

Currency of the Body and Mind: A Quest for Agency in the *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*

by Erica L. Spiller

The quest for agency is a constant theme throughout the biographies of 18th-century Victorian female poets. Paula R. Backsheider, in her book on 18th-century female poets, defines agency as “somehow resisting or escaping being socialized into being primarily imitative, writers with agency are believed to have, and be committed to, agendas and serious experimentations” (22). While it could be argued female poets in general are pushing the envelope by publishing in a form many believed should be reserved for males, Pilkington goes above and beyond to the truly experimental by publishing her personal *Memoirs*. Before her *Memoirs* were published, the readers of her time and place had only been akin to one other set of memoirs—those published by Pilkington’s friend Colley Cibber, the same man who encouraged her to publish her own. Not only did she publish in this mostly new and experimental vein, but she did so with serious commitment and agenda, two other requirements for achieving agency, according to Backsheider. Made clear in her *Memoirs* was Pilkington’s intent to gain agency through publication as she writes in Volume I:

That I, like the Classics, shall be read

When Time, and all the World are dead. (87)

Pilkington implies here that she plans on making a name for herself and that her life’s works will be preserved and read for eternity. Unfortunately, for Mrs.

Pilkington, the works of many 18th-century female poets have been buried for years, although they are beginning to re-emerge and will possibly take on the status of “classics.”

The *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington* did not remain a bestseller throughout the years following publication, but she did enjoy a great deal of attention initially following the publication. However, to understand where she ended up it is important to examine how she got there and what helped to motivate her journey.

Made clear in the early pages of her *Memoirs* is the importance that Mrs. Pilkington places on money and economic prosperity. Even in the Preface she opens with the lines:

It is usual with all Authors to write Prefaces, either to beg the
Applause of the Public, or else,
By Way of filling,
To raise their Volume's Price, a Shilling. (7)

These lines communicate that she is seeking not only more money, by way of the length of her *Memoirs*, but also that she may achieve greater notoriety by having written a Preface. Success for her is twofold—public praise and financial gain.

The fact that she is even composing *Memoirs* versus the typically Miscellany of Poems gives the sense that she is after something not only new and experimental for art's sake, but because the fresh and exciting is likely to cause a stir and thus bring in more revenue. Art for art's sake, while perhaps a theme she may have embraced in her earlier days, is likely not applicable to the production and publication of her *Memoirs*. As mentioned, what she is questing

after is a sense of agency and one that she must believe can be obtained by such a novel form for poetry and story-telling.

Her preoccupation with economic success is further established in the second page of her *Memoirs*. She begins by describing the success of her mother's ancestors and their honor, although in this case, honor is likely synonymous with money:

I was born in the Year 1712; by my Mother's Side descended of an ancient, and honourable Family, who were frequently inter-married with the Nobility. My Great Grandfather was Earl of *Killmallock*, whose Daughter married Colonel *Meade*... This Gentleman, to his Honour be it spoken, tho' he was a Man of Fortune. (10)

She goes on for several more pages describing the story of this "honourable" family, however, so as not to appear vain, interjects midway through that "As this little Piece of History redounds to the mutual Honour of both these great, and eminent Gentlemen; I hope it will not be accounted Vanity in me to recite it" (12).

Pilkington explains away her "falling from grace" as it may be seen by blaming her choice in marriage on her mother. Laetitia Van Lewen, soon to be Pilkington, boasts of her past love life:

I had almost as many Lovers... I should have been happily disposed of in Marriage, but that my Mother's capricious Temper made her reject every advantageous Proposal offered, and at last condemn me to the Arms of one of the greatest Villains, with Reverence to the Priest-hood be it spoken, that ever was wrapt up in Crape. (14)

Even in this passage she makes sure to mention that she had plenty of “advantageous” proposals, thus further illustrating her zest for money and economic success. Possibly to her detriment she did settle down with Matthew Pilkington, and despite his economic status being lower than she would have liked, the couple worked to raise their position in society.

Having been befriended by Jonathan Swift, whose celebrity status she later used by including personal anecdotes about him as a means to sell her *Memoirs*, Mr. Matthew Pilkington and his wife Laetitia entered into a community rich in poesy which allowed them both to further their attempts at poetic endeavors (Baldwin 636). They had both hoped that with Swift’s influential praise of their poetry they would find substantial income and notoriety. Unfortunately for Mr. Pilkington, Laetitia showed far greater poetic promise than her husband and she was quickly taken under the instruction of Swift who was not afraid to boast of her prowess over her husband’s (Lee 71). Laetitia describes one such occasion where Matthew had decided to mimic *Horace* and write his own ode that was stylistically similar. Laetitia decided to try her hand at this as well and reports in her *Memoirs*:

As I had finished my Task first, I shew’d it to Mr. *Pilkington*, who, contrary to my Expectation (for I imagin’d he would be pleas’d), was very angry, and told me the Dean [Swift] had made me mad, that the Lines were Nonsense, and that a Needle became a Woman’s Hand better than a Pen and Ink. So to bring him into Temper I prais’d his Ode highly, and threw my own into the Fire. And here let

me seriously advise every Lady who has the Misfortune to be
poetically turn'd, never to marry a Poet. (50)

Mr. Pilkington's envy of his wife did not stop there, and as he was more concerned about his own success, he left for London alone, despite his wife's insistence on joining him. He told her explicitly "he did not want such an Incumbrance as a Wife, that he did not intend to pass there for a married Man, and that in short he could not taste any Pleasure where I [Laetitia] was" (50).

So Mrs. Pilkington stayed in Dublin, frequently in the company of Swift, from whom she soon heard of Pope's disgust of Mr. Pilkington (Lee 71). It was during the ensuing discussion between Swift and Mrs. Pilkington that she envisioned a sort of separation between herself and husband, before any true parting took place. If she were to continue as a poetess and in the company of poets such as Swift, it was necessary she not share with Matthew the negative opinions toward him. Soon after, Matthew returned from London where he had met a woman who seemed to benefit him much more than Laetitia, and he filed for divorce on the grounds of adultery claiming he had found his wife in her bedchamber with Mr. Adair.

Whether Mrs. Pilkington ever actually committed adultery is still up for debate according to Goulding (qtd. in Kittredge 49), but his allegations were enough to obtain a divorce and the two were now officially separated. Although Matthew himself had been truly guilty of adultery he, being a male and the one who pressed charges, was believed and remained in control of all their estate, including their children, leaving Laetitia alone and practically penniless. By this

time, Matthew had made such a wretched name for himself that Swift had abandoned both of the Pilkingtons in fear of tarnishing his own reputation, and he no longer remained as an influence or savior for Laetitia. Finding herself alone and poor, Laetitia began her quest toward making her own living. Despite the prevalence of the all-too-common route of prostitution for monetary gain, Pilkington refused to go down that path (Thompson 112).

Although she swears to only using her pen as a means to gain capital, others encouraged her to use the gift of her sex. A. C. Elias Jr. mentions in his introduction to the *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington* “her husband, who tries to exploit her to other men while chasing widows or actresses on his own” (L). Michael Caines, in his book review of *The Complaints of Laetitia Pilkington*, similarly writes of her “husband who said one morning over breakfast that he felt nauseous at the sight of his wife’s breast (but was still prepared to sell her body to the highest bidder).” (3)

Matthew was not the only one trying to sell or use her body for sex capital either. Elias mentions further characters such as “married men who proposition her after her separation...his [Matthew’s] fellow clergy in Dublin, who hound her relentlessly while turning a blind eye to worse sins in their own families; and the haughty ladies, formerly her friends” (L). While staying in a lodging house shortly after the charges of adultery became known, the woman of the house actually sent a man to Laetitia’s bedchamber. Mrs. Pilkington relates the episode in her *Memoirs* upon the man entering her room after she had already told the woman she would see no one:

I started up and threw my Gown about me, but I was not quite so quick in putting on my Cloaths as the Gentleman was, in taking his off, resolving, without the least Ceremony to come to Bed with me. I pull'd my Companion who ask'd him what he meant? 'Why, who the Devil are you, you old Bitch?' said he: 'This Lady' (meaning me) 'is publickly known thro' all the Coffee Houses in *Dublin*.' (90)

Apparently, seeing her shock and upset at his admonishment he soon retracts his harsh advances and the conversation becomes a dialogue of understanding:

'Do I occasion your Tears, Madam?' 'You do Sir, and therefore I desire you will depart.' 'Well, Madam,' said he, 'I beg pardon, I had a full History of you from the Maid of the House, who said, she believ'd a Companion would not be disagreeable to you, especially as she was apprehensive you had no Money.' (90)

Following this incident, another of a similar nature, and similar stories from other married ladies in regards to the behavior of their husbands, Laetitia vows:

If every married Man, who has ever attack'd me, does not subscribe to my *Memoirs*, I will, without the least Ceremony, insert their Names, be their Rank ever so high, or their Profession ever so holy.

*I'll dash the proud Gamester from his gilded Car;
Bare the mean Heart, that lurks beneath a Star.*

And the more formal Villains, who in the Robes of Sanctity, commit worse Frauds than Highwaymen, surely ought not to remain unexpos'd.

*For me, while Heav'n afford me vital Breath,
Let them behold me, as their Scourge, till Death;
Them, thro' their Serpent Mazes, I'll pursue,
And bring each latent Vice to public View (93-4)*

As if Mrs. Pilkington's revenge threats, designed for monetary gain, are not made clear enough through this passage in her *Memoirs*, she goes on to list the price of each sin that was once told to her by a prelate. They are as follows:

	<i>l.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
For Adultery	1	7	0
For Simple Fornication	0	10	6
For Venial Transgressions	0	5	0 each. (94)

While she used threats and charts to ensure the downfall of men, eminent or not, should they cross her, she also received money by those enlisting the services of her and her pen. However, even these men should have been more cautious as the slightest indiscretion was likely to guarantee the wrath of Pilkington. Such is the case of Mr. Worsdale who left London to seek her out and ask for her help. She writes "he assured me, if I would devote my Genius to his Service, he would liberally reward me; to which I gladly consented, as an easy and honourable

Method of getting a Subsistence” (95). It would seem from Worsdale’s offer that she would be glad to have such an opportunity at making money without encountering the slanderous reputation of whoring herself for money, an occurrence which was so becoming increasingly prevalent. However, Worsdale, like many other people in her life, took one wrong turn and incurred her angry pen.

After writing a song for him, which he had asked of her, he showed it to Mr. Pilkington for review. Upon this meeting Worsdale allowed Matthew to change the last few lines, for what he thought was the better. However, when Laetitia received word of this, she labeled Mr. Pilkington’s lines as “profane and nonsensical” (96). Worsdale, seemingly as much of a questionable character as Matthew himself, soon began showing each Pilkington the other’s lines while claiming them as his own, and found them both to be equally successful in the public eye. However, Matthew demanded an increase in payment for his lines causing Worsdale to drop him for the less expensive Mrs. Pilkington who now seemed to be above the poverty line.

Although she was bringing in an income substantial enough to support herself, Laetitia soon gave birth to a female child – the child of which man no one can be sure, although she claims it as Matthew’s – and could no longer afford the lifestyle she desired on the salary from Worsdale. This caused her to return to threats and slanderous writings in an attempt to obtain more subscriptions to her *Memoirs*.

The threat money coupled with her reputation allowed her to be as prosperous as she was, although admittedly that was not very prosperous at all (Braeshear 617). As Caine mentions in his review “The comedian Henry Woodward sent her up on stage, at Dublin’s Smock Alley theatre in 1748, as the ‘Mrs Pill-Kill-Tongue’ who hissed ‘Subscribe, or else I’ll paint you like the Devil” (3). Caine further discusses how grateful she was for the attention, and in that assertion he is right on point. At this time in her life her reputation was already tarnished and she would not have seen portrayals of her as wicked, as long as they were only slanderous toward her writing and not her virtue.

