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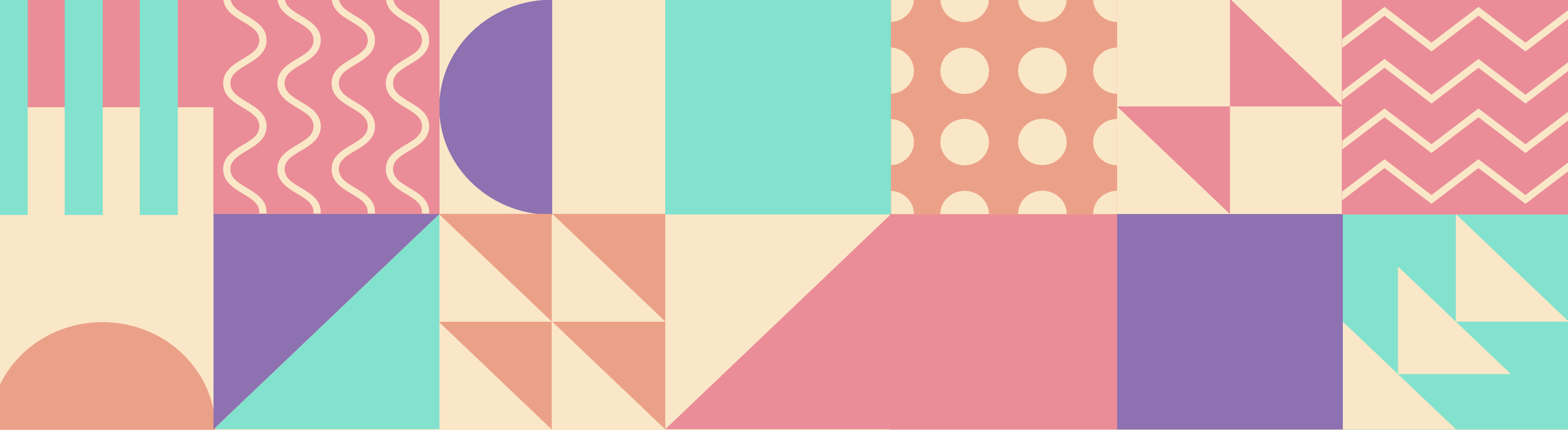

# 01

Mila Bikić

## Trauma and Intertextuality in Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

At the peak of the #MeToo movement, women across the globe shared their experiences of sexual abuse and exposed men who misused their positions of power to abuse and silence women. *My Dark Vanessa*, a novel published in 2020 by American author Kate Elizabeth Russell, tells the story of Vanessa Wye, whose high school professor, Jacob Strane, sexually abuses her and is accused of sexual assault by a former student of his. The novel was written for her creative writing PhD degree and examines the concept of consent, memory, and victimhood (Sturges). However, these topics have already been tackled in the past in works of fiction such as Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita*, which served as an inspiration for Russell's novel. This paper explores the intertextuality between Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa*, focusing on their approaches to trauma and sexual abuse. Through an analysis of narrative techniques and parallels, it argues that while both novels address similar themes, they diverge significantly in their portrayal of trauma, with *My Dark Vanessa* favouring a psychological approach to this topic. The analysis begins with a brief outline of Nabokov's *Lolita* and its cultural context. Next, the #MeToo movement is examined, and *My Dark Vanessa* is analysed through the lens of these events. Afterwards, Russell's novel is examined as an intertextual work of fiction, by presenting examples of intertextuality that are present in the novel, focusing on the usage of *Lolita* as a plot device. Furthermore, the employment of non-linear storytelling to depict trauma is presented as the most significant divergence of *My Dark Vanessa* from *Lolita* and trauma theory is applied to Russell's novel on the chapters set in 2017.

Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* tells the story of a middle-aged literature professor's obsession with Lolita, a 12-year-old girl named Dolores Haze. The novel begins with a preface written by Doctor John Ray Junior who presents the story as a memoir written by the late pseudonymous Humbert Humbert, who is imprisoned and awaiting trial for murder (Nabokov 79–81). It is assumed that the text of *Lolita* is written as a defence-speech he plans to read during trial, which he addresses to the trial's jury (Tamir-Ghez 71). In 1998, Random House's Modern Library division listed *Lolita* as the 4$^{th}$ most important novel of the 20$^{th}$ century (Connolly "Lolita's Afterlife" 141). However, the popularization of the concept of the "nymphet" and the change of meaning of the name "Lolita" bear witness to the transcendence of Lolita from the literary world to mass culture (168). "Nymphets" is Humbert Humbert's elevated denotation of "occurring" maidens aged between nine and fourteen "who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they are, reveal their true nature, which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac)" (Nabokov 91). In view of this, "nymphet" signifies female children who paedophiles such as Humbert himself are infatuated with. Moreover, Connolly alludes to the dictionary definitions of "Lolita", which define the term as "a sexually precocious" or "precociously seductive young girl", and state Nabokov's *Lolita* as the origin of such meaning ("Lolita's Afterlife" 168). Journalists use the term "Lolita" to denote any young female who might be involved with an older man. In Japan, the term "Lolita" signifies a fashion style and "lolicon" signifies an attraction to young girls ("Lolita's Afterlife" 168–189). Patnoe highlights a lack of

recognition among critics of the harm inflicted upon the character of Lolita, which corresponds with the prevalent issue of an excessively sexualized portrayal of the character in the media. Most critics do not discuss trauma in *Lolita*, but if they do, it is a discussion focused on Humbert's trauma, instead on trauma inflicted on Lolita or on the reader by Humbert Humbert (Patnoe 87).

Russell's exploration of a sexual relationship between an English literature professor and his underage pupil in her 2020 debut novel *My Dark Vanessa* is presented from the point of view of a survivor of child sexual abuse, the titular Vanessa Wye. The book portrays the abusive acts committed by Professor Strane and the resulting trauma experienced by Vanessa, while also highlighting the significance of the #MeToo movement for survivors of sexual abuse. To achieve this, Russell's novel utilizes a fragmented timeline, purposefully rejecting chronological linearity. Non-linearity in literature refers to the use of non-linear narrative structures or storytelling techniques where the events of the story are not presented in chronological order. Instead, the narrative may employ analepses and prolepses, feature multiple perspectives, or employ other unconventional methods to convey the story (Herman 57). By interweaving Vanessa's high school experiences from 2000 and 2001 with the events at the height of the #MeToo movement in 2017, Russell compels readers to confront the lasting effects of trauma and the intricate nature of memory.

In an article for *The Guardian*, Zinovieff argues that the movement was caused by a change in attitudes to the meaning of sexual consent. Formerly, sexual abuse of children would often be overlooked, but the movement caused victims to recognise themselves in stories of sexual abuse and offered a platform for their experiences to finally be heard (Zinovieff). This atmosphere of the #MeToo movement is intricately captured in *My Dark Vanessa* in the chapters that are set in 2017. Russell sets the tone of her novel by focusing the opening chapter with a fictional Facebook post written by Taylor Birch, another survivor of Professor Strane's sexual abuse. This Facebook post, in which Taylor recounts her experiences at Browick, causes a chain reaction which ends in Strane's suicide and Vanessa's re-evaluation of her past with Professor Strane. In the novel, Russell comments on the seemingly never-ending number of exposés that were emerging at the height of the movement:

> "Let me guess," she says, "another abuser exposed."
>
> I look up from my phone, my limbs cold.
>
> "It's just so endless, isn't it?" She gives a sad smile. "There is no escape." (Russell 16)

This conversation between Vanessa and her psychiatrist Ruby calls attention to the "endless" victims of sexual abuse who are at that moment shar-

ing their stories through social media. These victims remind us of the magnitude of this problem and call attention to how widespread it is. According to Tambe, the initial wave of the #MeToo movement was, in fact a viral phenomenon, with over half a million retweets of the hashtag within the first twenty-four hours, and reached the Facebook and Twitter feeds of people in Sweden, India, Japan, and other areas of the globe. Ultimately, it led to resignations of influential cis-men held responsible for such sexual misconduct. The public opinion of such allegations shifted from disbelief to the support of survivors (Tambe 197–198).

The similarities between *Lolita* and *My Dark Vanessa* are not coincidental but are of intertextual nature – in the disclaimer of her novel, Russell states that woven into the novel are her "own complicated feelings towards *Lolita*" (Russell 6). According to Landwehr, the term intertextuality was coined by Kristeva in 1966 and serves "as an alternative strategy to studying literary texts that would serve as an antidote to historically oriented approaches" (2). It generally connotes the structural relations between two or more texts, and assumes that by studying intertextuality, one "can uncover an author's intentions, the sources of his/her ideas, and responses of contemporary readers" (2). Both novels explore themes of inappropriate relations, manipulation, and power dynamics between an older man and a younger girl. Moreover, the most prominent instance of intertextuality between the two novels is the usage of Nabokov's *Lolita* as a plot device to manipulate young Vanessa. To establish a connection with Vanessa, who aspires to become an author, Professor Strane uses his literary knowledge. He assigns her books by authors he considers relevant to Vanessa: Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay (Russell 40–41). Vanessa understands that Strane's gesture of giving her books was a ploy to show interest: "I start to realize the point isn't really whether I like the books; it's more about him giving me different lenses to see myself through. The poems are clues to help me understand why he's so interested, what is it that he sees in me" (Russell 41). In this quote, Vanessa reflects upon the books Professor Strane assigned her to read and realizes that each of them shares a woman with red hair: Plath's "Lady Lazarus", the red hair of Dickinson and Millay. Professor Strane does not shy away from this as he points out that "Lady Lazarus" reminded him of Vanessa, and that Millay "was a red-haired girl from Maine" (Russell 41), exactly as Vanessa. This act of exchanging literature becomes a form of intimacy between them and culminates as Professor Strane lends her his copy of Nabokov's *Lolita* (Russell 69). Vanessa soon realises that this story of "a seemingly ordinary girl who is really a deadly demon in disguise" (Russell 70) signifies Strane's wish to advance their relationship from platonic to sexual – that he is Humbert, and she is his Dolores (Russell 71).

Patnoe suggests that "the source of misreadings of *Lolita* is the reader, who is extratextual because he or she is outside the text of Lolita, intertextual because he or she lives between the narratives and images that bolster the misreadings of Lolita, and intratextual as he or she, submerged in these larger influences of cultures and intertextuality, brings them to Lolita so thoroughly that they

become, for that reader, a real part of the Lolita text" (Patnoe 84). When applied to Vanessa's misreading of *Lolita*, it provides insight into why Vanessa, rather than perceiving the book as a cautionary tale, interprets it as a declaration of love. Before receiving *Lolita*, Vanessa already develops feelings towards Strane, a notion she brings into the novel as she reads it for the first time. One can also argue that through the act of child grooming, Strane influenced Vanessa to be susceptible to misinterpreting *Lolita*. It's worth noting that both Lolita and Vanessa are manipulated through the power dynamic inherent in teaching, where the abusers find themselves in positions of authority. This is a pattern the #MeToo movement acknowledges and fights against – it gave victims a way to better communicate this type of abuse, whereas before the movement, in case an individual in a position of authority touched their assistant in an inappropriate manner, this type of behaviour would often be brushed off as merely a "mistake" (Arjun et al. 37).

