Liminal Spaces and the In-Between: Mobilizing a Queer Resistance within Romantic Literature

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Andrew Guerrero Williams

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Advisor: Dr. Beres Rogers

Andrew Williams

Dr. Beres Rogers

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Introduction: Assessing the Parameters of Queer Theory

Throughout recent years, queer discourse has been deployed within a myriad of critical contexts as an analytic framework for questioning traditional notions of identity. The term 'queer' itself has also been known to signify a "coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications" (Jagose 1). However, I do not wish to simply engage the sexual politics of the lesbian and gay movement from which queer first originated. As Annamarie Jagose explains, critics in the 1970s sought to consolidate LBGT identities by using 'queer' to describe a "poststructuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (1). But rather than employ queer as a reductive shorthand for alternative sexualities, I aim to suspend and defamiliarize all normative political structures by calling attention to those incoherencies between traditional constituencies and the various forms of excluded otherness that loom at the margins of the hegemonic framework.

With regard to how to the often-questioned efficacy of queer studies as a viable theoretical model, it becomes necessary to address some of the concerns held by critics who question whether it is possible to bring a queer category into the critical fold without it being recuperated by those same normative structures which excluded it in the first place, or as Jagose describes: "Does queer become defunct the moment it is an intelligible and widely disseminated term?" (Jagose 2). Although non-normative identity often becomes co-opted by the mainstream

discourse, it just as often calls attention to the constraining effects of identity politics as a framework that over-relies on rigidly structured categories such as "heteronormative," "male," "colonizer," "human," "nature," and countless others. These arbitrary labels are flawed, to the extent that they simply oppose different forms of subjectivity (i.e. cultural, ethnic, gendered), when in fact the relationship between them is far more complex and intricate.

In using a queer framework, I am concerned with the way in which inside/outside boundaries marginalize certain perspectives while privileging others, and how such power "works through the foreclosure of effects, the production of an 'outside,' a domain of unliveability and unintelligibility that bounds the domain of intelligible effects" (Butler 22). I believe there exists a latent potential within this unintelligible site for a queer resistance to stable identities, insofar as a liminal border usually separates the hegemonic framework and the non-normative outside; as a result, this in-between presence dissipates the coherence of symbolic meaning. Liminal space can be conveyed in many terms, such as through the landscape of Charlotte Smith's *Beachy Head*, in the colonial encounter depicted in Helen Maria Williams' *Peru*, or even through the polymorphic representations of imaginative play within Keats' *Lamia*. In any case, by deconstructing the constructed foundations of Romantic identity, I will be able to suspend those standard normative frames which delimit queer potential, thereby enabling me to foreground the grey in-between spaces where the owned self functions not as a stable category, but as a fluid and unfixed site where cultural, ethnic, and subjective meaning can be reconstituted time and again.

Smith's Panoramic View of the Ecological Frame

What distinguishes Smith from a canonized poet like William Wordsworth is the former's singular ability to penetrate the blinkered veil of patriarchal ideology, while simultaneously overwriting the traditional humanistic paradigm with one that embeds humanity in a more natural, inclusive framework. Her poetic perspective with regard to the field of queer studies is invaluable, for it makes a conscious effort to recognize those socio-cultural limitations that aggrandize the poet's ego while obfuscating the depth of his or her gaze. Smith portrays the poet's subjectivity as a site of queer undetermined meaning to the degree that her vision is predicated by her ability to negotiate the contradictory impulses of her identity. Through her negotiation of the outside, she destabilizes the poetic "I" by registering the opposition between its constructs of self-recognition and the overreaching influence of a larger ecological framework.

This hermeneutic tight-rope act entails an acquiring of knowledge, whether it be scientific, spiritual, or political, that allows the subject to fully orient him or herself within both a naturalized and socially contextualized framework. Such a multi-variant plane of cognitive awareness, seldom accessible from typical social settings, is fully realized from the vantage point of the speaker in *Beachy Head*, who, "On thy stupendous summit…would recline" (Smith 1-4). Here is a place where the daunting monolith of history can be broken down into palatable sub-categories (e.g. war, geography, natural/literary/political history, botany, etc.) From these polymorphous pools of knowledge, the speaker is able to craft a roving, transcendent subjectivity capable of actually weighing the limitations and implications of what we constitute as human agency.

For Kari Lokke, this subjectivity is localized within the poem's hermit figure, who not only exemplifies a lifestyle of isolation tempered with active compassion for others, but also

functions as a two-fold critical response to the aesthetic of sensibility (which privileges the eroticism of bodily passions) as well as the Romantic notions of writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge. As Christoph Bode argues, the poem's structure suspends traditional binaries by operating on an intensely self-referential level, in that the text itself is inscribed within nature, and vice-versa. He goes on to posit that man and nature are further integrated via a geographical conceit, insofar as the materiality of nature reflects the accumulation of human history.

Thus, we see that the discourse of this poem is wrought with several overlapping themes, all of which negotiate the dynamic relationship between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic in different ways. I believe that Smith's ecocentric writing constitutes a potentially queer form of poetic sensibility within the context of the Romantic canon, in that she actively promotes a conscientious subjectivity, one that tends to foreground a paradigm of harmonious socio-natural co-existence in which empathy and knowledge serve as reminders of humanity's significance in the universe.

Given the widespread prevalence of the hermit figure within several Romantic texts, it becomes useful to look at how Smith's appropriation of this archetype complicates our traditional understanding of the hermit's function, as previously established in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. One of the key differences between them is that Smith's recluse is introduced at the end of her poem, while Wordsworth's is mentioned only in passing during the opening stanzas of his contemplative opus. If we take the speaker of Smith's poem to be not merely a rigidly defined persona, but rather a more nebulous kind of entity, one that is frequently appropriated by the poet's actual voice, then it becomes necessary to read her hermit as "the concluding focal point in the narrowing panoramic and telescopic vision that constitutes the

movement of the poem as a whole" (Lokke 47). Whether this understated denouement symbolizes Smith's inherent versatility as an artist or her views on the function of poetry at large is less clear, but nevertheless, it is interesting to compare the methodological differences between the two poets in terms of how Smith both relates to and repudiates the self-involved modus operandi of Wordsworth.

In *Beachy Head*, the speaker claims herself to have been "An early worshipper at nature's shrine, / I loved her rudest scenes – warrens, and heaths, / And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows" (Smith 346-48). This amorous attitude tonally evokes *The Prelude*, in that both Smith and Wordsworth are somewhat interested in bifurcating the world into two domains: that of the framing and interpretative perspective of the nascent artist, and that of a natural landscape subjected to the poet's volition of being inclined "to *trace* the brooks whose humid banks / Nourish the harebell" (Smith 354-55 (emphasis mine)). However, this poem's speaker is quick to impose limits on the poet's authority, which at times gets inflated by the male ego (often susceptible to falling victim to his own sublime-centric language), such as when, in the following stanza, she claims that "Those widely spreading views [of nature], [mocked] alike / The Poet and the Painter's utmost art" (Smith 370-71). By inscribing the beauty of one's creative powers within a natural framework, Smith displaces the Wordsworthian inner realm of the poet's mind by registering the material alterity of the natural world as the true point of reference for the poet who seeks to reach his or her full potential.

At the end of her poem, all of the infinitely rich details of life in the 18th century (as contemplated by the free-wheeling speaker) are subsumed within the mediating position of the hermit, who, despite removing himself from the goings-on of everyday life, unremittingly still

"Was feelingly alive to all that breath'd; / And outraged as he was, in sanguine youth…still acutely felt / For human misery" (Smith 688-91). Thus, Smith reconciles the tension between poetic ambition and public duty by idealizing an active figure tempered by humility; he lives and dies near the sea, itself a potent symbol of the underlying primordial solidarity that binds all of human society. This mediative figure is essential to our understanding of Smith's approach to reconciling the differences between man and nature in that, by situating her limited perspective within the sprawling context of human existence, she illustrates the queer, or otherworldly, nature of the passage of time itself. This discursive continuum harbors so many different socio-cultural and geographical variants that, from the mediating proximity of Smith's speaker, history appears not as strictly regulated categories, but as "clouds, with dark and dragon shapes, / Or like vast promontories crown'd with towers" (Smith 435-37). Smith's prescription to overcoming the blinding mist of ideology is to employ the imagination in service of removing herself from the limiting frame of her contemporary society, thereby enabling her to utilize the fluid quality of nature as a means of coming to terms with the colossal indeterminacy of the past, where "the wondering hinds…Gaz'd; and in giants dwelling on the hills / [people] Believed and marvell'd" (Smith 417-18).

Another way in which *Beachy Head* bridges the void between man and nature is through the destabilization of the speaker's subject position, which is rendered through the trans-historical terms of her subjectivity. Unlike Wordsworth, who often views the world through the rigidly defines lens of his picturesque-derived point of view, Smith's speaker inhabits "an imaginary [position]; it is a virtual one…more of a line or curve or trajectory constituted by innumerous points" (Smith 62). The speaker seldom refers to the physical whereabouts of her

corporeal body; instead, she invokes the faculties of Fancy, Contemplation, and Memory, components of the mind working in conjunction to paint a sprawling cross-section of science, history, and personal memory. Hence, we are already put on shaky ground, in terms of clearly delineating subjectivity, in that “the trajectory of the subject becomes visible only in the way it relates itself to its Other” (Bode 63).

