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Is a Picture Really Worth a Thousand Words?

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Ernest J. Bellocq set up his camera in Storyville about a hundred years ago in order to take obscene yet consensual photographs of prostitutes in the red light district of New Orleans. After Bellocq's death the negatives were found deliberately damaged, possibly by Bellocq himself. The faces of some of these women were scratched out, erasing their identity. In order to restore the identity of the women Natasha Trethewey, author of *Bellocq's Ophelia,* wrote a book of poetry about them. Because these nameless women, unlike the white prostitute in Édouard Manet's famous prostitute painting, *Olympia*[1] (1863), are black and openly display their genitalia, Trethewey writes in an attempt to reverse the common practice of the exploitation of female African American bodies. Yet she fails in her efforts to give what she calls "Bellocq's Ophelia" an independent identity in her poems; the name Ophelia itself directs readers to the common interpretation of the character in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and that character's traits. The title makes one imagine a victim of insanity who depends on the male gender to control her and has no sense of individuality because she only appears in connection to a man. Because the women appear by themselves with no males in the frame, Bellocq's photographs[2] are more successful in granting African American women a voice than Trethewey's attempts toward "the restoration of what is not seen or is forgotten as a result of erasure from local and national memory" (Rowell 1022). Instead of correcting the representation of black women in history, Trethewey only rehearses it and therefore fails to put an end to the hypersexual view of African American femininity.

The hypersexual view of African American women is one that has been developed and exploited over centuries. African American women have been constructed in literature as Jezebels as part of this racist and highly sexualized genealogy. A "Jezebel . . . is a cultural image that is portrayed as a mulatto or a fair-complexioned African American female, who possesses features that are considered European," a description which has long been used to characterize the sexuality of multiracial women (Jewell 46). In the racist genealogy of African American female sexuality, Jezebel connotes blackness whereas the view of white women remains antithetical to this view and white females are often desexualized. Even "semi nudity. . . [is] misinterpreted as lewdness" in literature when referring to African American women (Pilgrim). The idea that race defines human sexuality, that the African American male is a brute or rapist and the female is a Jezebel, has been promoted by dominant culture as fact. Trethewey's Ophelia tries to address the "continued onslaught of negative images" that is given to black women of all shades (Peterson xvi). Instead, her poems lack any individuality. Ophelia, as Trethewey has stated, "becomes what . . . [she] must" (11). She is a prostitute, just another Jezebel.

Trethewey's poems further allude to the sexualized image of the Hottentot, which also appears in the artwork of Kara Walker. In one of her poems, to reference that image, she writes of the "reversed silhouette . . . against the black backdrop" (20). The use of this imagery mirrors the "explicit, playful, grotesque, and deliberately shocking" silhouettes of Walker's artwork (Keizer 1656). These images are powerful because they help "reconstruct. . . African American history that attempts to leave out reference to the relationship between masters and slaves" (1662). Walker's *Camptown Ladies*[3] portrays a silhouette that has an exaggerated case of steatopygia, a "Hottentot Venus . . . [that is used in] linking past conditions of coercion with black female subjectivities in the present" (1663). These photos alone display how black, female sexuality has been raped by the genealogy of African American women's stereotypes. Trethewey doesn't attempt to combat inaccurate historical accounts but instead retells them, with no new depth or revelation.

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[1] For image, see http://locus.cwrl.utexas.edu/jbrown/files/Olympia.jpg

[2] For image, see http://www.artpapers.org/images/feature_articles/2003_1112/RECLINING LADY.jpg

[3] For image, see http://www.30americans.com/Artist/Kara_Walker/1.html

Misguided stereotypes about the hypersexuality of African American women are more fully corrected in the work of Toni Morrison and Sojourner Truth than in the poems of Trethewey. In contrast to the poet, Morrison uses her novel *Beloved* to "rewrite the history of African American women . . . by affirming the ineffable beauty of these bodies" (Peterson 16). She knows that words can never paint the truth because it has been so badly damaged throughout history, yet feels obligated to offer a less stereotypical view of black femininity. Instead of recognizing that African American women may have "self-respect, self-control, and modesty—even sexual purity [like] white women" (Jewell 24), Trethewey merely resurrects the past without the complexity found in Morrison's books. She neglects the history of African American women, whereas other writers like Morrison and Truth work to correct the past. When Truth draws attention to her body in her speeches she reverses the sexual view of women of her race by portraying the "bodily labor" she participated in as a slave, and her "child bearing," in order to "transform . . . her female sexuality into tools of labor . . . as a black woman worker" (Peterson 14). She takes a different approach than other speakers and writers by reshaping the view of African American women through her own struggle. Because the "nineteenth century stereotype stay[s] problematically lodged in the popular memory [of Americans] today," modern African American writers should work to combat all negative stereotypes of black sexuality (Brady 264). Trethewey, unlike Morrison or Truth, fails to reverse or critique misconceptions and even keeps them alive in the twenty first century.

Arlene Keizer poses the question, "Can this past ever be put to rest?" Because the past shapes the future, it will always be part of the present. In regard to Keizer's idea of post memory as the "haunted condition, in which images from the past hover over the present or erupt into it," Trethewey only aids in the systematic psychic dismembering of the cross-racial body (1650). Trethewey's failure to tackle the past could have been prevented had she given Ophelia more depth and complexity as a woman than the common stereotypes of the character do. The women in Bellocq's photographs appear to be of European descent, depth is only granted to these women when their black identity and background is examined. Trethewey introduces the world to the Storyville prostitutes and gives them a race in her poetry. This revelation of race adds implied meaning to the photographs that could have been disregarded otherwise such as the idea of the tragic mulatto, Jezebel or the sexually seductive stereotype which surrounds African American females. As Annette Debo notes, Trethewey "gives voice to the African American sex workers living in Storyville" (201), but this voice only reiterates the negative depictions and deleterious events suffered by African Americans of the time.

This use of race and sexuality is commonly found in literature. Race in Trethewey's case is now a "placeholder for a less stark, more complex set of relations of domination for which we do not yet have a literary or visual language" for sexuality (Keizer 1650). Trethewey constructs Ophelia through her acquisition of a drop of black blood, which can be dated back to slavery through the relationships masters had with female slaves through the "context of coercion" (Peterson 15). White males felt they had the right to access the bodies of African American females through sex, which gave birth to many Ophelias, young black women who seek fulfillment through men. Many young women whose mothers were subjected to rape would never know the identity of their fathers, like Trethewey's Ophelia, so they seek out other methods of affection from men. Because of this, slavery itself has an impact on the later prostitution of female black bodies.

Ophelia, whose existence is based upon the system of placage, is never transformed by her condition in Trethewey's poems. Joseph Roach describes "the weird demimonde of placage, [as] the Creole custom of arranging extramarital liaisons with educated mulattos" in New Orleans (217). This custom is related in the lines "earliest training—childhood—how/ [her] mother taught [her] to curtsy and be still /so that [she] might please a white man, [her] father" (Trethewey 20). Unable to grasp the idea of independence as a woman, Ophelia remains a victim of placage. The subjects of Bellocq's photographs could be misread as white women, but Trethewey reveals the racial background and casts Ophelia into the permanent role of a victim. She treads on the thin line between the depiction of black prostitutes as individual victims of circumstance and women plagued by historical curses. She rehearses many events that undermine the African American female gender but fails to transform any views.

