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CEAMAGAZINE

Black Womanhood and Reiteration in Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*
SHELBY CROSBY

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NICOLE WARDELL

JOURNAL OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION:
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CEAMAGazine, the peer-reviewed journal of the College English Association-Middle Atlantic Group, appears once a year and publishes studies based on writing research, discussions of pedagogy, literary criticism, cultural criticism, and personal essays concerned with the teaching of English. We will also consider for publication book reviews and poems and short fiction related to literature or teaching. Submissions, preferably limited to between 3000 and 5000 words (except book reviews, which should be limited to 2500 words or fewer) and prepared in accordance with the most recent MLA style manual, should be emailed as a Word document to David Kaloustian, Department of English and Modern Languages, Bowie State University, at dkaloustian@bowiestate.edu. The annual deadline for submissions for March publication is October 15.

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Encomium

Encomium [n. L f.Gk *egkomion* eulogy] A formal or high-flown expression of praise; a panegyric *(Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1993).*

After nearly two decades, *CEAMAGazine*'s long-serving editor, Virginia Carruthers, is stepping back and embracing a well-deserved retirement. It seems appropriate at this time to acknowledge her dedication and commitment to quality by offering up an encomium. While the original Greek form refers to a eulogy, happily, Ginny is still very much with us, so we can indulge in the more current form—a high-flown expression of praise.

In her many years of service to the organization and its journal, Ginny has acted as a kind of mid-wife, ushering into the world of print articles, stories, and poems by authors ranging from eager young graduate students, through more calloused classroom and academic veterans, to superannuated retirees who still have wisdom to impart. Often the work has needed no more than cursory copyediting; occasionally it has required more extensive revision. When this happens, Ginny's diplomacy and talent are most welcome, for she is able gently—yet insistently—to coax from authors their best work. And although Ginny's commitment to quality has always been first and foremost, she has managed to do all this at significant savings; it is largely through her careful stewardship that CEAMAG is able to boast solvency.

Those who have been fortunate enough to know Ginny—through correspondence or interaction at conferences—can attest to her graciousness and good humor. She is just as happy talking about her dogs or detective fiction (her not-so-secret guilty pleasure) as she is discussing abstruse academic matters. We will miss her steady, reliable presence as editor of *CEAMAGazine*. However, selfishly, we hope that her association with CEAMAG continues so that we may all continue to enjoy her company.

So Ginny, in closing this panegyric, may we wish you good health and happiness, and the leisure with which to enjoy them. Thank you—profoundly—for all of your years of collegiality. And, as Bob Hope so memorably sang, "Thanks for the memories."

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Black Womanhood and Reiteration in Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*

First recorded by the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* in June 1851 and then republished in Frances Dana Gage's *Reminiscences* in1863, Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" has become mythic. Truth challenges white racist assumptions regarding black womanhood, and while there are significant discrepancies between the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*'s version of the speech and Gage's reiteration of it twelve years later, no one can deny the lasting power of Truth's ideas and message. Truth saw that, while it was important for black women to fight for women's rights, it was also necessary for them to critique the cultural standards by which they were judged. She sought to demonstrate the ways in which race and gender intersect to create a unique and problematic subject position for black women in the United States. Truth elucidates this point most clearly when she states:

> Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and have de best place every whar. Nobody eber help me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best place, and ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ar'n't I a woman? (92)

Truth argues that black women are being judged by standards that have nothing to do with their lived realities. They are not allowed to be ladies; they are servants, field workers, laborers, so it is not tenable to judge them by the same standard by which white women are judged. Unfortunately for Truth and millions of her sisters, the Civil War and the subsequent Reconstruction years did not appreciably alter their subject position within American culture.

> In fact, even more was expected of black women: After emancipation, many black women—even those from the upper middle class and upper classes—remained in the work force. Thus, the black community developed values oriented toward

> both sexes achieving in the world of work. The attainment of formal education and the development of intellect were paramount. (Carlson 63)

So, in addition to piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, a black woman was also expected to work outside of the home to contribute to the family finances, to attain a formal education, and to be intellectually curious. Additionally, she should "display a strong community and racial consciousness," be "self-confident and out-spoken," and be a "race woman" (Carlson 62).

Therefore, the emancipated black woman was burdened with being a true Woman while also being a laborer and race leader. It is clear that these expectations were nearly impossible to meet; however, it is this ideal that authors, both men and women, journalists, and political leaders return to again and again as they create and critique black womanhood. While both black men and black women participated in this process of womanhood, black women writers often pointed out discrepancies between the reality of womanhood and the ideal of womanhood while most black male writers did not. In particular, one can examine Paul Laurence Dunbar's last novel, *The Sport of the Gods*. While this is a novel about transitions—movement from a rural to an urban setting, movement from a Reconstruction America to a Post-Reconstruction America—Dunbar maintains a sense of black womanhood that is Victorian and static.

Originally published in *Lippincott's* magazine in 1901, *The Sport of the Gods* was subsequently published in the United States in 1902 and in Great Britain in 1903 as *The Jest of Fate*. *Sport* is the only novel that Dunbar wrote that explicitly deals with African American life through African American characters. Although it was a commercial success, because of its harsh subject matter and its perceived abjectly hopeless ending, it never received critical acclaim during his lifetime. He is criticized for "perpetuating the derogatory caricatures of the minstrel show and the plantation tales" (Turner 1).[1] However, recently critics have begun to reconsider Dunbar's placement within a naturalist tradition.[2] By expanding our understanding of Dunbar's work, we can begin to see "beneath the humorous mask to the profound bitter irony" that characterizes his texts (Candela 61). Moreover, this expansion allows for an innovative exploration of Dunbar's black female characters. Fannie

Hamilton, Kitty Hamilton, and Hattie Sterling are the only black women characters that Dunbar ever creates and develops in the novel form, and each attempts to negotiate the meanings of womanhood, respectability, and identity in the hostile white and black worlds that are created in *Sport*.

Rather than allow for a new sense of black womanhood, Dunbar compulsively reiterates the oppressive tenets of "the cult of true womanhood," while also adding an extra layer of requirements and responsibilities. Not only are black women required to be true women; they are also required "to assume other roles, such as schoolteacher, social activist, [and] businesswoman" (Carlson 62). Dunbar reiterates only the most negative and stereotypical qualities of black womanhood and does not allow his female characters to become "New Woman." Hence, Dunbar's critique and judgment of Kitty, Hattie, and Fannie is a reiteration of a white patriarchal understanding of what women should be, rather than a new sense of a modern black woman that was emerging at the dawn of the twentieth century. Dunbar uses his black female characters as scapegoats receiving the bulk of the text's judgment and critique.

The Sport of the Gods directly explores the lives of black folk defying late nineteenth century literary and political expectations of African American authors, such as Charles Chesnutt and Pauline Hopkins, who insist on "individual moral responsibility" and the belief that if Americans worked together as one common human family, we would be able to overcome our nation's racialized past.[3] Dunbar's last novel stands in direct contrast to such notions. His leap into naturalism questions the notions of fate, free will, and progress. He examines and critiques the "conditioning forces of life" through the Hamilton family, but what are readers to make of the roles of black women in this naturalist text? Where do they fit and why does the text judge them so harshly?

In *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Movement of American Naturalism*, Jennifer Fleissner re-conceptualizes naturalism by placing women at its center. She argues:

> Naturalism's most characteristic plot, as in the case of the modern young woman, is marked by neither the steep arc of decline nor that of triumph, but rather by an ongoing, nonlinear, repetitive motion, back and forth, around and

> around, on and on—that has the distinctive effect of seeming also like a stuckness in place. (9)

For Fleissner, to further understand stuckness and "its relation to agency and history," one must replace determinism (one of the basic tenets of naturalism) with the "more nuanced concept of compulsion" (9). Compulsion, therefore, captures the way characters and readers alike *must* repeat and reiterate the same social behaviors and mores. Determinism implies that subjects have no choice or agency; compulsion implies that while social forces can, and often do, proscribe and limit choice, people can choose a different path. Compulsion allows for free will and agency; determinism does not. Hence, *Sport* is a novel that gets stuck in place, a novel that reiterates what black women must be, despite the social realities of their lives. In post-Reconstruction America, black women often worked outside of the home for meager pay and were often single mothers and the sole providers for their families.

Notwithstanding the realities of these black women's lives, many black folks still subscribed to the Victorian family structure, and "it became the ideal to which most working class black people subscribed not only during the post-Reconstruction era but during the twentieth century as well" (Tate 151). In fact, there was only a miniscule portion of the "black population [that] had the educational and economic means to support" such a model of family life (Tate 151). Although Dunbar's novel claims to be free from iteration, it participates in a reiteration of an ideal that African Americans could not uphold:

> Fiction has said so much in regret of the old days when there were plantations and overseers and masters and slaves, that it was good to come upon such a household as Barry Hamilton's, if for no other reason than that it afforded a relief from the monotony of tiresome iterations. (1)

Dunbar reiterates the racism, violence, and judgments of both the black and white communities, with no seeming way out of the conundrum, and, most importantly, he compulsively reiterates the tenets of Victorian womanhood in the face of an industrialized and modernized America. Rather than create a "race woman," like many of his contemporaries, Dunbar created Kitty, who is condemned by the narrator for her "Sister Carrie-like success on the New York stage [and] serves as the book's

set piece for the deepest corruption of the rural African American soul" (Fleissner 278).

While Joe is convicted and receives a life sentence for murdering his girlfriend, Hattie, it is Kitty who ultimately carries the burden of immorality. Hattie Sterling, Joe's girlfriend, is killed because of her inability to lead Joe down a path of moral righteousness, which is essential to the cult of true womanhood. Finally, there is Fannie Hamilton, who, at the onset of the novel, represents everything a good wife and mother ought to be, but she is unable to maintain this role once her husband is imprisoned and she is abandoned by her children. Fannie's ability to negotiate this new urban landscape is circumscribed by her fierce attachment to the cult of true womanhood.

In order to fully understand Dunbar's female characters and the novel's judgment of them, it is essential to understand the world that the Hamiltons are part of in the inchoate South. As a bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Sport* reflects a post-Civil War America that is struggling to understand itself. Both black and white Southerners are attempting to adjust to a social order that is in direct contradiction to their cultural and historical past. The Hamiltons are an upwardly mobile family trying to live a good, moral, life. Berry and his family believe that, if you work hard and live well, you will be a success in the new America. However, the Hamiltons are naïve and perhaps a bit too trustful of this new world order. Their relationship with the Oakleys has protected them and allowed them access to the finer things in life. Yet, as the novel unfolds, they are forced to see that this new South is not all that new and that old Southern values and beliefs are never very far from the surface.

