The Kirby Canon

2009-2010
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A winning compendium
of student compositions,
reviewed by faculty and peers.

“Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough, and I will move the Earth.” —Archimedes

“A good sentence can change the world.”
About THE KIRBY CANON

The 2009-2010 edition of *The Kirby Canon* presents outstanding essays from courses offered by the Wilkes University English program during the 2009-2010 academic year.

Essays were self-nominated or nominated by faculty. All essays were evaluated by a group of faculty and student reviewers.

The editors of *The Kirby Canon* wish to thank the students and faculty who submitted essays and participated in the production of this anthology.

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A Historical Moment in the Game of Tennis

Two athletes, Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs went head to head in an epic tennis match on the evening of September 20th, 1973 at the Houston Astrodome called “The Battle of the Sexes.” The motivation for winning was a chance to make history, and $100,000 prize money, which was the least of the opponents’ concerns. The media promoted the event using photos and television to aid in accomplishing a historical feat of a woman beating a man in the game of tennis (Schwartz). Even though men are arguably stronger than women, the game of tennis was changed forever by instilling equality when the woman, Billie Jean King, beat the man, Bobby Riggs, during the “Battle of the Sexes.” The “Battle of the Sexes” was a powerful concept during the early 1970’s when feminist activists were struggling to attain equality between men and women, thus people became interested in the event. This event ties in with “The Equal Rights Movement,” which was written in 1921 by Alice Paul, but was not passed by Congress until 1972 (“Equal Rights Amendment”). The “Battle of the Sexes” helped encourage some states to ratify the amendment after the event, since the image of powerful women was prominent around the world. Although this “Battle of the Sexes” was simply a tennis match, women all over the world were looked at differently in all aspects after the event; they were perceived as stronger individuals than before. To better understand the past and present I will use Berger’s method of studying art or images to analyze this picture.
This image depicts the most monumental moment in the history of tennis—the celebration immediately after Billie Jean King defeated Bobby Riggs. Billie Jean King holding her arms up in triumph is the focal point of the image. A defeated looking Bobby Riggs is at the net, ready to shake hands, the loser’s gesture of congratulations for a nice match. Not pictured is the record breaking crowd, which consisted of 30,472 spectators cheering at the end of the match. The perspective of this image is to make us believe that we were part of the crowd. John Berger, who wrote *Ways of Seeing*, shares with his audience how important he believes looking at an image is to preserving history. As Berger says, “[w]hen we ‘see’ a landscape, we situate ourselves in it,” and imagine ourselves in a particular location. One way to engage history is “[i]f we ‘saw’ the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history” (Berger 11). This applies to the image: upon looking at it, one places themselves in the audience. Imagine just reading about this image in a book. You would not have fully understood the meaning behind the event. With an image, you can acknowledge the emotions that the two opponents were feeling at a particular moment in time by studying their faces and postures. You can see just how much the victory meant to Billie Jean King and how disappointed Bobby Riggs was with the defeat. Viewing this image, you can “situate” yourself right in the crowd at the Houston Astrodome thirty-six years.
ago when the actual event was taking place (Berger 11). One can also situate him or herself in a whole different era or time period like women situating themselves in a time period where changes are made in women’s rights.

To fully understand what the image depicts, some background information must be presented on the two fierce opponents. Bobby Riggs was fifty-five years old when he played this match, and was at the very end of his career. He was the world champion tennis player in 1939 when he was only sixteen years of age. All through his career, he was referred to as a male chauvinist pig by the media and feminists, and he said that women could never be the players that men were, because they were too weak and were ‘just women,” (“Bobby Riggs vs. Billie Jean King”). In 1971, Bobby Riggs made the following statement, “[m]en are naturally better tennis players than women,” (Biography of Female Tennis Pro Billie Jean Motiff) which pertains to the physical ability and biological make-up of men versus women. Bobby Riggs stated that mentally and psychologically “[i]n everything men are better than women.” Riggs’ sexist and narcissist side showed when he said that, [i]n fact, I bet the very best women tennis player cannot beat an old man like me” (“Biography of Female Tennis Pro Billie Jean Motiff”).

He decided to prove his point in 1973 in two epic matches. Margaret Court was Riggs first female opponent who he played on Mother’s Day in 1973. The outcome of the match was in Riggs favor. Immediately after beating Court, Riggs challenged Billie Jean King, because he said he wanted to show he could beat the best women at the time. Billie Jean King denied Riggs offer the first time, but after Riggs got extremely cocky about beating Margaret Court, she accepted the challenge (Schwartz). “Women in tennis are as good as men and should be given equal opportunities,” said King before the match. Riggs simply said, “Prove it,” (“Biography of Female Tennis Pro Billie Jean Motiff”).
Billie Jean King was twenty-nine years of age, in the prime of her career when she beat Bobby Riggs in the “Battle of the Sexes”. She won numerous awards throughout her career such as the Associated Press’s Women Athlete of the Year in 1967 and 1973, the *Sports Illustrated* Sportswoman of the Year in 1972, and *Time* Magazine’s Women of the Year in 1976. Later, she would also end her tennis career with twenty Wimbledon titles (Schwartz). Billie Jean King was not just a fantastic tennis player, but a feminist who was concerned with how women were treated. Thus, she liked to make a difference in the world. She felt strongly about the issue of inequality of men’s and women’s tennis and fought hard to achieve many milestones in the advancement of women’s tennis. For Billie Jean King, tennis was a vehicle for her to contribute to changing the world.

Up until Billie Jean King defeated Bobby Riggs in the “Battle of the Sexes,” women were looked down upon in tennis and more generally in any sport for lacking physical strength. People thought that women’s tennis was not as prestigious as men’s. Therefore, the prize money for women in the game of tennis was far less than the money men earned. In 1968, the men’s Wimbledon champion would take home 2,000 pounds, but the women’s champion would only pocket a mere 750 pounds (“Prize Money History”). Billie Jean King collaborated with Gladys Heldman in 1973 to organize the Women’s Tennis Association, which was a union of women players that improved bargaining positions (Gladys Medalie Heldman).

Billy Jean King and Bobby Riggs did so much to improve the equality factor in the game of tennis, even though that was in no way Bobby Riggs intention. Obviously, the picture denotes Billie Jean King beating Bobby Riggs in the infamous match. However, from images produced during the “Battle of the Sexes,” people worldwide inferred many things about men’s tennis and women’s tennis, and also men and women in general. These inferences may have included: that
the game of tennis had changed forever; that men and women could be equal; and that men are not superior to women in sports. Although, not everyone thinks the same way.

The image of Billie Jean King raising her arms in triumph, located on page two, can be looked at in a variety of different ways. Berger states, “[w]e only see what we look at” (Berger 8). That is, to look does not mean to actually comprehend what is happening in a photograph. If a person feels strongly about a particular subject, they may not be able to comprehend what an image is portraying. This is the case with the image of Billie Jean King raising her arms victoriously after the infamous match. For example, “[m]ale chauvinist pigs,” such as Bobby Riggs, would see the picture and feel embarrassment. Most women, on the other hand, would feel a sense of pride. Other people in the world would view the image with a sense of shock, others with admiration of Billie Jean King. As Berger says, “[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe,” (Berger 8). This means, if a person thought that men were superior to women, he or she would view the image with either shock or embarrassment. If a person was very interested women’s rights, he or she would have a completely different view of the image and of women. The way people view the image of Billie Jean King holding her arms up in triumph is controversial, just as the rest of the images produced during the “Battle of the Sexes”.