In the title page of her *Memoirs* she defends her virtue while hamming up her publicity. The title page reads:

THE MEMOIRS OF Mrs. Laetitia Pilkington, WIFE TO THE Rev.
Mr. Matth. Pilkington. Written by HERSELF. Wherein are
occasionally interspersed, All her POEMS, WITH Anecdotes of
several eminent Persons, Living and Dead. In TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. 1. But one Stroke more, and that shall be my last. (3)

Her virtue is protected by the fact that she lists herself as still being the wife of Matthew Pilkington. By paying some sort of homage to him it makes her seem the better person who may not have any vendetta against him, although most audiences would know that is not the case. Also, by addressing her husband on the cover page she is adding fuel to the fire considering the scandal of their divorce was well known. It could be confidently inferred by readers subscribing to

this first volume that they would be welcomed with a healthy dose of inside glances at the gossip which surrounded the Pilkingtons.

Although the *Memoirs* are filled with libel and Laetitia often found subjects for such slander in people who would not subscribe to her volume, there was also profit to be made off those who she could portray in a positive light (Thompson 111). In one such circumstance she includes two poems written to a man from whom she “receiv’d an unexpected Bounty” (Elias 113). The poems she writes to him praise his virtue and name, although she never identifies him, at his request. She likely published these poems that cast him in such a positive light in an attempt to be handed more money from him in the future, but unfortunately for her he passed away soon after.

Following the death of her unidentified lender, she soon lost her support from the other financial backer in her life: Worsdale. Upon promising him a hundred Ballads, which she could not produce fast enough for his liking, she was scolded for her lack to deliver and their correspondence and professional career was considerably dissolved. It is here, in the loss of two men of funding that she decides

[To] leave *Ireland*; for though I led the Life of a Recluse, I had every Day some new Story invented of me. If I went out to take a little Air, they said, I had great Impudence to shew my Face; and if I stay’d at Home, I was then in Keeping with some Man who confin’d me, and, in short, I could please no body. (115)

Soon after these lines she ends her first volume only to return with Volume II, housing increased slander and further attempts at gaining economic agency.

While she had used her relationship with Swift as the primary means to sell issues of Volume I, also mixing in some slander and praise for other “eminent persons,” she resorts almost exclusively to libel as a means to gain subscriptions to the second volume. For those who would not be scared into subscribing to this volume, she makes an addition to her front page not seen in Volume I. She includes verses from Pope, Virgil, and Ovid not only to showcase herself as well read, but in a way comparing her skill to theirs. Furthermore, as opposed to the line “Anecdotes of several eminent Persons, Living and Dead” on the front matter of Volume I, she now uses the line “With Variety of SECRET TRANSACTIONS of some EMIMENT PERSONS” (119). The difference in the Volume II line can immediately be seen in the way in which the page is printed as phrases such as “SECRET TRANSACTIONS” and “EMIMENT PERSONS” are printed in all capital letters calling attention to the scandal with which the volume will clearly be filled. Furthermore, the words themselves are nowhere near as innocent as the word “anecdote” used in the first volume. Anyone picking up Volume II would be quick to notice the defamation they would be reading.

Knowing that Volume II was rife with accusations about well known people, Pilkington is smart in framing this preface with a motif of how she had been wronged and is therefore not responsible for her portrayal of the acts against her. She also begins the narrative portion of her *Memoirs* in Volume II by

describing how she maintained her virtue during her entire trip from Dublin to London, even though she had many licentious offers from fellow male travelers.

Upon arriving in London she was first visited by Colley Cibber who encouraged her poetry. She wrote sarcastic verses about Cibber himself, which greatly amused him, and he began to spread support for Pilkington (Thompson 111). She became particularly popular at *White's* where gentlemen such as Lord Fitz Roy took a liking to discussing Pilkington's poetry with her. These men encouraged her writing and many of the men Lord Fitz Roy and Pilkington solicited gave her money for a subscription to Volume II; however, when one Colonel refused, she wrote a poem about him included in the second volume. She comments in the poem on his mistress, who he gives a fair amount of money to, but that he will not give any to her for her poetry:

Now, pray, Sir, consider the Case of your Mistress,
Who neither can kiss, nor write Verses, in Distress:
For *Bacchus*, and *Ceres*, we frequently prove,
Are Friends to the Muses as well as to Love. (138)

The lines had their intended affect as the other men at *White's* chided the Colonel about his portrayal. The Colonel, soon tiring of the sport, sent Mrs. Pilkington a bottle of brandy as an apology although he joined her in consuming it. While this may have been a poor excuse for an apology, he actually did her a favor by introducing her to the Duke of Marlborough who approached as the two were sitting together. The Duke had heard that she was in want of money "and, opening his Pocket-Book, presented me with a Bank Note on Sir *Francis Child*

for Fifty Pounds” (139). After giving her the money he insisted she write something nice about the Colonel so as not to tarnish his reputation to which she agreed and composed some lines extempore.

She continues Volume II by either praising or insulting the character of many people that she encounters. However, this deviates from Volume I in that she does it with increased frequency and almost exclusively. While she does mention things that happen to her, she is less inclined to write about how certain events made her feel or show any remorse for mistakes she may have made in the past. In Volume I, while still focusing on the fortune she seeks, she often apologizes for upsetting Matthew, or mentions how lost or hopeless she was without her children. In her poem “Sorrow,” which can be found in Volume I, both her greed and sorrow appear coupled together:

...Encompass'd round with Ruin, Want and Shame,
Undone in Fortune, blasted in my Fame,
Lost to the soft endearing Ties of Life,
And tender Names of Daughter, Mother, Wife;
Can no Recess from Calumny be found?
And yet can Fate inflict a deeper Wound!

Thus the poor Bird when frightened from her Nest
With agonizing Love, and Grief distrest,
Still fondly hovers o'er the much lov'd Place,
Tho' strengthless, to protect her tender Race;

In piercing Notes she movingly complains,
And tells the unattending Woods her Pains. (91-2)

This poem runs for six stanzas and although mixed with her preoccupation with fortune, still seems to represent a pouring out of her heart's woes. However, a poem which describes her "distress" in Volume II is only one stanza and is more generalized by speaking to the race of women as opposed to her personal pain:

CAN, alas! the plaintive Pray'r
Dictated by Grief sincere,
Hope to reach a friendly Ear;
Will the kind and bounteous Heart
Sympathize while I impart
Such Affliction, as before
Never hapless Woman bore. (203)

While this poem clearly has similar themes to the one in Volume I, they each take on a different tone. Each poem seeks attention from others who are in a better situation than the author; however, the appeal to the audience is significantly more subtle in the first compared to the blatant call for sympathy and money. She asks point blank that a "bounteous" person help her out of her affliction. As a result of the obvious solicitation of money she receives the reply "I have so many Applications for Charity, that it is impossible for me to relieve all" (203). It appears as though now she is getting desperate and selling her wit in exchange for any sort of currency.

Where once Pilkington's wit resembled something worth a fair penny, as seen by Swift and other contemporaries, she had degraded herself to such a point where very few seemed to give merit to her poetic skill, although it surely remained somewhere within her. She even goes so far in the conclusion of Volume II to carry on a conversation with herself in which she attacks and defends her own work, and she leaves off with a promise that her third volume will be filled with even more "surprising Events, and infinitely more entertaining than either of the foregoing" (253).

The third volume, published posthumously by her son, can be best summed up in the first two paragraphs:

A Third Volume of Memoirs is a really bold Undertaking, as they are generally light, frothy, and vain; yet I have met with such unhop'd Success, that I am quite encouraged to proceed; more especially as my Word is pass'd to the Publick; and my Word I have ever held sacred. I cannot, like a certain Female Writer, say, I hope if I have done nothing to please, I have done nothing to offend; for truly I mean to give both Pleasure and Offence: Lemon and Sugar is very pretty. I should be sorry to write a Satire which did not sting, nor will I ever write a Panegyrick on an Undeserver: If a Rogue should happen to be mine honest Friend, I owe him Silence; but that is the most he can expect.

Many indeed are glad to become Purchasers. Persons whom I know nothing of, come and beg I may not put them into the Third Volume; and they will subscribe: Surely then they should knock at their own Hearts; and if it confess a natural Guiltiness,

Let it not breathe a Thought upon their Tongue

To my Dishonour – Shakespear.

I threaten not any, nor did I ever do it; but Characters are my Game, who

Eye Nature's Walks, shoot Folly as it flies,

And catch the Manners living as they rise. (263)

Contained within the paragraphs are her motivation and justification for her *Memoirs*. She is well aware of the criticism she has received, and thankful for it as the public interest boosted her readership. She is also in tune to the fear aligned with potential slanderous publication of notable public figures and how that fear manifested into further subscriptions. In preceding passage she rationalizes her art, story-telling, and intentions, but they matter not for what an artist produces is up to that artist and their intent remains their property as well. In the case of Laetitia Pilkington she used her wit, whether poetic or manipulative threats, to gain notoriety because she knew that it would bring in the subscriptions and allow her to be an independent woman and an owner of agency.

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Surprise of Surprises: Virginia Woolf, Mary McCarthy, and the Politics of Female Pleasure

by Tara Roeder

Whenever a woman is incapable of achieving an orgasm via coitus, provided the husband is an adequate partner, and prefers clitoral stimulation to any other form of sexual activity, she can be regarded as suffering from frigidity and requires psychiatric assistance.

—Frank S. Caprio

The advent of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century heralded a new interest in women's sexuality. This focus is evident not only in numerous (predominantly male-authored) psychoanalytic accounts, but in the literary work of male writers from D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce to Henry Miller and Norman Mailer. Yet often running counter to these narratives are the texts of women who author their own visions of sexual pleasure. My goal here is to explore the work of two powerful twentieth century female authors who speak back to dominant conceptions of sexuality. While on the surface the work of Virginia Woolf and that of Mary McCarthy appear to have little in common, each is deeply invested in exploring the politics of sexuality in innovative ways. Reading the work of Virginia Woolf against the first wave of Freudian theory and the work of Mary McCarthy against the numerous studies that emerged in the 1950s linking femininity to passivity is instructive in demonstrating how female-authored

counter-narratives can disrupt masculinist understandings of female pleasure. Such readings offer us a window into how these women were able to re-script the beliefs of analysts who would, in the words of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, “ratify ... the status quo into psychic laws, and perpetuate it under the sanction of ‘normalcy’” (98).

In *Prescription for Sexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era*, Carolyn Herbst Lewis examines the ways in which “healthy female sexual response” came to be regarded as the “foundation of successful heterosexual performance for both men and women in the 1950s” (38). In the wake of Freud’s work, a generation of doctors and psychoanalysts became adamant that anything but vaginal orgasm as the result of sexual penetration “did not qualify as well-adjusted, mature, healthy, or normal” for women (38). In line with the gendered mainstream political ideology of the day, “nice” women did not enjoy clitoral stimulation.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir—another woman author who defiantly resists the kind of gendered essentialism at the heart of such “normalizing” projects—pays special attention to the complexity of women’s eroticism, describing the “opposition of ...two organs: the clitoris and the vagina” (372). For de Beauvoir, there is significance in the fact that “the clitorid system remains unmodified in the adult, and the woman retains this erotic independence all her life” (372). In part an attack on what she sees as a Freudian focus on biological determinism, de Beauvoir’s ambitious and unprecedented study claims that vaginal sexuality is of “secondary importance” (372). Addressing the work of Kinsey et. al., de Beauvoir attempts to resist the characterization of women’s “passive” role in regards to both sexuality and society at large, famously claiming that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (267): “[T]he passivity that

is the essential characteristic of the 'feminine' woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert that a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society" (280).

Like de Beauvoir, Woolf and McCarthy represent the voices of early to mid-twentieth century women writers who imagined their own paths through the contested territory of "clitoral" versus "vaginal" orgasms; "normal" versus "deviant" sexual pleasure. Woolf and McCarthy address mainstream expectations about female orgasms in decidedly different ways. Although McCarthy effaces the earlier, radical politics of clitoral orgasm inscribed in the texts of Virginia Woolf, examining the two writers in light of each other highlights some of the diverse ways in which 20th century women have sought to re-imagine prevailing psychoanalytic wisdom on the subject of women's pleasure. Rather than explicitly engaging in an oedipal confrontation with status quo configurations of the "ideal" orgasm, the fiction of women as different as McCarthy and Woolf introduces alternative possibilities for female sexuality in response to popular paradigms.