These uncertain terms of identity construction are only resolved during the latter half of the poem, when the narrative focus narrows and shifts onto the travails of a lovelorn visionary who haunts the woods with his elegiac songs. At first, his subject position is clearly defined since his poetic “I” assumes full autonomy throughout each verse. But in the aftermath of his inscrutable demise, *Beachy Head*’s speaker notes how “near one ancient tree, whose wreathed roots / Form’d a rude couch, love-songs and scatter’d rhymes, / Unfinished sentences, or half erased, / And rhapsodies like this, were sometimes found…” (Smith 573-76). According to Christoph Bode, these lines represent an underlying auto-referentiality, insofar as the inscribing of the visionary’s work into nature also refers to how the overall poem itself operates as a liminal artifact. By suggesting that the meaning of *Beachy Head* cannot be contained solely within the confines of the text itself, Smith finally finds a way to express her egalitarian view of the poetic ego, in that she fully privileges nature over the written word as the ultimate medium through which human identity can be articulated.

The notion of a free-flowing permeability between literature and nature is further explored in Smith’s juxtaposition of geographical/natural history with human history (i.e. culture). What initially might seem a stark opposition is actually two sides of the same coin, as perceived through the geo-scientific perspective of Smith. The speaker’s contemplation of the

"strange and foreign forms / Of sea-shell; with the pale calcareous soil / Mingled" (Smith 373-75) sparks a new rumination upon the accumulative nature of history, and how, as Bode claims, one discerns there to be a "*spatialisation of time* – the deeper you dig, the older your finds" (Bode 66). The implications of this paradigmatic breakthrough lie in our definitive understanding of the place of poet within the context of space and time. By orienting her voice as embedded inside an infinite continuum of perpetual change, the speaker induces a materialization of time in which history exists through nature, which remains the only infallibly constant frame of reference for the poet, who otherwise has the tendency to reside within the myopic edges of her constructions of a stable poetic self.

Over the course of the poem, Smith engages in an all-inclusive discourse, spanning from "the mail'd legions, under Claudius" (Smith 410) to her own personal anecdotes of childhood, where "*I* once was happy, when while yet a child, / I learn'd to love these upland solitudes" (Smith 248). After using the imaginative tendrils of her mind to forge a frame of reference within the human-global timeline, she realizes that someday "nature will reclaim her" (Bode 68). Even though humanity and nature may ostensibly seem like points of opposition, Smith construes them as inextricably linked, in that they both share in the process of registering collective change. Thus, the idea of an isolated and demarcated poetic "I" is nothing more than a logical fallacy when one takes into consideration the reality that a literary text is always in conversation (consciously or not) with the annals of past, and that its meaning will always be subject to change; as she reconstructs history, so will future generations deconstruct her work as one small fragment of the many layers within the rock deposition of literary history.

As I have shown, there are innumerable ways to measure how Smith's *Beachy Head* constructs a new transcendent mode of conscience for the poetic self to abide by, one that imbues the poet with a sense of purposeful agency directed towards both the world and history, rather than inwardly. Her conception of nature provides an important governing framework by which literary meaning can transcend the context of literal textuality and freely engage with a diverse, somewhat inscrutable past. In expanding the boundaries of the poet's subjective periphery, she essentially ruptures the classic subject-object dialectic endorsed by Wordsworth as a valid means of discriminating and consolidating differences, but this does not result in the negation of her identity – instead, she takes the opportunity to confront the otherness of space and time by occupying and negotiating her own interstitial space, located between her personal outlook and the infinitely broader vista of nature as a whole.

This exploration of nature as a liminal text becomes further complicated in her other works. As many critics have already noted, Smith distinguishes herself as a Romantic writer through the diverse array of voices she inhabits from poem to poem. Jacqueline Labbe argues that her "deployment of multiple poetic personae…both forward an ideology of the gendered speaker and refuse it" (Labbe 142). In her *Elegaic Sonnets*, she repeatedly appropriates the privileged perspective of a marginalized figure (i.e. the wanderer, hermit, woodsman, etc) through whom she is able to negotiate her own emotional trauma. While this subjective multiplicity adeptly illustrates how identity functions as a performative construct, we cannot ignore the importance of setting in her poetry with regard to how it recontextualizes the relationship between humanity and nature by emphasizing the otherness of the latter within a non-humanist paradigm. I find that the theory of ecomaterialism provides valuable insight into

understanding Smith's unique conception of her natural environment, for it operates on the premise that the elements of nature "possess an uncanny agency all their own…they consume, convey, renew, destroy" (Cohen 4). Such a framework enables us to move beyond the delimiting context of the traditional Romantic "I" and treat the often-overlooked landscape as its own text, rich with meaning outside of the human constructs of time and space.

In her poem "XLIV: Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex," Smith depicts a storm-ridden scene in which the typical boundaries between the self and nature are erased, resulting in a liminal space where the human and the non-human merge. The boundary between ocean and land is shown to be an arbitrary marker of the landscape's materiality, which cannot be so easily contained: "The sea no more its swelling surge confines, / But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides" (Smith 3-4). This surging of the tide goes on to flood the graveyard of the neighboring village, thereby creating a kind of fluid overlap between the natural and the human. I believe this commingled space constitutes an ecomaterialist contact zone, which, according to Julian Yates, functions as a "multi-species…generative text out of which all manner of modes of being are generated" (Yates 176-77). By searching beyond the confines of human society, one is able to recuperate those forms of nonhuman otherness that exist within the liminal landscape.

Within this all-encompassing text, we see that it is impossible to maintain a strict hierarchy over the world; one might outline where a village begins and ends, but that does not prevent the "shells and sea-weed" (Smith 9) from participating in and complicating that human discourse. The disturbance of the dead villagers illuminates how human agency is merely a construct within the material context of "the warring elements" (13). Even though it may seem like nature is overwriting the history of a human narrative, one must not ignore Smith's attitude

towards the scene: she envies and even identifies with the collective unity between past, present, and an atemporal environment. Through her marginalized position, the speaker recognizes the underlying complexity of the dialogue between these fragmented things (i.e. water, wind, shells, the dead), while also realizing that her own status as an ego-driven human being will always prevent her from fully knowing, or reading, the material text of what she sees: "I am doom'd – by life's long storm oppress, / To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest" (13-14).

We see another example of human agency being denied in favor of an inscrutably irreducible nature with "LXX: On being cautioned against walking on a headland overlooking the sea, because it was frequented by a lunatic." This poem's speaker describes the plight of a mentally disturbed man who habitually roams a nearby sea cliff (a setting previously explored in *Beachy Head*). However, in this case the cliff not only constitutes the liminal threshold separating land and sea, but also the fragile boundary between "sanity" and "madness." Ostensibly displaced from normal human society, the lunatic takes solace in "measuring…[the cliff's] distance from the waves that chide below" (Smith 3-4). Thus, from his 'mad' perspective, he is able to perceive nature in a new light – as a unique entity fraught with meaning. His interpretive project consists of lying upon "the mountain turf…murmuring responses to the dashing surf" (6-8). Yet, despite his attempts to decode this environmental text, he is unable to successfully mediate between the natural and the human; to the untrained eye, he is nothing more than a crazed loon whose methods signify the ramblings of an insane mind.

While the speaker romanticizes the lunatic's position as one "uncursed with reason" (13), she is still reluctant to legitimize his textual reading of the cliff. In these quasi-odes to marginalized figures, Smith gives readers a vivid sketch of a madman's sensitivity or a

woodman's intimacy with nature, yet she seldom penetrates beyond sensibility-oriented characterizations that exclusively privilege the individual's capacity to feel/identify with her surroundings. As such, she indirectly excludes the ecomaterial knowledge of natural things, whose textuality lingers at the periphery of the poet's mind. In doing so, her work echoes Jeffrey J. Cohen's thoughts on thing theory: "things, especially things that appear to hold themselves in silence, must possess a power indifferent to language: something that comes from themselves, not via human allowance" (Cohen 6). As such, we need to begin looking outside the arbitrary constraints of human rationality and reexamine the world from the "giddy brink" (Smith 9) of Nature's alterity (which too often is simply co-opted by the Romantic imagination), if we are to comprehend the narrative potential of a queer ecomaterialist framework in which identity is constantly being reconstituted by the shifting relationship between natural objects and agents.

In her poem "LI: Supposed to have been written in the Hebrides," Smith comes closest to realizing an ethics of interdependence in which "the human is not the world's sole meaning-maker" (Cohen 7). Her language ostensibly paints the island as a drily desolate locale with an "unfruitful breast" and "scanty herbage" (Smith 1-3). But this somewhat critical characterization is at the same time undermined by the speaker's acknowledgement of the creatures that thrive on the island (i.e. the osprays, cormorants, and sea-mews). Hence, even though her notions of fertility and hospitality do not hold valid, there is something about the island beneath the surface that attracts and supports life. Smith seems to be communing with a nebulously defined 'other' in the form of some presence emanated by the island: "I could with *thee* for months and years be blest; / And of thy tenderness and love possest, / Find all *my* world in this wild solitude" (6-8).