Other pictures related to this image are: Bobby Riggs making a muscle and Billie Jean King touching it, which was taken by the media for publicity before the match; Billie Jean King being carried out to the middle of the Houston Astrodome on an Egyptian litter decorated with plumes of pink feathers, carried by six men in togas; and Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs shaking hands after the match (Schwartz). These images appear below. The picture that was used for publicity for the match of Bobby Riggs making a muscle implies that men are stronger
than women. This is a much different connotation than the one people form when viewing the image of Billie Jean King in celebration after the infamous match. In this photo, Bobby Riggs is clearly the focus or the center of attention; he is standing in front of Billie Jean King flexing his muscle, which emphasizes the issue of physical strength between men and women. He looks very intense. Billie Jean King on the other hand, is standing in the background not looking overly enthused about having her photo taken. This was not the case with the next photo I observed. Before the match, in the photo of Billie Jean King being carried out on a litter, juxtaposes the image of Bobby Riggs flexing his muscle. Billie Jean King is alone in this image, completely the center of attention. She looks comfortable on the litter, seeming as though it is an everyday occurrence. After looking at this image, one would assume that women are superior to men. The final image of Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs shaking hands implies that a fair match was played and the two opponents respected each other. The opponents exchanged the handshake, which is a gesture of congratulations from the loser to the winner, on the same side of the net which does not usually occur in the game of tennis. Bobby Riggs was extremely polite and showed class and sportsmanship after his loss. It leads viewers to imply that Bobby Riggs no longer feels so superior to women tennis players, since he just got beat. The image differs greatly from the other three images, and also symbolizes how much more women tennis players are respected following the event.
Bobby Riggs and Billie Jean King are two very different people who live very different lives. Together, because of the epic match they played on September 20th, 1973, like it or not, the game of women’s tennis was changed forever. The way women were perceived in general was changed as well. Sports impact culture and society greatly, thus how women are viewed in the sports arena impacts how they are viewed in other aspects of life. All in all, women worldwide are still looked at as fragile compared to men. However, the “Battle of the Sexes” greatly improved the position of women in power. Prior to the epic tennis match, women were looked at as weak, or not capable of competing with a man to any extent. Currently, women are improving their status when it comes to competing with men. Whether it is in sports, at work, as a dominant figure in the household, in school, or as a caregiver, women are slowly becoming more active in these roles. In sports, male soccer players and female soccer players are thought of almost equally. At work, although we are not there yet, this past election was the only election that had a female candidate for president, which makes it the closest any female has come to being elected in this powerful position. Also, a few CEOs of major companies are now females. In the household, more women are becoming successful with their careers, thus in most circumstances have much more of a voice in family life than women of previous generations. In school, even though there are .8 million more males in the United States ages 18-24 than females, females account for 57% of college students. That percentage is completely flipped from the late 1960’s (Marklein 1). As a caregiver, the role of women remains constantly dominant, although now, many women have their own successful careers along with being the primary caregiver of their children. Thus, it is obvious that the position of women in power has come a long way, but that does not mean that the work with issues concerning women’s rights are finished.
Women are still not looked at as equal in many aspects of life. In sports, men and women are often segregated, and do not play the same sport by the same rules. Tennis, for example, is played by both men and women. In men’s tennis, they play best of five sets, however, in women’s tennis, only best of three sets is played. Also, when men and women do play on the same court, which happens in mixed doubles, the men are looked at as the dominant players, no matter what their skill level. In fact, while I was at Junior Team Tennis Nationals in Mobile, Alabama at the end of October, I played mixed doubles and the male opponent cracked a forehand right at my head while I was at the net. This is a smart play; however, it is looked at as terrible tennis etiquette to aim at the girl. Thus, female players are looked at as fragile and males are thought to be dominant. At work, full-time employed women earned only 80% of the salary a male earned in the same position. Also, women on average ask for 30% less money than men ask for and they negotiate 85% less than men do (Salary, 1). In the category of the dominant person in the household, normally men earn more money than women, and also make the final decisions on major issues. For example, in my family, my father is in charge of the majority of the financial decisions that are made. In school, women are accountable for 57% of the students, however, in advanced programs, such as engineering and physical sciences women are barely seen. Also, in doctoral programs, women account for only 49% of students, which is up from previous years (Schmidt 1). These statistics explain why women earn much less than men. As a caregiver, women have always been looked at as dominant. In fact, currently, women are looked at as the only possible caregiver for children. If a man is a stay at home dad, he is referred to as ‘Mr. Mom,’ which is extremely demeaning because a child is just as much the father’s as it is the mother’s. We have gotten very caught up with the trend for female dominance in the caregiver role, which is not good at all.
Although the roles of men and women are somewhat equal, there is still much more room for improvement. If one was to compare the present to when his or her grandparents were young, the roles of women are much improved. However, hopefully my grandchildren can say the same thing when I am older, since there is still much to be done. Billie Jean King and the “Battle of the Sexes” improved the position of women in various aspects of life, however, even now, thirty-six years later after the “Battle of the Sexes,” much still needs to be fixed. Women’s rights has proved to be a very slow process, but it is definitely something worth fighting for.
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The Revenge, Power, Money and Love of a Demonic Angel

Hands are essential to defining who we are as a person. They are more than just a part of our body; they are like looking glasses into our pasts as well as spotlights on our future. In *The Life and Loves of a She-devil* Ruth’s hands affect the ways in which she metamorphoses into a she-devil as well as the hands of characters like Brenda, Garcia and her doctors. However, we also see how Ruth perceives her hands as almost God-like, because they are the tools she uses to reach the goals she sets out to achieve. This creates an oxymoron of describing her hands. They are both devilish and divine. Ruth’s hands reflect her strong personality as she moves along each new path in her life. Her hands aid her as she sets out to acquire “revenge… power… money… to be loved and not love in return” (Weldon 49). We notice the work of Ruth’s hands in Fay Weldon’s narration of the novel as she creates the life she wants for herself, a mirror image of Mary Fisher’s life. Yet it is possible to compare these powerful hands to instances in the Bible when it mentions hands in relation to revenge, power, money and love.

Ruth leads a very unfortunate life as a young adult, especially after her mother severs all ties with her because of her new husband, causing Ruth to be taken in by Bobbo’s family. Brenda, Bobbo’s mother, shows sympathy for Ruth’s current situation by convincing her husband to take her in saying, “She needs a helping hand!” (30). This is a hand given in sympathy to Ruth, yet she finds it a hand that holds her in place and
restricts her from growing as an individual. It causes her to stay with Bobbo because she realizes that she has no place to go. At the time when they were married, Ruth saw Bobbo as being a blessing but after realizing the time and work she puts into raising their children and receiving nothing in return, her opinion changes. Job 2:9 states, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Bible). The “good” related to this verse would be Brenda, in the beginning, giving Ruth a place to live. The “evil” would be Ruth being unable to establish herself as an independent woman.

However, with her own hands she generates an evil of her own by burning down her house, thus forcing her children to go live with Mary Fisher. She uses her hands to turn all of the appliances on to “maximum performance and turned on all of the switches” (Weldon 66). She used her hands to perform an evil task. The consequences for Mary Fisher will be dire. Instead of being Bobbo’s sexual refuge, she becomes a crazed woman with a house full of children and pets that are not hers: “Sometimes her fingernails broke and she couldn’t bother filing, painting and protecting them, but put the worrying finger in her mouth and tugged with her teeth and pulled the whole top segment of the nail off” (Weldon 116). Mary Fisher no longer is the perfectly manicured, sexy woman that Bobbo once adored but instead became a stressed housewife; thus Ruth’s revenge against Mary Fisher for stealing her husband progresses.

Power is one of the most important things to most people. They thrive on it. For Ruth, originally she had no power over her life. As a wife she was supposed to obey her husband’s every wish. Yet in the case of Bobbo, this is a bit extreme. The only power she possesses in her hands is physical power over inanimate objects is. At their dinner party, Brenda takes note of the table silver and infers that “Ruth [is] good at polishing.
One rub of the fingers and stains disappear” (14). This relates to Bobbo being open with Ruth about the many affairs he has with other women; Ruth simply polishes the problem away with her hands and what we are left with is a woman who is content with the life she lives. That is, until Mary Fisher begins to take over Ruth’s judgment and Ruth realizes that she needs more. Deuteronomy 12:7 states, “You shall rejoice in all that you put your hand to, you and your household, where the Lord your God has blessed you” (Bible). Yet Ruth does not feel blessed at all but instead feels betrayed. This is the main reason she feels she has power vested in her because she built up her household simple to have the will to set it to flames. As mentioned previously, she burned her house down, feeling that was more of a nuisance than a blessing. It is a thorn in her side as she is trying to break free of Bobbo.

When she begins to take matters into her own hands after leaving Bobbo, she opens up Vesta Rose, a job agency for hiring women. This gives her the confidence she needs to move on. Empowering other women, especially, gives her the drive she needs to take power over Bobbo. She does this by making Mary Fisher suspicious of her husband. Ruth plants one of her workers, Elise, under Bobbo’s nose in hope of attracting him to her. Ruth describes Elise as having “little hands which flew over the typewriter, and her neck bent prettily over the machine” (Weldon 142). These hands will do much more than glide over a typewriter, however. This gives Ruth power over Bobbo’s life because of her influence in his workplace. Accordingly it also gives Ruth the power to be able to blackmail Mary Fisher by sending a letter about Elise’s relationship with Bobbo. Ruth has Mary Fisher right where she wants her.

Ruth blackmails Mary Fisher in more ways than one. Not that Ruth wishes
anything in return from Mary Fisher, simply her unhappiness. She does this when she starts taking money from her husband’s clients. Ruth never had money when she lived under his roof because of all the money he spent on his mistress. She says to her children as she gives them money to get food at McDonalds, “I have given you everything I have to give, remember that. And all I ever had was scraps and leavings” (Weldon 65). She must go through the change she finds around the house, scavenging for any coins. She feels betrayed by Bobbo and therefore wishes to steal a substantial amount of his money once she has the power to do so. Deuteronomy 19:21 states “And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Bible). This is Ruth’s chance to take him for all that he took from her by using her connections with the office girl Elsie who gives her reign in his office. With her new powerful hands Ruth “[writes] to a Swiss bank in Lucerne… in Bobbo’s name, opening a joint account and depositing a check for the two million dollars” that she surreptitiously stole from his client’s accounts (Weldon 148). Ruth feels that she should be compensated for the indifference Bobbo showed towards her. Ruth’s tools turn from manipulation and physical power to economical security as she uses the women she employees to do her bidding and help her gain financial stability without her husband knowing it is her behind it. Once again, this incident affects Mary Fisher as she watches her husband deteriorate in jail as Ruth is once more affecting her life in a negative way. Yet Mary Fisher does not feel too much animosity towards Bobbo just yet and says, “How can she not forgive him, and how can she not forgive him with the imprint of Garcia’s fingers still recorded in her flesh” (Weldon 152). So in Ruth’s plan to steal Bobbo’s money she exposes the real Bobbo to Mary Fisher.
Ruth then uses this money to change her physical self so that she looks like Mary Fisher because, in essence, she desires to be Mary Fisher. Starting at the beginning Bobbo questions, “How can one love… what is essentially unlovable?” (45). He deems Ruth to be an unlovable person. Yet this is not the character we meet in the hospital, undergoing numerous plastic surgeries. She is loved by everyone that tends to her there. She goes in asking for all types of complex surgeries yet is disappointed when she hears that her hands can not be medically enhanced. Ruth has all of this money at her disposal that should be capable of “changing hands” from her Swiss bank account to her doctor’s pocket yet the money is unable to medically “change” her hands. Her doctors explains, “We can change everything but the hands… They remain as evidence of our heredity and our past” (Weldon 204). Ruth’s hands have undergone so many different phases in her life that they have shaped her to become who she is today. They are her self-created weapons into her devilish soul.

