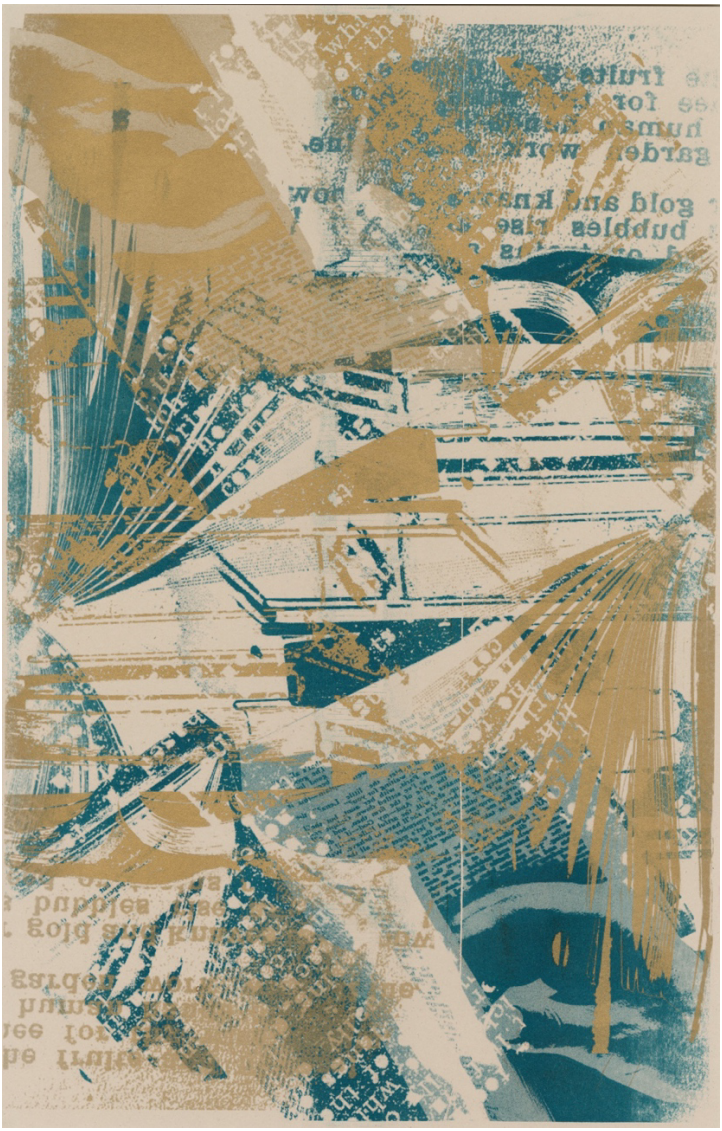
Articulāte

Volume 29 Article 2

Articulāte Vol. XXIX

Articulāte

2024



A Journal of Literary and Cultural Criticism

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Spring 2024
Volume XXIX

Cover art by Rita Costa ’24

Call for Papers:

Articulāte is a student-authored and student-edited journal sponsored by the English Department. The editors of Articulāte are looking for submissions that demonstrate original thinking and strong scholarly research in their analysis of literary and/or cultural texts. Essays should not exceed fifteen typed, double-spaced pages. However, longer essays of exceptional quality may still be considered. Please use MLA citations.

Submissions for the 2023-2024 academic year should be emailed to articulate@denison.edu. Please submit the essay and a cover sheet as two separate PDF files. Remove your real name from the essay and put a pseudonym on each page of the essay. In the file name for your submitted essay, put your pseudonym followed by the word "articulāte." In the file name for the cover sheet, include your real name and the word "articulāte." The cover sheet should include your real name, your pseudonym, the title of your essay, the anticipated year of your graduation, and your email address. Writers must be Denison students at the time of submission, and by submitting their essays, they are agreeing to have them published on the University database of student journals if they are accepted for publication. The journal accepts submissions at any time during the academic year, although we generally issue a call for papers at the beginning of the spring semester and make final decisions in late March or early April.

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*Winner of the 2023-2024 Robert T. Wilson Award for Scholarly Writing.

Motherhood as Immigration in Asian American Literature

Maggie Malin

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Motherhood is a prevalent theme in Asian American literature across genre, medium, and nation of heritage or origin; in such works, the journey of motherhood represents the journey of Asian American immigration. Motherhood is a multifaceted experience; in this paper I focus on the reproductive and productive aspects of motherhood, or the domains of childbirth and the workforce, respectively. If the immigrant mother represents the motherland—the country from which she came—then pregnancy and childbirth are a transitional phase akin to the overseas journey from Asia to the United States, and are accordingly represented by Asian American writers by images of the ocean. Arrival in the new land is marked by the metaphor of the mother's child, and establishment in the country of arrival is defined by labor. A mother-child disconnect is a representation of a greater generational and subsequently cultural divide characteristic of an Asian American experience that transcends one specific nation of origin. Korean American poet Suji Kwock Kim and Vietnamese American poet Ocean Vuong directly explore the tumult of reproductive motherhood—that is, the journey of pregnancy and childbirth—alongside narratives of sea travel in their respective poems "Fugue" and "Immigrant Haibun." Representing productive motherhood, or the labor expected from mothers and immigrants, Chinese American author and pioneer of the contemporary Asian American literature movement Maxine Hong

Kingston features the working mother of an immigrant family in her novel *The Woman Warrior*, as does Chinese American director Daniel Kwan (with white American co-director Daniel Scheinert) in the film *Everything Everywhere All At Once*.

The panethnicity of the Asian American theme of motherhood is not meant as a generalization based on continent instead of country, but rather a link that, through a shared understanding, strengthens a group that is systemically conceptualized as one by an America more concerned with race than nationality. The commonality—the representation of motherhood and immigration as parallel experiences—of this panethnic category of writing ties into the overarching importance of Asian American literature, which bears insider witness to a population often overlooked by the dominant majority and gives a voice to the historically and systemically silenced.