This essay offers a feminist engagement with the politics of the female orgasm in McCarthy and Woolf, reading their texts against the grain of psychoanalytic wisdom that privileges vaginal penetration as procreative, mature, and desirable. As Judith Fetterly reminds us, "When only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted and when that limited vision insists on its comprehensiveness," we lose the ability "to change our understanding of these fictions" (xi-xii). By delving into the counter-narratives of women, we can engage in meaningful acts of re-vision, conceived by Adrienne Rich as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old

text from a new critical direction” (Rich 18). The women whose texts I engage with here do exactly that, re-vising male-authored versions of female sexuality. I hope to show the meaningful ways in which their voices disrupt a larger socio-political framework in which female sexuality has been pre-scripted and co-opted by masculinist expectations.

***She Began to Like it a Little: Challenging the “Tyranny of the Orgasm” in Mary
McCarthy***

Mary McCarthy writes to Hannah Arendt on December 11, 1970, “I saw the current Women’s Lib idol, an absurd Australian giantess [Germaine Greer] who made remarks like ‘We must make them understand that fucking is a *political act*’” (Brightman 275). Although notoriously hostile to organized feminism, McCarthy’s aversion to “politicized fucking” had taken a different form in 1947, when her anger over Lundberg and Farnham’s *Modern Woman, The Lost Sex* led her to write a scathing review entitled “Tyranny of the Orgasm.” In it, she critiques the book’s “adjuration to American women to return to the home and leave men’s pursuits to men” (168). Starting with Kinsey’s findings that “from 50 to 85 per cent of American women college graduates had never experienced an orgasm” and “the percentage continued to decline as schooling was less intensive” (McCarthy 167), Lundberg and Farnham attempted to show, in the wry words of McCarthy, that “woman can recapture the orgasm by accepting her biological destiny. She must have at least three children and renounce her ego-striving activities in higher education and career-seeking [...] She must also renounce sexual freedom” (169). The “modern” woman (of whom McCarthy herself was an exemplar) was

described as neurotic and frigid. “If frigidity is to be viewed as a national scandal on a par with political corruption,” McCarthy writes, “the remedy at least seems obvious. The mother of little girls has only to present Dr. Kinsey’s figures to the truant officer” (167). Lambasting “the disingenuousness of this kind of reason that uses its own hypothesis as proof, that appeals always to the authority of ‘facts’ and allows itself at the same time an anarchy of interpretation” (173), “Tyranny of the Orgasm” is one of the few pieces by McCarthy in which the anger beneath the irony is palpable.

In Chapter Two of her novel *The Group*, published in 1963, McCarthy tackles the female orgasm on her own terms. In “Tyranny of the Orgasm,” she scornfully remarks that in *The Lost Sex* “the terminology of love and of medicine is replaced by the jargon of the factory and the garage” (170). McCarthy decides to bring back the terminology, not of love, but of medicine, when she describes Dick (with his “friendly, instructive voice”) undressing Dottie for her first sexual encounter: “he left her in her slip, just as they did in the doctor’s office” (*The Group*38).

Dick forces himself on Dottie, and Dottie likes it:

“Damn it,” he said. “Relax. You’re making it harder.” Just then, Dottie screamed faintly; it had gone all the way in. He put his hand over her mouth and then settled her legs around him and commenced to move it back and forth inside her. At first, it hurt so that she flinched at each stroke and tried to pull back, but this only seemed to make him more determined. Then, while she was still praying for it to be over, surprise of surprises, she started to like it a little. (41)

Then (surprise of surprises), Dottie has an orgasm: “all of a sudden, she seemed to explode in a series of long, uncontrollable contractions that embarrassed her, like the hiccups, the moment they were over, for it was as if she had forgotten Dick as a person” (41). When Dick falls asleep on top of her, she of course assumes that “something had gone wrong—probably her fault,” and is “ashamed of the happiness she had felt¹” (41). When she wakes Dick, he has the “air of a satisfied instructor”:

“You *came*, Boston,” he remarked ... Dottie glanced uncertainly at him; could he mean that thing she had done that she did not like to think about? “I beg your pardon,” she murmured. “I mean you had an orgasm.” ... “A climax,” he added, more sharply. “Do they teach that word at Vassar?” “Oh,” said Dottie, almost disappointed that that was all there was to it ... “It’s normal then?” she wanted to know, beginning to feel better. Dick shrugged. “Not for girls of your upbringing. Not the first time, usually.” (45).

It’s certainly not normal if Lundberg and Farnham have anything to say about it, and, as Dottie recalls, “Even mother hinted that satisfaction was something that came after a good deal of time and experience and that love made a big difference” (46)².

¹ Much like the narrative of female heterosexual experience outlined in *The Second Sex*: “(During intercourse) the fever (of female sexual excitement) rids her of shame for the moment, but afterward she is ashamed and horrified to think of it” (391).

² Although, luckily for female normalcy, a second, clitoral orgasm brought on by Dick’s manual stimulation is “less thrilling”; “‘Didn’t you like that,’ he demanded [...] ‘Not quite so much as the other, Dick.’ Dick laughed. ‘A nice, normal girl. Some of your sex prefer that.’ Dottie shivered ... it seemed to her almost perverted” (48).

Despite her contempt for Dottie (and Dottie's contempt for non-vaginal orgasm), McCarthy's "frank" detailing of the "facts" of a woman's first experience with intercourse—like her subsequent fitting for a pessary—is a significant act politically: "To bring certain kinds of information into print, even as *fiction*, is ultimately to rework the public/private divide and to redefine national propriety with its attendant unself-consciously universalist claims"(Miller 189). McCarthy is claiming a space in public discourse for the private experiences of women. I want to suggest that Dottie's orgasm is significant in another way as well; Simone de Beauvoir writes that "according to Stekel's statistics ... scarcely 4 per cent of women have orgasmic pleasure from the beginning" (391). McCarthy's unusual choice in giving Dottie—a Vassar graduate, and thus part of the most "frigid" portion of the "lost sex" Lundberg and Farnham are trying to liberate through housework-related orgasm—a climax during her first sexual experience is indeed significant. (As is Dottie's being "almost disappointed that that's all there was to it" afterwards—not only was it easy for her, it was also no big deal.) McCarthy's decision to grant an orgasm to an unmarried, sexually inexperienced female college graduate having definitively non-procreative sex continues the work she began in "Tyranny of the Orgasm." McCarthy undoes the logic of Lundberg and Farnham³ with the sexual exploits of Dottie and Dick.

What happens to Dottie afterwards is no triumphant feminist narrative—after being told by Dick to "get herself a pessary" (58), Dottie ends up alone and ashamed on

³ Logic she bitingly outlines, in "Tyranny of the Orgasm," as: "The devaluation of the home made woman lose her ... sense of self importance ... Woman, to recover her prestige, began to compete with man in his own domain, to work outside the home, vote, get educated, fornicate, and neglect her children ... but woman's biological nature ... punished her for not having children, for undervaluing the home and the feminine activities (nursing, dishwashing, sewing, furniture-polishing, cooking, tutoring), by refusing her the orgasm (168).

a park bench. Dick never contacts her, and she hides her contraceptives in the park and returns home to Boston. Yet while the sardonic anger of “Tyranny” is replaced by McCarthy’s trademark distance and irony in *The Group*, make no mistake about it: the writing of Dottie’s orgasm (despite McCarthy’s claims to the contrary) is indeed “a political act.”

A System of Waves: Clitoral Orgasm as Protest in Virginia Woolf

Unlike McCarthy, Virginia Woolf is well known for her explicit engagement with feminist politics in her non-fiction works such as *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*. In her fiction, Woolf continues her significant commitment to challenging phallogocentric logic, specifically through the inscription of female sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir writes that, “It is striking that in the woman there is a choice of two systems, one of which perpetuates juvenile independence while the other consigns woman to man and childbearing” (373). The “choice” between the clitoral and the vaginal is seen as the choice between “juvenile independence” and submission to a patriarchal model of procreative heterosexuality. In the world delineated by Freud, the vagina rightfully usurps the clitoris as a girl “becomes” a woman; “mature” female sexuality is, for Freud, vaginal⁴ (676). Within de Beauvoir’s “two systems” model, the choice of clitoral orgasm

⁴ In “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” Anne Koedt corrects this assumption: “Whenever female orgasm and frigidity are discussed, a false distinction is made between the vaginal and the clitoral orgasm. Frigidity has generally been defined by men as the failure of women to have vaginal orgasms. Actually the vagina is not a highly sensitive area and is not constructed to achieve orgasm. It is the clitoris which is the center of sexual sensitivity ... Although there are many areas for sexual arousal, there is only one area for sexual climax; that area is the clitoris.”

by an adult woman can thus function as a protest against patriarchy, a defiant sign of “juvenile independence.”

In her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf highlights the ways in which patriarchal narratives cannot successfully contain female desire. The most illuminating feature of Clarissa Dalloway’s love triangle (Peter, Richard, Clarissa) is that it’s not a triangle at all; “the most exquisite moment of [Clarissa’s] whole life” involves another woman (34). Pondering “this question of love ... this falling in love with women,” Clarissa thinks, “Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?” (32). The moment of connection with another woman is described as:

a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture...for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed.
(32)

Clarissa’s memories of her relationship with Sally ignite the text: “The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one’s feeling for a man. It [...] sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe)” (34). While traditional heterosexual encounters are predicated on the notion of male as active and woman as passive, the expression of love between two

women will have a different shape. The hierarchy of patriarchal relationships can be undone in the moments of passion between women who are “in league together.”

Clarissa remembers Sally kissing her “on the lips”: “The whole world might have turned upside down!” (35). This moment permits the creation of a private space between the two women:

The others disappeared. There she was alone with Sally. And she felt she had been given a present, wrapped up...something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!—when old Joseph and Peter faced them: ‘Star-gazing?’ said Peter.” (36)

The gift of Sally’s kiss, Clarissa and Sally’s rhythmic walking, alone, together, is abruptly halted by the intrusion of the men: “It was like running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!” (36). Clarissa’s memory of this moment of “juvenile independence” (de Beauvoir 373), the pleasure of which “radiates throughout the whole body” (de Beauvoir 396), is also a moment of dissent, a reminder of the “integrity” of the bond she shared with Sally before the “catastrophe” of marriage. Here Woolf makes clear that Freudian “maturation” narratives, as well as traditional marriage plots, are unsatisfactory constructs for her female characters.

Peter Walsh, of course, sees things differently: “Women, he thought, shutting his pocket-knife, don’t know what passion is ... Clarissa was as cold as an icicle” (80).

The “wrapped up” love that Clarissa and Sally share (and the “virginal” aspect she

displays publicly) are veiled threats to masculine narrative. Although publicly Clarissa has followed the Freudian model of sexual “maturation,” trading the pleasure of Sally’s kiss for that of heterosexual marriage, the memory of “the most exquisite moment of her life” retains the power to transport Clarissa back to the “sudden revelation” that comes from a moment of connection with another woman. The lyric, orgasmic quality of Woolf’s language when describing these moments can’t be fully contained by the other—triangular, heterosexual—plot of the text.

By blurring the boundaries between private and public, “feminine” and “masculine,” and personal and political in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf is indeed “suggesting that we damn ourselves if, in constructing a view of the world we deny a connection between politics and feelings or values, and so create a politics lacking both beauty and joy” (Edwards 111). She is also offering, as a (politically significant) counter-narrative to the patriarchal story of Freudian development, a powerful account of women’s connections couched in the language of the clitoris.

The theme of female desire as multiple also runs throughout 1927’s *To The Lighthouse*, where “nothing is simply one thing” (186). The lighthouse as phallus is denied a privileged space in the text; instead Woolf acknowledges a plurality of models of female pleasure. Mrs. Ramsay, the “essential female” who “knows without looking round” (9), gently insists to Lily Briscoe that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” (49). “Oh but,” Lily thinks, “there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting. But all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other. Yet...she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that” (50). Lily provides an alternative model for women, gently insisting on the intimate pleasures of

art, home, and solitude in the face of Mrs. Ramsay's concern with finding her a suitable husband.