The rest of Ruth’s body is another matter. Mark 8:43 states, “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched” (Bible). This is another reason why Ruth’s hands cannot be changed, if she did so she would erase her past and become a morally righteous woman. Yet she is nothing that even closely resembles a person such as this. She makes the nurses and doctors around her love her because of how mysterious she is: they do not know where the money is coming from, why she is so determined to rework her body’s structure, or when she will be satisfied with their work. Appropriately, when she leaves she is significantly more beautiful than when she originally came in. The positive side of this is that she looks like Mary Fisher. This is
her last bit of vengeance towards Mary Fisher. Before she dies, it is said that Mary Fisher “loves God, since there is no one else to love” since Ruth has taken away everything in her life and in essence has taken Mary Fisher’s bodily form on Earth (Weldon 222).

When Ruth comes back to High Tower, she comes to love herself as a part of the work her mighty hands have done the past years. She is confused by the thought process of others and remarks, “How they simply accept what happens, as if there were such a thing as destiny, and not just a life to be grappled with” (Weldon 277). She took matters into her own hands by trying to change her physical body as well as how she lives her life. Ruth finally loves herself for the demonic angel she has metamorphosed into. All love her, including Mary Fisher’s manservant and Bobbo for the beauty she created. She is no longer the “figure carved in stone: a giant chess piece, a clumsy black rook come to challenge the white ivory queen” that Garcia originally deemed her to be (Weldon 77). She is an all and mighty black queen now, here to fight the memory of the white ivory queen. Psalm 110 states, “The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool” (The Bible). Ruth made many enemies along the way yet these enemies became the people that grew to love her and her intriguing idiosyncrasies.

Ruth buys High Tower to bring revengeful misery against Bobbo, by the control she has over rebuilding the place even including hiring Mary Fisher’s manservant, using money she stole covertly from Bobbo’s account and with a love of herself to be the Mary Fisher she never was. The hands surrounding her shape Ruth to be the satanic beauty that we know her as today. She did everything in her power to change who she was. The references to the Bible show that perhaps heaven and hell really are not that far off, at
least in Ruth’s life. The ideals are similar and maybe this could suggest that Ruth is not as demonic as we make her out to be but in truth she is simply the exaggerated form of all of us combined. Just as Bobbo took revenge, control, money and love away from Ruth, Ruth learns to use her hands to take the same possessions from Mary Fisher, just as we take the same possessions from people in the world surrounding us.
Work Cited


A Meditation on Childhood: The Stories of Bruno Schulz

Living uncomfortably within the confines of an undesirable adult life and, eventually, during an occupation of his homeland and his very being, Bruno Schulz, in his writing of The Street of Crocodiles, exhibits a desire to escape and return to the days of his childhood. Schulz’s inclusion of this desire within what can be regarded as fictionalized accounts of his own formative years told through the characters he had created for the Street of Crocodiles collection has generated particular parallels among the stories within, most prominently within the stories “Nimrod” and “Pan,” which can be found at the epicenter of The Street of Crocodiles. “Nimrod” and “Pan” share some of the most blatant similarities than any other pair of stories in the collection, and it is completely fitting they should be presented one after the other in the book and as a centerpiece within the collection.

Bruno Schulz began his literary career as a middle-aged man and published only a few volumes of work before he was killed at the age of fifty by the German Secret Service, which had been occupying his home country of Poland. In the literary world, the work of Schulz has been heavily compared to that of French writer Marcel Proust. This is mainly due to both men’s wish to go back to a “time when the dividing line between imagination and external reality has not been drawn,” as exhibited in their writings (Taylor 455-57).

Those who read Bruno Schulz’s The Street of Crocodiles can absorb the collection in one of two ways. They can read it as an anthology of separate short stories, or they can relate it to a series of episodes in a larger coherent text, such as a novella. It might be more logical to do the
latter, only because of the recurring characters and locales throughout the stories and especially because each story is narrated by Joseph, a boy in his preteen years living with a uniquely dysfunctional family in a placid, relatively lifeless town.

Joseph’s youthfulness and “passivity as well as his professed simplicity” allude to Schulz’s longing to return to his childhood, as does the overall structure of The Street of Crocodiles itself (Brown 229). Assuming that we view the stories as episodes, the overall collection reads as though it were unfolding against any conventional time order. “In Schulz’s world,” “time may multiply and branch out into different directions” as it may in a youth’s perspective, which is driven by an underdeveloped sense of this “external reality” in which time is a linear entity, according to our standardized reasoning (Schonle 476, Taylor 457).

“Nimrod” and “Pan,” seem to break the “episodic” format discussed above, particularly when we regard the fact that they are obtrusive mirror images of each other and therefore can reasonably fit into one package. Also of note about this pair of stories is that they are the two shortest in the collection, “Nimrod” being less than four pages, “Pan” being only a little over three. In their brevity, they read more like snapshots, in which lie interrelated details of both an obvious and latent nature.

Before discussing some ways in which the two stories exist in parallel form and subsequently how they relate to Schulz’s desire to make a return to his childhood, it is best to present a general synopsis of each. In “Nimrod,” Joseph presents the simple tale of his discovery of a puppy “that appeared one day on [his] kitchen floor,” with which he “spent the whole of August” playing (“Nimrod” 41-44). “Pan” is another anecdotal piece, in which Joseph explains how he once ventured beyond the city gates with his friends and happened upon a ragged, apparently homeless man crouching in the brush in an overgrown section of a garden orchard (“Pan” 45-48).
The most obvious of the similarities between the two stories involves the homeless man in “Pan” and another character that appears earlier, at the end of “Nimrod:” a horrific, spiny, black cockroach. Nimrod, the puppy, discovers this cockroach on a freshly cleaned kitchen floor while chewing on a rug. Being new to the environment outside of the womb of his mother, Nimrod does not know how to react to this “black monster” (“Nimrod” 44). He stops and keeps a close eye on the roach’s movements. Then, out of “a mixture of anger and fear,” Nimrod growls for the first time (“Nimrod” 44). In “Pan,” Joseph is in a new environment as well, beyond the gates which held him in the city’s “womb.” Upon discovering the homeless man -- “a Pan without a pipe” -- he too finds himself “nailed to the spot” and “held captive” (“Pan” 48). Then, he retreats, as both the cockroach and the puppy had in “Nimrod.”

Proportionally, the cockroach is to Nimrod as the homeless man is to Joseph. Both are the objects of the respective climaxes of each story. Both allude to the unexpected surprises we find when we find ourselves in strange new worlds. It can also be said that each contribute to the development of Nimrod and Joseph. Nimrod, after seeing the cockroach and feeling the way he felt about it, makes a new sound “completely different from his usual whimpering” (“Nimrod” 44). Joseph, who had seemingly been confined to the Market Square and closely surrounding areas the majority of his life, sees someone who lives beyond the city gates for the first time.

The environments in which Joseph and Nimrod are submerged themselves contribute to the parallel nature of the two short stories. The new world in which Nimrod finds himself opens him up to “the charms of plurality,” and allows him to react to things that are new to him but that he comes to realize had always been in existence (“Nimrod” 43). The kitchen is a place of exploration and even danger, especially when the daily cleaning of the wooden floors occurs, but it is a place he quickly comes to know. Likewise, the garden beyond the city gates presents “plurality,” the idea of which is mirrored in Nimrod’s discoveries in the world of the kitchen,
beyond the boundaries of his mother’s womb (“Nimrod” 43). The garden is “vast with a number of extensions,” “[has] various zones and climates,” and contains an expansive variety of color and plant life (“Pan” 46). We know that Joseph gets used to the place quite quickly, due to his vivid spatial descriptions. In addition, Joseph had known that a world has always existed outside of his city, but only now is he venturing into it.

The concept of plurality as suggested in the two stories is identical to Schulz’s position that it is crucial “to ‘surrender’ to the world,” an action which is performed heavily during a person’s childhood (Schonle 479). Schulz, during his lifetime, had discussed in his writings that a person has two options for self-development. One can either create a rift between their inner world and the external world, which may or may not allow for the retention of one’s youthful eye, or one can allow the abundance of sights within the external world to fill their cognition and overwhelm their perceptions, which can serve to develop this youthful eye to its maturity (Schonle 477-79). Both Joseph and Nimrod behave according to the latter of Schulz’s ideas regarding the tracks along which a person can grow, thus Schulz advocates the allowance of plurality into one’s life at an early stage.

