

## ENG 225 Homework & Notes

### Literature by Women Vol. 1-2

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#### Middle Ages and Renaissance

■ = Quote ■ = Theme

#### **Introduction**

- Unusual access to education → privilege
- Switch from Latin to English in literature
- Changing religion hierarchy
- Mariolatry - praise for Mother Mary - women = good (if like Mary - virtuous)
- Women idealized OR as a temptress (weaponized sex) in literature
  - Men's desire/"torment"
  - Women = stylized and objectified – no agency
- **Misogyny**
  - Women's lives shaped by men
- Feme soles (widows and unmarried women)
- Feme covert ("covered"/married women)

#### **Rachel Sprecht**

- Responding to Joseph Swetnam's piece (which he published under a penname but sprecht did not)
- Title – implies the barking (animal) attacker must be muzzled for his black mouth
  - Subtitle Indicates her religious background
- Women are co-partners in the human endeavor (109)

#### **A Muzzle for Melastomus**

- Directly calls out Joseph as an idiot and a tormenter/harasser of women and a misogynist
- "But the emptiest barrel makes the loudest sound; and so we will account of you" (110)
- Implies that he was so focused on calling out women that his grammar was terrible
- He calls out women but Sprecht says it mainly reflects on men more than women
  - "If one would make a logical assumption, the conclusion would be flat against your own sex" 110
- "Further, if your own words be true, that you wrote with your hand, but not with your heart, then you are a hypocrite in print: but it is rather to be thought that your pen was the bewrayer of the abundance of your mind, and that this was but a little mortar to daub against the wall, which you intend to break down"
  - I question if she could potentially be referring to his use of a pen name as well

#### **A Muzzle for Melastomus the Cynical Baiter of, and Foul-Mouthed Barker against Eve's Sex**

- Women created to be solace to men
- Adam and Eve fire metaphor 114

### ***Initial Posts***

#### **Challenging Misogyny Without the Cover of a Pen Name: Rachel Spreght**

While reading the introduction to Rachel Spreght, a line caught my attention. It states, “Joseph Swetnam Published his *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* under the pseudonym Thomas Tell-Troth, Spreght responded with *A Muzzle Melastomus, The Cynical Baiter of, and Foul-mouthed Barker against Eve’s Sex*, which she boldly published under her own name” (Gilbert and Gubar 109). Pen names are a topic I have dug into in other literature classes in years prior, which is why I decided to write about Spreght. I found it interesting that a woman would – so valiantly – publish such a scathing response under her name while a man would choose a pseudonym, knowing the time period. One might think it would be the opposite, but Spreght proved everyone otherwise, despite its potential societal backlash. Spreght expresses, “you for being greedy to botch up your mingle-mangle invective against women have not therein observed, in many places, so much as a grammar sense. But the emptiest barrel makes the loudest sound; and so we will account of you.” (110). Her caustic tone is woven throughout this piece and thus challenges the norm, as women of her time often did not outwardly display their distaste or speak out about men's behavior as she does here. Her deviation from the norm could be why I enjoyed Spreght's writing, as she clearly stood up for herself and all women. Culturally, women and their voices were oppressed, in part for fear of social defamation. Gilbert and Gubar write, “in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance alike even the most talented literary women were constrained by cultural strictures which implied that any intellectual ambition might mean they were evil” (6). In Spreght's text, she is clearly well-versed in her intellectual and literary ambitions, which, historically, might cause society to

deem her evil if not for her directly calling Swetnam idiotic and pointing out his poor grammar. A woman speaking ill of a man challenged the social order; still, she decided to publish her real name. From the ensuing praise for her pamphlet, it appears she is applauded for her critique of Swetnam instead of facing public slander or a tarnished image. The reviewer writes, “Admire her much I may, both for her age, / and this her Muzzle for a black-mouth’d wight, ... She is unto her sex a faithful friend” (Anon, lines 13-14, 18). I agree; as a woman, I enjoyed Sprecht’s text and internally cheered for her. Being able to speak out against misogyny so openly and publicly is brave and admirable. At the same time, it seems Swetnam’s initial goal was somewhat cowardly: as if he knew his demeaning text would be unpopular, hence the usage of a pen name.

#### Work Cited

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, editors. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. W.W. Norton, 2007 pp. 2, 6, 109-112.

### **The Duplicity of Womanhood in the Middle Ages – Margery Kempe**

Margery Kempe’s journey surprised me: while culturally, chastity and religious devotion could promote a woman’s image, Kempe was instead seen as a heretic by some religious leaders. Facing her charges of heresy, she discovered “many of the Archbishop's household, despising her, calling her ‘lollard’ and ‘heretic’ and swearing many a horrible oath that she should be burnt” (Kempe 55). This discrimination Kempe faced fascinated me, as historically, women who exhibited the opposite behavior were labeled a multitude of degrading terms, not those who followed the ideal. I chose to write about *The Book of Margery Kempe* due to this double standard. Socially, a woman could not be too this or that, and her tale depicts this duality of

women's history. A woman was either labeled as a whore or a prude, but "after almost twenty years of marriage and fourteen children" (Gilbert and Gubar 45), often the expectation of women which she fulfilled, I fail to understand why Kempe's choice to devote herself to her religion would label her a heretic. From the text, I assume the heresy charges were due to appearing overly devoted. Her pilgrimage to Jerusalem left her sobbing on the ground (Kempe 53), continually crying or seeing God upon her return to England (54), advocating for her beliefs in public (57), and living in chastity with her husband who expresses, "you are no good wife" (50). Each of these instances leads me to believe this is why Kempe was labeled a heretic by the monk in chapter fifty-two.

While reading, I also began questioning how and why Kempe's devotion changed drastically. I wonder if Kempe felt societal pressure to turn to Jesus since, in her writing, it is clear that she fears her temptation in ways similar to those in texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer. Kempe conveys, "our ghostly enemy sleeps not, but he full busily searches our complexions and our dispositions and wherever he finds us most frail thereby our Lord's sufferance he lays his snare" (48). While reading chapter four (regarding temptation), I continually thought of Kramer's arguments as to why women were tempted towards carnal lust and the "fragility" of women, as Kempe illustrates in this chapter within herself. While I know that the *Malleus Maleficarum* was published shortly after Kempe's time, it provides practical insights into the societal expectations and understanding of women in the fifteenth century. While Kramer's book is not part of this course, Gilbert and Gubar describe it as "the antifemale diatribes" and "a fifteenth-century handbook for witch hunters" (5-6); I have to agree, having read sections of it. I apply it here to gain awareness of the culture and climate in mid/late 1400s Europe. No matter how or why Kempe turned to such a heavy devotion to God, it is clear that

women faced countless challenges and hypocrisy at this time, contributing to her circumstances in one way or another.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, editors. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. W.W. Norton, 2007 pp. 5-6, 45-57.

### ***Additional Posts***

I like how deeply you explore the complexity of Kempe's life and her religious devotion. You write, "She is not a saint. She is not clean or easy to admire," and I agree. While reflecting on Kempe's story, I had trouble defining what exactly I had just read and how to digest it. Here, you establish that her story is not something to be entirely understood, but instead, examining certain elements can help the reader relate to her story despite the differing periods. You state, "You don't have to believe in God to understand what it feels like to want something more meaningful than the world offers". Not being religious or traditional myself, when I read this sentence and the following paragraph, I gained a deeper understanding of Margery Kempe's journey. It makes me question if Kempe was somewhat bored with the life she had grown into, which I can certainly understand. I used to go to school in Ireland, and I always felt like something was missing. You relay, "What stands out to me is how that single experience shifts the entire trajectory of her life". For me, this was leaving Ireland and completely reshaping my life. Now, I, like Kempe, am entirely devoted to my passions. For Kempe, this was her faith; for me, it is my English education and writing studies. Though, I must admit that I might not be as devoted as Kempe. At the same time, I question whether it was this one simple event where she heard a melody that rerouted Kempe. Historically, things happen due to an accumulation of

experiences or events that alters the trajectory of a country, religion, person etcetera. Was there more to Kempe diverting from her normal life? While her introduction mentions her being married for twenty years and having fourteen children before this switch in lifestyle, I would like to hear more about her life before then from her perspective. What led up to her spiritual awakening? Was she bored? Tired? Looking for an outlet? I am not sure. Her book brings these questions to my mind, and perhaps further research and discussion is required.

Regardless of how or why Kempe made her drastic life changes, I admire her willingness and agency to fight for her religion, even while others doubted her or accused her of heresy. The messiness of her journey is commendable; I love how openly she spoke about her life. You summarize her story nicely when you write, “Margery Kempe teaches us that spirituality isn't about perfection, it is about persistence”. Agreed, her persistence transcended each barrier she faced, no matter how many people called her crazy.

I appreciate how you concentrate on Kempe's body and voice, as both play integral parts in her book. Focusing on this, her story is vital to understanding today's society and lingering traditions. You write, “Margery's body is repeatedly a site of conflict”. This line made me consider how relevant her story truly is. Replace “Margery's” with “Women's,” and immediately, the readers are transported to the present political climate in America. Her story reflects a long-debated point of contention in society, and I think we can learn a thing or two from Kempe. You touch on this when you write, “Despite the mockery, despite the limitations of her gender, she made her voice part of the literary and spiritual tradition”. I consider this line applicable as a call to action in modern society. Kempe wanted to share her story of perseverance with others, to make her voice heard and remembered. So much of women's history is lost due to the limitations

of gender; I love how you mention that Margery is “resisting erasure” (Gilbert and Gubar 46), as it is so true. At this point, I have taken a few women-centered classes, and I always wonder what happened to those women’s stories that get lost in time. What insights into the lives of women could we gain? What was it truly like? How much of it are we missing? Those, we may never know, but Kempe provides a sliver of history.

Kempe’s story is fascinating to me, given it was written centuries ago, and it's still relevant and encouraging. I agree when you say, “Margery Kempe is complicated, emotional, and often hard to pin down, but she was never passive”. I applaud her efforts, as it is clear that she never gave up despite all the barriers encountered and hardships endured. She brings up critical discussions surrounding women’s bodies, autonomy, and voices, and I am glad her story has remained on the record.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, editors. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. W.W. Norton, 2007 pp. 46.