Mrs. Ramsay's model of sexuality is indeed based on female/male mutuality:

Rose's arrangement of the grapes and pears, of the horny pink-lined shell, of the bananas, made her think of a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea ... she saw that Augustus Carmichael too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking; different from hers. But looking together united them. (97)

The juxtaposition of "grapes and pears" with "the horny pink-lined shell" and "the bananas" gratifies her. Her ("female") way of looking is complemented by Carmichael's ("male") way; she imagines the bottom of the sea while he "plunges in" and breaks off blooms. "Looking together," however, "unites them." Male and female are reciprocal for Mrs. Ramsay, who in many ways enacts (even as she slyly complicates) the kind of binary imagining of "male" and "female" Hélène Cixous famously maps out in her essay "Sorties": "Activity/passivity; Sun/Moon; [...] Father/Mother; Head/Heart" (37).

For Lily, the sources of pleasure are different, and creative in another way. Her act of painting is described in the following terms:

With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke.

The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas ... A second time she did it—a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with ... lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed ... a space. (158)

This space, the product of rhythmic strokes, is a space of female pleasure, the pleasure of women who “like to be alone.” Woolf’s language here is decidedly suggestive of sexual pleasure. As Jennifer Beth Simmons points out, “Through masturbation women [can] ‘test and transgress’ not only the interrelations of fantasy and reality, but also the heteronormative prescriptions of gender and sexuality” (73-74). Lily’s intense pleasure in solitude and art is a threat to normalizing, gendered prescriptions that would prefer to assign her a role as one half of a distinctly gendered, reciprocal couple.

Woolf is careful to avoid, however, creating a Lily/Mrs. Ramsay binary; there’s a *but also* here. Mrs. Ramsay too speaks a language of multi-faceted desire when she feels as if the light of the lighthouse:

were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly ... and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and ecstasy burst in her

eyes and waves of pure delight raced over ... her ... and she felt, it is enough!

It is enough! (65)

Woolf's luxuriant language here suggests that the ability to achieve ecstasy in solitude remains for even the "essential" wife and mother, Mrs. Ramsay. The joyful and "private" experiences of both women in *To the Lighthouse* challenge a reading of the lighthouse as phallic signifier, as well as Mr. Ramsay's slow, linear plod to the letter Z. Female experience—and the function of female orgasm—in *To the Lighthouse* is illuminated by Lily Briscoe's realization that, "The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (161).

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf makes explicit the politics of Mrs. Dalloway, which hint that marriage and heterosexual procreativity are not the be all and end all of women's experience. In the figure of Lily Briscoe, the androgynous artist, Woolf creates a female character whose pleasure comes solely from herself. While many of Woolf's female characters tug at the recognized scripts of Freudian sexuality, Lily tears them wide open. Moreover, Woolf transcends the realm of the literal in her fiction, linguistically and structurally inscribing the contours of female pleasure in her work. In their non-fiction, both Woolf and McCarthy explicitly challenge masculinist notions of the possibilities available to women. In Woolf's fiction, these challenges present themselves not only through her narratives of non-conforming women, but through the very shape of her texts. The politics of such a choice is indeed a radical one; by

refusing to replicate its tropes or patterns, Woolf unmoors the very foundations of phallogentric sexuality.

Political Orgasms and Orgasmic Politics: A Conclusion

The act of creating erotic knowledge has a political, as well as aesthetic function. By recoding the diverse sexual experiences of women in defiantly unapologetic terms, both McCarthy and Woolf resist power structures that demand passive, receptive versions of femininity.

While I'm hesitant to structure this conversation in terms of a binary, I do think that one way of highlighting the significance of such acts is to briefly look at the prose of McCarthy and Woolf in the light of synchronously male-authored texts. Woolf contemporary and fellow modernist D.H. Lawrence, for example, provides a vision of female sexuality in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that is no less political than Woolf's own, though his agenda is quite different. Lawrence posits the act of mutual, male/female orgasm, achieved via vaginal intercourse, as a powerful counter to the crippling forces of industry. Although his view of heterosexual intercourse as a reciprocal act diverges significantly from the kind of misogynist views being promoted by other male authors of the time (notably the Italian Futurists), Lawrence's reciprocity only goes so far: "I believe in being warm-hearted [...] in fucking with a warm heart. I believe if men could fuck with warm hearts, and the women take it warm-heartedly, everything would come all right," declares Mellors (207). Significantly, Mellors rather bitterly criticizes women who "just lie there like nothing and let you go ahead"; women who "pretend they're passionate [...]"

but [...] they make it up”; women who “want to be the active party [...] and bring themselves off”; women who are “just dead inside”; and finally, women who “put you out before you really come” (203). (These latter though, are “mostly the lesbian sort,” whom Mellors “could kill.”) This misogynist rant leaves a proscriptive space for what de Beauvoir calls the “true woman,” the woman who “unreservedly accepts being defined as the Other” (224). In contrast, the multiple avenues of pleasure open to Woolf’s female characters (male/female reciprocity, certainly, but also multiple versions of self-pleasure) suggest that it is up to women themselves to define both their purposes and their sources of sexual enjoyment.

Norman Mailer (a snide critic of McCarthy’s *The Group*), sees his own work in “The Time Of Her Time” as sexually revolutionary. In his preface to the piece in *Advertisements for Myself*, he writes: “There was a frontier for my generation of novelists. [...] We had to write our way out into the unspoken territories of sex” (476). The particular way in which Mailer writes himself “out into the unspoken territories of sex” here happens to rely largely on the myth of the frigid, neurotic woman who secretly longs to be degraded by a “virile” man. The story revolves around his protagonist’s attempt to “give” an orgasm to a Jewish college student with “all sorts of Lesbian hysterias in her shrieking laugh” (487). Denise does not have orgasms, which leaves him feeling, in his words, “murderous because she had deprived me, she had fled the domination which was liberty for her” (490). Increasingly enraged by her sexual “independence” (496), he eventually “succeeds” in his quest when he forces her to have anal sex and whispers in her ear “You dirty little Jew” (502). Since literature is indeed “political” (Fetterly xi), McCarthy’s critique of Lundberg and Farnham, as well as her

account of Vassar-educated Dottie's matter-of-fact first orgasm, seems even more crucial as an alternative to Mailer's phallus-driven account of how a man's sexual revenge on a female intellectual leads her to ecstasy.

As bell hooks reminds us, "We still live among generations of women who have never known sexual pleasure, women for whom sex has only ever meant loss, threat, annihilation" (86). In the face of such knowledge, it seems instructive to look to the work of women who have mapped out stories of women's erotic enjoyment, who explore a variety of sexual practices that "may range from promiscuity to celibacy, from embracing one specific sexual identity and preference or choosing a roaming uncharted desire" (hooks 92). The erotic knowledge created by Mary McCarthy and Virginia Woolf certainly calls into question the limited and static notions of female pleasure that had come to define the female experience in the work of many early to mid-twentieth century psychoanalysts and authors. When examined together, the defiance of McCarthy and the lyric protest of Woolf illuminate some of the diverse possibilities available to 20th century women writers who sought to wrench the female orgasm from the bounds of Freudian teleology. Politicized and contextualized, Dottie's orgasm becomes a critical response to Lundberg and Farnham's insistence that women are consistently defined by lack, while the clitoral pleasure of Woolf's protagonists speaks back to a linear understanding of female sexual development. The juxtaposition of these heterogeneous narratives leads ultimately to a multiplicity of models for female climax—in effect, to the toppling of the tyranny of *the* orgasm.

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The New Tattooed Lady: A Social and Sexual Analysis of Kat Von D and Megan Massacre

by Anni Irish

Tattooing, a body adornment practice that has become popular in contemporary culture, has a very fraught social history in the United States. This is especially true of the heavily tattooed female body, which has heretofore existed in marginal subcultures like freak shows and circuses; however it is the current representation of this body that I will explore in this paper. Reality television shows such as the TLC Network's *LA Ink* and *NY Ink*, which take place in tattoo shops, have had a profound effect in shaping contemporary attitudes about tattooing and the people who engage in this subculture. As Margot Mifflin notes in the third edition of her book *Bodies of Subversion: The Secret History of Women and Tattoo*: "Reality TV shows brought tattooing into middle class living rooms and showcased many quality women artists starting with the game changing Kat Von D" (101). However, these shows have also assisted in the fetishization of the heavily tattooed body. Kat Von D, an internationally known tattoo artist and star of *LA Ink*, has become the modern day equivalent of the tattooed lady. While Von D has branded herself through the show and has developed her own line of products from it, there is a specific way in which her body is perceived. Like Von D, Megan Massacre is a tattoo artist and reality television star, on the TLC show *NY Ink*. Massacre has come to be viewed in a similar way. Through the lens of queer, gender, performance and disability studies I will analyze how the heavily tattooed female body has reached a new level of hypervisibility within popular culture using Kat Von D and Megan Massacre as case studies.

Through these contemporary examples, I will analyze the ways in which the social history surrounding the heavily tattooed female body has contributed to current social attitudes. I will be defining queer as Mel Chen does in her 2012 book *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect*. According to Chen, “my core sense of 'queer' refers, as might be expected, to exceptions to the conventional ordering of sex, reproduction, and intimacy, though it at times also refers to animacy's veering away from dominate ontologies and the normativities they promulgate” (11). It is this “veering away from dominate ontologies” that I wish to explore in relationship the heavily tattooed female body. I posit that the heavily tattooed female body on several levels is operating within a queer social space. It is a body that is challenging societal and aesthetics norms while also attempting to create an alternative social space that fits into this larger definition of queer.

Through the creation of a queer alternative space, there is a larger history which also must be acknowledged that affects the ways in which this body is viewed. When thinking about how memory and perception are formed within a larger historical and social consciousness, the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson, who introduced a revolutionary concept of multiplicity, becomes useful to consider. Within his 1896 book, *Matter and Memory*, Bergson attempts to define memory and the ways in which it functions inside and outside of the body. According to Bergson:

With the immediate and present data of our sense we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience. In most cases these memories supplant our actual perceptions of which we then retain only a few hints, thus using them merely as 'signs' that recall to us former images. The convenience and rapidity of perception are bought at this price; but hence also springs every kind of illusion. (41)

Bergson's notion of "present data" offers a helpful framework through which to think about the heavily tattooed female body. The present data in today's popular culture that directly relates to the heavily tattooed female body is centered on reality television and the internet. However it is within these representations, perhaps the "signs" that Bergson references, that bring us closer to the "former images" (41). In that passage there seems to be an acknowledgment and awareness of the ways in which memories supplement our perceptions and the ways in which history informs this. It is the history of a specific body, group of people, social movement or object which informs the way it operates in the world. By taking up this Bergsonian notion of how memory is formed, I will discuss the ways in which the fetishized notion of the heavily tattooed woman has come into being.

By using Chen's definition of queer and Bergson's theory surrounding memory formation, I am making a larger argument surrounding the social history of tattooing in America and women's roles within this. It is through the creation of an alternative social space and the attached memories and bodies that a substitute reading of history can also begin to emerge. According to Saidiya Hartman in her 2008 article "Venus in Two Acts,"

As I understand it, a history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery but rather as the anticipated future of this writing. The writing is personal because this history has engendered me because 'the knowledge of the other marks me' because of the pain experienced in my encounter with the scraps of the archive. (5)

Here Hartman is speaking specifically about the ways in which alternative readings of history and how the archive can occur both in terms of our experience and the dead. While the scope of this article and Hartman's larger scholarship is looking at the ways in which slavery has

come to be understood and represented she is also looking at the ways in which specific narratives have not been included in history. Hartman is trying to excavate untold stories, in an attempt to both recuperate and rewrite the history of slavery. While I am not working within the same subject matter as Hartman, I feel that her methodological approaches can be used to unearth other untold histories. It is in the “scraps of the archive” where we as scholars begin to pose larger questions surrounding the formation of history and how certain narratives have been included and excluded.