In the article “Childhood Revisited: The Writings of Bruno Schulz,” Colleen M. Taylor writes that “Schulz’s utopia...was in the past, in the world of his childhood” (458). “Nimrod” and “Pan” both exhibit prime examples of Schulz’s longing to revert back to his young years, as suggested in Taylor’s article. In “Nimrod,” Joseph is clearly elated, as suggested by the excited tone of the writing, to find the puppy and to have the puppy as an object of his youthful curiosity. Joseph takes pleasure in playfully scrutinizing Nimrod as the puppy learns about its surroundings and its capabilities and adapts accordingly (“Nimrod” 41-44). It is especially pleasurable for Joseph because he was once in Nimrod’s shoes and still is to an extent, as subsequently suggested by his explorations in “Pan.” It is interesting to consider the passage “But before me
all the future lay open. What a prospect of new experiences, experiments, and discoveries!”
(“Nimrod” 41). Because it is written from the first person perspective, the line would suggest
Joseph’s future of discovery. However, can this not also be applied to Nimrod’s perspective?
Both Nimrod and Joseph have their futures laid open to them, and both still delve into plurality
and make their share of discoveries, as they are both still living within the realm of childhood.

    One of the more subtle but significant similarities between “Nimrod” and “Pan” are the
unique references made to the father within them. Joseph’s father Jacob is an enigma throughout
The Street of Crocodiles. He is introduced in the first sentence of the first story in the collection,
“August,” and it is immediately revealed that Jacob had either abandoned the family altogether
or is very reclusive of the family (3). These references to the father are made through the two
characters highlighted previously, the cockroach and the homeless man in the garden, and they
foreshadow the father’s appearance as well as the rest of the family’s ultimate view of the father
as reported in the stories that follow “Nimrod” and “Pan.”

    As stated earlier, when we read the stories in the collection as presented, it becomes clear
that they are out of time order, regularly flashing back and forth between summer and the
previous winter. In “Cinnamon Shops,” which takes place during the previous winter, it is stated
that “[Jacob’s] face and head became overgrown with a wild and recalcitrant shock of gray hair,
bristling in irregular tufts and spikes” and that he had taken on “the appearance of an old, ill-
tempered fox” (“Cinnamon Shops” 54). Does this not instill us with the image of the homeless
man in the garden? “Cockroaches,” which may be the most eerie out of all the stories, presents
us with the information that Jacob is “no more with” the family at this point (73). His behavior
had become so irrational and his physique had become so frail due to a serious sickness that he
could no longer function with people. In addition, black, scaly marks had begun to accumulate
on his skin (“Cockroaches” 73-76). Joseph states, “His resemblance to a cockroach became daily more pronounced -- he was being transformed into one” (“Cockroaches” 76).

Now we move forward in time back to “Nimrod” and “Pan.” The adversaries in these stories can be looked upon as images of the father in a different, tragically intangible form. Nimrod’s discovery and subsequent reaction to the cockroach and Joseph’s encounter with the shaggy homeless man are commentaries on the interaction between Joseph and his rather mythical father. In “Cockroaches,” Joseph is noticeably afraid of his father, who continually distances himself from the family (73-76). The unexpected reappearance of his father would undoubtedly set off a reaction of fear from Joseph, as the cockroach’s appearance and the homeless man’s appearance set off reactions of fear from Nimrod and Joseph respectively. In this respect, the father’s importance in spite of his physical absence cannot be disregarded. This is evident in the “unexpected encounters” that take place within the stories, whether or not these unexpected encounters are regarded as peripheral (“Nimrod” 44).

Bruno Schulz’s father died in 1905 when Schulz’s was only thirteen. After his death, he was no longer able to focus on acquiring an education in art, because he had to provide for his family (Taylor 458). It is known that Schulz “felt only love and admiration for his father as a ‘defender of the lost cause of poetry’” (Taylor 460). In this respect, it would make sense that Schulz would present Joseph’s father as a godlike entity in the stories. However, why would Joseph’s father be an object of fear in the household? In “Birds,” Joseph describes his father’s passion for ornithological wildlife as that of “the huntsman and the artist rolled into one” (20). Not only is this evidence that Joseph looks up to his father, but it is also reflective of Schulz’s admiration for his father as a “defender” of the artistic world. Further evidence of Joseph’s love for his father lies in “Cockroaches,” when Joseph narrates “I had a hidden resentment against my mother for the ease with which she had recovered from father’s death” (73). If we keep this in
mind, it becomes more likely that Joseph was afraid of his father because it was clearly visible to him that he was losing his father. Jacob was becoming more and more of an entity with the progression of time, and his detachment from Joseph’s world seemed inevitable.

Bruno Schulz himself once wrote, on his writing of Cinnamon Shops (the collection which later became known as The Street of Crocodiles) that the work was more like “an autobiography...or rather a genealogy of the soul” (Taylor 456). Schulz, through his depiction of Jacob’s downward spiral and Joseph’s feelings regarding this, seems to be expressing how he felt when he lost his father. To relate to the “adversaries” in “Nimrod” and “Pan,” this feeling of loss -- or rather the feeling of the fear of loss -- is triggered via different manifestations. After Schulz lost his father, he was forced to leave not only his youthful artistic imagination behind, but also his childhood. It is in this sense that Joseph is Schulz. With their fathers “wilting before [their] eyes,” the period to which they will always wish to revert begins to crumble (“Visitation” 15).

With The Street of Crocodiles, Bruno Schulz touches upon a concept to which many people living in this day and age like to adhere: the notion that the child within us will always remain in its place. The desire to return to that place in time can be felt by anyone at one point or another. Schulz brings his personal longing to the forefront in his collection of stories through Joseph, a character who shares the experience of having childhood torn away after the death of a father and who is tune with what the external world has to offer for the ability to imagine beyond a stagnating reality. Joseph in “Pan” and Nimrod in “Nimrod” are shown to still have the vast opportunity to open themselves to their environment without any manipulation by the “adult world.” To an artist like Schulz, this opportunity was the threshold to a sublime dream of unlimited selfhood and expression, untouched by commonly accepted logic.
Works Cited


In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story “The Birthmark,” Aylmer, the antagonist struggles with his wife’s sexual power. Due to a small birthmark on Georgiana’s left cheek, she holds power over the many men who are infatuated with her. In consequence, Aylmer’s approach to make his wife perfect ultimately leads to learning a valuable lesson that accompanies a tragic ending; the perfect person simply cannot exist. “The Birthmark” expresses the dominant theme of feminine sexuality, through allegory and idealism, which are evident throughout the text. Through Aylmer’s idealistic expectations he tries to achieve the “naturally impossible” (Hawthorne 2450), by trying to play God. Through the chronology of the text the reader can see Aylmer and Georgiana transforming from the greedy need of perfection.

As the marriage between Aylmer and Georgiana commences, Aylmer notices a small beauty mark on Georgiana’s face, which makes him very uneasy and sparks the idea of feminine sexuality. The narrator explains; “Georgiana’s lovers were wont to say, that some fairy, at her birth-hour, had laid her tiny hand upon the infant’s cheek, and left this impress there, in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts” (Hawthorne 2441). Georgiana would effortlessly sway the numerous suitors because the birthmark held powers which would infiltrate their hearts. Before his marriage, he thought
little or nothing of the imperfection and its’ sexual power, but it was not until after Aylmer wed Georgiana that the birthmark became a threat. Aylmer thought little or nothing of the matter, but he then realizes that the magic endowment is what too swayed his heart to the direction of Georgiana (2444). Aylmer becomes certain that other men will become attracted to her as well. Because of this Georgiana has a sense of sexual power over her husband. Aylmer begins to feel threatened by his wife’s sexuality and therefore becomes obsessed with the removal of the birthmark. As told by Cindy Weinstein, the writer of the article The Invisible Hand Made Visible: “The Birth-mark”, Weinstein points out that in the same passage Aylmer uses different readings of the birthmark (Weinstein 55): “It was a fatal flaw of humanity [...] expressed the ineludible grip [...] the symbol of his wife’s liability to sin, sorrow, decay and death” (Hawthorne 2441). It becomes obvious that the small birthmark has a significant impact on Aylmer. Since his wife Georgiana submits to his opinions he will be able to easily persuade her to remove the imperfection immediately.

Georgiana, like many women of the nineteenth century were expected to be submissive of their husbands, ensuring that their every desire be met according to his needs. Barbra Bodichon, the writer of the journal article A Female’s Status in the Mid Nineteenth Century, states that women in the nineteenth century had an obligation to be domesticated. Taking care of house, the children, and catering to her husbands every need was a typical schedule for a married woman (Bodichon 2). According to Cindy Weinstein, “Georgiana and Aylmer’s marital future seems a far cry from the separation of spheres, in which women had authority over the private home while men dominated the public world” (Weinstein 48). It
was common for women to act submissive to their husbands, as Georgiana does to Aylmer.