Trethewey's Ophelia, like Shakespeare's character, is dependent on men for survival. In "The Naming" she describes meeting her father: "my mother pushed me toward a white man . . . *Your father*, /

she whispered. *He's the one that named you, girl*" (37). From this moment onward she suffers from a need for attachment to the male gender; her father created her and, because of his position and race, she is now a victim of the genealogy associated with mulattos. She transcribes this idea onto Bellocq when Ophelia claims that "this photograph *we* make / will bear the stamp of his name, not mine" (39), even though she is the subject and without her there would be no artwork.

The elements that Trethewey incorporates from the African American women's genealogy in her poetry include the idea of the tragic mulatto, African American subservience, and the rehearsal of slavery. The events that helped in the creation of this racist genealogy are also present in the fancy girl auctions and the exploitation of Saartji Baartman. In the poem "December 1910," Trethewey juxtaposes the tragic mulatto with a fancy girl auction; Ophelia describes how "the auction was near" and her "dignified birth . . . [was] a tragic occasion" (13). She is surrounded by "wealthy gentlemen" and she must "recite poetry" for these men: she claims that she is "the *African Violet* for the promise / of that wild continent hidden beneath / [her] white skin," which calls attention to her "wild" side because of the African heritage she inherits from her mother (13). The fancy girl auction is further developed to the point where she goes "upstairs with the highest bidder" (14); her prostitution marks an end to the poem. History has shown how fancy girl auctions are damaging to a woman's sense of self worth, but Trethewey only retells what we already know rather than giving Ophelia an identity or an escape route.

Another example of this particular genealogy can be found in the case of Saartji Baartman, a South African woman from two centuries ago who was famous for her case of steatopygia, an extreme accumulation of body fat around the buttocks. Because of her enormous buttocks she was seen as animal-like, a "freak show" to be stared at (Brady 263). After she agreed to be taken from Africa to England, Baartman was put on display where customers (including males and females) were able to touch her abnormal body parts. Eventually this display grew into the "crude stereotype of black femininity," Baartman's exploitation became the accepted stereotype for women of African descent including African American females (Brady 263). Although Baartman was of pure African descent her sexuality soon became a trait that Europeans likened to all shades of the African Diaspora, an indication that "white culture defines blackness and vice versa" (Fanon 104). Trethewey alludes to this representation of Ophelia's physical attributes when she notes "a glass or a pair of boots propped upon my back," a reference to the women in Bellocq's photographs with oversized buttocks (14). This remains a stereotype of African American culture which is difficult to correct.

Though she views her own birth as civilized, Ophelia can never escape her past or genealogy. She holds this view because of her white blood and her outwardly white appearance, yet because she is not fully white she must

> pretend to be . . .
> a white woman . . . until [she] catch[es] the eyes
> of some stranger . . . and [she] must lower [herself to]
> a *negress* again. (7)

The refusal of African Americans to look into the eyes of white people dates back to slavery and displays African American subservience, a role that Ophelia is willing to play. She "wait[s] to be / asked to speak" in the poem "Countess P--'s Advice for New Girls," then she "lets him see whatever / he [Bellocq] needs" (11). She adheres to this idea of African American subservience and describes herself as the "grinning *nigger*" in "April 1911" (23). By her grin Ophelia indicates that she is tolerating something unpleasant without complaint, Trethewey never gives Ophelia the strength to not feel subservient to white men.

Trethewey also fails in her attempts to "participate in the tradition of recovering mythic female figures denied a voice" (Debo 202). Although Debo claims Ophelia is given a voice with which to "recount lost American history," the poems never go beyond those historical scripts (202). Slavery is not lost and its memory will never be erased from history, yet Trethewey rehearses it again without the liberation of her character. Though Ophelia is not a slave she is plagued by the effects of slavery and by extension she becomes a sex slave. The allusions to slavery begin early on in the book, specifically in the poem "January 1911," when Ophelia says "my labor is my own / . . . I have bought my mother" (15).

Given that it was common for masters to rape "slave women [because they] were property" (Pilgrim), Ophelia is no more free than her mother had been as a slave. Trethewey also paints this picture through the lines:

> Or I am back at the farm store
> The man leaning over me, pinching
> The tiny buds of my new breasts,
> Sneering, calling me womanish
> As I stare at the lines in the floor
> Until they blur into one smooth path
> Leading away from that place—
> *I am then nothing*
> *But the light I see behind my shut eyelids.* (18-19)

This ending to the poem "February 1911" leaves Ophelia with a feeling of belittlement and she is never given a firmer sense of racial pride or identity throughout the entirety of Trethewey's collection.

Trethewey would have aided in the breakdown of the female hypersexual genealogy if she would have let the women of Storyville be "frozen in time, forever about to speak" (Debo 203). These cut and dry images would have ultimately given way to their own voice. Because they are stiff, sociological and uninviting, these images would tell individual stories to male viewers and not awaken the past. As Debo notes, "Trethewey creates a composite character as the volume's primary persona and uses her to envision the aspects of her life that transcend the written histories and recorded images" (201), but this usage of one underdeveloped character does not transcend history but instead reverts back to history and digs up old bones. Photographs and printed images are two of the most powerful tools used to record history. Left alone, without the flawed interpretation of a poet like Trethewey, these images from the past are truly worth a thousand words.

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A Review and Commentary
on *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee

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Disgrace by J. M. Coetzee is a disturbing book that forces the reader to confront the darker side of life and deal with ethical issues and the baser instincts of humanity. Nevertheless, while ethical issues are examined, they are not resolved. It feels more like Coetzee thrusts these images disturbingly into the reader's psyche, forcing them to deal with these problems internally. To me, some light could have been found at some point in the 220 pages of this book. Unfortunately, perhaps Coetzee felt that he could better express an underlying statement about the history of racial oppression in South Africa without incorporating light subject matter into it. There appears to be no humor, no relief—comic or otherwise— throughout the novel. What we see of David Lurie's life, and the lives of the other characters in the book, is tragic. Certainly Coetzee could have given a playful side to David, the main character. Perhaps this would have shown what exactly his student Melanie found compelling about him. As it is, the reader can only venture to guess. The traumatic events that are later told would have appeared even more traumatic had the author added a greater contrast between the lighter, more human side to his characters and the serious content of the novel.

In many ways, this is a story about the powerful and powerless. Initially, David Lurie is in a role of power which turns to powerlessness after a sad turn of events. David, a professor who is reciting a poem by Byron to his class, states that the poem is about a fallen angel "condemned to solitude" (34). This poem in some ways foreshadows what is to become of David's life. He is a failure at love who loses his job and reputation, moves in with his daughter (Lucy) in the country and is then beaten and trapped in the bathroom as his daughter is raped. Later his house is vandalized and he eventually takes a job killing and incinerating unwanted dogs. Coetzee constantly draws parallels among these different examples of power and powerlessness throughout the novel.

Coetzee examines the underlying theme of powerlessness through the rape of Lucy. Rape has been a way to subjugate women since ancient times when a rape was conducted as a regular means to bring a woman into a man's tribe or nation. As Donna McNamara and Bonnie Clairmont state, "The English word 'rape' is derived from the Latin 'rapier' which means to steal, seize or carry away." Unfortunately, rape is still regarded as a way to steal, seize, or carry away, and today it does so by forcing women into subjugated and submissive roles and stealing access to their most private and intimate parts. Lucy describes the act as one of "Subjection. Subjugation" (Coetzee 159). However, Lucy's rape is not simply about the subjugation of women. She tells her father:

> "The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place, it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone."
> "This place being what?"
> "This place being South Africa." (Coetzee 112)

As the novel goes to demonstrate, Lucy is incorrect in her assumption that her rape is a private matter. Indeed, throughout the rest of Coetzee's book, the theme of public racial oppression and powerlessness is portrayed as part of everyday life.