As both immigration and reproductive motherhood are laborious, uncertain processes, especially for first-timers, mothers are tied to the same kind of narrative—a narrative of tumult, change, and insecurity—distinctive of sea travel stories. Particularly in poetry, in which the "act of meaning-making turns away from the literal, its truth bound to what can be evoked" through metaphor and imagery, motherhood's central role in narratives of Asian American immigration is often linked with images of the sea (Alexander 18). Transpacific scholar Erin Suzuki views the ocean and the literal and metaphorical journeys it stands for as "contingent passageways, navigated through a firm understanding of one's position and standpoint measured in a constantly changing relation to a fluid, dynamic world" (Suzuki 21). This fluid dynamism allows for the ocean to symbolize multiple journeys at one time. Korean American poet Suji Kwock Kim's autobiographical "Fugue" frames the birth process as a seafaring epic, with phrases such as "amniotic brine" and "placental sea-swell" representing mother and ocean alike as methods of transfer "from one

world to the next" (Kim lines 1, 2, 25). In Kim's metaphor, the mother as the womb is the place of origin, the first world, and "your afterlife," the baby's stillborn birth into the living world, as the new place of residence (line 21). There is a cynical weight to her narrative—the new world is a place of death for her child, who despite being "not yet alive" in her womb is "not *not*" alive in that place of origin and safety (line 13). Leaving the womb means a loss of life—in a risky transfer from one world to another, success is not guaranteed. Likewise, the journey of immigration ends in uncertain success, the promised land of the American dream often just a dream for most. Kim ties together the birth process, the ocean, and the transition from one world to the next as equal narratives of persistence amidst uncertainty and turmoil.

The ocean and the mother as means of transport are mirrored in Ocean Vuong's "Immigrant Haibun," a semi-biographical prose poem from his mother's perspective about his parents' journey across the Pacific Ocean from Vietnam. As Vuong's mother gestates, she acknowledges the tandem occurrence of her pregnancy and her immigration: "The ship rocked as you swelled inside me: love's echo hardening into / a boy;" this language mirrors Kim's "placental sea-swell" upon which "the ship of" her unborn child rides (Vuong, "Immigrant Haibun" lines 49-50, Kim lines 2, 6). In "Haibun," the unborn Vuong becomes a tribute to his parents' journey: "*If we make it to shore,* [his father] says, *I will name our son / after this water*" (Vuong lines 23-24). Vuong's birth, and thus his mother's labor, are a process inextricable from his parents' voyage, once again drawing a parallel between the experiences of the ocean, Asian American immigration, and motherhood, which continues upon Vuong's parents' arrival in the States. "If you must know anything," Vuong imagines his mother saying to him, "know that you were born because no one else was / coming" (lines 48-49). There is a lonely self-sufficiency to this

sentiment that resonates with "studies document[ing] that Asian immigrant women consider their families a unit of survival"—that in a new, unfamiliar world with different customs, norms, and expectations, the Asian immigrant mother persists with childbirth and child-rearing as a tie to a stability she struggles to find elsewhere, as well as a testament to her own capability in the face of peril and environmental upset (Moon 842). Vuong's existence is testimony to his parents' immigration, and to an extent, their successful survival. Through his eventual birth, Vuong's parents establish their new life in the US, linking the progenerative facet of motherhood with the literal journey of immigration through the medium of the ocean, much like Kim.

But although motherhood may begin with childbirth, it certainly does not end there. Motherhood, particularly for Asian American women, bleeds into the realm of the workforce, making the literary focus on mothers noteworthy because the division of labor disproportionately affects this group. In a study of "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor," UC Berkeley's Dr. Evelyn Nakano Glenn recognizes the imbalance of "reproductive labor," or "the physical and emotional maintenance" and "nurturing" of current and potential workers, as the "racial ethnic women['s]" job, on top of the productive labor that directly makes money (Glenn 104). In Kingston's biomythography *The Woman Warrior*, often viewed as a cornerstone work in the field of Asian American literature, the narrator's mother Brave Orchid continues to work into her eighties, "[s]cabbing in the tomato fields" because her husband no longer tends to the family—he "has stopped talking" and "doesn't cook new food" when she is out of the house (Kingston 103-4). In one alternate timeline in the dimension-hopping film *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, protagonist and Chinese immigrant mother Evelyn chooses to abandon social mores in favor of seizing the present to express emotions she hasn't felt allowed to express before: she admits that she "always hated this place" before

smashing the windowed walls of her laundromat in front of her party guests, her dual-tasked husband and business partner, and the IRS agent charged with taking the business away from her (*Everything* 1:38:31-40). (It is notable that the mothers in both *Everything Everywhere* and *The Woman Warrior* run a laundromat, with Kingston's Brave Orchid having to double as a tomato picker when there is not enough laundry work [Kingston 87]. Domestic tasks encroach on these Chinese American women's workplaces; they are offered little distinction between the responsibilities assigned to them as household leaders and as laundry workers.) As a young Ocean Vuong is practicing his writing, "the nail salon / will not leave" the Viet woman who teaches him as much as she knows of the English alphabet, the smells of "isopropyl acetate, / ethyl acetate, chloride, sodium lauryl / sulfate & sweat fuming / through her pink / I [heart] NY t-shirt" (Vuong, "The Gift" lines 10-15). Each of these mother-figures is pursued by her domestic tasks in her place of work and by her workplace tasks in her domestic space.

This tight interlacing between work and domestic life is a pattern for Asian immigrant women. In preparation for a case study of Korean immigrant mothers living in the US, Vassar College's Dr. Seungsook Moon draws on Glenn's research (among others) on Asian American labor, finding that "[f]or these women of color, historically excluded from the cult of domesticity…, the meaning of mothering encompasses the paid employment necessary for the sustenance of their families" (Moon 843). In other words, Asian American women do not have the luxury of being able to be just mothers or just workers; the socioeconomic implications of their race and gender demand that they become both. Brave Orchid's need to feed her husband being her motivation for her late-life labor, Evelyn's husband and implicit sole colleague being the same person, and Vuong's nameless mother-figure being followed around by the sillage of the nail salon are representations across media, genre, time

period, and ethnicity of the "little separation between public and private life" that Glenn identifies more specifically in Chinese American working women, and the "exclu[sion] from the cult of domesticity" that Moon sees across the female Asian immigrant population at large (Glenn 102, Moon 843).