  When Aylmer makes a remark to Georgiana about her birth mark she immediately attempts to defend herself, replying; “then why did you take me from my mother’s side?” (Hawthorne 2440). Before Georgiana married Aylmer, she was expected to be submissive to her parents. When Georgiana took Aylmer’s hand in marriage, Aylmer replaced her parents’ role and Georgiana was now expected to treat her husband with the same respect as her parents, as men were at top of the hierarchy over women. Mary Rucker states that Georgiana has a strong sense that the mark signifies an inextricable part of her essence and she suggestively questions the wisdom of destroying it (Hawthorne 456). This was problematic because Georgiana considered the birthmark to be apart of her identity.

  Since the imperfection has always been a part of her, she begins to question whether or not to part with it. Georgiana never thought anything about the imperfection on her left cheek, not until Aylmer began to criticize it. Georgiana says,

  Life is but a sad possession to those who have attained precisely the degree of moral advancement at which I stand, were I weaker and blinder, it might be happiness, were I stronger, it might be endured hopefully, but, begin what I find myself, methinks I am of all mortals the most fit to die

  (Hawthorne 2449).

Since her husband was not fond of the birthmark, Georgiana trusts her husband’s guidance and agrees to have the birthmark removed. Mary Rucker explains that Georgiana first decides to rid of the dreadful imperfection to secure her sanity and Aylmer’s peace. But the
more she studies the mark the more she begins to despise the fatal imperfection (Rucker 452). The narrator explains, “Still whenever she dared to look into the mirror, there she beheld herself, pale as a white rose and with the crimson birth-mark stamped upon her cheek, not even Aylmer hated it as much as she” (Hawthorne 2446). As Aylmer further degraded his wife’s imperfect flaw, the more she began to hate it. In accomplishing this, Aylmer successfully robbed his wife of her sexual power. The once confident woman was now belittling herself into the realm of a self-conscious wreck. The now self-conscious Georgiana thrives for perfection. With the help from Aylmer’s scientific methods he will quench both Georgiana and his thirst for perfection.

Even though Aylmer does not have a stable scientific history, again male domination steps in and Georgiana is forced to comply with her husband’s needs and desires. As Georgiana began to read her husband’s precious portfolio which included all of his scientific experiments, the narrator begins to describe the reading from the journal;

Much as he had accomplished, she could not but observe that his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed, his brightest diamonds were the merest pebbles, and felt to be so by himself, in comparison with the inestimable gems which lay hidden beyond his reach […] it was a sad confession, and continual exemplification, of the short-comings of the composite man- the spirit burdened with clay and working matter- and of the despair that assails the higher nature, at finding itself so miserably thwarted by the earthly part (Hawthorne 2447).
Due to the fact that a wide amount of Aylmer’s science projects have been failures Aylmer has become to feel like a fallen man, his love of science has failed him because many if not all of Aylmer’s experiments were failures. He repeatedly attempted to make something that already held a significant amount of beauty even more beautiful. The birthmark presents Aylmer with a chance both to right these scientific wrongs and, in doing so, establish the perfect human being. Mary Rucker, the journalist who wrote the article “Science and Art in Hawthorne’s “The Birth-Mark”” proposes that, “when Aylmer loses sight of the ideal beauty that he tries to objectify, the narrator and Georgiana, rather than addressing his perverted ambition and perverse attitudes, reverently inform us that all of his studies appertain to divine absolutes” (Rucker 450). With this knowledge of her husbands failures Georgiana still agrees to drink the potion that will perfect her. By Georgiana trusting in her husbands idealistic thoughts, fully believing that he will successfully cure Georgiana of the hideous mark, this scene constructed by Hawthorne shows how powerful Aylmer’s opinion is to his wife.

Because of the time period, the eighteenth century, women were expected to worship their husband, granting them an everlasting submissiveness.

In consequence to Georgiana’s blemish upon her cheek, her husband begins to feel threatened by her imperfection. The narrator explains, “many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing lips to the mysterious hand, it must not be concealed, however, that the impression wrought by this fairy sign-manual varied exceedingly” (Hawthorne 2440). Through Aylmer’s obsession of the birthmark and his wife’s potential admirers, he begins to notice every intricate detail of the blemish. Aylmer provides a
description in the story stating, “the mark wore a tint of deeper crimson, which imperfectly
defined its shape amid surrounding rosiness […] a crimson stain upon the snow, its shape
bore not a little similarity to the human hand” in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost
fearful distinctness (Hawthorne 2440). Just as the snow is white in comparison to Georgina,
representing the color of perfection or purity, when the crimson stain comes upon the snow it
represents a flaw, in this case being the birthmark. Snow which has not been touched is
similar to Georgiana’s face. On the right of Georgiana’s cheek it is like untouched snow,
perfection. But on Georgiana’s right cheek where the “crimson stain” lays is the snow that
has been blotched, and imperfect. The color of Georgiana’s birthmark is crimson, and
according to Jill Morton the writer of the article “Interaction of Color,” in literature the color
red or crimson can symbolizes sexuality, passion, blood, and dominance (Morton 6).

Since the birthmark’s shape resembles a human hand, there are several different
representations. The hand represents Georgiana’s humanity and Aylmer’s hand, which holds
dominance over Georgiana. Because the crimson color represents dominance, the hand on
Georgiana’s left cheek is Aylmer’s holding power or dominance over his wife. The
birthmark also represents humanity, because all people are born with flaws, which are an
essential attribute that makes a distinction between human begins and the divine. When
removing a person’s flaw, he or she is being robbed of the person they have been created to
be. Since all humans are born with imperfections, by removing flaws, people become perfect
and the perfect person simply cannot exist. In consequence to the removal of the birthmark
Georgiana only survives for a mere few minutes.
Aylmer’s fear begins to unravel, as he again calls out to male readers, writing, “masculine observes, if the birth mark did not heighten their admiration, contended themselves with wishing it away, that the world might posses one living specimen of ideal loveliness, without semblance of flaw” (Hawthorne 2441). To rid Georgiana of her sexual power and his jealousy, Aylmer uses allegory to persuade his wife to agree to remove the blemish. He tells his wife that the birthmark must be removed because it looks disgraceful on her face instead of revealing his true intentions, which is that the birthmark is an imperfection which he must conquer. Aylmer explains, “Ah perhaps upon another face, perhaps it might [...] but never on yours! No dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of nature that this slightest possible defect- which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty- shocks me, as being a visible mark of imperfection” (Hawthorne 2440). Unrealistic thoughts begin to clutter Aylmer’s mind to a point where his obsession quickly becomes a fatal devastating accident.

Hawthorne again uses an allegorical implication through the minor imperfection on Georgiana’s cheek. Aylmer found his wife breathtaking, loving everything about her except for her one insignificant flaw. This minor flaw on Georgiana’s cheek symbolized her humanity. By removing the birthmark he would take away her ability to live as a human being. Humans are naturally born with error and imperfections and by taking away Georgiana’s birthmark, a minor flaw, Aylmer will rob his wife from her from human traits. When it was finally time to change Georgiana into the perfect women, Aylmer transformed his dungeon into a beautiful apartment.
Hawthorne uses imagery through the remodeling of the apartment, to represent Georgiana’s birthmark. The narrator notes, “Aylmer had converted those smoky, dingy, somber rooms, where he had spent his brightest years in recondite pursuits, into a series of beautiful apartments, not unfit to be the secluded abode of a lovely woman” (Hawthorne 2444). The new found dungeon is similar to what Aylmer is trying to do to Georgiana’s birthmark. Before Aylmer decorated the dungeon it was smoky, dingy and the rooms were somber. The narrator explains,

the walls were hung with gorgeous curtains, that no other species of adornment can achieve; and as they fell from the ceiling to the floor, their rich and ponderous folds, concealing all angels and straight lines, appeared to shut in the scene from infinite space, for Georgiana knew, it might be a pavilion among the clouds (Hawthorne 2444).

Georgiana like the dungeon represents imperfection, but only once they are both perfected will Aylmer truly be satisfied. The Cindy Weinstein notes that “Georgiana’s new adobe represents Aylmer’s domestic utopia, a fantasy of invisibility and disembodiment that is manifested on the rich folds” (Weinstein 49). Here Hawthorne uses allegory, Aylmer again tries making something that is imperfect perfect. Weinstein notes, Aylmer’s dark and dingy laboratory represents all of his scientific failures, and by remodeling the dark laboratory he is trying to cover up his failures or imperfections (Hawthorne 54). Similar to Georgiana’s birthmark, Aylmer tries to create a perfect utopia between love and home. When the description of the curtains is given, Hawthorne uses allegory to represent the truth that lies under the curtains. Cindy Weinstein suggests, the curtains represent a fantasy of invisibility
and disembodiment which is manifested behind the curtains (Weinstein 49). To soothe his wife Aylmer began to put use of secrets science has taught him in the past (Hawthorne 2444). The narrator begins to explain the emotions Georgiana began to feel, “airy figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of unsubstantial beauty, came and danced before her, imprinted their momentary footsteps on beams of light” (Hawthorne 2444). Weinstein suggests that because Georgiana’s seclusion is constituted by the very thing that it pretends to exclude, which is Aylmer’s scientific experiments (Weinstein 49). The footsteps of light which danced before Georgiana is the birthmark upon Georgiana’s cheek.