The novel's title is an apt description of how the Hamiltons are treated by all whites, Northern or Southern. They have become things that the gods can manipulate, move, or destroy at their whim. But, these gods do not sit on high; they are Southern white males who cannot fathom a black person being their equal or Northern white men hoping to cash in on their pain and suffering. Despite Reconstruction efforts, these Southern gentlemen still see Berry, and all blacks, as children who need to be taken care of. The Hamiltons' naïve belief in American justice and democracy is as ridiculous as these men believing that blacks will come back to them and ask to be re-enslaved:

"Why, gentlemen, I foresee the day when these people themselves shall come to us Southerners of their own accord and ask to be re-enslaved until such time as they shall be fit for freedom" (Dunbar 31).

Berry Hamilton's arrest and subsequent conviction is made on the flimsiest of evidence and stems from Southern beliefs: "*The Sport of the Gods* presents the turn-of-the-century model of race relations through the characters of Maurice Oakley, a Southern capitalist who manages to profit even from the defeat of the South, and Berry Hamilton, his faithful servant of twenty years" (Inge 228). Oakley is thought to be a fair and honorable man by all; however, he is quick to believe that after twenty years of loyal service Berry would steal from him. Oakley's reaction is reflective of the Southern post-Reconstruction beliefs regarding emancipation:

> As soon as a negro like Hamilton learns the value of money and begins to earn it, at the same time he begins to covet some easy and rapid way of securing it. The old negro knew nothing of the value of money. When he stole, he stole hams and bacon and chickens. These were his immediate necessities and the things he valued. (Dunbar 15)

Ironically, Berry's accumulation of wealth is in proportion to his employer's increasing wealth. He, like Oakley, believed in hard work and moral living. However, because of racial prejudice, Oakley cannot imagine a black man being able to make enough money to have significant savings. Even more ironic is his example of what he deems a good old-fashioned Negro crime: stealing chickens, eggs, and ham. These items are stolen because of the small rations allotted slaves; Oakley acknowledges this fact, but not the cruel situation that creates the need to steal. Nor do the "old" thefts seem to bother him. It is Berry's engagement with capitalism that he cannot and will not countenance, returning to antebellum beliefs regarding African Americans.

Significantly, Dunbar does not allow the Hamiltons to escape critique. Their dependent relationship with the Oakleys is a reiteration of slavery's paternalistic structure. That Berry permits his family to live in a slave cabin in the backyard of the big house replicates the black American's relationship with white Southerners. Oakley, "acting as father figure to the Hamilton household, embodies both the personal power of

disciplinary intimacy and the transpersonal authority (and violence) of the law" (Inge 232). The Hamiltons' dependence on the Oakleys is directly related to their fall. Their blind faith in a system that sees them as laborers and children leads to their downfall.

Regrettably, Oakley's behavior and course do not change upon receiving his brother's letter of confession. Oakley is broken down, both physically and psychologically, from the revelation. Yet even knowing Berry is innocent, he is willing to leave him in jail for the full sentence rather than admit his brother's guilt and dishonor his "family." Berry's life and family mean nothing to Oakley, and his racist nature is fully exposed: "What of Berry? What is Berry to Frank? What is that nigger to my brother? What are his sufferings to the honor of my family and name?" (Dunbar 111-12).With the decision made, the Oakleys "wrote a lie to Frank, and buried the secret in their breasts, and Oakley wore its visible form upon his heart" (112). Their buried secret drastically transforms them; Oakley, unable to deal with the weight of such an immense secret, becomes an insane, muttering madman unrecognizable to those who knew him before: "He was as a man who trembled on the brink of insanity. His guilty secret had been too much for him" (132). The racial guilt that Oakley carries is the guilt of a nation that permitted the enslavement of millions of Africans and continues to permit racial bigotry impeding the growth and development of the emancipated black community. His wife, Leslie, is trapped in a racist and patriarchal world, which forces her to adhere to his decision to suppress the evidence. She is then compelled to care for him as he suffers the effects of maintaining such a weighty lie. The care of this madman leaves her "gray-haired" and "sad-eyed" (131). When Skaggs, a Northern journalist, takes Frank's letter from Oakley, Leslie "sprang in front of him with the fierceness of a tigress protecting her young. She attacked him with teeth and nails" (134). Her lady-like decorum is all but forgotten in defense of their secret. She transforms from an angelic character to a tigress, a fury-driven mad woman.

Sadly, the destruction of the Hamilton family that began in the South is completed in the North. New York City is not the refuge they had expected, nor is it a site of hope or potential. One by one the Hamiltons drift, or run in Joe's case, into the most pernicious vices the city has to offer. Upon arrival in the

city, Mrs. Hamilton "was not sure that she was going to like New York….The very bigness of it frightened her and made her feel alone, for she knew that there could not be so many people together without a deal of wickedness" (Dunbar 49). In this assessment Dunbar's authorial concerns come full circle. In his 1898 novel *The Uncalled*, Dunbar begins his critique of the city: "It is one of the defects of the provincial mind that it can never see any good in a great city" (196). Thus, in *Sport* Dunbar no longer sees the provincial mind as flawed; in fact, his earlier judgment is refuted and overturned. The city, as noted by Fannie Hamilton, is a site of wickedness and decay.

Fannie's life in the South was one of domestication and propriety. She and Berry attempted to emulate the white nuclear family structure. Their "little cottage grew in comfort. It was replenished with things handed down from 'the house' from time to time and with others bought from the pair's earnings" (Dunbar 2). Into this quasi-secure family are born two children who "brought a new sunlight into the house and a new joy to the father's and mother's hearts" (2-3). They were "doting parents" who worked hard and spoiled their children "much as white fathers and mothers are wont to do" (3). In her mimicry, Fannie attempts to live up to the standards set forth by the cult of true womanhood and teaches her daughter the same lessons; however, she is forced to abandon these standards in the urbanized North, despite her desire to enforce them, "revealing the depths to which the Hamilton adults internalize white ideologies" (Tsemo 28). Fannie's adherence and enforcement of these models of womanhood are not tenable in this new geographical space. However, Fannie attempts to keep this tradition intact, despite the obvious futility of the endeavor. Thereby, she reiterates a standard that neither she nor Kitty can attain.

Kitty stood at the window and looked down on the street" with a

> sort of complacent calm in the manner in which she viewed the girls' hats and dresses . . . . There was a sound quality in the girl's make-up that helped her to see through the glamour of mere place and recognize worth for itself . . . . She had a certain self-respect which made her value herself and her own traditions higher than her brother did his. (Dunbar 50)

While Dunbar never directly states what her "own traditions" are, it is clear that Kitty is raised to be a Southern lady, to aspire to the tenets of the cult of true womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The question, then, becomes whether these are, in fact, Kitty's values and traditions. Kitty's life, up to this point, was built on the notion that she, too, could be a lady; however, both the black and white communities turn their backs on the Hamiltons and denounce their middle-class values as lies and pretentiousness. She is unable to continue valuing her "own traditions" given that they are not, in fact, hers, and she is allowed only limited access to them. The theatre and its freedoms are far more compelling to Kitty than the restricted subject position available to her as a poor black woman in New York City.

Once Kitty is introduced to the theatre, she is "enchanted" by the "airily dressed women" that "seemed to her like creatures from a fairy-land" (Dunbar 58-9). She is, at first, seduced by the glitz and glamour that the stage projects; however, her unhappiness and rebelliousness develop more slowly: "At first the girl grew wistful and then impatient and rebellious. She complained that Joe was away from them so much enjoying himself, while she had to be housed up like a prisoner" (Dunbar 72). Kitty rebels against the forced domestication and sees that there are more opportunities for black women. Her dissatisfaction is only partially race related; it is also related to the burgeoning New Woman movement. The New Woman is a reflection of women's increased presence in the work force and increased economic freedom.[4] Women demanded that they be accepted as full citizens, and part of this acceptance was an acknowledgement of women in the workforce. They were also fighting for the right to vote, the right to their children, the right to property, and the right of legal protection from domestic abuse.

For black women, this transition was even more difficult given that they have been part of the workforce since slavery. However, unlike their Caucasian counterparts, black women were often allowed entrance only as domestic help. Kitty's choice of profession defies her upbringing, and, despite her economic independence, she is judged even more harshly by the text than her brother, the murderer. She sacrifices her honor, which according to Dunbar is a fate worse than death. Her

subsequent employment as a chorus girl seals the fate of the Hamilton clan. Moreover, both Joe and Kitty abandon their mother to an abusive marriage to a degenerate gambler, and poor Fannie cannot hold up under all the pressure: "I'll do it; I'll ma'y him. I might as well go de way both my chillen's gone" (96).

Kitty's abandonment of her mother and her success on stage propel her into what can be called a fallen woman. Dunbar depicts her life as materialistic and of little value or meaning; in particular, her parents cannot bear the idea of seeing her cheapen herself on stage, so they return to their mythic southern home without seeing her or her show. Despite her monetary success and her movement toward independence, Dunbar judges her harshly, and that judgment is clearly coming out of Kitty's subversive choice of jobs, her adoption of the New Woman ideology, and her continual rejection of the cult of true womanhood.

Dunbar's treatment of Joe is decidedly more sympathetic and understanding than his treatment of Kitty; thus, readers see a definite gendered difference. Joe was "wild with enthusiasm and with a desire to be part of all that the metropolis meant" (49). His desire to belong to this urban landscape leads him to drunkenness, dissipation, and murder. Despite small moments of clarity and ample warnings from his friend, Sadness, he is unable to understand or see how the world he has entered can destroy a person. Sadness, a young black man from Texas, acknowledges his participation in what he calls the "Indolence Club" without losing sight of the awfulness of that club and the awfulness of a country that would make such a club necessary. Yet, Joe is unable to understand his own subject position within American culture, and, therefore, the "Indolence Club" consumes and annihilates him and those closest to him, particularly his lady friend, Hattie Sterling. Hattie is an aging chorus girl who indulges Joe and teaches him the social customs of his new world. Joe has entered a "set which lives, like the leech, upon the blood of others—that draws its life from the veins of foolish men and immoral women, that prides itself upon its well-dressed idleness and has no shame in its voluntary pauperism" (Dunbar 85).

Rather than heed Sadness's warning, "the only effect that the talk of Sadness had upon him was to make him feel wonderfully 'in it'" (Dunbar 85). Moreover, his solid middle

class upbringing is dismissed as "silly and quite out of place" and "all he had learned in his earlier years was false"; thus, it became "very plain to him now that to want a good reputation was the sign of unpardonable immaturity, and that dishonor was the only real thing worthwhile" (Dunbar 86). Joe's inability to comprehend what Sadness tells him belies his immaturity and foreshadows his destruction. Joe flails helplessly as if he has no agency or determination, a true character of naturalism, allowing himself to get inculcated into the club without analyzing its structure and his placement within it. Moreover, by not interrogating his subjectivity, he is turned into the very monster that black men are accused of being.