In the way that Asian immigrant women's professional labor is evocative of the greater double standard of responsibility for Asian women in the States, and as the ocean represents the transitional reproductive labor of motherhood and immigration, mothers themselves are symbols of the immigrant experience—as the motherland. When Kingston's narrator returns as an adult to visit her mother, Brave Orchid chastises her for eating poorly and reminds her: "Aiaa, I'm getting so old. Soon you will have no more mother" (Kingston 102). With this threat of her own absence from the narrator's life, Brave Orchid expresses a fear that her daughter is on the path to losing her connection with China, whether intentionally or not. The literal tie to China that the narrator is at risk of losing is Brave Orchid—she is the one who traveled overseas to raise her daughter, and it is her lineage that directly ties her children back to China, her sister who visits from the old world. She is the last transitional link in the lineage between the American-raised narrator and the history of older generations who never left China. In her absence, the narrator will no longer have this link to the country of her ancestry. More symbolically, Brave Orchid is the enforcer of Chinese customs and traditions in the narrator's life, so in losing her mother she loses her knowledge and experience of Chinese traditions. By straying from customs she finds unusual, "act[ing] as if" a candy-eating tradition upon a visitor's arrival is "a bother," and moving away from a family of "children [who] made up their minds to major in science or mathematics" to be a writer, the narrator is putting distance between herself and the family she came from, and in doing so,

separating herself from her family's country of origin (121, 160). Brave Orchid follows a tradition of immigrant mothers as representations of their home countries that crops up across Asian American literature. In contrast to the "default" white American woman, Asian American lit scholars Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey T. Santa Ana identify "the 'culturally pure' Asian woman, especially in her role as mother, wife, and lover" as a signifier of "the Asian homeland" across early twentieth-century works of the genre (Wong and Santa Ana 180). *The Woman Warrior*, being essentially the first contemporary work of the genre in 1976, corroborates the truth of this trope within Kingston's own experience, and ties her experience to a greater body of works, creating a common bond that functions as an anchor for the Asian American literary domain.

Beyond being a symbol for the motherland, *The Woman Warrior*'s "focus on mother-daughter relationships" is "part of a feminist agenda to preserve memory and establish a matrilineal tradition" (Wong and Santa Ana 195). Each of the five stories that make up the novel center around a woman and her response to her intense circumstances and come from oral traditions. Most relevant are the first story, about an estranged aunt, which the narrator prefaces with her mother's instructions to "not tell anyone…what I am about to tell you," and the second and fifth stories, warrior woman folktales, which the narrator introduces respectively as a "chant that was once mine, given me by my mother" and "a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story" (Kingston 3, 20, 206). The stories being passed down are about women, by women, and for women, lending a certain gravity, a shared understanding of the severity of living a marginalized life. The narrator's mother warns her that she "would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught [her] the song of the warrior woman" nonetheless (20). She insists upon secrecy for the story of her disgraced sister-in-

law, yet passes down the story to her daughter anyway, breaking her own rule. This matrilineal storytelling resonates with the power of Asian American literature as a whole—giving a voice and thus a sociopolitical presence to a historically silenced group. Along the same lines of "preserv[ing] memory" and "establish[ing] a matrilineal tradition," in *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, we see only Evelyn's memories—not her husband's or her father's (Wong and Santa Ana 195). These memories inform the decisions Evelyn makes and the skills she gains to adapt to her current circumstance, emphasizing within the plot and metaplot the strength of a matrilineal tradition and the untold potential of the Asian woman.

Like in *The Woman Warrior*, it is the mother of the central family of *Everything Everywhere* whose lineage ties the child to the homeland. Evelyn's father Gong Gong visits the family from China while not much is heard about husband Waymond's family at all, highlighting the link between mother and motherland. Daughter Joy is held in place by both Evelyn's expectations—that "she [does] not end up like" Evelyn but instead succeeds beyond the laundromat that Evelyn "always hated"—and Gong Gong's traditional, conservative mindset, which Evelyn blames for translating "girlfriend" as "good friend" when introducing Gong Gong to Joy's (notably white and female) partner Becky (*Everything* 2:00:14-17, 1:38:31-32, 10:09-11). Even once Evelyn and Joy have reconciled, Evelyn continues to nitpick Becky, telling her she "need[s] to grow [her] hair" (2:10:43), in a similar way to her comments about Joy's weight, while Waymond is amiable towards Becky from the start. As such, Joy's matrilineal line is, of her parents, the more direct source of her struggle, compounded with the general anxieties of being a second generation Asian American young adult.

With this clear matrilineal line being rooted in the family's country of origin, the representation of child as America comes with

friction. Joy explains her transition into mad nihilist villain Jobu Tupaki with the sentiment, "Everything we do gets washed away in a sea of every other possibility" (1:29:48-58). Here the image of the sea resurfaces in line with Suzuki's observation of "transpacific Asian American literatures[']" tendency to explore otherness by "drawing attention to how the ocean's unknowability marks the limitations of contemporary…discourses" (Suzuki 18). For Joy, the ocean is chaos, and her understanding of herself as a queer second generation Asian American woman is in similar disarray. She represents the family's presence in America—torn between the world she grew up in and the one her mother was raised in, desperately and uncomfortably trying to reconcile the two with each other. Jobu explains to her mother the reason behind her multiversal hunt for her: "I was just looking for someone who could see what I see, feel what I feel," but Evelyn has seemed to fail in this capacity despite being a fellow Asian American woman of the same family (1:34:36-45). Joy's perception of the world is shaped by the generational division between herself and her mother—a combination of the expectations of her mother's family, to succeed in a way that Evelyn could not, her own American awareness, her inability to share her life fully with her grandfather due to the present language barrier and homophobia, and the typical identity crisis of young adulthood, among other factors. This mother-daughter disconnect represents a greater, more general generational divide between old country of origin and current country of residence and the conflicting expectations that come with honoring each.

Neither Evelyn nor Brave Orchid has an uncomplicated relationship with her daughter—each criticizes her daughter for not living up to the expectations set forth by the parents who made the overseas journey from China to the US. This complexity doubles as the Asian immigrant discomfort of uprooting one's life for opportunity in a country no more comfortable—and perhaps less

so—than the one left behind, furthering the representation of immigration through the symbol of the mother.