Lucy's rape is not the first instance of sexual power and powerlessness presented in the novel. When David is teaching at Cape Technical University, Melanie is one of his well-to-do students. Technically, some would describe David's advance on Melanie, in a surprise visit to her apartment, as a rape. Yet when Melanie doesn't fight or resist his advances, but instead helps him remove her clothes by raising her arms and hips, a very fine line is drawn between rape and consent. Coetzee not only foreshadows future events with David's statement that "she is too surprised to resist the intruder who

thrusts himself upon her" (24), he also alludes to the professor's intrusion into her life. In David's statement he shows that when he takes Melanie's body he also intrudes into her home, her social life, her psychological wellbeing, her college, her career plans and, last but not least, her body. Often, sex in its more base instincts, causes problems in all areas of a one's life unless one is old and mature enough to handle the inevitable consequences of sexuality. Melanie is neither of these. David's treatment of her emphasizes the theme of power and powerlessness as it illustrates that he at first has power over her, then loses his power as a result of his actions.

There is a subtle irony in the fact that David Lurie is publicly disgraced for seducing a college student, yet when three black men rape, rob and attempt to murder Lucy, they get away with their crimes. David and Lucy's power and powerlessness come to parallel the racial conditions in South Africa. There is some small redemption in the end when David, in spite of his failures at life, love, and women, chooses to support his daughter's decision to keep the baby that she doesn't love since he feels that "love will grow [because] one can trust Mother Nature for [it]" (216). Yet the novel does not indicate Lucy's thoughts about the multiracial child, and it would, therefore, be presumptuous to assume that she does grow to love the child. In the novel, the ending implies forgiveness and a fresh start at life for both David and Lucy, but nothing is assured.

Disgrace further parallels the racial oppression of blacks in South Africa with the treatment and view of dogs in the country. This is illustrated in the discussion that Lucy has with David about the animals when he states, "as for animals, by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation from animals. Not higher necessarily, just different. So if we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we feel guilty or fear retribution" (74). David here is not really talking about the dogs; he is talking about whites and their view of blacks. This view directly reflects the view of white people towards blacks in post-Apartheid Africa. His statement does not illustrate his power over the powerless dogs as much as it illustrates that he feels for them. The dogs are not a parallel for David's own power and powerlessness, but for South African blacks in a post-Apartheid nation in which he does feel guilt and does fear retribution, but wishes he could simply be kind. While this book deals with the social and economic tensions as related to different societal statuses and races, it also touches on the roles of class, age and gender. The story is both painful and depressing, made all the more profound in the lean prose that Coetzee uses in telling it. A story like this cannot come across as strong with unnecessary embellishments and flourishes

Honestly, Coetzee's novel is a difficult one to read. The subject matter is both grim and harsh. I felt that I gained very little in reading this book other than the straightforward use of dialogue and unembellished prose. Maybe embellishments and forceful writing would have detracted from the reality of the grim situations—after all what the book is about is pretty straightforward. Complicated prose may have diminished its seriousness. Yet it also seems true that Coetzee could have brought more lightness to the prose and made his characters more likeable without detracting from this serious subject matter.

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The Woman in Modernism

Heike Wrenn, English 428

"King and Queen of Serbia Murdered!" "Revolts in Russia!" "Greeks Revolt in Crete!" "King Carlos and Crown Prince Assassinated!" "Bulgaria declares Independence!" "Revolution in Portugal!" "Archduke Ferdinand Assassinated in Serbia!" These were just some of the headlines that appeared in newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century. The beginning of the century was a time of confusion and growing tension, of unease with social order and of uproar and revolution which eventually led to World War I. It was also a time of new advents, inventions, thought patterns and a sense of liberation from many traditional bonds; it was the beginning of the modernist era. Modernism is often defined as a response to the scientific, political and economic developments of the time and the way people dealt with those issues. The tension and unease that these issues brought along with them also manifested in the art of the time; it affected music, philosophy, visual art, and of course literature. Writers and authors of the time who reflected on these issues could not help but to give voice to the tension and change in their work, and a new literary genre, the modernist movement, was developed.

Modernism embraced the issues of class, gender, the struggle for knowledge, and the senselessness and alienation of the time. The movement was a response to an international sense of depression, the helpless feeling held by many at that time that nothing was concrete or reliable anymore. It dealt with the way human personality seemed to change, as Virginia Woolf once stated in 1910, and it embraced disruption and rejection to move beyond the simplistic. Gender issues have always been a topic in society as well as in literature, so naturally gender became a major focus of the modernist movement. Women, their intelligence and their judgment had always been regarded with contempt by a male-oriented society (Marsden). Women had been seen and treated more as complements to the men in their lives than as individuals or spiritual entities; they were depicted in literature as womanly, weak, dutiful, and stupid. Most authors continued to write with the misguided perception that women were always inferior to men.

For centuries, women were defined by men; the world was male-centered and male-dominated. Male philosophers and social theorists were the ones who identified woman with disorder, savagery, chaos, unreason, and the excluded "other." According to James Branch Cabell women were considered nothing more than conveniences; they were useful for keeping a household as well as for copulation and pleasure. Hegel describes womankind as the "eternal irony of the community," and Freud defines it as "the implacable enemy of civilization" (qtd. in Glasgow). Theory, logic, and order were considered to be masculine traits, the opposite of femininity. In her article "Feminism," Ellen Glasgow states that "in the past men have confidently asserted that woman exists not as an active agent of life but merely as a passive guardian of the life force and that it is nature's purpose that woman sit and watch." The philosopher Schopenhauer claims that one needs only to look at a woman in order to realize that she is not intended for great mental or physical labor. Schopenhauer goes as far as to state that women are childish, silly, and short-sighted; he does not acknowledge women as human, but instead implies that men are the only fully human beings and that women exist on a plane somewhere between them and children (qtd. in Glasgow). Evil is another trait that has been attributed to women for centuries, a characteristic that dates back to the Biblical allusion of Eve's temptation of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Until the early twentieth-century, these traits and characteristics were all considered feminine and women were portrayed and treated accordingly.

In 1912, Mary Coolidge asked whether the characteristic behavior described as feminine is in fact an inalienable quality or merely an attitude of mind produced by the coercive social habits of past eras. After she carefully studied societies which stress gender differences from infancy and compared them to primitive societies where men and women were mostly equal in status she concluded that it is the stressing of these differences, the imposing of values and traits rather than inherent biological characteristics, which is responsible for perceptions of "the feminine." Coolidge suggests that it is civilized man who has molded woman according to his standards and desires: "A successful woman must

be what man approved of," and for that reason women have always conformed to the standards set for them (85). Coolidge further postulates that it is because women are never given the opportunity to act as they feel, because all traits and characteristics not in line with the feminine are suppressed and perverted from infancy, that "the womanly woman" stereotype was created with its excessive dependence on men for support and guidance (90).

Writing as late as 1935, Dr. Adler, a Viennese psychologist, agrees with Coolidge that "there is absolutely no biological basis for the inferiority of women" ("Idea of Women's"). Adler, like Coolidge, holds men instead of women accountable for the feminine myth. Adler sees women's inferiority as "fictitious invention of the male sex" and claims that women are made "to feel that they are not at the level with men from the very beginning" ("Idea of Women's"). Adler makes the valid point that this myth of feminine inferiority is so strong that it will take women a long time truly become free of it and declare their independence.