In the chapter aptly titled, "Frankenstein," readers witness Joe's full transformation into a member of the Indolence Club; he and Hattie have been dating for four years, and she has tried "to check his course" and threatened to sever their relationship if he does not clean up and stay employed (Dunbar 114). In fact, she does break up with him numerous times, but each time he straightens up just enough for her to put her faith in him again until she "made a mistake. She warmed to him. She showed him that she was proud of him" (114). Hattie's faith is the faith of a woman in love, a woman who hopes for and expects that the man she is with will take care of her. Hattie's conventional attitude toward men and relationships is a surprising return to what Dunbar refers to as the "old teachings and old traditions" (86). This reiteration of tradition invokes a gender normative sense of the world and the couple's placement in it; yet, Joe is not able to be the stereotypical man any more than Hattie is able to be a true woman. The world they inhabit has made it impossible for them to live out these prescribed norms. While in the South, Joe "contends with Southern ideologies," but, with the move to the North, he responds enthusiastically to the "invitation to American citizenship" and freedom (Tsemo 29). However, he learns that citizenship is inaccessible to him, and his frustration takes a violent turn. Bridget Tsemo sees his murder of Hattie as "the ultimate gesture toward complete liberation" and "more symbolically, the murder of an ideology that ultimately makes Hattie a threat to Joe's 'new' manhood" (33). But, one may well ask, what about Hattie? Why does she take the brunt of his anger and why is she responsible for his manhood?

For Joe, Hattie becomes the source of all his problems; he is unable to recognize and accept his subject position in the American racial landscape. Hattie, as woman, particularly as a black woman, becomes the only site of violent resistance available to Joe. In fact, he is able to lay all the blame at her feet: she is the reason he is a drunk and a loafer. It is Hattie who has turned him into what he is, not a society that continually banishes people of color to its periphery, nor is it an unfair, racist justice system that pulled his family apart. It is the black woman who did not fulfill her moral responsibilities to keep her man on the straight and narrow, thus returning readers to the cult of true womanhood. While Dunbar acknowledges that Joe cannot be part of the body politic because of race and, therefore, exonerates him, to some extent, of responsibility, it is Hattie who bears the burden of moral responsibility. Joe clearly states this just before he kills her: "You put me out—you—you, and you made me what I am." The realization of what he was, of his foulness and degradation, seemed just to have come to him fully. "You made me what I am, and then you sent me away. You let me come back, and now you put me out" (119). Joe's transformation is complete; he "was a terrible, terrible man or a monster." Even as Hattie's "eyes prayed to his," his eyes were filled with "the fire of hell" (119-20). Hattie dies a gruesome death, and, unfortunately, that death foreshadows the treatment of black female characters in the twentieth century, particularly in protest literature.

The Sport of the Gods does not have a happy ending for any of its characters; despite its promise of avoiding the "monotony of tiresome iteration," Dunbar reiterates a severely limited sense of black womanhood. He, like America, does not heed Truth's words at the end of "Ar'n't I a Woman?" regarding Eve and women's roles: "If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all 'lone, dese togedder, ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again" (249). Rather than allowing Fannie, Kitty, and Hattie to "turn it back and get it right side up again," Dunbar forces them back into a paradigm that is not feasible. They will never be able to live up to white standards of womanhood and, therefore, suffer the consequences. Each character exemplifies what Zora Neale Hurston would proclaim in her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes*

Were Watching God, "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (14).

Notes

[1]See Robert A. Bone, *The Negro Novel in America*, and Sterling Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* and *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes* for early critical reception of *The Sport of the Gods*.

[2]For a nuanced understanding of Dunbar and his work, see Gene Jarrett's recent scholarship: "Second-Generation Realist; or, Dunbar the Naturalist"; "Entirely Black Verse from Him Would Succeed: Minstrel Realism and William Dean Howells"; & "We Must Write Like White Men: Race, Realism, and Dunbar's Anomalous First Novel." If interested in Dunbar's use of the city as potential site of escape and transformation, see Thomas Morgan's "The City as Refuge: Constructing Urban Blackness in Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*."

[3]Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932) was a novelist, essayist, and short-story writer. He is considered the most prolific and influential black writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His novels are considered novels of purpose, and he forwards social responsibility in all of his texts. See *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) and *Marrow of Tradition* (1901). Pauline Hopkins (1859-1930) was a novelist and journalist. She is best known for her novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance of Negro Life North and South*. Like Chesnutt, Hopkins forwards a strong belief in social responsibility and welfare.

[4]For a more complete study of the New Woman, see Martha Patterson's *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915*.

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Revelation, Inquiry, Persuasion, and Tricks: The Languages of Teaching in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

What makes good teaching? What makes good learning? What are the stakes of success and failure in education? To revisit these fundamental questions, I will propose a return to "old school" education through a reading of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and a crossing of the cultural divide between modern and ancient perspectives on learning processes. I will illustrate the meta-learning value of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* by examining the opening scene, where the seasoned hero Odysseus teaches young Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, how to carry out a military operation of vital importance: recruiting Philoctetes and his famous bow for the war effort at Troy. Through close reading, I will attempt to uncover the content of the ancient lesson and show that Odysseus delivers instruction in humanity and its highest form of expression—heroism—by means of several discourse strategies: revelation, inquiry, persuasion, and tricks.

I. Revelation

How do effective lessons begin? Conscientious teachers know that a good warm-up—usually a light activity which encourages discussion and reflection—can draw students in and ease their transition from break time to work time, from intellectual pause to intellectual engagement. Like a modern student, Neoptolemus begins his lesson in heroism with a warm-up. Anything but a light activity, however, this is a gatekeeping exercise for the aspiring hero and possibly the most important part of the lesson. Unlike a modern student, Neoptolemus must remain silent but fully alert during this "warm-up," in which the older Odysseus reveals a theory of learning, a theory of humanity, and a theory of language on whose mastery depends the young man's success as a hero and a human being.

A theory of learning emerges from the opening line of the play: "This is the shore of the seagirt land of Lemnos,

untrodden by mortals, not inhabited" (1-2).[1] In this line, Odysseus states the obvious—that they reached their destination—but adds a surprising piece of information: the island on which the old war party abandoned Philoctetes is deserted![2] Contemporary audiences, who knew Lemnos as a well-populated traffic hub, would have been shocked to find out that the island was uninhabited, and would have asked a few pressing questions: Why did the army not abandon Philoctetes on a populated island? Why did Philoctetes' companions not leave him in the care of friendly natives? Why was a renowned hero left to suffer alone? These questions demand an answer, but this answer does not come immediately or easily.

The frustrated expectation of a clarification reveals that learning begins in a state of emptiness and sharp cognitive discomfort. This discomfort, however, is not its own end, but is part of a larger model of collaborative learning: "You may listen, and I explain, and each may make his contributions" (24-5). In this model, listening precedes any explanations, as well as any meaningful conversation. Yet, listening does not represent a passive withdrawal of the self which allows a knowledgeable master to fill the learner's intellectual "cup." Listening represents an act of interpretation which requires the quieting of inner noise and the complete engagement of the mind because the stakes could not be higher: the attainment of human excellence (*arēte*) and the glory of heroism.

The stakes of the lesson emerge from a theory of humanity, which Odysseus forms out of the interplay between social responsibility and social isolation. This theory presents two possible models: a model of integration into a social fabric and a model of complete independence. The model of integration takes shape as Odysseus refers to Neoptolemus as the son of the most powerful father among the Greeks, Achilles (3-4). Odysseus assigns to Neoptolemus an identity defined by lineage because the young man, who has yet to earn attributes of his own, owes his importance to his father's fame (Pucci 157). In this model, to be human means to fulfill the traditional responsibility of becoming better than the father and thus advance through personal excellence the goals of the family and of the larger social group.[3] On the other hand, the model of complete independence, embodied by the suffering Philoctetes,

seems tied to the individual helplessness and isolation that define the abandoned hero's existence.

Determining the value of each model and choosing between them remains a task for Neoptolemus' listening and interpretive abilities. When referring to Philoctetes, Odysseus pictures an individual separated from the collective by his disease: his "foot was dripping from a malady that was eating it away; since we could not pour our libations or sacrifice in peace, but he filled the entire camp with savage and ill-omened cries, shouting and screaming" (6-11). Odysseus leaves out an essential piece of information—that Philoctetes' affliction was punishment for a transgression against the gods and the result of separation from the divine. This omission should open Odysseus to moral scrutiny and make the choice between the human models more problematic. Why did Philoctetes' fellow heroes leave him behind: were they so heartless as to abandon an ill comrade, simply because he was repulsive and noisy?

The answer depends on a theory of language which Odysseus builds through a series of observations on the purpose, situation, and audiences of his speech. After he recalls Philoctetes' abandonment, for example, Odysseus abruptly changes the topic and remarks that this is not the moment for a long conversation because Philoctetes might overhear it (11-14). As well, in the conclusion of his speech, Odysseus tells Neoptolemus to go quietly and find out if Philoctetes keeps to the same place, so that they can hold their conversation undisturbed: Odysseus will speak and Neoptolemus will listen, and then each will make his contribution (22-5). In Odysseus' lesson, human language thus involves self-expression via speech, reception via listening, exchange via dialogue, as well as qualities such as purpose and timing.

A heightened awareness of the qualities of human language is essential to the aspiring hero's success because language is the vehicle that conveys the information which, in turn, determines the young man's ethical decisions and practical actions. The surprises (such as the uninhabited island), omissions (such as the cause of Philoctetes' sufferings), and reflections (such as the timing of conversation) of Odysseus' opening speech suggest, however, that language of teaching is not monophonic. The gaps in meaning, the shifts in focus, and the changes in pace uncover the polyphony of language registers

suited to capture different levels of reality. In his opening speech, Odysseus addresses Neoptolemus in two language registers: a direct, small-picture register capturing the immediate, contingent reality, and an encrypted language of revelation capturing divine purpose and the goals of the social group. The attainment of heroism depends on the understanding of these registers because human excellence cannot be achieved only in the here-and-now, without relevance to the the community and the divine.

The direct, small-picture register reviews the practical details of the military objective, which include Philoctetes' abandonment on a deserted island, his last known location, and the need for an update on his whereabouts. Beyond the direct, small-picture register, however, lurks the big-picture register encrypted by the language of revelation. The clues to the existence of the big picture cluster around the center point of Philoctetes' suffering—his cave—which Odysseus paints in seemingly idyllic terms: "a cave with two mouths, such that when it is cold there is a double seat in the sun, and in summer a breeze wafts sleep through the cavern with its openings at both ends. A little below it, on the left, you may see a spring with drinking water, if it is still there" (15-21).[4] Ironically, Odysseus' description emphasizes in fact the idea of disease. In the Greek mindset, flowing air was perceived as dangerous and latently infectious (Padel 1-2), so the breeze of Philoctetes' cave actually represents an aspect of his torment. Furthermore, the close association between Sleep (Hypnos) and Death (Thanatos) and the placement of the water source on the left—the ill-omened side—undermine the bucolic representations of direct discourse.