But why mothers? What importance does a matrilineal tradition hold that a paternal line does not? What is the significance of the Asian immigrant woman in the American workforce? Women take center stage in contemporary Asian American literature because they face compounded marginalization—in the words of UC Berkeley Asian American Studies department's Dr. Sau-ling Wong, "Ethnicity is, in some sense, always already gendered, and gender always already ethnicized" (qtd. in Wong and Santa Ana 171). The woman of any race or ethnicity already shares something in common with the Asian American of any gender—the historical expectation of silence, politically, socially, and otherwise. Similarly, the mother and the Asian immigrant alike are faced with unique labor that American society is not set up to assist with; when a woman falls into both categories, this expectation compounds. By putting the focus on mothers, the struggle of the Asian American has an anchor in another population long beaten down by their place in society. Just as the ocean provides a means for transition—simultaneously childbirth and immigration—mothers provide a symbol for both the journey and the work put upon Asian Americans in their experience of immigration and life afterward. At the same time, mothers represent a strength full of intent and purpose, a strength that demands effort and that is amplified by other members of the population working for the same strength. The maternal narrative in stories of Asian American immigration is an intentional trope that evokes a globally meaningful persistence in the face of a world stacked against this population.

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Latinx Futurism in *MAÑANA: Latinx Comics from the 25th Century*

Olivia Bernard

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History is rarely written by the marginalized, and in much the same way, minority voices are often just as absent from visions of the future. Now, genres like Afrofuturism are breaking the silence by imagining futures that uplift people of oppressed races, genders, and cultures. Like many groups previously excluded from science fiction, the Latinx diaspora has also begun to ask what lies beyond the decolonial and what such a future would mean for Latin American identity. *MAÑANA: Latinx Comics from the 25th Century* is a comic anthology that seeks many answers to this question. Compiled by Joamette Gil, an Afro-Cuban artist who owns an independent press dedicated to uplifting underrepresented creators, *MAÑANA* opened the doors for anyone to tell their story instead of following the typical exclusive pitch process. Gil believes that reflecting on the past is a difficult but necessary project to heal the present, which can leave the future seeming a blank and dangerous space (Tai). She explains, "MAÑANA takes the beauty and richness of Latin America and moves it forward 1,000 years from the birth date of our current struggles, as a reminder that history is long and that its arc is ours to determine" (Tai). *MAÑANA* explores how Latin America's future and past intertwine as the creation of new interstellar identities mix with Latinx cultural heritage. The anthology presents a vast range of possible worlds that challenge traditional sci-fi tropes by placing postcolonialism,

displacement, and language in a radical framework of Latin American futurism.

Emma Perez, in her book *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History,* identifies the current day as existing between the colonial and post-colonial. The titular decolonial imaginary is a "rupturing space" or "time lag" open to questioning identity and official history through narratives and personal stories and root out colonialism buried in both the national and the cultural. She writes that "Traditional historiographical categories […] have been built upon that which came before, and therefore have contributed to the colonial. […] The historian's political project, then, is to write a history that decolonizes otherness" (5-6).

The future would therefore be a place where this rewriting is complete, and humanity can move forward into postcolonialism. On the contrary, though, it's often shown in mainstream science fiction as a place of *regression* backwards towards colonialism. Depictions of human space colonization, alien relationships, and treatment of fictional environments, even in utopian settings, suggest a future that uncritically repeats our past. In "Colonizing the Universe: Science Fictions Then, Now, and in the (Imagined) Future," Greg Grewell identifies the three main "master-plots" of science fiction, which all tie to colonial anxieties: "the "domesticative," the "explorative," and the "combative" (28). He points out the parallels between fictional space colonization and its historical counterpart, writing that "the science fiction industry has essentially borrowed from, technologically modernized, and recast the plots, scenes, and tropes of the literature of earthly colonization—but without, except in rare cases, questioning, critiquing, or moving beyond the colonizing impulse" (24). The decolonial project therefore does not end with decolonizing and rewriting the past; we must rewrite the future, as well, to prevent these lingering seeds of colonialism from sprouting. Because

the future and the past are deeply intertwined, as Gil so keenly observed, we cannot reshape one without revising the other. "Sámaras," by Leonardo Faierman and Richard Zela, directly engages the colonial impulses indulged by much of science fiction. In their imagined future, a populist despot has mandated that immigrants either be relocated to ghettos or be sent into space. Florencio, the main character, is faced with this grim choice. He reflects that "To stay would spell terrifying hardship for which there was historic precedent. To go risked experiencing a terrifying hardship for which there was… well, *some* kind of precedent. And, possibly adventure. And, most likely, death" (Faierman and Zela 47). On a distant planet, he finds the "Unnamed Palace," a captivating, dreamlike living cave network. He grapples with his role in this strange place, careful not to act as colonizer. When asked why he calls it the Unnamed Palace, he says, "I don't know. Maybe I just don't feel like a conqueror, and conquerors name things" (Faierman and Zela 51). But at the same time, "I guess, by avoiding any specific name, I've still robbed it of its meaning" (Faierman and Zela 51). In a way, this is Florencio is navigating the decolonial imaginary. He must weigh the present, life in this strange cave, with the colonial past that shunted him to the Palace to begin with. In desperate circumstances, how do we avoid becoming what we hate?

The story "Emisaria," by Terry Blas and Andrea Rosales, suggests that communication is the answer—which, in a way, is what Florencio is doing by studying the Palace and trying to understand his place in it. In "Emisaria," Lucinda is a linguist and librarian called to consult a group of anxious scientists who are trying to relocate humanity away from a dying Earth. The new planet, while habitable, already contains intelligent life, and Lucinda firmly asserts that "Simply going to another inhabited planet and claiming it as our own is definitely not something we should do" (Terry and Rosales

158). She references the massacre of the Aztecs and Native Americans and points out that "When people claim a place as their own and there are already people there, it never ends well. It ends in genocide, devastation, war" (Terry and Rosales 158). Lucinda directly calls out Grewell's "master-plots" of science fiction colonization when she says, "We weren't seeking out a place to conquer or explore. We're refugees" (Terry and Rosales 159). The scientists decide to try another way, and Lucinda is chosen to be la emisaria, "a representative, to ask for permission to live among them peacefully" (Terry and Rosales 159) by learning their language. By advancing this alternative, "Emisaria" poses a radical challenge to the "space colonization" trope as Lucinda rejects "a space that has been and is still being inscribed by the efforts of colonizers" (Grewell 29) despite the pressures of desperation. Through this scenario, humanity gets to atone for its colonial past.