Dora Marsden, after carefully examining the same issue in her article "Bondwomen," also concludes that femininity and women's inferiority are a social construct. Yet she claims that this is not necessarily due to the downgrading of women by men because "it is not possible for an outer force to give or take away freedom, it is born in the individual's soul" (Marsden). Marsden suggests that the perceived inferiority of women exists because some women instinctively see themselves as inferior and have accepted this inferiority without question. These women seek comfort and protection, they long to be at the side of a man, and it is for that reason that women in male dominated cultures have been willing to sacrifice their image and identity for centuries. Since femininity is only a construct and not an underlying fact, Marsden claims it can be deconstructed. To unravel the myths of femininity women must choose to feel a sense of equality, that women can be fully independent of the men in their lives.

Ellen Glasgow has similar notions. She suggests that the years of false stereotyping of women by men have bred in many the dangerous habit of applying these misconceptions to themselves. They have denied their own humanity for so long and with so much earnestness that they have come to believe in the truth of this denial. The deconstruction of traditional views of women is a challenge not only because it is so established in male-dominated culture but also because women have often shown such an eagerness to conform to the ideals of men that they have defied nature and reshaped both their minds and their bodies after the model placed before them. Glasgow is in agreement with Coolidge when she suggests that this apparent passivity is not inherent but acquired, that it "is obliged therefore to disappear in the higher development of the race." Glasgow, much like Marsden, believes that a woman's identity is formed by her willing acceptance of society's norms.

The turn of the century and its many changes, industrialization in particular, gave a number of women the chance to work outside of the home. According to Coolidge, "not a few" of these women were able to use their inherent intelligence and started to question and defy the traditional place of woman in western society (85). As time progressed a gradual change took place and "the new woman" emerged between the two world wars. One of the major aims of this modern woman was economic and financial independence. This type of freedom brought with it other rights: to choose whether to marry or remain single, to obtain work positions, the right of sexual expression and so much more. What was most important for "the new woman" was intellectual freedom; women were looking for self-realization, for the ability to use their intellectual abilities and talents to find themselves and their true identity. Needless to say this new woman became not only a threat to male-dominated societies but also a great source of material for the writers of the time.

As a result of the new feminist movement, literature of the modernist period often depicts the female as an individual who insists on her right to have a career or a family, or both, depending on her individual choices and desires. The "new woman" in literature is depicted as one who "emphasizes the identity of interests that all human beings have. While she recognizes the diversity involved in true equality, she sees that the diversity isn't necessarily on the sex-lines but on the lines of what each individual has to contribute to society" (West 14). The "new woman" was far from perfect and some of her aspirations and behavioral patterns were far from admirable, but much of this, according to June West, was simply "a result of woman's not being accustomed yet to freedom of choice" (14).

Although many changes are seen in the way women are portrayed in modernist literature—and

the "new woman" can certainly be detected page after page—many male writers were unable to let go of the old, established, feminine view of female characters. Tradition was still too strong and the "womanly woman" remained an important literary figure alongside this "new woman." William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Ernest Hemingway's "Snows of Kilimanjaro," and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* offer examples of how this new feminist view coupled with the old view of woman in modernist literature.

It is practically impossible to read "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and not notice the influence that modernism has had on Hemingway and his work. He clearly acknowledges the rapid changes that have taken place in society and the way these changes have affected women and their status. His story attributes the character Helen with traits common to the new woman, though he struggles with his acceptance of the freedom and change in status that this new woman signifies. The hold that tradition has on Hemingway, and other writers of the time, is just too great; as Adler states, the feminine myth is so strong it will take more time to break it. Hemingway first introduces his reader to Helen as a caring, nurturing, motherly type of woman; she is concerned about her husband, Harry, whose leg is injured, and about his physical and emotional comfort. She takes on a very traditional, maternal role and she is portrayed as somewhat naïve and single-minded when she denies the reality that Harry will die. Hemingway strengthens the traditional aspect of Helen through Harry's responses to her nurturing behavior. He apparently does not respect Helen or her thoughts; he accuses her of calling him names, calls her "a bloody fool," disrespects her opinion and disregards her wishes when he has Bwana fetch him a drink she thinks will be bad for him. Yet within this same conversation between Harry and Helen, the reader is given a clue that she may not be as traditional as she first appears, especially after Harry alludes to the fact that this woman and "her bloody money" have supported him (Hemingway 1985). A traditional relationship would have had Harry supporting Helen and, with this role reversal, Hemingway addresses the fact that Helen's financial support has not only allowed Harry to become slack in his writing but that it is also the reason for Harry's resentment of Helen; he feels threatened by his dependence on her. In their next conversation Harry again shows total disrespect for his wife, and, keeping with the traditional treatment of women from that time, he makes it clear that he sees her as an inferior. As he meditates on their relationship, he first holds her accountable for his misfortune, as well as his death as an artist, but he quickly comes to realize that it is he and not she who is to blame. She is a good woman, a woman who loves him "as a writer, as a man, as a companion and as a proud possession" (1989). His new opinion of Helen is very modernist. Her opinion of him as a "proud possession" is in clear opposition to traditional relationships in which the woman was held as the man's possession, in which the wife is always subordinate to her husband.

In one scene Hemingway presents the reader with a completely modernist view of Helen, a total role reversal: "She had gone to kill some meat and, knowing how he liked to watch the game, she had gone well away so she would not disturb this little pocket of the plain that he could see. She was always thoughtful, he thought. On anything she knew about, or had read, or that she had ever heard" (1988). In the past it was the man's role to be the provider, to be thoughtful enough of his wife to care for and protect her. Hemingway even portrays Helen in a manly manner when she comes back into camp "wearing jodhpurs and carrying a rifle" (1989). As Harry continues to reflect on his wife he comes to the realization that what she most wanted was "someone that she respected with her" (1989), a desire very characteristic of the new woman. Harry realizes that "she had acquired him" (1989); she built him a new life, and he traded his old one for security. Traditionally, it had always the woman who traded in "her life" for the security and protection a man would provide for her. As Harry continues to reminisce about his wife and becomes aware of her modernist traits, it appears that the hold that tradition and the feminine myth has on Hemingway prompts him to display her womanly traits again and blur those long-held associations with those of the new woman. In the middle of Harry's struggle with death Helen is preoccupied with the way she thinks things ought to be, the way she wants things to be and with trivial, superficial things. As death comes for Harry, Helen dreams about Long Island, her father and her daughter's debut. Hemingway clearly identifies the change in female status throughout this story. He firmly acknowledges that men were attracted to modern women yet feared the change and challenge presented by these women. These men are unable to let go of the womanly woman of the past, of that

long-established view of femininity. Hemingway continuously blurs the line between the feminine and feminist, not only in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" but in many of his other works as well.

F. Scott Fitzgerald experienced a similar struggle while writing *The Great Gatsby*. According to critics and Fitzgerald's own statements made in interviews and letters, he was influenced greatly by his own experiences in Jazz Age New York. His fictional character Daisy was closely modeled after his wife Zelda, while many readers and critics saw similarities between the fictional Gatsby and Fitzgerald himself. The couple did what they wanted to when they wanted, they were both originally from the South, they were irresponsible, and just as Gatsby adored Daisy the author greatly loved his beautiful wife. *The Great Gatsby* was written as a result of Fitzgerald's personal experiences in the 1920s and as a response to the issues of the time, among them the way women were perceived. Though women play a big role in his novel Fitzgerald only gives them secondary roles in the story, which keeps with the traditional view that women do not have a voice. Though these women have tremendous effects on men, which are often detrimental, they are portrayed as what Marsden has called "mere complements" to the men.

