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Paradise Always Already Lost: Myth, Memory, and Matter in English Literature

Elizabeth Stuart Angello

University of South Florida, lizzangello@gmail.com

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Paradise Always Already Lost:
Myth, Memory, and Matter in English Literature

by

Elizabeth S. Angello

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Sara Munson Deats, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Nicole Guenther Discenza, Ph.D.
Julian Yates, Ph.D.
Marty Gould, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This dissertation follows a collection of agentive objects around and through the networks of humans and nonhumans in four disparate works of English literature: the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, William Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, Thomas Hardy's novel *The Woodlanders*, and Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials*. Applying the emergent discourses of object-oriented analyses, I posit the need for a critique that considers literary objects not as textual versions of real-world objects but as constructs of human imagination. What happens when we treat nonhuman or inanimate objects in literature as full characters in their own right? What work do nonhumans do to generate the story and the characters? How does our understanding of the human characters depend on the nonhuman ones? Most importantly, what motivates the agency of the fictive nonhuman? I argue that in this particular collection of texts, nonhuman agency stems from authorial nostalgia for the Garden of Eden: a time long past in which humans, nonhumans, and God existed in perfect harmony. Each text preserves this collective memory in a unique way, processing the myth as the author's cultural moment allows.

The Dream of the Rood chapter uncovers the complex network of mirrors between the poet, the fictive Dreamer, the True Cross who speaks to the Dreamer, and the reader(s) of the poem. I use Jacques Lacan's stages of psychosexual development to trace the contours of this network, and I demonstrate how the poet's Edenic vision takes the form of

an early medieval feast hall in heaven in which God presides over a banquet table like Hrothgar over Heorot. *The Rape of Lucrece* chapter posits that a series of domestic actors (weasels, wind, door locks) join with various “pricks” in the poem in an attempt to protect Lucrece from her rapist, Tarquin. Through these objects, I investigate the limits of women’s speech and its efficacy before concluding with a consideration of the poem’s Edenic vision, a Humanist paradise-on-earth, in the guise of the Roman Republic. The next chapter follows a shorn section of hair through *The Woodlanders* as it performs various functions and is assigned responsibility and power by several different human characters in the novel. The hair acts within a network of “man-traps” that illustrate the dangers of human artifice in an industrial era, and it reveals to readers Hardy’s certainty that we will never reclaim Eden in our postlapsarian world. Finally, I navigate the fantastic worlds of *His Dark Materials* with the aid of three powerfully agentic objects: a golden compass, a subtle knife, and an amber spyglass. The first and second, I insist, resist not only their user’s intentions but also their author’s, because they are imbued with so much life and power that the narrative cannot contain them. The spyglass, by contrast, performs exactly as it was designed to do, and reveals the secret of the perfectly symbiotic world of the creatures called *mulefa*, who model for us a very contemporary new Eden that is populated by hybrids, sustained by materialism and sensuality, and presided over by earthly individuals rather than an omniscient Creator. Pullman’s trilogy brings us back to the Garden but insists that our fallen state is our triumph rather than our tragedy.

.1.

**Things Doing Stuff:
Materiality and Collective Agency
in English Literature**

Self-described student of science Bruno Latour defines an actor as “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference” (*Social* 71)—a dictum that cultural theorists have begun to take seriously in the past ten years. My dissertation examines a collection of things-that-make-a-difference in a broad range of English literary texts, forging new ground in material culture studies in its emphasis on the agency of textual objects. The first wave of object studies began by turning the scholarly tables, ignoring human actors in order to focus on the marginalized nonhumans in literary texts. The newest permutation, known in its various guises as thing theory, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and onticology, considers the extra-textual existence of nonhumans.¹ All of these approaches aim to teach us to live more ethically, through examples provided by scholars in a number of fields, such as politics, science, and sociology. Jane Bennett, for example, speaks specifically about socio-political crises, as in the example she provides of the North American blackout in 2003. When the electrical grid

¹ For excellent overviews of the development of object and material approaches in medieval and early modern studies, see Yates, “Things,” and Robertson.

went down in a cascade affecting 50 million people, Bennett explains, various groups attempted to assign sole responsibility to a particular actor. Some blamed the FirstEnergy Corporation for its lack of infrastructure, while the power companies blamed consumers for using too much electricity; others blamed the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, for allowing power companies to privatize; still others blamed faulty wiring, overenthusiastic protection protocols at power plants, and the weather. Bennett's project involves a more equitable distribution of responsibility, such that each actor takes responsibility for its specific role in the event and takes steps to mitigate the damage and prevent a recurrence. Where Bennett treats political events, Bruno Latour often examines socio-scientific events, as in the invention of the vacuum or France's attempt to build a better system of public transport. In *Aramis: Or, the Love of Technology*, Latour explores the demise of a Parisian train system by allowing the various actors to "speak" through documents, photographs, legal transcripts, and excerpts from fictitious textbooks and conversations. By doing so, he hopes, like Bennett, to create a more ethical distribution of agency and responsibility, rather than allowing the full weight of Aramis's failures to rest on any one party's shoulders. In a different field, gaming expert and Media Studies professor Ian Bogost uses his work to help us better empathize with the Other, continuing the work of minority studies generally, except that instead of urging more ethical relations with the human Other, he encourages them between humans and the stuff of everyday life. In *Alien Phenomenology*, Bogost shows both our proximity to and distance from a massive variety of things, including computers, IKEA furniture, motorcycles, card games, bats, and New Mexican hatch chiles. In the same way that minority studies teaches us to be better neighbors and ecocriticism teaches us to be better stewards of the earth, object- and

network-oriented studies, in whatever its guise, teaches us to be better actants working in congress with one another.

In this project, I attempt to create a unique space that contributes to this essential and burgeoning conversation. Here, I allow literary things, the stuff of human fantasy, to merit consideration as full characters with rich narrative lives, working in tandem with human actors rather than competing with them. Drawing from object-oriented studies and actor-network theory, I insist that only by recognizing all actors in an event can we afford each actor respect on its individual merits, and, as Bennett argues, we can assign responsibility more fairly. If the literary landscape represents our own and if we learn from literature how to *be*, then learning to read more ethically and more completely, can help us learn how to *be* better.

To demonstrate the universal utility of my methodology, I have deliberately chosen four very different texts from a wide swath of English literary history—although perhaps, like the small assemblage of detritus that Jane Bennett describes feeling so drawn to, these texts chose me. Each work boasts incredibly vibrant, agentic objects possessed with remarkable will and liveliness, things whose call I could not ignore. I begin with the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, wherein the True Cross narrates its own experience at the crucifixion of Christ, then jump forward in time to Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, in which a series of agentic objects attempt to speak for and inspire speech in their mistress. In a fourth chapter, I will explore the relationship between the forces of nature and an uncannily agentic symbol of human vanity—a fall of hair—in Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*. I conclude with a contemporary trilogy for young adults, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, in which a trio of extraordinary objects (a compass, a

knife, and a spyglass) aids a pair of adolescent heroes in their quest to destroy God and save their worlds. These disparate works are bound together by their agent objects, but also, and more importantly, by their shared message: that humans, things, and nature once existed in harmony. Each text envisions that harmonious state differently, in a way that illustrates the values and worldview of the people who produced the work, and each urges us to recover what we have lost.

The shared fantasy of symbiosis stems from the foundational Judeo-Christian myth of the Garden of Eden. This story tells of a time when humans lived at peace with the universe, unencumbered by things—all of their needs were satisfied by God and nature. When they overstretched their bounds and attempted to “be like God,” they sundered a primordial unity; banished from the garden and distant from God, the humans began to develop antagonistic relationships with the rest of creation. For the first time, animals threatened and the land resisted. The humans dug into the earth and from it fashioned tools and weapons and, later, decorations and treasure. As they became more entranced with things *qua* things, the humans became paradoxically more hostile towards the land and yet more ardent for reunion with it. In that tension, the land and the objects wrested from it began to work upon the humans, resisting their employment as agents of human will and, I argue, pushing the users back toward prelapsarian harmony.²

Each of the literary works treated in this dissertation stages the interaction between humans and resistant objects, and each posits an alternative vision wherein humans, objects, and nature coexist, often alongside God. In every instance, this utopian vision is

² As Serres sees it, “the awareness of things is violently calling us back” (*Natural* 39). He insists, rightly, that by ignoring the world, we have learned to live like parasites, condemning the world and ourselves to death—a shortsighted move that will eventually result in the death of our own species.

unique to its cultural moment: in *The Dream of the Rood*, it takes the form of a heavenly banquet hall, the quintessential locus of Anglo-Saxon *comitatus*, where the Dreamer will sit near his *hlaford* (“lord” but also “Lord”); in *The Rape of Lucrece*, harmony wears the guise of the Roman Republic—an example of human, rather than divine, perfection; in *The Woodlanders*, the secluded forest provides a surrogate Eden, although in a typically Hardian move, that paradise fails to survive the Industrial Revolution; and in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman reintroduces the original paradigm—garden, tree, serpent, fruit—and re-enacts the Fall, bringing humans and the world back into concord, though this time *sans* a god. In all instances, both humans and the objects that work upon them are inexorably drawn together by a kind of phenomenological gravity. As I will argue, things inherently possess their own agency, but often that agency becomes more visible in literature when in conjunction with human agency. If the objects here resist their passive, inert objectification, they do so in order to draw us back into congress with the nonhuman world, to flatten out our ontology (to paraphrase Levi Bryant) by dismantling the hierarchies that humans have developed to assert their dominion.

If the conceit of my study is that all actors in all texts are bound together in an endless network of influence and association, it seems fitting that I use a variety of critical and theoretical approaches to investigate these texts. Each chapter attends to the material reality of the most significant and active objects in the texts at hand, attempting to describe their life and power within the narrative network of actors. Political scientist Jane Bennett coined the term “thing-power” to describe the special agency of objects and their ability to attract human attention through their “vibrancy”: “Thing-power gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to

manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience" (xvi). Bennett relates her experience of being "called" by an assemblage of refuse in a culvert, called to notice it and think with it about her own subjectivity (and objectivity); so, too, the objects in this study have called to me, pulling my attention away from the human characters and demanding that I acknowledge their work as equally—and in some cases, more—powerful.

To consider these vibrant things on their own terms, I turn to some of the recent work in the emergent field of object studies. Generally speaking, these approaches seek to theorize objects on their own merits, as far as possible from human intervention or alteration. Levi Bryant, one of Object-Oriented Ontology's (OOO) predominant philosophers, posits an "Ontic Principle," wherein the primary condition of existence is differentiation: "To be is to make or produce difference" (263). This sounds a great deal like Latour's claim that an actant is "any *thing* that [...] make[s] a difference," but Bryant (and others, notably Graham Harman) worries that Latour's emphasis on the relations between things elides the special thing-ness of the object itself (271). OOO would rather that we first recognize this thing-ness and, next, recognize that we can never truly know it, since we stand apart from it. Bryant argues, "Objects have some sort of substantiality independent of their exo-relations and [they] hold something in reserve in relating to other objects" (273). Harman calls this phenomenon "withdrawal," and although I agree with OOO's claims, I also find their usefulness limited in the kind of literary study I have undertaken here. This project does not attempt to describe real objects in the real world, but rather literary objects populating a series of fictional universes. As such, each object is the product of a human fantasy, so that the operative question becomes not "What is the object?" or "What

does the object withhold?" but rather "Why is the object?" and "What does the author withhold?" Human agency and object agency cannot be disentangled. Literature is a human enterprise, and although a poem may feature an agentive weasel with its own weasel-y existence, Shakespeare invented that weasel. Like any parent, Shakespeare may be surprised to find his weasel become defiant, exceeding the boundaries he so carefully set for it; but although the weasel grows into a thing unto itself, Shakespeare's human imagination sponsors its thingness.

Thus Bennett's location of agency as always within "a human-nonhuman working group" (xvii) certainly proves valid here, for the human author's imagination and language animate his or her object characters—even when those characters exceed or resist authorial intention. "Even as textual entities," Latour explains, "objects overflow their makers, intermediaries become mediators" (*Social* 85). In the chapters that follow, I rely on this model of collective agency to explain why so many authors working in the Judeo-Christian tradition invent nonhuman characters that capture readers' imaginations so strongly. The myth of prelapsarian unity helps to reassure us when we grow uncomfortable with the antagonistic relationships we form with the nonhuman; Latour might include this myth under the heading of "modernity," which, he insists, never really existed but merely serves as an alibi for our need to ignore the hopeless entanglements of real life. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour dismantles the upper level of the modern settlement to reveal the hybrids beneath, tracing networks of actors and focusing on the connections between them.³ Technology, in Latour's formulation, is "congealed labor," a term that describes how

³ Latour believes that "modernity" is a fiction, based on a tidy separation of subject and object that has never actually happened. The idea that the so-called "Enlightenment" cleaned up the messily confused categories in the medieval period merely whitewashes the chaos that continues to exist: subject, object,

actors coexist and create each other, rather than serving as so many causes and effects (*Hope* 189).

One of the most significant aspects of Latour's Actor-Network Theory is its titular hyphen, which admits to a prevailing interest in relationships and asserts parity between the lives of things and the networks that contain them. In other words, Latour finds the hyphen more interesting than the parties it unites: the real work is in the binding. "Being connected," he claims, "being interconnected, or being heterogeneous is not enough. It all depends on the sort of action that is flowing from one to the other. [...] It's the work, and the movement, and the flow, and the changes that should be stressed" (*Social* 143). For Bennett as well, thing-power inheres in movement: "There is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not itself aquiver with virtual force" (57). All objects derive their vitality from their capacity to move and change, which Bennett and other object-oriented thinkers see in all things, even metal and stone, which humans typically thrust forward as the archetypes of the inert.⁴ Flux in such materials indeed exists, although it happens on a register imperceptible for humans: "'Objects' appear as such because their becoming proceeds at a speed or a level below the threshold of human discernment" (Bennett 58). To find movement in metal, Bennett has to dig deep—all the way down to the spaces between the material's atoms; there, she finds space, and space permits movement, and movement leaves traces that testify to liveliness.

church, state, science, belief, thing, event, social, and political are not discrete categories but rather increasingly dense and constantly negotiated relationships. Pretending that this is not so is the "modern settlement."

⁴ For more on the myth of "lithic imperturbability" and a powerful, poetic account of the actual liveliness of stone, see Cohen 56-63.

This kind of relation—minute connections and fluxions that can effect massive changes to a material’s composition, appearance, and behavior—is not a new discovery. As Bennett and Cohen point out, respectively, metallurgists and jewelers have understood it for centuries. As critics like Jonathan Goldberg reveal, even non-specialists have suspected it for millennia. In *The Seeds of Things*, Goldberg discusses Lucretius’s interest in sub-atomic vibrancy: “It is the nature of things that they are not solid bodies but rather bodies in motion. [...] Things are best understood as congeries of whirling atoms” (33). Lucretius’s theory anticipates Latour and Bryant not just in its insistence on movement but also on its awareness of difference: because things move, they can never be the same, even when they appear to be identical (36). Further, because things move, they relate and change one another and themselves; this motion Lucretius calls the “swerve,” or *clinamen*, and he believes creation happens therein, without the need for a creator or god-figure. If nothing moved, nothing would touch—everything would remain separated by the tiny, infinitely divisible spaces between their atoms. “But,” Goldberg writes, “the atoms swerve, and swerving they touch, come into conjunction, and part, and these aleatory meetings are where life meets life” (46).

Part of the anxiety about reunion exhibited by the texts in this study appears to rest on an intrinsic awareness of these quantum spaces—in other words, we always feel the distance between ourselves and others, human or otherwise, and thus we always feel a desire to connect across those distances. In working to understand his own grief, Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed this perception of lack thus: “I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition” (29). In psychoanalytic terms,

this means that we perceive a lack in ourselves; in Jacques Lacan's formulation, we feel our distance from the *chora*, or the state of symbiosis with the mother that we enjoyed *in utero* and in our infancy. This latent feeling of apartness (and its bedfellow, part-ness) motivates our need for stories like that of Adam and Eve in the Garden: we would like to remember a time when we were not apart, and we would like to hope for a time when we can reconcile, when we can really touch one another again. These desires appear time and again in English literature, but they emerge especially clearly in the texts I have chosen for this project: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Woodlanders*, and *His Dark Materials*.

In collating such disparate texts, I do not intend to assert the evolution of an idea, such that what begins in a medieval poem evolves until it reaches its apex in a contemporary series of novels. Rather, I will show how heeding the call of the nonhuman in any literary encounter might lead readers to uncover the collectives that support our existence. Philosopher Michel Serres aims to destroy the prevailing linear mode of describing time and history, insisting that we can better understand both as folded like a handkerchief or kneaded like dough, with ends constantly touching and melting; because of this wrinkling motion, time is constantly subjected to erasure and re-writing. All things are thus palimpsests, argues Renaissance scholar Jonathan Gil Harris, bringing Serres's conception of time to bear on literary and stage objects; they contain within themselves all past, present, and future meanings. Harris also shows how things can act as conjunctions, linking our time to Shakespeare's, or one literary object to another, or one textual object to a thing outside the text entirely. He summed up this argument in his memorable quip about Othello's handkerchief being best understood as an "and-kerchief" because it contains

within itself both intra- and extra-textual histories of handkerchiefs, stage properties, and fetishes (181).

I will adopt this prepositional mode of travel for my study, which chooses texts based on repeated troping. The path of this dissertation often crosses itself to become a tissue in which disparate threads weave themselves together to create meaning. To explain, claims Serres in his conversations with Latour, is to disentangle; when we *explicate*, we literally “unpleat” and smooth out the folds made in the fabric of time in order to perceive patterns and meaning (Serres and Latour 65). We do this by way of metaphor, a method of transporting or message-delivery (66), which is both the province of mathematics and of literature. According to Ian Bogost, a prominent voice in OOO, metaphor uniquely allows us to approach the truth of an object, the parts that recede when it enters into relationships with other objects (67). The literary object, already a metaphor, becomes the perfect figure for examining and explicating nonhuman agency. This dissertation will argue that a method of reading that attends to collectives and metaphors scripts an ethical and fruitful alternative to the anthropocentric narratives common to traditional academia, which can contribute to the real-world crises acknowledged by theorists like Bennett, Latour, and Serres.

I take as my particular model for such scholarship the work of Julian Yates, who deploys Latour, Serres, and others in his readings of early modern texts. In *Error, Misuse, Failure*, Yates calls for an “ethics of reciprocation,” wherein we acknowledge the ties that bind human and nonhuman actors into collectives of meaning. Lucas Introna makes Yates’s aim explicit and adds that we might productively act as poets rather than scholars, since poets patiently sit and listen to the world, waiting for things to reveal their own stories.

Literary critics thus become witnesses rather than interpreters. This poetics of “letting-be” echoes philosopher Donna Haraway’s “becoming-with,” a process of allowing species to interact and mutually constitute one another. Everything, for Haraway, can be imagined as a companion species, and everyone thus becomes a hybrid of technologies and selves. I prefer Haraway’s model to Introna’s, because hers requires action and participation; I cannot remove myself from action any more than the things I write about can. Like Haraway, Yates, and Latour, I believe that meaning and identity emerge through work—a “dispersal,” Yates calls it, “in which we participate” (“Drift” 48). Things move (“cascade”), and when they move, they move us with them (“Drift” 50). When we move, we move things with us.

In this dissertation, I intend to “play the locations” created by the agent objects in an early medieval poem, an early modern poem, a Victorian novel, and a contemporary trilogy, to see what happens when I try living alongside them for a while, listening like a poet, letting-be but also becoming-with (Yates, *Drift* 50). Many nonhumans in literary texts that appear to possess human-like agency operate on the condition of *prosopopoeia*, a rhetorical device in which a present figure embodies the characteristics or voice of an absent entity: Homer’s Dawn famously boasts rosy fingers. Paul de Man enriches our understanding of *prosopopoeia* by insisting on its etymological meaning as one who wears a mask or the face of another, “the fiction of the voice-beyond-the-grave” (77). De Man poses the frightening question of *prosopopoeia*’s “latent threat,” that “by making the dead speak [...] the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death” (78). Thus, figurative language acts as “our actual entry” into mortality and death (78). The objects examined in this dissertation approach this fearful possibility because they go beyond linguistic cleverness; readers must

understand them as, within their textual universe, *really* moving (at least textually), speaking, interacting, influencing, and sometimes threatening other characters, as if Homer's Dawn had reached out her fingers to strangle Odysseus.⁵ It can be no accident that object-oriented studies often concern themselves with death, worms, corpses, and zombies: vibrant matter implies the syllogism that if all things are actors, then all actors are ultimately things. The uncanny agency of these textual objects unsettles, which is why I hope to join theorists like Jane Bennett and Levi Bryant in establishing a new framework that allows for the agency of all things, human and nonhuman, and accepts the assemblages in which they participate. In such a formulation, object agency ceases to be exceptional and therefore also ceases to be threatening.

My second chapter, "*Imitatio Crucis: Sylvan Subjectivity in The Dream of the Rood,*" focuses on the talking cross in an Anglo-Saxon poem. In the poem, the True Cross appears to a monastic dreamer and narrates its experience at the crucifixion of Christ. In this narration, the actions and pain of Christ are subordinated to those of the Cross—compelling readers, remarkably, to focus on a chunk of wood rather than on the Son of God. After describing this experience, the Cross exhorts the Dreamer to follow its example, to hold it up as a model for strength and humility; thus the Cross effectively replaces Christ as the figure to imitate and venerate. Only by traversing this path can the Dreamer (and the readers) hope to gain entrance into Heaven.

The Cross's astonishing agency resists simple categorization. Clearly, this object makes a difference in the narrative, by shifting the linchpin of the Christian story and therefore the paths to salvation for both the Dreamer and the reader. In this chapter, I will

⁵ For more on the Classical and Renaissance uses of *prosopopoeia*, see Alexander 98-112.

read the poem against Jacques Lacan's description of the mirror stage as well as Julia Kristeva's revision of this psychological stage. I am particularly interested in the ways in which abjection, Kristeva's contribution to Lacanian theory, applies to the Dreamer's process of individuation. The Cross merges with and eventually displaces Christ, focusing on its own agony in the garden and later in the ground, until it is resurrected and becomes itself once more. For his part, the Dreamer longs to become one with the Cross and through the Cross unite with Christ before emerging from the vision as his own person. As a wooden cross, this object simultaneously re-presents the sylvan symbiosis humanity enjoyed in Eden and reminds us of the sin that brought us from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Cross reaches the Dreamer at a time when he has fallen out of communion with the world and feels distant from God, and, by presenting itself as an agent, the Cross inspires the Dreamer's reunion with both his fellow humans and God. Thus, only by identifying with and then differentiating from the Cross can the Dreamer (and therefore, the reader) become an autonomous Self, capable of attaining a seat at the Lord's feast table.

In the third chapter, "Lucrece's Needle-work: Domestic Agents and Humanist Fantasy in *The Rape of Lucrece*," I examine Shakespeare's early narrative poem. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the Roman prince Tarquin, who, becoming inflamed with lust upon hearing his comrade Collatine praise his wife's chastity, rides to Collatium and rapes her. After the crime, Tarquin returns to Ardea and Lucrece debates her course of action. Seeing a painted tapestry depicting Hecuba's suffering after the fall of Troy, Lucrece decides to kill herself, which she does upon confessing the rape to her husband, father, and uncle. In the wake of her suicide, her family uses her corpse as evidence of Tarquin's crime (and as further

evidence of his family's cruelty), leading the Roman people to rise up against the Tarquins, drive them out, and establish the Republic.

This chapter focuses on a series of domestic objects that attempt to protect their mistress from her tragic fate. First, a group of nonhuman conspirators in the hallways of Collatium come to life to forestall Tarquin's progress towards Lucrece's room: a weasel shrieks, a gust of wind blows out his taper, the door jamb scrapes, the lock sticks, and, finally, a sewing needle buried in Lucrece's glove stabs Tarquin when he picks up the item to smell it. All of these things animate themselves in Lucrece's defense, attempting to convince Tarquin to turn away. Horribly, though the would-be rapist pauses in his journey to consider the meaning of these things and their uncanny actions, he ultimately decides that they only increase his desire by making Lucrece's violation more of a challenge. As a soldier, Tarquin is no stranger to the thrills of battle and conquest, and he turns to military metaphors as he re-lights his torch and forces his way into Lucrece's literal and biological chambers.

Second, a network of pricks governs readers' interpretations of the rape and Lucrece's response. The central prick in the poem (Tarquin's offending member and its yet more offensive action) turns out to be only one among many, all the rest of which belong to its titular victim. Her needle pricks Tarquin's finger before his prick wounds her; she decides on her course of action after confronting a tapestry, woven with the prick of a shuttle; and she later stabs herself with the prick of a dagger, re-enacting her violation. In this reading, I show how the poem uses the figure of the prick to collate and complicate two theories that have become almost doctrinal in medieval and early modern studies: the

leaky woman as a source of male anxiety⁶ and the loom as a purely female discursive space. A needle is an opportunity, a permit, but also a paradox—it wounds in order to heal, fractures in order to bind. Each paradoxical prick attempts to speak for Lucrece, but each fails, leaving her suicide and her blood to testify on their behalf.

Two implied examples of human-nature symbiosis bookend Lucrece's agony. At the poem's beginning, Collatine praises his perfectly harmonious marriage to Lucrece. Catherine Belsey links Collatine's language to the printed propaganda circulating in Shakespeare's England about consensual companionate marriage, which notably describes the ideal union as a way to reclaim paradise. The poem concludes with Junius Brutus vowing to avenge his kinswoman's wrong; as mentioned above, he achieves this by dismantling the monarchy and founding the famed Republic, the Roman idea of a heaven on earth. Since prelapsarian communion cannot be achieved on a personal level, through marriage, the Romans regain it instead on a political level, through revolution.

Chapter five, "Falling from Grace: Science and Severance in *The Woodlanders*," travels to a remote village in Hardy's familiar Wessex to follow a fall of hair as it spreads the contagion of modernity throughout the bucolic apple orchards of Little Hintock. Young Marty South is plain and hardworking, poor and solitary, but her luxuriant chestnut-colored mane attracts the attention of the wealthy widow Felice Charmond, who sends a local wig-maker to purchase the hair and make her a "fall," or false ponytail. Hair is a liminal object because it crosses boundaries between inside and outside, private and public, living and dead; its uncanny nature lends it a measure of inherent agency, but in Hardy's novel, the characters afford it even more liveliness. Unlike the other objects in this

⁶ For a complete analysis of early modern tropes of the "leaky" woman, see Paster 23-63.

study, Marty's hair does not move or act on its own volition. Rather, several of the characters read it as powerful in a variety of ways. Moreover, once Marty's hair is severed from its owner, it catalyzes additional divorces, on scales both big and small: couples split up, good men die, houses are torn down, friendships are abolished, a carriage upends, and the only reunion that promises to endure (the marriage of Grace Melbury and Edred Fitzpiers) effectively severs the last native, fertile woodlander from her home.

Hardy reverses the Edenic trajectory found in the other works, moving not towards a new kind of symbiosis but away from a traditional one. The novel's backward glancing also helps to explain the prominence of Marty's hair, which consistently disrupts the present with its reminders of times, people, and attitudes long past. The time when humans and nature can co-exist ends when its last bastion can no longer protect it or keep it going, and throughout *The Woodlanders*, readers watch the mutualistic relationships enjoyed by the older denizens of Little Hintock dwindle as the more urbane interlopers bring new ways of life into the village. In the advent of the Darwinian era, Hardy sees this social progress as necessary and inevitable, but also as exacting a tragic toll. To illustrate this point, he ends the novel with three portraits: a group of elderly, mostly childless, workmen who embody the best elements of rural respect for nature and tradition; the solitary and wounded Marty South, who pledges her life and energies to continuing the work and sustaining the memory of Giles Winterbourne; and the Fitzpierses, who survive to reproduce but leave rural England. Marty's efforts, noble though they might be, exist on a life-lease, just like Winterbourne's cottage, and all her knowledge, devotion, and goodness will die when she dies. By contrast, the Fitzpierses will live on and pass their values to their children, but those values are abhorrently "modern"—their flexible morality and lack of

respect for the past earn for them independent and enduring selfhood but mean that they must lose their Eden. They must fall again.

In the final chapter, “To Dust Thou Shalt Return: Prosthesis and Paradise in *His Dark Materials*,” I return to the Garden of Eden by way of Philip Pullman, whose trilogy for young adults provides three agent objects, as well as a successful return to paradise. I discuss each of the objects after which Pullman titles his books: a golden compass, which enables its user to navigate throughout her universe and to know the truth about everything; a “subtle” knife, which cuts doorways between parallel worlds and intends to destroy God; and an amber spyglass, which allows a scientist and former nun to see how the universe works, how humans are destroying it, and how she might save it.

