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Editor's Preface

*Editorial Board

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

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

"It Ain't Right, and It Ain't Natural": Masculinity and Class Conflict in *Hadestown*

Alaina DiSalvo

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the musical Hadestown, which reinterprets ancient Greek myth for a modern audience. The narrative juxtaposes the relationship between deities Hades and Persephone with the struggles of Orpheus and Eurydice, illustrating themes of exploitation and social inequality. This paper looks at the standards of masculinity and femininity that are forced upon people, and how these strict roles harm everyone. This paper argues that Hades' control over Persephone and the labor force mirrors patriarchal and capitalist dynamics, where women and workers are commodified. Ultimately, it suggests Hadestown is a cautionary tale about reformist approaches within oppressive systems, advocating for revolutionary change. A Marxian analysis is used alongside contemporary feminist thought to explore these dynamics.

Background

Hadestown takes an ancient Greek myth and transforms it into a story about industrialization, exploitative capitalism, and social pressures to adhere to cisnormative gender roles. Writer Anaïs Mitchell retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice within the context of Hades and Persephone's relationship. Hades is the god of the dead, and he marries Persephone, the goddess of springtime. She lives with Hades for half of the year, causing fall and winter, and returns to the land of the living for the other half, causing spring and summer. Orpheus marries Eurydice, but she dies shortly after their wedding. To retrieve her from the Underworld, he uses his musical talents to move Hades and Persephone to compassion. He earns a chance to bring Eurydice back to the land of the living, provided she follows behind him and he does not turn back to check that she is there. As he ascends, doubt overwhelms him. Just before exiting, he turns to see Eurydice behind him. In that moment of doubt, she is lost to him forever.

Hadestown opens by telling the audience that something is wrong: the seasons are out of sync, food is scarce, and people endure harsh winters and scorching summers. Why is this happening? Orpheus has an answer: "The gods have forgotten the song of their love" (*Chant*). Instead of existing in harmony with his wife Persephone, Hades has become a conqueror, a capitalist mogul, who spends his time exploiting the resources of the Earth— which is his wife's domain— in order to accumulate wealth and exert control over the many workers in his employ. In this play, the Underworld (or "Hadestown") is not a place that human souls go when they die, but is rather an underground factory where the desperate poor go to earn a living. Here, Eurydice makes the decision to work at the underground Hadestown factory because she is desperate for food and shelter.

Orpheus plans to alleviate this suffering by reminding Hades of his love for Persephone and securing Eurydice's release. Just as the original myth ends in tragedy, so does the musical: because of a moment of Orpheus' doubt, Eurydice is lost to Hadestown forever. In a metatextual aside, Hermes, the musical's emcee, insists that they will keep telling the story of *Hadestown* "again and again." Why? The answer isn't stated outright. But Hermes recalls fondly that Orpheus "could make you see how the world could be, in spite of the way that it is" (*Road to Hell* (*Reprise*)).

Hades and Persephone: Environmental Conquest as Masculine Performance

On the Hadestown stage, a couple sits on an elevated balcony, playing dominoes. The man is dressed in a harsh pinstriped suit, and the woman wears a frilly green dress, holding a paper fan. They engage as equals in their board game for about half an hour before joining the action on the stage down below. This is Hades and Persephone, the god of the dead and goddess

of springtime, displaying their most affectionate and respectful interaction until the climax. *Hadestown* highlights the separation between the gods, who observe from above, and the struggling humans below. Hades and Persephone represent a bourgeois class whose material interests shape the lives of the proletariat.

Hades is the owner of a large corporation, but this is not the only source of his power. His control over electricity, oil, and coal worsens climate change. Hades also brings Persephone back to the Underworld far before six months have passed, making spring and summer unusually short. These efforts combined lead to famine and increased desperation for factory jobs. Aside from pure economic strategy, there is another motivation for Hades' decision to take Persephone underground early. As Orpheus explains, Hades is consumed by loneliness during Persephone's absence, and he feels intense jealousy at the thought "of his wife in the arms of the sun" (*Epic II*). The specific invocation of human imagery to describe the sun points toward Hades' jealousy being rooted in the fear of emasculation. His insecurity compels him to accumulate more power and resources, reflecting a constant struggle against feelings of inadequacy and the fear of being abandoned or overthrown.

Hades views relationships as purely transactional, which has left him unfulfilled despite his immense wealth and power. His obsession with material gain has caused him to lose sight of what he once cherished most: his wife, Persephone, and their mutual love. Immersed in a capitalist mindset, he feels disconnected from those around him and finds no joy in his relationships. Hades has "resolved personal worth into exchange value" and "reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 9). Persephone, valuing nature for its own sake, is entirely foreign to Hades and beyond his understanding.

As the goddess of springtime and the herald of summer, Persephone is intimately connected with the natural world. Therefore, by exploiting the earth for its resources of precious metals, oil, and coal, Hades is exploiting his wife. The connection between Persephone and the earth is made explicit in *Hadestown* and in ancient myth, but the connection between the earth and women, more generally, is a recurring concept throughout history.

This connection to nature is not purely aesthetic. In fact, it has real implications in regards to economic and social stratification. Maria Mies (1986) argues that the modern imperial system was built upon social divisions formed between racial, ethnic, national, and gender groups. Concurrent with the development of capitalism, patriarchal men began to "*externalize* or *exterritorialize* those whom [they] wanted to exploit" (p. 74). The logic behind this is clear: if a person or group is characterized as 'other,' it becomes much easier to inflict violence and injustice upon them. In *Hadestown*, Hades no longer thinks of Persephone as similar to himself. Rather, she is a foreign entity that must be conquered and subjugated in order to protect the

system.

Mies takes her argument a step further and contends that under the guise of legitimate scientific analysis, men in the age of industrialization would build "new machines" using natural resources, "by which he could make himself independent of Mother Nature" (p. 75). This framing adds clarity to the motivation behind Hades' actions. Hades is worried that without Persephone, he will have nothing to show for his life. Therefore, he hopes to take advantage of her resources to create a mechanized world, one in which, he hopes, he will eventually be able to succeed on his own terms.

Nancy Hartsock (2004) links the identification of women with nature to the capitalist economy: "Women *are* commodities [...] in obvious ways: most of the women in the world are disposed of and controlled by others" (p. 15). In this way, Hades' domination of Persephone can be extrapolated as a model for capitalistic gender relations. Women participate in the economy as part of the labor force, but they are also, often, the products being sold and the resources being extracted. This refers to women in the workforce, but also to women as objects of sexual desire and as the reproducers of the species. Women are exploited at every point in the capitalist process of production. As long as society prioritizes acquiring wealth over interpersonal respect and care, women will not achieve meaningful equality or liberation and men will not relate to women as fellow human beings.

Hades reveals more of his internal thought processes as the play goes on. He tells Orpheus that women are not to be trusted, and that the only way to reliably keep a woman by his side is to

> "Hang a chain around her throat
> Made of many carat gold
> Shackle her from wrist to wrist
> With sterling silver bracelets
> Fill her pockets full of stones
> Precious ones, diamonds
> Bind her with a golden band" (*Chant* (*Reprise*)).

Hades' advice is multilayered. He contrasts the violent imagery of captivity with the allure of precious metals and jewelry. Rather than using physical violence, he exploits his wealth to entice Persephone to stay, believing she will choose to stay with him for the comfort he offers. Thus, Persephone faces a dilemma: be free and impoverished, or wealthy and enslaved.

This choice is not only Persephone's to make. Hades controls both his wife and his workers through similar coercive tactics. When he tries to lure Eurydice to work for him, he claims her only chance for food and shelter is to sign a lifetime contract with his factory (*Hey*,

Little Songbird). This reflects a broader trend in capitalism where workers face the illusion of free choice, needing to sell their labor for basic necessities like food, shelter, and healthcare. Karl Marx (1844) classifies "forced labor" as any work which is "not the satisfaction of a need but a mere means to satisfy needs outside itself." Forced labor reduces a person, in their own mind, to "nothing more than an animal" as they are compelled to engage in work that "does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies [the] flesh and ruins [the] mind" (p. 43). Hades stresses that he does not force anyone to work for him. Arguably, he is presenting a false idea of choice. Due to the intense economic pressures placed on them, his workers do not have any real freedom to choose whether or not they want to work in his factory. Likewise, due to the material conditions Hades has created, Persephone does not have the freedom to leave Hades if she so chooses.

The workers of Hadestown spend their days building a massive wall to separate their factory town from the so-called dangers of the outside world. They are indoctrinated to feel lucky for employment, and told the outside world is filled with ruthless people and extreme poverty (*Why We Build the Wall*). Hades keeps them terrified of the outside so they won't realize Hades himself is the cause of their suffering. Over time, the grueling labor completely erases their sense of identity (*Way Down Hadestown* (*Reprise*)). As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) explain, the mechanization and stratification of industrialized labor causes work to "los[e] all individual character, and consequently, all charm for the workman." The Hadestown workers have become completely interchangeable with one another– they are "appendage[s] of the machine." They complete "only the most simple, most monotonous" work Hades assigns to them: swinging their pickaxes and building a wall to protect them from imaginary dangers (p. 14).

One stylistic choice in the portrayal of Hades is the extremely low tone of his voice. Hades' voice is *startlingly* deep: in one performance of the show, the crowd laughed the first time he spoke, suggesting they thought his overly-low tone was supposed to be a joke. The intimidating sound of Hades' voice is certainly reminiscent of his underground kingdom, but there is another layer to it as well. Judith Butler (1990) argues that "gender proves to be performance– that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (p. 25). Hades is, above all else, performing masculinity. This is not his natural voice– instead, it is an affectation meant to convey specific social status. Hades puts on a low voice because he is terrified of being seen as feminine or weak.