Daisy, though loved and deeply sought after by Gatsby, is used mostly to complement him or her husband Tom Buchanan. Myrtle, who would be seen as the complement of her husband Wilson, shows modernist characteristics in her pursuit of personal desires, but she is still a complement to her lover Tom. Both Daisy and Myrtle are treated with disrespect by Tom, since he sees them as inferior to him. Jordan Baker, though single and described as independent, is portrayed as an incomplete woman who needs Nick to be "that man to keep near her" (Marsden). Fitzgerald, like Hemingway, was influenced by modernism in his portrayal of women but he does not attribute to his characters clear and obvious traits. Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan are indeed modern women in search of pleasure, self-fulfillment and self-realization. Yet Fitzgerald is imprisoned by the long established view of femininity and was unable to free these women from their status as "prized possessions," objects of man's pride and pleasure rather than liberated individuals.

William Faulkner's portrayal of women, too, was shaped by modernism. In his novel *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner exposes his readers to several female characters. Faulkner, like Fitzgerald, assigns very feminine character traits to some of his women though, like Hemingway, he also blurs the lines in portraying others, particularly Caddy and Quentin. Mrs. Compson, the mother figure of the novel, is portrayed in a manner that suggests that Faulkner's view of women is radically old-fashioned and totally based on tradition. Mrs. Compson is characterized as a mindless hypochondriac who is always complaining and concerned only with the way she thinks things ought to be. She is not only unable to love and care for her children but to deal with life and the problems she is faced with. Jason, her son, treats her with a great deal of disrespect which depicts the idea of female inferiority and worthlessness that he associates with her and all women. Jason's manner of discussing women in general makes it clear that he views all women as inferior to men. He does not trust women or believe they are capable of conducting business; he even suggests that women "do not acquire knowledge" and that they "all have an affinity for evil" (Faulkner 96). Jason's beliefs and treatment of women, as well as the behavior of his mother, support this theory that Faulkner's view of women is traditional and old-fashioned.

When it comes to Caddy and her daughter Quentin, however, Faulkner more clearly blurs the lines between the feminine and feminist and his old-fashioned and traditional views are greatly influenced by modernism and its effects on the role of women in society. The fact that Faulkner does not give Caddy a voice to tell her own story reflects his traditional view. Women were not given a voice in the past; their opinion simply did not matter. Faulkner attributes to Caddy a number of traditionally feminine values and traits, but he also gives her some modern and even masculine characteristics as well. The way other characters view and treat Caddy is another indication of how Faulkner blurs the feminine/feminist lines. To Benjy, his sister is a traditional mother figure who is loving and caring. To her brother Quentin, Caddy is a prized possession that he is unwilling to share; his ultimate goal is to protect and keep her to himself. Jason treats Caddy with the same contempt and disrespect with which he treats all women, but at the same time he is aware that Caddy is more than just a prize or possession of men. Caddy is not the old-fashioned southern belle that Jason would like her to be; she is instead a woman with a mind of her own who is strong, self-assured and independent. Not only is Caddy financially independent, but she also supports Jason; it is he who is financially dependent on her. Caddy even becomes a threat to Jason and his

masculinity, a role reversal which offers proof of the modernist influence on Faulkner's writing. In his portrayal of Caddy, he is continuously able to blur the feminine/feminist line.

Virginia Woolf was correct in her statement that human personality changed sometime around 1910. Modernism had a great effect on society and, as a result, a definite part in shaping gender roles in literature. The influence of modernism on writers of that era like Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Faulkner is undeniable. At the same time those male authors were unable to break the prominence of well-established and traditional views of woman. Although the womanly woman stereotype was always included in their writings, they were willing to blur the lines of traditional gender roles and portray female characters from a feminist point of view. In literature, as well as in society, the change of gender roles was gradual. The feminine myth is a strong one, however, and it still affects women and their literary representation decades after that initial progress was made.

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Postmodern Theory as a Frame
for Contemporary American Literature

Jena Rowland, English 430

The efforts made to classify and define contemporary American literature have been incomplete at best. These difficulties lie in part because of the literature's close proximity to modern readers; we are still in the process of reading and writing contemporary American works. Readers do not yet have the advantages of perspective that generally arise from time and distance and which help us to analyze past literature objectively. Expectation, how one anticipates a particular text will reveal itself and what will be found in that revelation, is an advantage that forms in a reader's mind over time. As contemporary American literature is just that, contemporary, readers often approach such a text with the expectations they have formed while reading works of previous eras. The American literature of today is written in the same form that readers are familiar reading; such as novels, poetry, short stories and drama. The form that a contemporary work uses will already have a preformed set of expectations established in the minds of readers on how to analyze and understand the work. For these readers of contemporary American literature, such expectations often fail to benefit their readings and even hinder the reader's ability to gain meaning from the work.

The problem for these readers is that they become trapped in the contradictions between what they expect from a text and what actually appears in the reading. For many, contemporary American literature is at once recognizable and incomprehensible because a reader feels the familiarity of a novel even if little present in the work conforms to the expectations that this familiarity evokes. It is in this setting of contradiction that the postmodern theory can become more than just a tool for literary analysis. When this theory is used as a framework to understand contemporary American literature, the inconsistencies and contradictions of what one expects literature to be and what contemporary American literature is can be sorted through and understood. Toni Morrison's book *Jazz* offers an excellent example of how a work can challenge a reader's expectations and how the reader can use postmodern theory to overcome those expectations and derive the true meaning from a particular text.

Even though postmodern theory is wrapped up in confusion, this confusion itself often leads to purpose and meaning. Chris Snipp-Walmsley's idea that "postmodernism offers a moment of tension: a temporary, provisional, and always precarious middle ground that we can occupy so as to see things differently" is a good way to explain the relationship between confusion and postmodern theory (425). Through postmodern theory, the confusion between what we expect and what is actually in the text is where the purpose of contemporary American literature can often be found.

With the postmodern theory as a framework to understand *Jazz*, the confusion that readers feel while reading the entire story in the first four pages is important because it is meant to direct the reader's attention to a different interpretation of the story. This confusion calls into question what the purpose of a novel is, if not for telling a story, and makes the reader start to examine other possible uses of the novel format. This idea is developed throughout the novel. How exactly can the form of the novel be used in addition to the telling of a story? What other purpose is there of reading literature in the form of a novel if the story is no longer the primary focus?

Toni Morrison actually explains this in the forward to her novel with her claim that "[she] had written novels in which structure was designed to enhance meaning; here the structure would equal meaning" (xix). Morrison uses a structure like jazz music for her novel, the meaning of the book can be found in how it mimics the free flow of jazz rather than in the book's plot. If the novel would have met the expectations of readers by allowing the story to develop over the course of the reading, then attention would naturally drift to the plot for purpose and it would be more difficult to consider the jazz structure the most important aspect of the book. By telling the story at the very beginning Morrison causes the reader to question where meaning will be found, and the novel eventually reveals her purpose in the structure itself. As Snipp-Walmsley summarizes, this is where "postmodernism functions best not as a

philosophy or an aesthetic movement, but as a principle of critical vigilance: a means of opening up the contradictions and aporias in the master narratives and power discourses" (425).

Jazz starts to challenge expectations from the very beginning. The work is indicated to be a novel on the front cover, *Jazz* "A novel by Toni Morrison," but what follows does not read as one might expect from such a book. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines the idea of a novel as "an extended narrative . . . its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of character and motives" (Abrams 226). To put this definition into terms of reader expectation, a reader wants the novel to tell a story using characters, plot and situations so that by the end of the book, the story will have lead to some greater meaning that can be identified as the purpose for reading the novel to begin with.