In *The Golden Compass*, a friend of Lyra’s gives her the titular object (or *alethiometer*), a rare and strange thing covered in arcane symbols. If she points each of the two shorter hands on the compass face to specific symbols, then falls into a meditative trance in which she asks a question, the alethiometer provides an answer. Throughout the series, Lyra uses the alethiometer exactly like a compass—to navigate her geographic and emotional landscapes. Her companion, Will Parry, also carries an object that facilitates travel: the subtle knife, which has one blade that can slice through any earthly substance and another that can open a portal between two parallel worlds. Lyra and Will spend most of their time on the run, looking for safe places to hide, and Will’s knife proves invaluable in helping them escape quickly. Mary Malone, unlike her narrative counterparts, builds her own agent object, brushing amber tree sap onto a piece of bark and separating the resultant “glass” with a hollow twig. In forming the spyglass, Mary gains insight into the *mulefa*’s symbiotic way of life—a program which Pullman clearly promotes as his human

ideal—and, by looking through it, she comes to see what the *mulefa* see, what all the other humans in the trilogy fail to see: Dust sustains all life, and human arrogance and carelessness are threatening its existence.

The final book in the series suggests a perfect utopian vision, a world in which sentient creatures live in true symbiosis with their environment. Only in this world can the human protagonists find the necessary model for their return to Eden. Both this world and Pullman's entire multiverse privilege hybrid creatures—the *mulefa* will exist only as long as they remain in concert with their environment—and thus the series ends with a very modern pronouncement about the fate of humanity. Pullman's children kill the tyrant Authority (who is not, in Pullman's figuration, God-as-Creator), abandon their objects, willfully re-enact the Fall, and choose the fullness of human material experience over the sterility of theological knowledge. Without a god to believe in or work for, the young pair begins constructing "the republic of Heaven," a new kind of human life which embraces the earth and gives no quarter to semi-divine authorities. Pullman's atheist universe, populated by cyborgs and companion species, powered by networks, rooted in materialism and sensuality, stems from the very same hope for human-nature communion that inspires the very different universes described in *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *The Woodlanders*.

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.2.

Imitatio Crucis:

Sylvan Subjectivity

in *The Dream of the Rood*

The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem known as *The Dream of the Rood*, bound with other works in the tenth-century Vercelli Book and existing in fragments on the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross (and possibly the eleventh-century Brussels Cross),¹ tells the story of a monastic dreamer who receives a vision of the True Cross, which initially appears resplendent with gold and jewels before revealing the bloody wounds that lie beneath its gilt surface. As the Dreamer gazes upon the Cross, it begins to speak to him about the crucifixion of Christ. Remarkably, the Cross describes its own experience on that terrible day, focusing on its own pain rather than on Christ's, then goes on to tell about its burial and resurrection, then its ascension to Heaven. Finally, it exhorts the Dreamer to tell its story to others and to teach them to pray to the Cross. The Dreamer awakes and hopes for a time when he joins his departed friends at the Lord's eternal feast table.

The Cross's remarkable agency strikes modern audiences as singularly weird, perhaps because we expect to encounter such objects in children's stories rather than serious religious meditations. However, early medieval literature abounds with speaking

¹ Approximate dates for the Ruthwell and Brussels Crosses from Chiganti, esp. 50.

objects. Art historian Ben Tilghman notes, “Anglo-Saxons were subject to a cacophony of things constantly chattering about themselves, not only through riddles, but also in the form of inscriptions on actual objects, including [the Ruthwell Cross]” (1-2). In the same article, Tilghman cites Aldhelm’s preface to his seventh-century *Ænigmata* for reassurance that agentive objects are to be taken seriously: the author purports to “reveal in verse / The enigmatic nature of things” (3) and, by extension, the nature of all Creation. *The Dream of the Rood* achieves the same goal, revealing the enigmatic nature of two particular things: trees and humans. The poem employs the rhetorical figure *prosopopoeia* in endowing the True Cross with a speaking voice, a phenomenon that scholars have thoroughly explored, beginning with Margaret Schlauch’s 1940 study and continuing through the present day with articles by material studies theorists such as Ben Tilghman and Seeta Chiganti. I contend that the poem extends beyond even this fascinating and complex trope, positioning the Cross in front of the Dreamer as a perfect model for Christian subjectivity, a role that the Dreamer echoes for the reader. Thus, the poem contains or implies three figures at different stages on the path to Selfhood: a fully formed subject already living in perfect harmony with God (the Cross), a subject in process struggling to follow the Cross’s example (the Dreamer), and a new traveler on the road, learning to identify with the Cross through the Dreamer (the reader).

This didactic poem participates in a much larger conversation, which I will return to even more vigorously in chapters four and five, about the relationship between humans and trees. The poem invites us to attend to the Cross’s material reality as a tree by preserving it in its descriptions, but it also acknowledges the boundary crossings in which the tree participates. Many of the facets of the so-called New Materialism focus on

theorizing agency and "life" apart from its human equivalent—a thing can be alive, can have a life and make a difference, without sustaining a comparison to humans. Thus, a true object-oriented analysis might examine the tree *qua* tree, but, because the tree in *The Dream of the Rood* is the creature of a human imagination, the poem requires a more inclusive framework. Bruno Latour's actor-network theory provides such a metric, and in this chapter, I will uncover a partial network in the poem that helps us understand the wood's unique agency and admits to the presence of human author and audience.

Because human actors remain present in this analysis, it seems important to proceed by examining the significance of trees and wood to the Anglo-Saxons and, perhaps more importantly, to humans generally. I contend that we see wood, of all natural materials, as bearing the closest kinship to humanity. Many of our historical, linguistic, cultural, and social endeavors prove this true. We extend human metaphors to trees (we speak of their veins and limbs)² and arboreal metaphors to us (we put down roots, we construct family trees). David Wood writes that we imagine ourselves alongside trees because we use them to sustain and represent ourselves; we use them to measure our relationship to the planet (through phrases like "tree-hugger") and to each other (42-43). This operates in reverse as well: the history of human representation is in some ways also a history of wood. We carve lovers' initials in bark, scrawl our thoughts on paper, paint our portraits on panels, and sculpt our likenesses from tree-flesh. We deploy trees for shelter, protection, transportation, and tools. Trees are like us: they are warm, they breathe, they grow vertically toward heaven, they acquire deep lines as they age (we wrinkle; trees ring),

² Both "vein" and "limb," according to the *OED*, described parts of the human body for nearly five centuries before either ever referred to flora. In both instances, the change occurred in the mid-sixteenth century, a time when the botanical and anatomical sciences flourished in England and when many writers endeavored to draw parallels between bodies divine, celestial, human, animal, vegetal, and mineral.

and they boast similar cellular and vascular structures to ours. Trees and humans participate in a cycle of recursive sustenance: after we use them, we disperse and bury acorns and pollen and seeds and pinecones and even our own bodies, which dissolve into the ground to nourish trees.

Although the phrases I have employed here stem from a twentieth century English lexicon, no part of this argument is singularly modern: Jodi Grimes proves through historical sources in her unpublished dissertation how deeply the Anglo-Saxons felt their connection to trees. Comparing maps (vis-à-vis David Hill), place-names (recorded by Bede), legal and economic records (from Bede, Alfred, and Ine), and the literary corpus, Grimes asserts that the Anglo-Saxons frequently settled in close proximity to woodlands, perhaps often at the very edges, from whence the Rood was felled (20-31). “Anglo-Saxons and their settlements are connected symbiotically to forests and trees because of physical necessity,” she comments, and their shared provenance powerfully links the Cross and the reader of *The Dream of the Rood* from the very beginning of the poem (21). Forest areas, Grimes argues, afforded protection, as when King Alfred sought shelter from a Viking attack in 878. Many poems depict wooded space as not only protected but also sacred, as in *Guthlac A*, when the titular hermit establishes “a temporary Paradise on earth while [awaiting] the afterlife” (Grimes 25). Grimes solidifies the associations of trees with both sacred and secular spaces through historical records, which show the church’s enormous influence on woodland rights, and legal records, which suggest heavy fines for the illegal removal or burning of trees on another’s property (27-29). Taken together, these sources demonstrate the importance of trees in Anglo-Saxon life.

Wood is materially and ontologically flexible. Aristotle wrote of *hyle*, which literally means "wood," as the First Cause, the essential substance of an object—that which remains throughout the processes of translation that the material undergoes. If we take Aristotle at his word, wood remains wood, whether it becomes planks or paper or pencils or puppets. The popular modern story of Pinocchio, for example, plays with the latent human anxiety that we are all wooden subjects, that we are always already trees. If our essential stuff, our *hyle*, is wooden, and, as Kellie Robertson observes, "change [is] an innate principle of matter" (106), then both humans and trees only become Real through relation—the force that inaugurates change. A forest appears to be full of trees that all look, from a distance, identical, but anyone lost in the woods for an extended period of time discovers the falsity of this conclusion: like humans, each tree has unique characteristics, knots and branches and crooks and layouts and roots that mark it as independent from its fellow trees, even as it participates in an extensive, intimate system. Humans, who *en masse* appear indistinguishable but who at close range appear completely different from one another, establish our unique identities through our relations with other humans, things, trees, and animals.

Ironically, trees and humans must covet both independence and immersion, as attested by numerous theorists of subjectivity. For the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, for example, in the Real we find the time of greatest community, but we move away from this ideal state as we enter the Symbolic Order as autonomous beings. But selfhood and community might be less than linear—they might be, like trees, closely and knottily intertwined. Medievalist Alfred K. Siewers suggests that the Anglo-Saxons may have viewed

trees as simultaneously transcendental and rooted, arboreal and rhizomic.³ Nature and humanity coexist in a world that is both ecophany and theophany: Anglo-Saxons understood trees as place- and earth-bound singularities within a forest and ambitious, human-like, moral beings with branches connecting countless micro-ecosystems. Perhaps more significantly, trees act as important members of a divine plan, in which, as Siewers observes, "heaven and earth entwine in the branches and roots" ("Trees" 3). The world "framed by trees" that we read about in *The Dream of the Rood*, Malory, the *Voyage of Brendan*, and other pieces refers also to the fairy land of legend, the Celtic Otherworld, which acted as a "stand-in for the biblical Paradise in which created trees and plants dwelled with humans" ("Trees" 2). Siewers explains in a longer study, *Strange Beauty*, that in medieval literature, especially the *Periphyseon* of Eriugena, the Otherworld and the Tree of Life are one and the same: fallen humans have lost access, not to the specific individual tree, but to the understanding of the world-as-tree; he quotes theologian Dumitru Staniloae as articulating the loss in this way: "We can say that it is precisely those who cling exclusively to the [un-relational and objectified] surface of creation who lose the vision of its profundity in God, who lose the world as tree of life and as a chalice inviting us to take the immortal divine life" (*Strange* 62).

The double nature of trees, as advocated by Siewers and others, does not just exist for trees in the abstract: trees as specific individuals also qualify. In the True Cross—or, presumably, any cross—we receive "a symbol," contends Siewers, "of the intersection of

³ In this, Siewers is responding to the philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who deride trees as machines of power and logic. David Wood explores their argument more fully in relation to other philosophers' attitudes toward trees, but as he concentrates on nineteenth- and twentieth-century work, to include them here would stray too far from the Anglo-Saxon milieu. His claim, however, that trees are "extraordinary *differance* performers" reaches back to ancient British roots. Wood claims that we have retained a druidical sense of the uncanny presence and power of trees (39). For this, he expounds on the Old English and Germanic cognates for "tree" and "truth" (41).

the transcendent and immanent in the personal, in the person of the Creator made physical" ("Trees" 3). In other words, the tree-as-Cross *is* God. However, I will argue that the tree/Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* functions not just as a symbol of God but more as a replacement for Him. The Cross exhorts the Dreamer to venerate it, to pray to it for salvation, to long for reunion with it after death. It thus asks a reader (medieval or modern) to contemplate the human, divine, and material nature of a tree (even a former tree). Like Pinocchio, the tree-*cum*-Cross asks us if wood is not the primary medium through which the psychic becomes physical.

The Rood-tree offers a model of sylvan subjectivity that may or may not be a viable option for humans. Art historian Anne F. Harris finds the Cross's agency unsurprising, in that the living tree becomes both a thing and an actor only after it is cut down: "The hewn becomes inhuman," she writes, precisely because it "acts upon the human, simultaneously bearing witness to what it had been while alive and calling out for more manipulations and further fragmentations" (1). The wood, as opposed to the tree, responds to the human and invites a response only by virtue of its separateness, what Harris calls its "ontological suspension" (1). Although modern environmentalists and eco-activists assume trees in their natural state should be afforded the greatest value and that cutting them down and using them renders them inert objects, we might instead try to think of them as, like us, being differently valuable in their hewn state. The Anglo-Saxons might agree with Harris's assessment. Jodi Grimes reads in Alfred's Preface to Augustine's *Soliloquies* the king's instruction that both men and trees must strive to be useful (32-33). Based on her reading of several Old English riddles dealing with wooden objects, Grimes also locates the particular malice of the "enemies" who cut down the Rood-tree in their perversion of the

craftsman mentality: they use the tree contrary to its innately good, divine purpose, turning it against God rather than employing it to glorify Him (38). Margaret Schlauch reached the same conclusion much earlier by comparing *The Dream of the Rood* to Ovid's Latin poem "De Nuce," the brief anthropomorphic complaint of a nut-tree destroyed through human abuse and neglect (26).

In "Hewn," Harris presents a series of images, collectively called the *Arma Christi* (the tools of Christ), culled from late medieval Books of Hours; they depict the objects of the Passion, placed together on a page but separate from one another and completely devoid of human subjects. Even Christ's wounds are, in Harris's words, "hewn from the body of the hewed"—placed on the ground, overlapping the great fractures in the earth caused by the crucifixion (2). In building a narrative with these tools, Harris develops a "carpentry of things" and discovers, in "unseal[ing] the desires of the inhuman," that hewn wood looks forward rather than back (2). It anticipates and embraces material change, eager to become the next object: once a thing, always a thing. "It doesn't seek a return to Eden," she observes, "it's the ecology of the *human* that is nostalgic, that yearns to efface" (3). Her literary analogue, a fit companion to *The Dream of the Rood*, is the thirteenth-century *Legend of the Holy Wood*, a title that refers not to a unified text but rather to a widely disseminated and complex story that took many forms in various languages throughout its history. Barbara Baert's thorough account of its life begins with Honorius of Autun's *Speculum ecclesiae*, which at the start of the twelfth century attempted to connect the Tree of Life with Moses's staff and Christ's cross. Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (1290) presents the most broadly accepted version of the story in which Seth retrieves a branch of the Tree of Knowledge from the Garden and buries it in Adam's mouth. This stick

germinates and sprouts at Golgotha, becoming eventually the tree that the “strong enemies” of the Rood-poem hew and morph into the True Cross. The legend grew, posits Baert, in conjunction with efforts to read the events in the Old Testament typologically alongside the New Testament. “The usually so impenetrable history of salvation,” Baert writes, “is illuminated by that most precious vestige which was handed down to man from this mythical state of paradisaal innocence” (306). In this narrative, the tree that began its life in *The Dream of the Rood* as an indistinguishable member of a forest has already undergone a hewing, a transformation, and the journey from Eden to Calvary. Every beginning is an end to something else, and no human narrative sufficiently captures or traces the inhuman, either prior to or after its encounter with us.⁴

If *The Dream of the Rood* fails to tell the tree’s entire story, it succeeds in adequately describing both the tree’s work as a Latourian mediator and the event of the dream comprised of the tree+Dreamer hybrid. We cannot follow this particular tree on its journey, perhaps, because it is not a “real” tree, but rather an imagined one, the product of human fantasy. In fact, it is doubly so, since it comes to us in a dream within a poem: it is twice mediated by the human. Thus, the poem’s very existence reveals (and indeed strengthens) the connection humans feel to trees, the roots we believe we share. Perhaps we might also understand *The Dream of the Rood* as an analogue to the *Arma Christi*: this Cross, this Dreamer, this poem, and this poet represent the tools of Christ. Through this network, the Lord speaks to the reader and draws him near.

⁴ Simon Schama’s traces an even more elaborate (albeit hyperbolic) path through what he calls the “timber history of Christ.” Jesus, he observes, was “born in a wooden stable, mother married to a carpenter, crowned with thorns,” and between its incarnations as the Tree of Knowledge and the True Cross, the Rood-tree also appears in Noah’s ark, Moses’s rod, Solomon’s temple, and Joseph’s workshop (219).

To what end? We cannot, as humans, boast complete understanding of a tree's journey; we cannot even claim to completely understand our own. However, *The Dream of the Rood* binds together tree-journey and human-journey to construct parallel models for attaining subjectivity. By witnessing the life-building of both tree and man, we can learn how to build lives of our own. The Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* begins, as we all do, with a creation story:

þæt wæs geāra iu, (ic þæt gýta geman),

þæt ic wæs āhēawen holtes on ende,

āstyred of stefne minum.

That was very long ago, I remember it still,

that I was cut down from the edge of the wood,

ripped up by my roots. (28a-30a)⁵

Since the Cross tells us of nothing before the moment of its felling, we can infer that, until its "strange fēondas" (*strong enemies*; 30b) raze it, the tree had no concept of itself as separate from any other tree in the woods. It existed in unison with its mother earth, drawing its nourishment instinctively from the sky and soil. With no language or consciousness to impede the flow of life between things, the tree was not *the* tree or even *a* tree, but rather part of what constituted the "forest." The Cross experiences a distinct sense of loss in leaving this harmonious state for a life marked by suffering and humiliation.

The Cross's original state as an indistinguishable member of the forest recalls the initial stage of psychosexual development outlined by Jacques Lacan, in one of the most popular and compelling narratives of Becoming-Real in the Western world. Lacan's disciple

⁵ All translations of *The Dream of the Rood* are Elaine Treharne's, and the Old English text is from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, edited by Krapp and Dobbie.

Julia Kristeva named this stage the *chora*; in it, Lacan theorizes, a newborn infant knows only need and its instinctive satisfaction. He (for the psychoanalysts, it is always “he”) recognizes no boundary between himself and the mother, and thus lives as closely as possible to an osmotic, purely material existence—“the Real.” No language comes between infant and mother here, and no lines are drawn or laws established. However, the infant soon begins to feel his body as territorialized into erogenous zones (mouth, eyes, genitals) and to recognize the mother’s breast, gaze, and voice as external to his body; thus, he understands his needs as evidence of his own deficiency—and this dynamic, between lack and desire, drives the child for the rest of his life. For Lacan, the maternal imago (or fundamental relation that defines the *chora*) emerges in adulthood as the operative force behind adult philosophical and religious endeavors, since they seek a “metaphysical mirage of universal harmony” and mark “the obsession with a paradise lost” (qtd. in Lee 35)—an understanding that perfectly suits this Old English religious poem.

When the “strong enemies” “seized” (*genāman*) the tree and “made [it] a spectacle for themselves” (*geworhton him þær tō wæfersyne* 31a), the tree became a separate thing—but not yet a Subject, because it existed only to be gazed upon and ordered about by others. The tree is “carried,” “set,” and “fastened” (*bæron*, *āsetton*, and *gefæstnodon* 33-34), passive constructions that indicate that the tree, unable to move on its own power, must be borne by men who themselves operate under another’s command (*hēton* 32)—even those who carry the tree cannot do so of their own volition. The tree remembers, and it is aware, but it lacks any trace of agency or voice. In the next section of the poem, the Cross passively endures being “climbed upon” (*gestīgan* 34b) by the Lord and trembling under his weight. The desirous undertones of its narration, attested by verbs such as “stripped,” “trembled,”

and “embraced” (*ongyrede, bifode, ymbclypte* 36a, 42a), dovetail with Lacan’s observation that the child emerging from the *chora* often experiences yearning without understanding it. Although Mary Dockray-Miller reads in these verbs a sexual charge, an examination of the words in the Old English corpus fails to confirm her thesis. For example, when *bifode* appears in poetry, it exclusively refers to those stricken with awe in the presence of the Lord (*Dictionary of Old English*, “bifian”). We might understand this trembling (and, by extension, the stripping and embracing), not as specifically erotic, but rather as testifying to a more general form of attraction—a desire to unite with a powerful being. Kristeva posits an intermediate stage after the *chora* that she calls abjection, in which the developing child confronts the Other and simultaneously yearns for it and is repelled by it. The complicated interplay of these feelings inspires a horror at the threat to his progression toward Selfhood, which in turn leads the child to revolt against the other and expel it in order to purify himself. The conflicting aims of attraction and repulsion do not form discrete stages in the development of the Subject, but rather swirl around one another in a cycle of progression and regression. As we will see, this tension undergirds the Cross’s experience at the crucifixion.

As the naked Christ climbs onto the prone Cross, he takes the active subject position (reinforced by his hyper-masculine epithets, “hero,” “warrior,” and “powerful king” [*hæleð, beorn, rīcne cyning* 39b, 42a, 44b]) against the Cross’s object position. In line 44, however, the “enemies” lift the joint body of Christ+Cross and the narrative voice shifts: “I was reared a Cross” (*Rōd wæs ic āræred* 44a). The tree transforms from a member of a forest into something for enemies to gaze upon and lords to mount; it becomes, finally, a thing with shape, purpose, identity, and a name. It takes the active voice: “I raised up the

powerful King, / the Lord of heaven; I did not dare to bend” (*Āhōf ic rīcne cyning, / heofona hlāford, hlydan mē ne dorste* 44b-45b). Even under the torments that ensue, the Cross stands fast. It also adopts Christ’s agony as its own: “They pierced me with dark nails [...] They mocked us both together” (*Purhdrifan hī mē mid deorcan næglum [...] Bysmeredon hīe unc bütū ætgædere* 46a, 49a). Here, the Cross and Christ collapse into a single crucified body, the Cross merging with another being just as it had begun to establish itself as separate; notably, this time, it defines itself against and with a father figure rather than its mother earth. This conflation of Cross and Christ aligns with Lacan’s Mirror Stage, which originally referred to the moment when, seeing his own complete image in a mirror, the child recognizes himself as fragmented in comparison to this unified reflection. This stage allows the child to establish a self apart from the mother and move toward a bond with the father. Unlike the Biblical description of Christ carrying the Cross on his back, the Rood tells us that its foes carried it to Golgotha, and only in that place does he see “the Saviour of mankind / hasten with great zeal” towards him (*Geseah ic þā frean mancynnes / efstan elne mycle* 33b-34a). Christ serves as the Cross’s “other” here, the thing against which the Cross must define itself. The Mirror Stage contains two major tiers: first jubilation, or the hope of attaining the graceful, complete body glimpsed in the reflection, and then alienation, or a sense of despair at the gap between the body in the mirror and the clumsy, fragmented body in reality; the tension between these emotions parallels the desire-repulsion dynamic that characterizes abjection.

The Cross perceives itself now as apart from Christ, rather than a part of him, and the biggest threat to this new boundary is the now-dead body of Christ. It gazes upon his body: “I saw the God of hosts / violently stretched out” (*Geseah ic weruda god / þearle*

benian 51b-52a), emphatically positioning itself as the Seer rather than the Seen—“I beheld all that,” it says (*Ic þæt eall behēold* 58b). It confronts the corpse of a body it once understood as part of itself, thereby seeing the dead Christ as both It and Not-It; it laments with “all creation” (*eal gesceaft* 55b), expelling the horror through tears, blood, and sweat. Here the Cross begins to move through its merger with the Lord’s body and His experience in order to testify to its own suffering; it complains:

Purhdrifan hī mē mid deorcan næglum. On mē syndon þā dolg
gesīene,

opene inwidhlemmas. [...]

Bysmeredon hīe unc bütū ætgædere.

They pierced me with dark nails; on me are the wounds visible,

the open wounds of malice [...]

They mocked us both together. (46a-47a).

Through these real, physical wounds, the Cross bleeds and sweats and cries, and in the transfer of bodily fluids from the corpse to itself, the Cross effectively displaces Christ by pushing him away in its establishment of an independent identity.⁶ The hypermetricity of these lines in particular may testify to this move. With three stresses per half-line rather than the usual two, the verbiage becomes more active, more emphatic, standing out among the more traditional poetic lines as the Cross stands out among the more traditional crucified agent of salvation. Kristeva defines the corpse as the ultimate figure of abjection,

⁶ Thomas D. Hill explains the relationship between Christ and the Cross in a different way: “The character ‘Christ’ in the poem thus represents the divine aspect of the incarnate Deus-Homo, whereas the Cross represents the human, particularly the corporeal aspect of His being” (297). Hill’s reading makes sense within a theological or symbolic framework, but in a literary analysis, we must consider the Cross as the poet presents it: a separate actor. I make no claims here for what the Cross *means*, merely for what it *does*.

because it irrefutably illustrates the total collapse of subject and object: what once lived and breathed and thought and bled now lies forever silent and static.

The Cross's separate life grows more apparent as it emphasizes its role as a witness to Christ's agony: the voyeur position always carries the power of the subject, so we see the former tree viewing Christ as the Ideal-I against which it can define itself. A band of "eager ones" (*fūse* 57a) arrives to lift the Lord's body from the Cross and proceed with his burial. As the Cross watches them carve Christ a tomb "from bright stone" and "sing the sorrow-song for him" (*of beorhtan stāne, him þā sorhlēoð galan* 66b, 67b), it notices a qualitative difference between that divine body and its own earthly form. Seeing the Lord as its Ideal-I, or perfected version of itself, the Cross enters the Mirror Stage proper. Christ, "the glorious Lord" (*þām mæran þēodne* 69a), looks exhausted, "wretched in the evening-time" (*earme on þā æfentīde* 68a), but the Cross still limns his corpse as "the fair live-dwelling" (*fæger feorgbold* 73). In contrast, the Cross, like the child gazing down at his hands, sees itself as broken and imperfect. "I was all wounded with arrows," it complains (*eall ic wæs mid strælum forwundod* 62b); "I was all drenched with sorrow" (*Sāre ic wæs mid sorgum gedrēfed* 59a). It suffers first the agony of standing "fixed" (*staðole* 71a) while the warriors leave Christ to "grow cold" (*cōlode* 72b) in his tomb, and next the indignity of being felled "all to the ground" and "buried in a deep pit" (*ealle tō eorðan, on dēopan sēaþe* 74a, 75a). Although interred like Christ, the Cross again understands the disparity between the former's tomb of "bright stone" and its own hastily dug hole. Christ and the Cross, though bound symbolically through their shared agony, go their separate ways in death.

As the Cross moves further away from Christ, it becomes increasingly independent. Lacan understands this transition as the acquisition of language, and, in the case of the

Cross, it seems to be literally true. We have no evidence that the Cross could communicate outwardly prior to its burial and resurrection, but it emerges from its deep pit a changed thing. “The Lord’s thanes,” it tells the Dreamer, “friends, discovered me there, / adorned me with gold and silver” (*þær dryhtnes þegnas, / frēondas gefrūnon, / ond gyredon mē golde ond seolfre* 75b-77b). Now glorious, the Cross learns to speak—witness its introductory adverb: “Now you might hear, my beloved hero, / that I have experienced the work of evil-doers, / grievous sorrows” (*Nū ðū miht gehyran, hæleð mīn se lēofa, / þæt ic bealuwara weorc gebiden hæbbe, / sārra sorga* 78a-80a). For Lacan, this “stage” actually spans a child’s entire adolescence, from around age three to age sixteen; in its figurative use, it encompasses the bulk of one’s life journey. By contrast, in the poem, language acquisition happens in a moment, a single poetic half-line: “Now you might hear.”

Lest verbal acumen on its own not prove convincing enough a sign of agency, the Cross also participates in other human activities. First, it gets dressed: as the Lord earlier stripped himself of his human trappings before facing the destruction of his mortal body, the Cross allows itself to be clad in precious metals; the verbs for “strip” (*ongyrdon*) and “adorn” (*gyredon*) are nearly identical, roughly meaning (as their modern English cognates suggest) to un-gird and gird, respectively (*DOE*, “gyredon”). “Clothed” in the decorative trappings appropriate to a holy relic,⁷ the Cross continues by describing its newfound power: “I am able to heal / each one of those who is in awe of me” (*ic hælān mæg / æghwylcne ānra, þāra þe him bið egesa tō mē* 85b-86b). Miraculously, the Cross adopts Christ’s role as intercessor, assuming his duties in “opening the true way of life” to all “voice-bearers” (*ærþan ic him lifes weg / rihtne gerymde, reordberendum* 88b-89b). This

⁷ For more on the material brilliance of the decorated Cross, especially a detailed consideration of analogous crosses in Anglo-Saxon England and Old English literature, see Mize.

lauded group, the “speaking ones,” endowed with the special ability to communicate with God, included only humans (including the Dreamer) in the poem’s opening lines but now must include the Cross itself. The Cross gains the uniquely human capacity for the most important kind of speech—the one that testifies to the most important kind of relationship: that between humans and God, the world and the Lord. Now the ultimate agent, the Cross “urges” (*hāte* 95a) the Dreamer to repeat its story and venerate the Cross:

ac ðurh ðā rōde sceal rīce gesēcan
of eorðwege æghwylc sāwl,
sēo þe mid wealdende wunian þenceð.