As Georgiana scrounged around Aylmer’s newly found apartment she made a discovery, “over the volumes of his scientific library, in many dark old tomes, she met with chapters full of romance and poetry. They were the works of philosophers of the middle ages […] from the investigation of nature […] from the spiritual world” (Hawthorne 2446). By possessing romance novels in his laboratory, Aylmer is intertwining his love for Georgiana and his love for science. In a sense the Georgiana’s body is being used for an idealistic approach to science, and she becomes his latest experiment.

Again through the use of allegory Hawthorne shows the length of Aylmer’s obsession of the birthmark. In trying to erase the birthmark Aylmer imprints its qualities elsewhere. When Aylmer violently reacts to what seems to him Georgiana curiously wander around his workspace. The narrator describes Aylmer’s reaction when he discovers Georgiana’s presence; “he rushed towards her, and seized her arm with a grip that left the print of his fingers upon it” (Hawthorne 2448). Weinstein writes, stating that this passage suggests that
“as Aylmer’s desire to erase Georgiana’s fingerlike birthmark becomes more and more compulsive, he cannot help but inscribe even more finger prints upon Georgiana’s body” (Weinstein 49). Aylmer repeats to Georgiana that her “crimson hand” had “taken a pretty firm hold of his fancy” (Hawthorne 2442). Aylmer grows a deep obsession over the birthmark. When he finally rids his wife of her sexual power, all of Aylmer’s wishes will be granted; Aylmer will not only have the perfect wife but he will also master the art of playing the role of God through the enhancement of the sciences. Nicholas Bromwell the writer of the journal article “The Bloody Hand of Labor: Work, Class and Gender in Three Stories by Hawthorne”, Nicholas notes, “Georgiana’s body is at once the beneficiary, the site, and the victim of Aylmer’s experiment” (Bromwell 545). By ridding his wife of his sexual power, not only will Aylmer be successful in having the perfect wife, he will also gain a higher degree in his scientific study.

Georgiana’s birthmark becomes a sexual trademark. Georgiana’s birthmark is a mark of power it causes men to gawk over her, which heightens her feminine sexuality. Feminine sexuality is largely expressed throughout the text using allegory and idealism. Because of the time period men had the authority in the relationships with their wives. Women were subjected to be submissive of their husbands at all times. Aylmer took Georgiana’s subsmissiveness for granted and persuaded her to rid of her sexual imperfection. Aylmer begins to view his wife as not only his lover but also another idealistic experiment. Not only did Aylmer completely remove the imperfection he also robbed his wife of any confidence she once had. In doing so Aylmer’s idealism in his scientific studies ends fatally when he
finally quenches his thirst for perfection.
Works Cited


The discussion of gender in Thomas Hardy’s Victorian novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, is a crucial aspect to consider when reviewing the text, as the interactions, dialogues, and relationships between the male and female characters results in an array of predicaments. Whether in terms of how they perceive one another in the conscious or subconscious mind, communicate with one another, or physically intermingle with one another, within the context of the issues of the time, the heavy imbalance in every walk of life between men and women directly influences even the most informal of social dealings. Throughout the course of the Victorian period the debate pertaining to gender and the “woman question” was waged, encompassing a number of discussions ranging from the increase of accommodations regarding marriage laws to the argument against the unjust placement of women on a pedestal in terms of purity and other angelic associations that are embodied in Coventry Patmore’s poem, “Angel in the House” (The “Woman Question” 1581). Upon first becoming acquainted with Tess Durbeyfield, the female protagonist in the text, the way in which she is depicted aligns directly with the ideals desired of the female sex; visual imagery as provided by Hardy conveys the young maiden as “a pure woman,” which reads below the title on the original front cover of the novel, in addition to possessing strengths in the realm of physical beauty, modesty, and emotional expressiveness (Hardy 4; 18). Interactions with males throughout the course of the novel confirm such observations, and ultimately influence how they immediately identify and
subsequently interact with Tess. Alec D’Urberville and Angel Clare function in the novel as male figures who perceive Tess in contrasting manners; nevertheless, they remain unified in their intentional or possibly unintentional efforts to dominate and manipulate the object of their desires to their advantage in whatever means available. Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* articulates the absurdity of male attempts to dominate “the inferior sex” through restrictive techniques, the most extreme being the act of rape, while highlighting the fact that physical appearances of women attribute to how men execute their authority and respond to the female sex, as is best exemplified in the relationship dynamic between Tess Durbeyfield, Angel Clare, and Alec D’Urberville.

Tess Durbeyfield, the central figure of Hardy’s profound text, is in possession of physical strengths that place her in a position where she is the object of male attention despite her modest nature and lack of familiarity with the reality beyond her confined place. The word usage alone constructs an image of Tess that expands far beyond descriptions provided by other characters throughout the novel; as Jules David Law states in the article, “Sleeping Figures: Hardy, History, and the Gendered Body,” “Tess’s nomination as a subject worthy of narrative attention (her features are ‘eloquently’ articulated rather than random and discomposed) constructs at the same time an ideal viewer” (Law 247). John B. Humma goes a step further, arguing that the methods instituted to describe Tess, primarily through comparisons drawn to nature and the surrounding environment, depict her character as an “earthy sexual being” which in turn humanizes the mythologized being that is endorsed by the male characters in the novel, specifically Alec D’Urberville and Angel Clare (Humma 64). However, the fact that she is illustrated as a god of sorts is problematic; such a construction of her persona further embeds Tess upon a pedestal of perfection to reinforce the image of women as the utmost sustainers of virtue, thereby making
her more marketable as an object to behold and manipulate. Such a position is restraining and impossible to reach no matter the gender of an individual, yet in the case of Alec and Angel, their expectations of Tess remain centered upon the Victorian ideal of a woman as the “Angel in the House”: silent, pure, self-sacrificing, maternal, and obedient. Despite her insistent desire to remain solidified upon her moral grounding, she appears to be predestined to suffer immensely by acquiring the attention of the “wrong man” as opposed to earning the respect of one who is proper for her, as articulated by Kaja Silverman in her article “Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*” (Silverman 7). Relations between Tess and Alec as well as Tess and Angel appear to cross into the boundary of harming the protagonist in some capacity, particularly since the act of implementing techniques to control the woman within the text, no matter from a man she loves or despises, remains an act of male domination.

Interactions between Tess and Alec reveal the epitome of male lust and desire for sexual expression in regards to the latter character; the first act of communication between the pair is immediately identified as the emergence of one sided infatuation. Within the broader context of their meeting, motivations for the adventure are not of Tess’s doing; her family has insisted that because of their new identity that connects their lineage to a knight, if she seeks assistance from the bearers of said name, opportunities may be unveiled that could improve the plight of the Durbeyfields, specifically in the form of monetary assistance (Hardy 44-49). The result was nothing as had been hoped by the family, including the children who had cried in an effort to persuade their sister to travel away from home to become a lady and purchase a new horse, in regards to being supplied with an ample portion of funds (Hardy 48). Tess was merely hired to care for Mrs. D’Urberville’s fowls, which accompanied the duty of attempting to avert unwanted attention espoused by Alec, yet she accepted the labor to provide a measly income to her
desperate family (Hardy 56-57). Upon first becoming acquainted with her supposed cousin, the reader is introduced to a man clearly subjugated by his sexually devious nature; he drives the carriage without much consideration or attention, endangering his life in addition to Tess’s purposely to force his passenger into a state of dependency upon him, thereby commencing the theme of male domination (Hardy 54-55). Alec orders Tess to refrain from grabbing his arm, exclaiming that by doing so they will perish, demanding instead that she grasp on to his waist, a completely unnecessary act that he soon will sexualize out of the enjoyment that evolves from forcing a maiden into a state dependent upon the chivalric ideal to spare her life (Hardy 54-55). In an effort to once again have Tess grab on to the midsection of his body, Alec playfully asks, “Now then, put your arms round my waist again, as you did before my beauty…Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess; or even on that warmed cheek, and I will stop—on my honor I will!” (Hardy 55). Although she initially exclaims that never will she resort to fulfilling his requests, out of the escalation of fear for her sustaining her utmost safety, she unknowingly harms her modest nature by adhering precisely to his intentions (Hardy 55). Tess’s naïveté has therefore proven to be the factor that severely hinders her ability to reject a clever and mischievous young man from taking advantage of her, therefore ensuring the triumph of the first direct instance of a male character exerting his cunning and scheming tactics over a woman in Hardy’s novel.

Rape is the method of complete male domination implemented by Alec to control Tess physically, although other methodologies are applied prior to the controversial scene where she is taken into the woods after finally consenting to his offer of taking her home following the festival (Hardy 68-69). Indeed the question of whether or not consent was involved in the act of sexual intercourse reigns supreme in the minds of literary critics and readers alike, as such details
are not provided other than the fact that her virtue was no longer maintained. Nevertheless, I would argue that because Tess was asleep and given the personality of Alec, he would have proceeded to pleasure his own desires as opposed to awakening the object of his adoration when he occupies the physical and mental capability to exert his power over her. In an effort to swoon Tess one final time before resorting to sexual manipulation, he makes a promise that he firmly knows will sway his love in his favor: providing her father with a much needed horse. Tess is immediately enthralled by the gesture, as she had been the perpetrator behind accidentally killing the family horse, which severely hindered the Durbeyfield’s means of income. Alec then poses the question about whether or not she loves him, and in return receives a response that greatly offends him; although she is grateful and appreciative of his kind gestures, the frustration and hatred that cultivates within her body fosters not the admiration Alec seeks, but instead unremorseful and angry perceptions of the man who persists to exert control over her entire being (Hardy 69-70).