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## **17th and 18th Centuries**

### ***Introduction***

- Women joining the literary field/record alongside the development of the printing press
- Spread of education, religious disputes and political conflicts
- Moderation, tolerance, prosperity
- England became rich due to the installation of the Parliament (shift from royal courts)
- 1600s Puritans move to America and in late 1700s so did slavery
- English Civil war

## ***Initial+Additional Posts***

Anne Bradstreet

### **A Writer's Struggle to Publication as a Woman: Anne Bradstreet**

Despite its diminutive size, Anne Bradstreet's "The Author to Her Book" illustrates the challenges of writers, particularly women. How she personifies her writing as if it were her child intrigued me. Bradstreet writes, "Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain...My rambling brat (in print) should mother call...If for thy father asked, say thou hadst none" (lines 1, 8, 22). She likens her writing to that of her children, which I can, in ways, understand. As a writer, I appreciate displaying writing as taking a bodily form. As the one who created it, all the writer can see are imperfections, as Bradstreet indicates by describing the flaws in a piece. She observes, "I washed thy face, but more defects I saw / And rubbing off a spot still made a flaw" (Bradstreet lines 13-14). Here, she indicates the writing process as messy and maddening. I can relate to this, as I often overcorrect my work, frequently resulting in further chaos and disorganization. I have slowly learned that the writing process is untidy and frustrating. I correct myself as I write out of habit, which becomes irritating when large flaws become visible. In this text, Bradstreet reminds me these struggles are normal.

An interesting aspect of Bradstreet's work comes with her backstory and life as a literary woman. Her introduction establishes that she did not publish her writings herself. Instead, "her brother-in-law, John Woodbridge, arranged without her knowledge (or so he claimed) to have *The Tenth Muse* printed in London" (Gilbert and Gubar 145). With Woodbridge publishing her work, Bradstreet could have had further reach in her community and the wider London. I question how Woodbridge had access to Bradstreet's poems, possibly indicating she did want her pieces published. As a writer, I struggle to share my work with others. Woodbridge's ability to

publish Bradstreet's poems may indicate she wanted to share her them publicly while utilizing the authority of a man to do so.

"The Author to Her Book" rests in a unique place in Bradstreet's history: as a woman, she may not have desired to publish her works. Gilbert and Gubar explain, "By God's will, the Puritans felt...a good wife must be submissive and self-abnegating, renouncing what would seem to be egotistical ambitions and desires for intellectual self-advancement or self-fulfillment" (145). Indeed, many of Bradstreet's pieces may portray this image or language looked down upon in women in Puritan society. However, I believe she acknowledges this potential backlash. Bradstreet writes, "In critic's hands beware thou dost not come, / And take thy way where yet thou art not known" (lines 20-21). It is clear from this poem that she might have feared criticism of her works. In a way, she may be indicating to the public that she knows her writings have flaws or perhaps comes across as bold for what is deemed a virtuous Puritan woman.

"Anne Bradstreet." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 144-159. 2 vols.

### **The Agency of Abigail Adams and her Letters**

At the formation of the United States, Abigail Adams confronted outbreaks of disease, maintained properties, and raised four children and a niece while fighting for women's representation in the creation of laws. Her letters to her husband (John Adams) highlight her agency and perhaps anxieties about the construction of the U.S. and what authority will look like. Adams questions, "shall we not run into Dissentions among ourselves?...what Code of Laws will be established. How shall we be governed so as to retain our Liberties" (316)? While these are a

few questions from “Man Is a Dangerous Creature,” Adams poses countless vital queries to her husband in a handful of her three hundred-plus letters of correspondence to John (Gilbert and Gubar 315). I admire her endeavors to influence and remind John to “Remember the Ladies” in the new laws while warning him to “not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could”, else women may rebel (Adams 318). With the struggles she endured, I appreciate how, from the beginning of the U.S., women like Abigail still attested to represent women through letters such as these. While she could not be with her husband, she pleaded with him to be fair and just to both genders in the eyes of the government. I can feel her rage seeping from her words as she berates John for his inability to protect women in the law. Adams scolds, “I can not say that I think you very generous to the Ladies, for whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over Wives” (320). Her upset is evident through her language. After all, she had endured in the onerous environment that was New England, women are left vulnerable. Abigail suffered Jaundice, Rheumatism (316), a smallpox outbreak, a dirty house facing trespassers and thieves, a rotting crop, and the pressure of a tense political climate (318), all while John was away. I believe we can learn from Abigail when she writes, “Great difficulties may be surmounted, by patience and perseverance” (317). Her words ring true to her circumstances, as she adamantly refused to crumble under the pressure of her situation and instead prevailed. From her letters, I have a clearer understanding of how women felt during the creation of this country and perhaps the outrage once the ladies remained forgotten.

“Abigail Adams.” *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 315-321. 2 vols.

## **Romanticising Landscapes while Intertwining History: Charlotte Smith**

Following the rise of novels, Smith joined the fervor with *Emmeline* and *Ethelinda* but pivoted her efforts to poetry and sonnets. Gilbert and Gubar remark, “her productivity was extraordinary, as was her pioneering turn to the sonnet, a form that had fallen into disfavor by the early eighteenth century” (326). I respect her inclination to write in a form that had gone out of style. I tend to write in a hybrid format for my own writing, which many are unaware of. I love talking about form, as it plays a vital role in the interpretation of a text. However, that is a discussion for another day. Still, I admire Smith’s unconventional choice for her writings.

More than form, I was drawn to Charlotte’s evocative writing as she effortlessly sketches landscapes with her words. In an excerpt from her celebrated poem, *Beachy Head*, Smith defines herself as “An early worshipper at Nature’s shrine, / I loved her rudest scenes—warrens, and heaths” (lines 346-347). From her poems, this is evident. She details sprawling gardens (line 330), bivalves from unknown terrain (line 380), swooping seabirds (line 23), and untrodden paths (line 349). Each line is carefully sculpted to raise images in the reader’s mind so precisely that one might envision themselves where Smith stands. Her imagery is something I look up to as a writer. No word is unnecessary or punctuation out of place. I believe her writing brilliantly executes the phrase “show don’t tell”. Smith depicts, “Far in the East the shades of night disperse, / Melting and thinned, as from the dark blue wave / Emerging, brilliant rays of arrowy light / Dart from the horizon; when the glorious sun / Just lifts above his resplendent orb” (lines 13-16). Her unique wording illustrates the sunrise in a brilliant way that delivers detailed images into the mind of the reader as night falls away and the sun pierces the sky. Smith’s writing style is extraordinary, and her specifics are something I aspire to mimic.

While her landscapes portray exceptional images, Smith takes her writing to new levels by incorporating historical backgrounds to relay the triviality of human existence. Charlotte reminds readers about the preciousness of nature. She writes, “Come and behold the nothingness of all / For which you carry through the oppressed Earth” (Smith, lines 420-421). I interpret this line as Smith exploring the vastness of Earth through words with a hint of existentialism. Smith demonstrates the obscurity of life through her understanding of history. She recounts historical events that shape the land she stands on. She includes the Roman Emperor Claudius who invaded Britain (line 410), and raids from the Danes (line 426) in *Beachy Head*. By including these events, Smith demonstrates a deeper knowledge of the location she writes about, beyond the emotions and visuals the environment presents her with. Using this information, I begin to wonder if I should delve further into the history of the settings of my writings. Possibly unintentionally, Smith is providing beneficial writing advice. Simultaneously, she reminds readers that much of history is forgotten. Smith states, “All with the lapse of Time, have passed away” (line 434). Here, she implies that the environments she writes passionately about, eventually shrouds the indicators of history having taken place. I love how she depicts human existence as trivial to the landscapes we inhabit indirectly. To me, it is clear that Smith connected deeply with the nature that surrounded her, and I believe I can learn some writing tips from her attention to detail and history.

Smith, Charlotte. "Beachy Head" *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The*

*Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W.

Norton, 2007, pp. 326-336.

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## 19th Century

### *Introduction*

- Rise of industrial structures
  - “Religion of progress” 409
  - Anger at working and living conditions
- Imperialism and deculturalization take over
  - Civil rights – women’s suffrage and emancipation of slaves
- “Disappearance of God”

### *Initial Posts*

Mary Shelley, Sojourner Truth, LEL, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti

#### **Fanny Fern Employing Form: A Profound Knowledge of Grammar**

Recently, I am beginning to identify the role of form and structure in writing. Initially I understood it from a somewhat modern standpoint where anything goes (more or less). Now, I recognize the shift in form in older writers, like Fanny Fern’s work. Notably in “Mrs. Adolphus Smith Sporting the ‘Blue Stocking’”. I would describe this piece as organized chaos, which cleverly portrays the life of a mother, wife, and woman. Taking a moment's leisure, she is interrupted, “Ma, I want some bread and molasses” (Fern 588). Following this, Mrs. Asolphus Smith cannot have a spare moment to herself, as she is surrounded by the incompetence of her family. Everyone looks to her for everything. The scene highlights the sheer amount of pressure put on the women in the household. The mounting requests and questions shift the established structure of the piece.

The reader begins in the narrator’s head, expecting to witness the writing process until the first interruption. An em dash interferes with Mrs. Adolphus Smith’s writing, and her response is denoted by parenthesis “(yes, dear,)” (588), which seemingly indicates her dismissal or uninterest in the interruption. Overtime, fewer lines are written by the narrator as more interruptions tear her away from writing in peace. Before, she kept her focus (signified by her

lackluster responses in parenthesis and resuming her writing immediately) despite the countless requests until realizing her husband had left one of their children hanging upside down too long. Exasperated, she gives up, “There! It is no use for a married woman to cultivate her intellect” (588). Instead of the tone of disregard in the parenthesis, Mrs. Adolphus Smith breaks out into quotation marks here, signifying her focus is now entirely on her family out of frustration.

While this might read like a lot of summary, I want to highlight the meticulous dedication of Fanny Fern to her piece despite its meager size. Punctuation and grammar are often a dreaded step in the writing process (at least for me), but to have an exhaustive understanding of it and mold it to fit your piece is a remarkable skill. Fanny Fern shapes her sentences to portray tone of voice, audience, theme, subtext, and more. I like experimenting with structure in my writing, often landing somewhere in hybrid territory. I typically do not focus on the sentence-level form when I write, and I wonder if I should, based on Fanny Fern’s accomplishments in this piece. She utilizes an impressive knowledge of grammar and punctuation, harnessing both to work for her rather than against her, which it can sometimes feel like for me. Gilbert and Gubar write, “these diverse artists wrote their way out of the female ‘sphere’ to which they had been confined” (432). Fanny Fern manipulated the craft differently than whole structures, choosing to rework English writing mechanics instead. Her overall usage of words and symbols elegantly revamps how one can look at punctuation and grammar, extending herself beyond the “sphere” of what men thought possible. I hope to look into more authors who similarly adapt and reconstruct language to convey further meaning.