But by the means of the rood each soul

who thinks to dwell with the Ruler

must seek the kingdom from the earthly way. (119a-121b)

This passage and its surrounding lines make clear the Cross’s indispensable role in salvation: we can commune with God only *ðurh ðā rode* (“through the rood”), the same figure that activates the divine conversation to begin with. In the sentence immediately preceding the quoted lines above, the poet describes the Cross as *bēacna sēlest*, the “best of beacons,” positioning it as messenger, avenue (the earthly way, or *eorðwege*), and, now, sign or portent. Thus, we should imagine the Cross not merely as standing like a tree or speaking like a human, but rather as actively reaching out to or calling the Dreamer to follow it. Able to narrate its inner experiences and life history, endowed with the power to heal and direct, confident enough to issue injunctions, mobile enough to appear in nightly visions and bear souls from earth to the eternal feast table, the Cross emerges as a separate, fully formed being.

If, as Joseph L. Baird notes, the Cross “is the perfect embodiment of the *imitatio Christi* and thus a perfect exemplar for the conduct of man,” it should be no surprise to find that the poem’s Dreamer fares similarly (44).⁸ His *imitatio crucis*, however, occurs only after being mesmerized by his vision of the Cross’s pain. The Dreamer encounters the True Cross in a dream, where he sees it in all of its post-crucifixion splendor:

ic gesāwe syllicre trēow
on lyft lædan lēohte bewunden,
bēama beorhtost. Eall þæt bēacen wæs
begoten mid golde. Gimmas stōdon
fægere æt foldan scēatum, swylce þær fife wæron
uppe on þām eaxlgespanne.

*I saw a more wonderful tree
lifted in the air, wound round with light,
the brightest of beams. That beacon was entirely
cased in gold; beautiful gems stood
at the corners of the earth; likewise there were five
upon the Cross-beam. (4b-9a)*

The dazzling beauty of the Cross forces the Dreamer to make unfavorable comparisons with himself: “Wonderful was the victory-tree, and I stained with sins, / wounded with guilts” (*Syllic wæs se sigebēam, ond ic synnum fāh, / forwunded mid wommum* 13a-14a).

Like Lacan’s infant gazing upon a “perfect” copy of itself in a mirror, and as the Cross before

⁸ Robert Boenig concurs: “The poem must be about imitating the Cross as the Cross imitated Christ. [...] The Dreamer’s salvation depends not only on hearing a message but also on his gradual recognition of the mimetic relationship he may have with Christ through the Cross” (445).

him gazing at the body of Christ, the Dreamer understands his own body and soul to be fragmented when confronted with the glorious, unbroken Cross; his resultant feelings of shame and guilt lead him to gaze eagerly upon the Cross when it reveals its own stains:

Hwæðre ic þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte
earmra ærgewin, þæt hit ærest ongan
swætan on þā swiðran healfe. Eall ic wæs mid sorgum gedrēfed,
forht ic wæs for þære fægran gesyhðe.

*Nevertheless, I was able to perceive through that gold
the ancient hostility of wretches, so that it first began
to bleed on the right side. I was all drenched with sorrows.
I was frightened by the beautiful vision. (18a-21a)*

The Dreamer begins to see here that he and the Cross are alike, and the feeling unsettles him. Here, we have a man horrified at what he sees, but unable to turn away; the intensity of his gaze indeed adds an element of voyeuristic pleasure just at the moment when the Cross fails to contain its own horror and becomes “soaked with wetness, / stained with the coursing of blood” (*hwīlum hit wæs mid wætan bestēmed, / beswyled mid swātes gange* 22b-23a). The perverse joy that the Dreamer feels in being mesmerized by the leaky Cross—“Yet as I lay there a long while / I beheld sorrowful the tree of the Saviour, / until I heard it utter a sound” (*Hwæðre ic þær licgende lange hwīle / behēold hrēowcearig hælendes trēow, / oððæt ic gehyrde þæt hit hlēoðrode* 24a-26b)—testifies to his simultaneous revulsion and attraction.

The Dreamer appears here to be experiencing something similar to abjection. Because the abject signifies a breakdown in the already-fragile membrane between subject

and object, the boundaries between inner and outer, clean and dirty, also prove porous (Kristeva 53). Kristeva closely binds the abject to voyeurism and its accompanying pleasures, for which she borrows the terms *jouissance*. In abjection, the victim is “fascinated, submissive, willing” (Kristeva 10). Despite the negative feelings associated with giving into abjection, Kristeva insists that it is not only natural but necessary for development; she writes, “Syntactical passivation, which heralds the subject’s ability to put himself in the place of the object, is a radical stage in the constitution of subjectivity” (39). Thus, the Dreamer, stained by sin as the Cross confronting him is stained with blood, must face the horror and admit it belongs to him before he can purge himself of it and reinforce the boundaries between his Self and the Other.

Furthermore, the parallel experiences of abjection and *jouissance* experienced by both the Cross and the Dreamer may be the most thoroughly Christian aspect of the poem. J. Stephen Fountain illumines this tension by focusing on Kristeva’s formulation of *le sujet en procès*, ‘the subject in process’ (alternatively, ‘the subject on trial’). This term refers to a state of suspension, in which the emergent subject enjoys neither total control nor a return to choral submission, which Kristeva provocatively describes as a “jubilatory fall into nature” (qtd. in Fountain 193). Fountain’s study hints at the Christian implications of this liminal state without fully exploring its overlap with *The Dream of the Rood*. The suspended subject always waits for completion, looking ever forward to potential harmony and fulfillment; this, then, is the *de facto* state of being for a Christian subject like the Dreamer, who must reconcile his knowledge that a better life awaits him after death with some ability to experience the joys of life on earth. In Christian eschatology, the dream of eternal

satisfaction is a dream deferred, so every mortal must take pleasure in the waiting—and Kristeva calls this, too, *jouissance*.

By the time the Dreamer emerges from the vision, he seems to have separated himself from his identification with the Cross, though he remains an object under its governance. The Cross says, “Now I urge you, my beloved man, / that you tell men about this vision” (*Nu ic þē hāte, hæleð mīn se lēofa, / þæt ðū þās gesyhðe secge mannum* 95a-96b). The Dreamer no longer dwells on the sin that has sullied his heart or his lonely existence, but rather has a “happy spirit” and “great zeal” (*blīðe mōde, elne mycle* 122b, 123a), having found divine purpose in spreading the word of the Cross to his fellow speech-bearers. He has successfully expunged his disgust at his own sin and begun to establish himself as an independent figure, though he cannot complete the transaction without the assistance of one final actor: the reader.

In this final, implied doubling, the Dreamer transcends the Mirror Stage to become an autonomous subject who reveals his vision to the reader, thereby making the reader an object. The reader compounds the Dreamer’s gaze, transfixed not only by the vision of the leaky Cross, but also by the Dreamer as he narrates the poem. Ostensibly, the Dreamer shares his epiphany with us in order to fulfill the Cross’s directive that he “tell men about this vision”; in so doing, he both facilitates and blocks the reader’s path to salvation via contemplation of the resplendent Cross.⁹ The reader’s vision is blurry: do I dwell on the vision of the Cross or on the Dreamer’s narration of the vision? And if I am the object of both the Cross and the Dreamer, how will I ever achieve full subjectivity? Despite this

⁹ Virginia A. Chappell thinks that, instead of complicating the reader’s relationship to each of the poem’s actors, the Cross clarifies his relationship to Christ by “drawing the reader into an explicit face-to-face conversational interaction for which the dreamer is a surrogate” (7).

seemingly passive position, however, the reader ultimately figures as the supreme agent of the poem—for I can open and close the book whenever I want, rendering the Dreamer and the Cross (even Christ?) the objects of my study. Still, each reader’s successful journey owes a debt to the Dreamer, who learned from the Cross, which transformed itself from a hewn tree to a thing of glorious purpose under the tutelage of Christ himself. Thus, each character in the poem becomes a model for his audience (Christ for the Cross, the Cross for the Dreamer, the Dreamer for the reader) creating a perfectly Christian and almost perfectly Lacanian developmental schema.

As the vision closes, the Cross exhorts the Dreamer to contemplate it as an instrument of salvation, to pray to it as intercessor in the place of Christ proper. After waking, the Dreamer has another vision (this time a simpler imagining, rather than a fully dramatized dream) of himself, in which the Cross has delivered him to heaven. We read of a particularly Anglo-Saxon heaven, rendered here as a divine feast-hall with a great table around which sit the Dreamer and all his friends and family (those whose loss he laments at the start of the poem) and over which Christ presides as Lord of Heaven and lord of the hall (*hlaford*).¹⁰

The Dreamer longs for a return to prelapsarian harmony with the divine (the *hlaford* Christ) and the natural (the Rood), but significantly, he depicts this harmony as *comitatus*. He does not look backward to the perpetually verdant garden crossed by flowing streams described in the book of *Genesis*—perhaps too unfamiliar a setting for an insular medieval poet—but rather around himself to the high walls of the mead-hall that nurtures

¹⁰ Interestingly, Eric Stanley mentions that the oft-contested word *reordberende* contains the root *reord-*, which usually indicates “speech” but can also mean “food.” Given this, I imagine that the “speech-bearers” of the poem are not only those who possess the capacity to speak with God but also to eat with Him.

comitatus: the shared values, protection, might, and fellowship of his own people.¹¹ The individual actor fades into the network. Adelheid L. J. Thieme emphasizes another, uniquely Anglo-Saxon element in the Dreamer's vision: gift-giving. The Lord rewards the Cross for its loyal service by covering it in gold and jewels and by delivering it to the heavenly table; the Cross promises to deliver similar gifts to the Dreamer if he carries out his new mission, and the reader must recognize that he, too, will be rewarded if he proves a loyal servant to his lord/Lord (112).¹² The Dreamer imagines a wooden Paradise, figuring heaven as the most recognizable feature of the Anglo-Saxon physical and social landscape. In Old English usage, "timber" is both a verb meaning to build and a noun naming a wooden structure; the activity of building contrasts—or perhaps co-exists with—the stasis of having been built. Heaven is both dynamic and static, temporal and eternal. When today we accuse someone of acting "wooden," we deride them for being stiff and lacking the qualities of life, but *The Dream of the Rood* points to an Anglo-Saxon sense that life runs in continuing cycles. As Baert rather poetically suggests, "The holy wood is the armature of time, the framework of space, but it is also the tiny seed" (307). If a tree can become a branch, a branch can become a tree, a tree can become a building or a Cross or an intercessor, then we, too, can anticipate a life after death, regardless of whether we conceive of that life in salvific, Christian terms or object-oriented ones.

¹¹ Although Paradise feels decidedly Mediterranean in most biblical descriptions, including what remains extant in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Genesis A*, the poet responsible for *Genesis B* employs his native environment for the setting of the postlapsarian world that descends upon Adam and Eve. He has a guilty and terrified Adam warn Eve of the coming winds, fog, and mists that will kill them unless they build appropriate shelter (lines 804-811).

¹² Thieme also posits the vision as a gift from God to the Dreamer, and the poem as a gift from God (via the poet) to the reader (109). Britt Mize makes a similar point at a less explicit moment in the poem: the decoration of the glorious Cross. Then, he says, the jewels on the Cross echo the placement of the wounds on Christ, while also cementing the association of Christ with the Anglo-Saxon king in his role as gift-giver (169-171).

For all their differences, the Anglo-Saxon Christian world view, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and object-oriented ontology share the belief that truth exists beyond the reach of human perception, that there is something *more* to which we have little or no access.¹³ In Christian thought, we attain higher truth after death, whereas, for Lacan, we move ever farther from this perfection (called “the Real”), which he understands as pure materiality. For object-oriented ontologists, the truth also lies with the material: they argue that the totality of nonhuman existence exceeds our limited human experience. Taken together, these narratives form a foundation for understanding the shifting processes of identification between the Cross, the dreamer, and the reader through which each actor arrives at poem’s end as a complete subject. Each now-hybrid actor contains the divine, the human, and the natural, thereby achieving the unity lost and pined for since the Fall of Man.

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¹³ This idea overlaps in interesting ways with Plato’s world of perfect Forms, of which our bodies and our planets and our loves are merely copies. The contemporary author Philip Pullman takes Plato to task for this in the *His Dark Materials* series, and in Chapter 5, I will explore the intersections of these discourses on truth and material reality.

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.3.

**Lucrece's Needle-work:
Domestic Agents and Humanist Fantasy
in *The Rape of Lucrece***

The Rape of Lucrece boasts a nonhuman *dramatis personae* so varied and extensive that it might come from a classic Little Golden Book: a needle, a weasel, a door lock, a gust of wind, a painting, a knife. Taken out of context, this cast of characters denotes less an early modern poem than a sequel to Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*: both are fables about liminality, the power of the hybrid, and the productive cooperation of humans and nonhumans. Whereas Disney shapes the story as often quaint and silly, however, Shakespeare renders it entirely tragic. In Collatium, no gallant candlestick sings as it prepares an elaborate meal; no rotund teapot assumes the role of jolly nursemaid; instead, an assortment of household stuff musters their forces to prevent their mistress's rape. The analogy to *Beauty and the Beast* is admittedly facetious, but it is not facile: like a great deal of literature for children, who innately inhabit a twilight world in which anything is possible, *The Rape of Lucrece* trades in combinations and in-between spaces. Traditionally labeled a narrative poem, *Lucrece* may be more properly termed a prepositional poem (Yates, *Error xx*): to paraphrase Michel Serres through Julian Yates, it plays the location

("Agentive" 50), and if we are to make sense of its full collective, we must attend to its conjunctions.

The Rape of Lucrece tells the story of Tarquin, the son of Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. The prince hears his friend Collatine praising his wife Lucrece's beauty and chastity, upon which, consumed with lust, he leaves his fellow soldiers and begs hospitality of the gracious Lucrece. That night, Tarquin makes his way to Lucrece's bedchamber, pausing as he walks to reflect on the evil that he hopes to commit. After a brief struggle between his ethical and limbic systems, Tarquin decides that "desire [his] pilot is, beauty [his] prize" (279). Although able to convince himself that his passions should direct his actions, Tarquin encounters a series of uncanny objects that stall his passage through Lucrece's darkened hallway. Things come to life in Lucrece's house, clearly intending to prevent her rape:

The locks between her chamber and his will,
Each one by him enforced, retires its ward;
But as they open they all rate his ill,
Which drives the creeping thief to some regard. (302–05)

Shakespeare plays on the sense of "wards" as lock components and as charges, or those under one's care. Thus, Lucrece's locks give up their identity as her guardians of her chastity when they cease to function appropriately. In surrendering to Tarquin's grasp, the locks ought to be the sentence's object, but Shakespeare allows them to act as subjects—"but as they open they all rate his ill." The locks cannot prevent Tarquin from forcing them open, but they can ensure that they make enough noise to stall his progress into the room.

Their efforts, as those of most literary nonhuman agents, go unheeded (Yates, *Error* 7); their noise inspires Tarquin to be more careful, but he does not turn away from the door.

After squeezing past the locks, the “threshold grates the door to have him heard” (206)—another inanimate object threatening Tarquin. The doorjamb intends to give Tarquin away by alerting the sleeping Lucrece to his presence. The most remarkable facet of these things’ agency is not just that they move, but that they announce their motives. Why do the locks scream? To rate his ill. Why does the door stick? To have him heard. They are the objective equivalent of “Don’t go in there.”

Suspense continues to build as natural objects join the domestic: “Night-wand’ring weasels shriek to see him there. / They fright him, yet he still pursues his fear” (307–08). We tend to find weasels, as living creatures, easier to accept as subjects than door locks; we need not be surprised that a rodent screeches at an intruder in the middle of the night. When coupled with the creaking locks and the scraping door, however, the weasels’ noise-making feels uncanny and intentional; they are sounding the alarm. However, like their predecessors, they are wholly unsuccessful, as Tarquin “still pursues his fear.”

Perhaps sensing imminent failure, nature ups the ante, responding to Tarquin’s own earlier apostrophe to his “torch” to “burn out thy light, and lend it not / To darken her whose light excelleth thine” (190–91). As he creeps into Lucrece’s room, having successfully dodged locks, door, and weasels, Tarquin encounters a new obstacle:

As each unwilling portal yields him way,
Through little vents and crannies of the place
The wind wars with his torch to make him stay,
And blows the smoke of it into his face,

Extinguishing his conduct in this case. (309–13)

The wind clearly acts as the subject in this passage, “warring with his torch” so as to “make him stay,” while seeking out the cracks in the walls to find Tarquin and stop him from gaining Lucrece’s bedroom. Tragically, Tarquin’s own prayers go unheeded and the wind’s intended impediment proves no match for his “hot heart,” which “puffs forth another wind that fires the torch” (313).

Tarquin’s troubled journey continues:

By the light he spies

Lucretia’s glove wherein her needle sticks.

He takes it from the rushes where it lies,

And gripping it, the needle his finger pricks. (316–19)

By his rekindled torchlight, Tarquin can see Lucrece’s sewing glove, which he picks up from the floor, receiving an unpleasant surprise—“the needle his finger pricks.” This sentence boasts characteristically Shakespearean syntax, Subject-Object-Verb; but the assignments of subject and object are less familiar. Tarquin is not pricked by the needle; the needle pricks Tarquin, drawing blood and thus, in however small a measure, establishing its dominance over him. The tyrannical subject of *The Rape of Lucrece* (indeed, of Roman history) becomes, in this moment, an object—and a partial one at that, since we see only his finger in this episode. The needle’s new-found agency joins not just intention but vocal expression: the needle tells Tarquin, “This glove to wanton tricks / Is not inured. Return again in haste. / Thou seest our mistress’ ornaments are chaste” (320–22). A speaking needle presents us not just with an eerily animated object, but one that chooses to

communicate with the living. Natural and non-natural things might have their own language (locks creak, doors stick, weasels shriek), but this needle is also fluent in ours.

If the needle's grammatical position falls short of identifying it as a fully formed subject, perhaps we can afford it a greater degree of agency when we consider its kinship with Tarquin. If we accept that Tarquin constructs himself as a subject by dominating/consuming/raping Lucrece, thereby forcing her to be an object, then we must admit that the needle does the same thing to Tarquin. It constructs itself as a subject by symbolically raping Tarquin—notice what the needle does: it pricks. Lucrece's "chaste ornaments" (322), the very symbols of her female submission, fight back against her would-be aggressor in his own terms. Earlier, the wind "warred" (311) with him and now the needle pricks him, using Tarquin's own crime against him. If only it had worked! Tarquin's enflamed passions blind him to the messages the world sends him; his willful ignorance renders them "poor forbiddings" (323): "He in the worst sense consters their denial: / The doors, the wind, the glove, that did delay him, / He takes for accidental things of trial" (324–27). He also likes a challenge; the more Lucrece's agentive objects work against him, the more his desire grows:

'So, so,' quoth he, 'these lets attend the time,
Like little frosts that sometime threat the spring,
To add a more rejoicing to the prime,
And give the sneaped birds more cause to sing. (330–33)

Tarquin justifies his actions as "natural" by imagining that nature is complicit in his crime. He fails to realize that the dominant image patterns in the poem associate him with the military, especially with conquering soldiers, and Lucrece with the natural and

domestic spheres. Her first appearance at a spinning wheel at once proves her chastity, winning for her husband his soldier's wager, and inflames Tarquin's lust beyond his ability to control it. He is as much aroused by her inaccessibility as by her beauty; the more difficult it is to reach her, the more he is driven to possess her. Both the narrative voice of the poem and Tarquin describe Lucrece in ecological terms—she shares qualities with flowers, birds, fields, deer, coral, snow, and lambs. Perhaps, then, we might see the “differently animated” domestic and natural objects as extensions of Lucrece herself, animated by their association with her. A crime against Lucrece thus violates the natural world as much as it does this chaste woman; the world rallies to prevent such a wrong. Thus, the natural world becomes not only agentive but also intentive. The tragedy stems from Tarquin's inability to read the signs; like all humans who uphold Yates' “fiction of phenomenologically distinct categories [which] enable our use of the world” (*Error* 8), Tarquin silences by inattention the voice of nature, rendering it a mute witness to his crime.

Because of his inability to exist collectively with nature, Tarquin thinks of himself and Lucrece in explicitly natural terms, as if to say that if nature refuses to be complicit in his crime, he will replace things with humans. By overlaying his actions on those of the natural world, he sanctions them as somehow ‘natural’. His “will backed with resolution” (352), Tarquin enters Lucrece's bedchamber and gazes upon “the dove sleep[ing] fast that this night-owl will catch” (360). In the ensuing stanzas, Lucrece sustains comparisons to the sun, the moon, a host of different flowers, grass, and “a new-killed bird” (457); Tarquin, on the other hand, acts like a “grim lion” (421), a falcon, a cockatrice and a griffin.

Predictably, Tarquin always emerges as a predator, with Lucrece posing alternately as his prey and as the landscape against which his carnivores roam.

In attempting to replace nature with himself and Lucrece, Tarquin perverts the natural order, rendering nature mute once again, and “transforms the world into an object of use” (*Error 2*). The agentive objects do indeed become tragic figures, then, as Yates suggests, their intended vengeance thwarted and their agency disabled. We see this most clearly in the needle’s encounter with Tarquin, where Shakespeare makes a complex move: at first, the glove stands in for Lucrece’s vagina, and Tarquin penetrates it; next, the needle reverses the gender polarity, penetrating Tarquin’s finger.¹ The poem elsewhere employs the rhetorical trope of *prosopopoeia* to great effect; here, the needle exceeds its tropic boundaries and becomes a participant in the action, a character in its own right.

Moreover, the needle’s speech allows us to hear Lucrece’s voice for the first time. Thus far, everyone has merely spoken about her; we see her, but we do not hear her. Even when she greets Tarquin at the door, the narrator simply reports her welcome. The needle, in expressing Lucrece’s chaste protest, literalizes the trope of women speaking through their needlework. Tragically, however, Lucrece’s surrogate mouthpiece speaks to a man incapable of listening to a woman. Tarquin dismisses the needle just as he had ignored the agents in the hallway. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, just because a needle opens up a space in which women can speak does not ensure that what Nancy Klindienst Joplin has called “the voice of the shuttle” will make a difference in the narrative. The needle’s failure prepares us

¹ Katherine Eisaman Maus offers a typical reading of the episode: the prick belongs to Tarquin, and its action “constitutes, clearly enough, a proleptic allegory of Tarquin’s fate; his rape of Lucrece is also a self-wounding” (79). Further, Maus writes, this event “reinforces our sense not of Lucrece’s resistance but of her penetrability” (79). Such a reading strikes me as unlikely, especially as the needle rejects Tarquin’s assumption that the agent objects act as “accidental things of trial” (326) through its surprisingly energetic verbal reprimand.

for its mistress's; upon waking to find Tarquin in her room, Lucrece tries her best to dissuade him from his purpose. However, her Roman rhetoric (which amounts to nothing more than "consider your reputation") proves no match for a lust so powerful that Tarquin had earlier used it to relight an actual torch.

The scope of critical debate on the poem testifies to its hybridity: scholars find ample evidence in *Lucrece* to support and refute nearly every interpretive claim. Some, like William Weaver, argue that Lucrece faces her death nobly, like a strong woman, while many feminist critics contend that in taking her own life, she reinforces the values of the Roman patriarchy.² Lucrece earns praise as the ultimate agent in the founding of Rome (a more important player than her kinsman, Lucius Junius Brutus),³ although Heather Dubrow complicates his reading by emphasizing Brutus's usurpation of Lucrece's suicide: "Lucrece is turned into a stage property, and Shakespeare the actor knows well how props can be deployed to prop up authority" ("Electric" 26). She speaks both eloquently and excessively; she shifts the focus of a classical story from the male/political to the female/personal (Kahn, *Roman* 14), but only in a poem that eroticizes rape and forces Lucrece to accept the blame for her own violation.⁴ In their quarreling, critics lose sight of the poem's historical basis and put Shakespeare in a double bind: Lucrece is always already dead. Rather than seeking consensus, then, we ought to acknowledge the impossibility of that quest and wonder instead what work the poem performs through its ambivalence.

² For very influential feminist readings of the poem, see Kahn, Vickers, and Newman.

³ See Hadfield's treatise on Shakespeare's Republican sentiment.

⁴ Weaver, R. Rawdon Wilson, and Mary Jo Kietzman commend her rhetorical facility in expressing her trauma, whereas editor F. T. Prince excoriates her for "giving [too much] tongue" (qtd. in Bowers 1). Hadfield, Jan Blits, and Peter Smith lambaste Shakespeare for the misogynist stance they perceive in the poem.

Lucrece's generic complexity funds any examination of the poem's ambivalence. Although technically a narrative poem, its theatrical qualities, such as complex characterization, polyphony, and emphatic narrativity, lend it an air of drama. R. Rawdon Wilson identifies it as such:

While *ostensibly* a narrative poem, [*Lucrece*] must be, in some powerful sense, a drama [because it] is a compendium (an encyclopedia, or perhaps a seminary) of the conventions that constitute the embedded narratives [of Shakespeare's] plays. (40–1)

Contemporary theater directors have begun to capitalize on this theme: it has been performed on stage—as a dramatic reading, full-scale production, or something in between—at least ten times in the past twenty years, which is approximately eight times more than any other of Shakespeare's poems in the same period. These stagings explore the narrative complexity of Shakespeare's text and take advantage of its heteroglossia, often attending to the nonhuman voices that command the narrative (Angello, "Staging").

Perhaps it is the pervasive presence of the nonhuman in *Lucrece* that most lends itself to staging, since speaking, agentive nonhumans thrive in performance. Scholars like Paul Yachnin and Jonathan Gil Harris have surmised, correctly, that the most memorable character in *Othello* is the handkerchief, and we must wonder what *As You Like It* would have been if Rosalind had failed to find a pair of pants. Things literally come alive on stage, whereas in poetry, nonhuman voices sometimes get labeled and then ignored as a device or trope. In *The Odyssey*, readers imagine Dawn lighting up the seas with her famously anthropomorphic rosy fingers, but viewers of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* actually watch the Host leaping from an oven to proclaim the Word of God. The domestic agents in

The Rape of Lucrece are similarly animated, and thus we might best understand them as mislaid props, imported by a dramatist longing for the theater while its doors were shut to the plague. Props, as their name implies, support the play, and garner significance through their uses on stage; in other words, props have “careers” and “impart significance to those contexts [the plays themselves] as a result of the paths they have traced through time and space” (Korda and Harris 18).⁵ We must begin to consider stage properties as full, participatory characters in the drama, actors in their own right. If, then, props are indeed dramatic characters, and *The Rape of Lucrece* is essentially a dramatic poem, we must consider the agentic objects in *Collatium* as participants in that drama, as actors and therefore characters. The question then becomes, whence their particular degree of agency? What motivates them to do such work?

Every member of the poem’s nonhuman cast directly serves Lucrece, and the key to their uncanny agency lies in this relationship, for their mistress also inspires all the action through her involvement in the poem’s motivating force: the human obsession with and negotiation of property rights. The poem’s central questions are those of belonging and allowance: Who owns what (or whom)? Who gives permission, and who violates it? The male characters (Collatine, Tarquin, Lucretius, and Lucius Junius Brutus) clearly believe that they each own Lucrece (or at least, part of her) and accordingly treat her as a possession that may be stolen and must therefore be protected. Each male character feels certain of his right to own, trade, contain, and determine Lucrece, as Joel Fineman

⁵ In their collection of essays on props, Natasha Korda and Jonathan Gil Harris recover the important roles played by nonhumans on the early modern English stage and argue that our modern inattention to these theatrical properties results from a Puritan disdain for objects. In the same volume, Douglas Bruster concludes that the popularity of movable or hand props and their status as “vital, irrepressible bod[ies]” (77) testifies to the Elizabethans’ “almost childlike habit of relentlessly pushing against things, both animate and inanimate, to define themselves” (88).

delineates in his study of the poem's "lets" ("Temporality"). In order to "let," one must first possess, and Collatine and Tarquin quickly become locked in a proprietary pissing contest. The poem's conclusion echoes their struggle, when Collatine and Lucretius debate who has the most right to grieve Lucrece's death—a fight that ends only when Brutus intervenes with his ownership trump card: as the impetus for the Roman rebellion against the Tarquins, Lucrece's body, death, and significance belong to the *populum romanum*.