Further support for this idea comes in the middle of the second act. Orpheus successfully reminds Hades of a song he sang when he first fell in love with Persephone. Hades sings it once again, and his voice is barely audible and noticeably timid, hitting higher notes than ever before.

By singing this song, Hades humbles himself and embraces the feminine aspects of his character. Hades does have real love for his wife, but he hides it behind bravado and thundering shouts out of fear. Orpheus gets Hades to peel away his mask and engage with Persephone in a genuinely respectful and loving way.

Orpheus may fail in his personal journey, but he succeeds in reconciling Hades and Persephone. As the musical comes to a close, Hades allows Persephone to go back to the upper world right on time, putting the seasons back on schedule (*Wait for Me* (*Reprise*)). Over the course of this story, Hades acknowledges that the world needs balance. There cannot be unfettered masculinity without femininity. There cannot be winter without spring.

Orpheus and Eurydice: Reformism

Hadestown establishes traditional gender roles with Persephone and Hades, and then subverts them with Orpheus and Eurydice. Eurydice focuses on survival, seeking food, firewood, and shelter, while Orpheus detaches from the physical world to focus on his music and understanding the causes of disorder in their society. This division between the practical and the theoretical, the immediate and the far-away, can easily be envisioned as a gender divide. Hades and Persephone embody this contrast in a traditional, heteronormative way: Hades is fixated on the physical— mining, refining oil, and building walls— while Persephone drinks her cares away and tells wistful stories about the past. Hades is rooted in the present, while Persephone tries to escape it. This dynamic parallels Eurydice and Orpheus, with Eurydice as the practical Hades and Orpheus as the romantic, detached Persephone.

Eurydice suffers unimaginable hardship and realizes that her only chance at survival is to work a degrading job. Eurydice does not want to leave Orpheus, who she deeply loves, but her hunger for a better way of life wins out. Eurydice's personal desires are completely subsumed by the material conditions of her life. Eurydice can "live only so long as [she] find[s] work," and she "find[s] work only so long as [her] labor increases capital" (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 13). Her options are to work to increase Hades' personal wealth or to starve to death. Once Eurydice makes the decision to sign her life away, the three Fates (personifications of negative thoughts and doubts) ask the audience: "Wouldn't you have done the same?" Abandoning the man she loves and going to work for an obviously cruel man seems like a horrible decision. But, almost anticipating this criticism of Eurydice, the Fates continue:

"You can have your principles
When you've got a bellyful
Hunger has a way with you
There's no telling what you're gonna do." (*Gone, I'm Gone*)

These lines hint at the musical's main message: individual beliefs and attitudes are largely irrelevant in the face of exploitative material conditions pressuring the entire world to fall in line.

Nancy Hartsock (2004) argues that "the global labor force is being feminized in several ways" (p. 14). She outlines three trends: more women are joining the workforce, workers face discipline once directed only at women, and popular work types trend towards what used to be classified as strictly women's work. The relationship between bourgeois and proletarian is hierarchical and imbalanced in a way that is reminiscent of gender relations. Arguably, to be a member of the proletarian class is a subordinated, feminized social position. This is reflected in Eurydice's description of Hades, which uses language simultaneously reminiscent of a medical doctor and a sexual predator: "I trembled when he laid me out. 'You won't feel a thing,' he said, 'when you go down. Nothing gonna wake you now" (*Flowers*). When Hades leads a propagandistic chant about the importance of factory work, Persephone dutifully echoes him along with the workers (*Why We Build the Wall*). In summary, employer-worker dynamics echo gender relations in Hadestown and beyond.

Orpheus' association with the feminine, due in part to his class position, is repeatedly reinforced with references to nature and life. Eurydice says that Orpheus' presence is like having "sunlight all around [her]" (*All I've Ever Known*). When Eurydice asks how Orpheus will be able to provide for her needs, the impoverished Orpheus insists that everything they need for a wedding will be provided by the trees, rivers, and birds. The song Orpheus is trying to complete, he insists, will bring the spring. As proof, he shows that when he sings a few notes of his new composition, a flower appears in his hand (*Wedding Song*). When Orpheus journeys to the Underworld to bring Eurydice back, he remarks that the "rocks and stones" are "echoing [his] song"— or, in other words, he feels his quest is supported by the natural world (*Wait for Me*).

Hadestown is a story about nature. There are two definitions of nature which both need to be taken into account in this analysis: nature as plants, trees, and wild places; and nature as what is typical, expected, or inevitable. The title of this piece comes from the song *Chant*, where Persephone chastises Hades for corrupting the natural world to build his factory:

"In the coldest time of year

Why is it so hot down here?

Hotter than a crucible

It ain't right, and it ain't natural."

Persephone's argument is twofold. Hades is evidently exploiting the resources of the natural (as in, wild) world to produce electricity, oil, and metals. But Persephone is also invoking the 'natural law'— the idea that things must follow the expected and traditional rules of the world. Hades' factory is a corruption of the environment and an overextension of his authority. Since the

natural world is Persephone's domain, she argues that Hades has no right to interfere with it. This raises an important question: is Hades' behavior an unexpected flaw in the system, or is it a natural consequence of the way the system is set up? Is he suddenly overextending his authority or simply achieving the goal he's had in mind since the very beginning?

This belief in the two types of nature is another characteristic that unites Persephone and Orpheus. Orpheus believes he has both types of nature on his side, but his view is distorted. His optimism makes him imagine good intentions and happy endings where they don't exist. Early in the musical, Orpheus is asked to toast Persephone. The audience has already seen that she is a rather inconsiderate, self-interested alcoholic, but Orpheus's toast is glowingly positive. His words reflect not who she is, but who she *could* be. His toast reveals more about his worldview than it does about Persephone herself:

> "To the patroness of all of this, Persephone
>
> Who has finally returned to us with wine enough to share
>
> Asking nothing in return except that we should live
>
> And learn to live as brothers in this life
>
> And to trust she will provide
>
> And if no one takes too much, there will always be enough
>
> She will always fill our cups
>
> And we will always raise them up:
>
> To the world we dream about
>
> And the one we live in now." *(Livin' it Up on Top)*

Orpheus believes Persephone will solve all his problems and restore society to its harmonious past. However, this past is nothing more than a fantasy. The world has never been free of flaws, and Persephone certainly isn't able or willing to fix everything in the present. In fact, right after this toast, she is brought back to the Underworld by Hades. There is no proof that life has ever been free from prejudice, hierarchy, and violence. So why does Orpheus cling to this idea? Like many before him, he imagines a perfect matriarchy— a goddess-worshiping, woman-led society free from patriarchy's ills. Cynthia Eller (2011) explores the psychological roots of this belief within feminist movements:

> "Feminists have found in matriarchal myth license to hope that just as
>
> male dominance had a beginning in ancient times, it can have an end
>
> too: that oppression of women is not our only cultural heritage, but
>
> merely our most recent." (p. 5)

Imagining a matriarchal past has social utility. It is much easier to advocate for something if it has been done before, and is therefore provably attainable. Eller goes on to explain that because

this conception of the past is not rooted in historical fact, it can instead be seen as an indicator of the "cultural needs and desires" of its proponents (p. 13). Orpheus longs for social cohesion. He wants to live in a world where resources are apportioned equitably and compassionately. So, he imagines that this kind of world used to exist, and that he can bring it back if only he fixes what has gone wrong in Persephone's marriage. He ignores Eurydice's pleas for help finding food and firewood in order to work on replicating Hades and Persephone's love song *(Chant)*. He believes more than anything that if he succeeds, all of their material problems will disappear.

This belief does help Orpheus in some circumstances— not because it's true, but because of how strongly Orpheus believes it. As long as Orpheus maintains his belief in the imminent restoration of an egalitarian society, he succeeds. On his way to the Underworld, Orpheus is confronted and belittled by the Fates. They insist that his quest is doomed to fail, and that he has an overinflated sense of his own self-importance. He doesn't reason with them, or fight them. Instead, he starts to sing. His rendition of Hades and Persphone's love song forces the Fates into hiding— figuratively forcing back his doubts and fears *(Wait For Me)*.

Once in the Underworld, Orpheus foments a workers' uprising. He publicly questions Hades' rule, and the Hadestown workers agree with what he has to say. The language he uses is remarkably radical, and remarkably critical of Hades:

"I believe that with each other we are stronger than we know

I believe we're stronger than *they* know

I believe that we are many, I believe that they are few

And it isn't for the few to tell the many what is true." *(If It's True)*

Orpheus invokes the language of worker unionization and socialist ideology. Specifically, Marx and Engels (1848) write that, in contrast to minority movements of the past, "the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority" (p. 19). The bourgeois class is miniscule compared to the size of the proletariat. What keeps the proletariat from assuming power is a lack of understanding of this social imbalance— a lack of class consciousness. The most successful unionization efforts are those that understand that there is power in numbers, and leverage their numbers against the owning class to carve out better working conditions.

Hades recognises the threat Orpheus poses to his power, and fears it. He also recognizes that no matter what he does, there will be problems. If he refuses to let Orpheus leave with Eurydice, he'll "have a martyr on [his] hands," inspiring further rebellion in the workers. But if Hades allows him to go, "[he's] never gonna get 'em in line again" *(Word to the Wise)*. So, Hades comes up with a third option. Orpheus can leave with Eurydice as long as she walks behind him, and he doesn't turn around to make sure she's there. If Orpheus fails after being

given a chance, Hades knows, the rebellion amongst his workers will be quashed. Unlike in the original myth, it is not just Eurydice that Orpheus tries to save. If he successfully leads Eurydice out of the Underworld, the workers of Hadestown will follow. The workers implore him to "show the way," saying that "if she can do it, so can we" *(Wait for Me (Reprise))*.