The theme of displacement is also a prominent one in both *MAÑANA* and other Latinx literature. Displacement manifests as a character's desire to leave home to find oneself, often in the form of returning to a cultural homeland, but at the same time feeling guilt and sadness about leaving what they know. Alex Hernandez and Jemma Salume explore this impulse in their story "Sea Change," which uses allegory to examine displacement. In their future, a marine trematode infection causes the birth of web-handed green babies, known disparagingly as "flukes." Like the children of immigrants who seek to understand their cultural heritage, these children are drawn to the ocean, which calls to them in "an ultrasonic song sung with tongues that pulse in Spanish and Haitian and Creole and English" (Hernandez and Salume 145). Renny, a fluke teenager from Nueva Habana, must reconcile their desire to seek an uncertain life in the sea with their father's pain at seeing them go. Renny's father is also an immigrant who struggled to return to a Latin American home as a child, escaping from a sinking Florida to Cuba. By using their father's experiences to

explain their own desires to him, Renny and their father reach, if not an understanding, then at least an acceptance.

This corresponds to the generational disconnect that haunts many immigrant families and has been explored by other Latinx authors. In Cristina Garcia's novel *Dreaming in Cuban,* Pilar Puente runs away from her stifling immigrant mother to return, like Renny's father, to Cuba. During her escape, Pilar dreams that a strange spiritual group of people "lift me up high and walk with me in a slow procession toward the sea. They're chanting in a language I don't understand. I don't feel scared, though" (Garcia 34). Her dream resonates uncannily with the descriptions in "Sea Change," where Renny describes "the haunting chorus" (Hernandez and Salume 152) of the depths. The prominence of the ocean, mysterious songs, disconnect from the term "home," running away despite parental disapproval, an uncertain destination faced without fear: these are the refrains of first-generation children leaving to find themselves.

"Sámaras" and "Emisaria" also examine displacement. The former, obviously, deals with the horrid choice given to immigrants on Earth, who are not just once but twice displaced—first from their birth country to the USA, and second from their new homes to either stifling ghettos or to the unknown in space. Florencio struggles to find a place for himself in the Palace. Anaïs Mohit, an agent of the government who comes to subdue him and seize the resources of the Palace, ultimately turns to his cause and observes that "sometimes you just need to leave somewhere to understand it" (Faierman and Zela 55). The states of both leaving and returning, between which immigrants are often caught, give a fresh perspective on old homes and new that one can't see from within. "Emisaria" explores displacement to a lesser degree but still features a future where the whole of humanity is now displaced from Earth, on the brink of a mass migration to escape a home that has become unlivable—a parallel to how immigrants often must flee

unsafe situations in their home countries. “Emisaria” also hypothesizes about how the new location should respond to the displaced: by being “willing to listen” (Terry and Rosales 159).

On that note, the significance of language is another theme that ties these stories together. “Emisaria” is most straightforwardly about the power of language to tie together and understand new cultures. It imagines this as a mutual process; rather than the expectation that immigrants simply assimilate into the dominant language, “Emisaria” suggests that both must learn each other’s languages to be on equal footing. Lucinda and the aliens whom she meets have learned each other’s tongues, and Lucinda greets them in Spanish, unseating the assumption that English is (and should be) the universal language (Terry and Rosales 162). The central thesis of the story is Lucinda’s mother’s favorite phrase, which guides Lucinda in her trip to meet the aliens: “Un idioma, una vida” (Terry and Rosales 162)—one language, one life. Life and language are all but synonymous, and communication is the universal connection across cultures.

In some ways, this conflicts with other Latinx authors’ perspective on language. They instead discuss their struggles with *not* having learned the language of their culture. In her entry to the essay anthology *Wild Tongues Can’t Be Tamed,* Zakiya Jamal describes the sense of imposter syndrome she felt when she encountered others who “switched in and out of Spanish with ease, having conversations I could barely follow” (137). Her grandmother never taught her children Spanish because “she wanted them to be fully assimilated into the US” (Jamal 138) to avoid discrimination. Ultimately, however, this led to Jamal feeling “inauthentic” and alienated from other Latinx people. From this point of view, language is not the universal liberator; it can be just as exclusive as inclusive. Instead, Jamal posits that cultural connection must be more than language. It is also traditions, food, dance, song, and other threads that tie communities together.

"Sámaras" also grapples with language and the meaning it can give or take. As mentioned earlier, Florencio struggles with (not) naming the Palace, and at times words seem to fail entirely in this otherworldly space. When he speaks about manifestations of the Palace, his description is obscured by a black bar in the text. When Anaïs asks him about it, he says, "There's not really a shorthand for it" (Faierman and Zela 53), indicating that the description is invisible/inaudible to both us and the characters and therefore indescribable. Communication remains important, though. As the two share an alien fruit, Florencio observes that the Unnamed Palace "feels like it's communicating, especially when you eat these. But whatever it's trying to say is larger than I can get a handle on" (Faierman and Zela 53). The power of food as communication aligns with Jamal's assertion that culture extends beyond language to include things like food. If the Palace can be understood as an alien culture, then this is one of the ways Florencio has found to connect with it. Yet it's still easy to lose one's identity to the new surroundings; Anaïs must remind herself who she is, and Florencio assures her that though "I know it feels like you're losing yourself, but you won't. Just trust me. This will pass" (Faierman and Zela 53). Anaïs' disorientation can be seen as an analogy for how immigrants struggle to maintain connection to themselves and their culture in a new land that need not be hostile to threaten to engulf them all the same.