But if Brutus co-opts Lucrece to serve his own ends, he does so by force, and Shakespeare's choice to conclude his poem with this appropriation rather than with Lucrece's death foregrounds the property's role in the poem generally. Coppélia Kahn writes that the entire narrative "questions the wisdom and humanity of making property the basis of human relationships" (*Rape* 56), although some danger lies in branding Lucrece as a nothing more than property. Collatine and Tarquin clearly treat her as an object to be possessed and bargained for, to everyone's peril; if Lucrece is no subject, she cannot be mistress of her household "stuff." If we take this view, then we, like Tarquin, must understand the agent objects lining Lucrece's hallway (the locks, the jamb, the wind, the weasels, and the needle) as additional "lets" that "add a more rejoicing to the prime" (332). Because they build friction and therefore anticipation on the parts of both Tarquin and the reader, Joel Fineman argues that Lucrece's domestic agents function as a series of "yeses" rather than "nos." Shakespeare, Fineman claims, has created a "pornographic effectio," in which we revel—at least until the poet fails to satisfy us by omitting a detailed description of the rape itself.⁶ If we take the text at its word, however, we must afford

⁶ Maus, a notable exception, assumes that the domestic agents manifest Tarquin's internal dilemma, making them ancestors to Macbeth's hallucinatory dagger, which "proceeds from [his] heat-oppressed brain"

Lucrece and her “stuff” independence and active status; Shakespeare’s language makes clear that the objects themselves stage Lucrece’s resistance to Tarquin’s advances. Because Lucrece oversees the household, the “stuff” within necessarily falls under her purview. Needles obviously exist in feminine domestic space, but valuable things that could be detached from the permanent structure of the dwelling might also be legally owned by women—things like, for example, metal door hinges. Internal evidence cements this association, as Lucrece’s domesticity (and, indeed, her confinement in the home) fund her sexual appeal, for Collatine as well as Tarquin. The latter’s passion kindles only after Collatine invites the soldiers to picture Lucrece at her spinning wheel.⁷ Thus, Lucrece’s objects exemplify synecdoche, or taking the part for the whole—the whole being, of course, Lucrece herself (Dubrow, *Captive*).

Because Lucrece’s household stuff falls under a woman’s purview and its constituents respond to their mistress’s plight, they alert us to the poem’s greatest achievement: it radically alters the focus of one of the defining moments of Western civilization. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, a woman’s voice (broadcast through various object-channels) attempts to drown out the voices of men; the domestic sphere overlays the political; one woman’s tragedy ultimately trumps her husband’s military prowess; and the founding of the Roman Republic becomes a footnote to the story of Lucrece’s violation and death. Although the human story still takes precedence in the poem, the perspectival shift

(2.1.39). Maus finds that the needle which stabs Tarquin shows, paradoxically, “not Lucrece’s resistance but her penetrability” (79).

⁷ Natasha Korda proves, in *Domestic Economies*, that by the sixteenth century, new legal terms separated static property (such as land and houses), which men owned, from moveable property—often called “stuff”—(such as dinnerware and linens), over which women retained ownership, even after marriage or divorce. Georgianna Ziegler relies on textual, rather than historical, evidence to make essentially the same claim: that Lucrece, her bedchamber, and the objects that reside within it, comprise a single being.

away from powerful men and towards a marginalized woman is activated by a group of similarly ignored actors. Lucrece's domestic agents do not simply provide the setting for her story; they are its co-authors.

The story of Lucrece and her domestic agents continues after her rape, when she moves through her house in search of a particular tapestry, painted with the fall of Troy. She spots Hecuba therein, mother of raped daughters and queen of a raped city. In her grief, Lucrece finds a mirror for her own pain: "She lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow" (1498).⁸ Through her immersion in another's story, this piece of needlework initiates a complex web of mirrors and identification that extends beyond Hecuba to forge a chain of suffering women as the shuttle joined the warp and weft of the tapestry. Lucrece and Hecuba now, in Mary Jo Kietzman's words, "share a subjective space [and are] united by a shared experience of despair coupled with the position of subjection from which both view events" (39). Lucrece enrolls in a kind of emotional sewing circle in this middle third of the poem, comprised of Philomel, Hecuba, and Penelope. Philomel's brother-in-law raped her and cut out her tongue; the resourceful woman resists silence, weaving her story into a tapestry to reveal the crime. In Ovid's formulation, Philomel becomes a nightingale, and Lucrece mentions her in this avian guise, in which she repeatedly pricks her breast to sing out in pain: "And whiles against a thorn thou bear'st thy part / To keep thy sharp woes waking, wretched I, / To imitate thee well, against my heart / Will fix a sharp knife to affright mine eye" (1135-38). Earlier in the poem, Lucrece vows to emulate Philomel, and

⁸ In "Lucrece's Gaze," Stephen Carter insists that in this confrontation, "the painting-as-narrator tells Lucrece her own story," since she reads the tapestry as a representation of her own woe. In so doing, Lucrece enters Lacan's Mirror Stage, confronting the Other in order to establish a new space for herself. I agree that Lucrece emerges from this identification a different person but not with his assertion that she evolves towards a "detachment from the female space" (216).

this moment cements Lucrece's resolve through the collation of her experiences with those of other women: seeing Hecuba moves Lucrece to ventriloquize her pain, and when she calls upon Ulysses, the reader cannot but recall Penelope, the adventurer's archetypal chaste, weaving wife.⁹ The tapestry and the shuttle that created it thus connect Lucrece to her sisters across the spaces of history. Drawn together by the threads of their shared suffering, Penelope, Philomel, Hecuba, and Lucrece form a tapestry of pain which speaks for all of them at once.

Her encounter with the tapestry, and especially the portrait of the Trojan queen, moves Lucrece to action, a change that could only begin once she notes the kinship between herself and Hecuba. Kietzman calls this Lucrece's "recuperation," wherein the wounded woman "imagines her own voice as an instrument of justice that accuses the guilty, supports the innocent, and condemns the masculinist heroic ethos" (40). Now an "active reader" (Kietzman 40), Lucrece also links Tarquin and Sinon and, in her rage, rends the latter's face with her nails as though striking her own assailant. The narrator explaining how the tapestry acted as a balm for Lucrece: "she with painted images hath spent, / being from the feeling of her own grief brought / By deep surmise of others' detriment, / Losing her woes in shows of discontent" (1577-80). Although Lucrece displays a tendency to act in this scene, she ultimately, tragically, displaces her vengeance onto herself.¹⁰ Lucrece

⁹ Newman warns against associating Lucrece and Philomel too closely, since the former relies too heavily on masculine speech and writing, whereas the latter spoke through the feminine art of weaving. The poem, however, places emphasis on Lucrece's kinship with her historical and literary forbears and strongly associates her with needlework.

¹⁰ Both Pauline Kiernan and Richard Meek read Lucrece's encounter with the tapestry as a failure, which they both find inherent in any instance of *ekphrasis*. The device fails, they agree, because it mistakenly conflates reality with representation. *Lucrece*, however, demonstrates the very real effects of representation, especially in the ways that Shoaf mentions above.

seals her own fate as the exemplar of chastity by following the similar examples of Philomela and Hecuba, failing to recognize that she transcends exemplarity, that copies are only ever “part-knowledge and apart-knowledge” (Shoaf 61). As R. Allen Shoaf reminds us, exemplarity is a “two-edged sword—you follow the example, the example follows you” (57). Although the narrator understands the import of Lucrece’s emotional transfer with her exemplars, the heroine remains unable to see what he sees; failing to carry forth the tapestry’s lesson and take revenge against Tarquin, Lucrece decides instead to turn a violent hand upon herself.

If, as numerous critics have shown, the health and safety of the state depend on the un-violated (and ultimately unrealistic) fortress of the female body, Lucrece’s stain threatens not only her body and her home but all of Rome as well.¹¹ Susanne Scholz describes the analogy between Lucrece’s personal and political tragedy thus: “the soul of subjectivity obviously depends so much on its protective cover that a violation of the body is also detrimental to the soul; in the same manner the ‘imagined community’ of the nation cannot exist without its protective ‘wall’” (111). Lucrece alone correctly guesses that to prove her thesis, she must literally turn herself inside out. Her obsession with crossing the physical boundaries is well-attested in the poem. Clearly, she imagines her body as a vessel, or a container of Collatine's honor, and rape inflicts irreparable damage to her body:

If, Collatine, thine honor lay in me,
From me by strong assault it is bereft;
My honey lost, and I, a drone-like bee,
Have no perfection of my summer left,

¹¹ Peter Smith and Heather Dubrow (*Captive*) believe that as Tarquin storms Collatium and rapes Lucrece, he also violates and robs Rome itself, so that Lucrece had to die to purify the state.

But robbed and ransacked by injurious theft. (834–38)

Lucrece takes Tarquin's sin upon herself because she cannot imagine an alternative to her patristic values. It does not matter to her who initiated the brutalization, but only that the temple of her body is now stained and broken. The vessel has been shattered and, like any piece of pottery, will always show its cracks. After her rape, Lucrece invokes the cover of night to hide her shame, (over)emphasizing the vapors, smoke, and fumes of the dark: "O hateful, vaporous, and foggy night [...] Muster thy mists to meet the eastern light" (771–73). She speaks of "rotten damp," "exhaled unwholesome breaths," "musty vapors," "smoky ranks," and night's "furnace of foul reeking smoke" (778–99). Later, she returns to this theme, calling her words "helpless smoke" (1027), which can only be efficacious if followed by a "let[ting] forth [her] foul defiled blood" (1029). She searches for a knife, "to make more vent for passage of her breath, / Which thronging through her lips so vanisheth / As smoke from Etna that an air consumes, / Of that which from discharged cannon fumes" (1040–43). She claims that her tears will come from her "eyes, like sluices / [which] shall gush pure streams to purge my impure tale" (1076–77).

For all her verbal and physical leakage, Lucrece's speech ultimately must fail to activate change—Roman women have no rhetoric in which to persuade effectively (Coppélia Kahn goes so far as to claim that Lucrece's "resistance [to Tarquin] cancels itself out" because she uses the same linguistic codes that mark her as an object for his (ab)use [*Roman* 37]). Thus Lucrece must turn to Weaver's "forensic performance" and rely on ocular proof—more agentive objects—and perform a "blood test." Lucrece plunges a dagger into her breast and dies. The Romans tended to collapse the boundaries between inner and outer, so that the very internal senses of shame and honor become predicated

entirely on a Roman's public reputation (Blits). Thus, Lucrece, like Shakespeare's Lavinia, must not survive her shame. Such a conflation of boundaries may also have contributed to making Lucrece, in Sara E. Quay's provocative phrasing, "rapable." Both the ancient Romans and early moderns constructed women as naturally closed containers of virtue. Paradoxically, by being closed off to men, women present a challenge to masculinity; rape therefore destroys both female victims and male aggressors. Lucrece, then, commits suicide because she understands the untenable situation into which Tarquin has thrust her: her body and soul are both stained (Belsey, "Dispossessed").

The stain of rape serves as evidence that the boundaries between inner and outer have been transgressed, on personal and physical levels as well as sociopolitical ones. Women's bodies represent civic boundaries, and the exchange of women through marriage contracts strengthens those limits; therefore, when a man breaches the boundary (a woman's hymen), he pollutes the city as well, forcing the raped woman's body to bear the responsibility for that pollution. If the female body represents capital, then the raped body becomes counterfeit money—a contradiction that threatens the entire system, and, as such, must be destroyed (Joplin). Shakespeare's understanding of boundaries, though different from the Roman, adds a layer of complexity to Lucrece's position as a sealed and impermeable container, according to Lisa Starks-Estes, who limns Lucrece's death as an object lesson in the limits and dangers of the bounded self—an emergent Neo-Stoic discourse in early modern England. Any attempt to completely sever the body from the natural world will result in the body's resistance: Lucrece resurrects the Galenic model of a humoral body engaged in constant, osmotic exchange with itself and the world. Thus, in her death—an irreversible silence—Lucrece finally speaks effectively through ocular proof; her

flow of words becomes instead a river of blood and tears, “the liquid images of the humoral world” becoming, as Starks-Estes writes, “interchangeable with those of human physiology” (13-14).

As Brutus pulls the knife from Lucrece’s breast, “her blood holds it in chase” (1736) and then does a very curious thing: it pools around her body in two streams, transforming her corpse into an island. Fineman imagines the streams as forming a heart shape around Lucrece, thus rendering her “encircled by her broken heart”; he also points out that the leaky Lucrece “embodies Tarquin’s inside-outside movement when he ‘posts’ from Ardea to Collatium for the purpose of her rape” (40). Lucrece’s own blood, red and thin and pure, forms one of the streams, while Tarquin’s stain, black and clotted and filthy, forms another. Lucrece felt the presence of this black blood within her body (a tacit recognition of the Galenic model’s truth) and knew that it would kill her, unless she undertook what Catherine Belling calls a “purificatory suicide” (121). Further, Belling shows, while the blood courses through her veins, the red and black blood flow together; Lucrece’s *caco-chymic* (or impure) blood will only separate outside the body (121–22).

The speaker of the poem places enormous emphasis on her “wound,” as do Lucrece herself and her kinsmen. Their repeated references disturbingly equate the “hole” she makes in herself with her other “wound,” that opening through which Tarquin was able to defile her container: “The fault is thine,” Tarquin says, employing an unfortunate early modern trope (482). The implication is that women, however hard they may try to be good containers, simply have too many holes and thus cannot contain their virtue, hold their tongues, or satisfy their desires (Paster 22–25). As Tarquin claims, because women have a fault (that is, a vagina) rape must always be their fault. This leakiness also poses an implicit

threat to the patriarchal political realm, as a truly contained/controlled woman is an impossible ideal: "like a sieve which does not leak" (Warner 266). Lucrece's suicide thus becomes the ultimate negation of her containing function; by opening yet another hole, she initiates a grotesque osmotic process—she simply empties. First, her soul exits from her mouth and her life "flies" from her wounds (1728). Then, her blood spurts in a "purple fountain," "bubbling from her breast" in "two slow rivers" (1734, 1737–38). The blood congeals and "seems to weep upon the tainted place" (1746). Of course, we also know the physical reality of death: she leaks in other ways too, as her bowels release. "Poor broken glass," her father calls her, and he could not have chosen a more apt metaphor (1758).

In addition to the damaged vessel trope, Lucrece voices her interpolation in her adoption of Tarquin's metaphors. He refers to her body as "thy never-conquered fort" (482) and her subsequent use of his military colloquialism disturbs readers as we hear her vow to stab her "blemished fort" (1175). The repetition not only foregrounds the inherent problems with the Roman insistence upon militarism, but also serves to illustrate the degree to which Lucrece has internalized Tarquin's rationalization. She comes to believe herself a city laid waste, fallen to a vicious conqueror and never to be restored. Similarly, Tarquin attempts to coerce Lucrece with tales of bastard children and damaged reputation: "And thou, the author of their obloquy, / Shalt have thy trespass cited up in rhymes / And sung by children in succeeding times" (523–35). Lucrece remembers these potential children when she says, "This bastard graft shall never come to growth" (1962) and, "The nurse to still her child will tell my story, / And fright her crying babe with Tarquin's name" (813–14).

Ironically, a woman's freely flowing blood, traditionally the site of so much male anxiety, functions as the most effective form of female speech in the poem. Its testimony, enabled by the dagger, extends beyond Lucrece's death, effecting a biological change in all future raped women: "Ever since, as pitying Lucrece's woes, / Corrupted blood some watery token shows, / And blood untainted still doth red abide, / Blushing at that which is so putrefied" (1747-50). Lucrece kills herself so that "no dame hereafter living / By my excuse shall claim excuse's giving" (1714-15), but she also ensures that those unfortunate hereafter dames will have incontrovertible evidence of their violation. It is perhaps small consolation (the dames will still have to die to make their own excuse), but no small measure of agency on the parts of Lucrece, the dagger, the wounds, and the blood to physically remake every woman in the world.

Yet the dagger's influence extends further still—engendering a massive political reorganization and therefore remaking the men as well as the women. Lucrece's uncle, Lucius Junius Brutus, witnesses her suicide and finds himself forever changed by her wounds' example: "Seeing such emulation in their woe, [he] / Began to clothe his wit in state and pride, / Burying in Lucrece's wound his folly's show" (1808-10). The pronoun "their" might refer to Lucretius and Collatine, who have been weeping over Lucrece's body, but it might just as easily refer to the weeping wound in which he buries his antic disposition. After all, he again attests to the power of their "speech" when he "conclude[s] to bear dead Lucrece thence, / To show her bleeding body thorough Rome, / And so to publish Tarquin's foul offense" (1850-52). Shakespeare revisits this conflation in *Julius Caesar*, when Mark Antony moans that Caesar's wounds (made, not incidentally, with a dagger wielded by Brutus's similarly named descendant), "like dumb mouths do ope their

ruby lips / To beg the voice and utterance of [his] tongue” (260—61). After this, of course, Antony’s voice and utterance prove effective indeed, convincing the *populum romanum* to exalt Caesar and damn the “butchers.” Likewise, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece’s wounds damn the Tarquins and inspire the Romans to drive them out, leaving Brutus to establish one of the most powerful governments in Western history. Although Lucrece’s violation often functions as the alibi for the founding of the Republic, Shakespeare barely mentions the national consequences of her death, except to foreground her role in activating the rebellion. When Lucrece dies, the poem ends. And so, whereas the sewing needle and the shuttle failed to effect change, the dagger successfully communicates on its mistress’s behalf and inspires a massive social reorganization. Lucrece’s voice finally registers, but she dies in order to make it do so.¹²

As in all the texts in this study, the network of powerful nonhuman agents in *The Rape of Lucrece* hearkens back to a time when humans and things coexisted rather than antagonizing one another. The agents operate between a pair of Edenic fantasies that suit the poem’s historical moment, a century particularly fraught with multivalence, flux, and uncertainty: the poem opens with a marriage and ends with a republic. Both social constructs highlight what Giovanni Pico della Mirandola calls “the marvelous felicity of man,” by which he means our human capacity to choose to either rise above or fall below earthly constraints. Belsey suggests, “If we read the text as a critique, what it criticizes is a model of both marriage and government that works to no one’s advantage”

¹² Amy Greenstadt sees her body, unlike her voice, as a highly effective text authored solely by an agentive woman (Greenstadt), and Andrew Hadfield claims that her suicide positively reflects her efficacy and agency—perhaps making her an even more important agent of political change than Brutus. However, if Shakespeare makes Lucrece the ultimate author and agent, it also means that he endorses her death as a necessary service to a larger cause. Only in her death can Lucrece speak freely, as her chaste body becomes her voice. Her “swansong” is thus both a triumph and a tragedy (Catty).

("Dispossessed" 327). All marriages refer back to the first couple, Adam and Eve, but none can do so without also recalling their agony; any mention of a republican government denotes simultaneously Rome's glories and its horrors. The Edenic visions in *The Rape of Lucrece* illustrate the full experience of being human, from our striving for perfection to our inevitable failure to achieve it.

The poem begins with an arranged marriage, very much the *status quo* in ancient Rome and early modern England. Such unions boasted social, financial, and political benefits for the men involved in the transactions, while ignoring any consideration for the bride's quality of life. In 1594, however, when *The Rape of Lucrece* was first published, this model had begun to cede to the so-called consensual companionate marriage, first espoused by Puritan sects but quickly gaining popularity among the general population. Scholars have long noted Shakespeare's ability to produce conflict by mapping the concerns of his own time on top of those of the historical periods about which he wrote: witness Hamlet, a prince caught between the medieval Danish popular monarchial election and his own early modern primogeniture-based hopes; or Titus Andronicus, fiercely upholding an undeserving eldest son's right to rule in a country and historical period that privileged military service over genetic inheritance. The tension in *Lucrece*, too, arises from the protagonist's persistent adherence to Roman standards of chastity and spousal loyalty, which, as Shakespeare shows, can have disastrous consequences. The poem implicitly endorses the emergent sixteenth-century model of the consensual, companionate marriage as an antidote to the long-standing, unfair, and impossible ideals of a patriarchal arranged marriage.

As Catherine Belsey demonstrates in *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, sermonic and didactic literature written around the time of the poem's composition advocated happy, arranged marriages as paths through which we might re-establish an earthly paradise. This view held that a properly subordinate woman recalls Eve in the Garden, and indeed, Heather Dubrow finds that Lucrece is "prelapsarian in her ignorance of evil" (*Mourning* 98). That feminine lack of guile, so advocated from the pulpit as natural and desirable, effectively damns Lucrece, because it instructs her to trust Tarquin's face without questioning what lies beneath it. Also, figuring Lucrece as a piece of property that adds value to her husband's estate and fame to Collatine's name allows all of the poem's actors, including Lucrece, to understand the rape as a theft—more a violation of Collatine's assets than Lucrece's body. In reading Collatine and Lucrece as descendants of Adam and Eve, Dubrow joins A. D. Cousins, who sees the entire narrative as a rewriting of the Fall. Tarquin stands as a Satan-figure, tempting Lucrece's Eve. "In embodying both Tarquin's and Collatine's notions of the absolute good on earth, [Lucrece] becomes an analog to the earthly paradise and (an uncorruptible) Eve" (50). Her partner, Collatine, in boasting of his wife's chastity, becomes a "self-betraying Adam" and Collatium becomes a second, albeit fallen, Eden. Thus the poem both acknowledges and destabilizes the Edenic paradigm, allowing us to see it as a paradise indeed, but a paradise always already lost.

The Rape of Lucrece concludes much as it began: with an implied utopia, which reminds us both that humanity constantly reaches toward perfection and consistently falls short of attaining it. This vision concerns not Lucrece's marriage but her country. Brutus, moved by his kinswoman's suicide, kisses her bloody dagger and vows to drive the tyrannical Tarquins from Rome; Collatine and Lucretius follow suit, and together the men

“publish Tarquin’s foul offense” (1852). The *populum Romanum* responds enthusiastically and “plausibly give consent / To Tarquin’s everlasting banishment” (1854–55). The poem ends here, though readers know both from history and from the poem’s Argument that the story continues with the people establishing the mighty Republic in the Tarquins’ wake. The early moderns made no secret of their respect for the Republic; though England remained a monarchy, Belsey argues that “there were glimpses, at least, of an alternative based on consent, and Republican Rome was often invoked as its model” (“Dispossessed” 333–34). Republican sentiment, as Freyja Cox Jensen observes, reached an apex at the end of the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the glut of printed pro-republican material (121). Jensen argues that interpolation began early, as the humanist curriculum almost entirely concerned republican Rome: boys translated Cicero, Caesar, Livy, and Virgil to the exclusion of most other writers, and thus grew up with an ingrained sense of the late Republic as a perfect society, a “golden age” to be emulated. “Rome was a model for early modern England,” Jensen writes, based on “the Sallustrian-Livian myth of a Rome which conquered the world by its virtue, and which fell because of the increasing sway of vice” (122). Much has been made of Shakespeare’s fortune in being at the superior grammar school in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he certainly would have gained the very kind of knowledge that Jensen posits. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare found in Rome several models for England to both emulate and avoid; his many Roman plays and poems bear this out, from *Titus Andronicus* to *Coriolanus*. Although Jensen claims that the first century BCE, the last years of the Republic (as the period most congruent with sixteenth century England), proved the most fertile for early modern imaginations, Shakespeare in every instance refers back to the Tarquins and the rape of Lucrece, proving that, at least for him, the most

instructive moment in Roman history was not the rise of the tyrant Caesar but rather the demise of the tyrant Tarquin.

Andrew Hadfield, perhaps the most visible champion of Shakespeare's republicanism (to which I make no claims here), agrees. The poem's emphasis on Lucrece's violation shows "that her violation is the key act, not the subsequent rebellion of Brutus" (85-86). Hadfield also contends that the establishment of the republic ought to serve as a model for Shakespeare's current political situation: "[the] poem shows a chaste woman dying honourably and letting a small group of men take over government, a political transformation that the poem obviously endorses" (87). However, such an easy pronouncement falsely assumes ease in perceiving a definite political or social leaning in Shakespeare's work. If Shakespeare looked toward the early Republic as a possibility for England, he also looked toward the late, crumbling Republic as an equally likely possibility. For many early moderns, the Roman Republic represented the pinnacle of human political and social achievement—a society based, at least in theory, on equality, service, and a strong, shared moral code—and as such represented perhaps the closest humanity could come to regaining Paradise. From Shakespeare's early modern window, however, that paradise ended in sin and corruption.

According to Jensen, Rome fell to the exact same vicissitudes as the true Eden; she quotes Richard Lloyd as declaiming in 1584 of Caesar, Pompey, and Octavius, "when they were highest of all, / Ambicion, Pride, and Avarice, gave each of them a fall" (142). Lloyd may have directly meant a lesser, non-specific fall, but any such discussion—particularly one that references the three sins often blamed for Eve's transgression—must implicitly point back to the Fall-with-a-capital-F. Further, Jensen, reading Lloyd, describes Pompey as

the disruptive third element in the late Republic, ensuring that collective rule could not survive (132). Although neither Jensen nor Lloyd makes the comparison explicit, in their description of Pompey as a bringer of discord into a harmonic society, they figure him as Satan. Shakespeare and his contemporaries thus understood the end of Rome's glorious Republic, the so-called Golden Age of late antiquity, not as "the triumphant, all-encompassing empire spanning the known world, but [as] a bringer of death and a disruptor of civic harmony" (129). Shakespeare clearly shared in the republican *zeitgeist* to some extent, especially in condemning models of marriage and government built upon absolute possession and control; but as Belsey cogently argues, "If Lucrece's story promotes the value of consent, it does so literally over her dead body" ("Dispossessed" 334).

Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* thus stages a world that is paradoxically pre- and post-lapsarian. In it, we see a world teeming with human potential, a world recognizable to any reader of Pico's "Oration on the Dignity of Man," which envisions humans as constantly scaling and descending a ladder with its respective poles in the angelic and beastly realms. Our great divine gift, free will, means that we choose our position on the ladder at any given time; never static, we push ourselves upward and reach for the heavens before missing a step and sliding back down to satisfy our baser desires—and then, gloriously, ascending once more, never deterred or despairing, never believing that perfection is truly beyond our reach.

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**Falling from Grace:
Science and Severance
in *The Woodlanders***

Thomas Hardy's under-appreciated mid-career novel *The Woodlanders* takes place in a decidedly atypical Wessex environment: the bucolic apple groves of Little Hintock, a village so far removed from society that a barber from the closest town cannot even find it. Despite its aesthetic distance from Hardy's more familiar furze-covered heaths and pastoral meadows, *The Woodlanders* remains close to the author's philosophical and literary markers. The novel contains, for example, several pairs of mismatched lovers, characters who are doomed from the start, and a plot plagued by minor accidents that, when combined, produce a near-epic tragedy. It revolves around a network of associated things-that-make-a-difference: a pile of coins left on a mantelpiece, which tempts a hardworking girl into selling her prized hair; the fall fashioned of that hair for a wealthy neighbor; a menacing tree, whose felling directly or indirectly affects every principal character in the novel; an elderly woman's brain, more interesting in theory than in actuality; and an iron man-trap that ensnares only women.

Numerous critics have noticed the deep enmeshment that characterizes Hardy's oeuvre, especially in *The Woodlanders*. Ian Gregor refers to the work as a "great web," and George Levine asserts: "Everything is connected to everything else, and there are deep

moral consequences to this moral fact” (176).¹ However, according to Bruno Latour, in any diverse grouping, the individual agents exert varying degrees of pressure or emerge as more or less important actants. Jane Bennett extends Latour’s observation, with a nod to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, by noticing that “a particular element can be so contingently well placed in an assemblage that its power to alter the direction or function of the whole is unusually great” (42). This chapter will trace the work done by a few of these “operators,” most notably Marty South’s hair, which boasts such an inordinate degree of agency that critic Mary Jacobus calls it the “single triggering device” of the entire plot (123). Marty’s hair bursts with competing significations, from female promiscuity to the osmotic boundaries of subjectivity, but its potential for disrupting the present lives of Little Hintock’s inhabitants shines forth as its most prominent characteristic. Like Marty’s hair, many of the actants in the network of *The Woodlanders* have been severed from their original milieux, and the hair metonymically performs the consequences of these partings.