Aside from taking inspiration from the natural world, she ascribes inalienably sovereign qualities to the island that complicate the typical rendering of Nature as a canvas for human emotion.

While one might argue that the island's "tenderness" and love" (7) are simply projections of the poet's mindset, it is harder to reconcile the terms "mind" and heart" (14) which Smith uses to define her natural environment. Her description imbues the island with a uniquely non-normative agency, forcing the reader to contemplate the exact nature of the relationship between poet and setting. According to Kellie Robertson, material objects (i.e. stones, minerals) "allow for a projection into the space of the other, a conscious leap made through the medium of an ostensibly unconscious instrument" (Robertson 111). Thus, perhaps the sterile and unconscious quality of the island functions as a conduit through which the poet can engage with the other, or rather, construct the narrative potential of the island's otherness. When she proclaims, "Thy mind my empire --- and my throne thy heart" (Smith 14), she ostensibly positions herself as the official arbiter of the island's significance; her empire consists of what she chooses to convey about the island's inscrutability. However, this authorial vision is complicated by the way in which she attributes a possessive pronoun (i.e. "thy") to the island, thereby acknowledging the liminal presence of a natural agent. While that may not be a direct or accurate translation of the landscape's history or textual discourse, at least we are provided a window into how the creative process is fueled by the dialectic between the self and a natural other.

Smith further develops a proto-ecomaterialist notion of Nature's singular agency in her "Written at Penshurst, in autumn 1788." Similar to Ben Jonson's "To Penhurst," the beginning of the poem deals with both memorializing the iconic legacy of the estate and lamenting its current desolate state: "Ye towers sublime! deserted now and drear! / Ye woods! deep sighing to the

hollow blast / While History points to all your glories past" (1-4). Interestingly, the speaker creates an opposition between the lifelessness of the man-made house and the vivacity of the surrounding forest, which illustrates how Nature's timelessness and cyclicity can supersede and even overwrite humanity's narrative. By focusing on the otherness (i.e. the marginalized aspects) of Penshurst, as encapsulated in the "walks obscured by matted fern" and the "haunts [of] timid deer" (5-6), Smith sheds light on how human history can unintentionally participate in a discourse with its surroundings. While the estate's bombastic battlements may one day be dismantled by "the spoiling hand of Time" (9), the real legacy will live on not only through the immortalizing words of the poet, but also through the material fragments of the land and trees which supported those who lived and died within those boundaries. Thus, by engaging with the natural world as a liminal and polymorphous text, Smith challenges the bounds of normative identity, insofar as she privileges the dynamic interdependence between humanity and nature.

The Freedom of Unfixed Desire in *Don Juan*

Now that we have looked at the ecomaterialist treatment of natural/nonhuman agency, it becomes necessary to narrow the focal length of our critical lens at an individual level, which enables us to situate the problematics of desire within the broader context of queer studies. As a canonized text, Byron's *Don Juan* presents a unique set of challenges for those looking to complicate the dominant cross-dressing motif that frames many of the relationships within the poem. As Caroline Franklin observes, "the codes and laws of gender are continually challenged through transgression…though the subversive energy of sexual role-reversal is…contained by the comic resolution of each story" (Franklin 628); while Juan's salacious escapades continually

underscore gender's essential performativity, there is still the lingering issue of the protagonist's passivity.

As he progresses from one end of the sexual spectrum to the other (i.e. Hellenic to modern Western society), he never truly evolves from the origins of libidinous impulse – in Foucauldian terms, he cannot be identified as an ethical subject, as one who refers his conduct to a fixed law or set of laws. In Canto I, the narrator describes Juan's tutelage as one in which "no branch was made a mystery / To Juan's eyes, excepting natural history" (I.39). Therefore, without the aid of a system of principles to both guide and moderate his desire, the epic hero instead functions as a potent symbol of Lacanian desire, insofar as his vacuity represents a void of lack and negativity upon which the female characters project their own constructed notions of desire. According to Lacan, human desire is actually a latent desire for recognition by an Other; this recognition is achieved by desiring what the Other has or lacks (Lacan 38). By this assumption, we can identify Juan as the ideal Other, for he is the medium through which the women of the poem are able to explore the inscrutably liminal boundaries of their desires. By analyzing these various queer encounters, I will demonstrate how woman's quest for recognition is repeatedly derailed by an inability to reconcile the abject qualities of their longings within the limits of patriarchal culture.

The account of Donna Julia's tryst with Juan illustrates the precarious nature of the power dynamic between the individual (Julia) and the Other. Ostensibly, the former is attracted to the latter's handsome youth, but certain elements of their relationship hint more towards the platonic rather than mere physical lust. As they become further acquainted with each other, the narrator notes how Julia "knew the reason why…their looks [were] cast down," but Juan "had no more

notion / Than he who never saw the sea of ocean" (I.70). By projecting her emotions onto the blank canvas that is Juan, she is able to cultivate a greater sense of self-awareness, one that transcends the gender constraints laid down by a male-centric society. Juan's innocence is essential to his lover's inner development, for its indeterminability acts as a mirror, reflecting all the "deeper thoughts in store" (I.72) within her heart.

However, Julia's intimate circumscribing of her desire comes to an abrupt halt as soon as it begins to spill over the cultural boundaries of heteronormativity. When Don Alfonso barges into her room with suspicions of infidelity, she responds by flaunting her newly queer, polymorphous identity: "Perhaps'tis of Antonia you are jealous; / You saw that she was sleeping by my side / When you broke in upon us with your fellows" (I.156). No longer is she bound to the conventions of hegemonic femininity, but rather she challenges and confuses her husband's preconceptions by attaching homoerotic undertones to the homosocial bond between her and her handmaiden. It is telling that Julia's infidelity is revealed by the presence of Juan's shoes, which symbolically allude to her journey from the staid conventions of domesticity to the exotic and exciting territory of "reveries celestial" (I.79). But ultimately the path to self-realization is reigned in by the pressures of the Symbolic, as shown when Julia is sent to repent at a convent, where religious ideology works toward "the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual...to other actions always in conformity with values and rules" (Foucault 37). Thus, as an ethical subject bound to a fixed set of rules, she is forced to homogenize and purge her desire of any aberrations, thereby re-affirming the dominant culture of self-mastery.

The relationship between Haidee and Juan further complicates the queer reading of desire, in that their love is expressed through absolute excess. Upon hearing news of Lambro's apparent

death, the newlywed couple waste no time in ushering in a new age of opulent beauty and wealth – "for them to be / Thus was another Eden" (IV.10). While the narrator foregrounds the idyllic qualities of their romance, he also points out the stark disconnect between their shared ideal world and the banality of reality. The uninhibited desire shared by Haidee and Juan directly violates Lacan's pleasure principle (the limit to enjoyment), and as a result, they inevitably encounter the bane of jouissance (i.e. painful suffering). The eerie dream sequence in which Haidee imagines herself chained to a rock demonstrates how her once innocuous love for Juan has transmutated into an overwhelmingly indeterminate entity. Her identification with the Prometheus myth suggests that perhaps she may have overinvested herself in Juan, whose lack of identity manifests itself in the figure covered in a white sheet. When she sees his dead body in the cave, one cannot help but draw a parallel with Plato's allegory of the cave; like the men in the cave, Haidee mistakes the artificial shadows of romance for true reality, instead of using her relationship with Juan to enhance her self-knowledge.

The poem's discourse of desire is further developed at the end of Canto IV, when Haidee falls into a coma-like state after being torn away from her lover. Her all-consuming despair exemplifies what Slavoj Zizek terms "the reflexivity of desire…[which] could not be satisfied in any lasting way, that it was infinite, an infinite metonymy of desire" (Boyle 12). This relationship was doomed from the very start, for it lacked any limits or organizing principles that could constraint it; such an excessive, "otherly" desire can only come into conflict with the cultural hegemony, as embodied by Lambro's rage. Haidee's inability to cope with the loss of her object (of desire) and subsequent retreat into herself represents a dramatic shift from desire to "drive."

According to Zizek, the object of drive is “directly loss itself…where desire suffers from the repetitive failure to obtain full jouissance, drive finds triumph in this very failure” (Boyle 12). In order to counteract the disillusionment of failed desire, one takes solace by committing to the coherently repetitive loop of fixating on a specific object; in the case of Haidee, her fixated object is her despair. Rather than undergo the grieving process, she plunges into a “state unchanged…had no pulse, but death seemed absent” (IV.60). Since Haidee can never fully possess Juan on her own terms, she settles for the lack-of-Juan as a compensatory object. Hence, her desire takes on a culturally unintelligible queerness that alienates her from the rest of society – “she looked on many a face with vacant eye / …She saw them watch her without asking why / …Not speechless though she spoke not” (IV.63). Finally, all modes of communication break down; Haidee’s state of alterity cannot be integrated into the Symbolic, so she perishes.