Jazz challenges almost every expectation that a reader has in a novel, which includes the purpose of the novel itself. What normally takes an entire novel to develop, and what some would argue is the very purpose of the novel format, is learned before a reader even finishes chapter one of the book. We know the main characters are Joe, his wife Violet, and the eighteen-year-old girl. The conflict begins with Joe's affair with the young girl and ends with him shooting her, while Violet's attempts for revenge fail and she becomes more understanding. We even learn details that most novels place throughout the work to create suspense in the story, like how Violet learns of Joe's affair and why Joe does not get arrested. Readers expect that they will learn the story gradually as they read the novel, yet the story in *Jazz* is told fully within the first four pages. The contradiction between what the reader expects in a novel and what is read in *Jazz* creates confusion and makes the reader question what purpose there is in reading the approximately two hundred pages that are left.

Applying the postmodern theory to *Jazz* can help readers find meaning in the novel as a guide of how to navigate through this confusion and gain understanding, especially since confusion is so closely tied to the theory of postmodernism that it could be argued as one of its main goals. Dingo Felluga's "Introduction to Modernism and Postmodernism" lists "irony and parody, a breakdown between high and low cultural forms, a questioning of grand narratives, simulacrum versus temporality, disorientation, and secondary orality" as characteristics of postmodernism. Each of these terms not only holds some level of ambiguity in meaning, but also each works to create some confusion through their challenge to one's expectation in their use or application.

Once it becomes clear how the postmodern theory can be applied as a framework for understanding contemporary American literature, its uses are endless. As readers continue *Jazz,* they will encounter many more contradictions between their expectations and what they will encounter in Morrison's book. The novel confounds the expectation that setting is just where a novel takes place as the setting in *Jazz* actually becomes a character in itself. The expectation that the narrator is a singular person who is telling the story is also questioned since there are many narrators, which allows the voice to change at any time within the work. The expectation that history is used to supply factual background information or insight into the lives of the characters is also challenged throughout the novel in different ways by every character.

With each of these contradictions there is an element of confusion, a confusion that is cleared only when the postmodern theory is used to find the ultimate meaning of the work itself. Often this hidden meaning will leave readers to think as much about themselves as they are about the novel they have just read, the ultimate purpose of postmodern theory and much of contemporary American literature. As Morrison points out in *Jazz*, "[It's] something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out" (228). By using the postmodern theory to figure in the confusion of contemporary American literature, in the work of Morrison and other authors, the possibilities of what may be found are endless.

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Playing God:
World-Making Words

Sharon Kelley, English 490

When an author sits down to write a story or novel, s/he must become a god; living beings must be created, their lives must be meddled in, and on some occasions the author must step in to pull their fat out of the fire. This need to achieve divinity is true of any type of fiction an author chooses to write. For the writer of science fiction and fantasy, however, this step into divinity involves much more detail. The science fiction writer must create not only his characters, but also the very world that they will inhabit, complete with landmasses, rivers, mountains, people, races, governments, languages, history and culture. While each of these elements is important in creating a well-rounded novel, the use of created racial and cultural languages is one of the most important because it gives the world more depth and allows readers to judge and define the racial and cultural traits of the characters based on the language they use.

The Christian Bible states that the world began when God said "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). The statement in itself insinuates that everything began not truly with light, but with language. This concept is particularly prevalent in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien. He stated in a letter to his friend, Milton Waldman, that "behind my stories is now a nexus of languages . . ." ("From a Letter" xiii). This concept that literature can be as much about language as it is plot, if not more, is an idea that he would repeat several times in communications about his novel *The Hobbit* and his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In these four books, as well as in his novel *The Silmarillion*, language was not created to support the world; instead the world was created as a place for the already created languages to exist. Other writers of science fiction have also used created languages to broaden their invented worlds: among them C. S. Lewis, Stanley Weinbaum, Anthony Boucher, Isaac Asimov, Robert Nathan, George Orwell, and Dennis L. McKiernan (Barnes 392-94). In some cases the language use was integral in driving the plot, like in stories that focus on the difficulty of communication between two alien races. In others the created languages are used not to drive the plot, but to help create a more realistic world in which the action occurs.

I recently interviewed author Dennis L. McKiernan about his use of created languages in his Mithgar series. McKiernan states, "the use of other languages 'richens' the world, hence the writing." While Tolkien used his races as a vehicle for his languages, McKiernan uses created languages to help develop and define the races and cultures as they are introduced. In this manner, he feels that he is able to create a "broader" and more believable world. The question arises, however, as to whether this use of created languages is actually beneficial in writing science fiction and/or fantasy, or if it is irritating and irrelevant to readers. There have been numerous studies regarding the attitudinal responses of listeners to foreign languages, but it is nearly impossible to locate any that have been done for the written word. While many researchers have studied the use of linguistics and phonetics in literature, none have considered how the reader judges the characteristics of culture based on the languages used.

The studies of linguistics, ethnology and sociolinguistics have provided reams of material that authors may consider as they create languages for use in a science fiction or fantasy novel. Ross Smith discusses Tolkien's use and rejection of popular linguistic theory. He states that according to two of the most prominent linguists, Steiner and Chomsky, "the linguistic sign (i.e. word, utterance) was arbitrary and wholly unrelated to the referent (i.e. thing referred to)" (Smith 2). Tolkien and McKiernan, however, both claim that they selected words that "fit" or belong because of their sounds. According to Smith, "That Tolkien believed firmly in the direct link between sound and sense is beyond doubt; it formed the basis of his linguistic investigations, as he readily acknowledged" (4).

The studies of Chomsky and Steiner focused primarily on the spoken word. For authors such as Tolkien and McKiernan, the written word and how readers evaluate it is far more important. For these authors there is a dearth of information, however, as "the speaker-evaluation methodology holds center stage in the social-psychological and communication tradition" (Gal 630). For a writer, the way a

language sounds acoustically is not as important as how it appears in print, or how a reader may sound it out. For example, many readers of pagan or wiccan literature sound out 'samhain' as 'sam-hane', unaware that in the Scots Gaelic language the 'amh' phoneme is pronounced /aʊ/ and that 'ai' is not pronounced /eɪ/ but rather /ɘ/. In the International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA, this word is often read as [sæmˈheɪn] instead of the correct Scottish Gaelic pronunciation of [ˈsaʊ ɘn]. These difficulties in translating print to sound are important for the creator of a language to be aware of, but are generally not covered in existing studies.

The existing linguistics studies are still useful to the author who wants to create a full-bodied language. For example, Alford points out that even those who are language learners can often distinguish the differences in regional accents. This study, with a difference noted between first and second year students, can help writers discern when a character should be able to recognize the origin of another character. In separate studies, Victor J. Callan and Cynthia Gallois and Lesley and James Milroy confirmed that individuals judge the characteristics of not only the speaker but also of his/her culture of origin. Callan and Gallois state that "language is flexible and dynamic enough that ethnic membership can be implied through a variety of phonological, grammatical or other speech markers" (2). Milroy and Milroy found that by using these speech markers, many listeners can accurately judge socio-economic class and, with some knowledge of the culture of origin, can make value judgments on those cultures and the morals of the speaker.

Both J. R. R Tolkien and Dennis L. McKiernan seem to have read some of these studies or others from the past, among them the seminal work by Dr. Leo Bloomfield, since their use of created languages often correlates with the findings of several recent projects. Asif Agha discusses the use of honorific language and the human tendency to classify and stereotype speakers based on language. Not only do we rank people by class according to the honorifics they use, as well as those used to refer to them, but we also determine the "properties in relation to the rest of social life" based on the honorifics used within the languages of a culture (Agha 167). Both Tolkien and McKiernan use at least one created language with honorifics. While nearly every language presented in his work uses honorifics to address royalty, McKiernan's elves utilize a speech system that is extremely complex. A highly formalized language, nearly all other characters that come in close contact with the elves of McKiernan's world Mithgar are referred to as "Sir" or "Lady." Throughout the books this respectful behavior is responded to in a positive and reciprocal manner, similar to what Agha suggests is the common reaction to outsiders in highly honorific languages and cultures.