At the most crucial moment, Orpheus' prophetic insight and optimism fail him. He loses his faith in his own ability to change the world. He starts to bend to Hades' will, and become certain that Hades' power over them all is absolute and unbreakable. When Orpheus turns around, it is not just Eurydice he dooms to a life of backbreaking, degrading labor. Orpheus had the opportunity to revolutionize his entire society, but failed to do so. The play ends there— except for a few more words to the audience, to make sure they understand the importance of what they have just witnessed.

Near the end of *The Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels critique earlier socialist thinkers. Their choice of words is important: instead of calling these earlier thinkers incorrect, they call their conception of the class struggle "undeveloped" (p. 97). These thinkers, in Marx and Engels' view,

> "...consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms. They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favored. Hence, they habitually appeal to society at large, without the distinction of class; nay, by preference, to the ruling class. For how can people, when once they understand their system, fail to see in it the best possible plan of the best possible state of society? Hence, they reject all political, and especially revolutionary action; they wish to attain heir ends by peaceful means, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of such example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel." (p. 98)

This description unquestionably applies to Orpheus. Orpheus believes that all people are fundamentally the same, regardless of class. For example, when Orpheus recalls the story of Hades and Persephone's first meeting, he says, "And I know how it was because he was like me: a man in love with a woman" *(Epic III)*. Orpheus fails to see the glaring differences, in class and in gender expression, between himself and Hades.

Orpheus is opposed to revolutionary thought. He believes that by improving the lives of the bourgeoisie (Hades and Persephone), the system will begin to function the way it was supposed to function. This is the largest disagreement between Orpheus and the authors cited above: Orpheus believes that the system was intended to be fair, whereas Marx and Engels believe it was intended to be unfair. In their view, the system is not broken– rather, it is functioning exactly the way it was intended to function. Their view necessitates massive

upheaval and eventual revolution in order to achieve any meaningful social change. While being peaceful and conciliatory feels intuitively right, this approach is "necessarily doomed to failure."

This discussion centers in on the main question *Hadestown* asks: why does Orpheus fail? While Orpheus mends Hades and Persephone's marriage, the industrial system that sustains Hades' power remains intact. Orpheus seeks flexibility within the hierarchy but doesn't challenge its existence. This refusal— or, perhaps, inability— to destroy the system altogether is why their story ends in tragedy. On a personal level, his lack of belief spelled his failure. But if *Hadestown* is an allegory for larger social phenomena, then Orpheus failed because he did not overthrow the existing system. Hades is still in power, workers are still being exploited, and the proletariat are still in need of assistance. Eurydice will always go back to Hadestown. While this system still exists, what other choice does she have?

At the end of the play, Hermes explains that even though this story is a tragedy, they will continue to "sing it anyway" *(Road to Hell (Reprise))*. Why? Because Orpheus came so close. He had a lot of the right ideas. He was not incorrect in his approach, but simply "undeveloped." His actions "correspond with the first instinctive yearnings of that [proletarian] class for a general reconstruction of society" (Marx and Engels 1848, 98). This applies both to the social constructions of gender and of class. Orpheus attempted to lessen the strictness of gender roles and class divisions, but he did not attempt to eradicate these classifications altogether.

In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845)*,* Marx notoriously makes the following statement: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Thesis 11). In other words, it is not enough to "see how the world could be." Orpheus had the right interpretation. His method of enacting change spelled the end for him. Had he not left the Underworld according to Hades' demands, he would have maintained strength in numbers as he united with the workers. Then, he may have gone back to the upper world with a true change in his material circumstances. Orpheus didn't complete the journey, but he did begin it. Orpheus questioned the hierarchical systems of oppression, but that was only the first step. By aligning himself more fully with the interests of the working class, Orpheus could have broken down these systems and created a more equitable world.

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The Return of a Letter in Reverse Form: Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson's Critical Writings on Poe's *The Purloined Letter*

Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng

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ABSTRACT

Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Purloined Letter* revolves around a stolen letter and the brilliant detective Dupin's method of retrieving it by understanding his adversary's psychology. It raises an intriguing question: Why does a letter always return to its sender? In this essay, I will explore the nature of the letter/ signifier's return, drawing on Lacan, Derrida, and Barbara Johnson's critical writings on this renowned short story. This study will demonstrate that, despite their different theoretical contexts, these analyses mirror the very story they examine, raising questions about the legitimate role of the critic and the problematic nature of meta-language.

KEYWORDS
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Purloined Letter*, Lacan, Derrida, Barbara Johnson, meta-language, signifier

> It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside
> out, re-directed, and re-sealed.
> –Edgar Allan Poe, *The Purloined Letter*

Introduction

As one of the most renowned and intriguing detective stories, Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Purloined Letter*, first published in 1844, features the astute detective C. Auguste Dupin. Known for his extraordinary analytical skills, Dupin is tasked with recovering a stolen letter of significant importance, cleverly hidden by the culprit, which contains compromising material about a high-ranking royal. Despite extensive efforts by the police, the letter remains elusive. Dupin deduces that the letter is not hidden in an elaborate location but rather in an obvious spot, overlooked because of its simplicity. The narrative unfolds as Dupin outwits the thief by comprehending his psychological tendencies and retrieving the letter from its deceptively simple hiding place. By accomplishing this, Dupin exposes the limitations of conventional investigative methods and underscores his intellectual superiority.

This mystery surrounding the letter raises a deeper question: Does a letter always arrive at its destination? This essay explores the nature of the letter/signifier's return through the critical lenses of Lacan, Derrida, and Barbara Johnson. By examining their diverse theoretical perspectives, this study reveals that their analyses reflect the very story they critique, raising important questions about the critic's role and the challenging nature of meta-language. The essay highlights the intricate dance between concealment and revelation, signifier and meaning, as depicted in Poe's tale.

Lacan's Reading

Jacques Lacan offers a compelling perspective, arguing that the letter functions as an ever-shifting signifier, its meaning not tied to its content—since, notably, we never learn what is inside it. Lacan concludes his seminar with the statement, "a letter always arrives at its destination," a crucial distinction from "a letter is always delivered to its destination." This subtle difference shifts the focus from the passive object to the letter's active role. The letter does not merely reach its destination; it "arrives," choosing where it goes. The letter possesses the person who holds it, "reads" the reader, and makes them feel as though they are the true addressee, the rightful owner. In this sense, it becomes apparent that we do not so much speak language as language speaks through us.[1]

The letter in Poe's *The Purloined Letter* functions like a boomerang, always returning to its

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[1] Denise Riley argues that language is inherently impersonal. Rather than mastering language, we are often subject to it, with language speaking through us more frequently than we speak it. As Riley explores the powerful effects of language, it begins to appear as though language itself operates as an external force, beyond our conscious control. She refers to this phenomenon as an "outward unconscious," which complicates the boundary between the internal and the external, what she terms "extimacy." See Riley's *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect*.

point of origin. By the end of the story, after a series of displacements, the letter literally returns to its rightful addressee. It is initially written by an unknown sender to the Queen, stolen by the Minister, retrieved by Dupin, and handed over to the Prefect. The narrative suggests that, in the end, the letter returns to the Queen's hand. Yet, Lacan's interpretation of sender, receiver, and the letter's destination goes beyond the literal content of the story. As Lacan puts it, "… the sender… receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form" (53). This suggests that "a letter always arrives at its destination" not because the destination is a fixed endpoint, but because the sender is the destination.

Why does a letter always return to its sender, and why in reverse form? If the letter has agency, why does it turn itself inside out on its return? *The Purloined Letter* is a story designed to be without a definitive end, a literary work with a fascinating afterlife. The letter continually circulates among the characters, never fully claimed by any one of them. One reason for its elusive status is that it always leaves traces of its next location. In other words, the robber's knowledge is constantly made available to the character who has lost the letter. The Minister steals it in plain view of the Queen, prompting her to ask the Prefect to recover it. The ending even hints that, had the story continued, the Minister could reclaim the letter, since Dupin leaves behind a clue—his own handwritten note—that allows the Minister to recognize his adversary. In this way, the letter contains an element that sends it on its way, diverting it from its original path.

As Lacan puts it, "…the signifier is a unit in its very uniqueness, being by nature a symbol only of an absence. Which is why we cannot say of *The Purloined Letter* that, like other objects, it must be or not be in a particular place; rather, unlike them, it will be and not be where it is, wherever it goes" (39). *The Purloined Letter*, then, is not merely an object but a letter whose course is always prolonged—a letter in sufferance (43). Lacan argues that the displacement of the signifier shapes the subjects' actions, their destinies, their refusals, their blindness, and their fate—along with their innate gifts and social acquisitions.

In the story, the letter is turned inside out, resealed, copied, camouflaged, hidden, and replaced with a facsimile multiple times. Yet, despite these alterations and diversions, nothing can prevent the letter from reaching its eventual destination. A signifier always arrives at its unconscious destination simply because, from the outset, it belongs to the discourse of the big Other. As Slavoj Žižek points out, Lacan "lays bare the very mechanism of teleological illusion… [the letter's] true addressee is not the empirical other who may or may not receive it, but the big Other, the symbolic order itself, which receives it the moment the letter is put into circulation" (10).