The act of rape itself is not directly stated or described, nor is any material specified pertaining to whether or not consent was involved in the event before she became “a maiden no more” (Hardy 75). Nevertheless, the questionable act of sexual intercourse ultimately proves successful for Alec in regards to overriding the limited authority of a young woman in an effort to control nearly every facet of her being. Evidence further affirms the fact that Alec D’Urbervilles is advancing closely to occupying Tess when he calls out her name after they settle down for the night in a fog-ridden forest and the narrator states, “There was no answer…she was sleeping soundly” (Hardy 73). Hardy then shifts into questioning the location of Tess’s guardian angel from preventing the atrocities being committed against her virgin body while foreshadowing the difficulties that will result from the division of her past and future
selves (Hardy 74; Humma 66-67). Tess now occupies the identity of a fallen maiden despite her numerous attempts previously to rid herself from Alec’s deceitful hand; in addition to losing her sexual purity, a further shift in her identity occurs. No longer does the narrator refer to her as bearing the name Durbeyfield, but instead is now referred to as Tess D’Urbervilles (Hardy 74). Therefore, not only has Alec effectively triumphed in controlling Tess’s sexuality, but his authority has transcended to impacting her name, present self, and the ways in which she will be perceived by the community and more importantly the men of society. From a physical aspect, through implementing rape as a tactic of absolute male domination, Alex is now in control of her body as an objectified entity. However, the distinctions between the occupation of the mental and material realms of the female body are profound and must be taken into consideration, as Alec was in fact triumphant in exerting tactics of sexual subjection over Tess, yet entirely unsuccessful in monopolizing the mental capacity of his victim. Lovesey expands upon the subject of the rape of Tess through a perspective embedded in history, arguing that the intentions of Hardy in creating a character that falls from virtue is to provide a discussion of the broader issues of the time that revolve around the perceptions of the fallen woman. Given the rapidly evolving nature of Victorian society, the views focused on women who had not properly protected the sanctity of their virginity were changing, mainly due to the child prostitution and the white slave trade, and were thus directly impacting the broader human scope of sexual virtue (Lovesey 918-920).

Four months following her arrival to the D’Urbervilles estate and weeks after her exploitation, Tess no longer accepts residing with her rapist and alleged cousin, admitting that she feels little adoration towards Alec, and flees to her original home (Hardy 75-76). However, she extends blame upon herself for the act of seduction and rape that was perpetrated against her
once virginal body (Hardy 77; Lovesey 919). After her departure, Alec catches up to her on the road, inquiring her reasons for departing, to which she responds that she does not love him and refuses to remain in a position where she will continue to fall from the ideologies exerted within her moral code (Hardy 76-77). The narrator remarks on the significant alterations that have transpired because of Alec’s manipulative personality, juxtaposing the once exuberant Tess who vigorously fought to keep Alec away to the now complacent and obedient woman who is comparable to “a puppet” (Hardy 76). A subtle component of dialogue between the pair reveals hope for Tess despite having suffered through Alec’s tactics of female suppression; Hardy writes,

Alec D’Urbervilles removed his cigar, bent towards her and said—

‘You are not going to turn away like that, dear? Come!’

‘If you wish,’ she answered indifferently. ‘See how you’ve mastered me!’ (Hardy 78).

The importance of tone within Tess’s response is necessary to highlight, as the efforts implemented by Alec, although vigorous and well contrived, were not enough to restrict his victim to the extent he hoped. By acting indifferently towards a man who clearly expressed lustful adoration towards her and sarcastically mocking his ability to have mastered her, Tess is exerting the minimalistic aspects of her personality that have not been subdued, which is evidence of the fact that she is not as restrained as Alec had intended. Had Alec been able to manipulate every facet of her body, mind, and soul, Tess’s desire to depart from his presence and support would have never crossed her mind; however, despite becoming a victim of an act she was unable to control, she was unwilling to accept her current predicament, hence the reason why fleeing for her own safety becomes an act of necessity. However, a reminder of Alec’s
exertion over Tess’s physical self results from the rape; a son is born, bearing the name Sorrow, who subsequently passes away before being baptized (Hardy 94-95; Law 250). Although the narrator notes Tess was in a position to believe “The past was past; whatever it had been it was no more at hand,” the death of her child catapults her into a place where previous events dictate the course of the present (Hardy 91, 93-94). As a result, not only did Alec successfully monopolize the object of his narrative gaze in the most physical sense, but his actions indirectly brought about the demise of a child bearing a name that directly connotes the “sorrowful” nature of his mother’s situation.

As opposed to the suppressive and corruptive strategies Alec implements in terms of his treatment of Tess, the intentions of Angel differ significantly; as opposed to immediately seeking the attention of the young woman, he suppresses any sexually motivated desires and moves slowly when seeking conversational opportunities with the milk maid. Tess is an important component of the equation pertaining to why interactions remain limited following the acquaintance being established. The fear of past events and their resurgence remains at the forefront of her mind, and as a result the conversations that arise with Angel conveys Tess’s struggle with “life in general,” which proves shocking to Angel as he had not anticipated such a lovely girl to express such “sad imaginings” (Hardy 123-124). Nevertheless, Silverman affirms the reality that “Angel’s gaze may be more benign in intent than Alec’s, but there can be no doubt that it is informed by a similar mandate” which is precisely what must be recognized as a connecting element between the two male characters (Silverman 8). Tess’s physical appearance does prove to be a uniting factor between the men in conjunction with the overwhelming theme of male domination; arguably, the emphasis placed upon her beauty overwhelmingly establishes situations where Angel is able to exert the power of the male gaze upon the object of his thoughts.
(Law 248-249; Silverman 8, 10-11). Hardy in the concluding paragraphs of chapter XVIII communicates the moment when Tess knowingly becomes the object of Angel’s fixation, hence the reason why she projects her glance elsewhere; at this moment he briefly recognizes her figure from past events, and more importantly establishes his belief that she is by far the loveliest of the women at the dairy farm (Hardy 120). The instance, although subtle in importance, will ultimately lay the foundation for the relationship between the couple, as Angel’s misreading of Tess and her beauty as evidence for her sexual purity will prove problematic with the issues that emerge in subsequent chapters. Oliver Lovesey argues that the shift of Hardy’s depiction regarding Tess’s mouth alone is suggestive of the sexually-based alterations that occur and become noticeable following the incident of the wedding night; the enlightenment of Angel regarding Tess’s impropriety reveals the disillusionment of constructing an ideal specimen of the perfect woman embodied in the form of Tess (Lovesey 923-924).

Although Angel is immensely caring and nurturing in contrast to the sexually overriding Alec, exerting energies that convey the fact that he truly treasures his relationship with Tess (chapter XX is the commencing example of such), he too succumbs to executing tactics of domination over his partner, although in a much different manner. Despite reinvigorating the once suffering Tess and working diligently to prove his adoration and admiration as opposed to monopolizing her being, his misreading of her beauty as symbolizing an image entirely disconnected from her current self will dictate a significant predicament within their relationship. In one of the most problematic scenes in terms of unequal treatment due to gender that is accurately placed in the chapter entitled “The Woman Pays,” Tess, after several failed attempts and opportunities, finally confesses to her husband of her impurity and lost virginity. Prior to her profession, however, Angel shares in acknowledging a past error as well, to which he states,
I was going to tell you a month ago—at the time you agreed to be mine, but I could not; I thought it might frighten you away. I put it off; then I thought I would tell you yesterday, to give you a chance of at least escaping me. But I did not. And I did not this morning, when you proposed our confessing our faults on the landing—then sinner then I was! But I must, now I see you sitting there so solemnly. I wonder if you will forgive me? (Hardy 224)

Angel begs for Tess’s forgiveness, remaining mindful of the fact that he committed a socially unacceptable act while continuing to exert language that connotes his hope that she will accept his errors and continue in their marriage as a collaborative unit, free from weighty secrets. She immediately accepts his wrongdoings, even acknowledging his interjections that follow, and now feels fully prepared to vocalize her predicament that is of equal weight in comparison to Angel’s. Despite Angel appearing to be her “double” as confessed by Tess prior to her announcement, the severe contrast of reactions immediately conveys the double standard in the Victorian period of sexual impurity; Angel cannot and will not accept the truth, reverting to begging Tess to deny her confession, yet his wife must accept whatever truths emerge about her husband without questioning his authority (Hardy 224; Silverman 14-15).