Another example of queer desire is found in Canto VI, when Juan/“Juanna” is ordered to share a bed with Dudú, one of the harem girls. Juan functions as an ideal object of desire, in that his polymorphous gender identity encourages Dudú to assert agency and explore the tenets of her own unmapped desire. After she screams herself awake from a dream, everyone rushes to her side and finds her “agitated, flushed, and / frightened, / Her eye dilated and her colour heightened” (VI.72). Aside from the bawdy connotations this description suggests, we see that, no matter what occurred that night, Dudú has been shaken out from her normalized state of complacency. Her actual queering takes place within the dream that she later describes, in which she discovers a golden apple in a “wood obscure” (VI.75). This apple can be construed as a symbol of some forbidden or esoteric knowledge about Dudú’s own self; the fact that her biting of it is interrupted by the sting of a bee only reinforces the underlying conflict between her latent

queerness and the restraining conventions of traditional society. Upon hearing her account of the dream, everyone dismisses its content as nothing more than a "false alarm" (VI.79); as evidenced in the previously discussed examples, society is inherently unable to mediate the otherness of the individual who seeks to interrogate the rigid banality of normative values through self-exploration.

Feminine Discourse in *Maria*: Rejecting Patriarchal Claims

While Byron's satirical depiction of the male epic hero clearly exhibits the constraints of gender performance, it does not fully take into consideration the queer potential of the domestic world. As a reflection of both gothic and sentimental conventions, Wollstonecraft's *Maria* offers more than just a routine depiction of the sociocultural injustices against women in the 18th century, for it represents a female narrator whose exclusion from society enables her to critique its political structures from the outside. Geoffrey Galt Harphan posits that the practice of ascetic withdrawal highlights the issue "of culture by structuring an opposition between culture and its opposite" (qtd. in Dowdell 213). Based on this logic, Wollstonecraft situates the setting of the madhouse as a queer space that is withdrawn from patriarchal culture, thereby enabling her to perform an open feminine discourse that transcends the boundaries of domesticity.

The novel opens in medias res with the protagonist's imprisonment within the asylum, but within this classic gothic setting, there is an underlying opposition between the traditional roles (e.g. servant, madman/woman) assigned to its occupants and how the characters are able to circumvent and reconstitute those roles. Initially, the housemaid Jemima is reluctant to believe Maria's pleas of innocence, yet she is eventually won over by the latter's rational disposition. When Maria begins to correspond via letter with Darnford, she has to rely on her captor to act as

an intermediary between them; once Jemima is invited into this clandestine dialogue, the roles of captive and captor dissolve and we see Jemima begin to exert her own agency and voice through her increasing sympathy with Maria's plight.

By chapter 5, she finally musters the courage to confide in Maria and relate how she has also been mistreated and abused under the tyrannical system of patriarchal rule: "Jemima, after again patrolling the passage, was so softened by the air of confidence which breathed around her, that she voluntarily began an account of herself" (Wollstonecraft 51). Here, the "patrolling [of] the passage symbolizes the servant's status as an other, which enables her to bridge both the spatial and socio-economic gaps that society would normally impose upon her. In this instance, Maria (as the main narrator) now functions as the mediator between Jemima's tale of woe and the reader. She goes on to inhabit this interstitial role throughout the novel, such as when she enters into the confidence of a woeful landlady while on the run from her husband.

This framing distance between these subplots and the central narrative might not seem troubling at first, but it calls into question the actual legitimacy of Maria's representation of female suffering, insofar as she is containing these individual stories within the larger framework of the memoir addressed to her daughter. According to Lisa Plummer Crafton, Maria is aware of the oppressive power of the dialectical tension between "binding theatricalized social norms…[and] conscious self-staging" (Crafton 371), in that she knows that her marriage to George is predicated on her playing the role of the "chaste" wife. This awareness of the constructed nature of gender identifications culminates in her decision to leave her husband and elope with Darnford. However, Maria's ability to step outside of the "theater" of marriage is noticeably absent among the other female characters; instead, their lives are left unresolved, like

cursory fragments that, when viewed as a whole, adeptly reflect the marginalized state of the female condition. Despite her efforts to construct a coherent and autonomous female identity, Maria (and by extension Wollstonecraft) cannot help but convey femininity in terms of traditional conventions (i.e. sentimentalism), thereby perpetuating the very social theater from which she tries to escape.

These inhibiting conventions are at the root of the problematic nature of the novel's woman-to-woman correspondences. In response to Crafton's assertion that "the figure of the suffering woman could both critique tyranny and suggest the … power of imaginative sympathy" (Crafton 371), I believe that, while this figure does enable Maria to identify with other women and vice versa, it also constitutes a theatrical role (in and of itself) that delimits the complexities of the female by orienting women within the sexual economy of the patriarchal hegemony. For example, when Maria becomes intimate with the landlady of Mr. Venables, their conversation follows a gendered template in which the suffering woman is depicted as being acted upon by the outside forces of man's cruelty. The landlady tells of how she was "over-persuaded…to marry a likely man," but later foiled by "an impudent slut, who chose to live on other people's means" (Wollstonecraft 127). By privileging her own suffering over the unknown circumstances of the alleged "slut," the landlady illustrates how the suffering woman figure fails as a comprehensive mode of representation, in that it only provides insight into a troublesomely singular perspective. While Crafton might argue that this model deserves merit for providing a queer/alternative space for feminine discourse, that space is negated by its skewed value system, under which female suffering is valorized as a badge of honor and rewarded with pity. Hence, what Wollstonecraft ostensibly depicts as a strengthening of bonds within a vast community of like-minded women

actually operates as a window into a pervasive culture of suffering that delimits and generalizes the range of experiences available within 18th century womanhood.

By appropriating the plight of women and transmitting their stories through sentimentalist-steeped language, Wollstonecraft is able to vindicate her social reformist agenda, but at the cost of destabilizing female identity, as epitomized in the fragmentary state of the text itself. Her characterization of Darnford throughout the novel is structurally haphazard, in that she does not give a consistent depiction of the exact nature of the relationship between him and Maria. At the beginning of the narrative, Maria observes a man walking through a side-path from her cell, and immediately conjures up “a confused recollection of having seen somebody who resembled him” (38). After hearing the particular cadences of his voice, she identifies him as the man who had delivered her from an earlier predicament involving her escape from her husband. But in the next chapter, Darnford writes his first letter to Maria, in which there is no mention of their prior meeting having taken place. Thus, as the one male character with whom Maria is able to identify and confine in, he is apparently situated at the liminal boundary where the statuses of ‘friend,’ ‘acquaintance,’ and ‘stranger’ intersect. While one might simply attribute this nebulous male identity as an oversight by the author, there are deeper implications to consider with regard to Darnford’s ostensible role as the male savior.

Wollstonecraft’s ambivalent treatment of him might also reflect her own authorial anxiety, in terms of being confined by the traditional conventions of the Gothic genre itself. Within the typical Gothic work, marriage often functions as a resolving device that absolves the characters’ past traumas, but in *Maria*, the protagonist never considers marriage as a viable option; instead, she exposes it as a broken institution corrupted by various gender biases. Hence,

Wollstonecraft actually undermines the Gothic mode by depicting a woman who is attempting to construct her agency outside of those heteronormative constructs that restrict female potentiality. Consequently, Maria's relations with men (e.g. with Darnford) are wrought with vague contradictions, for this indeterminacy reflects the uncertain position of a new kind of femininity – one that is liberated from the ideological lens of male-dominated marriage.

During the second half of the novel, Maria recounts the incident in which Darnford supposedly rescues her from being turned into the authorities, but she describes her savior as a "stranger…with the most soothing politeness and manly interest" (125). As a result, the reader is left to speculate on the full extent of Darnford's motivations (i.e. his concern for Maria's well-being); by always appearing and reappearing on the margins of the narrative, he disrupts the continuity of Maria's history of relationships with men, thereby destabilizing the nature of masculine identity within the novel. In a way, his nondescriptness acts as a sort of blank repository (similar to Don Juan's essential lack) for Maria to project her own subjective notions of the ideal man, one that is essentially removed from the misogynistic social framework in which she is actually embedded. Her self-liberating creativity, in terms of constructing masculinity, is evidenced in her initial description of Darnford: "His steady, bold step, and the whole air of his person, bursting as it were from a cloud, pleased her, and gave an outline to the imagination to sketch the individual form she wished to recognize" (38). Maria repeatedly encounters this "individual form" throughout the story, but their relationship cannot evolve beyond the imprecise terms of an unfixed liminal space, without running the risk of being once again being embroiled in the normative constructs of a patriarchal culture.

The textual fragmentation within *Maria* is also illustrated through the open-ended state of the ending. After Maria is finally free from her husband's clutches, the author offers a series of resolutions from which the reader can choose to invest in. Having already rejected the principles of 18th century marriage, Wollstonecraft has little freedom to situate her protagonist in fortuitous circumstances (i.e. a happy ending); most of the options are riddled with baleful harbingers like "the rack of expectation," "consequence," and "mysterious behavior." Thus, perhaps this lack of closure serves as the author's recognition that Maria's story cannot be entirely contained within the theater of social norms, nor can it be resolved within a traditional narrative arc; as an allegory for the female condition, *Maria* presents merely a fleeting glimpse into the messily blurred boundaries of gender and sexuality, leaving it up to the reader to make sense of the fragments.