Žižek further draws on the Hegelian figure of the "Beautiful Soul,"[2] explaining that the subject/sender receives from the addressee his own message in its true form, i.e., the true meaning of his moans and groans. In other words, the letter that the subject puts into circulation "arrives at its destination," which, from the very beginning, is the sender himself. The letter reaches its destination when the subject is finally compelled to confront the true consequences of his actions (13). The message is emitted by the big Other, not by a conscious, speaking subject. As a result, one always says more than intended because language is not simply a tool freely chosen by the speaker. Instead, part of language itself exists independently of the speaker's expressive intentions. In *Žižek's words,*

> The big Other pulls the strings; the subject doesn't speak, the subject "is spoken" by the symbolic structure. In short, this big Other is the name for the social substance, for all that on account of which the subject never fully dominates the effects of his acts, that is on account of which the final outcome of his activity is always something else with regard to what he aimed at or anticipated. (216)

The subject cannot fully control the effects of their speech. The residues that emerge from the process of signification inevitably return. As Žižek notes, "this surplus of what is effectively said over the intended meaning articulates the repressed content—in it, 'the repressed returns'" (14). What is repressed is revealed on the reverse side of the message, and thus, the letter returns in its reverse form.[3]

Lacan's interpretation highlights the repetitive automatism inherent in the signifying chain and the eventual re-appropriation of the message. Dupin recovers *The Purloined Letter* by repeating the Minister's own trick—he purloins *The Purloined Letter*. In other words, he must undo a crime by committing the same crime himself. This repetition compulsion is what Johnson describes as "an act of untying the knot in the structure through the repetition of the act of tying it" (498). From the Minister's perspective, he ultimately receives the letter in its reverse form, which, in a sense, he has sent himself. By blackmailing the Queen, the Minister sets in motion an event that reshapes the entire power structure, making him the unwitting architect of his own fate.

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[2] Hegel's the "Beautiful Soul" is a figure who pretends to speak a pure metalanguage, under the mask of an innocent victim, to conceal the wicked way its own moans and groans "*partake actively* in the corruption it denounces" (*Žižek*, 12, italics original).

[3] Žižek argues that an object like the purloined letter "gives material existence to the lack in the Other, to the constitutive inconsistency of the symbolic order" (18). He also describes the subject's separation from the *big Other* in the following way: "Separation occurs when the subject becomes aware of how the *big Other* is in itself inconsistent, purely virtual, 'barred,' deprived of the thing—and fantasy is an attempt to fill this lack of the Other, not of the subject (i.e., to (re)constitute the consistency of the *big Other*)" (216). In this light, Lacan, Derrida, Johnson, and perhaps even ourselves, may be attempting to fill the lack of the *big Other*—to capture the true meaning of the letter or to decipher the words it contains.

Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson's Readings

This sense of repetition continues to unsettle Lacan's Seminar (1957), Derrida's "The Purveyor of Truth" (1975), and Johnson's "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida" (1978), where each theorist grapples with the enigmatic nature of *The Purloined Letter*. It seems that any attempt to analyze the story inevitably follows the logic of *The Purloined Letter* itself—transforming "one-upmanship into inevitable one-downmanship" (Johnson, 465). For John T. Irwin, the three-part chain of readings from Lacan to Derrida to Johnson mirrors the rivalry between the Minister and Dupin in their competition for the letter (1172). Irwin argues that while each interpreter uncovers the blind spot of the previous analysis, none is innocent in their own act of interpretation. Their writings inevitably undermine their own arguments, raising questions about the legitimate use of meta-language. To navigate the complex and labyrinthine passages of these three thinkers, Irwin focuses on their respective positions concerning the numerical structure of the story.

In Lacan's interpretation, the central plot of *The Purloined Letter* consists of "two" key scenes: the first in the royal boudoir, and the second in the Minister's office. Each scene is defined by three distinct glances, each associated with one of the three subjects involved:

The first is glance that sees nothing: the King and the police.

The second, a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides: the Queen, then the Minister.

The third sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whoever would seize it: the Minister, and finally Dupin. (32)

In the first scene, the King fails to see the letter that the Queen has hidden in plain view on a table. The Queen, noticing that the King does not see the letter, mistakenly believes she has successfully concealed it, with its address clearly visible. However, this oversight gives the Minister the opportunity to seize the letter right before the Queen's eyes, knowing that she cannot risk drawing the King's attention to it.

In the second scene, at the Minister's residence, the letter—now turned inside out and readdressed in a feminine hand—appears once again in plain sight, this time on the mantelpiece. The police, like the blind King, are close to the letter but fail to see it. The Minister, in turn, misinterprets the police's futile search as an indication that the letter is still hidden, repeating the Queen's earlier mistake. Dupin, representing the third gaze, is the only one to recognize that the letter is hidden in plain sight, effortlessly seizing it while the others fail to notice. According to Irwin, the Minister's shift from the position of the third glance to the second "exhibits the special vulnerability to self-delusion, to a blind spot, which the possession of the letter conveys" (1171). This triangular structure of scenes brings to mind a Chinese proverb: "Tang Lang Bu Chan

Huang Que Zai Hou," which translates to: while a mantis stalks a cicada, confident of its imminent capture, it is completely unaware of the oriole waiting behind. In Poe's story, the Queen in the first scene and the Minister in the second occupy the same position as the mantis. Their overconfidence and certainty of success blind them to the presence of the opponent, exposing their weakness.

Just as the Minister once wronged Dupin, prompting him to seek revenge, Irwin suggests that Derrida, in "The Purveyor of Truth," uses the same tactic to settle scores with Lacan.[4] Derrida's strategy is to turn Lacan's own argument against itself, echoing the dynamic in *The Purloined Letter*, where Dupin uses the same trick to get even with the Minister.[5] Derrida contends that Lacan's interpretation of the triangular structure of the two scenes in Poe's text represents "narrated scenes within the framing artifice of the story" (Irwin, 1172). However, Derrida argues that the story itself consists of two distinct scenes of narration—the first being the Prefect's visit to Dupin, during which he recounts the events in the royal boudoir, and the second occurring after the Prefect's second visit, when Dupin explains how he managed to seize the letter at the Minister's residence. Thus, if *The Purloined Letter* can be reduced to a number, it should be "four," not three. Derrida accuses Lacan of simplifying the four-sided structure of narration into the three-sided structure of the narrated scenes, asserting that "by missing the position of the narrator, his engagement in the content of what he seems to recount, one omits everything in the scene of writing that overflows the two triangles" (Derrida, 198).

In his analysis, Lacan has already played with the numbers one, two, and three. As Irwin notes, "The tale is composed of two scenes, the second of which, by repeating the triangular structure of the first, creates a sameness or oneness between the two" (1173). In an attempt to outdo Lacan, Derrida introduces the next number: four. However, whether Derrida arrives at this quadrangular structure by adding one to three, or by doubling two, is a problematic issue. This ambiguity serves as the entry point for Johnson to address the debate between Lacan and Derrida. As Johnson notes, Derrida thinks the triangular structure fails to recognize the uncanny effect of doubling in *The Purloined Letter* (which includes the detective's doubling the criminal's thoughts in order to outwit him as well as the Minister's divided self being both a poet and a mathematician).[6] However, this doubling is more associated with four than two,

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[4] Johnson notes that Derrida references Lacan in relation to the latter's multiple "acts of aggression" directed at him since 1965.

[5] In Irwin's words, "In his essay Derrida sets out to repeat the encounter between Dupin and the Minister with himself in the role of Dupin and Lacan in the role of the Minister" (1172).

[6] The doubling and the inherent dividing are two main themes in Derrida's analysis. In his own words, "As soon as the narrator makes Dupin return his letters, and not only to the Queen…the letter divides itself… a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and from the moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting" (201, italics original).

for what we refer to as doubling is almost always splitting and doubling... the figure of the double externally duplicates an internal division in the protagonist's self ... so that doubling tends to be as structure of four halves problematically balanced across the inner/outer limit of the self rather than a structure of two separate, opposing wholes. (Irwin, 1173)

Derrida argues that the psychoanalytic model of triangularity falsely assumes the possibility of dialectical mediation and harmonious normalization. However, as Johnson points out, in the Oedipal triangle, there is no privileged position that stands above or outside the unsettling effects of doubling—no objective vantage point from which to mediate the subjective interaction between the other two positions. The synthetic mediation of desire, therefore, is precisely what the destabilizing, uncanny effect of doubling continually undermines.

In Johnson's analysis, Lacan and Derrida are engaged in a game of even and odd, a strategy that Dupin himself uses as an illustration of how one doubles the thought of an opponent to outwit him. Irwin further explains,

Derrida opts for a quadrangular structure, that is, he plays the even number four, in order to evoke the uncanniness, the oddness of doubling; while Lacan opts for a triangular structure by playing the odd number three, in order to enforce the regularizing or normalizing effect of the dialectical triad. In this game of even and odd, Derrida and Lacan end up as reciprocal opposites, as specular doubles of one another: Derrida asserts the oddness of evenness, while Lacan affirms the evenness of oddness. (1174)

In a sense, Johnson illustrates how, through the debate between Lacan and Derrida over the same literary text, each of them receives the message in its reverse form—because the very mechanism of seizing the letter involves a reversal into the opposite.

But what of Johnson's own position on *The Purloined Letter*? Johnson does not choose to play the next number, five, as she already positions Lacan and Derrida as the two players in the game of even and odd. To take a stance on the numerical structure would mean playing the game of one-upmanship with a specular double, and as she notes, being one-up inevitably leads to being one-down. This repetition mirrors the entire drama of *The Purloined Letter*. Johnson is self-aware that her analysis is framed within a frame, bound by the structure of the story itself. As she puts it, "Everyone who has held the letter—or even beheld it—including the narrator, has ended up having the letter addressed to him as its destination. The reader is comprehended by the letter: there is no place from which he can stand back and observe it" (502).

In this sense, she recognizes that she is not immune to the repetitive act of analysis to which Dupin subjects the Minister, or which Derrida directs at Lacan. However, Johnson seeks to explore whether there is a way to interpret *The Purloined Letter* without simply repeating the mechanism of the story. How can one generate an analysis free from the blind spots or flaws that

the next interpreter might exploit to turn the argument against us?