Fern, Fanny (Sara Willis Parton). "Mrs. Adolphus Smith Sporting the ‘Blue Stocking’" *The*

*Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 432-588.

### **The Fruit of Goblins: Christina Rossetti's Allusion to Eve**

Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* is reminiscent of a folktale in many ways. The story warns readers of female desire and its dangers (Gilbert and Gubar 1078). Involving childlike wonder from Lizzie and Laura, Rossetti's text is bustling with imagery of Goblins and their fruits. Rossetti writes, "What peaches with velvet nap, / Pellucid grapes without one seed: / Odorous indeed must be the mead" (lines 178-180). With brief yet rich descriptions from the two young girls, Rossetti generates a narrative akin to a child's cautionary fairytale.

Though not directly stated in the text or by Gilbert and Gubar, I understood this story to somewhat mirror Eve's. A common theme regarding the perception of women is the story of Eve and the first "sin" by humanity. In *Goblin Market*, the underlying moral is to be careful with temptation, especially for women. It reminds me of Margery Kempe's tale of temptation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Kempe struggles to quell her desires toward adultery. She states, "and wherever he finds us most frail, there, by our Lord's sufferance, he lays his snare, which may no man escape by his own power" (Kempe 48). Kempe struggles to free herself from her lustful desires without outside help and perseverance. The same is true in Rossetti's tale, where Laura cannot free herself from longing for the goblin's fruit until her sister aids her. Rossetti pens:

Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted  
For my sake the fruit forbidden?  
Must your light like mine be hidden,  
Your young life like mine wasted, (lines 478-481).

As Kempe states, one may require the help of others to free themselves of their cravings, as Lizzie does for Laura. Initially, Lizzie is the one who cautions Laura about the Goblin's forbidden fruit, but here the roles are reversed. Laura shows fear for Lizzie's encounter with the Goblins, worried her sister has fallen victim to the same desire she feels. Lizzie, however, did not consume the Goblin's fruit, but used them to free Laura from the throes of desire that still consumed her years after eating the Goblin's fruits. Such fine detail by Rossetti lures the girls into the market to taste the fruits too appealing to be worthwhile.

I believe that this piece reflects the story of Eve, where the girls are tempted to consume the Goblin's forbidden fruits, which is not encouraged. Lizzie proclaims, "Their offers should not charm us, / Their evil gifts would harm us" (Rossetti, lines 64-65). Lizzie proclaims numerous fraught cries to avert their eyes from the Goblin men. Perhaps correlating to Eve's desires, Laura

struggles to heed Lizzie's warnings about the fruit. When Laura does consume the fruit, she is left destitute and yearning for more, perhaps as punishment for her greed. While I am not religious, from what I have gathered through other literature classes, it may be fair to draw this connection between Eve and the womanly desires portrayed in Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. I wonder whether anyone else felt this way or agreed with the association of the two stories I have made here.

Rossetti, Christina. *Goblin Market*. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 1076-1100.

Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 45-59.

I personally loved how Truth broke down each part of the prevailing ideology surrounding her race and gender in her speech. You tackle each of her concerns comprehensively and bring up vital discussion points. I appreciate how you point out, "Either these white men do not truly believe in the inherent fragility and helplessness of white women or they see an inherent masculinity in black women by virtue of their blackness". Identifying these beliefs raises concerns about why they exist and how they were instated. I would guess that Sojourner believes in the latter more based on "Keeping the Thing Going while Things Are Stirring". She states, "I have done a great deal of work; as much as a man, but did not get so much pay" (Truth 513). Though not explicitly equating masculinity to blackness specifically, she compares her unrewarding work as a slave to that of a lucrative man. Likewise, the segment from "Ain't I A Woman" you highlight about white women being helped into carriages may further the narrative

of white men believing inherent masculinity in black women over the false belief of white women's fragility. From my understanding, racism removes black women from the list of eligible romantic partners in the minds of white men; thus, a subconscious attribute of a more "masculine" role may apply to black women for similar homophobic reasons.

Though, I admit I see both viewpoints. Perhaps white men do not hold the belief that white women are inherently fragile, but their actions portray that view. Historically, education was reserved for wealthy men. In the nineteenth century, (white) women gained greater access to "minimal instruction in modern languages in a study of drawing or water coloring, embroidery and music" (Gilbert and Gubar 418), but education nonetheless. Truth relays, "White women are a great deal smarter, and know more than colored women" (512). So, shouldn't this "masculinity" be put on educated women instead of black women? No, the view on white women was indeed delicate and fragile, with an expectation of adopting the role of a "lady" rather than a woman or girl (Gilbert and Gubar 415). The facade white women were expected to uphold was a fragility, but whether men truly believed it remains to be seen.

Consequently, I believe the attribution of masculinity to blackness may be more true than a disbelief in the fragility of white women in the minds of white men. There may still be some truth to the skepticism of the white woman's delicacy, but it was the expectation of the time that white women appeared and acted as such. Today, neither nineteenth-century beliefs hold any weight, as identity lies more in the individual than society. Truth, however, provides an intriguing insight into the stereotypes of white fragility and black masculinity in women that linger today.

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## 1-20 Jane Eyre

### *Initial Posts*

I thought it might be interesting to make a post based solely on the introduction and the first chapter of *Jane Eyre*. While I have never read any of the Bronte's works, I vaguely knew the story of their lives. When the introduction first mentioned the "two imaginary kingdoms, 'Angria' and 'Gondal' (Gilbert and Gubar 633) I remembered a play I saw when still in high school that detailed the story of the Bronte's upbringings and rise to authorship. I recall being fairly confused by the play, switching between the imaginary worlds and the one lived by the children, until they revealed the identity of the sisters and brother. Now, reading their life in more depth, I have a deeper understanding of the family and their circumstances. I have briefly discussed pen names once before, so I was intrigued when I read that Bronte utilized a pseudonym. Bronte asks, "What author would be without the advantage of being able to walk invisible" (635)? Gilbert and Gubar state the more likely reason was the lack of recognition received by women's works, but regardless of reason it clearly worked to her advantage. I may side with Gilbert and Gubar on this matter, as it appears she did not remain anonymous for long with two people cited to have met with Bronte in the introduction (Gilbert and Gubar 635). Elizabeth Gaskell discussing her impression of meeting Bronte highlighted the melancholic tone she gave off. It is no wonder her vibe was so sullen given how much death and grief struck the family.

Even the first chapter caught my attention. Bronte has a unique attention to detail that does not feel overwhelming, but enough to pull the reader into Jane's world. From the start, I could tell that Bronte likely drew from her experiences growing up in Haworth as the first few lines detail the outside shrubbery and the sky. From Gaskell's experience meeting Bronte, Gilbert

and Gubar write, “the author dwelt ‘on the north side of a bleak moor, looking over sweeps of bleak moors’ with the sky as a ‘companion’” (636). Bronte’s opening imagery reflects a similar image, with “clouds so somber and a rain so penetrating” and “the leafless shrubbery” (636) I could not help but picture Bronte in place of Jane.

One line in particular caught my attention. Bronte writes, “Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my underdeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting” (638). While the part about images telling a story starts out somewhat cliché, there follows a metacognition of sorts from the narrator, who we learn is merely ten years old. Similarly this child shows an astounding level of knowledge for her age when insulting John Reed. Jane states, “I have read Goldsmith’s *History of Rome*, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, etc. Also I had drawn parallels in silence” (Bronte 639-640). It is clear from these first few instances that Jane is a literary type, yet Bronte establishes this in a somewhat subtle way that I appreciate. I am interested to see how this character develops over the novel, and what other parallels there are to Bronte’s life as well.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 633-640.

### **Mental Health and Disability: Tangled Emotions in a Time Before Understanding**

I doubt many who have read *Jane Eyre* would deny labeling Jane’s upbringing as tragic. While reading these first twenty chapters, however, I noticed (particularly in childhood) Jane’s depressive and anxious tendencies, similar to my experiences with both mental health disorders.

Simultaneously, I observed some tendencies in Helen, who I believe displays an early understanding of ADHD or executive functioning disorders. I am not sure what drew me to this topic of heavy emotion and circumstance, but the recurring themes stood out to me throughout the chapters.

Jane endures a heartless and isolating childhood at the behest of her cousins and aunt. Many times, I noticed that Jane, especially when younger, fell into depressive episodes that dulled her mood yet brought forth crying spells. The day after fainting, Jane remarks, “My worst ailment was an unutterable wretchedness of mind: a wretchedness which kept drawing from me silent tears; ... Yet I thought I ought to have been happy” (Bronte 646). Despite the wrongful punishment Jane endured, her gloom hovered over her following the unjust incident, causing tears to fall frequently. I have likewise experienced the unwanted tears that cascade almost unprompted – which I will not go too much into – but the relation or understanding may explain my interest in this subject. Another instance of depressive tendencies appeared when publicly shamed at Lowood. Jane proclaims, “here I lay again crushed and trodden on; and could I ever rise more? ‘Never’ I thought; and ardently I wished to die. While sobbing out this wish in broken accents” (Bronte 681). Here, Jane’s circumstances and mindset may provide insights into the comorbidity of depressive and anxious inclinations. Yes, her situation is terrible, which might guide her to this mindset, but her wish to die comes across as catastrophizing. She fears her peer's perception and her image tarnished by this humiliation (anxiety), which leads to her desire to lay on the refectory’s floor forever and ensuing rumination and sobbing (depression). I am no psychiatrist or therapist: I merely speak and relate from my own experiences in the same damaging mindset. A few other instances I noted but cut for the sake of space were as follows: Jane’s claim to be “exhausted by emotions” (683); her fear, pity, and tears of anger for Helen’s

punishment (685); and her rumination on body image, stating, “I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer” (703). Compiling each of these highlights Jane’s melancholy disposition, whether learned through a traumatic upbringing and a life of grief or an instance of anxiety and depression before a deeper understanding of mental health, Jane’s story is doubtless one of tragedy.