The Gothicization of Native Identity in *The Old Manor House*

In the hope that we can both expand and diffuse the hermeneutic borderlines of non-normative identity, it becomes crucial to regenerate the tenets of our queer space by inviting other discourses, such as postcolonialism, into the theoretical fray. Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* presents a unique hermeneutic challenge, in that the complexity of its three-act structure defies the confines of any single genre-based reading. Although the dramatic narrative centers on a romance complicated by the feudal politics and property rights of a genteel society, the middle section reframes the novel's cultural scope by depicting Orlando's experience as a British soldier in the American Revolutionary War. According to Janina Nordius, Smith imbues this colonial encounter between the white man and the indigenous Native Americans with gothic tropes, which in turn mediates "contemporaneous cultural anxieties through representations of fear and horror" (Nordius 41). This generic cross-pollination allows us to view native identity

through the lens of the abject, as something that is kept at bay through exclusion, yet still lingers in the liminal periphery.

Nordius claims that through the lens of the colonial gothic framework, we are ostensibly exposed to the constructed binary opposition between the civilized white man and the primitive native. At the same time, this colonial discourse becomes problematized (i.e queered), insofar as it (through methods of representation) not only queers native people as deviantly nonheteronormative and un-identifiable beings, but also appropriates the symbols of native culture as its own. Consequently, Orlando's status as an embodiment of civilized patriarchal values is fundamentally called into question when he interacts with and imbibes both the physical otherness of the New World and the cultural otherness of the Iroquois. I aim to intervene in this heteropatriarchal discourse by circumscribing the ways in which indigenous peoples are overwritten and/or silenced by the colonizer, who simultaneously normalizes and appropriates native difference.

To truly contextualize Orlando's colonial encounter, one must first look at his position during the early parts of the novel. The author depicts him as a well-educated, passionate man whose affection for Monimia is limited solely by the class and socio-economic barriers of English society. His masculine agency is contingent upon an ossified legal property system in which he is compelled to defer to the fleeting whims of Mrs. Rayland, an unmarried heiress whose own failure to produce an heir reflects the arbitrary nature of the patriarchal sexual economy. At the same time, Orlando positions himself as the male voice of reason in opposition to Monimia's feminine superstitions, as evidenced when he chastises her for believing in ghost stories: "Orlando, laughing at her simplicity, cried, 'And who, my dear Monimia, who has

violated thy natural good sense by teaching thee these ridiculous stories? Believe me, none of the Lady Raylands, as you called them, ever died for love…'" (Smith 72). This assertion of a gender binary between reason and superstition holds fast within the insularly demarcated context of genteel society, but we soon see his logic and understanding challenged by his venture beyond the pale of civilization and into the unmarked terrain of the Americas.

As Nordius observes, the description of Orlando's wartime travails is marked with a distinctly gothic or spectral quality that further enables the reader to distinguish the New World as an amorphous non-normative landscape. Over the course of his Atlantic voyage, he is stricken with a feverish illness that plunges him into a "state of insensibility" (358) and which sets the tone for the rest of his experience in America. One might argue that he never fully heals from his altered/transmutated condition, insofar as Smith chooses to portray his recovery in terms of a quasi-rebirth: "By the care of this excellent man, aided by the medical skill of the surgeon of the regiment, Orlando in about a fortnight arose as it were from the grave" (358). Thus, this ghostly imagery unequivocally reinforces the fact that the protagonist has become ontologically untethered from the Western constructs of his homeland.

By the same token, the otherness of Orlando's colonial encounter also applies to the newly realized disconnect between the British cause and the reality of the colonists' violated democratic rights. His faith in the political hegemony is shaken once he realizes that the Revolutionary War "was not only pursued at ruinous expence, but in absolute contradiction to the wishes of the people who were taxed to support it" (Smith 363). Such an economic contradiction sets a precedent for the kind of skepticism necessary for Orlando to challenge the delimiting confines of the identity politics of his homeland. Nevertheless, while this ideological

rift may hint at a burgeoning post-identity reawakening for the colonizer, there are various other ways in which he perpetuates the colonial discourse of the white heteropatriarchy.

For example, Orlando's first direct native encounter indirectly reinscribes white colonial authority by queering the cultural practices of the Iroquois tribe within a deviantly non-normative space. He is repelled by "their savage appearance, and the more savage thirst of blood which they avowed – that base avidity for plunder, with an heroic contempt of danger, pain, and death, [making] them altogether objects of abhorrence" (364). Even though he criticizes the British soldiers for their own cruel practices against the American colonists, he does not go so far as to label them as primitive, an emasculating term that is exclusively assigned/associated with the Native American men. Smith later provides a starkly graphic account of the natives' war customs: "[He] saw in the hands of the Bloody Captain eleven scalps, some of them evidently those of women and children, others of very old, and consequently defenceless men; many of them fresh" (365). The gothicization of such indigenous practices dehumanizes the native male, while also privileging his capacity for monstrous acts of violence as a defining characteristic. Furthermore, it denigrates the Iroquois by representing their society as a chaotic, lawless nether-region where family/domestic structures are disregarded in favor of a primitive lust for blood. This coding of the Native American way of life in terms of raging and illicit passions (i.e. the physical violation of the scalp-taking) both sexualizes and racializes Native peoples, in that it "constructs them as incapable of self-governance without a heteropatriarchal influence that Native peoples do not "naturally" possess" (Finley 35). Therefore, Orlando functions as the unconscious arbiter between the queer native difference and the civilized/modern norms of the Western hegemonic world from which he hails.

It is important to consider the implications of Orlando's native constructions, in that his characterization of the native men serves as a discreet way of reaffirming his own crisis-stricken masculine identity. As previously mentioned, his masculinity is initially regulated by not only the stringent English class system, but also the physio-spatial enclosures of the Rayland manor house itself, in which he has to negotiate the oppressively defined exclusivity (i.e. unavailability) of his love interest. On the other hand, the freely open frontier of the American landscape allows Orlando to break free from the rigid constructs of heteronormative power and remodel, or recodify, his masculinity in relation to the native queerness of the Iroquois. In one instance, he describes the "more gentle manners" (Smith 365) of one of the Native Americans, whom he refers to as the "Wolf-hunter." By ascribing a gentle disposition to this Indian warrior, Orlando queers indigenous masculinity as being a non-heteronormative aberration, a passive entity that beckons to be conquered by the correcting influence of the virile colonizer.

To fully deconstruct the exact nature of their relationship, we must first examine what Andrea Smith describes as the colonial imaginary, a paradigm in which colonizers view the native world through their own heteronormative lens. Within this imaginary, the Native operates as "an empty signifier that provides the occasion for Europe to remake its corrupt civilization" (A. Smith 48). We see this colonial process at work in the novel's depiction of the Wolf-hunter, especially with regard to how he interacts with Orlando. Charlotte Smith characterizes these two male figures as kindred spirits who engage in a mutually beneficial cultural exchange without the hostile confrontations associated with typical primitive encounters.

They share a "secret sympathy between generous minds [which] seems to exist throughout the whole human kind" (Smith 366), thereby hinting at the development of an

unconventional homosocial relationship that actually undermines and challenges the heteronormativity of traditional colonial discourse. Rather than through language, Orlando and the Wolf-hunter are capable of communicating on almost a subliminal level; by merely being in the latter's presence, Orlando can absorb and decipher the native customs which once seemed so terrifyingly non-identifiable and amorphous. Hence, we see that the colonizer, by suspending his predominant identity and inhabiting the queer otherness of the indigenous tribe, is able to contain the non-normative through his own patriarchal lens while also recuperating his own masculinity via his appropriation of the Iroquois ways.

Seeing that the novel's ending ostensibly restores conventional equilibrium by reinscribing Orlando within the hegemonic frame of British landowners, our critical intervention becomes incumbent upon whether we can situate a remaining hidden fragment of queer space within the limits of English property. While his heteronormative relationship with Monimia remains essentially unchanged, Orlando is still able to reconstruct the parameters of his male authority by creating a liminal point of access within his structured land. This invoking of the other is dramatized through Orlando's decision to reward an ex-military beggar by "making him the tenant for life of a neat and comfortable lodge in his park – an arrangement that gratified both the dependent and his protector" (Smith 523). As a result, he places himself in an in-between realm between the patriarchal framework and the queer identity first highlighted by the Native Americans, and later embodied by the marginal status of the destitute vagabond.