The first act of sexual intercourse in the novels can also be read as intertextual, as both acts are feature a dynamic wherein the minor is tricked that they are in control, despite asymmetrical power balances. According to Patnoe, Humbert's account of their first sexual intercourse can be interpreted in two ways: one can accept Humbert's claim that Lolita seduced him and initiated the intercourse, or one can challenge this perspective by imagining the act from Lolita's viewpoint. Humbert strives to portray Lolita as knowledgeable and experienced, making presumptions with him and directing the intercourse. However, this is his attempt to justify and convince "the jury" that what he did was acceptable, even though he was in a position of power and committed an act of sexual misconduct (Patnoe 90–92). In a similar vein, as their relationship becomes sexual, Strane swiftly convinces Vanessa that she is in control. Yet, Vanessa questions this notion, as she is aware that being in control does not necessarily mean that she is not forced and that she can say no. She wonders whether he genuinely believes that she is controlling the situation, as thus far, he has been the one making advances on her (Russell 84–85). This lack of control is visible in their first night together:

> For everything he does, he asks permission. "Can I?" before pulling the pajama top all the way over my head. "Is this ok?" before pushing my underwear over, slipping a finger inside so quickly that, for a moment, I'm stunned and my body plays dead. After a while he starts asking permission after he's already done the thing he's asking about. "Can I?" he asks, meaning can he tug the pajama shorts down, but they're already off. (Russell 91)

This excerpt exemplifies that Strane is the person in power in every given circumstance: initially he asks Vanessa to consent, but he never waits for a confirmation. His questions appear more as announcements, rather than inquiries. Later, the questions do not serve any purpose, as the acts in question have already been executed. After this, Vanessa falls asleep and when she wakes,

Strane assaults her. Similarly to the previously mentioned case, he asks for her consent, but does not necessitate a reply, and despite her tears, thrusts himself against her (Russell 93–94). As she is leaving his house, he asks whether she's overwhelmed, but she is apprehensive to admit her negative feelings about what transpired and that the act felt forced (Russell 95). This illustrates that Vanessa is subconsciously aware that she was sexually assaulted, but she is not mature enough to fully comprehend what transpired.

Furthermore, the title *My Dark Vanessa* is a reference to Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*: "Come and be worshiped, come and be caressed, / My dark Vanessa" (Russell 112). Strane presents Vanessa with *Pale Fire* after they start having sexual relations. According to McHale, *Pale Fire* is "a text of absolute epistemological uncertainty" (18) and likewise features narratorial unreliability, but pushes the boundaries established in the tradition of radically unreliable modernist narrators, to which *Lolita*'s Humbert Humbert belongs, by not being able to determine exactly how or to what extent the narrator is radically unreliable. Strane openly comments on the "uncanny" similarity between Vanessa Wye and the fictious Vanessa from *Pale Fire*. She describes seeing her name in the novel as "a loss of control" (Russell 112), an element she never had in their relationship.

Moreover, noteworthy similarity can be discerned between Humbert's nymphet theory and Strane's perspective regarding girls aged fourteen to sixteen. In a conversation with Vanessa, Strane remarks: "Girls become real so early. Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. That's when your minds turn on. It's a gorgeous thing to witness" (Russell 123). Strane's view of adolescent girls alludes to Humbert's theory of nymphets, which suggests that certain "chosen" girls aged nine to fourteen of "nymphic" origin, seduce significantly older men (Nabokov 91), but it is merely an excuse for Humbert's paedophilic behaviour. Vanessa points out the striking resemblance between Strane's words and Humbert's, but Strane denies any wrongdoing and insists that he no paedophile. He accuses Vanessa of understanding the book too literally and insists that he is not her Humbert from *Lolita*. Additionally, Strane stipulates his point by commenting on Vanessa's appearance and insisting that she is "fairly developed" (Russell 124), implying that she has already begun to mature physically and is more of a woman than a child. This comment strikes Vanessa as both flattering and uncomfortable, as it underscores the fact that Strane regards her through a sexual lens.

The parallels between Vanessa's life and the life of Lolita in Nabokov's novel are so striking that the lines between the narratives of *My Dark Vanessa* and *Lolita* are blurred. In a chapter that takes place in 2006, while discussing her capstone literature project with her professor, Henry, Vanessa proposes a paper on the topic of Shakespeare's influence on *Lolita*. She lists specific examples, such as "the virginal symbolism of Othello's strawberry handkerchief and the strawberry-print pajamas Humbert gives Lo" (Russell 251). What Vanessa does not realise immediately is that she herself is the receiver of those strawberry pyjamas, not

Lolita. This mix-up puts an emphasis on the degree to which Vanessa has internalized the narrative of Lolita and made it a part of her own story. Professor Henry points out that such an event does not happen in *Lolita*. This causes Vanessa to re-evaluate her own life, as she begins to see her experiences as if they were scenes from a movie she watched long ago (Russell 252).

An additional way to understand *My Dark Vanessa* is by viewing the novel through the perspective of Taylor Birch's character. During a conversation about Taylor and Strane's relationship, Taylor admits that Strane made her read *Lolita* at the beginning of their involvement. She acknowledges that she viewed Vanessa as the "precursor" of herself, as though Vanessa is the one who made him what he is – a child molester (Russell 268–269). In a similar fashion, Humbert describes his brief relationship with Annabel Leigh, who acts like a "precursor" of Lolita and is presented as the one to blame for his longing of nymphets ("The Precursors of Lolita" 11). There are several other instances of intertextuality throughout the novel that are worth a brief mention: Strane and Vanessa watching Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita* (Russell 137), Vanessa's reaction to Strane's touch after she finds out he had her expelled from high school – "I'll die if you touch me" (Russell 212, 217). In Nabokov's novel, Humbert utters these exact words as a reaction to Lolita's touch after several years (346).

*Lolita* and *My Dark Vanessa* diverge in their portrayal of the trauma that sexual abuse inflicts on a child. While Russell emphasizes the psychological state of her protagonist, the unreliable narrator of *Lolita* glosses over the true mental state of Dolores. As Tamir-Ghez points out, indications of Dolores Haze's fragile state are scattered throughout the story, and it should be evident that Dolores operates out of fear and desperation. The readers know that "Lolita has no place to go, that she cries every night, that Humbert terrorizes her in different ways to keep her submissive" (Tamir-Ghez 82).

In contrast, *My Dark Vanessa* employs a non-linear structure to delve deeper into the psychological aftermath of such experiences. In this way, *My Dark Vanessa* can be viewed as what Balaev describes as a trauma novel – "a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels" (150). As noted by Zinovieff, Russell's depiction of the teenage mindset is particularly distinctive, as she captures the complex hormonal turmoil that is puberty – fixating on sex, the need for intimacy and first love, defying rules (Zinovieff). Balaev describes the employment of non-linear plot structures "as a way of emphasising mental confusion, chaos, or contemplation as a response to the experience". This creates a gap in time which allows the reader to imagine possible scenarios of what might have happened to main character. (160) In the chapters set in 2017, the readers witness the damage their relationship caused as Vanessa has become a disillusioned individual working a dead-end job at the front desk of a hotel, who spends all her free time smoking marijuana or engaging in casual sex. She sees a therapist to deal with the emotional impact of her father's passing,

but she refrains from discussing Strane because she still believes that he didn't mistreat her. In their paper about the impacts of child sexual abuse Briere and Elliott state that forms of sexual molestation are shown to be a major risk factor that lead "to subsequent psychological difficulties in the short and longer term" (55). They list cognitive distortions, emotional distress, depression, anger, anxiety, an impaired sense of self, avoidance and interpersonal difficulties as possible psychological consequences of sexual abuse. In *My Dark Vanessa*, none of these are explicitly stated, but Vanessa exhibits worrisome patterns of behaviour such as the inability to confront the reality of Strane's mistreatment of her, a loss of interests, and her inability to remain sober. Briere and Elliott state that sexually abused women are ten times more likely than non-abused women to become alcoholics. According to their research, substance abuse is a way of dissociating psychologically, easing internal psychological damage and troubling memories (Briere and Elliot 61). A pattern of abusing marijuana, alcohol and other substances as a way of coping with strong feelings can be spotted through the novel, but it is most prominent in the chapters set in 2017 when she is dealing with Strane's suicide:

> It's fine. The drinking, the pot, the Ativan, even Strane—it's perfectly fine. It's nothing. It's normal. All interesting women had older lovers when they were young. It's a rite of passage. You go in a girl and come out not quite a woman but closer, a girl more conscious of herself and her own power. Self-awareness is a good thing. It leads to confidence, knowing one's place in the world. He made me see myself in a way a boy my own age never could. (Russell 168)

This passage depicts Vanessa's turn to substances such as alcohol, weed, and prescription drugs to numb intense emotions caused by Strane's suicide. She convinces herself that neither her substance abuse nor her involvement with Strane is problematic, rationalizing her behaviour by portraying it is a rite of passage that all interesting girls must go through in order to mature into womanhood. Thus, she is a self-deceiving first-person narrator, and as a result, her credibility can also be brought into question. Whilst her portrayal of events appears more authentic than Humbert's, given that her language is less ornate and the implied reader is not a jury, the narration of *My Dark Vanessa* is subjective and therefore some events are portrayed in a heightened, emotionally charged manner, which could be linked to the experience of trauma.

Vanessa resorts to substance abuse as a way of dealing with trauma, which Balaev describes as an overwhelming experience that shatters an individual's sense of self and understanding of societal norms (150). In Russell's novel, the traumatic event can be linked to Strane's abuse which causes the character to lose her sense of self and view society through a distorted lens that normalizes abuse. This is evidenced by loss of interest in writing, which was previously Vanessa's passion and motivation for pursuing an English degree. As Strane puts it:

"You were brilliant. I thought you were going to publish a novel at twenty" (Russell 56). Her loss of interest in writing can be traced back to her university days, when Professor Henry insists she apply to grad school in the field of English literature. However, after a confrontation with Professor Henry, who she finds is making similar inappropriate advances towards her, reminiscent of Strane's, Vanessa loses her interest in pursuing further education. This can be seen as a breaking point, after which her life becomes a series of dead-end jobs and chasing the next high.

At last, with the help of her therapist Ruby, Vanessa begins to unravel the power dynamics between her and Strane. She encourages Vanessa to think of the first instance that can be considered intimate, which helps Vanessa to realize that he was the one who initiated it (Russell 274–275). As Vanessa continues therapy, she gradually moves away from mourning Strane and towards mourning herself. She grapples with the fact that she has no recollection of anything that happened in her life before meeting Strane and begins to work through the trauma that resulted from their relationship. To the reader, therapy appears to be the light at the end of the tunnel in Vanessa's journey. Despite there being a long way to go in terms of her healing, Vanessa senses that she has already begun to experience positive changes. Moreover, the death of Strane symbolises the disappearance of a looming shadow from her life, and she is relieved to know that she will never have to encounter him again (Russell 316).

To conclude, *My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell examines complex themes of consent, memory, victimhood, and power dynamics through the lens of the #MeToo movement. It was heavily inspired by Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, which deals likewise deals with the topic of child sexual abuse. By employing a non-linear narrative, the novel exposes the devastating lifelong effects of child grooming and manipulation. Russell's portrayal of Vanessa's teenage mindset and the subsequent substance abuse of her adulthood as a means to cope with trauma provides a powerful insight into the emotional turmoil experienced by survivors of sexual abuse. Nabokov's *Lolita* is not only mentioned in *My Dark Vanessa*, but it is rather a constant entity present through intertextuality. As a plot device, Lolita is used to show Strane's intentions and is internalized by Vanessa, at times confusing her life with Dolores Haze's. The novel's exploration of topics of sexual abuse is particularly relevant in the context of the #MeToo movement, which has led to a change in attitudes towards the meaning of sexual consent, with a greater emphasis on the importance of respecting boundaries and acknowledging power dynamics in relationships. Its portrayal of the trauma that such experiences can cause is a poignant reminder of the devastating effects of sexual abuse on survivors and therefore is highly relevant to the present moment.