McKiernan's sci-fi novels also seem to have considered the linguistic principles of cultural change, which have been explained by Bonnie Urciuoli and T. A. Taha. Both of these researchers proposed a massive change when cultures divide geographically and the process of language creation that causes the two cultures to develop related but distinct languages. Within the millennia depicted over the course of the Mithgar series, the people of Jord and the people of Valon were once a single culture that divided when new territory was won. While many of their cultural characteristics remain similar and the two languages show similar roots, they eventually develop into two distinct nations with their own language. This division fits with the part of Urciuoli's research that claims, "When languages take on sharp edges, i.e. borders, they are mapped onto people and therefore onto ethnic nationality (which may or may not map onto a nation-state)" (533). Taha also supports this division and follows the process of such a nation-building divide through semantic changes. He states that as time passes "sometimes the original meanings of native words and other borrowed lexical items may undergo semantic change; some words may lose their original meanings, become obsolete, archaic, rare, or even just disappear" (87).

Both Tolkien and McKiernan have also used linguistic traits to show distinct cultural thought patterns. For Tolkien, the most dramatic example is in the language of the Ents. The Ents are a slow moving race for which hundreds of years are equivalent to our days, weeks or months. This race is often unable to understand the thinking and beliefs of the faster living hobbits. While the words are comprehensible, they do not have the frame of reference in their thought patterns to grasp the speed of actions or the need for such a hurry. McKiernan's Utruni, Elves, Chabbians and Dwarves all show traits throughout the books that are singular to their cultures. In some cases more experienced characters will show to novices that these behavioral traits are cultural and because of this difficult, if not impossible, to

explain in any other language. This impossibility supports Anna Wierzbicka's argument that "language carries with it some ways of thinking that are peculiar to that language . . ." (256).

Tolkienian scholars have studied the languages used in science fiction extensively, though primarily in its development and use inside and out of Tolkien's novels. This research into Tolkienian linguistics has covered a fairly wide spectrum since the first publication of his work. Carl Hostetter follows the study of Tolkienian linguistics through four distinct stages separated by what he calls five interludes. The stages of study are the "Readers and Correspondents," "Journals and Books," "Conceptionists and Unifists," and "Scholars and Speakers; or Elvish and Neo-Elvish" (Hostetter 1, 4, 9, 17).

The Readers stage began with the publication of the novels. When readers found the created languages and began to make an effort to translate and understand them and the writing used within. This stage is highly flexible since it is one experienced by many first time readers of the books. While professional study may pass into the fourth stage and eventually beyond, theoretically there will always be new first-stage readers. The second stage, Journals and Books, began with the introduction of journals and books dedicated to the study of Tolkien's languages. These include a variety of magazines and linguistic journals, societies of scholars dedicated to studying the work of Tolkien and even some papers and letters written by the author about his own work. It was in this stage that Quenya and Sindarin, the "historical" languages within the books, started to be compared with modern languages and analyzed for changes and discrepancies. The third stage, Conceptionists and Unifists, involved a debate over whether the aforementioned discrepancies were because of the conceptionist assertion that they were the result of the fact that Tolkien continually changed his languages, even after publication. The Unifist argument claims that such discrepancies are the fault of the reader or researcher's inability to correctly and fully translate quotes due to the lack of a full lexicon for the languages.

The fourth stage, Scholars and Speakers, is one of the most popular stages with researchers. In this stage writers attempt to complete or "finish" the Tolkienian languages in the apparent goal to develop a living, usable language that they and others can speak. This stage has led researchers to trace the "roots" of various words, phonemes and grammatical rules in the hopes of accurately translating and eventually expanding the language. For example, although Tolkien specifically states that his languages are wholly created and not derivative of Earth languages, Michael D. C. Drout traces the roots of several Tolkienian words to Old and Middle English. He follows Tolkien's life before he became an author, traces his work and life experiences through the study of Old and Middle English, and discusses Tolkien's work with the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

This extensive research still leaves the author of science fiction and fantasy unaware of how the reader of such created languages responds to them. Tolkien and McKiernan both believed that the languages improved their books and helped to create worlds that were broader, more realistic and more believable to readers. Yet without research into this belief there can be no definitive answer as to whether or not created languages are a positive aspect of such books.

To find answers, I conducted two surveys following the pattern of T. A. Taha. Respondents were asked to grade excerpts of writing in created languages on a five point, Likert scale grading system. Because, as C. F. Voegelin and Z. S. Harris point out, the "practical divorce of linguistic work from cultural investigation often means that the final linguistic statements and the final cultural statements are incomplete" (457), I used two distinct surveys to explore the differences in language both with and without contextual information.

In the first survey, respondents were asked to judge the speakers based solely on excerpts of selected languages with no background information or translation. In the second, respondents were given longer excerpts: some include actions or descriptions of the speaker, others include descriptions of the locations in which the excerpt was spoken, and some contain the reactions of any listeners to the speech. Both studies present respondents with the same six languages: McKiernan's Sylva, Châkka, Sluk and Old Pellarian and Tolkien's Quenya and Numenorian. Respondents were asked to judge the speaker on four categories and to select the number that best represented where the language fit on the Likert scale between two categorical opposites. The categories were peaceful/warlike, intelligent/stupid, casual/formal and the traditional fiction dichotomy of good/evil.

The first survey, in which respondents judge the characters based on language alone with no other context, was given to students at USC Upstate and posted in online writers' groups. One hundred forty-six people responded, twenty-three from USC Upstate and one hundred and twenty three from the Internet groups. Ninety-five respondents were female and fifty-one were male. Twenty-three were African American, ninety-nine were Caucasian, twenty-three were Hispanic and one was Asian. One hundred twenty-two spoke English as a primary language while twenty-four spoke other languages such as French, German or Spanish as their primary language. Fifty-eight spoke a second language and nine spoke a third language.

The second survey, in which respondents judged the characters based on language with the context given, was posted in online Yahoo groups for readers and writers in a variety of locations. Two hundred forty-five people responded. One hundred sixty-seven respondents were female and seventy-eight were male. Seventy-eight were African American, one hundred and twenty-three were Caucasian, forty-one were Hispanic and three were Asian. Two hundred spoke English as a primary language while forty-four spoke other languages like French, German or Spanish as their primary language. Eighty-seven spoke a second language and fourteen spoke a third.

In the first survey, answers varied widely and most categories averaged just slightly above or below average. Surprisingly, when the excerpts are considered in relation to the characteristics of the races as presented in the books of Tolkien and McKiernan, the study found that while individual readers may not be able to ascertain characteristics from language alone, the languages were effective overall. For example, both elven languages (Sylva and Quenya) were rated as formal (3.25 and 3.41 respectively) and peaceful (2.90 and 2.70 respectively). These languages, while distinct, have similarities in the use of certain phonemes. Neither uses hard /g/ or /k/ phonemes extensively and both rely largely on the use of fricatives such as /f/, /v/ and /s/ as well as nasal stops like /m/ and /n/. The language evaluations do match the two elven races which are presented very similarly by McKiernan and Tolkien, both show formality and peaceful natures (though both are excellent warriors as need dictates).