The Inchoate Muteness of the Native Specter

To complicate our understanding of the interaction between the colonizing outsider and the colonized native as a queer space, it is necessary to consider an unconventional text such as

Helena Maria Williams' epic poem *Peru*, in which the native land plays a prominent role in resisting hegemonic claims. With regard to our critique of identity, there exists a multitude of different critical angles from which we can critique the traditional models and boundaries of gender, sexuality, and desire. In terms of the queer potential of homosocial relationships (as previously highlighted in *Maria*), there seems to be a similarly vital access point within the native culture of the Peruvians, in which the raw intimacy shared between male warriors can be viewed as challenging the heteronormative assumptions of both patriarchal culture and colonial discourse. Another critical frame is found in the boundary-diffusing power of the spectral encounter, as evinced in the gothic-tinged portrayal of Native Americans in *The Old Manor House*. Whereas Smith's depiction of ghosts effectively brings into focus the amorphous qualities of the indigenous other, Williams' narrative employs the spectral as a means of dramatizing the overall dilemma that is embedded within nearly all queer interventions: how does one negotiate queer potential as an "unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (Jagose 2) without perpetuating those normative claims which mobilize queer interrogation in the first place?

In a way, the Gothic specter acts as a fittingly transparent allegory for queer logic's inherent affinity for liminal spaces, which provide readers a critical window from outside the hegemonic framework. From a theoretical perspective, this spectral window foregrounds the constraining and exclusionary effects of identity constructions across the textual landscape of Romantic literature, while enabling us to re-assess and perhaps reconstruct the very prerequisites of identity. While it is less certain whether a queer critique will lead to a stable position (i.e. identity claim) for marginalized voices, I am more concerned with the hidden implications of

"queer theory's political commitment…to the unknowability, the non-identifiability, of its own identity in the future" (Morland and Willox 5).

As part of the intersectional delineation of native queerness in *Peru*, it is necessary to first acknowledge Helen Maria Williams' authorial role as arbiter of not only native difference, but also the differences of the environmental land, whose myriad qualities do not easily fit within the established binaries of contemporary colonial discourse. According to Rayna Green, the "Native female body" is often conflated with "the conquest of land in the 'New World" (qtd. in Finley 34), thereby reifying the network of patriarchal power as it relates to heterosexual norms; this sexualization of the land gives privilege to and empowers white male desire, while stripping indigeneity of its own agency. Contrarily, the poem's speaker diffuses these arbitrary boundaries by anthropomorphizing Peru's natural world as a free-floating transgendered entity.

In the beginning of Canto I, Nature is described as a "gentle Region blest / … In her soft smile beam'd love, and artless grace, / And glow'd celestial beauty in her face" (Williams 6). On one level, this characterization positions the Native environment as a passively feminized ideal of romantic beauty and an easy prey for the imperialist claims of the Spanish conquistadores. However, such a basic interpretation too readily dismisses the latent complications that arise when we juxtapose the constructs of colonial discourse against the "anti-identity…politics" (Jagose 3) of a queer framework, which Williams mobilizes at the end of Canto I through her contrasting treatment of Nature as a fiercely bellicose and omnipotent force. It is interesting to note that this queering of the native land is not directly transmitted to the reader, but rather the author employs a mediator in the form of a zephyr, which suggests the underlying limitations of human subjectivity, while also placing into perspective the vast and unknowable multitudes of a

post-human nature. The speaker describes the zephyr as being tasked with invoking a sublime calling to arms of all the natural elements:

> Oh all ye pitying Spirits of the sky,
>
> Who hear in groves of bliss this ardent sigh,
>
> Mount the blue Lightning's wing, o'er Ocean sweep,
>
> Tinge with your Robes of flame the red'ning deep,
>
> Plunge to the central Caves that moan below,
>
> As o'er their heads the liquid mountains flow,
>
> Bid Death up-springing from the dark abode
>
> Mount the high billow, print the blackn'ing flood,
>
> Rush o'er the waves, the rough'ning deep deform,
>
> Howl in the blast, and swell the raging Storm (Williams 183-192)

This passage indicates a natural presence that supersedes the restraints of human-constructed gender binaries, as evidenced by the array of violently unhinged imagery that call into question our normative understanding of masculinity/femininity. In this case, Nature assumes the active "masculine" role of a militant aggressor whose power seemingly exceeds the scope of human understanding; Williams reinforces this Miltonic aesthetic through certain associative details, such as the "Robes of flame" and the swelling of the "raging Storm." Aside from the queering of a traditionally gendered (i.e. feminized) nature, this invocation also works on a larger scale as a visual aid for understanding and localizing the incoherencies of Peru's queer native ethos (as embodied by the "Spirits of the sky"). These spirits are not only positioned in direct opposition to the stabilizing influence of colonial discourse (i.e. the approaching

Spanish ships), but they also challenge the "racialized and sexualized narratives of the land…as penetrable and open to ownership through heteropatriarchal domination" (Finley 35), insofar as they symbolize the queer non-identity of a natural world that is infinitely permeable, unfixed, and subject to none of the usual constraints of identity politics. Rather than exclude one constituency from another, they enact a holistic, interdependent model of being. The abundance of fluid water imagery (e.g. "the liquid mountains," "the high billow," "the blackn'ing flood") imbues the Peruvian seascape with a kind of roving natural agency capable of exploring the dark thresholds of liminality typically excluded from human modes of perception. In doing so, Williams actually elides the ethnic and cultural differences between the colonizing Spaniards and colonized Peruvians by shifting and expanding the narrative focus to the panoramic illimitability of Nature itself.

The poem locates further incoherencies through its portrayal of the non-normative gender dynamic between the Peruvian princess Alzira and her husband Ataliba. Following the death of the latter in Canto II, Alzira undergoes the conventional stages of grief and fulfills her role as a widow in mourning: "The swelling pang unable to sustain, / Distraction throb'd in every shivr'ring vein; / Its rising tumults seize her yielding soul, / And in her eye its frenzied glances roll" (Williams 317-20). At first, it may seem that she is reinforcing gender stereotypes by giving in to those powerful emotions that trace back to a sentimentalist tradition. Yet, what distinguishes Alzira from more limited female characters (e.g. Monimia in *Old Manor House*) is her uncanny ability to disrupt the identity scripts of heteropatriarchal society and open herself up to other unclassified modes of being.

We see another representation of nativity via the manner in which she resolves her grief. Using Nature as a kind of repository for her emotions, Alzira decides to "press the cold turf to my fainting heart, … while it drinks the tears I shed" (335-37). While this quasi-liminal exchange may appear to reinforce conventional gender norms (i.e. women as governed by emotion), it also illustrates an acute awareness of human corporeality and its situated position within a natural framework. Her tears not only diffuse the physical limits of her own body, but also mediate a dialogue, or liminal correspondence, between the oppressed Peruvian land and native femininity. We see the land registering the absence of a stable patriarchal structure through Williams' depiction of "the light grass… / That shrouds with tender tufts my Love's dark Grave" (331-32). As a result of this gender shrouding, Alzira is able to make her own claim of agency outside the constraints of a normative authority, as epitomized through her self-empowering claim: "I weep no more" (339).

Further, she goes on to actually invoke a spiritual otherness in the form of her husband's ghost, which in turn creates a queer site of power from which she can negotiate the intermediate phase between life and death. This spectral encounter functions as a potent metaphor for how the Gothic and Native worlds intersect, in that, as a living witness to the horrors of colonial oppression, the only way for Alzira to process the denaturalization of her subject position is to bridge the gap between the ghostly and the corporeal. Her vision queers (i.e. circumscribes) a new breed of liminality that transcends the strictly material limits of her own suffering: "My Love ascends! – he soars in liquid light -- / Stay, tender spirit! Cruel, stay thy flight" (375-6). Similar to the Peruvian spirits, this fluid "liquid light" represents the queer ectoplasm that calls

into question those constructed limits of the self, leaving it up to the individual to decide where his or her essence truly resides.

Unsurprisingly, Alzira's exploration of the in-between is short-lived, as shown when Ataliba's ghost beckons her to take her own life and join him. One might argue that his overriding influence simply reinscribes the heteropatriarchal norms existing prior to the Spanish invasion, but we must also consider her own residual status as a queer agent. Having been stripped of all ties to her native community, Alzira has been effectively transformed into a living ghost; she lives neither here nor there, but in a spectral netherworld where (under the colonizer's rule) the self-attributions of her indigeneity are no longer valid. Thus, it is only fitting that she searches with "wand'ring glances wide around" (383) before finally plunging the dagger in her heart, thereby dramatizing the eliding of native identity within the narrative of colonial conquest.

As for the role of language in the task of queering the Native, one key incident in Canto III demonstrates the semiotic failures that occur when an outside colonizing force penetrates the non-normativity of an indigenous culture. Following a bloody battle, one of the native warriors realizes that he has been stricken with a mortal wound: "His bleeding form in speechless anguish prest" (Williams 434). Once again, we see how the silencing of language corresponds with the brutal violence of the colonial encounter. The muteness of the dying warrior corresponds with that of Ataliba's ghost, in that it shows not only how native masculinity has been displaced, but also how difficult it can be to contain nativity within heteronormative categories. It is important to observe these moments where speech and language fail to mediate the cultural difference between the colonizer/colonized, insofar as it exposes the inherent limitations of an identity politics that privileges one nationality over another.