Helen is a beneficial and eccentric guide for Jane at Lowood, who repeatedly finds herself in trouble and subject to harsh punishments. With Lowood’s strict schedules and tidiness, Helen admits that her mind frequently wanders elsewhere. Helen remarks,

I seldom put, and never keep, things in order; I am careless; I forget rules; I read when I should learn my lessons; I have no method; and sometimes I say, like you, I cannot *bear* to be subjected to systematic arrangements. (Bronte 672)

She likewise describes herself as entering a dissociative dream state during lectures (673). From my understanding of ADHD (as having a brother with it and taking special education classes), Helen displays many of the difficulties with executive functioning that those with ADHD struggle with. Her condition may not be ADHD, as I am no psychiatrist or doctor. However, I believe Helen does indeed have some level of executive functioning difficulties that limit her ability to succeed at Lowood. Some executive functions I notice Helen struggles with are daydreaming, time management and scheduling, forgetfulness, keeping organized, attention, and focus, among others. Throughout Jane’s time at Lowood alongside Helen, I pitied her lack of accommodation, as her difficulties were likely at no fault of her own yet led to much pain and punishment.

### ***Additional Post***

I completely agree with each parallel you've drawn between Charlotte and Jane's stories. The similarities are unignorable and essential links from Jane's fictional world to the actuality of Brontë's life. When you discuss Cowan Bridge School in comparison to Jane's time at Lowood, I couldn't help but remember the tragedy of disease at both schools. When reading the chapter about Helen's death, I recalled the suffering Brontë endured the passing of her sisters Maria and Elizabeth (Gilbert and Gubar 633). I wonder how much of her sisters' deaths Charlotte observed, and is being relayed from memory in Jane's story. Gilbert and Gubar note, "By all accounts, her description in the novel was unfailingly accurate" (633). While they mainly refer to the school experience, I am curious if Brontë, like Jane, witnessed the death of a dear friend/sister firsthand.

Another connection I noticed was both Jane and Brontë's desire to begin their own schoolhouse. Jane relays, "The utmost I hope is, to save money enough out of my earnings to set up a school someday in a little house rented by myself" (Brontë 775). Her words communicate a similar wish as to what Charlotte dreamed of. Gilbert and Gubar write, "the Brontë's severe Aunt Branwell quite unexpectedly offered them a small sum of money so that they could open a school of their own" (634). This offer allowed the Brontë girls a way to make money on their own accord, without need of a husband. Furthermore, "Still hoping to begin their school, the Brontë sisters drew up circulars and mailed them to prospective pupils" (Gilbert and Gubar 634). The parallels between the Brontë sisters' desires to own a school is also reflected in *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë, whether intentional or not, includes many indicators of her own life in *Jane Eyre*, allowing readers to examine aspects of Jane's story alongside her life.

You also discuss Brontë and Eyre's refusal towards conformity in gender norms. Again, there are many parallels between the real life and the fictional, as you point out. I noted one line in particular that also contributes to both Brontë and Eyre's feminist mindset. Brontë writes,

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: But women feel just as men feel ... they suffer from too rigid restraint, to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded ... to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (711)

This ideology was spoken by Brontë through Eyre, as you highlight Brontë's push against the accepted norms for women. I like how you call the novel a "personal manifesto" of sorts, as I agree that Jane's story transcends fiction at times like these. Each word sent through Jane was one unsaid by Charlotte. Despite the hardship, the oppression, and abandonment Jane encountered in her life, she has the luxury of being fictional, unlike Brontë.

## **Jane Eyre 20-end**

### ***Initial Posts***

#### The Art of Foreshadowing: A Tree Split and an Unconscious Warning

Charlotte Brontë is – no doubt – an impressive writer. Her aptitude for harnessing this craft is clear in *Jane Eyre*, especially with foreshadowing in her later chapters. This feature stood out to me before and during the unsuccessful marriage between Jane and Mr. Rochester and came in two forms: Jane's dreams and a chestnut tree. The first arrived alongside the coachman bearing bad news. Jane recalls, "to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble" and, "during the past week scarcely a night had gone by...that had not brought with it a dream of an infant... I did not like this iteration of one idea – this strange recurrence of one image" (Brontë 791). While the

reader may assume this recurrence is associated with the death of Jane's aunt, I also believe it could double as an early indicator of the failed marriage attempt between Jane and Mr.

Rochester. Recalling this information also sets up the later dreams Jane experiences closer to the marriage mishap. Brontë writes, "I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk...I might not lay it down anywhere, however tired my arms were – however much its weight impeded my progress, I must retain it" (836). These repeated images within Jane's dream likely foreshadowed the futile marriage ceremony and upheaval of her life. Brontë cleverly establishes the message/warning of a child in a dream, then proves the superstition correct by the aunt's death. She then again utilizes this signal for alarm leading up to the wedding. Brontë's skillful use of foreshadowing and pattern recognition makes her a wonderful writer.

The second indicator of trouble is the lightning strike that splits the chestnut tree. While seemingly an unimportant addition to the proposal, I could not help but question its incorporation until I realized it would foreshadow the disaster of the wedding. It first appears when Jane believes Mr. Rochester must send her away when he is to marry Mrs. Ingram. Brontë notes, "A waft of wind came sweeping down the laurel walk, and trembled through the boughs of the chestnut" (815). Twice, Jane notices this tree: the one she and Mr. Rochester sit near when he asks Jane to marry him. Later, Jane is informed, "the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away" (Brontë 817). I believe this line foreshadows two things: The reveal of Mr. Rochester's wife at the church and Jane's departure from Thornfield. The split correlates to the wedding, as an immovable wrench is driven between the couple, like a lightning strike to a tree. Jane reflects, "The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below"

(Brontë 832). This quote indicates that Jane and Mr. Rochester's relationship grew strong; thus, they still loved each other. However, the "community of vitality was destroyed" (832). Here, the line implies their relationship would never be the same, as it is forever changed by Mr. Rochester's secret wife. Jane's departure from Thornfield adds another layer to this foreshadowing. Regarding the tree, Jane remarks, "the time of pleasure and love is over with you; but you are not desolate: each of you has a comrade to sympathize with him in his decay" (Brontë 832). My understanding of this line is linked to Jane's temptation to stay with Mr. Rochester due to her love for him, but her ultimate decision to leave Thornfield to resist that temptation. Also, her departure was interestingly decided through a dream's warning.

### ***Additional Posts***

#### She is but no Bird: Jane's Resistance and Unreserved Speech

While battling countless obstacles in pursuit of a fruitful life, Jane never wavered in her unrelenting and honest speech against the men she encountered. I admire her for this decisive characteristic, as she shows bravery in speaking plainly to those who rarely encounter such a trait in a woman.

Repeatedly throughout the novel, Jane is referenced as a bird of sorts. From iconic lines to passing moments, Brontë positions Jane Eyre as a feeble and flighty bird. Jane herself ponders, "birds were faithful to their mates; birds were emblems of love. What was I?" (864). Later, Mr. Rivers describes Jane as "formed for labor—not for love" (932). These moments of language make Jane question her integrity and authority, but she persists. This point is made clear in Jane's inner monologue. Brontë writes, "He had not imagined that a woman would dare

to speak so to a man. For me, I felt at home in this sort of discourse” (902). With a firm foundation in education, Jane’s wits only grew sharper from demeaning comments.

Similarly, other characters itemize Jane as a bird of sorts. Mr. Rivers relays, “My sisters, you see, have a pleasure in keeping you... as they would have a pleasure in keeping and cherishing a half-frozen bird” (884). Though depicted as a weakness, Jane repeatedly defies this label through her speech. The most memorable line Jane relays to Mr. Rochester states, “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will” (Brontë 815). Her opposition to Mr. Rochester’s requests for marriage prevented an illegitimate marriage and arguably favorably shifted her prospects in life. Her defiance of male authority is commendable, as she never stoops down to her “place” as a woman or restrains her speech to the men she encounters. Gilbert and Gubar relay “To certify her spirituality and refinement, she must look and act like a fragile creature” (415). A feeble bird to many, but Jane’s demeanor demonstrated otherwise. While nineteenth-century women’s expectation was complacency, Jane refuses to sit quietly and accept the mark as a flighty bird. She speaks plainly to Mr. Rivers when he asks her to marry him. He spurns, “Your words are such as ought not to be used: violent, unfeminine, and untrue...they would seem inexcusable” (Brontë 929). This moment illustrates the strength of Jane’s language. By turning down such an offer, she secures her lifestyle of independence and peace. To me, Jane acquires more respect in doing so, and speaking up for herself assures the sanctity of her mind knowing she made the right decision.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 415-932.

I enjoy how you dig into the complexity of the women in this novel, especially Bertha, who earns little recognition in the reader's minds. I found your analysis of Bertha Mason interesting, as I did not look particularly close at her character while reading, instead regarding her as a plot device. You highlight Bertha's depth instead of the minimal attention I focused on her. The scene you spotlight where Bertha uses Jane's veil before breaking it accentuates an immense amount of depth in her character. It is clear from this gesture that she wanted more than a life locked in a dull attic, tied to a hired keeper. Perhaps she wished for the experience of being a bride and wife like Mr. Rochester treated Jane. This jealousy comes out in a solitary moment, when she has no idea that Jane is watching from her bed. It was not performative or a warning for Jane, but an instance of depth and self reflection for Bertha. Likely wondering why she couldn't be treated the same. This moment, and many others in Bronte's work, featured the astuteness of women of the time beyond Jane. As the reader knows Eyre's mind is remarkable, Bronte favored the women in her stories by encasing their complexity beneath layers beyond the shroud that other characters view and judge. Bertha is merely one example of this, as there are other complicated women who appear in Bronte's novel, too. These thoughts are things I had not considered until reading your piece.

While you touch on the depth of the women in the story, I also like how you address society's views of women in the nineteenth century. You write, "There was often no emphasis placed on a woman's personhood or internal beliefs or desires, and women were very often only depicted in relation to men or what they could provide a man". This statement spoke to me, as I believe it frames the life of a nineteenth-century woman well. Without a man, a woman could be labeled as a "fallen woman" (Gilbert and Gubar 416), but with a man, the "legal existence of a

woman is suspended... an obliteration of legal reality—or ‘civil death’ as it was sometimes termed” (417). Essentially, a woman could not simply exist on her own accord. But, as you state, this mindset was more reflective of society than the women themselves. This history is vital to understanding Jane Eyre and the women in the story, as Bronte lived in this society, experiencing the burden of expectations firsthand. Luckily, Bronte did not give up her desires and literary pursuits, as society may have expected, since Jane Eyre remains an example to women who fear standing up for themselves.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3 ed., vol. 1, W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 416-959.

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## **Turn of the Century**

### ***Initial Posts***

Unbelieved and Undersupported: Women’s Medicine and Mental Health

A historical theme that continues into the present day is the neglect of understanding women’s health and skepticism from professionals regarding the well-being of women.