Of course, Johnson's essay is not invulnerable to the logic of *The Purloined Letter*. In Irwin's words,

> In situating her essay as the third in a series of three critical readings, Johnson places herself in that third position which, in the structure governing the wandering of *The Purloined Letter*, is the position of maximum insight, but also the position in which the observer is subject to mistaking his insight concerning the subjective interaction of the other two glances for an objective viewpoint above such interaction. (1176)

However, Johnson begins and ends her essay by acknowledging the problematic nature of her act of analysis. On the very first page, she states: "In the resulting asymmetrical, abyssal structure, no analysis—including this one—can intervene without transforming and repeating other elements in the sequence, which is thus not a stable sequence…" (457). Her conclusion is similarly ambiguous as she reflects on her own methodological position in the final section of her essay: "My own theoretical 'frame of reference' is precisely, to a very large extent, the writings of Lacan and Derrida. The frame is thus framed again by part of its content; the sender again receives his own message backwards from the receiver" (505).

Johnson's self-reflexive analysis may appear to be at odds with itself, yet she highlights this tension before anyone else can point it out. Her ambiguity lies in the fact that, on one hand, she explicitly refuses to participate in the numbers game that Lacan and Derrida engage in against one another. On the other hand, in order to make this blind spot apparent, she must place her own analysis alongside the two earlier critical essays. In this way, Johnson demonstrates that, while she may not be able to stop the return of the message to herself in reverse form, she is able to show the dynamic of the self-reflexive act in analyzing the act of analysis. When the form of her writing demands a conclusion, she writes:

> For if the letter is precisely that which dictates the rhetorical indetermination of any theoretical discourse about it, then the oscillation between unequivocal statements of undecidability and ambiguous assertion of decidability is precisely one of the letter's inevitable effects…'Undecidability' can no more be used as a last word than 'destination.' …The 'undeterminable' is not opposed to the determinable; 'dissemination' is not opposed to repetition. If we would be sure of the difference between the determinable and the undeterminable, the undeterminable would be comprehended within the determinable. What is undecidable is precisely whether a thing is decidable or not. (504)

If "what is undecidable is precisely whether a thing is decidable or not," how should we interpret the final statement in Johnson's essay? How can we validate a conclusive remark like this? In this passage, Johnson delivers a conclusion without offering a definitive one: the final word is

that there is no final word. This self-reflexive statement performs a kind of logical reversal, embodying its own message while simultaneously negating it. It folds back upon itself, revealing the inherent contradiction in the very act of closure. By doing so, Johnson occupies a position that simultaneously embraces both its assertion and its negation, leaving no firm ground on which the conclusion can be definitively challenged or undone.

Conclusion

By examining Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* through the theoretical frameworks of Lacan, Derrida, and Barbara Johnson, this essay has illuminated how their analyses not only reflect the complexities inherent in Poe's narrative but also interrogate and challenge the foundational concepts of critical interpretation and meta-language. Lacan's psychoanalytic approach unveils the intricate interplay between the letter as a signifier and the unconscious desires it represents. Derrida's deconstructive reading exposes the inherent instability of meaning and the impossibility of a fixed interpretation, highlighting the fluidity and contingency of language. Johnson's self-reflexive critique bridges these perspectives, emphasizing the recursive nature of critical analysis and its entanglement with the very structures it seeks to dissect. This study underscores the timeless relevance of Poe's work, demonstrating its enduring impact on literary theory and criticism. Poe's narrative, therefore, serves as a testament to the enduring power of literature to provoke critical thought and inspire ongoing scholarly discourse.

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"Take the fool away": Reimagining Malvolio as The Anti-Clown in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

Nancy Mỹ Nghi La

ABSTRACT

This paper considers a new theoretical and practical approach to understanding unconventional methods of laughter-making in early modern English theatre. It establishes theatrical emotional reciprocity through French philosopher Michel Foucault's theory on heterotopia and argue that theatre audience and their projections play a role in fostering a relationship between theatregoers and actors on stage. Further, this paper examines embodied communication on stage that allow for a new kind of laughter-making where the characters become the joke, instead of merely performing a comedic act. The success of this alternative method of humour-creation is facilitated through mirror neurons in the brain where mirror neurons are activated when the subject observes others' actions. Using the character of Malvolio from *Twelfth Night* as a case study, this paper coins the term "anti-clown" to discuss characters that demonstrate this alternative process to laughter-making and argue that this method expands the role of the clown beyond that of simple comedic providers.

KEYWORDS

Twelfth Night, Malvolio, anti-clown, clowning, mirror neurons, heterotopia, audience empathy.

1. Introduction

Transgression of social class gets its time in the limelight in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* as ambitious Malvolio attempts to (unsuccessfully) move up the social ladder by trying to marry Olivia, his employer. This transgression is met with mixed reception both within the imaginary world of the drama and the real world of the audience. Malvolio is cruelly made fun of for his ambition on stage by the other characters, and yet he is considered a role model for the young men watching him in the playhouse at the Inn's Court, according to the journal of John Manningham, the diarist whose writing is an important primary source in early modern studies. This differential treatment of a transgressive character onstage and offstage can be explained, I argue, by an application of spatial theory, specifically Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia. *Twelfth Night* creates within the playhouse distinctive heterotopic spaces that allow the audience to participate in heterotopic illusion. I further argue for a new way to understand audience empathy in heterotopic illusions through examining Malvolio as an "anti-clown" figure, a term I coin here to describe a new type of clown figure in which dramatic irony and embodied humour are pushed to their limits in order to establish empathy between the character on stage and the audience. By using theories adapted from cognitive science, especially theories on the function of mirror neurons in generating empathy as explored by Jackie Watson and Bruce R. Smith, and in analyzing Malvolio as a clown that undermines stereotypical depictions of the clown figure, I argue that anti-clowning plays a crucial role in creating audience empathy in the playhouse.

2. Heterotopia on the Stage

Using twentieth-century philosophical and theoretical frameworks, including Foucault's heterotopia, early modern dramatic scholars revisit the theatre as a place of political, philosophical, and economic change in Elizabethan and Jacobean stages. As a spatial theory, heterotopia provides an explanation on how imaginary and real spaces are shaped by cultural projections, and how these two distinct spaces interact with each other. Andrew Hiscock, in an exploration of how spatial awareness permeates early modern drama, identifies the mutability of spatial theories in application to various plays (*The Uses of This World)*. From discussions of cultural belonging in *Hamlet* to examination of spatial alienation of Barabas in Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, Hiscock presents case studies of spatial theories to understand the cultural and social shifts that occur in early modern England as these experiences are reflected on the stage. Likewise, the concept of theatre as a heterotopia has been used to describe sociocultural observations—such as gender relations—as reflections of reality, as seen in Adrien Kiernander's analyses of heterotopia in Alma de Groen's play, *The Rivers of China,* where the city of Sydney is reimagined as a place where men played a subservient role to women, a set up

that establishes the city as geographically "familiar but estranged" (Kiernander, 8). From Hiscock to Kiernander, we see that the application of spatial theory to explore otherness on stage is commonly used; however, such applications tend to focus on geographical, economical, or political representations on the stage, rather than focusing on the effect of heterotopia on audience empathy. Application of spatial theory is critical to understand the early modern stage, especially when the stage is presenting acts of social transgressions, as is the case with Malvolio. The theory of heterotopia—especially the heterotopia of illusion—can be mapped onto the discrepancy between what kinds of characters are celebrated off-stage or onstage and the varying way in which these characters are received by their respective audiences. This application then allows us to better understand audience empathy and identification with characters onstage.

In the preface of his 1967 publication *The Order of Things*, Foucault coins the term heterotopia as a response to a passage from Jorge Luis Borges' short story, where a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" describes the categorization of animals:

> Animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) etcetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. (xv)

The existence of "(h) included in the present classification" and "(l) etcetera" within the same category points to the possibility of a space consisting of individual fragments that simultaneously contradict and reflect each other. Foucault considers this possibility a "disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the heteroclite" (*Order of Things,* xvii). To Foucault, heterotopias are spaces, real or imaginary, where multiple fragmented and contradictory possibilities co-exist and influence each other. Heterotopias can also be objects, as shown by Foucault's example of a mirror to discuss the qualities of a heterotopia: "the mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24). Just as the physical quality of the mirror allows it to function as a reflective surface, the nature of heterotopia allows it to function as a reflective site for real and unreal representations; it is a site where intrinsically contradictory ideas and presences co-exist. The theatre, when viewed as a heterotopia, becomes the mirror that Foucault invokes: in the same space and time, it becomes both a site of realistic reflection—manufactured by mimetic modes of

acting and staging—and a site of unreal representation, where a playwright's imagination is the only limit to what can be placed onstage.