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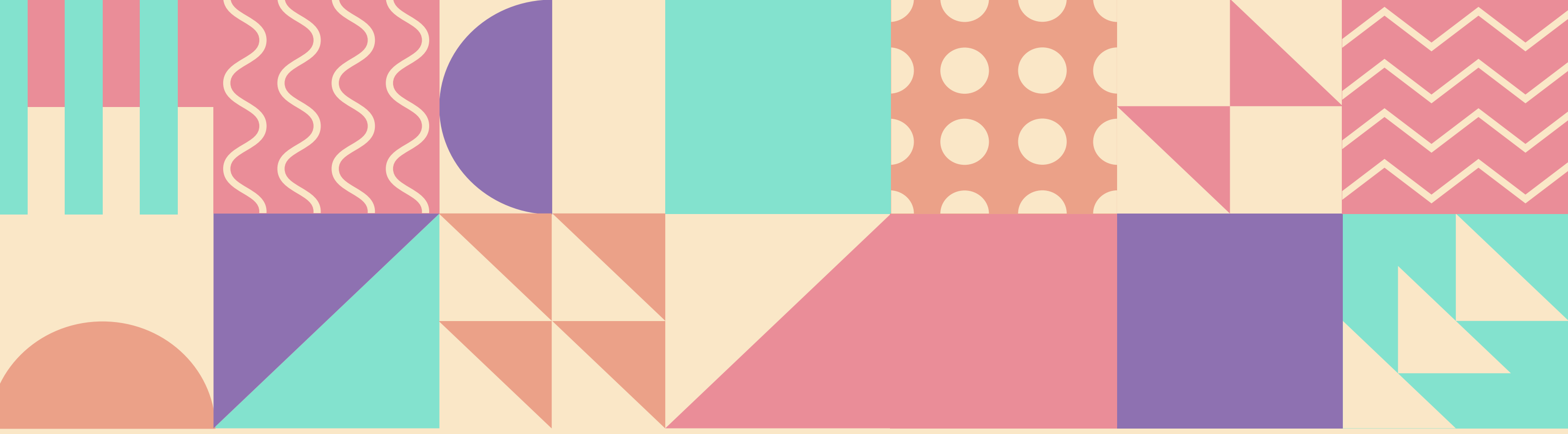

# 02

## Barbara Surjan

## Social change and Southern Paranoia in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

Set in the 1930s in the American South, William Faulkner's novel *Light in August* focuses on the stories of a handful of characters from the margins of Southern society. Their lives intertwine throughout the novel, each of them signifying the changes in the social structure of the South. The South in the era Faulkner deals with is marked by "years of hysterical white reaction to any possibility of integration, which was seen as a dangerous infection of the white cultural body and a threat to the very foundations of Anglo-American civilization" (Ladd 139). The story of Lena Grove, a young pregnant white woman in search of her child's father, is contrasted with the story of Joe Christmas, a young man whose racial ambiguity causes him to be abused and mistreated all throughout his life. Putting the focus on these characters, Faulkner emphasizes the issues of the time, in particular the ideology, tied to the perception of blackness and the fear surrounding being on the wrong side of "the color line" (Fields 159). Ideology offers "a ready-made interpretation of the world, a sort of hand-me-down vocabulary with which to name the elements of every new experience" with a function to "make coherent – if never scientifically accurate – sense of the world" (Fields 153).

Joe Christmas's story is a story of alienation. His life from the moment he remembers it, beginning at the time of his early childhood in an orphanage, is marked by prejudice. At the very center of the novel is the question of his race. Though his mother is white, it is unknown whether his father is black or Mexican:

> 'It was a fellow with the circus, Byron says. She told him that the man was a Mexican, the daughter told him when he caught her. Maybe that's what the fellow told the gal. But he' - again he indicates the old man - 'knew somehow that the fellow had nigger blood. Maybe the circus folks told him. I don't know. He ain't never said how he found out, like that never made any difference.' (Faulkner 363)

Joe Christmas resorts to violence and murder on several occasions driven to it by the hatred he experienced, the vehicle for which was religion. His grandfather, after leaving him at an orphanage, comes back as a janitor only to teach the children his belief that Joe, by possibly having a black father, is related to the devil. Later, whoever forces Joe into prayer and uses it to control and abuse him ends up murdered by his hand. For the entirety of his life, the speculations about him not being white, although he physically looks like a white man, causes him to be ostracized as soon as his identity is revealed. It is more the ambiguity of his race that scares the citizens of Jefferson, than any of the behavior he exhibits. After finding out, the people feel as though they had been fooled:

> Then yesterday morning he came to Mottstown in broad daylight, on Saturday with a city full of folks. He went into a white barber shop as a white man, and because he looked white they never suspected him. Even when the bootlegger saw that he had on a pair of second hand

> brogans that were too big for him, they never suspected. They shaved him and cut his hair and he payed them and walked out and went right into a store and bought a new shirt and a tie and a straw hat, with some of the very money he stole from the woman he murdered. (Faulkner 331)

It is in this way that Faulkner "problematizes Jim Crow" (Ladd 164). It was Jim Crow laws that, starting with dictating "separate spaces on public transportation, including trains, streetcars, and trolleys", eventually "ordered racial segregation in marriage, education, and health care" (Guffey 45). Faulkner challenges the idea these laws depended on and he does so with the portrayal of Christmas's genealogy; "one way a white man could be a black man, or rather a slave, in the Deep South in the 1920s and 1930s was through illegitimacy. If the father of an illegitimate child is an unknown stranger the child might be the carrier of what the white racist would have understood as social and cultural contagion" (Ladd 164). The reveal that Joe Christmas is black, no matter the fact that it's based on speculation, provides the townspeople with a challenge. The story engages with blackness "through a kind of logic based on faith rather than evidence" (Ladd 170). The idea that race is a biological, easily definable fact crumbles in front of their eyes; "if whiteness can be acted, then the white/ black binary becomes vulnerable because it becomes determined by performance rather than biology, which they have so far relied on to naturalize the rest of their practices" (Al-Barhow 57).

For southerners, the obsession with racial purity was intensified after the Civil War because of "the way the Spanish American War and World War I changed the relationship of race and class in the South" (Ladd 164). Since a large number of black American men participated in the Spanish-American War, an image of "martial courage, obedience, and respectability as the standard of manliness for young black men" appeared in newspaper and art (Amron 421). While this changed the perspective of many white Americans in the North, whites in the South mostly felt threatened. Though these representations provided a guide for confronting racial violence for black men in America and the traits of "the ideal black man" changed, what stayed the same was "the conduit that carried these traits to the black masses—the image of the African American soldier—represented two decades later by the roughly 400,000 sable doughboys who crossed the Atlantic during World War I" (Amron 422). Before starting to illegally sell alcohol together, the father of Lena's child, a poor white man named Joe Brown and Joe Christmas worked at the mill together, which reflects the fact that "blacks had begun moving northward during the war years in order to take advantage of the employment opportunities in northern factory towns" and "the economic consequences for the white South were immediate and serious" (Ladd 164). Namely, Joe Brown's poverty and social status is what incites him to become partners in selling alcohol with Christmas. His "artificial blackness is far from being an individual case; rather, it is a symptom of a substantial social transformation during the Great Migration, when a class of poor whites replaced African Americans deserting the South altogether or moving from the countryside to urban centers within the South"

(Al-Barhow 62). The relationship between race and class significantly changing brought about the issue of the color line, "which still represented for the white American (and especially for the white southerner) the indisputable boundary between civilization and chaos." (Ladd 168) Therefore, by doing business with Joe Christmas, Brown is aware that in the eyes of the public "his whiteness has already been compromised" (Al-Barhow 62). Nevertheless, the idea that whiteness makes him inherently more trustworthy than Christmas is what saves him from being a suspect in the investigation of Joanna's murder. Though Joe Christmas's lover Joanna receives the same treatment for her relationships with black people while alive, after she is murdered, her death becomes the tool to chastise Christmas and for the white townspeople to prove to themselves that their whiteness keeps them from becoming violent, failing to see that their desire to lynch him is violent itself. Upon finding Joanna dead they immediately assume there could not have been a relationship between the two of them, but that the black man who killed her had raped her: "knew, believed and hoped that she has been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (Faulkner 271). This is how Christmas ends up castrated and killed by Percy Grimm, whose supposed goal is to avenge Joanna. Grimm's mindset is reflected in the paragraph: "a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life" (Faulkner 426). His act is only a reflection of the idea of white supremacy, which in the South was used by "the black-belt elite" to distract the poor whites suffering the economic situation from their similarities to the freed slaves (Fields 159).

Though Lena's story contrasts Joe Christmas's, as can be seen from their very different endings, hers with a child and newfound love and Christmas's in violent death, Lena is not merely there to amplify how tragic his fate is. Being an unmarried pregnant woman not only means she is judged in her household which she needs to escape, but the image of her travelling alone "taps the xenophobia associated with social and political change in the South during the 1920s, when plain folk had begun to move out of the backwater as Lena is on the move, in search of a legitimizing identity as Americans and as participants in the national mission" (Ladd 167). Having lost both of her parents and having left her brother's house, her genealogy is an issue just like Christmas's. Similarly, the rest of the central characters of the novel are isolated from society. All of them find themselves at the margins of Southern society and are in some ways proof of the social change happening in the South, reflected in the way Joe Christmas's grandparents come to Jefferson: "[…] she to save Christmas and Mr. Hines to take part in his lynching - and the way they leave with her in charge is one of the strongest suggestions that Christmas's death has divided the white community, at least on the margins, and did not do so in vain" (Al-Barhow 68). Similarly, Reverend Gail Hightower had been ostracized by the community that blamed his wife's suicide on him. Him stepping away from religion and making an attempt

to save Joe Christmas by hiding him proves the same thing. He gives up on his obsession with his family's past in order to participate in his community once again. By escaping the future Southern society is forcing onto him, Joe Brown shows "that there are more whites ready to compromise racial binaries" (Al-Barhow 63). Byron Bunch, a worker at the planing mill who narrates these events to Hightower lives "a rigid self-discipline and almost a complete adherence to the values of his society despite the fact that he lives on the margins of this society" before meeting Lena (Al-Barhow 63). After falling in love with her, he manages to break out of these confines. Faulkner points the finger at the imagined lines separating those in need, but shows that it is ultimately possible to break them once one realizes their artificiality. Not only that, but he steps away from the idea that the key issue of the South is race and that "race is a product of history, not of nature" (Fields 152). The retrospective technique of memory used frequently in the novel appears lastly when Joe Christmas is dying:

> Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. (Faulkner 440)

The way the social structure caused him harm overwhelmed his memory and turned him into a violent man. Though they don't realize before they commit the act, the memory of those who murder him for the sake of their ideology is now plagued with violence as well and they can never escape it.