In the big-picture register, the language of revelation uncovers the possibility that the hero who dwells in a cave with two mouths, two openings, and a double seat participates in a series of dualities that mutate him in and out of the human condition. The mention of Sleep and a water flow on the ill-omened left side are reminiscent of Hades, where the river Lethe flows near the cave of Hypnos. In close proximity to extensions on the underworld, Philoctetes thus participates in a duality of terrestrial and chthonic existence.[5] The other/under-worldly dimension of the hero's being is accentuated by the cave itself, which would have been recognized as an ancient place of worship in Sophocles' time (Burkert 24-6). Furthermore, this

dimension might also have been enhanced by the staging details, which, as suggested by Seale (27) and Webster (68), would have made only the seaward entrance visible, leaving the audience to imagine what might have been on the other side.

The placement of Philoctetes in and around the cave thus reveals the hero's potential for tapping into the energies of other worlds. Indeed, despite his disability, Philoctetes remains invincible in the company of Heracles' sacred bow, which ensures his victory over any unfortunate opponent but also his survival on the deserted island. However, the hero's success as a hunter who survives exclusively on the animals he kills casts doubt on his humanity. The Greeks believed that "you are what you eat" and saw the human body as dependent on what entered it (Padel 2-6), so a human being who ingests only meat and breathes flowing air is susceptible to developing animal features and internalizing an infection.[6] Philoctetes' place of suffering thus witnesses the hero's possible mutation into a being that draws power from the chthonic and animal realms. However, the duality of beauty and disease, in conjunction with the position of the water (the hero's lifeline) on the left, suggests that this power is potentially corrupt and liable to misuse.

The big-picture language register thus prepares Neoptolemus for an encounter with a hero who cannot be understood correctly in the context of contingent reality and direct discourse. Philoctetes does not quite fit in contingent reality for a number of reasons. First, he is a temporal being who exists "frozen" in the timelessness of his deserted island; second, he is a terrestrial being who resides near a mouth of the underworld; third, he is a social being who has separated from his group; and finally, he should be a worshiper of celestial gods but instead has offended them through blasphemy. Furthermore, Philoctetes' nature transcends direct discourse because the hero himself proves incapable of fully human language: he cannot control his timing ("we could not pour our libations or sacrifice in peace"), his word choice ("he filled the entire camp with savage and ill-omened cries"), or his pitch ("shouting and screaming"). If Neoptolemus remembers his theory of language and theory of humanity and applies them to the big-picture register, he will understand that the object of his quest does not fit the human norm.[7]

Being normal, however, is not a hero's goal, and conformity is not the lesson taught to young Neoptolemus. Odysseus reviews what it means to learn, to speak, and to be human because a hero also pushes the boundaries of knowledge, language, and excellence, but only the manner and purpose of his challenge distinguish him from a villain. Odysseus' "warm-up" creates a path for an understanding of this distinction, a path which must originate in a state of cognitive and ethical discomfort. The "warm-up" also creates a conduit for future action and future learning, which must begin in a state of alert and reflective silence. However, should the student fail to experience discomfort and should he fail to be silent, the entire learning sequence becomes compromised.

II. Inquiry

After the conclusion of the active listening exercise, the lesson methodology changes from lecture to guided "hands-on" inquiry. In a balanced, fast-paced dialogue, Odysseus gives Neoptolemus instructions on gathering intelligence regarding Philoctetes' location. Odysseus asks Neoptolemus to determine if the cave is above or below their own location (28), if Philoctetes is there or not (30), or if Philoctetes has any personal belongings in his dwelling (32). During the course of the inquiry, Odysseus remains cautious and detached, as well as physically removed from the discovery process (Seale 29). From a strategic standpoint, Odysseus' disengagement protects him from Philoctetes' invincible bow, but, from a pedagogical standpoint, this distance allows Neoptolemus to develop a perspective of his own. To acquire an independent perspective, the aspiring hero must demonstrate comprehension of the theories of language, humanity, and learning, correct application of these theories in response to the mission objective, as well as insightful analysis of the material evidence.

Neoptolemus' command of language emerges out of his responses to Odysseus' instructions, which shape the nature of their dialogue. Considering that Odysseus' initial instructions, to "go forward quietly, and tell me whether he still keeps to the same place or he is somewhere else" (22-3) are quite specific, there should be no need for the subsequent series of short exchanges. The student should go, observe, return, and report, as instructed. Neoptolemus, however, proves incapable of

completing this task unassisted, which prompts Odysseus to devise a step-by-step observation process. Neoptolemus' participation in the recon mission shows that his powers of observation are crude but growing; however, his mastery of language is developmental and not necessarily improving during this stage of the lesson.

The developmental language abilities of an aspiring hero should raise alarm because, without an awareness of the language registers at play in the lesson warm-up, Neoptolemus cannot correctly comprehend and analyze the material evidence of Philoctetes' humanity. Indeed, Neoptolemus seems overwhelmed by the discovery of the cave's desolation and cannot move beyond an acute perception of wilderness and suffering. Neoptolemus hears "no footstep" and sees "an empty dwelling with no man there," and, only when prompted by Odysseus, does he see a bed of leaves and, after yet another prompt, a "cup made from a single piece of wood, the work of a poor craftsman" (35-6). With each prompt and question, Odysseus insists on uncovering more of Philoctetes' humanity: "Take care he is not bivouacked there asleep" (30); "Are there none of the things that make a home in there?" (32); "But is the rest bare?" (35); "The treasures you are describing must be his" (37). However, Neoptolemus insists on a perception of abandonment and pain, culminating with the discovery of the puss-stained rags as dreadful proof of Philoctetes' torment.

If Neoptolemus has grasped the intricacies of the big-picture language register, he should understand that the material reality of Philoctetes' surroundings bears proof of the hero's dual identity: someone who may be moving about during the day, engaged in the realities of active life, or someone who may be sleeping during the day, engaged in the chthonic realities of disease and death; someone who sleeps on a bed of leaves like an animal, or someone who carves tools like a human being. How well Neoptolemus has understood these dualities remains uncertain. However, Odysseus finds it necessary to reinforce the dichotomies of Philoctetes' existence in the conclusion of the exercise: Philoctetes cannot travel far, yet he has either left to look for food or to find a healing herb; he is disabled, yet capable of taking Odysseus' life.[8] In fact, where Neoptolemus describes only suffering and desolation, Odysseus presents a balance between disease, power, and healing, and foreshadows the

tipping of this balance in favor of strength and health, should Philoctetes accept to return to Troy, become healed of his affliction and, in turn, heal his army from the plague of defeat.

III. Persuasion and Tricks

Neoptolemus is invited to share in his comrades' glory, but whether or not he deserves to join the heroic ranks will be determined by the third, most challenging stage of the lesson. To advance in the pursuit of excellence, Neoptolemus must synthesize the information he collected, evaluate Odysseus' proposed action plan, and create his own approach to the mission. On a practical level, Neoptolemus must rely on what he knows about Philoctetes, the mission, and himself, to respond to Odysseus' request that he employ deception to acquire Philoctetes' bow. On an intellectual level, Philoctetes must synthesize his knowledge of humanity and language to evaluate Odysseus' argument in different discourse registers and then weave a heroic tale of his own. To help Neoptolemus achieve these goals, the lesson relies on the methodology of open dialogue to teach the discernment of various borders: between self-awareness and blindness, between heroism and villainy, and between persuasion and tricks.

The border between self-awareness and blindness emerges as Odysseus reveals the diplomatic, rather than martial, nature of the mission: Neoptolemus must befriend Philoctetes, gain his confidence, and then steal his famous bow. To persuade Neoptolemus to accept such a mission, Odysseus appeals to the young man's nature: "I know, my son, that by nature you are not the sort of man to speak such words or to plot to harm others. But—it is a pleasure to acquire a possession by a victory—bring yourself to do it, and in due course we shall be shown to have been in the right" (79-82). Neoptolemus, however, protests against this type of involvement: "It is my nature to do nothing by treacherous plotting: that is my nature, and it was also my father's nature. But I am ready to take a man by force and not by cunning: with one foot he will not get the better of us who are many" (90-2). Both Odysseus and Neoptolemus argue the concept of physis (nature) to problematize two means of attaining the mission objective: deceit or violence. However, Neoptolemus' definition of honesty reveals a thorough misunderstanding of his own deceit.

The question of deceit centers on three strategies Neoptolemus must use to earn Philoctetes' trust: Neoptolemus must reveal that he is Achilles' son, he must profess his hatred of Odysseus (justified by the loss of Achilles' arms), and he must pretend he is returning home. Neoptolemus must thus weave together, for Philoctetes' benefit, a blend of truth and falsehood reminiscent of Odysseus' storytelling in the *Odyssey* (Roberts 161-76). However, the precise formula for the mix of truth and falsehood remains obscure. While the first point is true (Neoptolemus is Achilles' son) and the third point is false (at least for now, Neoptolemus is not returning home), the truth about Achilles' arms is never clarified. Whether or not Neoptolemus has received his father's arms, the young man's approach to this essential issue reveals his blindness to his true nature.

If Neoptolemus did receive the arms of Achilles from Odysseus, as tradition indicates, and this part of the story is false, this lie will never get cleared between him and Philoctetes. Later on, Neoptolemus will confess his part in the stratagem to bring Philoctetes home but will not lose face by admitting ownership of his father's arms. That Neoptolemus never straightens out this misconception demonstrates his genuine readiness for employing deceit in order to secure the prize of Philoctetes' friendship. If, on the other hand, Neoptolemus does not have his father's arms, then the young man's very presence on the expedition casts doubt on his truthfulness to paternal physis. Achilles never agreed to being dispossessed of his rightful gain, so—if Neoptolemus relinquished his inheritance and joined the expedition for the promise of glory—he already betrayed his father's nature and the Achillean code of honor.

Neoptolemus, however, protests the strategy of deceit and affirms his allegiance to Achillean honor, which involves decisive action as opposed to machinations (86-95). Although Neoptolemus seems to display the proper attitude of a hoplite, his objections reveal his inner blindness. If Neoptolemus understood Philoctetes' dual natures, he would show respect for the wounded hero's immense power and would exercise caution. If Neoptolemus grasped the reality of Philoctetes' suffering, he would exercise restraint regarding a weaker individual. That Neoptolemus equates brutality with honesty is a grim foreshadowing of acts that will bring him notoriety, such as the

slaying of Priam, the sacrifice of Polyxena, the enslavement of Andromache, and his blasphemous quarrel with Apollo. Nevertheless, Neoptolemus does not see his attitude as inappropriate, so, when asked to act against his nature, he must take a leap of faith into an experience different from the brutal directness which he mistakes for his heritage.