3. Heterotopic Illusions in *Twelfth Night*

Foucault has multiple guiding principles for heterotopia, but the one principle that is most pertinent to this paper's discussion is that heterotopias can fall under two categories: one of illusion and one of compensation (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27). The heterotopia of illusion is to "expose every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27). It is this heterotopia of illusion that I map onto the dramatic treatment of Malvolio. The early establishment of the heterotopia of illusion in *Twelfth Night* is through the hostile treatments Malvolio receives from his dramatic counterparts. Sir Toby despises Malvolio because of Malvolio's puritanical attitude towards fun and festivity, as seen in Sir Toby's chastisement of Malvolio: "Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3.106–08).[1] Sir Toby also dislikes Malvolio for thinking he can marry Olivia and become Sir Toby's "kinsman" (2.5.52). Sir Toby's attitude towards Malvolio is one of detestation (and vice-versa), but it greatly contrasts with how the audience sees Malvolio. In John Manningham's diary, he identifies the focus of the play for him, and other young men in the audience, as the following:

> A good practice in it to make the steward believe his lady-widow was in love with him, by counterfeiting a letter as from his lady, in general terms telling him what she liked best in him and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel etc. and then, when he came to practice, making him believe they took him to be mad. (Manningham, 18)

Manningham's focus on Malvolio's role as a steward and not on his ambitions or anti-festivity is a sign of understanding his own social class and Malvolio's position as an employee. "The focus is immediately on 'the steward', the ambitious man—perhaps young—who aims to marry well and who, in order to succeed in life, expects to have to shape his appearance and behaviour to match the requirements of those in authority," writes Jackie Watson, extrapolating from Manningham's diary his singular focus on Malvolio's stewardship of Olivia's household (235). The "good practice" that Manningham references in his diary can also be read as a practical joke that Sir Toby, Maria, Feste, and Sir Andrew play on Malvolio. This joke is (as I will later argue) a part of the anti-clowning that Malvolio participates in to establish audience empathy. Sir Toby and the festive group's negative feelings towards Malvolio is contrasted against the positive, perhaps even idolizing energy from audience members of the Inns of Court off-stage. Positive

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[1] *Twelfth Night, or What You Will,* eds. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (Oxford, Clarendon Press), parenthetical references are to act, scene, and line of this edition.

reception of Malvolio extends beyond the Inns of Court audience, as seen from Charles I's reference to *Twelfth Night* as Malvolio's play in his copy of the Second Folio (Marcus, 54). I suggest that the Inns of Court's audience's projection of their own illusion onto the stage can explain the creation of this heterotopia of illusion. This projection of heterotopic illusion from the audience creates a pathway for reciprocal connections between the character on stage and the audience, especially through what I define as the anti-clown figure that Malvolio is channeling through his actions on stage.

4. The Clown and the Carnival

Before I discuss the anti-clown and its associations with Lent, I will first examine the tradition of the clown figure and trace its role in the carnivalesque reading of Shakespeare's plays. In his work, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*, David Wiles points to the medieval Vice character as the origin of the clown. Wiles' latest tracing of the appearance of a clown figure is to *Mankind,* an anonymous English play written in circa 1470 that features a character called Mischief. This character invents "new games for his companions, and the audience, to play," providing some relief to the intense drama that arises from medieval morality plays (Wiles, 1). "Mischief is at once the villain, whom the audience learn to shun, and the welcome game-maker who makes the play possible," Wiles writes, noting the different audience reactions to a clown in a dramatic production (2). From the beginning of the clown tradition there is a dichotomous treatment of the clown figure from the audience: they welcome him because he brings in laughter and games, but they also reject the clown because he is a Vice figure and a villainous character. Not only is the Vice "the principal comedian" that "dominates the play whenever he is physically present," but he also "has the power to juggle layers of reality" because of his real interactions with the audience in collection of funds for the troupe (Wiles, 2). Wiles notes that "there is no fixed boundary between actor and role," a lack of a fixed boundary that expands to include the relationship between role and audience. As such, clowning is integral to ensure the active participation of the audience (Wiles, 2). As drama evolves and adapts, so too does the role of the clown in drama. From the late medieval to the early modern period, the provincial clown that travelled around in the countryside to put on performances slowly gave way to the urban clown that performed in playhouses built for the purposes of entertainment (Wiles, 12). The clown figure becomes a household servant and a "social climber" that desires social mobility, a theme that Wiles points out early modern dramatists were "keen to explore" (4). Based on the performances of other plays that feature ambitious household servants such as Ithamore in *Jew of Malta*, playwrights such as Marlowe did explore such types of characters and the comedy they brought to the stage.

Actors who took on the clown role also redefined what it means to be a clown figure. One of the most famous clowns to have graced the stages of the early modern playhouses is Richard Tarlton, known for his ability to make people laugh just by poking his head out from behind the stage (Nashe, 188). Tarlton, according to Wiles, redefined the role of the clown by combining elements of the rustic clown to the urban setting (12). Tarlton's ability to make people laugh is well noted throughout primary materials discussing him on stage, from Thomas Nashe to the Queen herself.[2] The term clown then denotes both the type of actor that generates laughter from the audience, and the type of role within a dramatic production that provides comedic relief from the tension of the play.

As noted above, the clown figure and the theatre's festive associations are interconnected. Michael D. Bristol notes that the theatre tradition "objectified and recreated broadly dispersed traditions of collective life that were also represented and disseminated through anonymous festive manifestations such as Carnival" (3–4). Such connection then gives theatre the ability to be intensely critical of social and power structure, as during periods of festival and carnival, social orders are reversed, and power is "demystified" (Bristol, 4). With their connection to the disruptive tradition of carnival, clowns are given the freedom to create disruptions and to speak their minds on subjects that are considered taboo. This is demonstrated in *Twelfth Night* where Feste openly criticizes Olivia mourning her brother's death: "The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your / brother's soul being in heaven. Take away the fool,/ gentlemen," (1.5.65–67). Feste undermines the power dynamic between him and his employer by making fun of her mourning and not giving her the traditional respect one would give to their employer. By using the tradition that gives rise to his role, he has the opportunity to create empathy with the audience who enjoys witnessing the upsetting of power roles in an employer/employee relationship. Through humour and wit, Feste establishes himself as a generator of laughter both for the characters on-stage and for the audience off-stage.

In *Twelfth Night,* Feste and the comic group of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria allegorize the carnival, a period of time when order and boundaries are put aside to entertain jesting and laughter. Ronald Knowles seminal work on the carnivalesque reading of Shakespeare characterises the chaos of carnival:

> Carnival turns the world upside down. Hierarchies are reversed and suspended. Clothes are worn back to front. Comic crownings and uncrownings take place. Fools become kings, lords of misrule preside, boy bishops are elected, and so on. Bawdy is the outspoken language of the lower body, and sacred parody dethrones the hieratic. Carnival

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[2] See Nashe, 188. Also see Duncan-Jones, 20.

folk-laughter is egalitarian, and derision, not death, is the great leveller. (Knowles, "Introductions", 6).

The carnival and the clown figure go hand-in-hand in their performance of festivity on stage. Feste upsets the social dynamic within the play in his clowning much like the carnival tradition. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's preoccupation with consumption of liquor and bawdy jokes— "Accost , Sir Andrew, accost"—mirrors the lack of regard for propriety of carnival (1.3.45). On the surface, *Twelfth Night* is a performance of the carnivalesque. However, such a simplistic reading of the play restricts the potential of clowning (or, as I will later argue, anti-clowning) from other characters. It is not only Carnival that can upset social and political order, but also Lent, which through the figure of the anti-clown can function as a disruptor of power structures.

5. The Anti-Clown and Lent[3]

The anti-clown figure's departure from the original clown character comes from a subversion of the type of comedy deployed to connect with the audience, and the resistance of playing the role of comedic relief for the main plot of the play. In comparison to Feste's obvious clowning with his costumes and wordplay, Malvolio as the anti-clown figure deploys a sense of austerity and sobriety so seriously implemented that it is unintentionally comedic and yet equally as critical of the inherent social order as the original clown figure. The anti-clown, unlike the clown counterpart, asserts social order and propriety. Yet because they come from the same tradition, the anti-clown, in their assertion of social order, exposes and disrupts the power dynamics of the play.

Malvolio's anti-clowning is found partly in the production of his fantasies, and the embodiment of such fantasies on the stage. Unlike Feste's traditional form of clowning, where he deploys wordplay and wit as part of his clowning purposes, Malvolio the anti-clown reasserts comedy through embodiment. We hear of this embodied comedy second hand from Maria, who notes, "He has been yonder I' the sun practicing / behaviour to his own shadow this half-hour. Observe him, for the love of mockery," (2.5.14–16). The audience is asked to participate in this comedic moment through the invitation to "Observe him", and Malvolio's pretensions thus become mutually entertaining for Maria and the audience. Malvolio's performance here is comedic in a manner similar to a clown performing a jig to an audience, only this time, Malvolio's "practicing behaviour" is to his own shadow. There is no intended audience for such an act, yet it is still indirectly placed in the spotlight by Maria. Such indirect and unintentional humour is as effective in eliciting laugher from the audience as the traditional clowning that

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[3] Lent is a 40-day period in the Christian tradition when preparations are made to reflection on Jesus' resurrection. Believers would fast, practice almsgiving, and adhere by strict behaviour regulations during Lent.

Feste performs, as heard in the audiences' laughter in live productions of *Twelfth Night*.[4] Malvolio continues to build his fantasy in earnest: "To be Count Malvolio!/ … / Having been three months married to her, / sitting in my state— /… / Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown, having come for a day-bed where I have left Olivia sleeping," (2.5.32, 41–42, 44–46). This is an example of Malvolio's anti-clown act, where he points out the underlying power structure within the play—the dynamic between a Count and his "officers"—while making the audience laugh along. He uses the language of embodiment, "*sitting* in my state," and in many instances of live productions, the actor playing Malvolio actually sits down while saying these lines. Unlike Feste's clowning, where he uses jokes and wordplay for a comedic effect, Malvolio's anti-clowning is done by him *embodying* the joke. The difference between a clown and an anti-clown is in their intentions: the former intentionally makes fun of and criticizes a social structure to disrupt it, using words and wit for comedic effect, while the latter criticizes that same structure with their affirmation and belief in it, creating comedy by embodying the joke and becoming it.