Within the larger social history surrounding the heavily tattooed female body the spaces of freak/side shows and dime museums were used to put human bodies on display. This practice was most active during the late 1800's through the turn of the twentieth century. The kinds of non-normative bodies at this time included: dwarfs, people with deformities, foreign or racialized bodies and people with tattoos (30). Due to the fact that specific bodies were exhibited during this time period, there also seems to be a hierarchy that existed in terms of the venues in which they were seen. It was the transition from side show to dime museums that was significant (30). According to Robert Bogdan, in his 1990 book, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, “Prior to their absorption by museums human curiosities floated precariously, without roots. Moreover as long as each exhibit remained independent and had only limited contact with other freaks, no community or culture of show people could develop” (30). It is this transition from dime museums to side shows which led to the development of the popular amusement industry. In many ways this not only created a new enterprise but also an alternative space for people who were otherwise deemed as non-normative to exist within

When contextualizing the popular amusement industry at the turn of the twentieth century and the way in which it categorizes normative and non-normative bodies it is vital to keep in mind the ways in which these bodies socially functioned. Susan Schweik's book *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* addresses several legal issues surrounding the history of disability in the United States, but it also discusses the ways in which notions of aesthetics surrounding normative and non-normative bodies were policed. According to Schweik, "And the politics of fear and aversion that underpin all forms of the ugly laws again motivate a normative gaze that seeks to contain and institutionalize forms of human difference that lie at the intersection of disability and poverty" (33). Here Schweik is making a link between the gaze and the "intersection of disability and poverty". While there is a direct connection between disability and poverty within the context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when these laws were primarily on the books, the politics of fear and aversion are still elements that affect the ways in which non-normative bodies were historically viewed and, in some instances still are.

By using Schweik as a foundation, an argument can be made surrounding the concept of normative and non-normative in relationship to the heavily tattooed body. Schweick also explores the terms "sightly and unsightly." She concludes that there is ultimately an element of spectacle tied to the unsightly body; this would also be considered a non-normative body versus a sightly body, which would be seen as a normative body.

Thinking about the tattooed female body the way that Schweik uses to define the ugly laws and disabled bodies creates a space to think through the ways in which tattoos came to be viewed as normative. The history behind this body within American culture has come to exist within a similar social context to the disabled body. According to Schweik, like a disabled

body, the heavily tattooed body is also considered unsightly. The heavily tattooed body, regardless of gender, also socially policed, like disabled bodies of this time period, and was forced to exist within specific social contexts that were deemed to be appropriate. The heavily tattooed body was restricted to circus and freak shows, in which they were put on full view for paying spectators. The spectacle of human oddities within the freak show context functioned similarly to disabled bodies. Schweik states “a maimed body might be an explicit body, but someone else had to write its meaning upon it; and most importantly the unsightly body in deformance would invite only certain kinds of audience response” (47). Like a maimed body, a body with physical disfigurements, tattoos at the turn of the twentieth century operated in a similar fashion. Both tattoos and physical disfigurements existed within the same social context, and created an aesthetic measure of what a non-normative body looked like. During this time period, tattoos also became a marker of an aesthetic disfigurement and a form of entertainment.

On many levels freak show culture was the advent of the popular amusement industry. This industry is still alive and well today but is occurring within the realm of popular culture. Like freak shows at the turn of the twentieth century, reality television has come to light in almost the same way. Human oddities which served as a form of entertainment during the 1900's, have become reappropriated into a present day equivalent , in contemporary culture it is occurring through reality television. The fat lady has been replaced with shows like *The Biggest Loser*. *Hoarders* frequently features people with obsessive compulsive disorder. And the tattooed lady lives on within the context of *LA Ink*, *NY Ink* and AMC's latest television venture, *Freak Show*.

Through these modern day archetypes of the freak show, new audiences are introduced to bodies which are being deemed “non-normative.” These same issues have carried over into the portrayal of Kat Von D and Megan Massacre which have perpetuated the fetishistic attitudes surrounding the heavily tattooed female body. The new “freak show” is the tattoo shop and the people who work there. To date, TLC (The Learning Channel) has produced three major tattoo reality shows: *Miami Ink*, *LA Ink* and *NY Ink*. TLC was the first major television network to invest in and also popularize what would become tattoo reality television. Each show follows a predictable and easy to watch format which documents the owner of the specific tattoo shop and the staff that works there. Each of these shows chronicles the day to day activities of a typical tattoo shop, the staff and the patrons who come there. It is interesting to note that Von D is the only female owner of a tattoo shop within this TLC franchise. The popularity of her show *LA Ink*, which aired for four seasons, fueled her stardom. Von D's first television appearance was in 2005 on the tattoo reality television show, *Miami Ink*.

It was Von D's initial exposure on *Miami Ink*, which led to the filming of *LA Ink*. In addition to her reality television career Von D has two *New York Times* bestselling books, a Sephora makeup line and a clothing line. Von D, who has been a pop culture presence since the mid 2000's, is also actively producing both a brand and alternative reading of herself. Von D is a savvy business woman who is also attempting to redefine the way in which beauty has been constructed within American culture through tattooing. However, after four seasons, *LA Ink* was cancelled in October, 2011. The show averaged 1.4 million viewers per episode) and was one of TLC's most popular shows of that time. *LA Ink* was the most watched series premiere in the time slot it was on and consistently had high ratings within its four year run on

TLC. While filming the first season of *LA Ink* in 2007, Von D recorded an episode in which she broke the Guinness Book world record for tattooing the most people in a twenty four hour period. This was captured in an episode of *LA Ink* entitled “Kat's World Record” which aired on February 19, 2008 and featured Von D tattooing 400 people within a 24 hour time frame (Keller, 2010).

. While Kat Von D gained international notoriety through the success of *LA Ink*, she was widely known throughout the tattoo world prior to the show. The reading of Kat Von D's body is very different compared to Megan Massacre of *NY Ink*, who is the only other female tattooer featured on the TLC series. Massacre, like Von D, received national success as a result of her appearance on *NY Ink*; however Massacre is still in the beginning stages of her career. Although both women are heavily tattooed and work within the tattoo industry, there are several major differences between the two. Von D built a brand around herself which includes cosmetics, perfume, books, clothes, and, of course, tattoos. Massacre, on the other hand, is early in her career and is still developing her style of tattooing while also perusing an alternative modeling and music career which has been featured on *NY Ink*.

In many ways, when considering the representation of both women on these shows, it becomes important to think about the role of commodity and the ways in which it functions in terms of Massacre and Von D. It can also be seen in the brand that Von D has developed for herself. Within the shows' depiction of these two tattooers there seems to be a packaging of a certain lifestyle that has come to be associated with being a tattoo artist. However Von D and Massacre are still portrayed as having a non-normative lifestyle. Although the aim of *LA Ink* and *NY Ink* is to normalize a non-normative mode of living it is in many ways performing the same social functions that freak shows did at the turn of the twentieth century. It is using

elements of fetishism, spectacle, and theatricality through the lens of reality television to depict how a “real tattoo artist lives” and also the ways in which “a real tattoo shop is run.” While both shows were filmed on site at two fully functioning tattoo shops, there are also manipulated story lines within each episode, and the role of the camera and the performance of self must also be taken into consideration when thinking about the ways in which Massacre and Von D are being depicted. Reality television is creating almost the same social climate that freak shows at the turn of the twentieth century were producing.

According to Amelia Klem Osterud within her 2009 book *The Tattooed Lady: A History*, “Sideshowes helped audiences to define themselves and their own humanity in relation to the performer's inhumanity. Despite the fact that most sideshow performers, especially tattooed ladies, relied on fictional accounts of their lives to impress audiences these audiences paid to be reassured that they themselves were normal” (84). What is interesting to consider in terms of Klem Osterud's assessment is the role of the performer, specifically tattooed ladies, actively creating a new social narrative, and the way in which freak shows created a sense of normalcy in an otherwise non-normative situation. By spectators paying to see non-normative bodies in a freak show or side show context which is deemed a form of entertainment, they were able to confirm their normative status by looking at non-normative bodies.

Klem Osterud's notion of the normalizing of non-normative bodies within the context of the freak show becomes a very useful point when thinking through the ways in which Kat Von D and Megan Massacre are portrayed within popular culture. Like the tattooed ladies who came before them, Von D and Massacre are actively creating their non-normative sense of celebrity self. . Shows like *LA Ink* and *NY Ink* which showcase contemporary tattoo culture are doing so through the lens of a camera and are offering viewers of these shows a

contemporary representation of what a current freak show might look like. Von D and Massacre are putting themselves in front of the camera, and are attempting to demystify the life of a tattooer and what happens behind the scenes. However through this attempt at normalizing this practice, they are inherently isolating themselves within pop culture at large while also adding to the historically fetishistic views surrounding the heavily tattooed female body.

While the presence of tattoos within popular culture may be more visible within today's society there are lingering stereotypes that still exist. According to Mindy Fenske in her 2007 book *Tattoos in American Visual Culture*:

Tattooed bodies ultimately, therefore, force a visual recognition of the classed performativity of the body. Unlike other forms of social inscription that can be hidden because they have become naturalized (the codes have become invisible) or altered because they are temporary, tattoos constantly confront naturalization because they signify a permanent decision to mar the pure surface of the body. Metaphorically and literally, tattoos illustrate the inscription of social norms and codes upon the body. (40).

Although there is a relationship between class distinctions and tattoos which can be taken from this passage, the role of gender and the ways in which specific tattooed bodies are seen within different contexts have yet to be addressed on a larger scale. Perhaps it is the larger cultural inscriptions that tattoos create on a body which tie it to a larger social history. As Fenske is pointing out tattoos seem to socially function as a disavowal which ultimately challenges normative aspects of everyday life.

In the same way that Fenske is pointing to the social inscription that happens within the large cultural reading of tattoos, a similar element is occurring through the commodification of

them. Commodity is an element that is ever present in the way Von D and Massacre are actively engaging in their creation of celebrity self. This bleeds into the way in which designer tattoos have also become a part of the tattoo industry. There are many people who specifically come to High Voltage, Von D's tattoo shop in LA, or the Wooster Street Social Club, in New York City's trendy SoHo neighborhood, where Massacre works, to get tattooed. Due to the fact that both women are famous and are making a name for themselves within the tattooing industry, the price for getting tattooed by them increases both in monetary and cultural value. Von D is an internationally known tattoo artist who also has many other products available on the market as an outgrowth of the show *Massacre* who has involved herself in several side projects in the past has not reached the same level of celebrity status as Von D.

In many ways *NY Ink* and *LA Ink* are creating a social narrative in which there is a fetishistic portrayal of the heavily tattooed female body. Since Massacre is still in the process of both building up her fan base and clientele, her image as a reality star is undeveloped. Massacre is also presenting a more sexually charged media image, perhaps because she is still a newcomer both within the world of tattooing and reality television and because she is pursuing a career in alternative modeling industry. An August 2011 photo-shoot from *Inked* magazine which featured Massacre included several provocative photographs (Ineson, 2011). One of the images from the photo-shoot showcased Massacre laying on the a white floor with her left arm pointed over her head, hips turned outward wearing black heels and in a tiny black bra and underwear with lace accents. Shot in a style similar to 1950's pinup girls, Massacre's splayed out body showcases all of her tattoos—arms, hands chest, stomach,

thigh, legs, feet. Her face is arched toward the camera with her lips pursed together while her right elbow is placed over her long black hair.

In yet another image from the same August 2011 photo-shoot Massacre is standing with her back facing the camera in a different black bra and underwear set. However this pair of underwear is sheer and features a kind of garter inspired straps that hang down her thigh and loop over the back of her buttocks. The straps of Massacre's black heels seem to mimic the straps of her undergarments. Massacre is looking away from the camera, and only the side of her face is exposed. Her right hand is covering her mouth again exposing her tattoos but this time from a different angle. What is interesting to note about these images is both how sexually charged they are and also the timing of them. *NY Ink* premiered in June of 2011, and these images appeared in an August 2011 magazine. On multiple levels the aim of these photographs was to promote both Massacre and the show; however they seem to only perpetuate the stereotypes surrounding the heavily tattooed woman which have existed for generations. These images are similar to other photographs of Massacre that were featured on *NY Ink* which were produced through alternative modeling gigs she was hired for. On an early episode of *NY Ink* Massacre admits to posing nude which creates a buzz among the Wooster Social Street staff

In contrast to Massacre's highly charged sexually images, Von D also produced a series of promotional shots for *LA Ink* in 2007, ("LA Ink and Tattoo Finder"). Shot in almost the same poses as the first Massacre image from the *Inked* photo shoot, Von D is lying against a bright yellow back drop. Her body is spread out on the yellow floor and she is wearing red platform sandals, a red tankini swimsuit with a ruffled miniskirt bottom, and her nails are painted red to match. Von D's hair is crimped in a what seems to be a 1930's inspired hairdo

and two blonde streaks accent her otherwise jet black hair. One of Von D's arms is bent in front of her as her other arm rests on her upper thigh. While many of Von D's tattoos are visible and her body language is relaxed and she is looking directly into the camera, the overall feel of this image is less sexual than Massacre's photographs.