This leap of faith requires an appreciation for the way of the tongue over the way of the sword: "Son of a noble father, I too when I was young had a tongue that was inactive and an arm that was active; but when I came to put it to the proof I see that it is the tongue, not actions, that rules all things for mortals" (96-9). The interplay between the power of language and the power of action traces the border between heroism and villainy, a border which can materialize either in the immediate contingent or in the higher plane of the divine. In the contingent, the way of the tongue might appear villainous, especially to an audience who would have had direct experience with corrupt officials taking advantage of the bravery of soldiers. In the big-picture world of the heroic code, however, language is paramount because the hero's deeds of courage mean nothing without a story to preserve them.

For Achilles, the story was everything—after all, he could have had a happy life with many generations of descendants to honor and remember him, but this story did not satisfy him. Achilles wanted an immortal story as the best of the Achaeans, and for it he was willing to sacrifice his life, the success of his army, and the life of his companions. For this reason, when Odysseus addresses Neoptolemus as "son of a noble father" (*esthlou patros pai*), he reminds Achilles' son of the respect owed to the power of the heroic tale. Neoptolemus' story, however, is in danger, because he has just declared violent action, even against the suffering and the helpless, as his heritage, and has shown ineptitude in the way of the tongue.[9] Nevertheless, there is still hope in Odysseus' repertoire of persuasion and tricks.

To secure Neoptolemus' cooperation, Odysseus tells the young man that he must resort to a trick because Philoctetes is completely impervious to persuasion. Odysseus attempts to justify the lie by invoking the common good, but Neoptolemus is primarily interested in personal benefit: "But what advantage is there for me if he should come to Troy?" (112). Odysseus

responds with the prospect of victory at Troy, but his winning argument is the promise that Neoptolemus will be called clever, as well as valiant (119). This promise offers hope that Neoptolemus may yet surpass his father (who was not famous for being clever) and even establish a double parentage from the best of what Odysseus and Achilles have to offer. To convince Neoptolemus to carry out the mission, Odysseus appears to practice persuasion while advocating tricks (Buxton 126). However, Odysseus may not be persuading Neoptolemus at all but tricking him out of his direct nature and into language registers that capture the vantage point of the divine.[10]

The realm of the divine is actually what defines the border between persuasion and tricks and gives ethical meaning to both. Odysseus concludes the lesson with an invocation to Athena Polias and Hermes (133-4), who embody the hermeneutic dilemmas of the individual striving towards ethical action. In the context of contingent reality, the embodiment of the city and the master of tricks seem like the perfect patrons for a politician interested in practical success.[11] In this reality, to trick Philoctetes out of his bow and to force him to return to Troy represents an act of violence against an individual's right to choose. However, Athena is also the mistress of rational activity, arts, and literature, and Hermes is also the messenger of the gods. In the big-picture context, their association suggests that any divine message comes encrypted in a poetic form which requires rational interpretation. In the light of intelligent interpretation, the poetry of divine prophecy reveals a higher level of reality; in the absence of proper interpretation, the same prophecy turns into a cruel lie and a trick.

Neoptolemus' quest for Philoctetes actually begins and ends with a divine prophecy. The prophecy of Helenus motivates the young man to embark on the journey to Lemnos.[12] The prophecy of Heracles, delivered by Heracles himself in the conclusion of the play, ends Neoptolemus' mission on Lemnos. Both prophecies promise success at Troy, but neither guarantees a bright future for Neoptolemus. Heracles, for example, advises Neoptolemus and Philoctetes to care for each other like two companion lions (1436), but then reminds them of the importance of piety (1440-1444). Heracles appears to bestow a happy ending to the heroic journey, but audiences familiar with the tradition of Neoptolemus' life would have known that

Achilles' son did not acquire excellence but a bleak notoriety, did not live happily or die gloriously, was not favored by the gods but suffered their wrath. Those audiences would have understood that Heracles' prophecy turned into a cruel trick because Neoptolemus did not balance bravery with piety or success with restraint.

The invocation to Athena and Hermes thus concludes the lesson by consecrating poetic hermeneutics as the highest level of heroic skills. Without this skill, aspiring heroes like Neoptolemus can be crushed by the weight of words misunderstood, because, in the heroic world, poetry will not be ignored. Poetry is not a weak craft, a trivial pursuit, or an unfaithful copy, but an emanation of the divine, a receptacle of collective memory, and a record of human excellence. Poetry encodes revelations of higher realities, demands participatory inquiry, urges openness to persuasion, and plays tricks on the inattentive. Its polyphonic registers teach excellence and capture the story of its pursuit. Outside its boundaries, heroism has no meaning.

Notes

[1]All direct quotes from Sophocles' *Philoctetes* are the translation of Hugh Lloyd-Jones.

[2]Scholarly perspectives usually present a multi-faceted consensus on the function of the uninhabited Lemnos as a mirror for Philoctetes' isolation and fall from a normal human's social condition. For Rose, the island offers a sophistic image of a primitive and presocial life (63). For Rehm, the island presents a parallel to Foucault's notion of *heterotopia*, a place where historical time stops, but where remarkable transformations are possible (140-1). For Vidal-Naquet, the deserted Lemnos appears in contrast with the world of the *oikos*, as well as with the world of Troy (166). Mandel wonders why Sophocles did not place Philoctetes on a truly uninhabited island, and argues that audiences more readily accepted an uninhabited Lemnos rather than the dissociation between the hero and his traditional place of suffering (22).

[3]Segal argues that, for the Greeks, humanity represents civilization and the opposite of bestiality. Because the proper locus of civilization is the polis, whoever cannot share in the polis is either a beast or a god (13).

[4]Jebb suggests that the morning sun could be enjoyed at the seaward mouth of the cave, while the afternoon sun fell on the other entrance (8-9).

[5]Harrison suggests that Sophocles consciously employs a hero destined to be worshipped after death and hints at Philoctetes' future cult status. These hints are particularly significant in the end of the play, where Heracles speaks of undying renown as reward for Philoctetes' suffering (173-5).

[6]Later in the play, the chorus pity Philoctetes for not "having gathered food from the sowing of sacred earth" (706), thus reinforcing the abnormality of an exclusively carnivorous diet.

[7]Edith Hall suggests that language distinguishes between Hellene and barbarian, the term *barbaros* originally referring to the sound of incomprehensible speech (4-11). Because Philoctetes is incomprehensible, he has transformed into an Other.

[8]Penelope Biggs emphasizes the image of Philoctetes as a survivor and suggests that his mysterious disease springs organically from the hero's soul and the festering grudge against the Greeks (231-5).

[9]Blundell suggests that Neoptolemus' crude response to Achillean *physis* represents a measure of his ethical immaturity, which leaves him open to Odysseus' influence; in the end, however, Neoptolemus activates his true *physis* under the influence of Philoctetes (137-48).

[10]Lada-Richards suggests that the Philoctetes' showing of the bow invokes parallels with the revelation of the sacra in the Eleusian ceremony, while Neoptolemus' desire to touch the bow recalls the face-to-face transmission of the mystic rites (179-93).

[11]Scholars who analyze Odysseus in the context of contingent reality frequently represent him as a villainous character. Knox, for example, perceives Odysseus as a degenerate version of the Homeric hero, a glib politician without honor, who encourages Neoptolemus to turn into a liar (124-7). Likewise, Kott suggests that Odysseus embodies the "unscrupulous cupidity of the democratic politician and tradesman," as opposed to the "callous traditionalism of aristocratic leaders," embodied by Achilles and Philoctetes (177). As well, Roisman sees Odysseus as an un-heroic politician who has lost his youthful idealism, a word-monger who manipulates logic for personal profit (72-6).

[12]Gill suggests that the prophecy of Helenus functions as a riddle, whose answer unfolds as its recipients understand the spirit behind its literal meaning (140-2).

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The Undead Peace of the Bog People

The girls sit, all rapt attention,
brows creased in misgivings
as Seamus Heaney's dead man
wakes up from the bog.

They wrap themselves with
the comfortless ease of the chilly syllables
innocuous and, at times, even mellifluous.
We stumble over alien words,
foreign yet familiar, memory straining
for resonant practices, as the noose tightens
unresisting, the instant he is thrust,
stunned, into the quagmire of his fate.

This cloudy day, with rains heaving to take over
the old high ceilinged classroom, darkness can assail
corners, evoking shadows long dead, but suspected of revisiting.
For girls with hurts weighing down, this is not the right setting
to learn about bog people or any dead. They recoil
from pictures on the Wiki, stupefied
at the unfathomable peace, the almost studied
elegance of a man condemned to sacrifice.

Yet the end of the lesson sees them peaceful
with the lift words give, connecting deaths across eons
and landscapes so very different from theirs,
intents so wildly varied.

Star lifted out of bogs to an unearthly delight
but not on iridescent crowds of imagination
pretty pictures of oft-updated statuses
of pointless routines and self approbations
played out in rarefied fields that safe distances give:
but stunned at what crowds can do to
collect their wishes that push you down bogs,
the proof of their faith in their beliefs
preserved beneath bland peats
that reluctantly reveal somnolent eyes and
drugged obedience of limbs that belie
the aura off every willing sacrifice.

This is why I teach, to lift myself with them
alight into the embrace of words and
relive an odd peace that at least briefly overlooks
the pain of lived misfortunes—theirs, and mine.

NATALIE DORFELD

The Walmartization of Higher Education: Congratulations! You Are Disposable.

Introduction

Walmart and academia. To the untrained eye, they don't have much in common. Walmart is a depressing, yet highly convenient, cement block of a store where one can buy anything from tube socks to tires in bulk quantities. Academia, on the other hand, is so much more than an ivory tower on the perfectly groomed hillside. It is an ideal, a final destination, where dreams can supposedly come true. We have been brainwashed to think if one works hard enough, the elusive American Dream is attainable.

But what if that dream were canceled? According to recent statistics, the average full-time Walmart worker pulls in roughly $26,000 a year (Buchhiet par. 3). This generally includes no benefits or retirement package. The full-time adjunct in humanities, who is a part-time professor, teaching a load of eight classes, can net less than $16,000 a year. Again, this includes no benefits or retirement package. To add insult to injury, if this person is en route to a Ph.D., she has most likely raked up anywhere from $30,000 to $100,000 in student loan debt (Bousquet 3). Could it be more depressing? Sadly, yes.

As Marc Bousquet noted in *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, adjuncts are the new norm, specifically in first-year writing programs. Nearly thirty-five years ago, 75% of college teachers were full-time. The other 25% were utilized if someone wanted to take a sabbatical, became ill, retired, and so on. Today, in just one working generation, it is the opposite (Bousquet 3). Roughly 75% of those teaching in academia are part-timers whose marginalized status is evident in designations such as "visiting professors," "soft money," "emergency hires," "ad hoc," "nonvoting," and "limited contract" (Berry XI).