While the clown figure can stand separate from the narrative of the play, the anti-clown is confined to the play, therefore making the unintentional criticism from the anti-clown even more effective. As Bristol notes, "Feste, like all fools, is in a situation of enhanced understanding because he has experienced the 'other side.' In addition to his role within the narrative, he is also a chorus who stands outside it and draws attention to what the other characters do not 'know'" (Bristol, 141). Feste is introduced to the audience by Maria, who notes his absence and return to the household at the beginning of the play: "Nay, either tell me where thou hast been or I will / not open my lips so wide as a bristle may enter in way of / thy excuse. My lady will hang thee for thy absence" (1.5.1–3). On the contrary, Malvolio's presence within the household is fixed due to his role as steward of the house, and this omnipresence in the house is highlighted when he interrupts Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's late-night partying (2.3.81). This interruption of festivities mirrors the effect of Lent. As the calendrical period of festivities end after the Twelve Nights, the period of Lent, and the restriction and fasting that comes with it, begins. By having Malvolio interrupt the party, Shakespeare effectively gives Malvolio an association with Lent, and thereby associates the anti-clown figure with Lent. Despite the fact that both types of clown acts result in audience laughter, the figure of the clown is seen as one of festival and carnival, while the anti-clown, with its firm belief in social order and structure, is strongly associated with the restrictive, anti-festive period of Lent. The anti-clown's association to Lent leads to its lack of

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[4] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night,* directed by Tim Carrol (2012; London: Globe on Screen), 1:12:51. Hereafter cited parenthetically Globe 2012 with timestamps in recording. *Twelfth Night,* directed by Simon Godwin (2017: London: National Theatre), 1:03:32. Hereafter cited parenthetically NT 2017 with timestamps in recording.

popularity, which causes its existence to be overshadowed by the festive clown. The anti-clown can generate laughter as much as a clown can, but because of the anti-clown's subversive form of humour through embodiment, he does not register to the audience as a type of clown. This lack of recognition brings us to the main question that summarizes Ralph Berry's article on the audience's participation in act 2 scene 5 of *Twelfth Night*: how can the audience enjoy the comedy of *Twelfth Night* while they are ridden by the guilt they feel for laughing at Malvolio making a fool out of himself? (112) Since Malvolio is not recognized as a type of clown, he becomes a victim to the comic group's practical jokes. However, in recognizing Malvolio as the anti-clown, we see that he serves a comedic function in criticizing the social structure he exists in; laughing at him is the intended effect, because he embodies the joke.

6. Malvolio as the Anti-Clown and Heterotopic Illusions

Malvolio's peak anti-clowning act occurs when he embodies the heterotopic illusions he creates, where he achieves the title of Count through marriage to Olivia. Similar to many young, learned men of his time, Malvolio wishes to capitalize on his proximity to nobles and social elites, afforded to him through his education (Smith, "Introductions", 2). Malvolio, by tapping into these illusions, exposes the "group of similarly educated men, often of middling rank, with the ambition to marry well and to secure preferment" in the real space of the playhouse (Watson, 226). Malvolio plays out how he, in his illusory identity as Count Malvolio, would change the way he interacts with people and environment around him, in what I argue is an act of anti-clowning:

> And then to have the humour of state and—
> After a *demure travel of regard*, *telling them I know my*
> *place, as I would they should do theirs*—to ask for my
> kinsman Toby
> ……………………………….
> Seven of my people with an obedient start
> Make out for him. *I frown the while, and perchance*
> *Wind up my watch, or play with my—some rich jewel*.
> Toby approaches; curtsies there to me. (2.5.49–52, 55–58; emphasis added)

The description of how Malvolio will uphold himself, with a "demure travel of regard" while fiddling with his accessories, is part of the illusion that Shakespeare is drawing for the audience in this heterotopia on the stage (Globe 2012, 1:15:52–1:16:02.). It is also, as I have established in the section above, an element of anti-clowning. In creating this illusion, Malvolio reaffirms the social dynamics that initially subjected him to the role of stewardship in the first place. The

embodiment of the illusion ("I frown the while") is Malvolio's anti-clown act in *Twelfth Night.* The interconnectedness of the heterotopic illusion and the anti-clown act is evident in *Twelfth Night,* but as I previously argued, the anti-clown act can take any form of embodiment that indirectly criticizes the political, economical, and societal structures of the play. It is in the embodiment of other identities that we find the anti-clown.

The climax of this heterotopia of illusion—the moment the audience is triggered into feeling empathy for Malvolio—happens at the moment Malvolio is on the edge of *being* the joke:

'Jove knows I love,

But who?

Lips do not move,

No man must know.'

'No man must know.' What follows? The numbers

altered. 'No man must know.' *If this should be thee,*

Malvolio? (2.5.92–98; emphasis added.)

The audience, in this moment, is witnessing Malvolio's embodiment of a practical joke. This embodiment stems from a certain flexibility that allows Malvolio to pick up various identities, such as a Count, which are then presented to the audience as a subversion of power dynamics. David Ellis' comment on Malvolio's inflexibility and inadaptability as a source of comedy becomes short-sighted (121). As seen above, Malvolio has the flexibility and adaptability to be somebody else; he can "practice behaviour" that he witnesses from others, and he can project other identities onto himself (3.2.64–77). This flexibility is, I argue, a remnant from the clown figure from which the anti-clown is derived. Malvolio fulfills his role as the anti-clown by being adaptable to his environment, and it is this adaptability that builds the audience's empathy for him, especially the audience at the Inns of Court in 1602 watching *Twelfth Night* as part of their Candlemas revels.

Another form of Malvolio's anti-clowning through embodiment is from the way he changes his clothes and facial expression in an attempt to presume a different identity. We hear of his transformation second-hand from Maria and Sir Toby in act 3 scene 2, but the full effect of the behavioural change settles in full force when Olivia sees Malvolio's new version of himself. Upon being summoned, Malvolio greets Olivia: "Sweet lady, ho, ho!" (3.4.17) In the footnotes of their edition of the play, Warren and Wells indicate that "ho, ho!" also acts as a direction for Malvolio to smile and laugh.[5] A change of dress and demeanour are also signals of anti-clowning through embodiment, as Malvolio physically and behaviourally changes and morphs into the joke

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[5] See *Twelfth Night,* 170, footnote regarding line 3.4.17.

played on him. In the play-text, the effect of the cross-garter and yellow stockings does not translate well through monochrome pages, but the 2012 original practice production of *Twelfth Night* emphasizes the comedic result of Malvolio's embodiment (Globe 2012, 1:46:46). While Olivia's rise in tone and emphasis at the end of delivering the line, "How now, Malvoli-oh" certainly add to the comedic effect of Malvolio's anti-clowning, the audience's laughter has already begun before Olivia starts saying her lines (Globe 2012, 1:46:54). Upon seeing Malvolio in his new garb, the audience breaks into laughter, and thus creates an opportunity for us to explore audience empathetic connections to theatrical representations.

7. Mirror Neurons and Audience Homogeneity in the Early Productions of *Twelfth Night*

As the stage is presenting Malvolio's anti-clowning, the audience is affected empathically by his embodied humour. This empathy is shown through not only John Manningham's well-known diary entry where he discusses watching *Twelfth Night* with fellow Inns of Court members, but also in the audiences' response in the live adaptations this paper previously mentioned. The empathy that audiences feel for Malvolio can be explained by the presence of mirror neuron, a discover Watson explores in her article on sensual language in *Twelfth Night* and its effect in triggering empathy. The discovery of mirror neurons in macaque monkeys in the 1990s and the suggestion of mirror neurons' presence in the human brain in the early 2000s present a new approach in considering how humans react to movements, and how such reactions are related to emotions (Watson, 227). Mirror neurons are activated when a person engages in action, but they also fire when the person observes similar action being done by another person (Rizzolatti, 419). When the human brain perceives action, whether it be "transitive" (physical movements that the brain can perceive), or "intransitive" (hidden movements that the brain cannot perceive), the brain is triggered by the action as if it had acted out those actions itself (Watson, 227).[6] This discovery is critical in dramatic studies, as it can be used to explain the intricate relationships between audience and actors on stage. This theory can also be deployed in understanding intra-audience effects. An audience member does not exist in isolation; their presence in the playhouse (whether contemporary or early modern) is inherently communal, and therefore an audience member's reaction can affect other audience members' perceptions as well as what they are seeing on stage. Recent scholarship by Bruce R. Smith applies mirror neurons in understanding the proportionality of "trans-body experiences" in theatre, and why such experiences are so significant to the audience. Smith notes the intricate relationship between witnessing and becoming in the context of the playhouse, as mediated by mirror neurons:

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[6] See also Duncan.

Recent experiments in neuroscience have demonstrated how so-called "mirror neurons" cause spectators to feel in their own bodies what they are witnessing in a virtual space, namely a space that presents itself as reality, and functions as reality, but is not itself real. Theatre stages are signal examples of such spaces. (Smith, "Framing Shakespeare's Senses", 31)

The existence of mirror neurons then bridges the gap between witnessing an actor's embodiment of certain roles and their emotions and the audience's reaction to witnessing this. Following this line of thought, performance viewing is not a passive consumption of the actor's talents; it is an active bodily experience that neurologically triggers somatic responses within the audience. As Watson notes, "while watching a play, members of the audience would have a stronger neural reaction to emotions they have already experienced'" (229). These strong neural reactions can include empathetic and physical responses, as noted by Rizzolatti and Craighero (Rizzolatti and Craighero, 107). In Rizzolatti's recent book compiling two decades' worth of mirror neuron research, he notes the existence of mirror neurons in areas of the brain that control responses such as laughter, fear, and disgust. From reviewing various human experiments, Rizzolatti proposes that mirror neurons, scattered throughout various regions of the brain, can trigger specific reactions that respond to what is being observed (Rizzolati and Sinigaglia, 123). One such reaction is laughter; a reaction that is of abundance in the audience of *Twelfth Night*. It is in this laughter that we see the audience's empathetic response towards Malvolio and his anti-clown act that embodies the joke of the play.