In my analysis of these images the time line and clothing used become key elements to consider when thinking about the emotion these photographs produce. I specifically chose images that were used to promote the shows both Massacre and Von D were featured in. I was also deliberate in picking images that were used early on in their careers as reality television stars. All three images are from season one of *NY Ink* and season one of *LA Ink*, however Massacre's images are more highly sexualized than Von D's. These images seem to be straddling a line between promoting the shows they represent but also producing sexual imagery that may increase their popularity. These photographs are in larger social and cultural dialogue with trend of pornography that became popular during the early 2000's, depicting women who had undergone a variety of body modifications including piercings and tattoos. Some websites where similar imagery of other tattooed women can be seen include (caution, these are adult sites): *Suicide Girls* (www.suicidegirls.com), *Burning Angels* (www.burningangel.com), and *God's Girls* (www.godsgirls.com). These websites also are also using a normal/familiar format to show an otherwise non-normative body in a sexualized way which lends itself to the larger fetishistic attitude surrounding the heavily tattooed female body.

The images of Von D, Massacre and the pornographic websites that depict women who engage in body modification in a sexually charged way is speaking to Bergson's concept of memory formation. These images have cultural significance and are operating within a

larger visual world. When viewing these images the larger social history that they are tied to is extremely evident. The promotional photographs for *LA Ink* and *NY Ink* echo many of the early poster advertisements used for the circus and freak shows. Circus posters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries depicting tattooed ladies were also extremely sexually charged. These posters often featured women laying in similarly provocative poses with their tattoos exposed and wearing costumes that were equally scandalous for the time period. In a 1910 circus poster of tattooed lady Ruth Sylvia, Sylvia is captured in an almost identical pose as Massacre and Von D ("Item 5340"). Sylvia is shown lying on a red couch in a revealing one piece garment. The bodice has a pearl embellishment which can be seen on the breast portion of it with royal blue fabric peeking through. The waist line of the outfit has an intricate design that is yellow and is attached to a larger piece of fabric that Sylvia is laying on. Sylvia, like Von D and Massacre is also shown lying on her side with one arm propped up on a pillow holding a mirror and her arm appears to be fixing the ornate head piece she is wearing. Sylvia is looking into the mirror and looks as if she is getting ready to go on stage. Many of her tattoos are exposed except for her torso and stomach area which is obstructed because of the one piece garment she is wearing. While this image does not appear to be overtly sexual within today's context, it was very sexual for the time period. Mifflin's *Bodies of Subversion* presents two similar images, one of an unknown tattooed lady from the 1920's (pp. 28-29) and Lady Viola (pp. 18-19; this image also available at http://www.tattooarchive.com/tattoo_history/lady_viola.html) There is also a different in the amount of information publicly available on these women.. Hardly any information about Sylvia, Lady Viola, and countless other women and men who worked within the confines of freak show is known today, in stark contrast to Von D and Massacre. Both women are actively

engaged in creating the next chapter in American tattoo culture while there is very little known about its past.

Within alternative and queer formations of history and the archive it becomes crucial to consider the ways in which specific bodies have come to be socially regarded. Through the lens of reality television and a popularization of tattoo culture at this point in American popular culture, Kat Von D and Massacre are both challenging cultural standards of beauty and power by being heavily tattooed. It is through Von D's and Massacre's queering of both their success and their bodies where this alternative formation of the history of the heavily tattooed female body can begin to emerge. However this alternative formation of history must also involve a recuperative effort to look at the tattooed women who have come before Von D and Massacre. While Kat Von D and Megan Massacre are America's tattooing future there is a far larger story behind them that is not known. By recovering these stories, and being mindful of the larger social history they fall under, perhaps one day the fetishization of the tattooed female body may not exist and a queer reading of this history can emerge.

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The Eastern Threat to Women's Enfranchisement in Nellie McClung's *Purple Springs*

By Shoshannah Ganz

Introduction:

Nellie McClung (1873-1951) is considered the most influential Canadian feminist of the early twentieth century. As well as being a public figure fighting for women's right to vote, own property, run for office in parliament, and her role in the 1927 landmark case for women to be recognized under the Canadian Charter as persons, she is also remembered as a prolific writer of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Most celebrated for her writing about the suffrage cause, McClung also wrote extensively about temperance, birth control, immigration, domestic "missionary" work, war, and most problematic to her legacy, eugenics, which was still a popular social philosophy in the early twentieth century.

This paper explores McClung's 1921 work *Purple Springs*. Her most autobiographical work of fiction, *Purple Springs* acts as the third and final work in a trilogy following the life of the central character Pearlie, from her humble upbringing to her political battle for women's right to vote in Manitoba. *Purple Springs* retells the story of Nellie McClung's own dramatic performance of a mock women's parliament in 1914, which played a key role in defeating Premier of Manitoba Sir Rodmond Roblin's Conservative government in 1916, and bringing about the eventual victory for the liberals and women's right to vote. But *Purple Springs* also recounts a number of other concurrent stories in the history of Canada—the temperance battle and the connection

between racial purity and tuberculosis have been explored by Cecily Devereux in *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* (2005) at length. However, this paper is interested in exploring another aspect of the text, one that is also related to the agenda of Western moral progress. McClung promotes the idea in her fiction that all things coming from the East¹ are a threat to the moral and racial purity of Canadians and the economic progress of Canada as a nation. Although McClung never clearly articulates a coherent understanding of Eastern philosophy, she nevertheless warns against the application of Eastern ideas as embodied by the “Oriental” contemplation of the old doctor and its application to medicine and community life.

This paper, then, is interested in how McClung engages with early twentieth-century ideas of and from the East. McClung figures the East as both closely tied to the feminist struggle for women’s freedom and as a threat. McClung’s portraits of the East in *Purple Springs* appear to threaten the possibility of women’s progress towards equality and freedom. Further, the application of Eastern thought to life and its possible curative properties are represented by McClung as threatening Western progress. Finally, McClung’s female characters are further enslaved symbolically by aspects of

¹ I use the term the “East” in an attempt to avoid repeating the racist terminology current in McClung’s day. McClung and other writers of her era employ the term the “Orient” and “Oriental” to denote the countries and all things associated with the cultures of China, Japan, and India. McClung’s ideas about the “Orient” would have come from both travel writing and missionary writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The racist ideology of the era focused its negative stereotyping on the Chinese and exoticized the Japanese. However, by the time of *Purple Springs* the Japanese were seen in similarly racist terms to the Chinese and the religion, philosophy, and culture had all been subsumed under the term “Oriental” and the earlier differences elided. Thus, McClung and others could use the term “Orient” or “Oriental” to signal the entirety of the underlying racist ideas of the day and assume that her reader would view all things of the “Orient” or “Oriental” as negative.

the East and it is only through Western and moral progress that the men and women of McClung's various fictional communities can be restored to harmony.

In the pre-Confederation and early post-Confederation period of Canada's past, the threat to the progress of civilization was always posed from the wilderness or from the Natives lurking in the wilderness. However, in the 1920s in both the Canadian urban and rural settings of McClung's stories, hard work and moral progress triumph over the wilderness and the threats posed to civil progress are almost entirely of Eastern origin. The exception is in the case of tuberculosis, which, according to McClung, can be overcome by temperance and hard work. This doctrine is expostulated through embedded moral vignettes, but also clearly tied to race and figured as a foreign invasion from outside the nation—the East. But while the scourge of alcohol and tuberculosis are removed through temperance, moral rigor and hard work, the threat of Eastern ideas of any kind, religious, medicinal, philosophical, or otherwise, seem much more difficult to eradicate in part because they have worked their way into the psyche of people in the community and to McClung masquerade as philosophical and meditative. McClung sees these Eastern ideas as being a threat to the moral and economic progress of the nation and as resulting in the racist characteristics associated with people from the East including laziness and lack of social consciousness. For McClung, the possibility of hope, restoration, and healing are represented as "Purple Springs"—springs that restore harmony, represent self-sacrifice, and can be discovered only when women are granted the necessary rights to self-governance. But clearly the hope for liberation of women and moral progress does not extend to the East and is in fact threatened by all ideas from the East. In both *Purple Springs* and *Painted Fires* the East is represented as a

threat and one that, while lurking at the margins of the texts and in the shadows of the story, is never able to be entirely overcome.

Literature Review:

Randi R. Warne's *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung* (1993) resists what he contends is the "single-minded attention to her famous 'feminist polemic'" and rather argues that McClung played a central role in making Canada a better place through her involvement in the social gospel movement supporting J.S. Woodsworth's All People's Mission in Winnipeg (2-3). While Warne is taking issue with earlier discussions of McClung which focus on her "feminist polemic," the scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s seems to be particularly characterized by scholars taking issue with the type of feminism McClung represents. As Miaso Dean argues in her 1998 *Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction*, the very theme of self expression as a form of liberation for women is problematic. According to Dean, "as the New Woman novels suggest; self-expression relies upon a concept of a natural self which reinstalls the stereotypes of the feminine" (77-78). Janice Fiamengo notes the following year in "A Legacy of Ambivalence: Responses to Nellie McClung" that "in the 1970s, McClung was squarely at the centre of the feminist revival in historical scholarship" (Fiamengo). Looking at the 1972 reissued *In Times Like These* to support her claim, Fiamengo cites Veronica Strong-Boag's introductory remark that *In Times Like These* is "the best feminist writing Canada has yet produced" (Strong-Boag xiv) while at the same time acknowledging the problems of the maternal feminist movement. Fiamengo continues

that sometime in the 1980s this celebration of the iconic status of Nellie McClung as an early feminist was overtaken by views such as Carol Lee Bacchi's *Liberation Deferred* (1983) which criticizes McClung and her compatriots as "conservatives terrified by the social implications of the emerging industrial order" (qtd. in Fiamengo) and Mariana Valverde who focuses on the problematic legacy of racism and eugenics in the history of the feminist movement. Through her survey of the critical history of McClung studies, Fiamengo appears to open the way for feminist critics in the twenty-first century to look more closely at Nellie McClung's literary works themselves in light of the existing balanced portrait and perspective on the debate regarding the centrality of McClung's involvement in the early eugenics movement in opposition to the legacy of McClung and other maternal feminists. Wendy Roy in the following year draws McClung into contemporary feminist discussions of autobiography questioning the lack of self-disclosure as well as the implications of McClung's work with regards to working-class feminisms. It would seem that with the publication of Roy's article the debate surrounding eugenics and racism had concluded and the discussion of feminist contribution and the actual practice of autobiography were at the foreground.

However, the same year, Cecily Devereux published her landmark work *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* suggesting that McClung's work "[a]t the beginning of the twenty-first century," as Fiamengo has noted, "is characterized [...] by ambivalence" (5). And while I note the critical debates around race, eugenics and feminism, it is at this point of ambivalence noted by both Fiamengo and Devereux that I would like to take up my argument. I will be coming back to Devereux's central study of eugenics in my discussion of what I characterize as the

threat of the East in McClung's work. Devereux's study intersects with mine in her conclusion that both McClung and Murphy's "conception of 'Canadianness' was rooted in British imperial ideas of race and of natural racial hierarchies and in what Antoinette Burton has characterized for the first-wave white feminists in India and other imperial contexts as 'the white woman's burden' to 'raise up' the 'lower' races" (11). As noted earlier, according to McClung the intersections of "building a race" and the eradication of alcohol and tuberculosis have some application to the protecting of western and moral progress and what has been considered by her racist contemporaries such as Ralph Connor as the moral (and I would suggest, economic) threat posed by the East (*The Foreigner* 24).