In the humanities, and in composition studies in particular, the academic landscape is dismal at best. Although contractual instructors are the majority of every English

department in the country, they are marginalized, as is apparent in the following statistics:

- Roughly 93% of composition sections are taught by graduate students or adjuncts, otherwise known as "disposable" teachers (Bousquet 3).
- Part-time English professors who have kept logs, including preparation, teaching, grading, and administrative duties, net between $3.00-$10.00 an hour (Berry 7).
- English researchers are expensive. Writing classes, a skill that every student needs, are filled by less-disciplined, part-time employees (Downing 64).
- Women are in the minority. Roughly 80% of all full professors in Rhetoric and Composition are men (Enos 53).
- Thousands of writing instructors live on sub-livable wages, no health insurance, no job security, and no say in what or when they teach. In fact, many qualify for welfare and food stamps (Marshall 112).

What does this mean? For colleges and universities, bluntly, it means fine wine at discounted prices. It is much easier to hire a handful of adjuncts and dismiss them at will than hire one full-time faculty member with benefits and a retirement package. And given the supply-demand situation of the current English market, which details an "overproduction of Ph.D.s" and an underproduction of [full-time] jobs," there is a new crop of hungry graduates lining up out the door to gain experience every year (Bousquet 41). Can anything be done to derail this speeding train before conditions actually worsen? Yes and no.

This article will focus on three options for those considering an academic career in English, including avoiding it all together, considering Plans B, C, and D, or fighting the system. Each proposal comes with risks, but for those who have toiled in the adjunct trenches with self-doubt, being paid poorly, and with no room to call their own, it is beneficial to know all the options before leaping headfirst into humanities, which for all its glory is currently a broken system of labor exploitation (Brandy 147).

Just Don't Go

In 2003, Thomas Benton, a pen name for William Pannapacker of Hope College, wrote an article for *The Chronicle* titled "So You Want to Go to Grad School?" In 2009, he followed up that piece with "Graduate School in the Humanities: Just Don't Go." In each of the commentaries, his message was clear and to the point: only a crazy person would enter such a glutted market of despair and hope for the best.

He says he still receives letters, usually in two sets: those considering Ph.D. programs and those on the market. The former batch is green, still asking for advice, as though he had somehow changed his mind. Benton claims they have been praised all their lives, received perfect grades, and been given glowing recommendations. Why, some institutions have given them a full ride. They are blindly told, "Don't worry, massive retirements are coming soon, and then there will be plenty of positions available" (Benton par. 2).

The second batch comes from those in the trenches trying to secure full-time work. They are most often angry, feeling as if they have been duped. They did everything right, but "they are 30 and unemployed, or worse, working as adjuncts at less than the minimum wage under the misguided belief that more teaching experience and more glowing recommendations will somehow open the door to a real position" (Benton pars. 3-4) .

Whether naïve or misled, it simply comes down to math. There are too many English graduates, both at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels, and not enough full-time positions. Once more, academia is a business, and businesses like to save money. In "The Politics and Economics of the Super-Exploitation of Adjuncts," Ruth Kiefson states:

> The mean income for adjuncts at a two-year college is $8,178, and the national average for full-timers is $40,000 plus $10,000 in benefits. A little math will tell us how many part-timers can replace one full-timer. The growth of part-time labor in college is therefore both a cost-cutting practice and a way to control the work force. Adjunct faculty, with absolutely no job security, are not inclined to create waves. Having thousands of full qualified adjuncts, desperate for full-time jobs, standing in the wings of lower-priced replacements,

> objectively undercuts the bargaining position of full-timers. (147)

According to recent data cited by Charlotte Allen, 68% of the new college hires within the last five years have been off the tenure track (par. 6). Allen states critics are calling it the "'corporatization of higher education'—the idea, heretical in professorial circles, that universities should be operated with fiscal efficiency" (par. 6).

Given the forbidding scenario and enormous debt a student will face, Benton can identify only a mere four circumstances under which one might even remotely "consider" graduate school in the humanities:

- You are independently wealthy, and you have no need to earn a living for yourself or provide for anyone else.
- You come from that small class of well-connected people in academe who will be able to find a place for you somewhere.
- You can rely on a partner to provide all of the income and benefits needed by your household.
- You are earning a credential for a position that you already hold—such as a high-school teacher—and your employer is paying for it. (pars. 18-19)

Such conditions, as mentioned above, are few and far between. The truth of the matter is most people pursue the humanities for the love of it, for the opportunity to share great works of literature with students. However, "the emotional rewards of teaching are not accompanied by material rewards" (Schell 67).

It is a tough call to tell an individual not to pursue her dreams. Immoral, almost. But one should be educated when entering the field, knowing the good, bad, and ugly effects of her decisions. The bottom line is 93% of introductory classes in composition are taught by adjuncts, 60% of non-tenure faculty make less than $28,000 a year, and less than half (47%) of part-time faculty paid by the course get six weeks' notice of their teaching assignments (Scott 154).

The landscape is, indeed, atrocious for an English major. There is no shame in saying "no" right off the bat, for the statistics are stacked against those coming out of graduate programs. Some, as noted in *Ghosts in the Classroom: Stories of Adjunct Faculty—and the Price We All Pay*, start idealistic only

to end up burnt out: "I am a dreamer. I am an idealist. I am a victim. I am a whore. I am a fool. I am an adjunct" (Swift 10). Others, the lucky few, actually make it. Be it luck, being in the right place at the right time, or stellar credentials, they land a full-time, tenure track position. In the end, it is a personal, and sometimes painful, choice.

Plans B, C, and D

While the current data is bleak, many are still drawn to the humanities, English programs in particular, for what is coined as the psychic income. Originally labeled by Eileen Schell in *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers*, Katherine Wills discusses its nature in "The Lure of 'Easy' Psychic Income." It is defined as

> the perceived personal, social, and cultural compensation that a job brings to an individual above and beyond wages. Some adjunct teachers prefer to work for the perceived benefits and status of an academic position, not just for the (pin) money. (201)

She states this notion of psychic income can be a beneficial tool in understanding "the historical stubbornness in labor problems in the teaching of writing," including why so many adjuncts sign up for deplorable conditions in the first place (201).

While giving for the greater good is noble in its thinking, life eventually gets in the way. Academia's dirty little secret is that very few adjuncts can support themselves, let alone families, on sub-Walmart wages. This is why it is imperative for individuals to consider backup plans with a degree in English.

Corporate Blogger

One such plan may include blogging. A blog, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is "a web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer" ("Blog" 1). A corporate blogger posts reflections for any given company, primarily with commercial giants in the field.

According to the article "35 Awesome Jobs for English Majors," social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, have exploded in the last decade. This medium is extremely popular with students just getting out of college; hence, the readership for blogs is plentiful.

> Big companies like IBM, Microsoft, Yahoo! and Dell often require corporate bloggers. In the past ten years, the need for content has exploded with the internet, making the demand for writers increase. These corporate blogs are used as 'branding' tools, offering free and helpful content to their customers. Even smaller corporations (for example, Mint.com) have company blogs and require a vast amount of content each day. Many English majors, of course, end up writing these corporate blogs. ("35 Awesome Jobs for English Majors" pars. 39-40)

Mark Schaefer, author of "The 10 Best Corporate Blogs in the World," believes the field is constantly growing because it produces results immediately. According to the Center for Marketing Research at the University of Massachusetts, a study showed that "just 22% of the Fortune 500's blog compared to 45% of the Inc. 500's and about 80% of non-profits" (Schaefer par. 7).

With companies such as Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Whole Food Markets, and Marriott hiring corporate bloggers in droves to connect with that key Generation X market of consumers, writers with technological savvy, a loyal following on the web, and a distinct or witty writing voice will be rewarded.

Social Media Community Manager

Another possibility along the same lines for a "punchy" and outgoing writer is working as a social media community manager. James Mulvey, author of "5 Jobs for English Degrees You Never Knew Existed," states this is a new communication role at many companies. These individuals are hired to run social media platforms and brands for companies. One such employer said the following:

> I'd rather hire someone with a journalism degree for this than an MBA in marketing. Find someone who can write, with a 'punchy' attitude, and has their [sic] finger on the pulse of current trends, news, etc., and you have a winner. Social media best practices and the ins and outs of your company's products are easier to teach than these other core skills. (Mulvey par. 43)

These companies include heavy hitters, such as Coca-Cola, New York Giants, and HBO. Writers are asked to build upon their

rhetorical skills learned at the B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. levels. These skills include but are not limited to the following:

- Analyze your social community's needs.
- Write blog posts.
- Develop strategies to keep your community happy.
- Answer questions from the audience.
- Think of new ideas for starting conversations.
- Analyze results, such as reach, frequency and other marketing metrics.
- Monitor social conversations; be the voice of the brand. (Mulvey par. 44)

The foundation of any English degree involves studying great works of literature and classic and contemporary modes of rhetorical analysis. The two positions listed above, especially utilizing one's voice to best market a product, would be ideal for an English major looking for career paths besides teaching.

Education Coordinator at a Digital University

Lastly, for those looking to keep a toehold in academia but not live paycheck to paycheck like many adjuncts, there are educational coordinator positions. This specialist's main objective is "to create an online presence for an employer or client through the use of digital media software and visual communication skills." Likewise, they are "responsible for writing and posting content on the Internet and may need to know online marketing techniques like search engine optimization (SEO)" ("Digital Media Coordinator: Career Info, Job Duties and Salary" pars. 2-3).

Companies like to hire English majors because they come into the workforce with a strong set of editing skills, knowledge of electronic software, research knowhow, and an ability to learn new things and implement innovative ideas when needed. Furthermore, because many of them are young and hungry fresh out of college, they can identify target audiences within their peer circles and find the best ways to present information and/or products ("Digital Media Coordinator: Career Info, Job Duties and Salary" pars. 3-4).

According to monster.com, the starting salary for an education coordinator at digital universities is approximately $30,000-$50,000. If the said individual chooses to move up the ladder and become a media specialist for a successful public

relations company, the salary can inflate to $97,000, a distant cry from the poverty-like wages as an adjunct ("Digital Media Coordinator" 1).

In the end, given the traumatic nature of the humanities field, English above all, it is prudent to have a backup plan—perhaps not just one but several. The above alternatives, corporate blogger, social media community manager, and education coordinator, are all similar in the fact that they require strong writing and communication skills that English majors can readily provide. And unlike working in the field as a part-timer, which is unpredictable at best, many of these positions provide a respectable wage, with some positions starting fresh out of college vs. age 30 for many English Ph.D.s., which means less debt. Regardless of the position, a humanities degree is not a dead end job if an individual does not land a job in academia. Solid writing, editing, and research skills are needed in fast-growing markets. Time and time again, employers are choosing English majors over their business-minded peers.

Unionize

The last and final option for those willing to forego the advice of selecting another major or investigating alternative paths is unionization. According to Linda Ray Pratt, author of "Disposable Faculty: Part-time Exploitation as Management Strategy," "Unions are the best way to take the cheapness and convenience out of part-time employment because they raise the institution's monetary costs and time investment through both the contract and the act of negotiating it" (Pratt 273). However, it can be a sensitive topic for a number of reasons.