In the second survey answers were still somewhat varied, but more consistent with the depicted characteristics of the authors. Even in cases where the contextual information was little more than a description of the speaker's surroundings, readers were able to define the characteristics of Intelligent/Stupid and Good/Evil most accurately. While respondents to the first survey tended to average within a point and a half from the middle score of 3, respondents to the second survey were more comfortable to give ratings on the far ends of the scale and scores tended to be further from the median when context was included. Interestingly enough, while respondents were able to select characteristics with stronger certainty, in only three cases (Old Pellarian and Numenorian, in regards to Peaceful/Warlike and Numenorian Intelligent/Stupid) did the addition of context change the average scores to the opposite side of the spectrum. In nearly every other category the addition of context merely shifted the average score closer to the polar ends of the spectrums for whichever side of the mean the non-context language scores had already graded. In fact, the mean differential between scores given with and without context was only 0.781.

Table 1. Contrast in Ratings With and Without Context
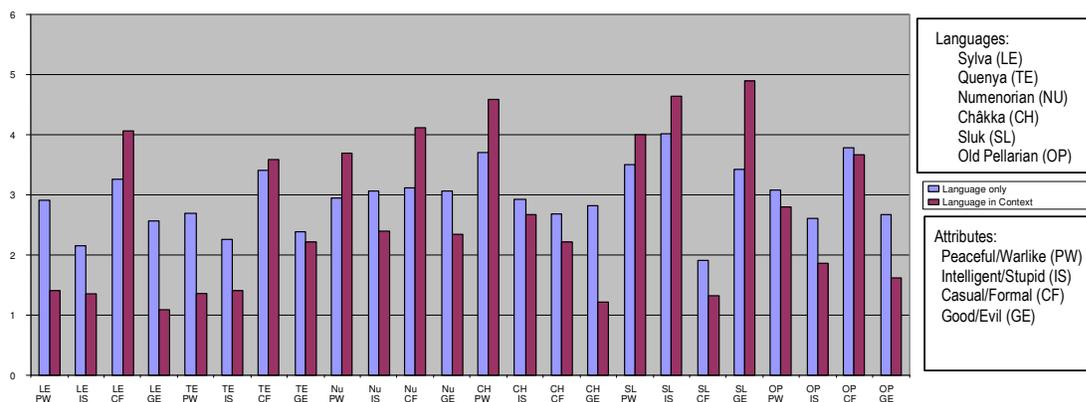
Interestingly, there was some difference in how certain languages were judged by speakers of different primary languages. German speaking respondents rated Chakka and Sluk, both languages that frequently use the velar stops /k/ and /g/ as well as the bilabial stops /t/ and /d/, more positively than did the speakers of English, French or Spanish. The German response to these languages was typically at least a point more towards the positive end of the scale than the response given by other language speakers, while French respondents were the harshest on these same languages. When the second survey was used, this discrepancy decreased, which shows that the target audience's primary language should be considered with the creation of fictional languages. There were no apparent differences noted in the ratings when categorized by gender. Both males and females tended to rate equally. Scores between males and females averaged a 0.14 difference when no context was given and a 0.6 difference when the context was revealed to respondents.
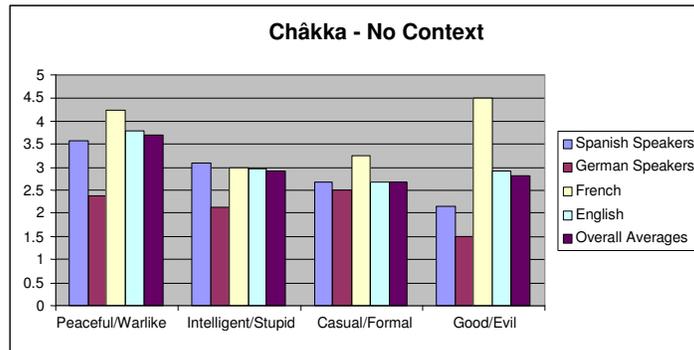
Table 2. Châkka by Language—No Context
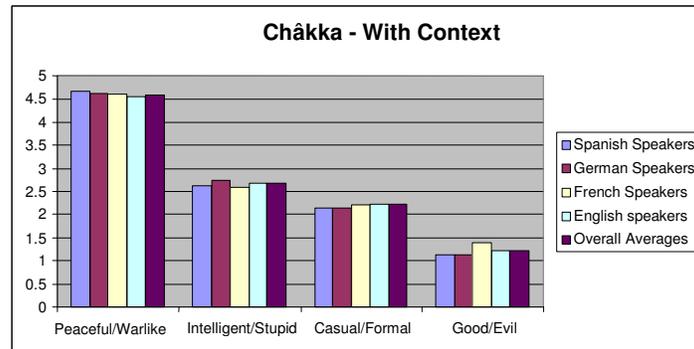

Table 3. Châkka by Language—With Context

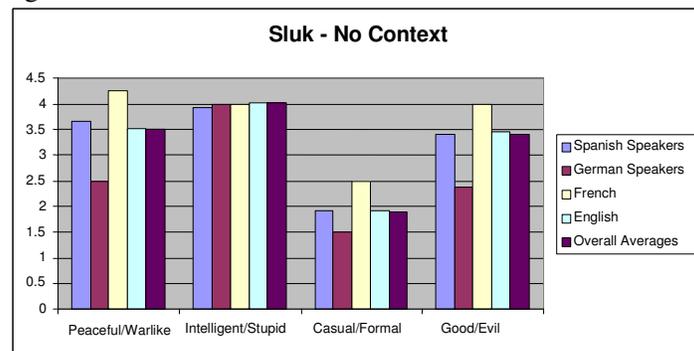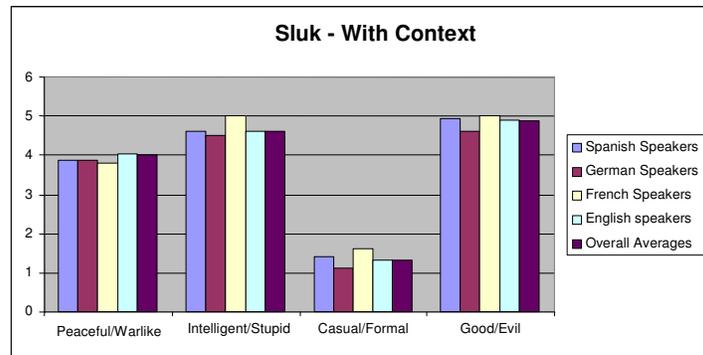
Table 4. Sluk by Language—No Context

Table 5. Sluk by Language—With Context

Sluk - With Context

The two surveys show that readers were able to evaluate and judge characteristics of speakers and races from the languages they speak. This result implies that authors of science fiction and fantasy should use created languages in their work to develop a broader world full of different cultures. Because of the differences in how certain languages were rated, it would be highly beneficial for writers to be aware of attitudinal studies regarding phoneme use and listener response. For example, the Dwarves of McKiernan's books are a race that fit in the fictional dichotomy of good and evil as a "good race." Due to the strong use of harsh sounds, selected to fit the dwarfs' underground life and affinity with stone, many respondents rated the dwarves as evil unless the context material showed attitudes or behaviors that helped to develop the impression of the respondents.

Extensive research still needs to be conducted to ascertain more fully which phonemes are optimal for creating languages with a specific intended emotional response for readers. Such a study could not only help to create the perfect created language in fiction, but could also be adapted for use in persuasive speech and writing. The study can also be used by linguistics and English literature teachers in understanding how students view foreign languages and foreign characters based on the appearance of the language spoken by those characters as it is written. This study has shown that the use of created languages is beneficial to the science fiction fantasy writer. Eighty three percent of respondents to the second survey stated that the created languages made the worlds more believable. With such broad numbers, it is obvious that when we begin to create a world and play god, before we can call for light, we must have the language necessary to speak the command.

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