Queer resistance to the heteronormative colonizer is revealed not only through opposed nationalities, but also through the permutable state of homosocial bonds. This alternative discourse of sexuality takes place when a fellow warrior comes to the dying warrior's side and promptly makes a vow to take his own life as a way of honoring their male friendship. Rather than permit this senseless sacrifice, the wounded Peruvian instead argues, "By all the sacred ties / That blend our hearts, forbear!" (440-41). Hence, we see that, in contrast to the heteronormative model of European culture, native men share a deeply intimate homosocial bond that ruptures our sense of traditional sexuality constructs. The blending of their hearts symbolize a native queer essence that remains intact through the dying warrior's plea to keep on living, thereby preserving a non-heteronormative space for posterity's use. Further, the preservation of this same-sex relationship acts as a rebuttal to the underlying "colonial matrix… [where] Native men are feminized and queered when put in the care of a white heteropatriarchal nation-state" (Finley 35). By reclaiming their homosocial masculine agency, these two warriors enact a queer narrative of an oppressed, but ultimately uncompromising, alternative identity.

While the spectral encounter and the gender-blurring nature of homosociality are both fairly coherent tools for exposing non-normative otherness, it becomes harder to clearly situate a critical lens when approaching such an ambivalent character as the Spanish missionary Las Casas. He exists as a problematic figure insofar as his moral crusade in the name of Christianity is capable of either promoting or circumscribing native queerness, depending on the exact circumstances. For instance, at the end of Canto III, he haphazardly comes to the rescue of a Peruvian priest that has been mercilessly tortured for refusing to renounce his deviant faith. Realizing that the man is about to die, Las Casas decides to impose his constructed religious

beliefs onto the Peruvian's own indigenous culture: "Tho' veil'd till now the sacred light, / The God who rushes on my mental sight…His mild forgiveness then my soul shall prove, / His mercy share – Las Casas' God is love!" (543-8). By suggesting that the dying man was "veil'd" under the cover of his own native identity, Las Casas conveys an unequivocal sense of the cultural bigotry that is latently inscribed within colonial conquest, in that he ostensibly offers salvation (i.e. a sense of belonging) to the Peruvians; however, at the same time, he is merely reinscribing those hegemonic constructs that classify one form of being, while excluding another.

Later in the poem his normative status is complicated when he helps Zamor and Aciloe (two Peruvian lovers) escape to Chile, while also dissuading Alphonso (a Spanish conquistador) from trying to marry Aciloe against her will. Here, Las Casas actually promotes queer difference by keeping the native woman from being unwillingly placed in the restraints of the heteropatriarchal economy. Thus, while he may be overtly committed to Christianity as a hegemonic framework, he also feels a paradoxical obligation to undermine colonial discourse's regulatory tendency to associate the conquest of the land with the sexual conquest of the native female other.

The Indeterminate Frames of Imagination and Genre

In any case, we see that the systematic project of colonization fails to either assimilate or recover nativity's incoherence, as evinced by the muted qualities inscribed within Peruvian masculinity. This collapse in meaning seems to suggest a heretofore unexplored dimension to our queer intervention: the semiotic void between dissimilar cultures and ethnic identities, where normative frames become heavily mitigated by the uncanny encounter between the subject and the abject. In her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva expounds that the

abject other exists as a "threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable…It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva 1). This excluded condition possesses significant value as a marker of queer fluidity, insofar as it interrogates the constructs of identity at the contiguous level of semiosis (i.e. sign processes).

Besides our extensive analysis of the fluctuating and undetermined state of natural, spectral, and homosocial thresholds, there is further queer potential within the space of semiotic dissonance, in that it offers an opportunity for queer discourse to remain viable without reinforcing normative values. As presented in Williams' poem, the abject native's unspeakability indirectly calls attention to the constraining limits of the Spanish heteropatriarchy; under these circumstances, the indigenous perspective never truly participates in the symbolic system, but instead looms as "a weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes…on the edge of non-existence and hallucination" (Kristeva 2). Hence, while native identity is unable to revoke its status as a radical, it can at least suspend the semiotic process (through which normativity is inscribed) by foregrounding its own muteness, as evidenced through the fatally wounded warrior who silently lies in a pool of his own blood.

Given these points, I believe it behooves us to contemplate the intermixture of queer difference that takes shape within the nebulous ether of the Romantic imagination, as manifested in John Keats' "Lamia." For Denise Gigante, this poem is inextricably set in conversation with the physiological discourse of its historical period, in which "vitalists…sought to define the science of life beyond the mechanistic sphere of Newtonian science" (Gigante 433). In order to dramatize this dialectical paradox, Keats represents the eponymous protagonist as a supernatural,

snake-like being whose physiological indeterminacy symbolizes the Romantic notion of monstrosity as an excess of life. Gigante goes on to describe how this idea of the monstrous evolved from an Enlightenment concept of deformity to its contemporary definition as "that which exceeds representation" (434). By the same token, Lamia challenges the traditional reference points of human ontology through her ability to galvanize the intangible possibilities of imaginative play.

With attention to issues of representation, we see Lamia's status as a free-floating signifier embodied through her first appearance in the poem:

> She was a Gordian shape of dazzling hue,
> Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
> Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
> Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
> And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
> Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
> Their lusters with the gloomier tapestries— (1.47-53)

This entire description unsettles the framework of our sensory awareness, to the extent that Lamia's physiological ephemerality manipulates, or plays with, the fringes of the reader's imagination. According to the O.E.D., the adjective "gordian" can signify a "matter of extreme difficulty," which suggests that Lamia's shape is unable to fit comfortably within the standard categories of nature. Comparatively speaking, this physical incalculability works as the logical culmination of our understanding of liminal space, insofar as it obscures the essential limits of the self. Her own body becomes a complex site of contested meaning, in which she does not fall

easily into any one category of being: "striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard, / Eyes like a peacock" (Keats 49-50). Under those circumstances, she operates as a fitting allegory for the queer potential within the Romantic imagination. While Gigante argues that Lamia's explosive array of colors underscore her monstrous nature "insofar as she exceeds the telos of aesthetic form" (Gigante 439), one might argue that her resistance to normative aesthetics actually emphasizes the arbitrary contingencies upon which that form is constructed.

It is also important to realize the symbolic role of Hermes as the messenger god who employs his mythical power to mediate between Lamia's nonstandard snake form and her incorporated human form. According to Carl Jung, Hermes is "Trickster in a role as messenger, a god of the cross-roads, and finally the leader of souls to and from the underworld…His [staff] therefore penetrates from the known into the unknown world" (Jung 153). Thus, if we construe this god to be the arbiter of semiotic meaning between two opposed worlds, it becomes possible to read his transformation of Lamia as a metaphor for the queer process of artistic creation, in that it registers a suspended state in which sensory experience transcends and reconstitutes the boundaries of the self.

Keats describes the metamorphosis as a kind of physiological combustion, in which her eyes "flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks" and a "deep volcanian yellow took the place / Of all her milder-mooned body's grace" (152-56). These subliminal images expose the constraining effects of the human body as a material construct by showing how the unfixed imagination of the artist can essentially rise above the physical realm and create its own space of queer un-specificity. Within this artistic viewpoint, Lamia's subject position is constantly being

restructured, thereby foregrounding her liminal monstrousness as an expression of measureless potential "too sweet for earthly lyres" (299).

However, this creative potential is ultimately contingent upon the artist's fragile state of mind, which is easily susceptible to being recuperated via the fetters of reality, as embodied by the philosopher Apollonius. His cold faith in the material hegemony reveals the political (i.e. patriarchal) investment of those who wield power through maintaining strictly held categories of identity; this Philosophy lives to "conquer all mysteries by rule and line, / Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine -- / Unweave a rainbow" (235-38). Apollonius shatters the potential of the shared dreamscape between Lamia and Lycius by fixing his gaze upon her form, thereby situating her polymorphic otherness, or otherworldly qualities, within the strict hierarchy of material beings that translate (in physiological terms) into a "mechanistic collection of limbs, a heavy body deprived of its living principle" (Gigante 445). Without this ineffably undetermined living principle, those artists seeking to elevate their vision beyond the obdurate confines of reality cannot access the non-normative potential of queer ideas and inspiration.

As opposed to Keats' fixation with the imagination as a means of transcendence, we see Coleridge's *Christabel* negotiate the displaced category of queer through his depiction of deviant femininity. One of the primary challenges involved in examining Samuel Taylor Coleridge's haphazardly unfinished poem in relation to our attempt at configuring a Romantic queer discourse, is to find a valid way of accounting for and reconciling the ever-present tension between the protagonist's unified subject position and the persistently usurping threat of difference, which occurs on both sexual and socio-political levels. In this particular text, woman's role within the patriarchal hierarchy is made problematic by a troubling sequence of

events, during which the heroine is alternately portrayed as the active agent behind her desires in one scene, and a passive being who succumbs to an uncannily eldritch presence in the next. These identity-blurring vacillations point to a larger issue at hand – the ultimate undecidability of the feminine, as engendered through Christabel's relationship with Geraldine, an inscrutably polymorphous figure that can easily be read as a projection of the former's mental state. However, if Geraldine functions as a symbol of liberated female volition, then it is imperative to take note of the repercussions of Christabel's progressive identification with and appropriation of such a socially subversive exemplar of behavior.