Presently, women’s health is appallingly underfunded. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* and her own life experiences unveils this issue surrounding women’s well-being. The story surrounds a bout of hysteria: “a loose term for “various kinds of ‘female’ emotional disorders” (Gilbert and Gubar 1392n1). Essentially, an all-encompassing phrase meant to belittle women’s issues – in my opinion. *The Yellow Wallpaper* highlights how unbelievably women are

concerning their mental health. Gilman writes, “You see, he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do” (1392)? The narrator immediately establishes her overlooked mental state before the full spiral into madness ensues. Ultimately, the expectations of gender roles exacerbate this issue, and it is due to the narrator’s confinement that she succumbs to the terror that her mind creates. I mention gender roles due to the connotation of hysteria and women, as the Greek root *hyster* means uterus or womb (Gilbert and Gubar 1167). Additionally, the “rest cure” was popular in this period which, as Gilbert and Gubar write, evoked “enforced idleness” (1167). While meant to act as a remedy to women’s “hysteria”, this story reflects the “rest cure” provocation of madness instead.

I wanted to discuss this topic as it appears in Gilman’s real life, too. She battled postpartum depression at a time when it was largely misunderstood. Gilman depicts this as having to choose “between going, insane, and staying, sane” (Gilbert and Gubar 1389). She was likewise put on the “rest cure,” which led her to this mindset. While I cannot say I have experienced postpartum depression, I relate to Gilman’s circumstances and feeling misunderstood, like her character in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Anytime I talk to my psychiatrist (who is a man), I feel unheard, and he frequently misinterprets me. Many times, I wonder if having a female-identifying psychiatrist would be better, as he makes me feel worse than I did before the appointment (yes, I know I should switch providers). I believe my experience somewhat mirrors Gilman’s and her character’s. The narrator indicates contention in her feelings towards the doctor’s suggestions. Gilman pens, “I disagree with their ideas” (1392). The disparity and distaste she displays for the doctor’s methods remind me of my experience with my psychiatrist. He has, on numerous occasions, suggested books – frequently with religious undertones – that I doubt would truly “cure” my (nonreligious self’s) mental health. Gilman

recalls a similar kind of treatment in “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper?”. Gilman states, “He concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to ‘live as domestic a life as far as possible;’ to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,’ and ‘never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived’” (1403). Like my psychiatrist, Gilman’s male physician chalked up her ailments to something almost entirely unrelated. Overall, I believe this theme of disregard for women in healthcare is something more people should be talking about, as it has been a problem since the beginning of patriarchal society.

Another note I wanted to touch on was the writing style of this story. It seems journal/diary-like in its structure. Gilman exclaims, “Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way! ... I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper” (1394). The stylistic choice of exclamations causes a lively, yet stream-of-consciousness-esk feel to the piece. Gilman jumps from one thought to the next in somewhat quick succession, which ultimately aids her in the descent into hysterics. Her use of form here implies a foundational knowledge of the impact of structure on a piece.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. “The Yellow Wallpaper.” *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. Edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 1388-1403.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper.” *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. Edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 1403-1404.

## ***Additional Posts***

### Female Agency in Literary Realism

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman contributes to the shift towards literary realism in “The Revolt of ‘Mother’”. While a work of fiction, this piece demonstrates obscured aspects of marriage and womanhood in earlier literature. The ideal depicted in earlier centuries was the patriarchal familial structure, but frequently, women became mitigators for the men behind the scenes. Freeman writes, “‘How long have you known it?’ asked his mother. ‘‘Bout three months, I guess.’ ‘Why didn’t you tell of it?’ ‘Didn’t think ‘twould do no good’” while the daughter comments, “‘I don’t see what father wants another barn for,’” (1347). Here, Freeman displays the hierarchy that exists within families as well as society. The husband and son are aware of the plans for the empty plot, but the mother and daughter are left uninformed. Upon learning the intent for the barn, the mother acts realistically, upset that her husband broke the promise he made forty years prior. Her husband knew she would be agitated, and thus, he evaded any talk about the new barn. Freeman pens, “‘I want to see you jest a minute.’ ‘I tell ye I can’t nohow, mother’” (1394). This quote captures Adoniram’s aversion to his wife’s questions. He knows he broke his promise by building a new barn instead of a nicer house. I believe the following lines by the mother illustrate women operating as the mitigators for their husbands – an indicator of the use of realism – and Freeman challenging women’s norms in literature. Freeman writes:

“Now, father, look here”--Sarah Penn had not sat down; she stood before her husband in a humble fashion of a Scripture woman-- “I’m goin’ to talk real plain to you; I never have sense I married you, but I’m goin’ to now. I ain’t never complained, an’ I ain’t goin’ to complain now, but I’m goin’ to talk plain” (1349)

As the mother explains, she has been dutiful and complacent during their long marriage, yet she decides to accost her husband regarding the new barn. I believe this dynamic suggests the reality of marriage during this time, with the husband taking charge while the wife offered advice. An undiscussed social reality that Freeman is challenging in this text. Gilbert and Gubar support this when they write:

They were writing in an age when thousands of women were crossing the threshold from the private to the public sphere. Unlike many of their Victorian precursors, literary women no longer felt constrained to write covertly about their Rebellion against socially prescribed roles (1178).

Sarah Penn seemingly takes her “prescribed role” humbly and loyally. Yet, Freeman writes Penn’s story to rebel against her husband: a potential insight into the real lives of women during the turn of the century. Though Sarah discusses the matter with her husband – in an attempt to alter his decision about the barn – it is her agency that makes the change. This moment is where Freeman challenges societal norms in her writing, displaying a woman’s rebellion more publicly. She details, “Before the next morning he had spread the story of Adoniram Penn's wife moving into the new barn all over the little village... Any deviation from the ordinary course of life in this quiet town was enough to stop all progress in it” (1354). By writing this, Freeman acknowledges that Sarah’s rebellion is peculiar in the eyes of society, similar to how the public may retain this story. I chose to look into this piece because of its contribution to documenting the real lives women live and the impact women have if they speak up as Sarah did.

Freeman, Mary Wilkins. “The Revolt of ‘Mother’.” *The Norton Anthology of Literature by*

*Women: The Traditions in English*. Edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 1178-1357.

I love the idea that Bradley and Cooper were writing to each other. I felt it most in “Lo, my loved is dying”, as the emotions seeped out of each line from a grieving lover. Fields pens, “Lo, my loved is dying, and the call / Is come that I must die” (lines 1-2). I believe Bradley wrote this poem, as Cooper had cancer and died the year this poem was written (1913) (Gilbert and Gubar 1221). An intriguing aspect of these lines is the call to die part, as Bradley knew she also had cancer and likely linked it to the death of her lover as a sign regarding their relationship. Dying only three years later, I cannot imagine the devastation Bradley felt while composing this short piece, knowing she too would die soon.

The scenario detailed in “A girl” felt connected to the pair of authors/lover’s lives. Fields writes, “Such: and our souls so knit, / I leave a page half-writ— / The work begun / Will be to heaven’s conception done, / If she come to it” (lines 10-14). I believe these lines allude to the writing process of the couple’s stories. Fields explains, “If one begins a character, his companion seizes and possesses it; if one conceives a scene or situation, the other corrects, completes, or murderously cuts away” (1221). Bradley and Cooper worked in tandem to develop and flesh out their characters and stories. They wove together their writing while they tied their names to the same pen name. I believe the above quote from this piece indicates their process of sharing ideas.

I wanted to talk about these authors primarily due to their interesting use of a pen name. I cannot say I have heard of authors utilizing the same pseudonym before, though it makes me question how many others may have done this. Especially for female authors linked to their husbands, I question whether some of a man’s work could have come from his wife instead. I particularly like how you state, “They *had* to disguise themselves to get published, but they refused to silence who they were. That’s brave,” as I agree. Their gender limited them in the sphere of literature, as men still dominated the literary market. The way you talk about

acceptance and tie it to the present, places Bradley and Cooper's circumstances into perspective. Maybe they felt it was only natural to publish under Michael Fields, as their works were frequently created together. Plus the advantages for women to publish under a male-presenting pseudonym to gain more recognition in the literary field. Their use of a pen name seemingly had quite a few benefits. I wonder what conversations occurred to reach this combined identity. Socially, their situation was looked down on, but together they seemed far more open and happy. They jointly explored identities as writers, as lovers, and as humans. I like how you mention the messiness and authenticity we all crave, as in their writing, I believe they were able to experiment with their tangled identities.

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## **Early 20th**

I enjoy how you scrutinize each line Lowell utilizes to depict her lover. As I read Lowell's piece and your analysis, I could not help but notice how Lowell seems to use each element to juxtapose her lover. As seen in "Venus Transiens," water and air imagery are the primary elements used to discuss her lover. Lowell writes, "Was Venus more beautiful / Than you are, / When she topped / the crinkled waves?" (lines 2-4) and later, "In the blue and buoyant air, / Cinctured by bright winds, / Treading the sunlight" (lines 19-21). Here, Lowell details her lover's abilities to harness the nature that surrounds her. Rather than nature itself being beautiful, her lover becomes accentuated by those natural elements. In "The Weather-Cock Points South," Lowell displays the same, where I believe she refers to her lover as an exceptional white flower unseen anywhere else in the world while using nature to signify her lover's beauty. Lowell scribes, "The low moon brightens you with silver" (line 18). Again, this quote illustrates

Lowell's use of nature to emphasize her lover's loveliness. I also note your example from "Opal," where fire and ice are the elements employed to depict (presumably) her lover, Ada Russell. I had not thought about how this poem ("Opal") contrasts with the previous poems by Lowell. When you state, "This poem paints an image of a passionate and dangerous lover," I have to agree. Now, comparing Lowell's works, she details a fiery lover – assuming she speaks of the same person – while she also compares her to a delicate moon-touched flower. I am curious to know more about Lowell and Russell's relationship, as it appears like a complex and personal love that only the pair could truly understand. While we, as readers, can guess the nature of their relationship through Lowell's impeccable use of imagery, it is a struggle to grasp the intimacy of the relationship without further details.