Informed by research on mirror neurons, we see that Malvolio's embodied act of anti-clowning takes on new importance: evoking empathy from the audience. While characters on-stage detest Malvolio for his social transgression, the audience off-stage feels a sense of empathy for him because they witness his *becoming* of a joke as the anti-clown. From the entries of Manningham's diary written immediately before and after watching *Twelfth Night*, we know that the audience which included Manningham was a crowd of ambitious young men who shared the same fear, anxiety, and hope as Malvolio. Manningham's diary consists mostly of gossip about the financial states of the young men around him, which we can interpret is the preoccupation of those in his social circle. In an entry three weeks before he went to see *Twelfth Night,* Manningham writes about a young man and his wife's financial state:

Mr. Fr. Vane, a yong gent. Of great hope and forwardness, verry well affected in the country already, in soe much that the last parliament the country gave him the place of knight before Sr. H. Nevell; his possiblitie of lving by his wife verry much, shee beinge daughter and co-heir to Sr. Antony Mildmay; and thought hir mother will gibe hir all hir inheritance alsoe; the father worth 3,000ℓ. per annum, the mother's 1,200ℓ (13).

The established preoccupation with other young men's financial positions then points to a homogenous audience at the 1602 production of *Twelfth Night*. Their homogeneity stems from similar educational, professional, and financial aspirations. Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill, in *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama: 1558-1642*, caution against establishing a "homogenic" audience, as the results can be reductive by grouping diverse individuals into one cluster, but I argue, as did Watson in her essay, that the 1602 audience gives us the best chance at understanding audience empathy because of their homogeneity (Low and Myhill, 10). The young men in the audience all went to the same school, received the type of education, and have similar if not identical career paths after their time at the Inns of Court (Watson, 226). Low and Myhill's argument, while understandably cautious, does not apply to the 1602 audience. As Watson notes:

> In terms of gender, age, social position, intellect, and transgressive instincts, then, the playgoers surrounding Manningham form as cohesive an in-group as a modern literary scholar can envisage in the early modern period. As sensory response is contingent on variables such as these as well as on historical period, this cohesion is important if one is to draw any substantive conclusions about their likely response to a staged play. (226–27)

The homogeneity of the 1602 audience lends itself to such grouping, and to not capitalize on this homogeneity out of caution for generalization will lead to a missed opportunity to study historical audience response to drama. In contrast, my analysis here does avoid the grouping of the contemporary audience. From live production recordings, the only factor that I can address is the collective response from the contemporary audience: their laughter at certain comedic moments in the play. This laughter is the physical manifestation of audience empathy that stems from the activation of mirror neurons, which are triggered by watching Malvolio's embodied anti-clowning on-stage.

Conclusion

The establishment of heterotopia within the dramatic world of *Twelfth Night* and the real world of the audience, both contemporary and historical, lead to the necessity of creating a new type of clown: the anti-clown. The contradictory notion of heterotopia makes it an ideal theoretical framework to consider the theatre, a space where, at any given moment, there are two distinct realities simultaneously in conversation with each other. The reality of the stage, created by the imagination of the playwright, and the projections of the audience based on their own perception of the world, are all reflected in and contained by the heterotopia of the theatre. Specifically, it is the heterotopia of illusion that this paper is concerned with, as it is an explanation for the widely differently way Malvolio is treated, onstage and offstage. In the dramatic world onstage, Malvolio is treated with disdain by the comic group, comprised of Sir

Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, Feste, and Fabian, because of his interruptions in their merry-making and his ambition in wanting to transgress social boundaries by marrying Olivia. This negative treatment is contrasted by how the audience in the historical 1602 audience would have perceived a character like Malvolio. From analyzing John Manningham's diary entry where he recorded his thoughts on a "steward" in Malvolio's position, this paper extrapolates that there is an illusory projection from the audience towards Malvolio onstage. This projection creates a necessity to discuss the method through which audience empathy is established. I argue that by viewing Malvolio as a different type of clown, an anti-clown, we can further understand how audience members and characters onstage interact with each other in the heterotopia of illusion.

While stemming from the same type of Carnival tradition of misrule and subversion of social structures, the anti-clown departs from the clown in how the physical way their humour manifests. The social and economic questions that *Twelfth Night* poses set the perfect stage for Malvolio anti-clowning, and the practical jokes played on Malvolio—and his embodiment of those jokes—makes him the perfect textbook anti-clown. Unlike a typical clown character with its Carnival associations and affinity for misrule, the anti-clown is associated with Lent and the adherence to order and power structure. However, in its effect to reaffirm the power structure in which it exists, it calls to question the stability of such structures and undermines them. Such is the role of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night,* where his embodiment of the joke played upon him is a criticism of the social class system that confines him. The physical embodiment of being a joke sets the anti-clown apart from a typical clown; and it is in witnessing such physical transformation that the audience feels empathy for the anti-clown. The neurological mechanism that explains this phenomenon is the presence of mirror neurons in the brain. Mirror neurons are triggered by action is performed and when action is perceived. When action is perceived by the brain, the mirror neurons that resides in specific parts of the brain that control emotions and empathy are activated. Connecting this cognitive science perspective to Malvolio's anti-clowning elucidates the reasons behind the audience's responses to transgressive characters, bringing to light on the emotional effects of theatre and performance.

This paper demonstrates that an application of the anti-clown aids in the understanding of audience empathetic responses. The anti-clown can provide a different way to theorize about early modern drama and its effect on audiences, historical or contemporary. Likewise, the discovery of mirror neurons and its role in generating empathy is crucial in dramatic and performance studies. Awareness and application of this neurological phenomenon onto early modern dramatic studies gives us an opportunity to understand the empathetic and cognitive responses from the audience members, an often-overlooked topic in dramatic studies.

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In *Narratives and Narrators*, Gregory Currie offers a sophisticated philosophical investigation into the nature of narrative and narration, challenging existing theories while constructing his own comprehensive framework for understanding how stories work. This ambitious project succeeds in bringing analytical clarity to several contentious issues in narrative theory, though some of its conclusions may prove controversial.

In his preface, Currie states that he aims to write an account to the approach of narrative he favors, which is philosophical—avoiding history or narrative structures. His central thesis is that narrative should be understood philosophically, as a cognitive activity rather than merely a textual feature. He argues, rather convincingly I might add, that narratives are fundamentally about agency and mental states, suggesting that our ability to engage with stories draws upon the same cognitive mechanisms we use to understand human behavior in everyday life. This is a bold claim. The typical psychological/cognitive approach seems evident. But Curries is more of an epistemological claim, since it deals with how we acquire and process knowledge/understanding through cognitive mechanisms. To that end, this perspective allows him to sidestep some traditional problems in narrative theory while opening up productive new lines of inquiry.

Methodologically, Currie's approach is impressive. Each chapter builds carefully on previous arguments, and potential

objections are anticipated and addressed thoughtfully. The use of examples from both high literature and popular culture helps ground the theoretical discussions in concrete cases. Perhaps the book's strongest contribution lies in its rigorous analysis of unreliability in narration. Currie develops a sophisticated account that treats unreliability not as a binary property but as existing along multiple dimensions. Drawing on examples from literature and film, he demonstrates how unreliability can manifest in a narrator's facts, interpretations, or evaluations. Calling these "narration from an ironic point of view," he highlights examples through text and film, notable Hitchcock's *The Birds.* His discussion of how readers detect and process unreliability is particularly illuminating, incorporating insights from cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind.

Currie's treatment of the relationship between authors, characters, and narrators is another highlight. He argues against the common view that all narratives necessarily have narrators, instead proposing a more nuanced account that distinguishes between different types of narrative presentation. This leads to a compelling discussion of free indirect discourse and its implications for our understanding of narrative perspective. Currie posits what he calls a new way of looking at the character-narrative binary. This is where his project becomes a bit controversial. Though I hinted at the outset of this review his analysis relies less on psychology than on philosophy, it is here where Currie's reliance on the former arises. He's not as confident in this realm, however. Warily drawing from cognitive psychology, he claims Character is simply a cognitive illusion. Thus, according to this claim, there exist strong, independent reasons to believe in Character; Currie suggests that we do not. And if there is some reason to doubt the existence of Character, or, if as he says to doubt well-entrenched assumptions about Character's role in our lives, then the problem arises as to whether our belief in it is not founded on evidence but has something to do with the fit between narrative and Character.

The book's engagement with empirical research in psychology and cognitive science is both a strength and a potential weakness. While this interdisciplinary approach yields valuable insights, some of the experimental evidence Currie cites feels preliminary, and one wonders how well it will stand the test of time. Also, some readers may find Currie's dismissal of poststructuralist approaches to narrative too swift. While his commitment to analytical clarity is admirable, there are moments when his framework seems ill-equipped to handle the full complexity of experimental narratives that deliberately resist traditional notions of agency and reliability.

The implications of Currie's account extend beyond literary theory into broader questions about human cognition and social understanding. His suggestion that narrative comprehension relies on the same mental mechanisms we use for real-world social understanding has interesting

implications for both cognitive science and literary studies. One notable omission is sustained engagement with non-Western narrative traditions, which might have provided valuable test cases for Currie's theoretical framework. Additionally, while his account of narrative understanding is sophisticated, it sometimes seems to presuppose a rather idealized rational agent as its reader.

Despite these limitations, *Narratives and Narrators* represents a major contribution to our understanding of how stories work and how we engage with them. Currie's lucid prose and careful argumentation make complex ideas accessible without sacrificing rigor. The book succeeds in its ambitious goal of developing a comprehensive philosophical account of narrative and narration, even if some of its conclusions remain debatable. It sets a high standard for work in this field and will likely influence discussions of narrative theory for years to come. Currie's work will be attractive to philosophers of literature and narrative theorists, while also offering some (perhaps more limited) insights to cognitive scientists interested in story comprehension and social understanding.