First and foremost, the very terminology used to describe regular faculty vs. adjunct faculty is damaging. Full-timers are referred to as "permanent, ranked, voting, core, standard, salaried, continuing contract, internal, and academic," while part-time labels include "visiting, occasional, unranked, casual, limited term, peripheral, new model, clinical, non-regular, extension, non-academic, faculty wives, emergency hire, non-voting, limited contract" and so on (Berry XI). Hence, people feel disposable, even degraded. They don't want to ruffle any feathers out of fear of losing their jobs.

Secondly, according to Tuckman, Vogler, and Caldwell, there are many different types of adjuncts in the field of English. There are the semi-retired, students, hopeful full-timers, full-mooners, homeworkers, part-mooners, and part-unknowers (189). While students and hopeful full-timers may possess an overwhelming urge to picket administration buildings and better their conditions, a semi-retired individual is not working as an adjunct to get rich. She does not necessarily need the money; therefore, she may not be as motivated to attend meetings, organize the troops, and pay union dues.

Lastly, even if a solid cohort is assembled, that doesn't mean it will last for any length of time. According to an adjunct in Barbara Wolf's (2001) *A Simple Matter of Justice: Contingent Faculty Organize*, which is the sequel to *Degrees of Shame: Part-time Faculty: Migrant Workers of the Information Economy*, the turnover rate for part-timers is as high as 50%. Berry adds, "My personal experience in many institutions is that most turnover among part-time contingents is in the first one to three semesters . . ." (7). Thus, it's often difficult to get a good group of like-minded people together, especially since organizing is such a time-consuming event.

However, that is not to say it cannot be done. Wolf's most recent documentary, *A Simple Matter of Justice*, validates one success story after another. Members of APBU (Association of Professors of Bishop's University), COCAL (Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor), CPFA (California Part-time Faculty Association), and P-FAC (Part-Time Faculty Association of Columbia) have all taken on exploitative administrative powers in Quebec, Massachusetts, California, and Illinois, respectively, and have won.

Berry, an adjunct instructor at two universities in Chicago, Illinois, and a featured part-timer in Wolf's *A Simple Matter of Justice: Contingent Faculty Organize* documentary, said, "Unions matter. Unions help. That's the real message. I mean, I am making more than twice as much money per class at Roosevelt University in downtown Chicago today than I made in 2000 when I taught my first class there." He stated the raise wasn't owing to inflation or general pay hikes either; "the union made that difference."

In his 2005 book, *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education*, which was

based upon his 2002 dissertation at Union Institute and University, Berry discusses the dos and don'ts of successful organizers and their organizations. Five key lessons stood out from his experiences:

> 1. Build an inside committee first of all, even if small, and look especially for people with previous organizing experience of some sort. This is the core of the democratic collective leadership of the future union. Outside staff should be advisors, not leaders.
> 2. Nearly anything that involves more people actively is good. Welcome new people and try to model bold and committed, but not suicidal, behavior. This helps to replace fear and fatalism with hope and courage.
> 3. Learn as much as possible about the power relations and politics in and around the institutions. Then look for alliances on and off campus, starting with our fellow workers and students.
> 4. All kinds of communication can work. The key is honesty, consistency, and building relationships of trust over time.
> 5. We only lose, ultimately, if we quit fighting. Remember that the administration never quits. (96)

But above all, Berry states, people have to stick together. Adjuncts have "shared experiences that can bind us together," even though "contingent faculty is one of the most isolated groups of workers in the whole society" (113). Whether it be forming a committee, recruiting energetic people, or making phone calls and sending out e-mails, power stems from numbers.

"Many of us will be afraid to make this leap, especially with our own working-class students, for fear that they will lose respect for us and then we will not be able to teach them effectively," states Berry. "Nonetheless," he adds, "we can do this if we do it together and if the organizations we build supports [sic] us in doing so" (135).

Some organizational movements fail owing to the reasons mentioned above (fear, various types of adjuncts, and the high turnover rate), but those who "don't give up" and "fight for more tenure track jobs," in addition to improving the current conditions of contingent faculty, ultimately triumph, claims Berry (138). It takes a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, but success is obtainable and sustainable if people band together and just insist on fair compensation and working conditions.

Conclusion

Coming into academia, many young scholars are unaware, either through youthful ignorance or blinding passion for the humanities, of just how quickly the academic landscape has deteriorated within the last working generation. Currently, there are thousands of underemployed Ph.D.s wandering the country, trying to scrounge up work in the glutted market, which grants only 40% of English Ph.D.s tenure tracks (Toth 2). In a nutshell, it's good work (if you can get it) but a bad living.

While there are many options out there, this piece focused on three: just don't go, hope for the best but have several backup plans, and fight for equal rights. Each comes with pros and cons, and given the sensitive nature of the issue, it is a highly personal choice.

Many part-time English professors, like Erica Werner, author of "Will I Pass the Test?," find themselves on the fence, stating, "So what do I say to students who ask my advice on whether or not to go into the teaching profession? I tell them that it's the most rewarding job I've ever had or ever will have. It's also the most difficult . . . I'm not sure how long I can keep it [the adjunct lifestyle] up" (38-9).

At the end of the day, we all must collectively realize the ivory tower, a so-called haven "from the outside pressures of the commerce and worldly exchange," isn't as it appears (Schell 71). Like Walmart, it is an exploitive organization that, frankly, cares about the bottom line. Adjuncts save money. Period. For those 69% off the tenure track in English and making less than $28,000 a year, life can be very hard (Scott 154). However, with knowledge comes power, and, subsequently, control and freedom to decide. Some will choose another path, and others will challenge the status quo. Happy endings, just like in literature, are relative.

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Exploitation of the Fittest: Critique of Social Darwinism in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair presents a bleak picture of life behind the Chicago stockyards in the early 1900s. The immigrants of Sinclair's novel are mired in the waste and degradation of a ravenous capitalist society. Sinclair's novel aims to critique the economic and social conditions of inequality infused in the American society of the Gilded Age. The trend of science to explain social conditions in industrialized societies was at its zenith at the turn of the nineteenth century, creating a pseudo-social science out of laissez-faire economics and Social Darwinism. Sinclair's protagonist in *The Jungle* is ignorantly impressed by the jargon enforcing these false ideologies; he "would not have known how to pronounce *laissez faire* but he had been round the world enough to know that a man has to shift for himself in it, and that if he gets the worst of it, there is nobody to listen to him holler" (64). *The Jungle* serves as a powerful critique of the damaging Social Darwinism inherent in the American society of the Gilded Age.

While *The Jungle* is touted as the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the twentieth century owing to its impact on health and safety in meat and food industries in the United States, its purpose in addressing the damning effects of Social Darwinism of the time remains largely overshadowed. Much of the literature concerning the novel focuses on Sinclair's journalistic tactics and the novel's sensational impact on the food industry. While these influences are noteworthy, the shock value of exposing the unsanitary practices and conditions may lead readers to overlook the novel's implicit criticism of the systematic injustices in the social systems that made such practices acceptable. The existing literature addressing *The Jungle* does not sufficiently define and focus on the popular social science beliefs that Sinclair vilifies in his work.

Outlining a brief history of the rise of Social Darwinism in American society gives a more sound understanding of the ideologies Sinclair fights against. Charles Darwin produced his

groundbreaking book, *On the Origin of the Species*, in England in 1859. This is Darwin's seminal work on the theory of evolution and the launching of a new scientific ideology known as Darwinism. The book documents Darwin's observations and findings on his five-year expedition aboard the *HMS Beagle*. His theories on biological organisms' perpetual struggle for existence and laws of natural selection are ascribed specifically to the plant and animal life he studied as well as broadly to the human population. Darwin uses "the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense, including dependence of one being on another, and including . . . not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny" (3). Darwin believed that "natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing . . . the improvement of each organic being . . . [and] can act only through and for the good of each being" (4). While Darwin's theories are attributed to humans and animals alike, his focus remains free from the complex intricacies of industrialized societies. His understanding of natural selection is one in which the environment and the race as a whole are improved by the laws of nature.

In 1860, the English scientist, Herbert Spencer, published his influential essay, "The Social Organism," which links Charles Darwin's groundbreaking theory of evolution to Spencer's theories of social organization. Spencer's essay was enthusiastically accepted in Western industrialized societies of his day. He proposes that a natural evolutionary and biological progression explains how "the serf class becomes devoted to the process of alimentation; while the [superior] class, ceasing to take any part in the process of alimentation, becomes devoted to the coordinated movements of the entire body-politic" (9). Spencer's theories propose a natural sifting of people to different classes owing to inclination and inherent ability. In his 1864 publication, *Principles of Biology*, Spencer first introduces a term that becomes synonymous with Darwin's theory of evolution. Spencer states, "Survival of the fittest, acting alone, is ever replacing inferior species by superior species" (143). The term, "survival of the fittest" became widely accepted and used among biologists and scientists. The term was quickly adopted for use in social spheres of industrialized societies to rationalize the inequalities inherent in laissez-faire economics.

EXPLOITATION OF THE FITTEST: CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL DARWINISM IN UPTON SINCLAIR'S *THE JUNGLE*

American sociologist, William Graham Sumner, combined the principles of Darwin and Spencer in applying them to U.S. society. Sumner came to be called the father of American Social Darwinism for his efforts to use Darwin's theory of natural selection in justifying the wide chasm between wealthy and poor. His form of social science excused the upper classes of the Gilded Age from responsibility towards the poorer classes. His fusion of Darwinian ideology with sociology led to his belief that "a drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be . . . the law of survival of the fittest was not made by man, and it cannot be abrogated by man. We can only, by interfering with it, produce the survival of the unfittest" (134). Sumner's social application of the laws of natural selection favor the upper class, effectively excusing them from not only aiding the lower class in their struggle but also in applying equitable and favorable working conditions for the immigrants working for them.

In *The Jungle*, Sinclair exposes the damaging ways Social Darwinism is entrenched in American society. The title itself is reminiscent of Darwinian doctrine and the law of the jungle. Sinclair's jungle is every bit as treacherous, only it is social circumstances that pose grave danger to the meatpackers of Chicago. He portrays how tenets of Social Darwinism create corruption and despoiling not only in the food the immigrants are producing but also in the lives of the immigrants themselves. *The Jungle* tells the story of Jurgis Rudkis, a Lithuanian immigrant, and his young family's idealistic dream of American life. Jurgis is "ineluctably drawn into the gears of competitive capitalism" (Gottesman xxxiv) and the nightmare of American industrialism—ruled by the tenets of Social Darwinism. Jurgis becomes one of the thousands of immigrants Spencer refers to as the "serf class" in his works. Sinclair uses Jurgis to demonstrate the destructive effects Social Darwinism creates in the spheres of economics, popular culture, and law.

While *The Jungle* censures Darwinism when applied to society as a whole, Sinclair's disapproval of Social Darwinism is especially apparent in the field of economics. Leading businessmen of the Gilded Age "accepted Darwinian terminology . . . . John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, James J. Hill, and Chauncey Depew . . . represented the survival of the fittest, men who had come through the fierce competitions of the great city because of their superior ability" (Wyllie 630).

Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate whose fortune was made in the late 1800s, discusses Social Darwinist tendencies in his essay, "The Gospel of Wealth." Carnegie states that "the price which society pays for the law of competition . . . is also great; but the advantage of this law is also greater still, for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train" (4). Like Carnegie, many of the business entrepreneurs at the turn of the nineteenth century also applied the science of Darwinism to economic practices.

While the pursuit of wealth ushered in by the industrial revolution created economic prosperity for some, Sinclair felt that capitalism unbridled was paid for at the expense of the working class. At Jurgis's introduction to the meat-packing plants of Chicago, he feels it is "almost profanity" (44) to speak about the plant and its owners with anything but reverence and awe. Sinclair alludes to the "greatest aggregation of labour and capital ever gathered" (44) and displays the power of Durham's packing plant when Jokubas explains that the plant "supported directly two hundred and fifty thousand people . . . and indirectly it supported half a million" (44). Sinclair illustrates the power of the capital and industry of Jurgis's new world; for Jurgis it was "a thing as tremendous as the universe—the laws and ways of its workings no more than the universe to be questioned or understood" (44). In this parallel between the laws of the universe and the laws of capitalism, Sinclair successfully sets up a connection between the laws of Darwin's science and Carnegie's laws of competition. Neither should be interfered with or questioned.

While the novel sets up the direct link between American capitalism and Social Darwinism, Sinclair begins a process of exposing the false ideologies of the economic realities of Social Darwinism. Jurgis and his family enter the world where it is assumed that competition is law and where only the strong survive. The twelve-hour work days amid the rivers of blood, refuse, dangerous chemicals, and horrible working conditions, however, cut down even the strong, who are cavalierly and heartlessly replaced. A broken foot, infected cut, consumption, and a host of other ills brought on by working conditions all serve as excuses for enforcing an arbitrary code that serves to withhold prosperity from the workers, leaving them only misery and penury. Historian David D. Anderson states that "Protestant

ethic and social Darwinism" (5) created the Chicago of the 1890s. He goes on to explain that, for immigrants like Jurgis, the city becomes a symbol "of a brutality and determination to win, to achieve vengeance or to conquer, that was no less naïve than Jurgis's earlier youthful innocence" (10). Jurgis's reverence for the great industry is soon replaced by a vehemence and understanding that every man is on his own in the jungle of Chicago's Packingtown.

Sinclair uses Jurgis's experience as a lesson of morality for American society. Jurgis and his family come to represent the throngs of workers being disadvantaged and ill-treated by the great cog of industry. In Sinclair's view, Social Darwinist tendencies, which fueled capitalism and industry, resulted not in a separation of the weak from the strong, but in a separation of the wealthy from the poor. The wealthy rise to power on the backs of those whom they abuse, giving little thought to working conditions or equality. Sinclair's open attack on this system is obvious in Jurgis's altered train of thought by the end of the novel:

> How many millions of such poor deluded wretches there were whose lives had been stunted by Capitalism…they really thought it was 'Individualism' for tens of the thousands of them to herd together and obey the orders of a steel magnate, and produce hundreds of millions of dollars of wealth for him, and then let him give them libraries. (364)

The outright condemnation of Carnegie is obvious. For Sinclair, Carnegie's libraries fail to atone for the damage Social Darwinian ideologies produced for immigrants like Jurgis. Sinclair's reference to individualism and animalistic descriptors makes a definite connection between American economics and Social Darwinism and effectively portrays the damaging effects of both.

Just as Sinclair's critique of Social Darwinism is apparent in his treatment of American economics, it can also be seen in his treatment of the popular culture of the time. The popular culture of the Gilded Age included silent films, dancing halls, beer gardens, baseball, amusement parks, and novels. One of the genres most influential in American society was the dime novel. Dime novels, both affordable and available at every dime and nickel store, were "popularized by Horatio Alger" (Hornung

334). Alfred Hornung discusses Alger's success in writing over 130 dime novels between 1870 and 1890, which glorified the rags-to-riches stories of fictional boys whose hard work and perseverance granted them financial success in America's industrial frontier (334). Alger's "dime novels served to support the ideology of the publicly sanctioned Social Darwinism and the demands of a rugged individualism in a laissez-faire economy" (334). It is in this literary environment that Sinclair produced *The Jungle*.

If Alger's novels sanctioned Social Darwinism in their stories of orphaned boys who rose to the top because of hard work and superior ability, Sinclair's novel stood in stark opposition to Alger's ideologies. Hornung believes it is without question that the tale of Jurgis and his family is in direct opposition to the young immigrant boys of Alger's novels who overcome the jungles of Chicago and New York to take their rightful place among the bourgeoisie of American society (336). The American dream of Alger's novels is transformed into a nightmare for Jurgis and his family who "had travelled all the way from Lithuania to it . . . the new emigrants were still tasting it, lost in wonder, when suddenly the car came to a halt, and the door was flung open, and a voice shouted—'Stockyards!'" (Sinclair 27). While Jurgis and his family were seeking the American dream, Sinclair effectively transposes the dream onto a concrete jungle exposed in all its ugliness when the immigrant's trolley opens up to the stockyards.

It is in the ruthless world of Social Darwinian ideologies that Jurgis's dream reflects his internalization of this code: "He was fighting for his life . . . he had wasted his life, he had wrecked himself, with his accursed weakness" (Sinclair 239). In a world ruled by competition and survival of the fittest, even the strongest will find rising above their peers—let alone beating the system—nearly impossible. Failure to make a fortune is deemed weakness by Jurgis, instead of understanding it as a flaw in a corrupt system aimed at keeping upper and lower classes separate. Sinclair's story of an immigrant ends in direct opposition to Alger's dime novels. *The Jungle*'s ending of a man who fights his way towards the light filtering down from the top, only to be beat down repeatedly, was, unfortunately, the reality for many, rather than Alger's success stories.

Within the framework of *The Jungle*, an effective demythologization of Social Darwinism is seen not only in the economic world of the Gilded Age and the popular culture of its time but also in the courts of law. Jurgis inevitably finds a place in the corrupt world of American economics by falling into corruption himself. Violence, robbery, and dishonesty bring him before American courts, which, in turn, dole out a harsh form of justice obviously beholden to Social Darwinian thought. Jurgis, as a lower class immigrant, is dismissed time and again, with the favor of the courts leaning towards those whose stations in life are above him. Jurgis's statements are dismissed and only the stories of his accusers are believed. With no money, no social status, and no superior qualities, it is no wonder that Jurgis feels that "the law, that society, with all its powers, had declared itself his foe" (Sinclair 180). The capitalist machine worked against Jurgis, paradoxically creating in him an enemy of healthy competition and survival of the fittest.

Sinclair's fictionalized account pits the courts against the lower classes, and evidence of similarities to the courts of Sinclair's time is discernible. There was in the courts of the early twentieth century a decided favoring of exploitative capitalist practices that were supported by Social Darwinist beliefs. For example, in the 1905 U.S. Supreme Court case of Lochner v. New York, the court ruled against a New York law that limited the hours a baker could work in a given week to sixty. The Supreme Court stated that the law violated the "right and liberty of an individual to contract" (Lochner). While the case upheld the right of bakeries to demand unusually long work hours from their employees, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes issued a dissent. He discouraged the court's adherence in capitulating to a laissez-faire mentality, since the "Constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory" (qtd. in Lochner). He further argued that "the fourteenth amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's social statics" (qtd. in Lochner). Holmes's dissent clearly makes a connection between the harmful sway of Social Darwinism over American society at the turn of the century. Holmes's dissenting opinion notwithstanding, the Supreme Court's decision in this case further mirrors other court decisions of the day in which the right of big business is favored over the right of the individual.

The result of the Lochner case in stripping individuals of their rights in favor of corporations was not unusual. The Supreme Court in the early 1900s, under the influence of Chief Justice Melville W. Fuller, took an active role in promulgating economic growth at the expense of individual workers. In 1908 the court heard Loewe v. Lawler, also called the Danbury Hatter's Case. The decision of the court effectively applied the Sherman Antitrust Act to labor unions that represented employees. The case stripped the unions of their right to boycott, citing the boycotts as an obstruction to the free flow of interstate commerce. The court's decision also mandated that individual members of the unions could be held financially responsible for damages caused by the activities of the collective union. The Fuller Court also legally forbade workers from joining unions in Adair v. United States. In general, the judicial system upheld laissez-faire economics during the Gilded Age. It furthered the tenets of social Darwinism by supporting the tactics of capitalist corporations at the expense of the poor workers they exploited.

It is no surprise that Jurgis wrestles with the power of the courts and the impact they have upon immigrants like himself:

> He had no wit to trace back the social crime . . . he could not say that it was the thing men have called "the system" that was crushing him to the earth . . . [nor] his masters, who had brought up the law of the land, and had dealt out their brutal will to him from the seat of justice. (180)

Jurgis realizes that the courts are not fully responsible for the Social Darwinist tendencies that crush his daily existence, only that they are subtly connected to the men who control and profit from America's vast economic system. Sinclair's critique of the propensity the courts have for favoring the gospel of wealth relates directly to Justice Holmes's dissent in Lochner v. New York. It reminds readers that a man's right to contract should in no way uphold Spencer's ideas of survival of the fittest in American economics.

While many have claimed that Sinclair's novel failed to fully give voice to the socialist glory for which he was aiming and, therefore, failed the working classes of Chicago, his ability to mount an effective critique of the Social Darwinism of the Gilded Age has proven influential. In the closing scene of the novel, Sinclair uses Schliemann to fully illuminate the corruption

and damage produced by Social Darwinist's healthy competition:

> Schliemann went on to outline some of the wastes of competition: the losses of industrial warfare; the ceaseless worry and friction; the vices—such as drink, for instance the use of which had nearly doubled in twenty years, as a consequence of the intensification of the economic struggle; the idle and unproductive members of the community, the frivolous rich and the pauperized poor; the law and the whole machinery or repression; the wastes of social ostentation . . . in a society dominated by the fact of commercial competition money is necessarily the test of prowess, and wastefulness the sole criterion of power. (378)

It is without question that Sinclair's novel took aim at the very heart of Social Darwinisim. The ideas of healthy competition, natural selection, survival of the fittest, and the law of competition, however applicable to the natural world, are methodically exposed as productive of abuse and vice in the social world of industrialized societies. Sinclair's jungle dramatizes the patent misapplication of Darwin's biological theories by social engineers intent upon justifying the continued exploitation and subsequent social stratification of the Gilded Age. Through Jurgis and his plight, Sinclair effectively and decidedly tore down the notion that Social Darwinism is about survival of the fittest and established, rather, that the economic theories it supported necessitated exploitation of all, including the fittest—leaving readers with the responsibility of passing moral judgment on Social Darwinism in the Gilded Age.

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