Unlike her shorter poetry, "The Sisters" discusses Lowell's curious interest in her feminine literary forebearers. The tone of this piece was self-aware. It felt like I was in Lowell's mind while reading it, both due to me not entirely understanding each reference (even with the footnotes) and from its cognizance of speech. Lowell pens, "Good-bye, my sisters, all of you are great, / And all of you are marvelously strange, / And none of you has any word for me" (lines 163-165). Reading this quote felt odd to me, which is why I wanted to discuss this poem, too. Lowell acknowledges her inability to speak with authors of previous generations, though she can presently appreciate their works. I say this poem is self-aware due to Lowell's delivery. She writes, "Strange trio of my sisters, most diverse, / And how extraordinarily unlike / Each is to me, and which way shall I go?" (Lowell lines 141-143). These lines felt most like Lowell's consciousness, as she notes the differences (yet greatness) in each author's works but recognizes her work will be different, too. It is as if she is questioning her style or place in the literary timeline. I, however, believe one's writing style is naturally built – rather than through deliberate

intent, as Lowell hints at here. Yes, some writing requires more attention to detail, but overall, one distinguishes oneself by being oneself. I hope that makes sense, but after tutoring students in their writing for the past year, I have gained the ability to know who's writing is who's, based on merely sentence structure, vocabulary, tone, etc. Working with the same students multiple times has allowed me to see how their voices as writers emerge unconsciously, where I believe Lowell is attempting to become metacognitive in her discernment as a writer.

Lowell, Amy. "Opal", "The Sisters," "Venus Transiens," and "The Wheather-Cock Points South." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. Edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 1388-1403.

#### Outlining the "New Woman" Through Unstructured Writing - Mina Loy

The rise of "the New Woman," frequently held a negative connotation, where women took on new liberties that men felt threatened by. I believe Mina Loy engaged in this concept through her writing. Gilbert and Gubar explain that "the New Woman" was seen as "Flawed and [a] potentially evil personage" (17). These women were ambitious and literary, two adjectives that signified danger to literary men. Loy was rather literary in her pursuits, however, moving to New York and leaving her family behind to engage in her artistic profession (Gilbert and Gubar 250). I believe Loy is largely a product of her time, as she watched women gain more liberties, like the right to vote. She then utilized her writing to express her distaste for the traditional feminine lifestyle. Loy's writing is cunning and unlike any other from her time (or before), especially in her work, "Feminist Manifesto". With its bold text and bolder writing, Loy breaks the traditional format one would expect. Breaking the bounds of standard structure, Loy's work

is filled with large bolded words, varying font sizes, countless underlining, and a fervor in her tone. Loy writes, “And if you honestly desire to find your level without prejudice – be **brave** & deny at the outset – that pathetic clap-trap war cry **Woman is the equal of man** for she is **NOT!**” (255). The vigor in Loy’s writing brings out her desire for women to have freedom, as women are individuals, too. I found this unusual structure to further her point about the expectation of a traditional woman, as unspoken rules refrain writers from using bolded or underlined text. The structure of this piece also breaks down what is typically seen in print, as the interspersed words may symbolize the breakdown of female complacency and reliance on men.

Due to her unique writing and artistic pursuits in life, I believe Loy could be one of “the New Women” of this period. I decided to write about Loy the second I read the following line. Gilbert and Gubar state, “Mina Loy refused throughout her career to abide by the rules of what she elsewhere called the ‘rubbish heap of tradition.’ ‘Nothing short of absolute demolition will bring about reform’ (250). As one who likewise enjoys writing far outside of tradition and in hybrid styles, I admire Loy’s courage to spit in the face of convention. I also agree with the second clause about absolute demolition, as otherwise, people are blind to the alternative. If one lives comfortably, one may become blind to flaws. In the early twentieth century, I believe men began feeling the pressure of these outspoken women as they were forced to confront this change. The integration of “the New Woman” as a negative phrase was likely intended to scare some women off of their literary passions. However, Loy did not seem to care when the newspaper labeled her a modern woman (Gilbert and Gubar 250), and it may have empowered her to be part of this feminist movement more.

Loy, Mina. "Feminist Manifesto." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. Edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton, 2007, pp. 17-257.

### Masculine Ignorance and Symbolism: Susan Glaspell

Susan Glaspell's work captivated me in plot and delivery. I found the structure of a play to serve as a great medium as this thoroughly entertaining mystery developed and ensnared me. I always appreciate when an author utilizes form and structure to better convey their message, as standard prose may not land as the writer intends. I agree when Gilbert and Gubar write, "confining environments that frustrate the full development of human potential as well as the impact of gender on the complex process by which we read and interpret not only literary but also social texts" (177). This quote regards Glaspell's writing, and I believe in its sentiment. It is never beneficial to look at a situation from only one side. In Glaspell's play, this means only the men's perspective. I believe Gilbert and Gubar mean that – even beyond the topic of gender – we, as readers, should approach the literary field with an open and flexible mind. In Glaspell's piece, we find that the truth would not be revealed without those who worry over trivial things. As Mr. Hale puts it, "Well, women are used to worrying over trifles" (Glaspell 180). Mr. Hale's dismissal of the women highlights the ignorance of those who hold bias. As the reader knows, Hale was wrong to disregard the women's words and negligible concerns. Had he (and the other men) considered the women's concerns even remotely important, the mystery of Mr. Wright's death may have been solved sooner. Instead, the men mock the women by saying things like, "They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just know it! [*The men laugh: the women look abashed*]" (Glaspell 183). However, this mockery makes a joke out of the men since they missed

out on vital evidence concerning the very thing they were attempting to solve. The constant belittling of the women reeks of toxic masculinity, though they may never realize it.

I also wanted to touch on Glaspell's utilization of symbolism. As readers, we may be familiar with the common connotation with birds – their representation of freedom. I believe Glaspell incorporated the bird as a portrayal of Mrs. Wright's freedom. Glaspell writes, "She was kind of like a bird herself – real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and – fluttery" (185). Here, the women make a direct link from Mrs. Wright to the bird. The bird was evidently strangled to death, its neck snapped. This image is indicative of Mrs. Wright's circumstances, as with the growing tension of isolation, she snaps. More than the bird, the rope used to kill her husband displays the suffocation she must have felt for so long in isolation. Mrs. Hale comments, "I've never liked this place. Maybe it's because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I don't know what it is but it's a lonesome place and always was" (Glaspell 184). I, too, would be driven mad by the suppression and loneliness felt in a house all alone with a restrictive husband. Mrs. Hale reasons that living in such a place can lead someone to insanity. The rope, and the strangulation of the bird, indicates complexity to Mrs. Wright's situation, and what lifestyle some women endure with such little support.

Glaspell, Susan. Trifles. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 178–189

## Hurston's Wit and Regionalism

I decided to write about Zora Neale Hurston for her engaging and (at times) comedic writing style. I believe others should look into her works as she has a unique awareness in her writing, especially in "How it Feels to be Colored Me". Hurston pens, "Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? it's beyond me" (360). Quotes like this highlights her character as one who acknowledges the racism in her time period, yet applies humor to lessen the impact of their discrimination. Hurston seems to laugh at society and its foolish expectations, firing off witty commentary. Hurston declares, "No, I do not weep at the world – I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife" (358). This line, in reference to "the world is my oyster", made me laugh due to its cleverness and had me in awe.

While Hurston's astute writing caught my attention, I believe I stayed for the depth she achieves through her wit. "How it Feels to be Colored Me" broaches the challenging topic of race in a dominantly white society. For Hurston, she describes her experience as, "I'm not tragically colored. There's no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all" (358). While this may be true for her, there were many women grappling with their histories that were frequently obscured by time. Gilbert and Gubar note the early-twentieth century as having, "A new realization that women did have a history, and particularly a history of cultural achievement" (25). Having read so much literature by women, I agree with the significance surrounding its historical richness. Hurston's experience is unique due to her childhood in the primarily black community of Eatonville, Florida. Though Hurston claims her heritage and skin color has no hold over her, I then question her aptness for generating primarily regionalistic literature in rather similar or near-Eatonville-like places. Hurston pens, "The town

knew the Southerners and never stopped cane-chewing when they passed. But the Northerners were something else again. They were peered at cautiously from behind curtains by the timid” (358). Here, she captures the culture of the town she grew up in. While it is not a work of fiction, I recall her “The Gilded Six-Bit” being regionalistic in style, too. I believe her experience growing up in a primarily black community influenced her writing style, as she takes regionalistic approaches to life. Though she may claim her race to have minimal impact on her, her career and literary pursuits suggest otherwise.

### ***Additional***

I was particularly drawn to Marianne Moore’s poem “Poetry” for its insightfulness into why I have, for so long, disliked poetry. She starts the piece, “I, too, dislike it” (Moore line 1). This quote drew me in quickly before I read her introduction by Gilbert and Gubar. For as long as I can remember, I have disliked poetry for its vagueness and indecipherability in my mind with such flowering text and shrouded metaphors. Moore writes, “the same thing may be said for all of us, that we / do not admire what / we cannot understand” (lines 13-15). To hear that Moore, a poet, dislikes poetry for the same reasons I dislike it felt oddly validating. At the same time, Moore explained poetry in a way I had never thought about it before. She describes poetry as, “so derivative as to become / unintelligible” (Moore lines 11-12). I believe the word “derivative” stuck with me, as poetry is such an intimate art that it derives from the author’s soul. After reading this piece, I can acknowledge and appreciate poetry as simultaneously abstract and ordinary. So ordinary that it becomes abstract, in a way.

Although Moore’s “Poetry” spoke to me, I did not connect to her other selected works quite as personally. Instead, I felt drawn to her personification of the sea in “A Grave”. Moore

announces, “the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look” (line 9). The idea that the sea can cast its gaze at one thing or another intrigued me. As a reader, I felt stricken with its look; the weight of its ominous glare was palpable. I never considered that tides could be greedy as “rapacious” and “collector” imply, but I enjoy the similes for their human-like implications. The personification exhibited by Moore brings a ruminative tone as it meditates on the aspects of the ocean that act like a grave. She writes, “It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing, / but you cannot stand in the middle of this; / the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave “ (Moore lines 3-5). These lines also spoke to me as they illuminate the dreariness brought on by large bodies of water. Here, Moore describes the sea as a grave, one of unforgiving nature – again a corroboration of its personification. I question whether it is a positive thing to be wary of the ocean/sea in the way Moore depicts it. This piece sparks moral questions regarding fishing, as Moore depicts it as “desecrating / a grave” (lines 12-13). Again, I am skeptical of Moore’s proposition, as I am more inclined to believe the sea’s role as a collector rather than a graveyard. Is a cemetery a collector? I guess it might be, which is relatively grim in my opinion. I think of a collector as more of a positive, eccentric person, not as the grief felt in a graveyard. Perhaps Moore was somewhat off base here, though her personification skills drew me in with the tides she spoke of.