Similarly, Renny's attraction to the ocean song could be understood as being drawn to a mother tongue that they never had the chance to learn, like Jamal's complicated relationship to the Spanish language. Though the song is in "Spanish and Haitian and Creole and English" (Hernandez and Salume 145), it's still inhuman and haunting, implying a disconnect from what Renny knows on land. Like "Sámaras," "Sea Change" touches on the power of names; the word "fluke" itself is of particular significance. Its meaning is layered:

"A flatfish or the part of an anchor that slams into the seabed, the gentle curve of a whale's tail, the killing end of a harpoon, a brightly colored lure dangling from a hook. A miniscule, bloodsucking trematode. An incredible chance occurrence. A slur for those born like me" (Hernandez and Salume 146). These layered and contrasting definitions once again highlight the nuance and ambiguity of language. Words have hidden meanings that can lead to confusion or disconnect.

In the context of Latinx literature, the word "fluke" can be an allegory for the difficulty of naming an identity, which many of the authors in *Wild Tongues* struggle with. "Afro-Latinx" has a similarly complicated meaning for many. While Jamal embraces it, other authors feel its connotations lead to issues. Janel Martinez, in "Abuela's Greatest Gift," writes that "the term Afro-Latina seemed to take on a new meaning among those who see it as simply a trend, not an existence that comes with an unquestionable understanding of self and how you're perceived in the world" (229). With this in mind, "Sea Change" bears one incredibly striking omission: the story never gives any word other than the stated slur "fluke" for the trematode children. Perhaps, as a new group, they've never had the chance to name themselves outside of the disparaging dominant land culture. In fact, "Renny" is not even the main character's real name. It's a nickname, given by their father, that's short for Renacuajo—tadpole, polliwog. Readers never learn their real name. So when Renny swims off with their ocean kindred at the end of the story, it seems that perhaps they will find a new name and new identity for themself beyond the above water world that has imposed labels on them for so long.

Latinx futurism is a young genre, brimming with potential. The future is a ripe place to explore the themes of Latinx literature and their kinship with Latinx stories of the past and the now. Science

fiction is a genre ripe for reappropriation by the marginalized, who will likely find it a powerful conduit through which to deconstruct colonialism, reimagine communication, analyze language, and come to grips with a turbulent history and present. Narratives like these can serve as warnings or aspirations, tales of freedom or repression, finding identity or losing it, here on Earth or far off in the cosmos. The stories of *MAÑANA* are just the first of many vibrant possible futures for the Latinx community.

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Hard-Boiled Queer Detective Fiction

Ava King

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From the 1940s atmosphere to the jazzy, snappy language of the narration, Stephen Spotswood's *Fortune Favors the Dead* appears at first glance to perfectly fit the world of noir, a modern take on hard-boiled detective fiction. However, with the injection of queer themes, readers begin to question how closely Spotswood's work mirrors the rough-and-tumble, often misogynistic genre it appears to be modeled after. For the purposes of this argument "to queer" something is defined to mean: to introduce LGBTQ+ themes in order to evoke a sense of marginality within a traditionally heteronormative framework. While adhering to key aspects of hard-boiled detective fiction, in his novel *Fortune Favors the Dead,* Stephen Spotswood queers gender and other features of the genre illuminating the social injustices embedded in the formula.

John Cawelti lays out the modern city, the relationship between detective and police, the depiction of female characters, and the detective's unique moral code as critically important elements of hard-boiled detective fiction. While his article explores other facets of the genre, the aforementioned remain the most appropriate to consider in the context of Spotswood's novel. Cawelti explains that the traditional detective story contains "this fantasy of the modern city as a place of exotic and romantic adventure," unlike the city's role in the hard-boiled genre (141). By debunking that fantasy, the hard-boiled author portrays the city as a place of temptation and illicit immorality that the detective

must reject in order to retain his sense of moral superiority. Indeed Cawelti mentions this sense of apparent moral superiority throughout his argument as a distinguishing characteristic of the hard-boiled detective. He explores the concept in his negative estimation of the relationship between police and detective in the genre. As Cawelti states, "the hard-boiled detective metes out the just punishment that the law is too mechanical, unwieldy, or corrupt to achieve" (143). Thus an inherent distrust remains within the relationship between the detective and the force. Cawelti explains that even in exceptional cases when the detective relies on an officer for help in an investigation, ultimately he will choose to distance himself from the institution because, unlike the police, the hard-boiled detective is interested only in true justice, which goes beyond the law and the corruption of governmental institutions (153).

Unfortunately the detective's mistrustful attitude encroaches upon his relationships with female characters in the genre. Obviously classical hard-boiled fiction only explores sex and romantic relationships within the context of heteronormativity, and inevitably falls into misogynistic depictions of female love interests. Of sex in the hard-boiled detective story Cawelti writes, "it is an object of pleasure, yet it also has a disturbing tendency to become a temptation, a trap, and a betrayal" (153). Often the hard-boiled detective discovers that the woman he has been pursuing has committed the very murder or crime he has been investigating. Cawelti stresses that although the hard-boiled detective may be initially waylaid by a hypersexualized, femme fatale love interest he will inevitably overcome the distraction and leave the woman to suffer "justice" either by his own hand or the law's (159). The detective's choice to punish wrongdoing regardless of personal relationships harkens back to the concept of the detective's moral superiority. "For the hard-boiled detective, a case is not merely a problem; it can become a crusade to root out and destroy the evils that

have corrupted the urban world," writes Cawelti (151). Therefore the detective views himself as the necessary arbiter of justice, and the formula praises him for this. Readers are meant to sympathize with the detective, and while they may chafe at some of his more drastic measures, ultimately they will agree that his unsavory means justify his moral ends (Cawelti 151). The city, the police, women, and the detective's sense of justice all contribute to the world of the hard-boiled detective, and each helps illustrate social injustices inherent in the genre, especially when examined through Stephen Spotswood's contemporary and queer lens.