In *Light in August* Faulkner depicts how the changes on a higher level impacted those on the margins of the society in the American South. Faulkner problematizes the intensified obsession with racial purity in the South after the Civil War, particularly in his portrayal of Joe Christmas whose ambiguous racial background brings out the paranoia of southerners' who are forced to face with the artificiality of the "color line". Further, he challenges the idea that race is a product of biology rather than history by portraying how the society similarly rejects the white characters whose genealogy is put into question or because of their proximity to Christmas. Lastly, he brings into question the idea that the central issue of the South is race and shows that breaking out of these structures and fears is possible.

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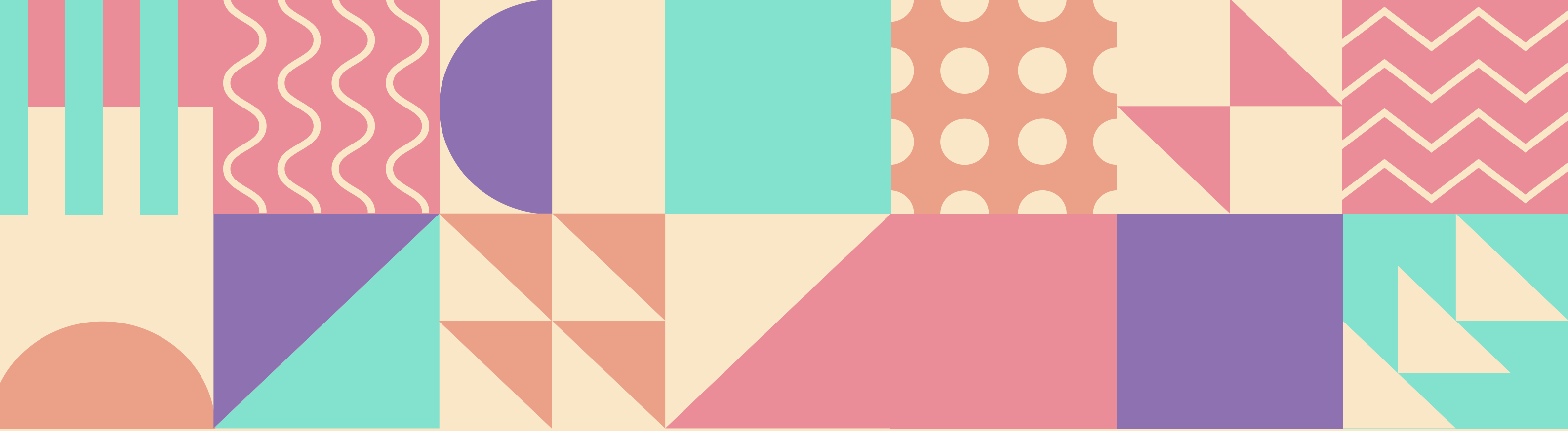

# 03

Nika Keserović

## “A Miracle of Rare Device”: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Power of Imagination

Historically, Romantic poetry has frequently been defined in literary theory in regard to its focus on the power and significance of imagination. While contemporary critics, such as Seamus Perry or Jerome McGann, often reject the need for a fixed definition of Romanticism, the importance of imaginative power and the creative abilities it grants us is nevertheless prevalent in the works of the first-generation Romantic poets. This is especially true for the likes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who not only discusses it in his critical autobiography *Biographia Literaria* (1817), but also uses his poetry both to lead by his own creative example and to further illustrate within the poems themselves the dynamic potential of imagination. He does this through his use of supernatural themes and motifs, as is best represented in his poems "Kubla Khan", "Christabel", and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The aim of this essay is to offer an interpretation of these supernatural elements insofar as they change based on the imaginative power represented in the poems, and to explore what Coleridge potentially saw as the true power of imagination.

The division of duties between Coleridge and William Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* serves as the most obvious proof of Coleridge's interest in the extraordinary. When "the thought that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts suggested itself" to them, Wordsworth's poetic subjects "were to be chosen from ordinary life", while Coleridge's endeavors were to be "directed to persons and characters supernatural" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 168). However, his poems had to inspire interest in his readers that would extend beyond the simple "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation", as Wordsworth put it in his later *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (240). This would require the poems to have "a semblance of truth" that would be sufficient enough for the readers "to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 169). The "dramatic truth" of the poems would arise from the emotions which would "naturally accompany" the experiences and engagements with the supernatural, and which would "suppose them real", at least to any human being "who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency" (168). Coleridge, of course, understood that such experiences would resonate with most people, given the historical fact of human preoccupation with things beyond our phenomenological reality.

Three poems in particular – "Kubla Khan", "Christabel", and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" – very effectively illustrate Coleridge's fascination with the supernatural. Not only are they overabundant with supernatural imagery, be it as the presence of supernatural events, characters or scenery, but they are also collectively referred to as daemonic poems, which emphasizes their supernatural aspects. Based on one of his later notebook entries, which for a long time "largely escaped scholarly notice", Coleridge "defines the daemonic by reference to his own fascination with the transnatural", and uses "the daemon" to refer to "the image of a mind fascinated with the transnatural" (Leadbetter 1). In this sense, "transnatural"

would stand for "something supersensuous that exists beyond the order of Nature" (Mahoney 246), or, in other words, "outside the chain of cause and effect, which is of Nature" (Warren 673). Coleridge does use the term "supernatural" as well as "transnatural" (which could allude to a differentiation purposely made), but it seems that there is not a great difference in meaning between the two. A potential explanation might be that the supernatural simply represents phenomenal manifestations of transnatural principles, which (due to their supersensuous, transcendent nature) remain outside of the realm of experience. The supernatural can also be viewed in psychological light, in the sense of an attempt "to bring into the light of conscious experience and knowledge events and experiences that would otherwise remain below the conscious threshold in the realm of the unconscious" (Wheeler 86). Such a reading would allow us to see the supernatural as the representations of attitudes, emotions and psychological states of the characters: on the one hand, personal fears and limitations, and on the other, great spiritual experiences. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive and in fact come together in the poems. However, what the supernatural represents in the poems depends greatly on how the characters themselves see it.

Is it perceived as an external force, or do the characters themselves take on a supernatural form? Is it threatening or enlightening? It seems that the experience of the supernatural is based on the imaginative power of the characters and, in the case of "Christabel", the narrator as well. Namely, for Coleridge, there exist two kinds of imaginative power. One is the primary Imagination, which he "holds to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception"; therefore, all people possess it. It is "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" – allowing the world to be recreated in the mind, but recreated only in the sense of being repeated. The secondary Imagination is "an echo of the former", but it is not as passive and unmediated – it "coexists with the conscious will". It too recreates, but actively so; "it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates", always "struggling to idealize and unify", going beyond that which is simply given to us perceptually. It is dynamic, living, "vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 167). The idea that man can grapple with the transnatural through his imaginative faculty is already implicitly present in this definition. In this way, the secondary Imagination is very reminiscent of Kant's Reason. Leslie Brisman states that if for Coleridge Reason is a supernatural faculty, it is ultimately to be identified with (not just mediated by) the imagination (124–25). On the other hand, Coleridge states that "a debility and dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses render the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism" (*Biographia Literaria* 16). Therefore, for the unimaginative, the supernatural becomes a sinister, dangerous presence, met only with apprehension and fear, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the three daemonic poems.

"Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" can be analyzed alongside one another, given some of their formal and interpretative similarities that separate them

slightly from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Both "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" were first published together in a pamphlet in 1816, almost two decades after their original composition, and both are, in some sense, considered to be unfinished poems. Coleridge expressed in *Biographia Literaria* that with "Christabel" he should have more nearly realized his ideal (of using supernatural elements to express a kind of truth) than he had done in his first attempt, referring to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (169). However, partly due to the fact that it was not finished, Wordsworth excluded it from the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. As Farrison remarks, Coleridge had a hard time finishing the poem (86), and it was finally published over 16 years later. Leadbetter states that Coleridge always maintained that "Christabel" was unfinished and in 1833 even said: "I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could not carry on with equal success the execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one" (204). However, even before publishing it Coleridge allowed copies of it to be made, and "recited the poem regularly, so that it became his signature poem when in company", unlike "Kubla Khan", which, although written in 1798, remained "surrounded with peculiar secrecy" (Leadbetter 201) before it was published in the 1816 pamphlet at the request of Lord Byron. "Kubla Khan" is described in the Preface to its publication as a fragment of what was originally two to three hundred lines of poetry, a product of what Leask has described "the Poet's unconscious, drugged conception" (1), or an opium-induced "vision in a dream" (as Coleridge himself explains it in the poem's subtitle) whose transcribing was interrupted by a person from Porlock paying a visit to Coleridge. Leask goes on further to argue that the poem's unconscious composition, "given its highly organized structure and form" should be "taken with a pinch of salt", and that the poem may be "resituated in the intellectual climate of the late 1790's", its imperialism and orientalism, as well as Coleridge's particular – namely, radical – political views at that time (2). Such a reading is not only justified based on the arguments Leask presents, but also vital if we wish to avoid divorcing the poet from his historical context. However, Coleridge expressed in the Preface that for him "Kubla Khan" was more of a "psychological curiosity", being a transcription of a drug-induced dream somewhat based on a sentence from *Purchas His Pilgrimages*[1] (which he had been reading). Additionally, "several of his writings in 1797 reveal a serious interest in meaningful dream-visions" (Leadbetter 186). This lends merit to the idea that "Kubla Khan" could, on a meta-level and not just within the poem itself, be an investigation of the effect of supernatural forces on the mind, as the Preface to the poem states that "the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, *given* to him". In this sense, it would be something supernatural that had blessed Coleridge with a poetic vision, the poem itself "a proof of something inwardly achieved; a private affirmation of Coleridge's poetic identity" (Leadbetter 183).

However, within the poem, the supernatural takes on both a negative and a positive meaning. Kubla Khan's impression of the supernatural presence is that it is violent and frightening. Not only does it threaten his pleasure-dome (which

is simultaneously the product of his creative power and the visual representation of the vision he has for his empire), but it also pervades everything around him – nature itself appears to be supernatural. The only exception is the perfectly organized scenery surrounding the pleasure-dome:

> So twice five miles of fertile ground
> With walls and towers were girdled round
> And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills
> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
> And here were forests ancient as the hills,
> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. ("Kubla Khan", lines 6–11)

The nature within the walls is tame, adjusted to human conceptions of utility and beauty; the ground is fertile, the gardens bright. Not even the ancient forests (although subtly reminding us with their longevity of something more permanent than the fleeting empires and fragile palaces made by men) remain dark and impenetrable, as their shade is broken up by the sunlight coming through. Everything savage and untamed is shut out. However, beyond the walls, nature is wild, energetic and powerful beyond Khan's control; "the pleasure-dome, so impressive in the first stanza, is overshadowed by the enormity of its natural surroundings" (Perry 133). The verbs used in lines describing the chasm are dynamic and used to personify the scenery, making it seem alive with energy:

> And from this chasm, with hideous turmoil *seething*,
> As if this earth in fast thick pants were *breathing*,
> ...
> And mid these *dancing* rocks at once and ever,
> It flung up momently the sacred river. ("Kubla Khan", lines 17–18, 23–24, emphasis added)

The "antithetical relationship" between Kubla Khan's order and nature's chaos is emphasized by "the opening word of the second verse paragraph: *but*" and "where the first verse exemplifies the harmonious criteria of beauty and orderliness, the second is full of the mountainous and discordant paraphernalia of the sublime" (Perry 133). This contrast is present in the way water is described, too: in Khan's garden, the "sinuous rills" are mild, seen almost as decoration when compared to the mighty, meandering Alph. That Khan sees nature as wild and supernatural is clear from the adjectives used to describe it:

> A *savage* place, as *holy* and *enchanted*
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was *haunted*
> By woman wailing for her *demon*-lover! (lines 14–16, emphasis added)

The woman wailing for her demon-lover is primarily "mentioned to convey the atmosphere of the deep romantic chasm" (Nethercot and Patterson 929); the

scenery is haunted by a strong energy, brimming with desire, power and passion. The descriptions of the violent chasm, its loudness and force, and the idea of a "sunless" and "lifeless" ocean ("Kubla Khan", lines 5, 28) further evoke a great sense of terror, and are almost a warning to Khan that what he is doing is not right. His vision of the world as a place onto which he ought to project his fantasy is flawed, especially when contrasted with the vision in the last six lines of the second verse, in which Khan's pleasure-dome and wild nature are miraculously combined. As Perry explains, this vision is what one could see if one were to stand half-way down the length of the Alph, where the reflection of the dome is accompanied by the tumult resounding from the caves of ice (the caverns measureless) and the racket of the fountain (134). This is what the character of the Visionary Poet at the end of "Kubla Khan" can imagine – a kind of complex unity that does not seek to reduce everything into the conceptions of one man. In the last 18 lines, the Visionary imagines what would happen if he could recall the song of the Abyssinian Maid and thus bring together in his music "the sunny dome" and "the caves of ice" ("Kubla Khan", line 47) – the fact that it remains a hypothetical statement is evocative of Coleridge's own experience of composing "Kubla Khan" and trying to remember his dream. The supernatural would not present itself as scary or even external at all, but rather manifest itself through him, his floating hair and flashing eyes, which are a notable sign of supernatural power in Coleridge's poems. It would mean that the Visionary Poet could exhibit supernatural qualities precisely because of his imagination.

However, despite their difference, Kubla Khan possess a kind of imaginative power too, only his is more limited when compared to the Visionary's. This is given a theoretical explanation in *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge makes a distinction between the commanding and the absolute genius. Those people who are in possession of the absolute genius "rest content between thought and reality, in an intermundium of which their own living spirit supplies the substance, and their imagination the ever-varying form" (17). Such is the Visionary Poet – his vision is not a physical reality, but it brings together all things, as "there exists" in his mind "an endless power of combining and modifying them". But the men of commanding genius, such as Kubla Khan, "must impress their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality" (17). They have a strong impulse to realize their ideas, but they are not as self-sufficient because of it – realizing their visions requires "appropriating and applying the knowledge of others", which often makes them tyrannical and as such "destined to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of a day" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 17). The fact that men of commanding genius need to turn their visions into physical reality affirms what Coleridge stated about the dimness of imagination and the reliance on immediate impressions. Eventually, the limits of his imagination force Kubla Khan into superstition and fear, so much so that he hears the voices of his ancestors prophesying war in the tumult of the Alph reaching the ocean. The apprehension of war evokes a sense of aggression and

violence, which Coleridge connects to the lack of imagination. In *Biographia Literaria*, he says that such an absence of imaginative power "cannot but produce an uneasy state of feeling, an involuntary sense of fear" of which "anger is the inevitable consequence" (16). What Khan fails to control turns into supernatural threat, or what he perceives to be an unavoidable family curse looming over him.

In "Christabel", it seems not only that the fear of facing the supernatural is not unfounded, but also that its threat finally becomes realized. Geraldine's parasitical intrusion into Christabel's life is truly destructive, or at least leaves the reader with this impression – because "Christabel" is unfinished, there is some potential for a happy ending, but, as has been stated before, Coleridge did not feel that he could successfully execute his idea. Perry explains that "the corruption of Sir Leoline's family that Geraldine works is analogous to the ruin prophesied for Kubla's precarious civilization" (140). However, while he argues that "*unlike* the Khan, Christabel is responsible for bringing these destructive energies into the safe enclave of the castle" (140), it is important to remember that Kubla's wish to subjugate nature to his vision is a conscious act and therefore does make him culpable. Christabel's responsibility lies in the fact that she actively brought the danger within by leaving the safety of her home to go into the woods to pray and by carrying Geraldine over the castle's threshold back inside.

In some ways, Christabel is the apotheosis of innocence – the narrator talks of the "lovely sight" ("Christabel", line 280) of Christabel in the woods as she was "kneeling in the moonlight, /To make her gentle vows" (lines 285–86) and frequently refers to her as "lovely lady Christabel" (lines 23, 38); at one point, even Geraldine calls her "holy Christabel" (line 229). She is good, kind, selfless, praying "for the weal of her lover" (line 30) and quick to help Geraldine in her distress. However, in a line from the first edition of Part I that was omitted in the 1816 publication, it is clear that the dreams Christabel has of her "betrothed knight" are not necessarily pure, as they "made her moan and leap". This might allude to repressed sexual desire, which Christabel perceives to be sinful due to her strong religious beliefs. When Geraldine's dark nature is revealed, Christabel is distraught, convinced that she herself was to blame for her fate ("Sure I have sinn'd!" [line 382]), praying to Christ to "wash away her sins unknown" (lines 389–91). She is accompanied in her religious superstitions by the poem's narrator, who prays throughout the poem to Virgin Mary to shield Christabel. The narrator emphasizes the piousness within the universe of "Christabel" and provides the ultimate frustration for the reader, being a "story-teller who is manifestly unsure of what is going on" (Perry 140). As Wheeler puts it, "the narrative voice is neither objective, authoritative nor impersonal; it continuously reaffirms a limited point of view, a subjective, even prejudiced 'reading' of the situation, recounted by a very singular personality clearly portrayed by Coleridge as naive and superstitious" (90). The unreliability of the narrator allows for non-literal interpretations of Geraldine as "a projection from a dream, an aspect of Christabel's personality" (Taylor 712), or "a kind of personification or symbol of desire, sexuality, or energy" (Wheeler 87).

However, this does not make her any less real within the poem and her supernatural, magical powers have an undeniable effect on other characters. She first appears to Christabel in the forest (which might, just as it does in "Kubla Khan", symbolize the wild and untamed), "on the *other* side" of a "huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree" ("Christabel", line 41–42), a possible representation of the unconscious, which could make the poem a portrayal of Christabel's confrontation with her repressed desire (Wheeler 87), or a simple wish for agency. One of the rare instances in which Christabel takes action is when she sneaks out of the castle, but she has to do it in secret. Her world is filled with limitations: her father's expectations for how she ought to behave, religious morality that forces her to repress her sexual desires for her distant lover, and a lack of intellectual independence and self-knowledge, which leave room for superstitious beliefs and stunt her imagination. Furthermore, the consequences of her lack of imaginative power, her innocence and inability to see through Geraldine's disguise, make her an easy prey – she is vulnerable because she blindly relies on external protection. This is represented in the fact that her guard is a "toothless mastiff bitch" ("Christabel", line 7), whose description reflects the illusion of protection – although it is a big dog, it has no teeth to bite the potential intruders. Similarly, once they are inside the castle, Christabel shows only "resigned obedience" to Geraldine (Taylor 713) and puts all her trust in the spirit of her deceased mother to guard her, as well as the saints, who "will aid if men will call" ("Christabel", line 331). The only meaningful action she takes to try to save herself (telling her father to send Geraldine away) comes too late – the spell she is under makes her attempt completely futile.

Geraldine, on the other hand, is incredibly powerful. She "assumes numerous voices, sighing in sweet weakness, speaking to spirits, summoning powers, vibrating magical force", and eventually "her different voices multiply while Christabel's go mute" (Taylor 713). Geraldine can be seen as "a symbol of unfettered, unguided imagination" (Wheeler 87). Her power is, much like the power of the Visionary Poet in "Kubla Khan", represented by her exhibiting supernatural qualities. That kind of power is frightening, and the narrator's fear for Christabel ("Jesu, Maria, shield her well!" [lines 54, 585]) is similar to people's initial reaction to the Visionary Poet (crying out "Beware! Beware!" in "holy dread" ["Kubla Khan", lines 49–52]). Just like the Poet, she has "large bright eyes" that "glitter" ("Christabel", lines 222, 577). However, unlike him, she uses her power for evil. Her magic triggers a response from the mastiff bitch, and it prevents her from being able to enter the castle without Christabel's help, but both of these warning signs remain ignored. She can communicate with the spirit of Christabel's mother and send it away:

> 'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!
> I have power to bid thee flee.'
> (...)
> 'Off, woman, off! This hour is mine–
> Though thou her guardian spirit be,
> Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.' (lines 206–207, 212–214)

Finally, she exerts control over both Christabel and her father, Sir Leoline. The narrator confirms her control over Christabel when he addresses her directly and says, "O Geraldine! one hour was thine– / Thou'st had thy will!" (lines 306–7) – Geraldine gets what she wants. As Taylor states, "a transfer of power seems to occur; one young woman absorbs another, eradicates her will and her speech, deprives her of the imaginary protective spirit of her mother and the fragile loyalty of her father, and fills her with the underside of her own vicious features" (718). Geraldine takes away Christabel's ability to reveal to Sir Leoline her true nature, and charms him, so that he believes her more than he does his own child. While Christabel catches glimpses of her evil features ("the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head, / Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye" ["Christabel", lines 587–88]), Sir Leoline deems her "sure a thing divine" (line 478). The fact that the source of her magic, her "mark of shame" (line 271) is not described ("a sight to dream of, not to tell" [line 254]) alludes to its transnatural origin. What is unspoken is incomprehensible, at least to human Understanding. Geraldine embodies the transnatural principle of Spirit or Will, the source of human agency. Because it cannot be explained away by the simple law of cause and effect, free will allows for morality and imperfection in judgement. Geraldine can grasp the transnatural because of her imagination, but she is unguided in her use of the supernatural powers it grants her. However, Wheeler and Perry both note that Geraldine cannot be reduced to a simple personification of evil; while "the reader is tantalized with the equation of Geraldine as evil and Christabel as good" (Wheeler 87), it is more likely that Geraldine is "good corrupted, rather than intrinsically wicked" (Perry 140). She does not harm Christabel, but only takes her place and forces her to keep her secret – the poem is focused on exploring "the horror of using other persons as things" (Taylor 720), seeing them as means to an end. For undeclared reasons, Geraldine uses her imagination to overpower Christabel, to eject her from her place in the world. She orchestrates an unfair exchange in which she gets whatever she has set her sights on and transfers all the malice to her victim. Christabel is drained of her agency and becomes snake-like herself – all of her attempts to tell the truth about Geraldine turn into "hissing sounds" ("Christabel", lines 460, 594). Eventually, she is corrupted by hatred she inherited from Geraldine:

> The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
> I know not how, in fearful wise,
> So deeply she had drunken in
> That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
> That all her features were resigned
> To this sole image in her mind:
> And passively did imitate
> That look of dull and treacherous hate! (lines 602–9)

Perry states that "'Christabel', like its partner poems, explores the theme of unity", but it does so "by imagining its perversion" (141) – Geraldine takes on the role of Christabel, and Christabel is forced into becoming like Geraldine. Although

she has a more powerful imagination than Kubla Khan, much like him, Geraldine lacks the understanding of true unity and has to control the people around her to achieve her vision - she can only stay at Sir Leoline's side as long as he is fooled by her disguise. In some sense, her secondary imagination fails halfway in its mission to unify and idealize, and only dissolves and disrupts; her lack of moral guidance turns her imaginative power into a force of destruction. Wheeler offers an explanation for what Geraldine might be lacking:

> Imagination in this sense could be described as that uncontrolled creative force (as imaged for example in the second stanza of "Kubla Khan") which is dangerous until harnessed by moral and religious counterforces. Or, we might say that the figure of Geraldine is Coleridge's way of expressing his early fears that imagination is somehow essentially pagan and non-Christian and must be supplemented by the Christian Will or Reason if it is to be the benison to humankind that we desire it to be. Reason (or Will) and imagination need each other if human beings are to realize their fullest spiritual and creative potential, for reason without imagination is lacking in energy, while imagination without reason and will is energy unshaped, unformed and undirected, and therefore potentially dangerous as a destructive and disruptive force. (87)

Geraldine fails because she only embodies the transnatural principle of Will and does not reflect on it. As Coleridge states in *The Stateman's Manual*, "the human mind is the compass" (368) to a certain gnosis, and Geraldine simply does not utilize it as such. The ultimate knowledge Coleridge has in mind as the end goal of human Reason is what Warren called the sacramental vision of "One Life" (671). While it ties into his Unitarian beliefs, Coleridge also might have derived it from his neo-Platonic studies (Warren 672); inasmuch as it is a Christian vision, it is not aligned with the Christian doctrine (especially of the 1790s), and Coleridge's philosophical inquiries complicate a simple religious understanding of "One Life". Unitarianism presents a vision of the universe as a unity, with God "not as king or lord, but God as a diffused and ubiquitous life" and "immanently present in every aspect of nature" (Perry 136). Perry states that "this sublime and inclusive vision has a troubling corollary": since everything Godly is also good, the existence of evil is ultimately denied (136). However, this assumes that, according to Coleridge, God resides in everything as something already actual, instead of a potential waiting to be realized. Even Plato argues that not all things realize their Being properly – it is a process of becoming, and not something simply given. For Coleridge, God is one of "Objects transnatural" (*The Notebooks*, III 4166) – although he is immanently present in the world, the idea of God is transcendent and can only be grasped through Reason (or imagination) which enables us "to conceive of an order beyond the evidence of the senses" (Leadbetter 9). This daemonic gnosis requires a willful act, a conscious effort, but because the principle of Will or Spirit is transnatural and offends against the order of Nature (the principle of cause and effect which rules the world of the

senses), it also necessarily allows for morality. It is not a path of categorical evil, but the acts of Will must eventually be supplied with knowledge in order not to become destructive. "To leave the appointed station and become daimon" includes both "shame & power" (*The Notebooks*, III 4166); Leadbetter explains that "the transnatural combines a sense of transgression with ideas central to Coleridge's philosophy of human potential" (11).

The story of atonement and the redemptive power of imagination is at last offered in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Perhaps as a sign of Coleridge's firm conviction in its message, this is the only finished daemonic poem. It is a story of change and the process of becoming, as the Mariner moves away from superstition towards a new interpretation of the world. This is also congruent with how Warren explains the "constant contrast between moonlight and sunlight" (676) in the poem, the sun being "the light of understanding", which "shows the familiar as familiar" and is "the light of practical convenience" (678) – in the daylight the Mariner participates in the communal, superstitious, Catholic vision of world, while the moon represents "imagination and the storm of creative vitality" (680); it is at night that he finally grasps the vision of "One Life" and reaches eventual salvation.

The poem frames the Mariner's voyage as a story told from present perspective, when he is telling it to the Wedding-Guest. At this point, he has already experienced his spiritual journey and exhibits supernatural powers in his storytelling: he is referred to as "the bright-eyed Mariner" ("The Rime", I:20,40; VII:105) who holds the Wedding-Guest "with his glittering eye" (I:13); the Wedding-Guest "cannot choose but to hear" (I:18). To put it simply, like Geraldine, "the Mariner hath his will" (I:16). This is in contrast with the beginning of his tale, when he describes the scenery at the start of his voyage; the power lies with nature, which is sublime – terrifying, as well as beautiful:

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound! (Part I, stanzas 13–15)

The supernatural is, like in "Kubla Khan", perceived as external and frightening, a force to be reckoned with. The albatross that comes is greeted as "a Christian soul" (I:65), perhaps even a godsent, "pious bird of good omen" (as Coleridge calls it in the poem's 1817 Gloss). However, the first sign of change in the Mariner is present in the fact that he abandons the vision of the world he is used to and, like Geraldine, embodies the transnatural principle of Will without supplying it with Reason, shooting the albatross. The Catholicism of the ship's crew fails to provide both them and the Mariner with sufficient moral guidance, as it reverts to a superstitious reading of their situation. When the wind stops blowing, they accuse the Mariner of doing "a hellish thing" by killing the bird "that made the breeze to blow"; when the weather is good, they are thankful that he slew the bird that brought "the fog and mist" ("The Rime", II:9–20). True disaster strikes them with the change in atmosphere and Nature's supernatural response to the Mariner's crime. In some sense, this is the prophecy Kubla Khan hears in the Alph's tumult: nature coming to punish him. The Sun becomes red, the sea, which "like a witch's oils, / Burnt green, and blue and white" (II:47–8) is covered "with slimy things" (II:43) and the ship has no wind to continue on. The crew, slowly dying from thirst, is barely alive when Death and Life-In-Death arrive. The mariners are punished as accomplices in the crime, not only because they condoned the murder of the bird in their superstitious beliefs, but also because they made "man's convenience the measure of an act" (Warren 675), with complete ignorance of the unity of the universe. The Mariner is spared, even though at this point he has not abandoned his superstitions. However, his transgression demonstrated his moving away from a passive existence into an active one, grasping for higher knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, he still does not understand the vision of "One Life"; when the rest of the crew dies, he only sees "the beauty of the dead men, and protests against the fact that the slimy things should live while the beautiful men lie dead" (Warren 675). After his murderous act, the Mariner is struggling to pray, as he is no longer fulfilled by the Catholicism he was raised with, but is also yet to progress to a new order. He is torn with guilt over the deaths of his fellow mariners, and this shame is perhaps what enables him to use his imaginative power to see the world as "One Life". One night, having been mourning the men's deaths for days, he sees the ugly, slimy water-snakes and their tracks of "shining white" ("The Rime", IV:51) flashing like a "golden fire" (IV:58); in other words, they become beautiful in his eyes. At last, he states: "A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware" (IV:61–2) – he can finally pray again, reaching an understanding of the world as one. He is not praying out of guilt or a desire to be saved, but out of love, as he can finally see the world in its unity. At this moment, the albatross, which has hung around his neck as a cross signaling his guilt, falls off his neck and sinks into the sea. The dead men who had cursed him with their looks as they were dying now return to help him get to the shore. However, it is not their souls which return to their bodies to make them alive again, but rather "a troop of spirits blest" (V:58), perhaps coming from a transnatural source. That same source, the Spirit, appears in the form of a force that moves the ship towards land. The Mariner then finally sees the supernatural as helpful, in ways in which

Kubla or Christabel never could. The men eventually become all light, and turn into seraph-men, glowing as “signals to the land” (VI:89); the Mariner has earned his salvation.

There is a sense of loneliness that is a necessary result of imaginative power and the vivid vision of the world it grants. As Leadbetter puts it, “for Coleridge, genius itself involved this nexus of intellectual power and social alienation” (10). In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge states the following:

> It is an old Complaint, that a man of Genius no sooner appears, but the Host of Dunces are up in arms to repel the invading Alien…We need not go to the savage tribes…to learn, how slight a degree of Difference will, in uncultivated minds, call up a sense of Diversity, and inward perplexity and contradiction, as if the Strangers were, and yet were not, of the same kind with themselves…Alienation, aggravated now by fear, now by contempt, and not seldom by a mixture of both, aversion, hatred, enmity, are so many successive shapes of its growth and metamorphosis… (226–27)

The Visionary Poet in “Kubla Khan” evokes both awe and dread in his spectators, but most certainly not empathy. Geraldine can force people around her to accept her and be drawn to her, but she cannot form true connections with people, as every relationship formed as a product of her magic must necessarily be seen as contrived and tyrannical. The lack of imaginative power in other characters in “Christabel”, on the other hand, makes them too weak to help each other, despite their pre-existing relationships: Sir Leoline disregards his love for his daughter because she has embarrassed him, Bracy the bard is forced to obey his master even though he has a vision in a dream that Christabel is in danger, and the spirit of her mother stays beyond the physical world, despite the strength of her love for her daughter. The Mariner is also alone after he returns from his voyage, and just like Geraldine, he uses his supernatural powers to draw people in – he forces his listener to stay and hear his story. However, there is an instance of true empathy and human connection that arises from his new vision, one that transcends friendships and familial relationships because it is founded only on their humanity and shared experience – the relationship of the Mariner with the Hermit that saved him. It is the Hermit that encourages the Pilot to save the Mariner in spite of the Pilot’s reservations:

> ‘Dear Lord! It hath a fiendish look–
> (The Pilot made reply)
> I am a-feared’ – ‘Push on, push on!’
> Said the Hermit cheerily. (“The Rime”, Part VII, stanza 6)

The Mariner considers the Hermit a “holy man” (VII:61), the one who will wash away his sins. The Hermit is holy because he too shares the vision of “One Life”; he sings “loud his godly hymns / That he makes in the wood” (VI: 105–6) – not the

communal religious songs, but his own hymns. Moreover, perhaps he has had to retreat from society precisely due to the transgresiveness and unconventionality of his vision of the world. Nevertheless, the Hermit can grant absolution to the Mariner by recognizing him for the man he has become, a man who has grasped the transnatural idea of God and Truth, and supplied his Will with moral. This is why the Hermit asks the Mariner "What manner of man art thou?" (VII:64); he knows what innocent, inexperienced Christabel could not have known – that a person with sufficient imaginative power can be evil if they do not use their imagination to see the world as a unity, to love "all things both great and small" (VII:102). In some sense, man's ability to unify the world in his mind and supply his spirit with a moral basis might truly be "a miracle of rare device" ("Kubla Khan", line 35) – therein lies the true power of imagination.

In his daemonic poems, Coleridge explores the supernatural and the effect it has on the characters. The way they see the supernatural reflects their perspectives on the world, which vary from a superstitious fear of everything they cannot control or a selfish disregard for others to a higher knowledge which can redeem and connect an individual to the world and his fellow men, especially those who possess that knowledge too. Coleridge's faith in the power of imagination perhaps explains the magnitude of his fear that a loss of imaginative power might be the greatest tragedy for man. The daemonic poems offer a potent lesson for the readers, and the abundance of supernatural elements in the poems encourages them to "dissolve, diffuse and dissipate" the works in front of them to renew their visions of the world too.