Moore, Marianne. “A Grave.” *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 307–319

- - - "Poetry." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 307–319

I largely agree with how you write about Taggard. You describe her voice as "fiercely tender," which I cannot agree more with. She gets her point across but in a gentle, motherly way. Your analysis of "Everyday Alchemy" reminded me of Taggard's "A Middle-aged, Middle-class Woman at Midnight." She writes, "I'll not endure this stink of poverty" (Taggard line 18). Her tone relates to the "fiercely tender" comment from earlier, as her opinion is stated bluntly. Yet, there is a gentleness in the spirit of the sentiment. I believe this piece relates to "Everyday Alchemy" as Taggard grapples with the morality of poverty. As you discuss the hardworking women who are humbly exhausted, I believe her position surrounding poverty shines in both pieces. It is clear Taggard disagrees with the treatment and conditions those who are underpaid endure.

Admittedly, I was intrigued by Taggard's "With Child," as it is not commonplace to hear pregnancy discussed in literature. Which leads me to question why such an ordinary thing (pregnancy and childbirth) is scarcely addressed in the literary sphere. I would wager a guess at the gender-based biases and oppression we have seen throughout history. I agree that Taggard adopts a reflective, motherly, nearly animalistic role. She depicts herself as "No slim and language girl" (Taggard line 3). This line illustrated the change for me, as pregnancy takes a serious toll on the female body. Taggard utilizes nature to ground her experience, which I find beautiful. Taggard exclaims, "How earth tingles, teeming at my heel" (line 12)! The feeling her words exert is electric. Though I have never been pregnant, I, as a reader, appreciate how

connected to the environment and the earth Taggard is. I can only imagine what she must have felt to write in such an elegantly carnal manner. I agree as you discuss the current political climate and how it seems to want to dictate women's bodies. I wonder if Taggard's strength through this life-altering event of childbearing could empower women today. Everyone can learn a thing or two from her perseverance (and any mother, really) while also choosing to write so openly about the unseen emotions behind the process of generating new life.

I adore the lines you quoted from "At Last the Women Are Moving." They perfectly highlight Taggard's shift to the broader feminist movement. Many of her works assume feminist undertones, but this poem affiliates with the collective movement of the time, with more explicit connotations. Taggard questions, "How did these timid, the slaves of breakfast and supper / Get out in the line, drop for once dish-rag and broom" (lines 9-10)? Here, she questions how women have found the time to pause their domestic duties (that men deem so utterly important around the clock). I admire her use of "slaves of breakfast and supper," as it boldly displays Taggard's disdain towards household work. At the same time, Taggard's words express awe at the mobilization of feminine power.

I could not have phrased your final sentiment better, so I instead encourage others to look into Taggard's poetry for themselves. No matter how trivial one's experiences or concerns feel, they are often mistaken, as even slight activities can be inspiring to future readers, as Taggard's words are.

Taggard, Genevieve. "At Last the Women Are Moving." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 494–496.

- - - "With Child." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 494–496.

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## **Late 20th Century**

### Protective Mothers and Fictitious Customs

Maya Angelou's excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* depicts the intricacies of a mother-daughter relationship. A grandmother who is not afraid to stand up for her granddaughter, even if it breaks the social construct of the color line. Angelou writes, "If one was dying, it had to be done in style if the dying took place in whitefolks' part of town" (927). It is heartbreaking knowing the care that black people needed to take to get treatment without being discriminated against, all for some fictitious "code". And still, they were turned away simply for having a different skin color, as the white dentist preferred to help a dog, degrading them to an animalistic level (Angelou 929). The child states, "It seems terribly unfair to have a toothache and a headache and have to bear at the same time the heavy burden of Blackness" (Angelou 928). A child can recognize how society impairs non-white individuals, implying the deep-seated issue with the public's perception of race. How tragic for those who knew they needed help but could not get it simply because of society's preconceptions about them based on appearance. Regardless, the young girl knew the steps she had to take to appear "better" in front of whitefolk and let her grandmother take charge to get her treatment for her intense toothache.

From the young girl's eyes, her grandmother took on this otherworldly protective role to ensure she received care from the white dentist. She details, "Her eyes were blazing like live

coals and her arms had doubled themselves in length” (Angelou 929). The child's depiction of her grandmother is starkly different from what happened. Still, I believe it accentuates the powerful bond between mother and daughter (though ‘grand’ in this case), especially when the grandmother feels her granddaughter needs assistance. The reason I chose to write about this piece is from my recent visit to the emergency room. While my mother was unable to accompany me, my boss, who is a mother herself, worked as a surrogate mother when I needed help. I believe Angelou's story is relevant to my current circumstances, since my boss was there when I most needed it, taking on the supernatural maternal role. That day, I saw the same kind of protectiveness depicted in Angelou's story in my boss. The girl states, “I was so proud of being her granddaughter and sure that some of her magic must have come down to me. She asked if I was scared. I only shook my head and leaned over on her cool brown upper arm” (930). Though I'm not related to my boss, I can agree with this sentiment. I'm so thankful that I was not alone and had someone to advocate for me when I couldn't, as I'm sure the young girl in the story did. She felt reassured by her grandmother's presence, knowing that nothing could harm her, as her grandmother's strength in being able to intervene when necessary became a comfort.

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 926-930.

I agree when you detail Smith's poems as an unneglectable whisper. Like a call you cannot ignore, unsure if it urges you to take action or if a simple acknowledgement is all it requires. Smith indeed welcomes the emotions that come from her pain, as shown in many of her

pieces. In “Papa Love Baby,” Smith writes, “And wished mama hadn't made such a foolish marriage. / I tried to hide it, but it showed in my eyes unfortunately / And a fortnight later Papa ran away to sea” (lines 12-14). Smith’s emotions radiate from her texts as she grapples with themes of family, love, heartbreak, guilt, grief, identity, and more.

I also loved “This Englishwoman” for its humor at the duplicity of social expectations. Its brief, yet stark comedy illustrates a reality women faced. To be “refined,” a woman had to fill an unrealistic niche. I believe your note about women being too this or too that is exactly Smith’s point. Gilbert and Gubar state, “Representations of women often became blatantly titillating to men” (566). Smith’s depiction of a refined Englishwoman falls in line with the portrayal of women at this time. As you state, Smith's words intend to highlight how women's bodies are used as objects to please men. She mocks the standard by highlighting its hypocrisy through such a short piece. With so few words (twelve), she states so much.

I believe this piece also corresponds with your analysis of Smith's use of double consciousness. While the term “Double Consciousness” was often used to depict those of African-American descent, it can apply to women who are marginalized in this period as well. Alongside the shift from traditional views of women (and the rise of Future Shock (Gilbert and Gubar 564)), they began outgrowing the rigidity of patriarchal expectations and morphing into their own identities. The image of the refined Englishwoman was fading into the historical record as more women grew comfortable with their identities and histories and began speaking out against these idealized versions of women, as Smith does in her works.

I appreciate how you also focus on Smith's pieces that highlight a softer side of humanity, as in “Human Affection”. This piece stood out to me as it centers a different kind of emotion from her other pieces, which I believe makes her pieces seem more well-rounded as she branches

out to other emotions and topics. This poem is genuinely tender as it takes a moment to appreciate the gentle affection in human nature, particularly between a mother and daughter. In this period we see women depicted as objects to please especially for men. The male gaze is repeatedly talked about even now, but I believe this piece illustrates the female gaze. It stands out as more realistic to any other depiction of women in media as it is this raw, solitary scene portraying the love between mother and daughter that often fails to be shown as Smith does in this poem. How you use the word “preserve” as it truly represents what I believe Smith is attempting to portray through her writing.

I was particularly drawn to Sylvia Plath’s “Mirror” as it explores the object exactly how it is, unwavering in its truthfulness despite the blame it often receives. Plath writes, “I am not cruel, only truthful— / The eye of a little god, four-cornered” (lines 4-5). Her choice to personify a mirror intrigued me, as I feel like most authors do not take this “object-study” approach. By viewing the mirror in this poem, readers see human nature reflected. There is something so tragic in seeing humanity’s desires this way. Plath relays, “A woman bends over me, / Searching my reaches for what she really is” (lines 10-11). Constantly looking outward to figure out our identities, Plath informs us that what is inside can answer that through her elegant use of the mirror.

Plath also personifies words/language in her piece “Words”. She writes, “Axes / After whose stroke the wood rings...The sap / Wells like tears” (lines 1-2, 6-7). Words echo as the axe strikes the tree, and their meaning wells like sap from a freshly cut maple. This powerful imagery highlights the power behind language and the vitality of words to us as humans. Plath’s ability to personify objects or concepts is impressive, as they build deeper meaning through a different

lens. I would never have thought to compare words to that of an axe, nor would I have thought to give a mirror or reflection thoughts of their own. I love the way Plath plays with form, as it alters how I perceive and interact with these objects or concepts. Maybe the next time I look in the mirror, I can appreciate it for its truthfulness and steadfastness, as I am the one who changes. The next time I write, I can admire the value and power each word holds. Many times when I write, I have to wait for the sap to appear to get a full understanding of my words. As Plath states, “Years later I / Encounter them on the road– / Words dry and riderless” (lines 14-16). Over time, our words change their meaning, and they may not always return to us as initially intended. As a writer, I grapple with this concept, as each reader can interpret writing in remarkably different ways. I believe Plath's writing speaks to this, especially with “Words”.

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## **Late 20th pt. 2**

I decided to read Margaret Atwood's poetry because I have previously enjoyed her novels in other classes. She has a unique way of writing that feels lively and authentic, but I had never read her poetry before. As I read the selected poems, I noticed a theme of aging and the anxieties that accompany it. In “Waiting,” she writes, “And you realized for the first time / in your life that you would be old / some day, you would some day be / as old as you are now” (Atwood lines 34-37). This piece is nostalgic in the way that Atwood reflects on her life, detailing what it was like to be a child; realizing that she will one day look very different due to aging. The same can be said about “Morning in the Burned House”. Atwood details, “everything / in this house has been long over...including the body I had then, / including the body I have now” (lines 24-25, 28-29). She knows that change is inevitable, but there is apprehension in her tone, conscious of this certainty.

Her reflections also highlight the mindset that aging is natural and nothing to be afraid of. Atwood pens, “And now it is now...it is only a memory, after all: / a memory of a fear” (lines 48, 51-52). She now recognizes that the anxieties surrounding aging were baseless. It seems like she now cherishes the aspects of aging she was fearful of in her youth. In “Asparagus,” Atwood wonders, “If I should let my hair go gray / so my advice will be better” (lines 17-18). Here, she approaches aging as less of a concept to fear, and more of a thing to embrace. Though her youthful anxieties appear in other forms of her poetry as well, namely “Marsh Languages”. Atwood relays, “The languages of the dying suns / are themselves dying” (lines 18-19). I wonder what other angles she has used to look at change. Gilbert and Gubar relay that she studied Victorian fantasy, analyzing the mysteries of human curiosities (1204). I question if this path led her to explore such existential themes.