Purple Springs

Chapter II of *Purple Springs* is titled "The Day!" and to the first-time reader of McClung or the veteran reader who is coming to *Purple Springs* as the third and final installment of the trilogy about Pearlie Watson, we know that March 1 is the day that Pearl has been eagerly awaiting for three years. On this day, Pearl Watson's eighteenth birthday, Doctor Clay has promised a formal proposal. Pearl had promised that today would be a beautiful day and when she rises early she notes that "[t]he sun was throwing long blue shadows over the fields, brightening the trees on the river bank, with a thin rinse of pale gold. Down in the ravine, the purple blue of the morning twilight was still hanging on the trees" (15). The description of the "purple blue of the morning

twilight,” while draping the day in romantic hues, should not be mistaken as the dawning of a beautiful day. *Purple Springs*, as the title itself signals, takes extensive figural interest in the colour purple. In a text that champions hard work and moral progress over inherited wealth and the snobbery of the rich, it is not surprising that McClung should reclaim the colour purple from its long association with royalty and wealth. McClung’s invocation of purple is decidedly ambivalent. The colour purple is used in the context of beauty and hardship and suffering and sacrifice, but it is also used to signal people of pomp and circumstance who misuse wealth and are selfish and proud in their use of purple in their personal adornment.

The end of that day comes in Chapter III “The House of Clay” where “the two doctors drove home in the purple-blue twilight, seated side by side, but with minds far removed from each other” (29). Again, there is the comfortable companionship of the doctors, a successful surgery, and the beauty of the “purple-blue twilight.” However, the doctors’ minds “far removed from each other” signal that ambivalence is a part of the beauty of the “purple-blue twilight” and that all might not be well. It is in this chapter that we learn Clay is suffering from an unnamed disease that will keep him from the beautiful aspect promised in the purple dawn and dusk. He will ultimately decide that as a result of this disease he cannot propose to Pearl and the day will end without the promise of marriage—which to McClung and other maternal feminists of this period is central to the maternal role of women in building the nation.

In the latter part of Chapter III the old doctor and the young doctor, Clay, discuss his unnamed condition. This conversation is central to the polemics of the text, and the three hundred pages that follow this discussion are the working out and dismissal of the

old doctor's Eastern approach to medicine. The discussion between the old and young doctor opens as follows: "There is no immediate cause for alarm,' he said, speaking slowly, 'people live for years with it, as you know—a cracked plate sometimes outlasts the good one—and as a matter of fact none of us are entirely free from it'" (34). While "it" is never named, "it" by the tell-tale symptoms refers to tuberculosis. The doctor concludes that "none of us are entirely free from it," suggesting that the seeds of contamination are among everyone and shared by all humanity. In fact, it would seem to suggest that if this is a racial scourge, as Devereux suggests, then according to the old doctor, all humanity are carriers of "it". However, this opinion comes from the old doctor—the old doctor being the former drunkard of the earlier two works in this trilogy and thus as tuberculosis and liquor are clearly linked as contaminants and associated with racial and moral impurity, he is not free of these implications. However, it seems strange that the young and upright Clay of the first two books of the Pearlie Watson trilogy should in fact be contaminated. Clay is hard working and does not drink. And while McClung uses Clay as an extended example of the healing powers of hard work and morality, over the Eastern indolence suggested by the old doctor, the fact that Clay is tubercular at all is a decided rupture in the text and may be intended to make the reader uneasy about the possibility of contamination. The disease of tuberculosis, like the immigrants from the East and their philosophies cannot be contained or eradicated and can destroy even the most upright. The call for the utter eradication of these elements thus becomes even stronger. The old doctor continues his discussion with Clay to suggest how Clay should respond to the unspoken diagnosis. The doctor says:

You will have to be more careful, though, Clay, you will have to call a halt on your activities—there must be no more of the all night sessions of yours—and those fifty mile drives—it is just like this—you are carrying a mortgage on your business—a heavy mortgage—and yet one that the business can carry—with care, great care. Many a good business man carries a heavy mortgage and pays well too, but of course it cannot stand financial strain or stress like the business which is clear of debt. With great care, you should be good for many years—but you must not draw on your reserves—you must never spend your capital—you must never be tired, or excited, or hurried, or worried. (34)

The old doctor employs the extended metaphor of a business, suggesting that the body like the business can carry a heavy affliction or disease just as the business can carry a heavy mortgage, but that because of this Clay must, like the business, be careful of his expenditures. Again, it is important to recall who is giving this message—the old doctor. In the previous two works of the trilogy we have seen the Watson family triumph over debt and hardship through backbreaking work. Pearl leaves her family at a young age to work as a servant in order to pay off the family debt. McClung, through the portrait of the Watson family, suggests the Christian triumph of being debt free—debt almost figures as sin or scourge. In Chapter I, when Pearl picks up the phone to overhear gossips calling her family common, she states in her long and proud response about her family's hard work "John Watson did work on the section, and they'd be fine and glad to get him back. He owes no man a dollar, and bears no man a grudge" (11). The portrait of the honest, hardworking, and godly family is compared to the back-stabbing rich

gossips who they have worked for in the past, and the proud conclusion is that regardless of humble origins or working on the section, Pearl's father "owes no man a dollar" (11). Clearly to McClung, a debt free life is a godly and hard working life, and thus for the old doctor to employ the metaphor of the heavily indebted business as one that can be successful is an unlikely and unwelcome situation in the McClung cosmology. There is nothing good about debt or about not working hard. In fact lack of hard work, even when accompanied by wealth, is seen to breed idle gossip and wrongful pride. The rightful pride Pearl takes is in the hard work her family has done, which is later equated with nation building.

The old doctor's speech to Clay continues to denounce the climate of Canada and any western nation and to suggest again that putting off work is a boon. He remarks as follows:

And this climate is a bit strenuous in winter—you must get out before another one comes, and live some place that is easier. This country keeps a man on his toes all the time, with its brilliant sunshine, its strong winds, its bracing air. You need a softer air, a duller atmosphere, a sleepier environment that will make you never do today what you can put off till tomorrow, and never put off till tomorrow what you might as well put off till the day after tomorrow. (34-35)

McClung never clearly states where the old doctor believes Clay should go, but the warm and temperate climate describes nowhere in Canada and could quite possibly be a place in the East and thus according to McClung a site of further degeneration and

threat. Moreover, the old doctor's championing of idleness as curative goes against the entire gospel of moral progress—brought about by hard work. It would appear that tuberculosis in the previous books of the trilogy was in fact to be conquered with dedicated hard work and with the denouncing of the demon liquor. At Pearl's earlier place of employment, the greatest threat to the hired hand comes when the drunkard son by idle drinking fails to summon the doctor and it is through Pearl's hard work that the life of hired hand is saved. The monetary reward that Pearl receives gives her family the start that they need to buy a farm and through hard work become prosperous. Further, the young girl, Lily is saved by the dedicated hard work of the community and by the shutting down of the bar and the repentance of the bar owner in shunning evil and instead working hard to bring the doctor to Lily's aid in her greatest hour of need. Nowhere in the Watson trilogy is idleness, rest, or a different climate suggested to be the cure except by the old doctor—a proponent of Eastern ways. The brisk air and hard work and the scourging of the demon liquor are everywhere the cure to tuberculosis and other social evils. Any time when help is summoned and there is a delay, the delay, whatever the cause, seems to signal distress and possibly death. Even in this case, the delay afforded by the old doctor's diagnosis and discussion with Clay bodes poorly for Pearl. The delay of Clay's proposal by a day leads to a longer and indefinite delay or termination in the days that follow. And since the creation of families and the moral upbringing of these families, is central to the progress of the nation—that is, nation building—the decay of this plan for marriage and family is a signal of death and disease for the nation.

While Clay denounces the life of ease that the old doctor proposes with a cry of “What a life!” (35), the old doctor responds at length by picturing the life of ease as a grand alternative to the one of hard work and moral progress championed by proponents of western capitalist economies such as Canada. The old doctor, described as “intoning his words like a very young clergyman,” states:

... a fascinating life, and one that I would enjoy. Here we hurry up in the morning and hurry to bed at night so we can hurry to get up again in the morning—we chase ourselves around like a cat in the ancient pursuit of its own tail, and with about the same results. The Western mind is in a panic all the time—losing time by the fear of losing time. The delights of meditation are not ours—we are pursued, even as we pursue; we are the chasers and the chased; the hunter and the hunted; we are spending and are spent; we are borrowed and lent—and what is the good of it all? I have always wanted to be an Oriental, dreaming in the shade of a palm tree, letting the sun and the wind ripen my fruits and my brain, while I sat—with never a care—king of the earth—and the air—O, take it from me, young fellow, there are wonderful delights in contemplation, delights of which we are as ignorant as the color blind are of the changing hues of the Autumn woods, or the deaf man is of music. We are deaf, blind and dumb about the things of the Soul! We think activity is the only form of growth. (35)

The old doctor here articulates the amorphous “Oriental” philosophy McClung is denouncing as a threat to the progress of the nation. The “western mind” as pictured by the doctor is continually obsessed with progress and movement as if constantly being

“hunted”. The “Oriental” or Eastern alternative offered here by the doctor as curative for body and soul involves his personal dream of being like the “Oriental” and includes palm trees, leisure, sun, ripening fruit, and time for contemplation of nature. While this is hardly a rigorous description of Eastern philosophical practice it is posed as the alternative to the Western model of progress. The doctor goes on to say that “We are cursed, you and I, and all of us. [...] with too much activity. We are obsessed with a passion for material achievement. [...] We mistake activity for progress” (36). Clay’s response is immediate and impassioned that “it is progress” and “activity does bring achievement—development” (36). Clay uses as an example the young fellows he has organized into sports teams and how the activity of the sports had saved them from “loafing and idling, reveling in crazy, foolish degrading stories—absolute degeneration” and that “[a]ctivity had saved them—activity is growth, it is life—it is everything” (36-37). And this discussion, while limited to this opening chapter, lays the foundation for what *Purple Springs* fights for and proves—activity and hard work is the answer—it leads to moral and material progress and hard work can and will conquer social evil. The old doctor, McClung’s conceptualization of a person who has been influenced by Eastern thought, includes of course his earlier embodiments in the trilogy as a lazy drunkard. The old doctor continues to argue in this chapter that no one is saved by activity and that no one who depends on “outward things for [their] happiness” can be saved, as “[o]utward things change—vanish” (37) and further appeals to things of the heart—to meditation—“the Kingdom of Heaven is within you” (37). For the old doctor, the Kingdom of Heaven within is not governed by a specifically Christian ethos. Instead, it employs the Christian terminology seductively and is rather referring to the Eastern

ideas about meditation and a focus on spiritual and inner peace over outward progress and accumulation of wealth. Following this discussion of the Western versus the Eastern approach to life, the old doctor launches into what seems to be his other pet topic—women. The old doctor goes from a discussion of Eastern thought and the way to health and happiness through Eastern meditation to a denouncing of marriage and women—here attacking the very bulwarks of morality and nation building. The doctor is portrayed as not believing in love and as being positively nasty towards all women kind. That the Eastern influenced doctor should be particularly threatening to the enfranchisement of women is hardly surprising. The racist beliefs about the abuse of women in the East were bolstered by the missionary literature in particular which discussed the barbaric practice of foot binding in China, as well as polygamy and harems. While the doctor in fact discusses marriage in the Canadian and western context, his Eastern philosophical leanings would have been easily extended to the Eastern beliefs and practices with regards to women. Thus when he congratulates Clay for not being married and then says that “[t]here is no love strong enough to stand the grind of domestic life” and pictures it as a “fearful bore” (43) the Eastern alternative of even more extreme servitude and sexual slavery for women would have been invoked. The old doctor concludes that women are meant to adorn and be beautiful but that “[w]omen, the best of them, grow tiresome and double-chinned in time” (43). Clay counters these portraits of both marriage and women by stating that “[m]arriage is a mutual agreement, for mutual benefit and comfort, for sympathy and companionship. Family life develops the better side of human nature, and casts out selfishness. [...] People only live when they can forget themselves, for selfishness is death” (43-44).