In addition to harboring the corruption and violence expected from a hard-boiled detective novel, the city in *Fortune Favors the Dead* plays a vital role as a place where Willowjean and others can find acceptance for their queerness. In his examination of the hard-boiled detective genre, John Cawelti describes the city as, "a gleaming and deceptive facade [hiding] a world of exploitation and criminality" (141). By Cawelti's estimation, the detective remains as the last truly virtuous character in a city that, although it may appear to symbolize a beautiful future for humanity, really illuminates the moral degradation of the modern age (Cawelti 141). Certainly Dr. Olivia Waterhouse would agree with Cawelti's assessment of the city. When Will and her boss, Lillian Pentecost, reveal Dr. Waterhouse's involvement in a string of crimes reaching back into Lillian's past, Dr. Waterhouse recalls the corruption of the city saying, "it's like we've learned nothing" (Spotswood 317). The venom with which Dr. Waterhouse speaks of the city - in her evaluation, a modern epicenter of depravity - explains her motivation for the heinous crimes she commits. In this way, perhaps Dr. Waterhouse and not Will emerges as a better analogy for the point of view expressed by the conventional hard-boiled detective in reference to the criminality of the city. Indeed, for Will the city allows her to express her queerness in a way that simply would not be possible in a

small town. Ms. Parker visits a club in the city described "as a sort of late-night limbo that catered to people of all shades and predilections" (Spotswood 162). The freedom of the city allows Will to slip under the radar, to be absorbed in the masses and largely overlooked, enabling her to live unapologetically. Of course the city's acceptance of queerness has its limitations, as evidenced by the hate crime Will experiences later, but its role as a liminal space where societal boundaries are beginning to be pushed exemplifies Spotswood's departure from the formula. Because of the queerness of the novel, the city can be appreciated for perhaps the very thing that a conventional hard-boiled detective would despise about it: its willingness to embrace deviance from social mores.

Spotswood's depiction of the police in the novel aligns with the expectations of incompetence and corruption in the hard-boiled genre; however, his layered approach to Lieutenant Lazenby exemplifies a break from the mold. Furthering the corruption motif of hard-boiled fiction, Cawelti claims that "the police represent symbolically the limitations, inadequacies, and subtle corruption of the institutions of law and order" (153). We see this in Spotswood's novel when Will meets sex workers in jail and remarks, "apparently the owner had missed a payment to a judge and the girls were paying the price" (16). From the beginning of the novel, Spotswood illustrates that the legal system is not in the business of achieving justice, at least not in the way the hard-boiled detective views it. The police are the most prominent branch of the justice system in hard-boiled detective fiction, and thus, as Cawelti agrees, the institution of the police cannot be viewed in a positive light. While Spotswood's police match the cold and corrupt picture of them as laid out by Cawelti, his individual characters allow for more nuance in the depiction of the force. When Lieutenant Lazenby apprehends John Meredith, the perpetrator of the hate crime against Will, he encourages the district attorney to avoid a trial assuring

Will that she "wouldn't have to parade [her] and Becca's private life in front of a jury and roll the dice they didn't vote not guilty by reason of [she] was asking for it" (Spotswood 253). Lazenby's active choice not to press charges against Will or Becca criminalizing their homosexuality proves himself to be a better arbiter of justice than the force as a whole. Spotswood humanizes the Lieutenant through his careful handling of Will's attack, and by suggesting that a policeman can be in it for true justice, he complicates the hard-boiled formula. The very nature of queering the genre allows for the abolition of black-and-white thinking in the novel, as illustrated by Spotswood's nuanced portrayal of the police in *Fortune Favors the Dead.*

Although Will's relationship with Rebecca Collins perhaps aligns more closely with hard-boiled fiction than any other aspect of the novel, unlike the sexually objectified irredeemable villain of pulp fiction and its kin, Becca survives the novel and retains her freedom despite her culpability as a double murderer. In hard-boiled detective fiction, "the intense masculinity of the hard-boiled detective is in part a symbolic denial and protective coloration against complex sexual and status anxieties focused on women" (Cawelti 154). Certainly *Fortune Favors the Dead* follows this pattern initially with Will showing romantic interest in and sexual attraction to Becca, later revealed to be the murderer. Both Will and the hard-boiled detective ultimately resist the sway of the femme fatale, but not after being under her spell for a portion of the story. Unlike traditional hard-boiled detective fiction however, Spotswood's world depicts a female detective at its center and thus somewhat escapes the negative portrayal of women wherein their sexuality denotes their criminality. Because Will, as the narrator, views Becca through a decidedly female gaze, readers grow to empathize with Becca through Will's first person point of view instead of viewing her solely as an object of sexual conquest as Cawelti describes. While *Fortune Favors the Dead* manages to escape the more sexist aspects of

the stereotype of the femme fatale, ultimately the novel does allow some aspects of hard-boiled tradition to seep through; Becca serves as a romantic distraction for the detective that hinders their ability to recognize the love interest as the murderer and also, potentially, the instrument of their destruction. In the end Will does end their relationship when she and Lillian solve the mystery, but Spotswood does not allow Becca to be written off so easily. Instead he uses the tragedy of Becca's circumstances - the tragedy that she lost the only parent who truly understood her without the chance to understand him due to her mother - to inspire compassion for Becca from both reader and detective. Ultimately Lillian and Will decide to "sever the chain of these events so that no one else need suffer from them, innocent or guilty" (Spotswood 305). With this choice, Spotswood suggests that by queering the romantic relationship more space is left for compassion and nuance on the side of the villain especially compared to traditional hard-boiled detective stories where often the villainous seductress must die for "justice" to be achieved

While Will's sense of justice, the individuality of her worldview, and her marginality connect the novel to its hard-boiled roots, her queerness in relationship with these aspects ensures that Spotswood's work belongs to a category all of its own. Will resembles in this sense the hard-boiled detective "whose moral code [...] transcends the existing order" (Cawelti 151). Like her conventional contemporaries, Will takes action as she sees fit, to enact justice to her liking. In a particularly climatic and pivotal moment for Will, she physically confronts an acquaintance's abusive husband, and even after she has gained the upper hand chooses to punch his teeth in anyway, as both a warning against future retaliation, but also, as we are encouraged to understand, as a form of projected vengeance against Will's own abusive father from whom she could not save her mother. When Will recounts the incident she declares, "I felt better than I had in days"

(Spotswood 264). In choosing to handle the situation herself and not rely on law enforcement, Will reveals her own striking similarity to the hard-boiled detective with her unique sense of justice heavily influenced by her own history and personal values. With her distrust of authority stemming from her experience with her father as a negative patriarchal figure and her history of persecution as a circus member, Will has all the makings of a hard-boiled detective who turns to their own unique moral compass shaped by a lifetime of living outside of social expectations. However, because of her identity as a queer character as well as her socio-economic class, Will does not have the ability to evade social consequences in the way that Cawelti's detective can. Of the hard-boiled detective, Cawelti claims "he is as much a victim of the world as a voluntary rebel" (161). Unlike most hard-boiled detectives, Det. Parker's separation from mainstream society cannot be characterized as "voluntary." Her queer identity distances Will from the hard-boiled archetype; the social order of her time refuses to accept her sexuality and thus her marginalization is not a choice. Stephen Spotswood irrevocably alters key aspects of the genre by inserting queer characters and themes into his novel creating a world of higher stakes where society's poor grasp of justice directly impacts detective as well as victim.