The Woodlanders revolves around the ill-fated relationships between native Hintockians and newly-established ones, especially the pairing of Grace Melbury and Edred Fitzpiers. Grace grew up in Little Hintock as the daughter of the local timber merchant, but her father sent her away to the town of Sherton Abbas for education and genteel training, in order to increase her social standing and therefore her value as a wife for her adoring neighbor and childhood friend, Giles Winterbourne, a self-made, hardworking man. Mr. Melbury’s plan backfires when he realizes that Grace has now risen too far above Giles, and

¹ Mary Jacobus finds a passage in Hardy’s notes, transcribed from John Addington Symonds, that captures the author’s interest in such networks: “Each act, as it has had immeasurable and necessary antecedents, will be fruitful of immeasurable and necessary consequents; for the web of the world is every weaving, and to drop a thread in it is utterly impossible” (qtd. in Jacobus 126). Symonds and Hardy conceive here of what science calls a “Markovian series,” after Andrey Markov—a chain of events in which each instance determines the next possible outcomes. Rolling dice, for example, is random; playing a dice-controlled board game is not. For more on Hardy’s knowledge of evolution and heredity, see Padian.

he reneges on his offer and marries her off to Fitzpiers, the curious doctor who has lately moved to Little Hintock. Grace and Fitzpiers find each other fascinating at first, but their affections cool quickly in the normalcy of everyday married life. Soon, Fitzpiers begins a torrid affair with the lady of Hintock House, the local manor; Felice Charmond paints a seductive and very modern portrait, her vivacity and inconstancy attracting Fitzpiers time and again. Most of the novel concerns itself with the ebb and flow of these major couplings, although it also follows the fall of Giles Winterbourne's fortunes: because of a minor slight he inadvertently levies against Mrs. Charmond, Giles loses his home and most of his business, which also costs him Grace's hand. He finds shelter in a crude hut in the woods, but he later abandons even that to avoid any suggestion of impropriety when Grace, fleeing her wanton husband in shame, takes up residence there. Exposed to the elements, Giles succumbs to a terrible illness and dies in Grace's arms, after which she gradually reunites with Fitzpiers, forgetting her vows of faith to the dying Giles.

By no metric could readers view the young woodlander Marty South as one of the main characters in the novel: she has no solid relationship with any principal actor, she hardly participates in most scenes, and she remains largely unchanged in personality and behavior from the beginning of the narrative until the end. Indeed, the narrator acknowledges her existence only when her actions directly affect Grace, Giles, Fitzpiers, or Mrs. Charmond. However, the novel begins and ends with a portrait of Marty, and if we follow not just the girl² but the chain of events inaugurated and sustained by the girl's hair, we find her presence and influence in nearly every crucial moment in the story. Her hair

² Marty, at twenty years old, ought to merit the title "young woman" like her counterpart Grace Melbury, but the narrator and other characters only ever refer to her as a "girl," for reasons I discuss in more detail in the pages that follow.

orients us to life in Little Hintock in significant ways and helps explain how the characters and the town itself meet such tragic ends—an explanation lost to us if we attend only to the fully human register.

To acknowledge Marty's hair as a Deleuzean operator in *The Woodlanders'* network, we should first understand its materiality, or what Bennett calls "vibrancy." The capacities that humans typically posit as funding "life" or "agency" (such as movement, influence, and change) also inhere in nonhumans, argue Bennett and other object-oriented thinkers. Latour includes in his famous litanies of actants not only living nonhumans such as animals or plants but also concepts, forces, organizations, and events. Everything has a life, if only one can perceive the levels at which that life may reside. Bennett employs the term "thing-power" to describe "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). Marty's hair certainly possesses thing-power, as I will show, but any hair—human or otherwise—can make its own claims to livelihood, albeit of an uncanny sort. Composed of dead cells (literally a waste product), hair nonetheless "grows" from both living and dead bodies and carries their imprint, even when it falls out or is cut off. For example, we can easily recover a genetic imprint from hair left at a crime scene, and it may even be possible to clone an animal from the DNA in a single, intact hair follicle. Hair is simultaneously living and dead material—a zombie object. Its uncomfortably liminal status fits anthropologist Mary Douglas's paradigm of bodily waste like blood, dirt, and fingernails. Like those substances, human hair transgresses the border between inner and outer (150). If all structures (social, political, physical) are most vulnerable at their margins, anything existing at or issuing from those sites must be carefully policed (199). Hair threatens order.

Hair's potential to unsettle or actively disrupt human activity shimmers in each strand, and that capacity is magnified in such a remarkably lively mane as Marty South's "bright gift of Time" (12). It boasts a unique "shade you can't match by dyeing," according to the local wig-maker (12), and thus cannot be reproduced or faked—but it can be transplanted, and this mobility underwrites much of the anxiety in the novel (12). Its uniqueness makes it a rare prize, a striking contrast to its owner, drawing Barber Percomb to Little Hintock and thus becoming the impetus for the entire novel, the first point of entry into its network, the first component in its increasingly thorny assemblage. Although Marty eventually agrees to sell her exquisite hair, neither she nor Percomb (nor Mrs. Charmond, who purchases it) understands that, like her DNA, Marty's story travels with her hair. The frequently cited scholarship of anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai and Janet Hoskins explains how this phenomenon works. In *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai focuses on commodities, or things that are exchanged, traded, or given; he argues that such objects have "life histories" or "careers," and that they carry with them the knowledge of their pasts and their production (41). Hoskins, in *Biographical Objects*, discovered that getting to know items of importance to her human subjects led to the most thorough and accurate understanding of the subjects themselves. She thinks of these items as "containers" of meaning (5) but also as "anchors" (7) in the sense that they retain and publicize the past (11). Elaine Freedgood relates these ideas to Victorian literature directly through "it-narratives," or stories related by differently animated objects such as needles, lamp-posts, and dolls. From these tales, Freedgood extrapolates a Victorian awareness of material vibrancy, challenging the Marxist view that commodities are dead or alienated from human craft, arguing that Victorians understood the boundaries between person and object as

more permeable, even, than we often think of them today. Further, she writes, “the self inheres in its present *and* former possessions no matter what, including the parts of the self that are sold” (87). Although Freedgood’s it-narratives represent a niche market in nineteenth-century printed material, their thematic concerns transcend their narrow genre and prove instructive for reading *The Woodlanders*. Like many of Hardy’s novels, it brims with nostalgic objects: carefully preserved footprints, indelible carvings in wooden jambs, skills long abandoned by urban industry, steel traps hiding in sheds.

No single object in the book so embodies this mood and so frequently brings the past into the present as Marty South’s hair. Rather than acting as an heirloom or a memorial (like Grace’s footprints, tenderly preserved beneath a stone by her father), Marty’s hair constantly disrupts the narrative by reminding readers and characters alike of its humble provenance. Ironically, the hair’s first victim is Marty herself, who has “but little pretension to beauty” other than the rich, “unmanageable” locks that frame her face with their “rare and beautiful approximation to chestnut” (11). With no other physical or financial asset to speak of, Marty has only her hair to help her win the affections of her neighbor Giles Winterbourne. The novel casts no doubt on the fitness of this coupling, carefully drawing them both as partners in their work and their philosophical outlooks. Giles lives in perfect harmony with his surroundings, blending first into the apple tree he holds in the town square and later into the apples themselves, painted with pips and juice as “Autumn’s very brother” (205). Marty also boasts an intimate kinship with nature, instinctively working twigs and branches better than men who have spent their lives in practice, and communicating with the trees: “How they sigh directly we put ‘em upright,”

she murmurs, “though while they are lying down they don’t sigh at all” (64).³ Giles does not return (or even seem to notice) Marty’s ardor, however, and when she realizes the futility of her efforts, she accedes to Barber Percomb’s offer.

Although we might read Marty’s actions as evidence of her broken heart, the hair’s continued activity suggests more to the story. Galia Ofek refers back to Mary Douglas to position of hair as an inherently transgressive substance, one that crosses important boundaries between living and dead, rich and poor, healthy and sick, and thus introduces contagion. Because wig-makers reaped hair from the dead in order to create the falls coveted by women like Felice Charmond, the prevailing Victorian view held that false locks spread disease. Even hair cut from living women posed a threat, writes Ofek, since the buyer could never know for certain how clean the seller kept her tresses (9-10). Although Marty severs and sells her hair willfully (it is not harvested like an organ from a corpse), the severed locks nonetheless suggest a severed limb, and their loss disfigures, even disables, Marty. When Giles sees her cropped pate, he exclaims in horror that her head now looks “like an apple upon a gate-post!” (22). Her marred, inhuman, unfeminine form causes him to recoil, further decreasing the possibility that he might ever find Marty attractive as a potential mate. Further, her baldness renders Marty more susceptible to contamination herself: she soon contracts three simultaneous illnesses, to which Giles pronounces, “You

³ According to Peter Coxon, who examines Hardy’s attention to female hair across several novels, Marty’s consonance with the natural world is a common theme, but her tragic ending breaks the pattern: “The brunettes in Hardy’s fiction integrate most successfully with nature and the physical world. The world is acceptable to them; it is regarded as an ally and the stresses and strains which are an inevitable part of the whole of life are ameliorated in coming to terms with it. In the main theirs is a satisfactory existence and seldom do they emerge as tragic figures on account of their own precipitate action” (98).

Bruce Johnson takes a different path with regard to Marty’s (and Giles’s) natural sympathies, claiming that “Hardy [...] habitually compares his characters with animals, plants, topography, weather, geology, not as though something in their character were merely like the natural thing or event but as though allotropy were being sought, as though the same manner of being had been wrought in both by larger forces and processes” (4).

had no business to chop that hair off, Marty; it almost serves you right” (65). Although Douglas’s and Ofek’s work implies that hair must be tightly controlled, Hardy suggests in Marty’s sickness that even her untamed hair, when in its rightful place, protected its owner.

The problem with Marty’s hair, then, stems not from the hair itself or from Marty but from the separation of the two. Douglas’s influential work on the book of Leviticus equates wholeness with holiness in Western traditions, and Marty’s haircut fits into that archetype by defiling her. In this novel obsessed with divisions and attempted reunions, Marty divorces herself from her single distinguishing characteristic, so that men who have known and worked alongside her for twenty years can only “parenthetically” say, “I *think* it was Marty” when they pass by her on the lane (366, emphasis mine). Galia Ofek and Elisabeth Gitter, among others, recover important knowledge from Victorian England that helps explain Marty’s hair as a key to her identity. Primarily, hair metonymically represents female sexuality, and, according to Gitter, “the more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation implied by its display” (938). Marty’s hair bodies forth an over-abundant, untamed, and singular sexual force negated by the girl’s otherwise ungendered appearance and role in Little Hintock. Marty works with men, bears a gender-neutral name, boasts no female friends or male suitors, and even completes her father’s work with her rough hands. Her hair clashes with her nature, though it suits Mrs. Charmond perfectly.

Mrs. Charmond just happens to have the same chestnut hair—a consonance that calls into question the class distinctions to which Mrs. Charmond and her ilk cling so strongly—and everything Marty lacks: money, independence, education, social graces, and, above all, a voluptuous femininity. At first Marty takes umbrage at the widow’s intention to use her hair to “get another lover with,” but when she overhears Mr. Melbury’s plan to

marry his daughter to her beloved Giles, she hacks off her tresses in bitterness and despair, effectively removing any trace of her ill-suited and now-useless fecundity (14). Perhaps Marty, who reads the world and its inhabitants with unfailing accuracy, understands that such a powerful sexual totem naturally belongs to a woman like Mrs. Charmond. Without Giles's love, Marty embarks on the lonely, sterile path she will tread to the end of the narrative. Severing her locks figures both as deflowering—the only act of “ravishment” she will ever know—and as castration, since Marty never seems to age or blossom during the protracted action of the novel. Instead, she retains an eternally childlike body, “the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible” (366).

Ironically, however, parting with her hair and thus her sexuality also frees Marty from the tumultuous and tragic affairs of the other characters—and probably saves her life. With no participation in the romantic whirlwind and nothing to offer the principal characters, Marty can freely circulate among them unnoticed. She can skulk at the margins of every scene, watching everything without implicating herself in any action. When she acts, she does so anonymously and without threat of repercussion, as when she sneaks up to Giles's house in the night and scrawls a poignant message on the stones: “You will lose your Grace” (107). In this way, Marty functions exactly like the needles and lamp-posts and dolls in it-narratives, which can see even what the normally omniscient narrator cannot. Freedgood writes that these objects are necessarily limited by their lack of literal voices and mobility, but that “this silence and stillness can confer special access to the unstudied manifestation of the interiority of the people they observe” (96). Like Freedgood's silent and perceptive objects, Marty does not speak much, but her ability to watch everyone else without attracting attention means that she can see what they might hide from a more

vocal character. The knowledge Marty gains from her observations allows her to accurately read not only the trees and plants but also her neighbors; of them, Marty alone seems to understand the stakes involved in these thorny human relationships. She pays a price for her position of cognitive privilege, however. “Marty *sans* hair” poses no threat to anyone, but “hair *sans* Marty” pens a different story.

The narrator recognizes the hair’s disruptive potential, comparing the shorn girl to Sif, raped by Loki, and implying that Marty’s haircut unleashes the locks’ potential for mayhem. Once removed from her head, Marty’s tresses continue to move, “stretched like waving and ropy weeds over the washed white bed of a stream” (20) as they rest on Marty’s stool in anticipation of the wig-maker’s next visit. At the hands of Barber Percomb, “her coil of hair,” writes Elisabeth Gitter, “becomes a serpent in the woodland garden” (945). Marty’s “shining arboreal hair” introduces corruption and deceit into a town previously characterized by openness and honesty—no one in Little Hintock closes a curtain or shuts a door, behaviors that determine not only their personalities but also their physical features. Hardy describes this phenomenon by way of introducing Marty South:

Where the eyes of the multitude continuously beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away its individuality; but in the still water of privacy every tentacle of feeling and sentiment shoots out in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed book by an intruder.

(Hardy 11)

Clearly, no one takes advantage of this lack of guile, which exposure renders the villagers acutely vulnerable to the newcomers’ glib tongues and fickle affections. Because of this, Marty fails to resist Barber Percomb’s oily tongue and inadvertently solidifies the foothold

of commerce in her agrarian enclave by subordinating her hair's natural, fecund power to the "jaundiced" stare of the gold sovereigns that Percomb leaves on her mantle. "In the fallen Eden [Marty] inhabits," proposes Gitter, "[the hair] has no power or value as a sign of true identity: its only worth is commercial" (946).

The now-commodified hair takes on new life with Mrs. Charmond as a false ponytail, called a "fall" in Victorian parlance. Transplanted to the widow's head, the fall aids in Felice's seduction of newly-married Edred Fitzpiers. Mrs. Charmond's augmented locks, vibrant with implications of surface and fashion and decoration, capture his attentions; his first physical description of her alights on the "pile of magnificent hair on the crown of her head" and the "particularly rich brown of her hair-plaits" (187). Although Felice boasts many charms, as her surname indicates, her hair plays a principal role in catalyzing their affair. As Fitzpiers recollects his brief dalliance with Felice when they were both young adults, the memory of her hair swims to the top of his mind: "The young lady who wore a long tail of rare-colored hair—ah, I see it before my eyes!" (188). Her hair does in some measure help ensnare Fitzpiers as a lover, but, more importantly, Mrs. Charmond believes her hair acts in such a way. Felice's upper-class obsession with artifice and cultivated graces permeates every facet of her existence: she poses in a deliberately provocative way, she turns Giles Winterbourne out of his home for a petty social misstep,⁴ and she acquires and discards friendships as quickly as lovers. As Latour reminds us, an actant need not

⁴ On a foggy day, Giles and Mrs. Charmond both attempt to drive their carriages down a narrow lane. Giles's carriage has loud bells attached to it, such that any traveler familiar with the Hintock woods can hear him coming and avoid the large lumber trailer. Mrs. Charmond, ignorant of native custom, insists that because she is an important person, she ought to have the right of way, despite Giles's much more cumbersome load. Her driver says, "Our time's precious. You are only going to some trumpery little village" (96). Giles insists that his five tons of timber trumps their luggage cart and refuses to back down. Right though he is to assert his claim on the road, Giles nonetheless offends Mrs. Charmond to the point that she later refuses to renew the life-lease on his house.

necessarily act of its own volition, but rather can be “granted” activity by another actant (Bennett 9). In Mrs. Charmond’s mind, Fitzpiers’s love (or at least desire) requires this hair and the pleasant fiction it enables.

In this instance as in so many others, a woman’s hair brings the past into the present, connecting individuals but at the cost of rupturing their current lives: to love Felice, Fitzpiers must commit adultery, severing his connection to his wife Grace. The ease with which he does so testifies not only to the power of Marty’s hair (and its conjoined twin, the memory of young Felice’s hair) but also to the frailty of the doctor’s commitment. Fitzpiers shares Felice’s inability to see beneath surfaces and beyond decoration, and this blindness leads him astray time and again.⁵ Readers glimpse his fickle nature when, for example, he begs the elderly Grammar Oliver to donate her brain to his studies after her death. The brain becomes the object of his fascination for some months, even though Grammar eventually annuls the contract, but when Fitzpiers finally does get a brain to examine from another villager, he rapidly loses interest: “[The brain] was not so interesting under the microscope as might have been expected from the importance of that organ in life” (134). The narrator opines that Fitzpiers’s interest in science derives more from ideas than practice, more from novelty than reality. Fitzpiers certainly feels this way about his wife, whom he treats as yet another object of study, watching her in fascination through telescopes and windows before deciding to spend time with her as “recreation”: “This phenomenal girl will be the light of my life *while I am at Hintock*” (134, emphasis added). Even the narrator sees the tenuousness of Fitzpiers’s interest in Grace: “As an object of contemplation for the present,” he sadly observes, “Grace Melbury would serve [...] to

⁵ Ian Gregor calls the doctor “the Proust of Little Hintock,” one who, like Mrs. Charmond, “sees [the] world as composed of discrete objects, existing for his own purposes” (151).

relieve the monotony of his days” (135). The doctor feels no more strongly about Felice than he does about Grace, and although the mere fragment of a memory of her hair proves sufficient to detract him from the dullness of married life, he easily rejects her as a “flat delight” (327).

Perhaps the most powerful example of Fitzpiers’s obsession with surfaces and commodities, and certainly the most tragic example of his inability to dwell on the real consequences of his idealistic actions, is John South’s tree—an object that tugs strongly on the “great web” of this novel and threatens the present with collapse by re-introducing the past. Unsurprisingly, this episode begins with Marty South, who hopes that Fitzpiers can bring his cutting-edge scientific knowledge to bear on her father’s physical and mental illness. The elderly man has fallen prey to his lifelong fears about the great tree growing outside his house, threatening to “cleave us, like ‘the sword of the Lord and of Gideon”” (99). The elm was planted in the year of South’s birth, and the man had thought several times in his youth that he ought to cut it down, until it was too late, South says, “and now ’tis my enemy, and will be the death of me” (91). Marty explains that the tree “has got human sense, and sprouted up when he was born on purpose to rule him, and keep him as its slave” (101), which Fitzpiers declares utter nonsense. If the tree keeps South under its power, the doctor reasons, then cutting the tree down will liberate the ailing man from his bondage. At no point does he ask Giles or Marty for their advice, despite the girl’s pronouncement that “others have been like it afore in Hintock” (101) or Giles’s assertion that lives and trees are completely intertwined in Little Hintock. Fitzpiers orders the tree cut down, which indeed kills South directly; more importantly, South’s death deprives Giles

of his property, marriage prospects, and, ultimately, his life.⁶ The doctor, so interested in the case when it stood before him, simply shrugs it off, saying in bemused surprise, “Damned if my remedy hasn’t killed him!” before walking away in search of the next interesting thing.

Marty’s attempt to bring the past (“others have been like it afore”) into the present in a healthful, productive way fails in the case of her father and his tree, perhaps because, like Samson, she lost her power when she severed her beautiful hair. Elisabeth Gitter ties hair to the threads that women use to sew, weave, and tell their stories: “Woman’s loom or hair is her instrument” (938). Cutting off her hair parallels Marty cutting out her tongue, in that it renders her bereft of effective communication: “Marty is a Philomela, unable to speak and unable, bereft of her hair, to show who she really is” (Gitter 946). Although she can literally speak, Marty’s words drift by the other characters unnoticed and her identity, which characters so often establish vocally, remains unattested. Marty’s tonsorial split initiates a chain reaction, which claims her own father as one of its victims. Her very recent past works in tandem with the tree’s more distant history to destroy the present and future of Little Hintock. But Marty cannot be made to shoulder all of the blame for her father’s death: Fitzpiers’s blindness to a truth deeper than his modern superficiality contributes heavily. Since Marty herself calls for him when her father takes ill, he should have listened to the girl’s offer of native history.

⁶ Most of the houses in Little Hintock were held by life-lease: a contract that existed for the length of the oldest homeowner’s life. When John South dies, the life-lease expires and the land on which the homes were built reverts back to its original owner, the proprietor of Hintock House (here, Mrs. Charmond). During the term of the contract, any of the homeowners could emend the contract and apply for full ownership, but Giles never got around to doing so before South dies. When he loses his home, Mr. Melbury decides his lack of a proper dwelling renders him an unsuitable match for his beloved daughter Grace (and one must imagine that any father would feel the same). Further, Giles retreats to a one-room woodland cottage, and when Grace comes to stay with him later in the novel, he abandons the hut to her care and sleeps instead under a poorly constructed lean-to. In the unforgiving February weather, Giles catches cold and dies.

As Marty's haircut comes back to haunt her, so too does her hair return to haunt Dr. Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond. The hair insistently reminds others of its origins, in part by failing to disappear fully into Mrs. Charmond's own coiffure. The function of any cosmetic enhancement is to disappear, or, at least to appear natural; to do otherwise would render the supplement ineffective. Barber Percomb testifies to Mrs. Charmond's anxiety about the hair's ability to do just that when he begs Marty to keep their transaction clandestine: "'Tis as much as my business is worth if it should be known that I've let out her name" (13). Both Marty and Mrs. Charmond believe that the hair's origins can destroy this affair, a misreading that stems in both instances from the women's relative knowledge or ignorance of modern fashion. Because Marty considers her hair a thing of tremendous value and importance, a repository of historical truth and personal identity like one of Hoskins's biographical objects, she believes that revealing its origins will wreak similar destruction on Mrs. Charmond's life. Because Felice, by contrast, believes so ardently in the power of artifice and appearance, she also privileges the fall as the linchpin in her courtship of Fitzpiers. Since Marty shares Felice's belief in the power of the deceptive hair, when she tries to recover Fitzpiers for her neighbor, Grace, she goes straight for the fall. The narrator pittingly opines, "It was poor Marty's only card, and she played it, knowing nothing of fashion, and thinking her revelation a fatal one for a lover" (243). Marty's hair held more value for her than any other possession, and the girl cannot understand that something so precious to her would function as a mere trifle for anyone else. If the hair has become the serpent, her confession to the doctor becomes her "long contemplated apple of discord," but Fitzpiers, as usual, ignores Marty's words for some time (249). The hair's humble roots eventually do become ammunition, but only for teasing Felice rather than for putting the

“bullet” in their affair as Marty expected. However, Mrs. Charmond cannot abide her lover’s mockery. Because her life exists only on the surface, even his shallow jests destroy her, and in her humiliation she sends him packing. Her perfectly coifed image shatters (for her, if not for him) beneath his attacks and this loss of self becomes complete when a jealous ex-lover shoots and kills her. Marty’s “bullet had reached its billet at last,” Hardy writes, explicitly connecting Marty’s fall of severed hair to the fall of Felice and Fitzpiers (365).

As a device fashioned explicitly to capture the attentions of a man, Felice’s fall/Marty’s hair is the first of a series of “man-traps” in *Little Hintock*, though the novel never explicitly names it as such. It is also the only successful man-trap in the entire narrative, the only one that actually traps a man. The others range from unsuccessful to what we might politely call “differently successful”—that is, they take action, but not according to their users’ wishes. Jonathan Glance’s short article on *The Woodlanders* identifies several “man-traps” in the novel, including Marty’s hair, which “snares its victim—Edred notices its beauty—but eventually that trap rebounds on its ‘toiler”” (28). Glance also identifies a lace handkerchief that Felice drops in Baden as a young woman as a man-trap because the smitten Fitzpiers had found that bit of cloth and endeavored to return it to her (doubtless her intention in dropping it). In their youth, Felice attracted Fitzpiers with her luxuriant tresses and coyly misplaced handkerchief; in their maturity, she replays the scene with as many of the same actors as she can muster, tightening their bond with identical, albeit counterfeit, locks.

Felice thus conspires with figurative man-traps like Marty’s hair and her own lace handkerchief, but she also works through literal man-traps—the unforgiving iron machines that dotted the agrarian landscape of early nineteenth-century England. Just as the hair

ensnared Fitzpiers as a lover for Felice, a series of man-traps captures a friend for her: the widow bonds with the delightful young Grace Melbury in their first conversation, which concerns the series of traps hanging on the gallery wall at Hintock House. When Grace notices the brutal display of local instruments of violence, Mrs. Charmond anticipates Freedgood in speaking of their unique identities: “My husband was a connoisseur in man-traps [...], collecting them from all his neighbors. He knew the histories of all these—which gin had broken a man’s leg, which gun had killed a man” (59). Trying to dismiss such horrors by removing any possibility of continued life and action, Grace compartmentalizes the objects as “relics of a barbarous time happily past,” (59). Safely ensconced in memory, Felice now considers them, like Marty’s hair, mere decoration: “Well, we must not take them too seriously” (59). Again like Marty’s hair, however, the man-traps remain in full view, asserting their continued relevance despite the inattention of Little Hintock’s interlopers like Felice, Edred, and even Grace, who ought to know better since she was raised in the village. When she shudders at the sight of them, it signals her instinctive response to the collective memory of their danger. The past has never truly receded in the woodlands, and man-traps still abound in Little Hintock.

If Marty’s hair is a man-trap, then perhaps Tim Tang’s iron man-trap, functioning in similar ways, can be considered a hair extension. This engine rests in Tim’s shed, long forgotten as actual agricultural practice, now only a “cobwebbed object”—a cogent description that recognizes the engine’s identity as a site of history but also its membership within a network. Like Marty’s hair, Tang’s man-trap fails to answer the call of the human, acting in ways that its users do not intend. The narrator recognizes its vibrancy, relating it in two pages of exposition to a series of vicious creatures (shark, crocodile, scorpion),

having a spine and fierce jaws and even a “soul” (351). When set, the trap “produced a vivid impression that it was endowed with life” (351). Underneath the dust of several decades’ disuse, then, the engine retains its power, in part because of its composition and in part because of its own powerful story. Although the Hintockians no longer use man-traps for their express purpose, the engines remain alive in the collective memories of these people, and in “in almost every village one could be found in some nook or corner as readily as this was found by Time” (351). The Hitockians remember, for example, when a woodsman accidentally walked into one and gave himself lockjaw, and Tim Tangs himself recalls watching this very trap maul pieces of lumber that he and his friends threw at it as a “fearful amusement” (351). Their capacity for harm, then, is well-attested by the woodlanders, and Tim has seen with his own eyes the damage that they can do, no matter how much Mrs. Charmond refuses to take them seriously.

The cuckold’s trap lies in wait for Fitzpiers, but its “soul” has other intentions, for it ensnares quite a different quarry: Grace Melbury, hurrying toward a clandestine meeting with her estranged husband.⁷ The poor woman had mostly eschewed his company since learning of his affair with Mrs. Charmond, but now she feels that she must rejoin him, having failed to procure a divorce (perhaps the only instance of severing in the novel that would have worked to everyone’s benefit) and having abandoned her regular pilgrimages to Giles Winterbourne’s grave. The pull to remain in Little Hintock and reclaim her native habits and associations, so strong while in Giles’s company, has faded in the face of

⁷ Interestingly, J. Hillis Miller encourages us to acknowledge that things have intentions and desires because of their willingness to enter into relation: “The intention of the hay-rake, that it should be used for raking hay, is encountered as an inextricable part of the rake. To see it as a disconnected ‘object,’” he chides, “is an artificial and derivative way of seeing it, for the rake by way of its use reaches out toward all the surrounding items in the community. [...] Each element in the collection, whether maker, tool, or user, is part of a complex totality of involvements” (94).

Fitzpiers's apparent contrition and the glamour of his new practice in the Midlands. As she runs toward her husband, the man-trap snags Grace's dress in its iron teeth, causing her to cry out in alarm. Her distress activates Fitzpiers's interest in the phenomenal, the unusual, and the emotional: his passions rise to meet the passions of the situation, and he and Grace cement their reunion. The "diabolical" trap gives Grace exactly what she thought she wanted: a sharp reminder of her humble origins, a way to return to her native surroundings. Instead, this irruption of history into the present undoes Grace just as Marty's hair undoes Felice, by severing her from her earlier intentions. Rather than reclaiming her for Hintock, the trap only brings her closer to her philandering husband and ultimately expels both from the village.