## End Notes

1 Samuel Purchas was an English compiler of travel and discovery writings who continued the encyclopedic collections begun by the British geographer Richard Hakluyt in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes; Contayning a History of the World, in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells, by Englishmen and Others* (1625). As an editor and compiler, he sought to interest the general public of his day. During a time when travel literature had the patriotic purpose of inspiring Englishmen to engage in overseas expansion and enterprise, his collections were read with enthusiasm, but they were also frequently the only source of information on important questions relating to geographical history and early exploration. Despite being published almost two centuries earlier, *Purchas his Pilgrimes* was the favorite reading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

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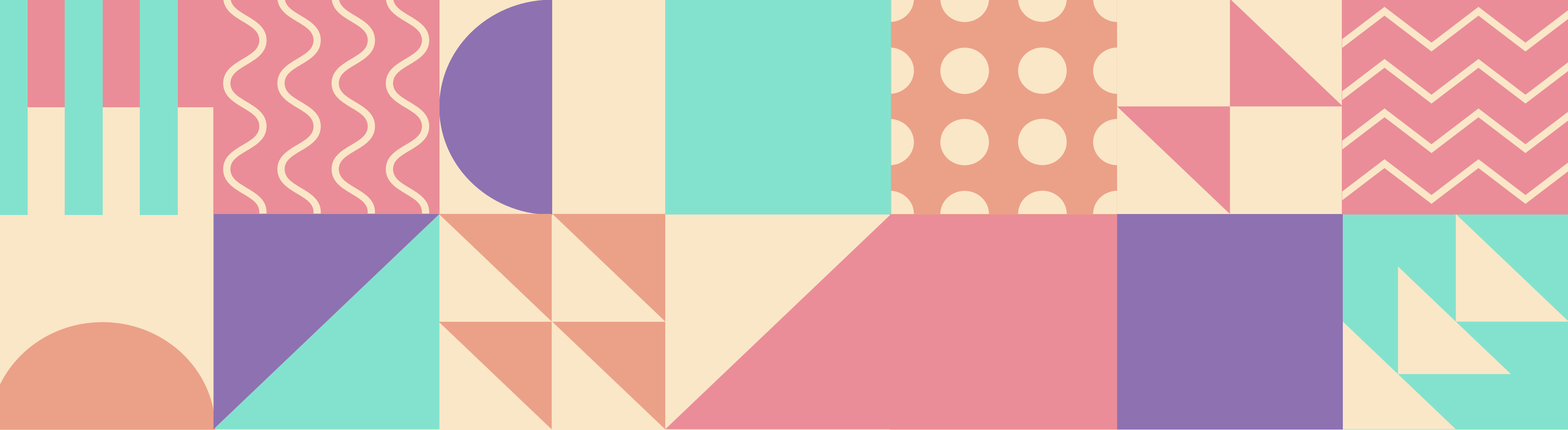

# 04

Teo Francišković

## Racial Prejudices in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

*The Lonely Londoners*, a novel by Sam Selvon, broaches and expounds the issue of immigration to Great Britain from her former colonies during the 1950s. Selvon, who was of Trinidadian descent himself and was "part of the first-generation immigrants [...] who had made the passage to Britain from the West Indies" (Pichler 47), published the novel in 1956, in the midst of increasing immigration waves and rising tensions in the country. Given that Trinidad achieved independence in 1962, "Trinidadians and other West Indians were – legally, at least – considered full subjects of the British crown", meaning that "Selvon was not a border-crossing 'immigrant' in the strictest usage of the word" (Dyer 113) and did not write out-of-language or out-of-country. Selvon's novel is written from the immigrants' point of view and employs a creolized form of English and myriad slang expressions as a multicultural narration strategy. The book accentuates the life of West Indians immigrating to the Mother Country in hopes of acquiring well-paid jobs and finer living standards. The fact that *The Lonely Londoners* focuses on immigrants from the West Indies is not only relevant due to the author's background, but because they were "the first nonwhites to settle in large number" and "[o]f all the immigrants arriving in Britain in the middle of the twentieth century, none attracted as much attention from whites as West Indian men" (Collins 391), beginning with the passengers who had disembarked from the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, which marked "year zero for mass black immigration" (ibid). Selvon's fictional characters are depicted struggling and eventually succeeding, not only to accommodate to the unfamiliar climate and culture, but to a world that mistreats them solely on the basis of the color of their skin.

Selvon draws attention to the racism, mistreatment, inequality and prejudices with which the immigrants are faced when arriving in Britain. To this end, the reader is introduced to several characters and events, each bestowed with a pivotal role to illuminate the issue. Praising the work as noteworthy, Ashley Dawson mentions Selvon in his monograph, elaborating on the migration to the United Kingdom after 1948: "Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* depicts the first generation of overwhelmingly male immigrants from the Caribbean struggling to cope with the stereotypes and prejudices they encountered in Britain" (30). Selvon presents the situation right after WWII, when the stereotypes had only evolved into prejudices and hostility, rather than erupted into violence and rioting. In her paper on the immigration and politics of everyday life in Selvon's fiction, Rebecca Dyer asserts that Selvon's target audience were not the Caribbean people, rather white Britons, whom he sought to inform of the immigrant life as he "inserted important messages about race relations in Britain" (115) in his fiction. The first character introduced in *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses Aloetta, is a male Trinidadian immigrant who has already spent ten years in London and has helped out other West Indians who come to the UK in search of a better life. One such immigrant is Galahad, the second protagonist of the story, who arrives in Britain at the beginning of the novel. Moses aids the newcomer since "he used to remember how desperate he was when he was in London for the first time and didn't know anybody and anything" (Selvon 3). Recalling the plight that he himself

has faced, Moses deems it only fair to assist his countrymen when in a position to. The gratuitous aversion towards people of color is all too well known to him.

The first scene in the novel reveals the importance of discourse with regards to this aversion, as it is made clear that prejudices against the West Indians are stirred up by the media. Whether it is written or spoken communication, words tend to shape the way in which people approach or perceive a certain issue. In her analysis of the concept of nation and belonging in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Pichler suggests that the nation, among other things, is "a system of (cultural) representations, a discourse which creates significations and influences our behaviour towards and perceptions of others and ourselves" (45), a concept that "many make use of in order to exclude 'Others' from being part of and taking part in the 'imagined community'" (ibid). This representation matters if an individual is to be recognized as a rightful member of the community. In the novel, it is the radio and the newspaper that produce discourse about the immigrants and their reasons for coming to Great Britain, essentially deciding how the 'other' is represented. It comes as no surprise then that mainstream media is the kernel of the prejudices displayed by the white Britons in *The Lonely Londoners*. Moses states this at the very beginning: "…whatever the newspaper and the radio say in this country, that is the people Bible" (Selvon 2). The media describe the West Indians as primitives who imagine that the streets of London are paved with gold. The first scene describes a reporter enquiring into the story of a family that has only just arrived in Britain from Jamaica. The reporter portrays the event as an invasion in his periodical. "The next day when the *Echo* appear it had a picture, and the picture write: Now, Jamaican Families Come to Britain" (Selvon 12). Such half-truths and scare tactics formed and spread by the media serve to corroborate the notion of an ample arrival of immigrants, warning the British public that hitherto the immigrants had been arriving alone, but now their entire families followed.

Media fearmongering resonates with the already existing racism, as it essentially verbalizes it into a particular discourse, but it remains unclear why such intolerance – taking the shape of prejudices and stereotypes – is present in the first place. In their essay on the psychology of prejudices, Victoria Esses et al. introduce a theory that apprehension towards the 'other' is caused when two groups are forced to share scarce resources. The paper uses the term resource stress, further explaining: "Resource stress refers to any perception that, within a society, access to resources may be limited for one's group. The resources involved may include economic resources, such as money and jobs, as well as less tangible resources such as power and prestige" (Esses et al. 100). According to this theory, if too many people are crammed in a certain area, the resources end up stretched thin, which prompts hostility between different groups. In *The Lonely Londoners*, white Britons feel threatened by the influx of West Indian workers, who are manifestly ready to accept smaller wages than them. This leads to the so-called zero-sum belief – a belief that the more the other group obtains,

the less is available for one's own group. Hence the competition between the groups. Moses alludes to this not always having been the case, only in the latest period as the immigration rate increased, and presents his assumptions to Galahad: "Well, as far as I could figure, they frighten that we get job in front of them [...] The other thing is that they just don't like black people, and [...] that is a question that bigger brains than mine trying to find out from way back" (Selvon 20). The trepidations shared by the white Britons are, Moses argues, illogical. Rarely do the British lose employment in favor of a 'spade', particularly when it comes to well-paid jobs. The way Moses describes the prejudices held by the British instantly reminds Galahad of the situation in the United States, alluding that Galahad had either previously been mistreated in the 'Land of the Free', or simply affirming America's notorious reputation as far as racial inequality is concerned. Moses, drawing a comparison between the US and the UK, admits that similarities exist, but that white Americans dislike nonwhites and tell them so outright, whilst white Britons treat the immigrants coldly and resort to "the old English diplomacy" (ibid.), as the British refuse to admit out loud that they are perturbed by the presence of black people.

Group competition is closely tied to the dissemination of discourse, since it fuels primarily negative narratives and representation of rival groups. When they feel threatened, groups resort to different ways of attempting to remove the competition. In their paper, Esses et al. denote several strategies that aid the groups in completing this agenda, the first of which is promoting negative discourse: "First, a group may attempt to decrease the competitiveness of the other group. This may take the form of expressing negative attitudes [...] about members of the other group [...] in an attempt to convince both one's own group and other groups of the lack of worth of the competitor" (101). Moses and Galahad discuss how this strategy comes to be when Moses narrates the story of Cap, a young Jamaican immigrant who pulls tricks and hoaxes. Cap is characterized by idleness and manipulation. Since he cares not for an honest day's work, he employs cunning tricks and charm to get by. Cap does not present a prototype of a West Indian worker, but rather a swindler who can be of any race and color, yet the blame will be associated with his own cluster at the end of the day. Moses warns of the credibility this provides for the prejudices maintained by the British; "...is fellars like that who muddy the water for a lot of us [...] One worthless fellar go around making bad, and give the wrong impression for all the rest" (Selvon 34). Prejudices are often born from isolated incidents and are then applied to a group as a whole. The Jamaican immigrant pulls ruses in hotels, falsely presenting himself as a student and giving promises of an incoming allowance, with no intention of ever paying the bill, and then his misbehavior gets associated with others like him, not just Jamaicans, but West Indians and black people in general. Having introduced the story of Cap to his illustration of the migrant underclass and their experience, "Selvon does not suggest *all* immigrants have been unjustly defamed, simply that in the current atmosphere, racial mythology [...] is disproportionately powerful" (Ellis 222). The mischief Cap causes only fuels

the prejudices formed by the whites and becomes the nexus point of discourse that seeks to remove the competition, thus making it even more difficult for the diligent, hard-working West Indians to make an honest living.