Her poetry depicts a fascination with change, aging, and decay that extends beyond simple human maturation. I am likewise intrigued by her awe of this theme as she grapples with the aspects of life that most are terrified of facing. The media frequently depicts aging as a negative thing, advertising countless anti-aging products and propounding stigma surrounding the elderly. By discussing aging, it appears Atwood somewhat comes to terms with it, since it is unavoidable. After reading these pieces, I feel relatively reassured by Atwood’s reflections. She relays her fear of the inevitable in her childhood, but as she is now older, it is far less intimidating for her. Her remarks indicate there is nothing to worry about in regard to aging.

#### Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. Selected Works. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 1203-1210.

Gish Jen's *Who's Irish?* is a comedic reflection on an Asian American mother trying to fit into her new role as grandmother in a culture she still grapples to understand. The narrator explores what it means for her to be an immigrant living in the United States, discovering her new role and changing relationships. Simultaneously, this piece examines parenting styles through the lens of right and wrong. The narrator blatantly compares the strict discipline in Chinese parenting culture to the more lackadaisical Irish upbringing. Jen writes, "I just happen to mention about the Shea family, an interesting fact: four brothers in the family, and not one of them work" (1438). Clearly, the narrator disapproves of the Shea family's lack of work ethic, particularly her son-in-law. She mocks him, relaying, "I especially cannot understand my daughter's husband John, who has no job but cannot take care of Sophie either. because he is a man, he say, and that's the end of the sentence" (1438). I find Jen's writing here comedic, which continually engaged me throughout this piece. I can relate to her assumption that Irish parents coddle their sons, as I have witnessed it firsthand. My Irish grandparents strictly adhered to traditional gender roles with their son and daughter (my mother). Likewise, I saw this when I was in school in Ireland with two male (Irish) flatmates who avoided cleaning the dishes like the plague, citing that their mothers "never taught" them how. Meanwhile, my male Romanian flatmate was a neat freak. In this sense, I can understand the narrator's thought process and assumptions.

When the narrator is put on babysitting duty for her granddaughter, she is surprised by the lack of corporal punishment on the three-year-old. When asked not to spank her daughter, the grandmother states, "Don't tell me what to do...I'm not your servant, I say. Don't you dare talk to me like that" (Jen 1441). Despite her daughter's attempts to tell her why spanking is wrong, the

narrator refuses to alter her parenting technique. The cultural divide between mother and daughter is partially felt through the syntax of the piece. The narrator writes in a Chinese-influenced syntax, where most lines read differently, grammatically, than English or American structures. Jen writes, “I promise I no hit you. If you come out, I give you a lollipop” (1443). Where, typically, this line would be written as, “I promise I will not hit you. If you come out, I will give you a lollipop”. When the narrator recites lines from her daughter, they read more naturally. Jen writes, “It gives them low self-esteem, my daughter say. And that leads to problems later, as I happen to know” (1441). Through the variance in syntax, Jen illustrates the divide between the pair beyond mere mother-daughter arguments. I admire this choice, as it characterizes the narrator in such a deep way as it is rooted in the text itself.

Jen, Gish. *Who's Irish?. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, pp. 1436-1445.

I agree that silence is the allure of Glück's “Lullaby,” as it swiftly gathers its scenery and setting, but allows the lack of voice/body to fill in the gaps. I like how you relate the tone to a parent comforting a child to sleep, as it makes sense with the title. Though this poem does not rhyme, like any traditional lullaby, I believe it reads as one regardless. I believe the shift you refer to occurs at the second page break. Glück pens, “Don't think of these things anymore” (line 6). The line is somewhat harsh in its delivery. But, with the piece as a whole, it reads as a gentle encouragement instead. More urging the reader to lightly detach their excitement from the transition from day into night.

I cannot agree more with your love for the last two lines. I initially overlooked them, but after rereading them in your analysis, I can better appreciate their value. My life has been unreasonably busy lately, and I suppose I have not taken the time to slow down and admire the silence. I love when you write, “We live in a world that teaches us to fill space constantly, talk, noise, distraction, movement,” as it so accurately depicts how I have been feeling lately. It feels as if we cannot get comfortable with silence. We crave noise, and the constant need for that is thoroughly interwoven in our society now, especially in the media. I am currently recovering from surgery, and for the first time in a while, I just sat outside and let myself be comfortable without any other distractions. It was weird at first, but I grew to enjoy it, and I know by tomorrow, I will have already forgotten that feeling. It is heartbreaking that we cannot slow down and appreciate the things around us more intimately anymore, which I believe is what Glück is trying to convey in her poem. My few, blissful minutes outside reflect those small moments that Glück encourages us to enjoy. It was not a large, planned outing that lasted hours; it was a few moments sitting outside in the grass watching the sunset (however hazy from the wildfires). As you point out in Glück’s lines 7-8, it was a fleeting moment that was felt so deeply.

While you discussed the last two lines, the first two lines relate to this idea of slowing down, too. Glück scribes, “Time to rest now; you have had / enough excitement for the time being” (lines 1-2). Undoubtedly, we all need to rest more and relish in the silence in our day to day. Glück's poetry encourages us to do so. With all the commotion in the world, I agree that “Lullaby” encourages us to stop contending with the silence. Glück also shows us that it's possible to do so gently, without piling more noise on top of the pre-existing tumult. Thank you for encouraging me to read Glück’s poem, as I thoroughly enjoyed it.

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## Reflection

**For the course reflection, write 1000-1250 words about the writers and ideas that have had the strongest impact on you this semester--whether that impact is positive or negative or a combination of the two. This isn't a formal essay, so while the document should be MLA-formatted, it doesn't have to adhere to any specific structure otherwise--just let your ideas flow where they will!**

I believe this course led me to explore more works by various authors than I ever would have originally. Many of the authors I read through each section, I had either heard of before or read some of their pieces already, but never dove into their “catalogues” thoroughly. For example, I have read *The Penelopiad* and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, without ever knowing she had collections of poetry. I found myself enjoying her poetry as I read it because of the theme of aging she focused on. She was once fearful, but then turned accepting, and she redefined what it meant for her to age. I love the way she reshapes this image, as aging is often depicted in a negative light in the media and society, in general. However, she did not let this get to her, as she realized that aging is a natural process and not something that inhibits her, as it is often intensely depicted. I felt reassured by her writing, knowing that getting older is inevitable and natural, not something to be frightened of. I was also thoroughly entertained by her piece “Rape Fantasies” for her engaging and comedic narrator. This piece in particular (and Atwood's Works in general) inspired me to buy another one of her novels (*The Blind Assassin*) as I forgot how much I love her writing.

Similarly with Abigail Adams, I had read "Remember the Ladies" for other classes, gaining a basic idea of women advocates at the time of this country's creation. However, I never read her other letters like "Man Is a Dangerous Creature," which I realized I enjoyed gaining a fuller understanding of her place in this country's creation, and what the frontier felt like for a woman trying to survive. It is clear through her writing that she was under a lot of stress and was enduring challenging times without her husband there to support her. I also loved hearing her outrage when she found out they did not, in fact, "remember the ladies" as her disappointment seeps through her writing.

I knew I was going to like this class the moment I read Rachel Speght's *A Muzzle Melastomus*. Incidentally, this was the first piece I read. Reading that piece invigorated me, knowing that women have been fighting against the harsh ideals they are forced to follow since the beginning of time. I was so inspired by her piece that I emailed the professor who founded UNE's Women's Studies program, asking her if she knew it. I was so excited about Speght fighting back against a man so publicly and boldly. I sent her this quote:

You appeare herein not unlike that painter, who seriously endeavoring to portray Cupid's bow, forgot the string: you for being greedy to botch up your mingle-mangle invective against women have not therein observed, in many places, so much as a grammar sense. But the emptiest barrel makes the loudest sound; and so we will account of you. (Speght 110)

I thought her writing was so clever and humorous that I was laughing out loud at her wit and courage to talk to a man this way. Needless to say, my professor enjoyed hearing this quote (particularly the phrase mingle-mangle). I will never forget what it felt like reading her words for the first time and being elated to read about other authors like Speght.

My biggest hope for the future, having taken this class, is to bring it into my future career. I am studying English education and will be graduating next year. I know many schools have a strict curriculum for what students read. However, I hope to incorporate some of the authors from these two anthologies into my teachings. I acknowledge that this might not be plausible, but many schools still read *Jane Eyre* (and *Wuthering Heights*), and read authors like Zora Neale Hurston, Sojourner Truth, Abigail Adams, Phillis Wheatley, Anne Bradstreet, and Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, among others. One problem that I noticed in many school districts is the excessive amount of works written by (white) men in curricula. I hope this may one day change, but for now, I will do everything I can to include more female authors in my classroom.

I cannot think of any negative impacts from reading any of the authors, though sometimes it was challenging to pick an author whom I would want to write about. I found the list of your favorites from each section very helpful and acted as a guide for me to know where to start. Some sections had so many authors that it was somewhat overwhelming to decide on who to pick. I would end up reading a bunch of authors, but none that I could relate to or find something substantial to write about. I appreciated your list of favorites, as I often wanted to write about those authors when I could not decide on who to read and reflect on.

I have mentioned this in the discussions, but I am a writer who enjoys breaking the limitations of standard structures, which is why Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" stuck with me. Though some authors challenge traditional structures and forms, Mina Loy truly went above and beyond what other authors displayed. There is a visible difference on her pages in the anthology. She utilizes varying text size, bold lettering, underlining, italicizing, and exclamation marks, where many traditional forms would not permit such audacious writing. She truly hates convention, and I admire that. I adore writing in hybrid formats as they are more freeing and take

on a unique meaning when you utilize all aspects of the page. Plus, her ideas are likewise commendable. She pushes back on the traditional expectations of women and advocates for their right to vote. I will not forget Mina Loy anytime soon, and I will be keeping her in mind the next time I write a hybrid piece.

I believe this course helped me obtain a better worldview on women's writing throughout history. With a diverse selection, I gained a deeper understanding of the inner workings of women's lives. There were no works where I felt negatively impacted, as women's writing is so essential to grasping our history. I will do everything in my power to incorporate women authors in my teachings in the future for this reason. And now, I have an entire catalog of authors who contributed their voices to the historical record, and for the benefit of other women, due to this course.