The collision of rural knowledge and urban deceit frames this scene in a way that perfectly reflects the conflict of values dramatized in *The Woodlanders*. Ironically, Fitzpiers (who ought to be unfamiliar with traps, given his lack of rural experience and native knowledge) understands the situation and can free his wife from the engine's maw because he "had often studied the effect of these instruments" at Hintock House, while caught in Mrs. Charmond's man-trap. Fitzpiers liberates his wife from "the monster's bit" with the help of a billet, a thick piece of wood—a term that contains another meaning, as in *billet-doux*, a love letter (357). Thus, Edred uses a kind of language learned from an extramarital dalliance to pen a "love letter" to rescue the woman whom he has betrayed. Four chapters earlier, Hardy had used the same word, when Fitzpiers finally reads Marty's confession and brings about the end of his affair: "Her bullet reached its billet at last" (327). In this sense, "billet" means the letter's final destination, but its etymology specifically refers to a soldier's post, showing the antagonistic tangle of significations written by the various man-

traps in this woodland network. Hardy's linguistic agility emphasizes the unavoidable relations between past, present, and future, and shows them as not so much linear (like trees) as rhizomatic (like the furze that grows on the Wessex heath).

The Woodlanders' temporal model resembles Michel Serres's concept of "folded time," in which time looks less like a line and more like a knot in which threads constantly cross one another. However, unlike the ball of dough Serres puts forth, where constant creasing and overlapping eventually make a smooth product, Hardy's novel illumines the danger of letting the past overcode the present. Perhaps this gestures to the lack of harmony generally in the universe, the dissonance created after the Fall from divine grace. The parallels to the story of Eden certainly emerge clearly in this novel, although, unlike the other texts in this study, they exist throughout rather than presenting in a small, focused paradisiacal vision at the very end.⁸ In Hardy's universe, the return to Eden is not a goal for the future, but an opportunity in the process of being lost. Little Hintock *is*, in some ways, an attempt to give a local habitation and a name to a perfect world in which humans and nature work together, and a divine presence, if Hardy's work has any, exists in the work itself. Tucked away in a lush, fragrant apple orchard, in the first chapters the village feels unscarred by social or industrial progress, although not fully a utopia: its inhabitants perform excruciating, exhausting work for very little socio-economic gain, and they struggle mightily to maintain their meager existences. Yet, as Richard Kerridge comments, "their work, hard as it is, possesses the undividedness of mind and body, self and environment, that is the object of so much Romantic longing" (137). This sense of harmony strongly captures the Edenic paradigm, which violently ruptures when disturbed.

⁸ Without referring specifically to Eden, Gregor nevertheless sees the novel as presenting "an index of primal experience, endlessly capable of adaptation and repetition" (169).

The Woodlanders tells the story of a remote paradise falling before a phalanx of outsiders who move in and tempt its inhabitants with a new, urbane, flexible morality. If Marty's hair, severed and commodified, becomes the serpent in the garden, then the apple it offers glitters with the allure of ornamentation, leisure, and hedonism. The arrival of interlopers and their cosmopolitan values introduces this serpent, but although some critics, like Shirley Stave, pin the entire tragedy on Grace Melbury's return from finishing school, Hardy seems to distribute responsibility fairly evenly across the shoulders of Grace, Felice, and Edred. Even Giles bears some of the blame, since he subordinates his lived experience to his desire to please Grace: every time he attempts to speak, think, or act like her, tragedy ensues. In this sense, Giles plays the role of Adam, acting against his own impulses in order to please a woman; as Andrew Radford points out, both Grace and Giles himself make this comparison (322), and the book clarifies the consonance between Giles and the natural world. Significantly, Giles cultivates apples and most successfully blends into his surroundings when covered with pips and peels and juice. Giles has skin "the colour of his environment" and looks like "Autumn's very brother," having a "sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech"; he conflates "the fruit-god and the wood-god" (151; 205; 63; 278). In short, he shows as much kinship with and mastery of the apple trees as Adam showed of the animals in the garden. According to some apocryphal sources, notably the Semitic *Life of Adam and Eve*, when Adam dies, the natural world mourns. Although we have no evidence that Hardy knew this tradition, he nonetheless describes a similar phenomenon on the death of Giles Winterbourne:

Winterbourne was gone, and the copses seemed to show the want of him; those young trees, so many of which he had planted, and of which he had

spoken so truly when he said that he should fall before they fell, were at that very moment sending out their roots in the direction that he had given them with his subtle hand. (326)

If Giles stands underneath (and among) the trees as a hapless Adam, then Grace, who tempts him so successfully, must be his Eve, as Grace and Mr. Melbury imply. When she watches her husband ride off toward Hintock House, Grace meditates upon her woes: “She wondered if there were no one world in the universe where the fruit had no worm, and marriage no sorrow” (204). Her father later cautions her to discard Fitzpiers by telling her to “put off the old Eve,” and when she sits with Giles in a Sherton Abbas church, certain of the impending divorce, the narrator pityingly describes them as “two poor Arcadian innocents [...] like children in the presence of the incomprehensible” (288; 282). When that plan falls through, Grace becomes again “the old Eve,” penning herself up in her father’s house and making the garden her utmost boundary—only this time Eve imprisons herself in a garden rather than getting exiled from one (295). Shirley Stave offers another way of linking Grace to Eve: if Marty stands in for nature itself, then she must remain eternal and unchanging; however, since story stems from change, the story must inhere in another character, one “who has a history, who has fallen out of Eden, who is no cosmic deity but rather who is limited, human, fragmented. [...] That body is Grace Melbury’s” (87). Thus Grace figures not only Eve in the Garden but, perhaps more importantly, Eve cast out of the Garden as well.

Next to Giles’s and Grace’s Adam and Eve, the interlopers collectively form the figure of the tempter. The villagers assert that Fitzpiers, with his examinations of dead men’s brains and perusal of arcane books, acts “in league with the devil,” and his first notable

action in the town is the felling of a tree (8). Mr. Melbury blames him for the disastrous marriage between him and Grace: “The devil tempted [me] in the person of Fitzpiers” (226). When Felice wonders why humans are “given hungry hearts and wild desires” if not to use them, Fitzpiers answers, “You must eat of the second tree of knowledge,” linking himself to his serpentine ancestor (197). His partner, Mrs. Charmond, through Barber Percomb, also plays the tempter. Barber Percomb promises Marty fortune (relatively speaking) and implies friendship—or at least association—by confiding in her the truth about the hair’s purchaser. Marty accuses Barber Percomb of speaking to her like “the Devil to Dr. Faustus,” and when she resists he continues his temptation with oily threats: “You see, Marty, as you are in the same parish, and in one of this lady’s cottages, and your father is ill, and wouldn’t like to turn out, it would be as well to oblige her. I say that as a friend” (13). Of course their conversation results in the creation of a “fall” of hair for Mrs. Charmond, which the lady of Hintock House then uses to tempt Fitzpiers away from Grace, which results in the fall of everyone else in the novel. Marty’s hair and Tim Tang’s man-trap work in tandem with these agents of discord, apples in their own right, as vectors that introduce the contagion of modernity into the Edenic reserve of Little Hintock. Although the objects expel the interlopers from this insular community, the outsiders occasioned the arrival and agency of these objects to begin with. Even when Mrs. Charmond, Dr. Fitzpiers, and Grace Melbury have left for good and the contagion has been purged, readers clearly see that life in Little Hintock will never recover from the invasion.

As tragic as this vision seems, Hardy endeavors to show how natural a process we have witnessed. An early proponent of Darwin and Malthus, Hardy includes important references to the burgeoning theory of evolution; he champions a view of nature as

indifferent to human struggle and of life as a Markovian process—one in which change produces change, each step dependent on the step immediately preceding it. Where you begin determines where you go, and your history determines your present—a lesson learned the hard way by characters like Marty South or Mrs. Charmond. Hardy's fiction, poetry, and personal correspondence reveal his view of social and scientific progress as practical, inevitable, and even desirable, sharing Richard Kerridge's view that "the message that social mobility brings disaster is as bitterly ironic as the suggestion that nature would have done better not to progress from invertebrates to vertebrates" (138). However, this real-world truth does not prevent Hardy from seeing the tragedy that evolution levels on the individual lives of the simple, rural people that populate his literary environs. He celebrates the native inhabitants of Little Hintock and their close ties to the land on which they live and work, but he does not do so naively. In the much-noted "starry moss" passage from Volume 1, Grace Melbury and Giles Winterbourne walk through a beautiful part of the wood, teeming with life, in which water pours in "green cascades" and "huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs" (48). Yet, beneath the overlay of vitality, nature competes, fails, and rots: "The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling" (48).

It can be no accident that our first glimpse of nature's red teeth and claws accompanies Grace's return to Little Hintock, since she forms part of the trifecta of outside pollutants that destroy the village. Mrs. Charmond, via Marty's hair, first introduces the disease, and Dr. Fitzpiers's first attempt at curing a native woodlander results in the simultaneous deaths of an important tree and the most important living man in the village. The initial actions of all three characters catalyze the decay of Little Hintock, and readers

watch from the sidelines as it and its inhabitants slowly wither like the sapling entwined with ivy. Those readers and critics who find the novel's ending unsatisfactory miss the nods to Darwin and Malthus. Phillip Mallett connects Hardy's tragic endings to his awareness of evolutionary theory: "In Hardy's fiction, the most vital, the most richly endowed, generally fail to survive, or to leave any progeny. [...] Resources will be wasted in a busy and active universe, as one individual or species survives and another does not" (166). George Levine acknowledges Hardy's responsibility in making a story out of this model: "Connections are there regardless of the interests and knowledge of the characters in an impersonal and unintentional, quite Darwinian way. [...] It is the 'artist' who perceives the design and movements" (176). In *The Woodlanders*, of course, Hardy's design focuses on the ever-stalwart Marty South, whose hair has regrown by the end of the novel, but whose independent identity has not. She stands beside Giles Winterbourne's grave, promising to keep up Giles's work (Fitzpiers purchased his cider-making equipment for her) and comforting us with the knowledge that, because of this, Little Hintock and its customs will continue. However, ours is a sterile vision, for although Marty South possesses a marvelous capacity for the husbandry of plants and trees, she herself will not reproduce. The narrator dispossesses her of her womanliness:

As this solitary and silent girl stood there in the moonlight, a straight slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible [...] she touched sublimity at points, and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism. (366)

The symbolic castration of her haircut leaves her, at novel's end, figuratively shorn in the guise of a nun, as she was literally shorn in the first chapter. As long as Marty lives, she will keep Little Hintock from disappearing, because her faithful memory vaccinates the village against death. "The spot may have beauty, grandeur, salubrity, convenience," muses the narrator, "but if it lack memories it will ultimately pall upon him who settles there" (125). Sadly, Marty's psychic mouth-to-mouth can only last as long as she, and we know without a doubt that no one will come after her.⁹

Marty is a metonym for Little Hintock, which is itself a metonym for its system of rustic, rural values, which is, in turn, a metonym for prelapsarian Eden and its accompanying symbiosis of humans, nature, and divine grace. But with each remove, we put more distance between ourselves and such a union; the vision which concludes the novel hearkens back to Genesis, but with God conspicuously absent. Shirley Stave notices the biblical allusions but also Hardy's revisions:

Hardy's novels chronicle human consciousness' changing perception of nature—from a past he mythologizes as having felt a unity with nature, to a time when nature began to be perceived as other, to a present where nature is a force against which the human must struggle and which it must attempt to control. Such a consciousness may best be described as postlapsarian; a fall into disunity has occurred, a fall that severs the human from the greater nature. (74-75)

⁹ Mary Jacobus ties nearly every crisis in the novel to each character's relative possession or lack of memory: "Little Hintock means nothing to [Fitzpiers] because he is ignorant of the past. [...] But to Marty the landscape is peopled with memories, and her daily life becomes a memorial for the dead Giles. [...] Marty's fidelity partially heals the breach between Nature and Imagination, making available the only source of immortality permitted in a depleted and demythologized world" (132-33). Jacobus rightly identifies the importance of Marty's continued memorial, but she misses the myriad threats posed to that immortality.

Marty might appear as a kind of nun in this scene, but she symbolically weds or binds herself to a dead mortal man instead of a holy spirit; Hardy's tragedy resolutely occurs on secular and individual levels, without much regard for the sacred or universal. Marty guards Little Hintock as Gabriel guards Eden, the flaming sword of her chaste love and tragic nostalgia ensuring that no one will ever enter or leave the village again.¹⁰ She may feel that she protects something sacred (and indeed, she does), but life is a Markovian process, every move forward bearing the marks of its previous movements, and if her village does not evolve, it will die. "Her longing for the imagined health of the past," notes Andrew Radford, "must be a sign of sickness in the modern moment" (326). Little Hintock's decline, like our own, is irreversible. Readers feel an enormous sense of loss at the end of *The Woodlanders*, regardless of the natural "right-ness" of what happens. The beings that fail to survive can still have a profound effect on those who do; everything leaves its mark, and perhaps readers and writers must work to find the beauty in the overarching narrative.¹¹ George Levine concurs: "It is the 'artist' who perceives the design in events and movements that must feel and be mere 'Hap' to the people who are seen as part of that design" (176). Kevin Padian, too, sees humans as responsible for finding beauty and tragedy in the complex web of existence: for Hardy, as for Darwin, nature exists and changes on the level of "deep time," while humans can only perceive what happens in the moment. Thus "the tragedy of novels is only possible because we allow ourselves the luxury of ruminating of the scale of individual lives" (233). Relationships make *our* world

¹⁰ "Her most intense life," Gregor recognizes, "is to be lived as story, as filling the vacancy of the present with the heroism of the past. For Marty it is a past already serenely in her possession, and it is her serenity, rather than her desolation, that the book finally conveys" (172).

¹¹ "Life is movement," muses Michael Irwin regarding Hardy's animated landscapes, "movement leaves traces, and those traces are there to be read as evidence of what has been going on around us" (86).

go 'round, but they do not make *the* world go 'round. Finally, although Hardy certainly embraces evolution and the progress it entails, Padian warns us against labeling him a progressivist: "The notion that the human condition was continually improving would have been anathema to Hardy, because so much time-honored culture and value are lost in the process" (230). When we sacrifice our ties to nature and to one another, we engender tragedy.¹² Hardy once wrote that the human race is "one great network or tissue which quivers in every part when one point is shaken" and, in another letter, that our distance from nature, rather than our enmeshment in it, binds us to act as its stewards (Padian 225). As the Industrial Revolution burgeons all around Hintock, Hardy's postlapsarian novel presents the changes that it engenders as inevitable and even necessary, but as exacting a terrible, tragic price.

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¹² We must read Hardy as embracing the network of human and nonhuman, argues Johnson. In doing so, "he seems less the railer against fate and more the quiet student of these tenuous filaments that lead not only to other people but to the earth and nonhuman life itself. [...] The touch is all" (8-9).

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5.

To Dust Thou Shalt Return:

Prosthesis and Paradise

in *His Dark Materials*

When Random House, Philip Pullman's American publishers, re-titled the first book in the *His Dark Materials* series, the author balked. "The golden compasses," he insisted, is a phrase he culled from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to denote the constituent materials of his fictive universe—not a discrete object, but rather the stuff out of which all objects are made. He intended to use the phrase for the series' title and to call Book One *Northern Lights*, but Random House prevailed, and the first volume of the series appeared in the United States as *The Golden Compass*. "I was stuck with it," Pullman bemoaned; "'Northern Lights' is what it's about" (Parsons and Nicholson 127). This chapter will, like Pullman's publishers and the compass itself, resist Pullman's intentions; it will argue that Book One is very much about a golden compass, just as Book Two is about a subtle knife and Book Three is about an amber spyglass. Pullman's titles do not simply refer to a series of interesting, easily marketable objects, but rather name the true protagonists of his trilogy, the characters that propel the narrative and affect the greatest degrees of change. Indeed, all of the human characters in *His Dark Materials* directly, if unwittingly, serve the ends of the series' extraordinary nonhumans. In this way, the titular objects and the narratives in

which they participate exceed the roles that Pullman prescribed for them, increasing their own visibility and expanding the boundaries of their fictional existence.

In the grand tradition of speculative fiction¹, *His Dark Materials*, with its multiple universes, fantastic bestiary, and strange technologies, resists succinct summary. *The Golden Compass*, the first book of the trilogy, follows an 11-year-old orphan named Lyra Belacqua on a journey through her vaguely medieval world, in which women enjoy almost no positions of power; a brutal and oppressive Church inhibits the spread of knowledge; and humans are accompanied by daemons, or animal embodiments of their own spiritual natures. Lyra leaves her foster home at Jordan College, Oxford, and travels to the North to rescue her friend Roger, who was captured by the Church for use in a series of gruesome experiments. Before the book's conclusion, Lyra finds the parents she had believed dead and rescues Roger, only to lose him to her overzealous father, who kills the boy in order to build a bridge to a parallel universe. Lyra's guilt over her (albeit unwitting) part in Roger's death motivates her actions throughout the rest of the series.

In the second book of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife*, Lyra meets Will Parry, a slightly older boy with an absent father and a mother who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, and who comes from a very recognizable late-twentieth-century Oxford. In trying to protect his mother, Will accidentally kills a man before walking through a "window" in the air, which leads him into the same universe to which Lyra and her father have travelled. Teaming up, Lyra and Will meet Mary Malone, a physicist in Will's world who studies conscious electromagnetic particles, and Lyra helps her reprogram her computer so that

¹ The term "speculative fiction" encompasses a wide variety of genres, including science fiction, horror, and fantasy, and generally refers to "fiction in which a fantastic element or ahistorical setting [...] is central to the plot or to its characters' understanding of the universe they inhabit" (Howe).

Mary can speak to them. In this book, Will and Lyra also embark on a search for Will's father John, whom they find during a fight in the mountains. Just as Lyra had lost her friend Roger moments after rescuing him, Will watches his father die at the instant they recognize one another.

In the third volume of the series, *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will journey to the Land of the Dead to apologize to Roger and John Parry; once there, they lead the dead souls through a canyon and cut a new window into the land of the living. Together, they change the afterlife, so that rather than spending eternity locked in the underworld, dead souls may choose to return to the world above and dissipate into Dust. Once they return, Lyra, Will, and the dead souls join forces against the Church in the earthly war that has begun in their absence; at one point, they take pity on an aged man locked in a cage and free him, having no idea that he is the Authority (Pullman's God-figure). Afterward, Lyra and Will find Mary Malone living among strange creatures called the *mulefa*, who exist in perfect harmony with their natural surroundings. From them Mary has learned the truth about Dust and the Church in Lyra's world, and when Lyra and Will find her, she passes on her knowledge and leads them into a re-enactment of the Fall. Ultimately, Lyra and Will return to their respective worlds, knowing that they cannot survive for long in a non-native universe, and the series ends with Lyra musing on what the world will become in the wake of the Authority's demise.

As their titles indicate, each book in the series revolves around an extraordinary object: a compass, a knife, and a spyglass, which are borne by each book's primary focalizer—Lyra, Will, and Mary, respectively. These objects, like the others in this study, possess a degree of agency and intention that sets them apart from other literary objects.

Far from being passive tools, these things script, direct, and star in their own narratives, in which the human actors play only ancillary or at best complementary roles. Pullman readily admits to his objects' motives, though he seems underconscious of how powerful those motives truly are.

The Golden Compass features a magical object of Pullman's invention called an alethiometer. Random House had solid textual, if not authorial, grounding for using Milton's phrase to describe it in the book's title: "It might have been a compass or something of the sort" (*Compass* 65), we read, and then, "It was very like a clock, or a compass" (*Compass* 70) with a free-swinging long hand, "like a compass needle" (*Compass* 70). Later, we learn that its human inventor indeed intended it to function as a compass, which "would respond to the idea of Mars or Venus" instead of North (*Compass* 152). Thus, despite Pullman's protest, "golden compass" suits the device far more aptly than *alethiometer*, which means "truth measure." As critic Santiago Colás notes, the alethiometer entirely fails to either measure or evaluate truth, instead providing true answers to its user's questions (39). Like a compass, it helps Lyra navigate her geographical landscape, telling her which way to go, as well as her emotional landscape, suggesting which choices are right or wrong. Stranded at Jordan College, Lyra has no way to satisfy her wanderlust until she receives the alethiometer. From that moment on, she does not stop travelling until the series' final pages, when she returns to Oxford and elects, surprisingly, to pursue the solitary, immobile life of a Scholar. Significantly, she makes this choice after losing her instinctive ability to read the alethiometer. Thus, the instrument's appearance inaugurates travel; its possession facilitates it; and its loss terminates it. If Pullman binds the

alethiometer's entire existence to movement and its function to navigation, it is undoubtedly more of a compass than a measure.

Lyra's truth-measure thus does not measure very well at all; nor does it reveal universal or inherent truths. Instead, it relies on its human user to interpret its symbols, during both the questioning and answering processes. Colás cautions against mistaking the compass's offerings as objective knowledge, since readers (and Lyra herself) can only access Lyra's reading of it. Each symbol contains a wealth of possible meanings, and those meanings have been gleaned by other, equally subjective and fallible human users. Lyra's readings may be more accurate than theirs since they spring from her intrinsic understanding—or they may be less so, for the same reason. Colás suggests that in the novel “truth starts to look much more like a conversation, like something put together in the process of seeking it” (40). Conversations require two or more parties, which aligns with Heidegger's understanding of *alethia*, not as “truth,” which can be independent, but rather as “disclosure,” which requires both a subject and an indirect object. Truth, for Heidegger—and for Colás and Plato and, apparently, Pullman—is not a fixed thing that can be observed (and therefore measured), but rather “an effect created through a dynamic contact between [reality and the mind]” (Colás 41). In other words, “truth” identifies a movement, an event, an inter-action, what Latour calls a *proposition*, between a real, nonhuman object and a human's perception of that object. Truth is both propo- and prepositional, a connection, like that which links humans to their daemons.

What Colás (and Heidegger and Plato, but not Pullman) neglects to mention about the event of “truth” is the mediator, or the object that introduces other actants into the network: here, the alethiometer itself. Deleuze and Guattari might call the alethiometer an

“operator,” a specific actor in a network that, in Jane Bennett’s succinct definition, “is so contingently well placed in an assemblage that its power to alter the direction or function of the whole is unusually great” (42). In its material reality, the alethiometer possesses both the deep agency of metal (in its gold housing) and the slow agency of stone (in its crystal face) theorized by Bennett and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, respectively, but it also gains a more traditionally recognizable form of agency (based on movement and communication) from a substance called Dust. In Lyra’s world, “Dust” collectively names a type of elementary particle that becomes visible in photographs treated with a certain chemical; it falls from the sky in great swaths, clustering particularly heavily around post-pubescent humans and objects that have been worked by them, such as tools or statues. The Oxford scientist Mary Malone explains that Dust (she calls them Shadows) “are particles of consciousness” and that they “flock to your thinking like birds” (*Knife* 78).

Pullman uses Dust to further emphasize the importance of material existence: angels, in *His Dark Materials*, are not beings of pure spirit, as Augustine would have them, but rather structures composed of Dust, or pure matter. “Matter and spirit are one,” Mary learns in *The Subtle Knife* (221). The flat, dull grey metal that comprises the alethiometer’s free-swinging needle attracts Dust like a magnet, which allows the instrument to interact with humans. In *His Dark Materials*, the rebel angels use the Dust powering the alethiometer as a conduit through which they can enlist Lyra, Will, and Mary in their campaign to destroy the tyrannical angel known as The Authority. Through the angels, the “truth”-network in Pullman’s series gains an additional node, and another level of complexity, for although the alethiometer always answers Lyra accurately and honestly, it does so within the confines of the angels’ program. It tells her how to travel North, for

example, because the angels want her to go North; it reveals the location of the armor of the exiled bear-king Iorek Byrnison because Lyra will need his loyalty and strength to defeat the Church. At times, the compass scolds Lyra for focusing on the wrong question or not trusting its answers; at others, it offers her information that she did not request. “Lyra was sure the alethiometer had more to say: she was beginning to sense now that it had moods, like a person, and to know when it wanted to tell her more” (*Knife* 71). Importantly, though the angels can communicate with and direct Lyra through the alethiometer, they cannot initiate a conversation nor force her to follow their bidding. The compass needs the girl.

“Truth” in *His Dark Materials* functions as a proposition between multiple actants including (but not limited to) an external “property of reality” (Colás 41) such as geographical coordinates, the alethiometer, Dust, angels, the painted symbols and four hands on the compass’s face, and Lyra, who poses a question, chooses the appropriate symbols, and then translates the given response. In this network of agency, the alethiometer emerges as the most powerful object, the operator that alters the direction of the whole; however, a strictly object-oriented analysis might overlook its most important property—it requires human interaction. Alone, the alethiometer does nothing, moves nothing, powers nothing but itself; in Lyra’s hands, it moves a young girl and everyone with whom she comes into contact, unites parallel worlds, and remakes the entire metaphysical structure of the universe.

Similarly, Lyra relies on the alethiometer; as her name implies, Lyra is a consummate storyteller, in both the positive sense of an author, who invents to entertain and teach (Western tradition associates the lyre with storytellers like Apollo and Orpheus) and in the negative sense of a liar, who invents to deceive. Although children’s literature

traditionally codes truth-telling as positive, in *His Dark Materials*, Lyra's "silver tongue" proves more valuable, thus stripping "liar" of its ethical connotation. Still, the series ultimately implies that Lyra's psychological development and personal growth comes at the expense of her innate gift; although lying often saves her life, the truths dispensed by the alethiometer foster a capacity for movement and change that assures Lyra can move forward and achieve her goals. In this way, by supplying an absent trait, the compass becomes a kind of fantasy prosthesis—distinguished from a real, physical prosthesis, which, as David Wills demonstrates, never becomes entirely natural or accepted. Lyra feels no discomfort or shame when using the alethiometer, experiences no awkward or painful learning curve, displays no phantom limb syndrome in which she yearns for a truth-telling of her own. Rather, she reads the compass with hardly any effort, sometimes not even realizing when she communicates with it: "It was so much a part of her now that the most complicated questions sorted themselves out into their constituent symbols as naturally as her muscles moved in her limbs" (*Compass* 287).

Yet, readers eventually see what Lyra (and perhaps Pullman) cannot: neither the angel-driven compass nor the girl can accomplish their goals without the intense, osmotic relationship they share; it might be said most accurately, therefore, that Book One is not about a golden compass at all, nor about a girl named Lyra, but rather a Latourian compass+girl hybrid. We can trace the development of this technology through Lyra's growing understanding of how the tool works, and how it works within her. She recognizes its independent agency early in the book, though she finds it largely unremarkable, as when she describes the longer needle swinging "on its never-ceasing errant way" (*Compass* 70). Though it resembles a compass, Lyra sees that it has volition: "it swung where it wanted to"

(*Compass* 70). A compass needle is drawn by natural property towards a fixed point; the alethiometer's needle, on the other hand, chooses its location(s); it "wants" to go somewhere. Initially, she fears the alethiometer's awareness—reading it, she admits, does not make her "pleased or proud [because] whatever power was making that needle swing and stop, it knew things like an intelligent being" (*Compass* 130).

Soon, however, Lyra connects this "power" to the electromagnetic particles known as Dust and begins to conceive of the power as a collective, substituting "they" for "it": "And they know such a lot," she exclaims. "As if they knew everything almost! [It is] a different kind of knowing [from Mrs. Coulter's cleverness]...It's like understanding" (*Compass* 133). As Lyra becomes more adept at using the alethiometer, she notices that it has feelings; upon turning to it for reassurance about a friend in trouble, she finds that it "rebuke[s] her for asking the same question twice" (*Compass* 303). It also comes to know Lyra, as when it identifies her new companion Will as a murderer. Most adolescents, it seems safe to say, would find such an assessment less than comforting, but Lyra deems him brave for this and therefore "a worthy companion" (*Knife* 24). The alethiometer knows Lyra so well that it even begins answering questions she has not asked (*Knife* 69-71). At this stage, it also begins telling her what to do in earnest, so clearly that she is "genuinely startled" (*Knife* 71) by its presumption. Receiving such an order from an object leaves Lyra feeling "awkward and defiant" (*Knife* 71), a sensation that Freud might call uncanny. Eventually, Lyra and the alethiometer become inseparable, complementary beings, or, in Donna Haraway's terms, a cyborg (or, at the very least, a companion species). "The alethiometer's like a person, almost," she explains to Will. "I sort of know when it's going to be cross or when there's

things it doesn't want me to know. I kind of feel it" (*Knife* 92). The compass is like a person, almost—and Lyra is like an alethiometer, almost.