As critic M.H. Abrams illustrates, Romantic philosophy and literature has a tendency to demythologize the dogmatism of Christian theology by displacing a God-oriented worldview with a Nature-centric one, in which a Hegelian-derived dialectic ensues between the subject of the human mind and the object(s) of his or her surroundings. This theoretical conceit operates from an "inclusive biological perspective" (Abrams 176), insofar as when the mind weds together two antithetical notions, opposing differences are expunged and a new synthesis is born; similarly, we see Christabel's traditional life of normalcy slowly merge with the otherworldly counterculture embodied by Geraldine, yet the degree to which that coalescence succeeds is unclear. As for Jerrold E. Hogle, Coleridge's decision to employ elements of the Gothic (a genre often deemed too vulgar for its reliance on erotic and romantic imagery) is loaded with metatextual implications, in that this literary style not only articulates people's fears of indeterminacy (thereby providing a sort of catharsis and return to the norm), but also works as a depository within which the strange and the deviant can be categorically housed, thus preserving a clean-cut dichotomy between the socially "acceptable" and what lies beyond the pale.

Yet, with “Christabel” this distancing mechanism between the self and the abject becomes ruptured by the unsettling grey areas that loom within the context of filial relations. These violently fractured forms of subjectivity in Coleridge’s poem can be interpreted as the poet’s attempt at subverting and reconstituting the conventions of the Gothic genre, in that the inscutability of the relationship between Geraldine and Cristabel represented the unfixed interstitial space that overlaps between the caprices of female fancy and the disparate world of dreams.

The themes of faith and piety are not excluded from this Romantic work, but rather are embedded in secularized forms that convey the primacy of nature as an organizing/orienting construct. At the beginning of the narrative, Christabel is described as a devout woman who uses a “huge oak tree” as her altar, where “in silence prayeth she” (Coleridge 37-38). Even though the exact recipient of her prayers remains unnamed, the fact that there exists some modified spiritual dialogue illustrates a receptive quality within the heroine, one that will prove crucial in the poem’s later events. Her ostensible virtue is encapsulated by the benevolent manner in which she selflessly embraces and tends to the needs of Geraldine. This kind of graciously unmitigated hospitality reflects the poet’s transposing of Christian moral values from their dogmatic underpinnings to a newly revised non-deistic model in which the normative altar is replaced by the liminally situated trees whose silence keeps the meaning of religious discourse in suspense.

The vestiges of Christian ideology are further appropriated through the speaker’s pointed reference to religious iconography, such as when, upon the ladies’ entrance into Christabel’s chamber, he depicts “the lamp with twofold silver chain / …fasten’d to an angel’s feet” (Coleridge 176-77). This lamp, which (according to Abrams) is a term used to signify the

constructive power of the writer's subjective mind, is associated with a symbol of divinity, which consequently implies that Christabel's identity is informed by faith, however loosely circumscribed. But by that same token, if we construe her to be representative of the Gothic genre's instability, then perhaps the link between the angel's feet and the lamp's chain symbolizes how one's faith in normative structures becomes unmoored by material constraints (i.e. the dissolved boundaries of the castle gate).

With respect to the influence of Romantic philosophy on the poem's meaning, there seems to be a latent correspondence between the Hegelian dialectic and the way in which Christabel's point of view is constructed. The former, as Abrams explains, is built on the premise of a "dual mode of subject and object, whose interactions…bring into being the phenomenal world and constitute all individual experience" (Abrams 91). This same paradigm is enacted within the poem's depiction of the heroine's (subject) encounter with Geraldine (object). Initially, Christabel occupies a subject position that appears to be fully capable of discerning truth from fantasy; when she hears Geraldine tell a tale of kidnapping and abuse under the hands of men, she immediately identifies with what she perceives to be another victim exploited by the tyrannical hegemony of the patriarchy.

This scenario gives Christabel the opportunity to play the dual masculine roles of protector and host, which most likely are not typically available to her within a male-dominated framework. Her agency is further exemplified when she directly advises Geraldine, "So to my room we'll creep in stealth / And you to-night must sleep with me" (Coleridge 116-117); on the other hand, this invitation toward intimacy can be read as the first sign of her normative identity being challenged to the degree that she defies the patriarchal authority of her father. Christabel

also has the tendency to be seduced by the aesthetic guiles of feminine beauty, without taking into account the identity-rupturing indeterminacies that are attached to it. For example, while Geraldine is undressing in the ladies' chamber, the heroine is compelled by a "brain of weal and woe," in which "so many thoughts mov'd to and fro" (Coleridge 233-34), to gaze at the frankly sexualized image of her new friend's body. Here the Hegelian model of subject-object interplay is ruptured by Christabel's failure to exert a moderating counter-action against the raw carnality of the duplicitous faux-damsel who possesses a spell "in the touch of [her] bosom…which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!" (Coleridge 255-56).

Accordingly, the heroine's ability to assert herself diminishes in conjunction with her progressive entanglement with a chameleonic female figure who takes on so many different forms that, as a result, the poem's definition of what constitutes the "real" is made extremely problematic. I believe this multiplicity of meaning reflects the displacement of the female within the generic constraints of the Gothic to the extent that both Christabel and Geraldine's subject positions become restructured by the mercurial invasion of dreams and visions.

The destabilizing of the feminine in this poem is another example of just how easy it is for the poet to invert the conventions of literary form through dramatic/narrative ambiguity. In order to make sense of the speaker's oscillating portrayals of woman, we must refer to the work's socio-cultural context -- specifically the meaning behind the pervasive ubiquity of the Gothic. As Hogle posits, this inherently artificial genre acts as the ideal cover under which Coleridge can explore "the proper range and possibilities for a woman," which are "clearly in question and quite unresolved" (Hogle 23). Keeping that in mind, certain moments now are recast in an entirely new light, such as the night when Christabel and Geraldine sleep together for

the first time. Interestingly, even though their overt intimacy is in violation of heterosexual convention, the speaker seems to recuperate the patriarchal model by describing Geraldine's slumber as akin to "a mother with her child" (Coleridge 289). Thus, Geraldine occupies the dual roles of both lover and maternal figure; such a grey area points to the indeterminacy of the Gothic female.

Despite the incestuous undertones, there is a comforting familiarity encoded in the language used during this passage that could even be construed as an evocation of the banal, in terms of how the narrative is insularly concerned with the self-contained world of two lovers, without paying any heed to the exterior world. However, this pattern is corrected in the second half of the poem, when Sir Leoline enters the narrative fold. He becomes enraptured by Geraldine's black magic and consequently endangers the entire kingdom, as revealed by the mini-narrative recited by Bracy. Sir Leoline's ultimate skepticism toward Bracy's premonition exposes the rigidity of the heteropatriarchal framework as a short-sighted construction that inhibits female agents such as Christabel from fully exploring their queer desire.

In view of this tension between creative autonomy and uninhibited inspiration, I have demonstrated that the feminine in Coleridge's "Christabel" is much more than a mere site of cultural indeterminacy, for it occupies a far more powerful and flexible position than previously conceived. By straddling the constructed line between traditional patriarchy and the Gothic unknown, the feminine operates as a symbolic tool that helps us understand the poet's daunting task of distinguishing valid sites of queer agency from the frightening bedlam of abject non-normativity.

Mediating an Intertextual Space Between Romantic Works

I have shown in my discussion of the interplay between liminal spaces and queer discourses that there exists a wide variety of fluidly transcendent subject positions that are not easily contained or recovered by normative structures. By examining the environmental landscape as a materially liminal text in *Beachy Head*, we have established the function of nature as a repository for nonhuman and ecological discourses. The subsequent narrowing of my critical lens exposed the performative staging of sexuality and desire, as evidenced in Byron's *Don Juan*. This questioning of heteronormative values has led us to realize how femininity operates as a queered and unstable site within the confines of the patriarchal system. Their free-floating liminality can be conveyed either through the withdrawn state of a madhouse (e.g. *Maria*), or via the secret networks of gossip that travel from one woman to another.

With regard to colonial discourse, we situated another prominent in-between space within the cross-cultural encounter between the heteronormative colonizer and the non-normative native, whose essential difference is conveyed through his spectral, religious, or semiotic exclusion. Finally, by turning inward, we were able to locate the unfixed potential inscribed within both the Romantic imagination and dream space. All of these liminal thresholds illustrate the ultimate freedom within queer discourse's resistance to normalizing forces, in that they show queer to be "always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming" (Jagose 3), where one's identity becomes exploded with the boundless possibilities of non-normativity. Furthermore, we might consider utilizing queer's liberating framework as a new hermeneutic lens for reading Romanticism itself as a liminal space, insofar as the literary canon situates itself between political categories (i.e. French Revolution vs. monarchy), gendered norms, and also between markedly different models of poetry. While these various texts may seem divergent in thematic

and historical scope, they are all bound by their consistent interrogation of identity as a provisional construct that wavers indecisively between the material and the immaterial.

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