Clay denounces the old doctor as a poor philosopher and little wonder. The entire Pearlle Watson trilogy is an extended exultation of hard work leading to moral virtue and the goodness and sanctity of family life. The old doctor, as a vanquished prophet of Eastern philosophy, exits the scene barely to be heard from again.

The day when love was to have been promised is deferred and instead ends with the young doctor Clay in contemplation of the fire, “which glowed with blue and purple lights behind the windows of glass” (47). Again, the purple flame signals ambiguity about the doctor’s situation, the promised union with Pearl, and the complexity of the Western versus Eastern answer to disease and life itself. But the rest of the text is the working out and overcoming of the obstacles to love, marriage, and family, and the liberation of women, which leads to the repentance of the old boys and with it the restoration of family and community. While the old doctor is never brought to repentance, he is seen to be a proponent of Eastern ways—ways that dishonoured and excluded women and led to widespread unhappiness and immorality.

Clay does not tell Pearl about his disease, but ends their promised engagement. Pearl does not understand why, but amidst the shattering of her dream she emerges stronger and more radiant and ready to fight. In the chapter that follows, she looks back on past struggles with poverty and praises her parents and others for “many a thrill of pride had she experienced in thinking of her parents and their days of struggling. They had been and were, the real Empire-builders who subdued the soil and made it serve human needs, enduring hardships and hunger and cold and bitter discouragements, always with heroism and patience” (72). Out of the bitter disappointment and the nasty gossip because her family “worked at poorly paid, hard jobs, thereby giving evidence

that they were not capable of getting easier ones” (73), Pearl realizes that this is a “mistaken way of looking at life” (73). Pearl goes on to denounce the “hoggish ones” for being “the exalted ones” and she throws “back her head and looked with rapture into the limitless blue above her, with something of the vision which came to Elisha’s servant at Dothan when he saw the mountains were filled with the horses and chariots of the Lord” (74). The “baptism of joy” that Pearl experiences comes out of the suffering caused by the “hoggish ones” and the “falling of her house of dreams” and with it comes “[a] sudden feeling of haste—[...] a new sense of responsibility—there were so many things to be done” (74-75). Notice, there is no purple haze in the sky, but rather “limitless blue” and a sense of clear purpose and direction and responsibility because “there were so many things to be done” (75). Clearly, this is not the contemplative, East-inflected position of the old doctor, or even a giving in to earlier thoughts of escaping to a teaching position in the north; rather it is a position that indicates Pearl knows her past and has a sense of purpose and urgency for the future.

In addition to Pearl’s story of rejection, *Purple Springs* also emphasizes the stories of two women, Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Grey, who are oppressed by the laws that disadvantage women. Pearl is instrumental in both stories by befriending the women and restoring their relationships with their families. Mrs. Paine has slaved on her farm for ten years, but reaped none of the rewards for her work. Her husband has saved all the money, a sum exceeding fifteen hundred dollars, but none of this money has gone to making the home comfortable or clothing Mrs. Paine or the children. Now Mr. Paine has decided to sell the farm and start a hotel. Mrs. Paine has no legal right to either the farm or her children and she will be forced to work in the hotel business (selling liquor)

rather than desert her children. This in-laid story helps to convince a young lawyer Mr. Neeland to join the women's cause. The other in-laid story is related to the central plot of the story and in fact to the title. Mrs. Grey is a woman rejected by her community because she has a child and will not explain the circumstances to the community. This woman's history is eventually told to Pearl. The child's father is dead and the grandfather has threatened to send his grandson to England—the widow and mother having no legal right to the child unless she was unmarried. And so, rather than lose her child, she takes on the unmarried status, changes her name, and moves to a place she has inherited which she calls Purple Springs. In both cases, the family and the community are deprived of hard working, intelligent, moral women who become outcasts because of the laws that give married women no rights over their property or children. It is the laws that are immoral and make outcasts of the women rather than the women themselves. The women labour under these conditions caring for their children and leading upright lives. Eventually the Premier, Mrs. Grey's father-in-law, loses the election largely because of the staged women's parliament in which Pearl takes a leading role—in order to defend the cause of women such as Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Grey. Although Nellie McClung is careful to emphasize that people's hearts change and that it is not the laws alone that need to change, the change in government and the resulting vote for women means protection for women such as Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Grey. The ex-premier, now a humbled and broken man, is reintroduced to his estranged daughter-in-law, grandchild and into the community of Purple Springs. The promise and hope of the Purple Springs is realized in this restoration opening up the way for other and more physical manifestations of restoration.

Doctor Clay is approached to run for parliament—exactly the sort of work the old doctor has advised against. The old doctor when he sees Clay again notices that he is looking better and comments, “You are going easier, and sleeping out—that’s right. And you see you can save yourself in lots of ways—don’t you? Good! I’m pleased with you. I hear they are after you to run against the Government. You won’t touch it of course” (209). However, Clay decides to run because of his love for Pearl, belief in the women’s cause and because in spite of the personal cost he believes that “it is not individuals who count—it is the race” (218). According to the old doctor’s Eastern approach to medicine and life, relaxation and taking it easy should be the cure. However, Clay does not appear to be greatly weakened by the political campaign. And, intersecting with the story of Mrs. Grey, and as a direct result of the election, the Premier is restored to his family and the woman of Purple Springs is able to tell Clay and the community of the fabled Purple Springs. Mrs. Grey describes it as follows:

Set in the mountains, which arched around it, was this wonderful square of fertile land, about six miles one way and seven the other. The foliage is like the tropics, for the hot springs keep off frost. The creeks which run through it come out of the rocks boiling hot—but cool enough to bathe in as they run on through the meadows. Their waters have a peculiar purplish tinge, which passes away after it stands a while, and a delicate aroma like a fragrant toilet water. I called it the ‘valley of purple springs.’ (255)

The mysterious Mrs. Grey and her husband only left the original Purple Springs because “[w]e couldn’t keep it all to ourselves and be happy over it. We couldn’t forget all the sick people to whom our purple springs would bring healing” (259). The healing powers of the water are described as follows:

We found out that the water in the streams had healing power, and made one’s skin feel soft as velvet, especially one stream which had the deepest color. One old squaw, whose eyes had been sore for years, was healed in three weeks and went back to her people with her wonderful tales of the valley. After that we had Indians with us all the time. They brought their sick children and their old people, and the results were marvelous. I never knew the stream to fail. Even the tubercular people soon began to grow rosy and well. The food seemed to have healing power, too, and some who came hollow-cheeked, feverish, choking with their cruel paroxysms of coughing, soon began to grow fat and healthy. (258)

But Purple Springs is also a state of mind and healing for the race and nation. Mrs. Grey’s son, James, repeats his mother’s belief about Purple Springs: “Mother says that what kills people’s souls is when they have no purple springs in their lives. She says she’s sorry for lots of people. They live and walk around, but their souls are dead, because their springs have dried up” (235). Clearly, the healing Purple Springs is not simply a physical healing, but one that signals a spiritual cleansing as well and particularly for women. It is through hope and belief in the Purple Springs that women like Mrs. Grey keep working to make their homes beautiful and their children moral—

when the hope in healing the family, community, and nation fail then the purple “springs have dried up” (235). And the hope for Pearl, and McClung, is for women to gain the vote and with it the right to property and to raise their children. And it is because of this hope and belief that Pearl and Clay work hard for the future rather than giving in to what McClung views as the Eastern way—meditation and the quiet life. The Purple Springs can only be realized through personal sacrifice—like Mrs. Grey’s and Clay’s—and through the hard work of individuals like these there can and will come healing for the nation. As a result of Clay and Pearl’s hard work, women win the vote and Mrs. Grey is liberated from her silence, allowing Clay to learn of the Purple Springs that can heal tuberculosis—a mental and geographical place that can only be realized through hard work.

But the purple of the Purple Springs is not unambiguously healing and cleansing for the scourges of the nation. Purple also seems to signal false pride and the pretense and show that often accompanies politics. Certainly the “purple past” of *Painted Fires* signals immorality—harlotry and involvement in the opium trade—although in this case wrongly and the reputation of the Finnish woman with the “purple past” is restored through hard work, perseverance, and morality in the face of prejudice and injustice perpetrated by people of wealth and immorality—this time unambiguously tied to the Chinese trade of opium. The virtuous restoration of the reputation of the moral and hardworking heroine comes again through and in a utopian-type community—like Purple Springs—left to the heroine as a reward for her morality, compassion and hard work. Purple also seems to be connected to the political satire of *Purple Springs*, as it is in the work of other contemporary political satirists such as Madge Macbeth. At Pearl’s

first public speaking engagement she employs both humour and story-telling to humiliate the corrupt Member of Parliament who supports the consumption of alcohol and the exclusion of women from the political life of the nation. Parody and satire become Pearl's trademarks in the later political campaigns. Interestingly, in this first instance while Mr. Steadman, the Member of Parliament, prepares his speech, "Mrs. Steadman had decided that she would wear her purple silk with the gold embroidery" (81). This choice of colour for the event is later emphasized following one of Mr. Steadman's remarks regarding women, "I am old fashioned enough to want my wife to stay at home. I like to find her there when I come home. I don't want her to sit in Parliament" (95). Mrs. Steadman is pictured as "in front, with the purple plume in her hat nodding its approval" (95). Later, in a private home performance and parody of the Premier for the visiting Peter Neeland, a purple gown is employed in the tableaux, which gives way to what later becomes a central political parody of the text, responsible for winning the election. Madge Macbeth, writing under the pseudonym of Gilbert Knox in *The Land of the Afternoon*, a political satire of Ottawa, also uses purple in a similarly ambiguous ways. Lady Denby is known for her purple garments, the purple in this case seems to signal right proportions and the right relationship to the royal purple—she is a truthful and kind woman. However, the upstart Mrs. Pratt wears purple in a way that highlights her inappropriate, self seeking and false political action. The purple she is wearing calls attention to her attendance at events she has not been invited to and on the occasion of a wedding during war times, "Mrs. Pratt's idea of economy was expressed by a royal purple chiffon velvet, trimmed with ornaments of amethyst and pearl" (316). For both McClung and Macbeth, the ostentation and vacuity of the women

is signaled by purple—both women are wives of rather stupid and lazy politicians. However, both McClung and Macbeth signal the absurdity of these characters by setting them apart as inappropriately dressed with ostentatious feathers and chiffon on occasions when this kind of showiness is particularly out of proportion with the event or times. McClung and Macbeth both give a great deal of attention to the ways in which their characters' comportment and dress signal aspects of character—modesty, thrift, hard work, poverty, as well as strength and certainty. Pearl is a model of right dress—choosing suits that set off her strength and purpose and using her attractions to strengthen the cause of women's liberation.

Madge Macbeth seems to share Nellie McClung's belief in the threat to women from contact with any embodiment of the East, in this case India. A secondary character in *Shackles* (1926) is a young missionary woman returned from India to raise money for her mission. While *Shackles* is primarily the story of a woman writer who is entrapped by male expectations of domestic duty, the missionary women's relationship with the central character Naomi's husband actually acts to further enslave Naomi. The missionary woman is a threat to the moral order of the text and the Eastern missionaries' presence results in the re-enslavement of the almost liberated Naomi. More generally the underlying racist ideologies embodied by the East and anything related to the East is figured as a threat to nation building and more particularly, to the concerns of this paper, to the liberation of women. The racist ideas about the morally inferior position of women in the East and by extension anything to do with Eastern culture or thought is thus figured as a threat to early twentieth century women's feminism.

The purple past and purple future—related at once to harlotry and opium use and healing and community—is an ambiguous colour symbolically related to discussions of the East. However, while purple seems connected to wrong dress and attitude as well as to misjudgment of character and past, it also signals in both *Purple Springs* and *Painted Fires* the possibility of healing—both mental and physical—in the geographical and psychological Purple Springs that can be discovered through the liberation of women, the eschewing of all things from the East and the resulting healing of women in a utopian-type community such as Purple Springs.

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