Pullman's conditional adverbs do more than mark Lyra as a half-articulate, noncommittal street urchin; they also admit to her limits—and those of the alethiometer. Lyra tells Will that she understands the compass as well as it understands her: "If I done nothing but spy on people, it'd stop working. I know that as well as I know my own Oxford" (*Knife* 92). Her words make it clear that the alethiometer has ethics as well as moods; it knows wrong from right and it teaches her by example. But the compass does not enjoy omnipotence; it is powered by sentient beings, and all sentience in Pullman's fictive universe is limited—even (or especially) what passes for divine sentience. Lyra reveals to John Faa, the leader of the Gyptians, that the alethiometer never lies to her: "It never does, Lord Faa, and I don't think it *could*" (*Compass* 182; emphasis added). It gives very specific information, but cannot provide people's given names ("of course," the narrator scoffs) (*Compass* 73).

Further, the alethiometer sometimes fails to read emotional and social nuance, a quality available only to humans in the trilogy. When Lyra meets Mary Malone, for example, the scientist asks a great many questions, and only Lyra has enough information to respond appropriately: "It was all very well, the alethiometer telling her to be truthful, but she knew what would happen if she told the whole truth. She had to tread carefully and not tell direct lies" (*Knife* 77). Although the alethiometer frequently informs or opines unbidden, its truths occasionally fall short: Lyra complains to Mary, "The alethiometer won't exactly tell me what I need to know" (*Knife* 85). Interestingly, Lyra assumes that she can find the missing information through the Cave (Mary's computer) and the *I Ching*, which hangs on

Mary's office door. In Pullman's world, both the Cave and the *I Ching* run on Dust, suggesting that the sentient particles speak through multiple conduits (metal, plastic, bone; pictures, words, patterns). The angels know everything, but the alethiometer cannot share the totality of their knowledge: a complete transmission requires all three modes (compass, computer, oracle). It takes a network.

Finally, the alethiometer has one crucial limitation: it cannot force Lyra to obey its instruction. Most of the time, she does so, especially after an early misinterpretation results in near tragedy ("We oughter listened!" she laments) (*Compass* 138). In *The Subtle Knife*, however, she resents its command to abandon her search for the origins of Dust and focus on finding Will's father; failing to trust that the two goals might be related, or that another's needs might be more important than her own, she instead goes her own way—and promptly loses the alethiometer. When it looks as though she might never get it back, she confesses to Will, ruefully: "But I wouldn't listen. I just done what *I* wanted to do, and I shouldn't" (*Knife* 139).

That Lyra can still exercise free will (however misguided it may be) after consulting the alethiometer illustrates its most important quality: it requires voluntary human interaction. For all its intrinsic material agency and mysterious intention, the golden compass is always already cyborg technology. Every part of this extraordinary machine requires human workmanship: humans must mine and refine the minerals for the gold and crystal housing; they must acquire and mix the plant and mineral matter to make pigments for the paint; and they must hunt the elephant and sable that provide ivory and hair. The alethiometer is a thing made by humans for human use, and it must be manipulated by humans into revealing its secrets—Lyra has to ask a question to get an answer, even if the

device continues “talking” to her after it answers the initial query. In fact, once Mary wires her Cave to communicate with the Dust-Angels in words rather than patterns, it, too, requires the interrogative mode. On impulse, she tries to explain herself to the computer, but the angels grow impatient and cut her off: “ASK A QUESTION,” they demand (*Knife* 219). She complies, but soon begins expounding again, to which they respond, “CORRECT. BUT YOU NEED TO ASK MORE QUESTIONS” (*Knife* 219). Interrogation, like Heidegger’s *alethia*, is fundamentally an interactive mode of communication, a two-way street, and the sentient particles that Pullman calls Dust need it. They are, in fact, compelled by human interaction; it sustains and nourishes them.

The complex web of interdependence appears early in the series, as Lyra acknowledges the alethiometer’s need for humans. Before she ever asks it a question, John Faa inquires of Lyra how it knows which level of symbolic meaning she intends when she points a hand to an emblem. “Ah, by itself it don’t,” she replies. “It only works if the questioner holds the levels in their mind” (*Compass* 111). Readers discover more slowly the degree of Lyra’s dependence upon the alethiometer. At first, it appears to bring her closer to danger, as Mrs. Coulter clearly wants to steal it from her. Soon, though, Lyra bargains for her inclusion on a Gyptian expedition to the North by virtue of her ability to read the alethiometer. Lord Faa sees how useful such a compass can be on an otherwise blind excursion, so he consents to taking Lyra. Thus the alethiometer facilitates her first real movement, the first step in her own personal quest. Pullman’s description of the fledgling Lyra in her first reading attests to this move toward independence: “It was a sensation of such grace and power that Lyra, sharing it, felt like a young bird learning to fly” (*Compass* 134). Unsurprisingly, this feeling encourages Lyra to continue using the

alethiometer, growing ever more adept at descending the “ladders” of meaning (*Compass* 133).

At the peak of the alethiometer’s integration with Lyra, she hardly needs to think about how to operate it; working this complicated device becomes instinctive. Trapped in the palace of a fierce armored bear, Lyra ignores the danger surrounding her: “It was so much a part of her now that the most complicated questions sorted themselves out into their constituent symbols as naturally as her muscles moved her limbs: she hardly had to think about them” (*Compass* 287). Lyra’s instinctive use of the alethiometer clarifies its prosthetic function. When a human loses (or is born without) a limb, her movement is severely restricted; one option for rehabilitation is a prosthetic limb, a device that offers hope for more mobility but never seems to replace the missing limb. Such is Lyra’s alethiometer, which fosters mobility not because she lacks an arm or a leg, but because she lacks a moral compass. Specifically, she lacks the ability to tell the truth, which provided necessary protection during a childhood filled with absent adults and “coarse and greedy little savages” (*Compass* 36). Lying gave Lyra authority and power, and it shielded her from everything from spankings to boring classrooms to the parents who neglected her until she became useful as a pawn in their deadly game. However, when Lyra strikes out on her own, she realizes that lying as a survival strategy has outlived its usefulness. The alethiometer shows her how powerful telling the truth can be. When Will enters the picture, the compass also introduces Lyra to the concept of self-sacrifice, of putting someone else’s needs before her own, and thus to one of the foundations of mature adult love.

Though the alethiometer for a time acts as prosthesis for Lyra, augmenting her capacities and facilitating movement, it does not remain so throughout the trilogy. Lyra

eventually internalizes its lessons and its abilities: she learns to respect her natural gift for lying and when to use it well, but she also learns when she must tell the truth to proceed. A prosthesis replaces but cannot rehabilitate, and so the alethiometer comes to function more like cyborg tech to Lyra, an external device implanted and assimilated. She acquires her own moral compass and makes her own decisions, often based on the needs of others rather than her own selfish desires. Lyra uses the alethiometer less and less in the series until, in *The Amber Spyglass*, she hardly touches it. She makes major decisions without even feeling for its weight in her pocket, as though she has completely forgotten about it. She does consult it for advice about another object possessing occult powers, Will's subtle knife, and the message she receives is murky at best. "I've never known it so confused," she observes (*Spyglass* 182). Soon we realize that the alethiometer has not changed as much as *she* has:

And now [...] Lyra bent over the alethiometer for the twentieth time. [...] How wearily Lyra turned the wheels; on what leaden feet her thoughts moved. The ladders of meaning that led from every one of the alethiometer's thirty-six symbols, down which she used to move so lightly and confidently, felt loose and shaky. And holding the connections between them in her mind...It had once been like running or singing, or telling a story: something natural. Now she had to do it laboriously, and her grip was failing, and she mustn't fail because otherwise everything would fail. (*Spyglass* 384)

After Lyra and Will reach Mary Malone in the land of the *mulefa*, and after they fall in love properly and re-enact the Fall, Lyra becomes completely severed from the alethiometer: "She just didn't know what any of the symbols meant" (*Spyglass* 490). She understands part

of why this is so—she no longer needs it, though she never does realize the extent to which the compass, via the angels, held her hostage to its own needs. “It just came when I needed it, for all the things I had to do,” she tells Will (*Spyglass* 490). Now that she has accomplished her goals, achieved vengeance for the rebel angels, and restored the flow of Dust to the multiverse, the alethiometer ceases to be necessary.

In a strange twist, Lyra chooses at the novel’s end to devote the rest of her life to studying alethiometry. The angel Xaphania explains to her how the work of pursuing this knowledge will lead to a lifelong grace that is “deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely” (*Spyglass* 490). The decision to become a Scholar reveals Pullman at his most intrusive and most moralizing, because it advances his program (work hard, embrace life, don’t believe in a god) at the expense of his characters. Lyra proves herself brave, adventurous, and dynamic, and the austere, solitary, static life of a Scholar jars powerfully with her nature. Further, it robs the alethiometer of its character, as though it is now a “proper” object, content to sit around and wait for Lyra to figure it out again. One wonders, too, what it will even want to do now that the angels have won the war and Dust fills the skies. Has it become a Magic 8 ball, a fortune-teller, an actual compass? Pullman leaves these questions unresolved, since at the end of the trilogy, the narrative entirely discards this magical agentive object. In relegating the compass to the scrap heap as a “thing,” a dark material devoid of creative potential, Pullman undercuts his own argument for a purely material, sensual existence.

Many of the themes advanced by Lyra’s relationship with the golden compass echo throughout the development of Will Parry’s relationship with the subtle knife. Like the compass, the knife has a life and mind of its own but requires human interaction to make it

work. As with the alethiometer, Pullman fails to explore all of the implications of the knife's material reality, once again creating an object that exceeds its boundaries and authorial intention. As before, the narrative ultimately punishes this object for its disobedience by neutralizing its power and rendering both it and its owner immobile, impotent, and unhappy.

Unlike Lyra's alethiometer, the subtle knife proves aptly named. The word "subtle," like the knife, offers a site of competing significations: the *Oxford English Dictionary* catalogues thirteen separate meanings spread over seven centuries, all of which denote Will's weapon in its composition, usage, or intentions. The primary meaning of "subtle," mysterious or elusive, certainly proves apt in describing the circumstances surrounding the knife's invention. First, it hails from a city called Cittagazze, which exists somewhere between the trilogy's innumerable parallel universes and acts as a way station for inter-versal travelers. Second, it was created by a group of philosophers working in the Torre degli Angeli—pursuing the ever-elusive concept of Truth in a structure dedicated to beings of both matter and spirit. On the tower's doorways, Will and Lyra find their first encounter with angels: "humanlike figures with folded wings [...] expressing power and compassion and intellectual force" (*Knife* 131). The knife, too, bears the imagery of its origins in the gold wires pressed into its rosewood handle: one side depicts angels with their wings folded; the other side depicts the same angels, but with wings upraised. In this liminal place, the knife's creators imbued the tool with subtlety—with mystery and elusiveness; as alchemists, they traded in gaps and ligatures, and they sought a weapon with a blade so fine, so *subtle*, that it could cut the tiniest particles of lead, "so small you couldn't see it, even. But [they] cut that, too" (*Knife* 130).

Object-oriented ontologist Graham Harman argues that nonhuman objects contain life and knowledge that humans can never possess, and thus that objects always recede from our critical grasp. Further, writes Levi Bryant, when objects enter into relation, they withhold something of themselves; they do not give everything away. Harman's and Bryant's assessments accurately describe the subtle knife: even the omniscient narrator cannot precisely capture the knife's material reality. The metal, we read, is "dull," with "a swirl of cloudy colors [...] just under the surface," (*Knife* 159-60)—indescribable except by vague words like "dull," "cloudy," and "shadowy": "If there was such a thing as shadow-colored, it was the blade of the subtle knife" (*Knife* 160). It has two edges, so keen that they cannot even be seen with the human eye (*Knife* 160), which the bearer may use to destroy both the material and the immaterial. Later in the series, we discover that "nothing, no one, matter, spirit, angel, air—nothing is invulnerable to the subtle knife" (*Knife* 276). One edge slices through any earthly substance, from the last two fingers on Will's left hand to the crystal walls on an angelic carriage. Its dull grey metal mirrors exactly the long, free-swinging needle of Lyra's alethiometer, which attracts and channels Dust; as we saw with the compass, the angels at war with the Authority employ this metal as a conduit through which to direct their program. The *OED* mentions that "subtle" once meant "consisting of fine particles," which reinforces the notion that Dust-angels suffuse this blade of the knife. Additionally, the *OED* gives the compound "subtle matter," which describes a weightless substance, imperceptible except by its effects, like "the fluid believed to be responsible for electromagnetic phenomena." As Mary Malone concludes, the Dust particles carry an electromagnetic charge, which enables her to communicate with them via computer; Lyra

earlier observes the same property when she notices minute particles floating in light beams focused on the black and white surfaces of a Crooke's radiometer.

The other edge of the knife blade, when properly directed, cuts through the membranes that separate parallel universes to create windows between them. In its silvery, metallic aspect, it recalls the most insidious weapon in *The Golden Compass*: the intercision blade. Lyra's mother Mrs. Coulter ran an experimental testing center at which she used just such a silver-colored metal on a guillotine-like apparatus to separate children from their daemons. The metal, described by the lab workers as a "manganese and titanium alloy" (*Compass* 239), severs the link between human and daemon. Because this bond is both immaterial (humans can neither see nor touch it) and material (humans feel physical pain when it stretches and can die when it breaks), it aligns with another meaning of "subtle": of distinctions so delicate they cannot be perceived. Thus we can infer both that the boundary between human and daemon is of the same stuff as the membrane between parallel worlds, and that, as the series demonstrates, compromising either of them always has unforeseen and disastrous consequences.

"Subtle" can mean mysterious in the sense of imperceptible, but it can also denote deceit or secrecy, such as the knife's possession of occult knowledge to which humans can gain no access. Giacomo Paradisi, the aged philosopher who trains Will in the use of the subtle knife, explains that the weapon "knows when to leave one hand and settle in another" (*Knife* 159). It transfers ownership only through a fierce battle that leaves the new bearer without the last two fingers on his left hand. The fight in which Will loses his fingers and gains the knife reveals the truth of not only the knife's name ("subtle"), but also his own: Will Parry. The pun on Will's last name (a parry is a block, an essential move in

sword- and knife-fighting) pales beside the dexterous pun on his first. Again and again, we read of his remarkably strong will: the narrator calls him “implacable” (*Knife* 4) and “fierce” with a “hot and deadly” anger (*Knife* 10); he frowns and sweats in his sleep; and Lyra finds him “savage, and courteous, and unhappy” (*Knife* 24). When the previous bearer of the knife attacks Will, the younger boy knows what to do: “He’d learned that the object of a school fight was not to gain points for style [...but to] hurt him more than he was hurting you. [...] He’d found out that not many people were [willing], when it came to it; but he knew that he was” (*Knife* 154). Much later in the novel, the witch Ruta Skadi encounters Will, and even this ancient, proud creature fears him: “This young wounded figure held more force and danger than she’d ever met in a human before, and she quailed” (*Knife* 285). Will has spent his young life fighting, and he has grown weary and resentful of that fact; when he laments to his father that he no longer wants to bear the knife, the older man answers firmly: “You’re a warrior. That’s what you are. Argue with anything else, but don’t argue with your own nature” (*Knife* 283). The subtle knife chooses Will as its bearer because he alone possesses the will to wield it to the end of its program.

But Will gains something crucial from the knife as well. As the alethiometer functioned as a temporary prosthesis and a mode of transportation for Lyra, so does the subtle knife function for Will. The *OED* offers a thirteenth separate entry on “subtle” that suits Will’s use of the knife uncommonly well (and is especially uncanny given the rarity of the use of “subtle” in this way): capable of “small, delicate, improvised movements.” This definition fits the technique Will employs to open and close windows, but also to way he and Lyra travel throughout the multiverse. Will’s primary problem, when readers first meet him, is stasis: he has accidentally killed a man while defending his schizophrenic mother

from a home invasion, but the man's partner now ardently pursues Will. An adolescent boy with little money and no reliable parents to protect him cannot easily move around in the world nor find safe harbor; Will is trapped. When Will obtains the subtle knife, however, he gains the ability not only to move freely through his own universe, but also through any and every universe; he may lose two fingers and an astonishing amount of blood in his battle for the weapon, but he earns safety for himself and his mother. He also acquires the means by which to find his father, who disappeared on an expedition to the North when Will was a baby, but whom Will has always worshipped *in absentia*. Repeatedly told by his mother that he must "take up his father's mantle," Will's maturation depends on finding his father and figuring out what that enigmatic statement means. The knife, therefore, moves Will in ways both subtle and overt, both emotional and physical.

Although the knife's occult knowledge appears to hurt no one apart from its successive bearers, and in fact assists Will in important ways, its secret, more insidious effects drive most of the action in Books Two and Three of *His Dark Materials*. Before it exceeds the intentions of Will or Pullman, the knife exceeds those of its fictional creators. Originally, they did not deliberately forge a weapon, but their hubris and anthropocentrism in presuming to fully know the truth of an object made it possible. When they attempted to reveal the secrets of lead for their own profit, the instrument created to destroy the base metal withheld crucial knowledge: namely, that each time the knife opens a window, the action releases ghastly, invisible creatures called Specters, which feed on the souls of adults. Will's father describes the subtle knife as "a tool for their own undoing" (*Knife* 190), since the Specters feed on both human souls and the Dust that sustains life and human

consciousness.² Giacomo Paradisi tells Will that the Specters came specifically because the philosophers sought knowledge that humans should not have. “This was a mercantile city,” he explains of Ci’gazze, “We thought a bond was something negotiable, something that could be bought and sold and exchanged and converted. [...] But about these bonds, we were wrong. We undid them, and we let the Specters in” (*Knife* 165). Thus, the knife is subtle because it proves difficult to understand and trades in fine distinctions, but also because it intends to deceive. According to the *OED*, the deceptive quality described as “subtle” inheres specifically in a person or tool; in *His Dark Materials*, it belongs to a tool acting like a person.

Releasing Specters is not the only negative consequence of using the subtle knife, however. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary Malone traces the environmental crisis plaguing the entire multiverse back to the windows created by the knife. She sees that Dust has begun flowing out of the worlds, falling through the windows into the imperceptible spaces between them. As she learns, and as Lyra has long guessed, Dust and human consciousness exist in a kind of feedback loop, attracting and sustaining one another; without Dust, humans as we know them would cease to exist, and the demise of our awareness, intelligence, and creative capacities would obliterate Dust. Ultimately, Will Parry dedicates himself (with the help of the angel Xaphania) to closing all of the existing windows in order to save the Dust, and he breaks the subtle knife to prevent anyone from making new openings. As with the creation and release of Specters, the knife produces effects unrealized and unforeseen by humans; but unlike the earlier instance, the drainage of Dust

² Santiago Colas agrees that knife provides for Will not only to move freely but also to freely “impose one’s will unconstrained by the will [...] of others.” However, he notes, the freedom to overcome material limitations in Pullman’s conspicuously material multiverse “carries the ultimate ethical cost”: the Specters which devour our souls (59).

through windows cannot be blamed on the hubris or carelessness of its human users, and instead must be understood only as the mysterious and elusive workings of the knife itself.

The knife's least subtle intention—and perhaps its primary one—remains hidden from Will, even after the boy uses it in exactly the way it wants him to. As one character tells Mrs. Coulter, Lyra's birth mother and the chief antagonist of the series, "Some people call it *teleutaia makhaira*, the last knife of all. Others call it Aesahaettr" (*Knife* 276), which means "God-destroyer" (*Knife* 273); Will bears "the one weapon in all the universe that could defeat the tyrant" (*Knife* 282). In *His Dark Materials* (and this is perhaps Pullman's least subtle intention as well), the being worshipped as "God" or "the Authority" is actually no more than an angel—the first angel, who seized an opportunity for unlimited power and announced to the next angel that he had created him. The Authority has become old, feeble, and remains only the nominal head of heaven; in his stead, another angel named the Metatron rules the skies and directs the Church. The rebellious angels have let Lord Asriel in on this secret, inspiring him to gather and lead an army against the Authority and those who support him; Asriel plans to replace divine tyranny with an earth-bound "Republic of Heaven," formed by the equal efforts of all living creatures. The series' emphasis on the Authority's "tyranny" falters when Will and Lyra actually encounter the aptly-named "Ancient of Days." When they emerge from the world of the dead in Book Three, they find themselves on a battlefield, witnessing the final war between heaven and earth, and there they discover an old, old man trapped inside a cage and whimpering; they describe him as "demented and powerless" (*Spyglass* 410). Will uses the knife to slice through the golden bars and the children watch as the man dissipates, smiling, into shimmering Dust; they never do discover that they have killed the Authority. Thus, the subtle knife, like the golden

compass, seeks the destruction of the Authority—and though the books never state this explicitly, their motivations stem from the same cause: rebel angels.

Giacomo Paradisi tells Will, “You have come here for a purpose, and maybe you don’t know what that purpose is, but the angels do who brought you here” (*Knife* 166). His pronouncement shocks Lyra and Will, but not the careful reader, who remembers the motivating force behind the alethiometer. The subtle knife, like the golden compass, was ostensibly created by humans for their own purposes, but the angels had other plans. Just as the angels interfered in the evolution of human consciousness, they interfered with the golden compass and the subtle knife. Attracted, perhaps, by that dull grey metal, the angels employ the subtle knife as a mechanism for directing Will Parry. Will’s father, John Parry, who accidentally crossed into Lyra’s world many years prior and has since been living as a Tartar shaman named Stanislaus Grumman, explains the knife’s intentions to Lyra’s friend Lee Scoresby: “I know about the subtle knife and what it can do. And I know where it is, and I know how to recognize the one who must use it, and I know what he must do in Lord Asriel’s cause. I hope he’s equal to the task” (*Knife* 190). When Lee agrees to help Grumman find the knife because he hopes it will protect Lyra on her journey, the shaman warns him, “The bearer of that knife has his own task to do, and it may be that his doing it will put her into even greater danger” (*Knife* 192). It strikes perhaps the wrong note to imagine that the task belongs to Will; despite his name, what Will wants to do stands rather at cross-purposes with the knife, and the knife’s goal ultimately trumps all.

No character understands—and fears—the knife’s inherent agency as deeply as the bear-king Iorek Byrnison, who befriends Lyra in *The Golden Compass* and travels south to rescue her from her kidnapper in *The Amber Spyglass*. There, he finds that Will has broken

the knife by thinking about his mother while cutting a window; the guilt pulled him out of the trance required to perform the work. Will asks him to repair the tool, but Iorek resists, claiming that the world would be better off without it. “What you don’t know is what the knife does on its own,” he advises the headstrong boy. “Your intentions may be good. The knife has intentions, too” (*Spyglass* 181). When Will questions the bear’s logic, Iorek responds with a cogent explanation of his object-oriented philosophy:

The intentions of a tool are what it does. A hammer intends to strike, a vise intends to hold fast, a level intends to lift. They are what it is made for. But sometimes a tool may have other uses that you don’t know. Sometimes in doing what you intend, you also do what the knife intends, without knowing.
(*Spyglass* 181)

Iorek asks Will if he can see the sharpest edge of the knife, and when Will responds in the negative, Iorek wonders, “Then how can you know everything it does?” (*Spyglass* 181). Iorek Byrnison cuts straight to the heart of objective agency—what we cannot see acts in ways we cannot understand. A thing that recedes from human perception still exists and makes a difference; therefore, we must recognize the knife as an actant in Pullman’s human drama, but we must also acknowledge its involvement in other, unseen dramas. Things withhold when they enter into relation.

In the forging of a new knife, Iorek instructs Will to “hold it in his mind” (*Spyglass* 189) because such an instrument requires not only physical work but mental and emotional work as well. He does not imply that only a subtle knife requires this hybrid process, but rather any forging of metal, which speaks to Jane Bennett’s discussion of metallurgy in *Vibrant Matter*. Bennett asserts that metal, which most humans believe to be

inert, unchanging, cold, and almost as antithetical to life as stone, actually teems with movement and potential—a “metallic vitality” (59). The atoms in metal have spaces between them, comprising a lattice-work whose spaces make their boundaries “porous and quivering;” these spaces, writes Bennett, determine the properties of metal, which the metallurgist exploits with heat to create its final form. Unlike a scientist, who endeavors to “know what a metal *is*,” Iorek Byrnison is a craftsperson who wants rather to “see what a metal can *do*” (Bennett 60; emphasis original). Iorek understands that he cannot truly know the knife’s intentions, as he tries to explain to Will, because life and potential lurk in the very stuff of the metal: the material reality of metal is by its very nature unknown—manipulable but not controllable. Pullman, too, describes the material as a mesh, full of gaps; he writes that Will, involving his mind in the process of the forging, senses “the loosening of every atom in the lattice of the metal” (*Spyglass* 189). The final joining of broken pieces proves the most difficult, and Will knows that “if he couldn’t hold it in his full consciousness together with all the others, then the knife would simply fall apart as if Iorek had never begun” (*Spyglass* 190). Will finds the strength for such work only in collaboration with Lyra, who holds the stones and stokes the fire, and whose daemon fans the flames with moth wings. Pullman writes, “So he and Iorek and Lyra together forged the knife” (*Spyglass* 190). Repairing the subtle knife is the ultimate network of making in the trilogy, the most explicit example of Latourian theory at work, and another strand of meaning in the lattice-work of “subtle.”

The knife’s intrinsic hybridity and subtlety emerges not just in its composition and repair, but also in its conditions of use. The knife’s subtlest function, cutting open windows into other worlds, depends on precisely the kind of delicate, improvised moves described

by the *OED*. When Giacomo Paradisi guides Will through his first opening, he tells him to “feel” the air with the knife, gently, probing for a “gap so small you could never see it with your eyes [...] the smallest little gap in the world” (*Knife* 161). The knife, like Lyra’s compass, requires a human user in order to function, and the movements and mental processes by which Will must use the knife to locate and open a window between worlds is itself properly subtle. Finding the “snag” in the air, Will compares the process to using a scalpel to find the space between tiny stitches in a piece of fabric, and he soon realizes that he can only do so by merging his consciousness with the tip of the knife—just as he later does while Iorek mends the broken blade. Lyra, accustomed to reading the alethiometer, knows the process instinctively, and she knows from her conversations with Mary Malone that the poet John Keats referred to it as “negative capability,” but this brand of letting-go and letting-be does not come naturally to Will. In fact, he finds that he cannot relax into it at all and so must find another path, one more suited to his warrior nature; he becomes “no less intense, [but] focused differently” (*Knife* 162); the narrator admits to the boy+knife hybrid when, after Will has found his first “gap” or “snag” in the air (which, we later discover, exist “anywhere, but not everywhere” [*Knife* 172]), readers learn that “Will’s soul flow[ed] back along the blade to his hand, and up his arm to his heart” (*Knife* 162). Exactly as Lyra must allow herself to merge with the compass, Will must learn to work in tandem with the knife, to recognize and complement its agency instead of attempting to overcode it with his imagined human superiority.

Opening a window requires this Keats-ian trance, but so does closing one. To do that, Will must treat his fingers as though they are the knife; Paradisi instructs him: “Put your soul into your fingertips” (*Knife* 164). Thus, in some capacity, Will absorbs the knife's

mystical properties, and readers learn that the window-making process requires human and tool in equal measure—the human has to become the tool, both while holding it and without it in hand, and the tool must act in ways that we tend to code as human.

Occasionally, the physical body betrays that relationship, as Lyra explains to Will when the pain in his bloody hand distracts him from closing a newly-opened window: “*You en’t wrong at all. You’re doing it right, but your hand won’t let you concentrate on it*” (*Knife* 164). Interestingly, to solve this problem, Will must not push his humanity aside but rather embrace it. Lyra counsels him, “Just sort of relax your mind and say yes, it does hurt, I know. Don’t try and shut it out” (*Knife* 164). When he does this, when he acknowledges the full reach of his material reality, Will becomes the master of the subtle knife—although, as we have seen, his actions and intentions primarily serve the ends of the angels and the knife itself.

As Lyra first used, then incorporated, then abandoned the golden compass, so Will also uses, incorporates, and abandons the subtle knife. He understands by the series’ end that because the object cannot be contained or controlled, it must be destroyed. It releases Specters, creates holes through which the Dust can flow out of the multiverse and, perhaps most importantly, it no longer has a purpose. The “God-destroyer” has done its job, and Will, like Lyra, ends the trilogy by choosing stasis and security, remaining in his own world with Mary Malone and his mother. With no need to travel between worlds, Will rejects the prosthetic device that had for so long kept him safely in motion and instead accepts his legal and moral responsibilities. There remains no subtlety at the end of *His Dark Materials*, no uncertainty about what Pullman wants his characters and his readers to do: for all his emphasis on free will and his enthusiastic destruction of a supreme Authority, Pullman’s

ending leaves no alternative. Lyra issues the injunction in no uncertain terms: “We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and patient, and we’ve got to study and think and work hard, all of us, in all our different worlds” (*Spyglass* 518). And again, a host of nonhuman agents speak up in concurrence: “All the different bells of the city chimed [...] agreeing in all their different voices on what the time was, even if some of them got to it a little more slowly than others” (*Spyglass* 518); the metaphor of the bells clearly echoes Lyra’s rather Puritanical insistence on hard work and individual achievement. In the book’s final moments, Pullman picks at the threads until he completely unravels the network he had so painstakingly created.