Incidentally, the mistreatment is apparent in the employment of immigrants, not just the lack of it. They are given lesser jobs, if any at all, and are gravely underpaid. The 'logic' behind the zero-sum belief demands that the West Indians be given lower wages, else there would not be enough money circulating for the white Britons. Supporting the mistreatment of immigrants is the notion that they are ignorant and bereft of skills. In his essay *Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, Marcus Collins discusses several aspects of the immigrant experience, ranging from family life and interracial sex to interracial violence and citizenship. As for the experience of employment, Collins asserts that West Indians emigrated primarily in order to work, as most migrants do, but when they began seeking employment in Great Britain, "they found out that whites doubted whether they were either willing to work or able to do so" (399), as the general consensus was that migrants are slow, lazy and irresponsible workers. Thus, the worst of vacancies were reserved for them. The exploitation of West Indians as presented in the novel is based on the false impression of immigrants as less intelligent or inept, which simultaneously justifies their mistreatment. The employers take advantage of the immigrants being in dire need of employment, since they are ready to do just about anything, no matter how inconsiderable the salary is. Moses warns Galahad that many firms even deny access to black people applying for a job, and if a vacancy is open to West Indians, it is solely for the low-paid labor they provide: "They think that is all we good for, and this time they keeping all the soft clerical jobs for them white fellars" (Selvon 35). Moses' words resonate perfectly with the statistics from the 1950s, as "over three-fifths of the men were placed in such [semi- or unskilled] jobs in Britain, with fully half of them consigned to the lowest category" (Collins 401), prompting Collins to draw a grim conclusion in his article: "West Indian men were damned if they worked and damned if they didn't" (402). Selvon's characters are not poor as a result of incompetence to find a suitable job or get promotions. They are bereft of the good life because their employers seek to profit off a labor force severely underpaid, while the government and the society at large refuse to acknowledge them as equal to the white Britons, which translates to the migrants' salaries ending up unequal as well. Moses and Galahad are powerless to oppose the harsh conditions imposed on them, not unable or unwilling to recognize the injustice of it. This mistreatment of the West Indians, compared to their white counterparts, is also one of few ways for the West Indians to conceptualize the other side, i.e. the life of the British majority. Ma, for example, is an honest immigrant who works in a restaurant and who 'meets' the white Britons in quite a bizarre manner: "Only from washing up Ma form a idea of the population of London" (Selvon 68). Ma lives in a different world than the whites do and her only contact with them is through the dishes she washes – a rare point of contact between the worlds of the rich and the poor, albeit brief and indirect.

As vile as the exploitation of cheap labor-force can become, it is the ordinary Britons who are described as most hostile towards the migrants, for they are perturbed by the influx of 'spades' from the Caribbean. Due to racism and xenophobia, the British disdain the immigrants and seek to separate themselves from the colonial 'other'. This phenomenon of prejudice is explained by Gordon Allport, who uses the term in-groups. Allport explains in his essay: "These [in-group] memberships constitute a web of habits. When we encounter an outsider who follows different customs, we unconsciously say: 'He breaks my habits'" (46). In-groups give people a sense of 'us', for they hold the conventions and traits one treasures. People prefer the familiar. That which is alien is regarded as less good, potentially harmful or even dangerous. During his first winter in Great Britain, Galahad embarks on quite a venturous undertaking. Starving and frightened, Galahad goes to the park, catches and kills a pigeon, which he plans to cook with rice. Observing the whole episode is an old white woman, who panics at such an incongruous sight, screaming "monster" and "killer" at Galahad. Galahad flees the scene and retells this incident to Moses; "The old geezer call me a cruel monster [...] If you did see she face, you would think I commit a murder" (Selvon 120). Galahad is bemused by this conundrum: such reprimands are directed at him for killing one of a thousand pigeons, yet no one seems perturbed by the West Indian immigrants starving on the streets. The old lady's reaction is such because her familiar environment is jeopardized. Pigeons are not for eating, such is the established rule, and if one breaks it, then their values must be savage, outlandish and intellectually inferior. Focusing on the character of Galahad and his feelings of anxiety in London, Kanneh argues that migrants from various Caribbean islands form a new identity, that of the black British, by which they "radically change the identity of London itself, *claiming* London for their own" (40, emphasis in the original). This identity, with its new norms and patterns that stand in stark contrast to the ones established by the whites, is met with outrage. Norms are universal, but there are no universal norms, which is why the Britons cannot comprehend the customs of the West Indians, who on their part regard their behavior as normal and acceptable.

Prejudices arise from stereotypes as well. It could be argued that the two come hand in hand. Forming a widely-held and oversimplified image of a person or a thing necessarily gives rise to preconceived opinions of the stereotyped concept. US philosopher Lawrence Blum, who wrote about stereotypes and stereotyping, describes the phenomena as cultural entities. Even if a person does not accept or hold a stereotype, they still recognize it when used, the effects of which can be subliminal. Going on, Blum claims: "When we say that group X is stereotyped in a certain way [...] we generally refer to the recognizable presence in a certain sociocultural context of salient images of that group – more precisely, of associations between a group label and a set of characteristics" (Blum 252). Labeling a stereotype as "sociocultural" is the crucial part. An individual may form their own personal stereotype, but if it stays at that, it may as well be classified as an opinion. A cultural stereotype has to be accepted by a majority and operate

so as to model the general stance of the stereotyped group, which is why Blum refers to them as 'cultural' (252). In *The Lonely Londoners*, the West Indians are seen stereotyped as oddballs and criminals who refuse to adapt to the British lifestyle. Moses mentions how the white Britons regard all black people as drug-dealers; "They like weed more than anybody else, and from the time they see you black they figure that you know all about it, where to make contact and how much to pay" (Selvon 114). The irony, Moses explains, is that the whites are drawn to marijuana as much as the West Indians, if not more, and yet the prevailing air has it that black people are smugglers and drug-consumers (or associated with them). The judgement has no relation to reality, and yet it comes out dominant. It is unlikely that encountering an honest West Indian would shift a Briton's perspective on the matter. The Briton would either regard this as an isolated incident or refuse to accept that one exists.

Even if not of biased opinions themselves, other Britons will heed to the beliefs already established by the majority. It is a question of numbers. An individual feels the need to submit to the opinions of a larger group, especially one's in-group, as a result of social pressure, even if they disagree with those opinions. Scarcely anyone wishes to be classified an eccentric. This phenomenon is known as the Asch Paradigm, named after Solomon Asch, a psychologist who studied if and how personal opinions and beliefs can be affected by a majority group. Asch clarified the findings of his many experiments as follows: "Apparently the sheer weight of numbers or authority sufficed to change opinions, even when no arguments for the opinions themselves were provided" (3). Even a wrong opinion will be accepted, because the minority group often yields to a majority group and their beliefs. In the novel, on one occasion Galahad encounters a mother and a child in the streets of London and courteously attempts to confer with them. "But the child mother uneasy as they stand up there on the pavement with so many white people around: if they was alone she might have talked a little [...] but instead she pull the child along and she look at Galahad and give a sickly sort of smile" (Selvon 76). The woman is constrained due to social pressure, as it is explicitly stated that she would not behave this way were they "alone". It is a patent instance of the Asch Paradigm at work. The woman's impudent demeanor towards the West Indians and any prejudices she may display are not formulated by the media or discourse, they result from social implications. This is a case of a more subtle, indirect influence of media narratives. Their fearmongering is absorbed by most Britons, a majority, whose attitudes and actions force the other Britons, the minority that has remained immune to media lies and half-truths (although, these cannot be dismissed, since their effects are still subliminal and serve at the point of recognition of stereotypes), to subscribe to in-group logic. The woman is not hostile towards immigrants. Her interest to pleasantly confer with Galahad is depicted as genuine, but she displays anxiety in his presence, and Galahad is aware of this – and affected by it, as it causes him deep sorrow. The other whites discard the immigrants, so it should only be expected of the woman to do the same, to which she conforms.

This episode leads Galahad to form a theory of his own: it is the color black that the Britons do not like; it is the color black causing his troubles; it is the color to blame for all his ordeals; there is nothing wrong with him individually. "So Galahad talking to the colour Black, as if a person, telling it that is not *he* who causing botheration in the place, but Black, who is a worthless thing for making trouble all about" (Selvon 77, emphasis in the original). Referring to the cultural setting in Britain, whether fictional or not, and to the friction between various cultures in the postcolonial period, Pichler arrives to a conclusion that "race undoubtedly was and presumably still is the most powerful factor of alienation and insecurity" (47). According to Pichler, the immigrant characters in *The Lonely Londoners* are seen struggling to overcome the initial culture shock, to somehow acculturate to the Mother Country, but this goal proves difficult for them to attain as they are stuck in "a society in which race and social class are fixed and rigid instruments for categorizing people" (51). The environment in which the West Indians find themselves resolves to constitute them as second-class citizens, assuming they are accepted as citizens at all. This in turn creates problems of poverty and a lack of education among the West Indians, giving further claim that they are not as resourceful as the white Britons, and it keeps their category of race intertwined with a perpetual state of poverty. Galahad feels so strongly about this belief that he attacks the color black, referring to it with a capital B, and blames it for all his misfortune, designating it as the main culprit for the vacancies and lodgings that elude the West Indian immigrants. It is worth noting that at this point the color of his skin no longer constitutes a racial category, but a socially constructed one. In her paper on racism, culture and national identity, Kadiatu Kanneh, analyzing numerous works of fiction produced in the UK and the US that tackle the topic of racial inequality, refers to this specific scene with Galahad and states that, in this moment in the story, Galahad "discovers a sudden split between his identity as a British citizen and the Blackness which keeps him continually in transit" (44). However, as Kanneh discusses, the term 'race' seems to become synonymous with other terms denoting the 'other', as a result of which "[n]ation, culture, home and belonging become words fraught with contested meaning, and the word immigrant becomes totally conflated with the word Black" (41). It is the conflation of immigrant with the color black that serves as "the cause of a separation between citizen and ethnicity, between British and foreign" (44). Stereotypes associated with West Indians – them being thieves, drug-dealers, unintelligent, incompetent, inferior – are treated as inborn traits of the black community. It is these characteristics that define one as black more than the skin color itself, which is why blackness can be applied to any outsider deemed undesirable, any 'other', no matter what race they belong to. The actual color of the skin is important solely on the level of easier identification of an immigrant's blackness. Thus, this becomes an issue of "narrative, myth and emotion" (Kanneh 44) more than reality, affirming again the impact and importance of discourse. By being black, one is an immigrant, and by being an immigrant, one is black.

Reactions to prejudices and stereotypes can vary. Other than our in-groups, which include people who follow the same customs and abide by the same norms, essentially – groups that one belongs to, Gordon Allport also distinguishes reference groups – those groups one strives for and looks to acquire their membership. Allport uses an example to better enlighten his theory: "A Negro may wish to relate himself to the white majority in his community. He would like to partake of the privileges of this majority and be considered one of its members. He may feel so intensely about the matter that he repudiates his own in-group" (Allport 37). In other words, if one's in-group is underprivileged and discriminated against, the person will naturally look to another group, one that is better off, which then becomes one's reference group. Some West Indians in *The Lonely Londoners* react to the prejudices by denying their origin, hoping to be accepted into their reference group, in this case the white Britons. This self-hatred and feeling of shame lead the migrants to distance themselves from their own kin, if only to avoid being associated with them. Such is the case with Bart, a West Indian immigrant of rather light skin color, who is embarrassed of his company and tends to present himself as more English. He would justify himself to the white Britons; "I here with these boys, but I not one of them, look at colour of my skin" (Selvon 48). And yet, despite all his attempts and claims, Bart is never accepted by the whites. He cannot escape his in-group any more than he can escape his blackness, regardless of how much he tries.

In brief, the prejudices directed towards Selvon's characters originate from media libels, unfounded trepidations, misguided assertions, racial discrimination, intolerance of different customs, subliminal effect of stereotyping, and social pressure. The immigrants presented in *The Lonely Londoners* display discernible resolve to endure the daunting trials of their everyday life in the United Kingdom. Based on no grounds, rather through faulty reasoning (zero-sum logic, fears bred by media narratives, etc.) and a failure to understand or accept the plight of the 'other', the white Britons question the morals and diligence of their Caribbean neighbors. The migrants are left having to deal with the uncomfortable reality of belonging and not belonging at the same time, inhabiting a city of divided worlds. The novel brings the scattered individual stories of migrants into a single narrative, one that finally tells their story.

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