After Tess completes her narrative at the beginning of phase five, in complete contrast to her lack of envy and pain when listening patiently to her partner’s secret, Angel’s “face had withered,” his speech began to lack coherency, and the act of merely walking proved challenging (Hardy 227). His tone immediately shifts into an attack, leading Tess to plead for his forgiveness, crying, “In the name of our love, forgive me!…I have forgiven you the same…Forgive me as you are forgiven! I forgive you, Angel” (Hardy 228). Angel forcefully responds that forgiveness cannot be extended in such a situation, as the “grotesque prestidigitation” is unworthy of any
form of mercy, which is in essence his way of enforcing patriarchal ideals pertaining to purity and virginity (Hardy 228, Silverman 14). The absence of Tess’s virginity in the eyes of Angel creates an entirely new individual, one who is unfamiliar and distanced from the figure that he had assumed to be his partner; such statements affirm the unreasonable nature of the expectations placed upon Tess while being expected to adhere to the ideals placed on the restrictive and unreachable pedestal of the Victorian period. John B. Humma affirms such observations in his article, “Language and Disguise: The Imagery of Nature and Sex in Tess,” arguing that, “…by idealizing Tess’s sexuality, by esteeming—and estimating—it in proportion to Tess’s ‘purity’ as he perceives it, he destroys his myth in the very act of creating it” (Humma 64). He continues, stating that the supposed myth of Tess and her sexual piety is demythologized by Angel and the utmost (Humma 64; Lovesey 914) From a more religious-based reading of the novel as contributed by Oliver Lovesey in “Reconstructing Tess,” the author argues that one possible reason as to why Angel idealizes Tess and vigorously seeks to reconstruct her virginity is because of the absence in his own spiritual faith; therefore, her presence is intended to fill in the void he desires to seal (Lovesey 914). Although an instance of such nature can be viewed beyond the confines of male domination alone, important considerations must be yielded to comprehending the persistence of Angel in his refusal to accept the faults of Tess’s past that were of equal worth to his own errors. The blatant double standard exerted over Tess affirms the view of women as completely unequal in terms of sexuality and the irrationality of the concept of sexual purity. Lovesey states, “Tess was begun in 1888 at a time when the late-Victorian obsession with virginity had turned to mania due to revelations about child prostitution, an increase in prosecutions for child sexual assault, and a revival of the stereotype of the wicked, exploiting mother” (Lovesey 917). Therefore, the emphasis placed upon upholding sexual
piousness within a historical context transcends into Hardy’s novel, which in turn becomes yet another method of male domination over women, as is best exemplified by Angel’s refusal to forgive the impropriety of Tess’s sexual past.

Much like Rochester in *Jane Eyre* renaming Jane after the proposed marriage was accepted, Angel resorts to similar tactics which are identifiable as a method of manipulation over women to purposely alter their identity to display the authority of the male figure. In an engaging conversation that revealed the depth of their disposition in chapter XX, Angel begins to refer to Tess as “Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them” (Hardy 130). The text notes that she would ask him to call her Tess, and he would promptly revert back to doing so; nonetheless, what proves to be more problematic about the process of prescribing “fanciful names” to Tess is the notion of her beauty dictating when Angel would draw such associations to the object of his attention (Hardy 130). When she was in her most beautiful and thereby hauntingly impressive form, occupying the function of “a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one typical form,” Angel would implement facets of knowledge contrived from his education to refer to Tess (Hardy 130). However, after a vigorous day of activity requiring all available energies, the beauty beheld by Angel begins to dry off from her faith and figure, no longer is she in possession of unearthly qualities and instead struggles to hold physical features that rise above other women throughout the world (Hardy 131). Such a system as instituted by Alec conveys his obsession with perfection, as he desires to encompass Tess under the realm which only gods occupy, yet in order to sustain the splendor of her body as an object, the act of working to support her family must be removed since the energy exerted wears upon her physical attributes. Although minor when compared to the broader issues that emerge from Alec’s character, the fact that he is
constructing an idealized version of Tess by referring to her as Grecian goddesses ultimately establishes the reality that disillusionment by the falsified image he created will blind Angel from the true nature of his love.

In an effort to counteract the sexualized attention received by two members of the male sex who manipulated the supposed superiority of their gender to dominate Tess in some shape or form, leaving her as the individual to bear the consequences of others actions, she desires a method to subside such unfortunate awareness of her captivating physical nature. After all, Tess believes the reason she is experiencing such issues mainly due to the handsomeness of her physical features; she is fully cognizant of the fact that the men she encounters are attentive to such features and therefore act upon their lustful desires, which proves detrimental to the well-being of Tess. Hardy writes,

She reached Chalk-Newton, and breakfasted at an inn, where several young men were troublesomely complimentary to her good looks. Somehow she felt hopeful, for was it not possible for her husband might claim her even yet? But she was bound to take care of herself on the change of it, and keep off lovers. To this end Tess resolved to run no further risks from her appearance…she entered a thicket and took from her basket one of the old field-gowns…She also, by a felicitous thought, took a handkerchief from her bundle and tied it around her chin…as if she were suffering from toothache. Then with her little scissors…she mercilessly nipped her eyebrows off, and thus insured against aggressive admiration she went on her uneven way. (Hardy 279-280)

Resorting to maiming her physical appearance is evidence enough that male domination has resulted in deleterious effects upon Tess beyond her exterior self; her interior temperament is
becoming darker due to the corruptible nature of reality that resulted in the emergence of men who have victimized her because of the beauty she possesses. She firmly believes that appearing disheveled and lacking in facial features will rid “against aggressive admiration”; however, Tess even cries out that her appearance no longer matters as she is hideous without the companionship of Angel, which can be deemed as the infiltration of ideologies of the Victorian period that advocated the image of a woman not being entirely complete without the presence of a male figure (Hardy 280). Important consideration must be yielded to the line that reads “But she was bound to take care of herself on the change of it, and keep off lovers”; although the process of being controlled by male figures is the main reason that drives Tess to divert attention away from her attractiveness, she is the individual making the decision to rid unwanted consideration from the male sex (Hardy 279). Silverman confirms the argument, stating “Tess resorts to the much more extreme measure of cutting off her eyebrows—i.e. to disfiguration. She thus attempts to not only obscure the outlines of her form, and thereby melt into her surroundings, but efface the erotic pattern that has been traced upon her body by a series of ‘interested’ viewers, so that she herself no longer serves as a supporting surface of figuration” (Silverman 25). Several instances in literary texts that originate from the Victorian period convey the female character as being forced by the prominent male figure to influence some aspect of her body in an effort to control features that draw attention to her in some form, often due to unwanted attention that would lead to jealousy (as is best exemplified in Robert Browning’s “The Last Duchess”). However, because of the deleterious effects male domination has had beyond the exploitation of Tess’s physical state, infiltrating the realm of her mind as well, she believes the burden of her appearance must be altered by her own hand as a final act of submission and loyalty to her husband who continues to struggle with the announcement of past events that mirror his own.
The fact that physical appearances attribute to how men execute their authority and respond to the female sex determines how Tess decides to deal with the predicaments that have led her astray; in an effort to display to her detached husband that she seeks to win back his affection, first and foremost by altering her beauty to keep interested viewers at bay, she is willingly sacrificing what little she possesses in the world for forgiveness and redemption, even through altering her exterior.

Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* provides an important discussion pertaining to the prevailing theme of male domination and how the construction of a relationship with Tess Durbeyfield at the center conveys the reality of the plight of women during the Victorian period. The two male figures that encounter her character most, Alec D’Urberville and Angel Clare, although differing in regards to intentions and perceptions of Tess, ultimately unify in their emphasis on her beauty and efforts in which she can be restricted. For Alec, the most extreme instance of female subjugation is executed in the act of rape; for Angel, his manipulation of Tess’s identity and refusal to pardon her wrongdoings that mirror his own falsehoods prove successful in the act of dominating the protagonist. Arguably, the fact that Hardy’s novel is entitled *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* as opposed to maintaining the name sake Durbeyfield or attaching the last name she was given after marrying Angel Clare is the final affirmation of Hardy’s view of the absurdness that accompanies the act of a male dominating a female. The identity of Tess is associated with Alec, the man who monopolized her physical image and stole her virginity through the act of rape, which is considered the heaviest form of authority executed by men throughout the text. Since Tess attributes the elements that define her physical appearance as having negatively impacted her status as a woman and an individual, as men perceive her beauty as an invitation sexual manipulation, the option she deems as most
preventative in terms of directing male attention elsewhere is through purposely altering her exterior, which includes sporting heavily worn clothing and a dirty complexion. From the broader historical perspective in which *Tess* emerged, the struggles of the Victorian woman were immensely overwhelming, as their position included a status of inferiority due to their gender, and as is best exemplified by Tess, were subjected to being unrightfully placed upon a pedestal of perfection. Law argues in the article “Sleeping Figures: Hardy, History, and the Gendered Body” that,

Tess’s body is thus not simply a historicization, but a highly aestheticized historicization. And in this sense *Tess* represents a ‘solution’ to Hardy’s earlier attempts both to aestheticize and to gender historical change—attempts that foundered on his desire to make both men’s and women’s bodies the objects of history…To say that history is embodied in Hardy’s novels is only a first step. In Hardy’s work, a ‘history worth knowing’ is not incarnated in any single or simple body; history, embodied, is alternately beautiful and grotesque, alternately masculine and feminine; alternately the subject of knowledge. (Law 253)

Within the context of male domination, the statements of Law convey the reality that through the figures of the text that take their form as Tess, Alec, and Angel and therefore influence the plot, the issues of the time Hardy composed the text make an emergence; one of the most dominant social predicaments of the period was focused upon women and their roles beyond the domestic sphere. As a result, the discussion of male domination and the techniques instituted by women to prevent their bodies from becoming the mere objects of desire accompanies the intention of dictating the broader issue of the female sex in a traditional patriarchal society.
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