And yet, he leaves readers with some hope in the form of the *mulefa*-world in which Mary Malone spends the majority of her time in *The Amber Spyglass*. This universe promotes Pullman’s pro-hybrid program and the narrative hints at its utility as a model that Mary, Will, and Lyra can take back to their own worlds. Mary knows well the benefits of the network: her entire life has been about boundaries, combinations, and connections. Though she voluntarily and unapologetically left the Church, she mourns the loss of her spiritual connection to the universe. An avid reader of the I-Ching, Mary knows well the liminal, trance-like state Lyra and Will fall into in order to use the compass and knife, respectively. Her material awakening arrived at a scientific conference, while she sought to balance her spiritual needs with her sensual life; a man shared with her a piece of marzipan, itself a hybrid creation, a human-made treat designed to mimic the natural. That temptation, that almond-paste faux-apple, brought Mary firmly into the realm of the material, the sensual, the physical, the earthly, and she holds this model up for Lyra and Will when they find her in the *mulefa*-world at the trilogy’s end. This critical moment—the

event that changes the entire structure of the multiverse—can only occur in the Edenic world of the *mulefa* and with the curious device that they help Mary fashion.

The narrative drags through Book Three of *His Dark Materials*, but it must do so in order for Philip Pullman to accomplish his program, which rests on his detailed construction of a new world. Mary stumbles through a window into this universe after following a cryptic message from the I-Ching: “Keeping still is the mountain; it is a bypath; it means little stones, doors, openings” (*Spyglass* 81). Equating stone, a material most often understood as boundary or barrier, with doors speaks to the trilogy’s broader presentation of objects as opportunities. In climbing the mountain, Mary indeed finds a window, albeit one not made of stone, and through this aperture she enters a new world—Pullman’s utopia, a symbiotic, complex society presided over by sentient creatures called *mulefa*.

In the *mulefa*-world, Mary actually observes two groups of creatures, both of whom have diamond-shaped spinal columns with two legs in the middle of their torsos and one leg each at the front and back. The first group stands grazing with an air of bovine docility, but the second group, the *mulefa*, move with such intention and intelligence (*Spyglass* 88) that Mary quickly aligns them more with herself than with the animals she knows from her own world. She speaks to them and finds that they vocalize and can echo some of her words, but that they inflect much of their communication through subtle movements of their sensitive and flexible trunks. Mary makes an important linguistic decision: “So they had language, and they had fire, and they had society. And about then she found an adjustment being made in her mind, as the word *creatures* became the word *people*” (*Spyglass* 123). “It’s not *them*,” she thinks; “they’re *us*” (*Spyglass* 123). The *mulefa* live in villages and pair in lifelong monogamous couples; as mammals, they care for and nurture

their young; and they work with extraordinary levels of cooperation. Watching them weave a fishing net together, Mary first pities their lack of opposable thumbs—until she realizes how much nicer they find it to work together, lacing the fibers together with their entwined trunks, and how much the “advantage” of her human hands “cut her off from others” (*Spyglass* 128).

The *mulefa* live symbiotically, not only with each other, but with the natural world as well. Mary carefully notes the interdependence of the *mulefa* and the enormous, sequoia-like trees that grow in their world; the trees drop three-foot-wide, round seedpods that prove nearly impossible to crack, while the *mulefa* have hooked claws on the insides of their middle hooves which fit perfectly into the round hole in the seedpods’ center. The *mulefa* use the seedpods as wheels to travel through their world, which can only happen, Mary observes, in “a world that provided them with natural highways,” such as the long, dark “ribbon-like” strips that traverse the plains and appear completely “resistant to weathering or cracking” (*Spyglass* 127). The *mulefa* rely on the wheels and roads to travel the great distances between their villages, the river, the tree groves, and their agricultural spaces; the trees rely on the *mulefa* to wear the seedpods down with riding until they crack; the seeds rely on the *mulefa*’s careful tending in order to germinate. “Little by little,” the narrator explains, “Mary came to see the way everything was linked together, and all of it, seemingly, managed by the *mulefa*” (*Spyglass* 128).

Although Mary places the *mulefa* at the top of the hierarchy, and indeed they do introduce all of the actors into this particular network, the mediator—or actor that does the most (or most important) work—is actually Dust, which falls into the upward-facing blossoms of the seedpod trees and, as in the rest of Pullman’s multiverse, provides the

mulefa with self-awareness. They acquire the Dust through absorption: Dust (the *mulefa* call it “*sraf*”) saturates the oil from the seedpods, and the pinnacle of *mulefa* psychosexual development arrives when a *zalif*’s claws become long enough to hook into a seedpod and he or she can take to the roads. “Mary saw,” we read, “how much a growing youngster must long for the day when the wheels would fit” (*Spyglass* 126), not only for the same freedom human teenagers covet, but also for the “wakefulness” (*Spyglass* 224) that comes with the oil and Dust: “the oil was the center of their thinking and feeling [and] the young ones didn’t have the wisdom of their elders because they couldn’t use the wheels, and thus could absorb no oil through their claws” (*Spyglass* 129).

When Mary inquires further about the Dust and the oil, the *mulefa* share their version of a very familiar story: the creatures had no memory, no awareness, until one day a female *zalif* playing with a seedpod found a snake in its hole, which told her to put her foot in the hole and she would become wise. “And the oil entered her blood and helped her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the *sraf*” (*Spyglass* 225). When she shares the seedpod oil with her mate and the others, they separate from the grazing animals and call themselves *mulefa*, and the difference between children and adults becomes distinct. Thus the *mulefa* develop advanced consciousness exactly as humans do, through the acquisition of Dust, and they create a nearly identical myth to explain the process. The seedpods function for the *mulefa* as sky-iron armor functions for the *panserbjorne* and as daemons function for humans: a physically separate though emotionally entangled part of their tripartite nature. Mary hints at this when she marvels at

their symbiosis³—“It was as if the *mulefa* and the seedpod really were one creature, which by a miracle could disassemble itself and put itself together again” (*Spyglass* 229)—as well as their mutualism—“Sometimes the *mulefa* would groom each other’s claws, out of pure sociability” (*Spyglass* 229).

Pullman locates Mary’s discovery of the *mulefa*-world and its hybridity in her reading of the I-Ching, which introduces readers to her own experience of Dust. She uses the I-Ching after losing access to her computer, The Cave, with which she had communicated with the rebel angels, who had commanded her to “PLAY THE SERPENT” with Will and Lyra. In traveling, Mary consults the I-Ching exactly as Lyra consults the alethiometer, and though the responses take a different form, the text makes it plain that they operate in the same way: Lyra even guesses that “there must be lots of ways of talking to Shadows,” including the “sticks” she saw on Mary’s office door (*Knife* 83). Further, Mary must employ the same liminal trance-state with both The Cave and the I-Ching that Lyra and Will fall into with the compass and the knife, respectively (*Spyglass* 81). Thus, the ancient Chinese sticks also act as conduits for the Dust-angels, working to bring Lyra, Will, and Mary Malone into alignment and re-establishing the prelapsarian trinity of woman, man, and spiritual counselor. Despite the I-Ching’s key role in this, however, Mary’s titular spyglass proves more effective in bringing about the final changes to Pullman’s universe—and this end goal belongs to the author, not to the angels. Once the war ends in their favor, the angels become instead the handmaidens of humanity. Xaphania, an archangel who has

³ In her Marxist analysis of *The Amber Spyglass*, Rebekah Fitzsimmons complicates the notion that the *mulefa* are symbiotic creatures, positing them instead as “Slaves to their own Utopian existence” (226; capitals original) because they cannot live without the Dust provided by the trees. The seedpod trees, in Fitzsimmons’s formulation, act as parasites rather than symbionts—but such a reading ignores the depth of the *mulefa*’s reciprocal need for the trees.

helped Lyra on her journey, explains that she and the other angels will dedicate themselves to closing the remaining windows in the entire multiverse. Pullman differentiates even more clearly between Mary's spyglass and the other titular agent objects by ensuring that Dust does not power the spyglass, nor does the spyglass conduct Dust. Rather, Mary employs her spyglass to discover the secrets of her mysterious "Shadow particles."

Mary fashions the spyglass in order to observe the *mulefa*-world, hoping to find a scientific solution to the environmental crisis that plagues them: the seedpod trees are dying, and without the Dust-filled oil from the seedpod wheels, the *mulefa* will lose their self-awareness. The spyglass then, unlike the compass or the knife, has nothing to do with movement and action and everything to do with observation and education. Perhaps, as Mary Harris Russell has suggested, this object is "significant in its instrumentality" (71); in other words, the very thing-ness of the amber spyglass establishes its importance to the trilogy. It does not speak to Mary as the compass speaks to Lyra and it does not possess covert intentions nor perform unknown acts of violence like the subtle knife; rather, it enables an adult (Russell emphasizes the need for a mature user for this particular tool) to perceive a pattern in the universe and guide the characters to "make the ethical leap from solely individual to social responsibilities" (Russell 71).

The narrative emphasizes Mary's maturity through the patience and hard work required for her to create the instrument: she spends many weeks painting layer upon layer of tree sap onto thin strips of bark before stripping the bark away and polishing the glassine remainder; breaking the sap-plate in half, she then separates them with a tube of bark and glues the pieces together. This occurs only after Mary realizes that she must relax and live with the *mulefa* rather than actively trying to achieve a goal, and, even then, she

does not know precisely what to do with the spyglass. The answer comes only after she starts to experiment, “or, rather play, since she still didn’t have a clear idea what she was doing” (*Spyglass* 227). Through this relaxed, unfocused “play” (a word that adds a sense of joy to the work we know is involved), Mary discovers that rubbing the amber surfaces with seedpod oil allows her to see Dust—and further, to watch it flowing swiftly away from the trees on currents of air. The *mulefa* confirm her observations, claiming that the trees had begun to die about three hundred years prior; Mary immediately connects this time frame to the trilogy’s other agentive objects:

Three hundred years ago, the Royal Society was set up: the first true scientific society in her world. [...] Three hundred years ago in Lyra’s world, someone invented the alethiometer. At the same time in that strange world through which she’d come to get here, the subtle knife was invented.

(*Spyglass* 366)

This pronouncement sounds at first as though Pullman traces the loss of “virtue” (the *mulefa*’s word for what the Dust brings) in the multiverse to the advent of science, while in actuality he wants us to focus on the final clause. The Dust leaves not because humans began to invent things, but rather because they invented a specific thing: the subtle knife. As we have seen, the knife’s occult intentions bring Specters into world and create openings through which the Dust drains. “The subtle knife was responsible for the small-scale, low-level leakage. It was damaging, and the universe was suffering because of it” (*Spyglass* 451). Dust, Mary perceives, requires a feedback system, a complete network, to sustain it, and without the Dust:

it would all vanish. Thought, imagination, feeling, would all wither and blow away, leaving nothing but a brutish automatism; and that brief period when life was conscious of itself would flicker out like a candle in every one of the billions of worlds where it had burned brightly. (*Spyglass* 451)

Mary carries her new understanding with her into conversations with Lyra and Will, recently returned from the underworld, when she again makes an “imaginative leap” (Russell 71) after hearing about the abyss created after the detonation of a hydrogen bomb in the rebel angels’ war with the Church. Lyra and Will had capitalized on the chasm, into which massive quantities of Dust fell but out of which could emerge a never-ending stream of dead souls, who dissipate into new particles of Dust. Thus Pullman fuses the cycle of life to the cycle of Dust, and he has Mary experience the power of this overlap in an out-of-body experience in which a Dust cloud carries her body through the air; in their embrace, Mary recognizes the inextricable ties between sentience and these shadow particles: “part of her was subject to this tide that was moving through the cosmos. And so were the *mulefa*, and so were human beings in every world, and every kind of conscious creature, wherever they were” (*Spyglass* 368). Now understanding how each party’s fate is bound together with mutual love and sustenance, Mary observes through her glass the entire natural world desperately trying to stem the outward flow of Dust: “wind, moon, clouds, leaves, grass, all those lovely things were crying out and hurling themselves into the struggle to keep the shadow particles in this universe, which they so enriched” (*Spyglass* 452). Seeing their energetic resistance to this human-made wrong, Mary feels called, in what Fiona McCullough calls an “ecofeminist epiphany,” to respect her prepositional nature: “ceasing to robotically follow her Father’s indoctrinating script, she listens to the semiotic rhythm of

her Mother's pulsating 'womb'" (158). To do that, she hearkens back to the angels' first command, delivered through The Cave: she must play the serpent.

Each text in this dissertation concludes with an Edenic fantasy: a vision of reestablished harmony between humans, the natural world, and a divine presence, which is in each instance appropriate to its cultural moment; Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* boasts the most explicit and detailed of these fantasies. When Lyra and Will find Mary Malone in the *mulefa*-world after traveling through the underworld and setting The Authority free, the scientist has just encountered one of the emergent souls, who whispered to her, "Tell them stories." She was referring to the harpies in the underworld, who agreed to guide the souls to the opening in exchange for true stories about their lives, but Mary takes it as an instruction akin to the angels' injunction that she "play the serpent." Thus, she sits with Lyra and Will and describes to them her encounter in Portugal and her resulting decision to leave the convent. She lingers particularly over her temptation with marzipan, when she had realized that the sensual pleasures of our physical bodies trumps the sterile spirituality insisted upon by the Church. Mary's enthusiasm in this moment stems from the awakening of consciousness she had experienced the night before, when she drifted apart from her body on the eddies of Dust. Pullman writes, "Had she thought there was no meaning in life, no purpose, when God had gone? Yes, she had thought that" (*Spyglass* 452). As it turns out, however, restoring the Dust-flow to the multiverse by engineering a new Fall, ensuring that self-awareness and creativity and mutualism would continue forever, proves a far greater purpose than worshipping an aloof (and fraudulent) deity. "Well, there is now,' she said aloud, and again, louder: 'There is now!'" (*Spyglass* 452).

After filling their heads with stories of her past, Mary packs the exhausted travelers a picnic and sends them off to get some rest and be alone with one another. They head straight for a grove of the seedpod trees, the same copse that had struck Mary upon her entry into the *mulefa*-world and had made her feel “as if she were in a cathedral: there was the same stillness, the same sense of upwardness in the structures, the same awe within herself” (*Spyglass* 86). In this secular paradise, the trees form a sacred space, dedicated to the beauty of the natural, material world, inspiring spiritual wonder and a sense of connection to all earthly things, while remaining unencumbered by the narrow and strict control of organized religion. Among these trees, Lyra finds herself, almost unwittingly, echoing Mary Malone’s material awakening: she bites a small, juicy red fruit, then brings it to Will’s lips with trembling fingers; they kiss, for the first time—and the entire world changes. As Will’s body lights up with love and desire, the narrator pulls back to give the pair some privacy. Readers can only guess what occurs in this tree-stand, but it seems important to remember that these protagonists are yet only twelve years old—and perhaps their kiss, and the feelings of sensual, material awe that it engenders, is enough to remake the world. Will thrills to Lyra’s body (and his own) in ways that take him by surprise:

The word *love* set [Will’s] nerves ablaze. All his body thrilled with it, and he answered her in the same words, kissing her hot face over and over again, drinking in with adoration the scent of her body and her warm, honey-fragrant hair and her sweet, moist mouth that tasted of the little red fruit.
(*Spyglass* 455)

While the adolescents re-enact the Fall of Man in this sylvan cathedral, the universe falls still, and Pullman’s anthropomorphizing of this moment is instructive: “Around them there

was nothing but silence, as if all the world were holding its breath” (*Spyglass* 455). Unaware of what transpired in the trees—but surely hopeful that her stories had effectively tempted them into just such a union—Mary and the *mulefa* see immediately that the Dust has ceased flowing out of the universe and has resumed falling directly down on the world. It had “found a living home again, and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all” (*Spyglass* 470).

Pullman clearly believes that the supposed Fall of Man was a *felix culpa*—not, as in Christian teaching, in that it brought us closer to God through Christ, but rather in that it actually improved our state by taking us on “a journey from prelapsarian myopia to postlapsarian vision” (McCullough 152), a metaphor consistent with the trilogy’s ultimate focus on a spyglass, an instrument of sight. Here, in *His Dark Materials*, he refigures that catastrophe as an embrace of the material beauty, physical sensation, and worldly pleasures afforded by our humanity, qualities that remain quite literally untouchable for the “higher” beings, like angels and deities.⁴ The great Adversary Satan becomes here an opportunity rather than a conflict; as Anne-Marie Bird writes, “Satan himself is Dust: an essential and dynamic force which initiates the process of awakening [...that] results in a fully formed individual” (121). Satan is Dust, and Dust is beautiful: the *mulefa* describe it as “like the light on water when it makes small ripples, at sunset, and the light comes off in bright flakes” (*Spyglass* 222). In this series, Pullman wholly rejects the Neoplatonic doctrine of simulacra—the idea that our human, earthly world merely echoes a perfect, distant world inaccessible to us in our current, fallen, weaker state. For Pullman, humans are not

⁴ Pullman once described his aim to Sarah Lyall for the *New York Times* in similar terms. He said, “I wanted to emphasize the simple physical truth of things, the absolute primacy of the material life.” As I have demonstrated, however, the physical truth of things is far from simple.

shadows on a cave wall, but rather beings given the glorious gift of material reality, an eviable, not execrable, capacity for sensation. Thus, his masterwork depicts innocence as naiveté and children as “coarse and greedy little savage[s]” (*Compass* 33)—“innocence,” comments Naomi Wood, functions here “as a negative quality—as a *lack*” (543);⁵ maturity ought to be welcomed and celebrated, because it brings the pleasures of work and sexuality and experience and knowledge. Read through Pullman’s lens, Eve’s embrace of the fruit and the tree becomes simply a growing-up; for God to punish humans for coming into their worldly inheritance renders him immature by contrast, and his separation from the human and earthly world feels like the move of a petulant child. Good riddance, says Pullman, and goodbye as well to all of the hard work the churches have done in the name of that child to cast the Fall as sin and loss, to present the story of Adam and Eve’s freedom to experience the entire globe as a cautionary tale of woe. Pullman puts Lyra and Will right back into the paradisiacal garden⁶ and sets them up, through Mary Malone, to fall again so that this time, we might get it right. Rid of the pesky Authority and nearly rid of his servants in the Church, humans can reverse the tide of Dust so that it blankets us once more with the gifts of knowledge, experience, sensuality, and creativity.

But Pullman is no anarchist—there must be something else in place of the Authority, some structure for the world to ensure our continued survival. *His Dark Materials* presents

⁵ Worse, Wood argues, “by showing some of the negative consequences of innocence’s inability to imagine the pain of the other or to take responsibility, Pullman depicts children’s innocence as potentially amoral, even immoral” (544).

⁶ Fitzsimmons rightly insists on the postlapsarian qualities of the *mulefa*-world: while other readers take the Edenic descriptions of this universe to indicate its utopian or pastoral, “free of complex technology,” she reminds us that “the wheels *are* technology [...and] furthermore, they have craftsmen who celebrate Mary’s experiments and inventiveness” (217). Maud Hines concurs, asserting that “natural” materials and processes are simply those available in one’s own world (43). I would argue that Pullman’s “New Paradise” rests on exactly this distinction: a perfect society, *pace* Thomas More, should mirror the *mulefa*’s hybridity, materiality, harmonious and productive technology, and atheism.

relation as the antidote. Dust, Pullman's controlling metaphor, is nothing but tangible relation, visible prepositions, and it can continue to exist only in a world presided over not by an absolute and remote Authority but by all of us, by the network,⁷ which Pullman names the Republic of Heaven. A world, explains one character, where "there are no kingdoms at all. No kings, no bishops, no priests. [...] We want no part of it. This world is different. We intend to be free citizens" (*Spyglass* 210-11). Speaking about this ideological concept as it relates to our own world, Pullman emphasizes "a sense that [...] we are a part of everything that's right and good. [...] The meaning of our lives is their connection with something other than ourselves. [...] We're not isolated units of self-interest" ("Republic"). Further, as Colas reminds us, "we are not separate from what we would know or from the technologies we use to know [...but rather are] characterized by [our] openly disposed but purposive, inventive engagement with the material world" (43). Readers, along with Mary Malone, find precisely this brand of conjunctive existence in the *mulefa*-world. There, beings who are "conscious of [their] own consciousness" ("Republic") feel a moral obligation to foster connections with each other and with the entire natural world. They include in their network physical creatures such as the herd animals, local flora such as the seedpod trees, and metaphysical things such as Dust and angels. The *mulefa* tend themselves and the earth, and those they nurture sustain them in return through connection. "Paradise," writes McCullough, "can only be regained in the recognition of an interdependent ecosystem" (156).

⁷ Bird illumines a crucial distinction between the mythologies established by Genesis and those created by Pullman: the first, she suggests, "is built on a system of classification—the notion that creation is a matter of naming a matter of making distinctions, and of articulating opposites" (111), whereas the second rests on "the desire to connect everything with everything else" (113).

Pullman concludes his trilogy, and his unsubtle prescription for the future of humanity, with the permanent separation of Lyra and Will, as each returns to his or her own world; but he tempers the moment's tragedy with the comfort offered by the republic. Will tried desperately to cling to Lyra before ultimately realizing that "we have to build the Republic of Heaven where we are" (*Spyglass* 488); later, alone, Lyra understands what he meant: "We shouldn't live as if it mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place" (*Spyglass* 518). Again Pullman's Protestant, British upbringing intrudes into the narrative, as Lyra continues, "We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and patient, and we've got to study and think and work hard, all of us, in all our different worlds, and then we'll build [...] the Republic of Heaven" (*Spyglass* 518).⁸ Sarah K. Cantrell reads this moment as intensely optimistic: "living means choosing the 'space of possibilities'" (319), rather than the "insidious fantasy" promoted by most fairy tale worlds that "work and struggle are complete" (320) when the quest ends.

Paradise, in *His Dark Materials* as in some strands of Judeo-Christian thought, is a real place and exists in a specific temporal and geographical location; but for Pullman, we ought not look to pursue it and regain it. He believes that in the Garden, humans were innocent and immature and laboring under a delusion that a deity cared for them, but they were also isolated from the larger world and its many splendors. Postlapsarian life, with its supposed curse of honest work and the alleged sin of sexual experience, actually offers a

⁸ Lyra and Will's separation seems less tragic after considering Lisa Hopkins's assertion that humans in *His Dark Materials* contain everything they need within themselves: they are each a trinity unto themselves (a body, a daemon, and a Death), and this, Hopkins says, is Pullman's real subversion of Christian doctrine—that we do not require an external component to complete us (55). Although I disagree with her notion of the self-contained human, I do find her argument useful in providing a sense of our internal relations: we are ourselves miniature networks.

sense of true connection with the universe: no one knows the earth and the animals more intimately or respects them more completely than the farmer, who earns his knowledge through tillage and husbandry. "Experience," maintains Naomi Wood, "still necessitates pain and toil, just as the God of Genesis decrees. For Pullman, though, labor in and of itself is a reward, allowing the laborer to transcend her natural limits" (547). Lyra and Will, therefore, re-enact the Fall in order to bring us back into connection with the universe, as symbolized by the reversal of Dust-flow and the continuation of the symbiotic *mulefa*-world. Philip Pullman's ultimate hope for humanity is thus not found in Paradise, but in Paradise lost.

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**Paradise Always Already Lost:
Stewardship and Symbiosis
in English Literature**

What might it mean that such a disparate variety of texts, spanning at least a thousand years and crossing all lines of genre, subject, and even language, share the same foundational narrative? Why do these works talk to one another, and to us, across and through time and space? To answer these questions, I return to the beginning, to the story underwrites this entire study: the myth of the Garden of Eden, which we may read as an environmental fable. It is the origins of a social contract between humanity, God, and the universe in which humans assume responsibility for the care of their world.

Such a perspective informs the 2014 epic film, *Noah*, directed by Darren Aronofsky, which draws clear lines of division between the descendants of Adam and Eve: the children of Cain and the children of Seth. The first faction comprises meat-eating, bellicose metalworkers who have cut a wide swath of devastation across the earth. An industrialized people, they represent the modern viewer, epitomizing the worst aspects of modern life: they indiscriminately rape women, murder children, devour live animals, burn their own camps, and capriciously waste natural resources. By contrast, the children of Seth (who disdainfully call the children of Cain “men”) inhabit basic, temporary shelters and live

wherever the earth can easily sustain them; the film implies that they are vegans and ascetics, depicting them eating only once, when they scrape miniscule bits of moss off a rock. They ardently fulfill the Creator's prelapsarian mandate that humans must care for the earth and its creatures. In addition to the characters, the flood that occasions the story also feels familiar to contemporary audiences: it simultaneously relates a story of the distant past and foretells our near destiny. Climate change has made our waters rise and our polar ice caps melt so that a flood, although perhaps a much slower flood, is now a certainty. We know that our coastlines are shrinking. We know that glaciers are melting. The water will overwhelm us soon, because we, like the tribes led by Tubal Cain, have showed so little regard for the earth. We have not acted as stewards of the earth, though we are ourselves the descendants of Seth.

The Garden of Eden myth is similarly a story not only about communion but also about stewardship: we must nourish the earth because the earth sustains us. That texts from so many eras and genres of English literature use the Garden and the Fall as touchstones testifies to their deep impact on our collective consciousness and to our innate understanding of time as folded. Each text in this dissertation encompasses concurrent time schemes, looking both backwards to the original paradisiacal symbiosis and forward to its re-establishment. The possibilities for renewal, as I have shown, comprise a spectrum of human ideals and achievements, from the sense of community and protection offered by the Anglo-Saxon feast hall in *The Dream of the Rood* to the humanist dream of a socio-political republic in *The Rape of Lucrece* to the *locus amoenus* of *The Woodlanders* to the naturo-technical hybrid land of the *mulefa* in *The Amber Spyglass*. Although I have argued that we need not understand these texts as evidencing a linear evolution, wherein Philip

Pullman's neo-Paradise is somehow "better" than that of the *Rood*-poet or Shakespeare or Hardy, his vision is the most fully symbiotic of the four. In his earthly Republic of Heaven, all creatures are not created equal: the *mulefa* have dominion over the cattle-like creatures and are charged with sustaining the seed-pod trees just as in Eden, Adam and Eve have dominion over the animals and are charged with tending the garden. All creatures, however, are equally necessary to the continued survival of the world's inhabitants. It is also the only earthly paradise that promises to survive. We know, as Shakespeare knew, that the Roman model of a republic, while a promising ideal, fell apart, a casualty of human weakness (this, too, is the message of Aronofsky's *Noah*, which unsettles viewers by disabusing us of the notion that the descendants of Seth will ultimately fare any better than the descendants of Cain had done). We know, as Hardy knew, that the isolated, hardworking, traditional villages of the English countryside will get razed and paved while their inhabitants disperse on the new railroads and make their way into urban factories. Only the *Rood*-poet offers an immutable vision of a sustainable paradise, but it is one of divine origin; we cannot attest to the existence of Heaven proper, or to its resemblance to a medieval feast-hall, but at least we have no historical evidence of humans destroying such a paradigm.

What Pullman offers to twentieth- and twenty-first century readers is the possibility of attaining that kind of community here and now, not only with our kindred but also with the earth itself and all its creatures, tools, elements, and ideas (a concept absent from the *Rood*-poet's eschatological imagination). Pullman's vision is the most complete because it encompasses the entire complexity of creation: the living and the non-living (including the dead), the abstract and the concrete, the material and the immaterial, the real and the

perceived, the past and the future, the human and the non-human, the mobile and the static. In the *mulefa*-world, as in our own, everything makes a difference. Thus, our task, like that of Mary Malone in fashioning the amber spyglass, becomes learning to see clearly the things in our world and understanding the relationships between them. Our problem is not one of loss but one of perception. When Mary Malone leaves the *mulefa*-world to return to her own (also our own!) Oxford, she brings back with her the gift of sight: the witch Serafina Pekkala has taught her to see her own daemon, which she learns to do in her meditative trance state. Only by looking sideways through her peripheral vision can Mary spot, with blurred vision, the alpine chough that accompanies her, much like Plato's chained slaves can only see the blurred truths of the shadows on the wall of their cave. The series implies that we, too, can see all the truth but see it slant—by looking at these disparate texts over, through, and across time, traveling along the prepositions that bind them, focusing on their words but glancing at the spaces between them with our peripheral vision.