At each turn in his novel *Fortune Favors the Dead*, Spotswood plays into expectations for the hard-boiled detective genre and proceeds to critique and question them, proposing that the traditional hard-boiled detective formula inadequately addresses social issues both of its own time, and of the present. Willowjean Parker certainly indicates a breath of fresh air from the often sexist and violent archetypal hard-boiled detective, and yet Spotswood includes many connections to the formula in order to create a genre of his own that retains the mood of the original with the addition of better addressing societal ills. Spotswood's queer subversion of hard-boiled detective fiction ultimately results in a

story with more nuance and verisimilitude as he adapts an inherently misogynistic and homophobic genre for a queer detective.

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The Evolution of Chinese Beauty

Leah Cashin

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It is no coincidence that Gillette, one of the most popular razor producers in America, has marketed their products for women under the name of Venus, otherwise known as the goddess of beauty and love, Aphrodite. In addition to Gillette's Venus line, many other beauty products today have been influenced by ancient goddesses from different cultures around the world. In China, for instance, many cosmetic brands have adopted the names of Chinese goddesses in order to promote messages of traditional beauty. Nüwa Beauty advertises its products using the image of the Chinese mother goddess, Nüwa, to sell their Four Beauties Traditional Lipstick and Blush. Similarly, Ashà Beauty brands itself under the name of Yang Asha, the Chinese goddess of beauty. Sabbatical Beauty also sells a skin serum called Chang E's Silver Moon Pearl Serum, designed after the Chinese goddess of the moon, Chang'e. World views on femininity and female beauty have largely been shaped by the advertising and entertainment industries. China is no exception and with the growth of technology, Western ideals have been allowed to spread towards Asia with greater ease and speed.

I aim to examine the traditional beauty standards that female characters in Chinese folktales have created or contributed to. I will be comparing these traditional beauty standards with contemporary ideals in order to better understand the ways in which such perceptions have

changed over time. The westernization of Chinese beauty standards has negatively impacted the body image of Chinese women, leading to body dissatisfaction, plastic surgery, and eating disorders. Beauty through a Western lens is defined by European features, many of which are unattainable and inaccessible for Chinese women. The spread of such beauty standards contributes to the mass culture replacement of regional folklore. In order to establish the traditional beauty standards in China, I will be drawing from four different Chinese folktales and two articles concerning the representation of ancient Chinese female figures. To compare the traditional with the contemporary, I will be examining a study of Chinese female college students and an article about the effects of contemporary beauty standards. These sources will allow me to present the relevance of the issue of westernization and its implications for Chinese women in particular.

It is helpful to first begin with an overview of the Four Great Beauties of China. These women are present in a multitude of Chinese folktales and modern media. Most notably, they have inspired the creation of various idioms to express a person's beauty. First, there is Wang Zhaojun who is said to have been "so beautiful that birds would forget to flap their wings and fall out of the sky" ("Mingbai" 1). Her story begins in the emperor's court where she served as a concubine. Unlike the other concubines, however, Zhaojun did not bribe the portrait painter. As a result, her portrait failed to reflect her stunning beauty and the emperor mistakenly sent her away as a political bride for Xiongnu, King of the North. Continuing with the nature motif, another Great Beauty, Yang Guifei, was said to have "made all the flowers hide away in embarrassment when she walked by" ("Mingbai" 1). Guifei was originally betrothed to the emperor's son, but once the emperor gazed upon her face, he wanted her for himself. The emperor ordered that Guifei become a nun and afterwards, secretly married her himself.

The next Great Beauty is Xi Shi who "was so beautiful that when fish saw her reflection in the water, they would forget how to swim and sink to the bottom of the lake" ("Mingbai" 1). It is said that Xi Shi's effect on fish was seen by the King of Yue who upon seeing her, arranged her marriage with his enemy, the King of Wu. In the end, his plan proved successful as the King of Wu became so attached to Xi Shi that his kingdom fell apart from a lack of attention to governing. Finally, there is Diao Chan who "was so radiant that the moon itself would hide away in shame upon seeing her" ("Mingbai" 1). Diao Chan is most well known through the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. She was promised to marry both the tyrant Dong Zhuo and the warrior Lü Bu. Lü Bu eventually defeated Dong Zhuo in order to win Diao Chan's hand in marriage. These Four Great Beauties of China are common knowledge in Chinese households and continue to inspire new generations of film and literature alike. The legacy of traditional beauty that they have left, however, is now being challenged by westernization.

Pale, white skin remains a key ideal of beauty in China due to the history behind lighter skin as well as the representations of goddesses and female characters in Chinese folktales. In the earlier days of Chinese civilization, laborers who worked outside in the fields had darker skin as a result of being under the sun for most of their lives. Affluent people, on the other hand, were able to maintain pale skin since they did not have to go outside often. Thus, white skin became a desired trait because it signified the wealth and status of a person. Across various cultures, women's beauty is often described as having similarities with the moon and this concept is particularly prevalent in Chinese culture. In the folktale "Cloak of Dreams", Nai-Fe, the wife of Emperor Ming-Huang, is described as being "as beautiful as the moon in May" (Balázs 65). The moon has long been seen as a symbol for femininity due to the connection between the moon's cycle and the

menstrual cycle. This connection between Chinese female beauty and the moon persists in several folktales as well as connections between beauty and other parts of the natural world. This is exemplified by the popular idioms used to describe the Four Great Beauties of China. Additionally, In "Weaving Fair Lady and Water Buffalo Boy", Weaving Fair Lady's disappearance causes the heavens to be "empty and no longer beautiful" (Moss 59). In the end, she becomes a star in the Milky Way, destined to meet her lover only once a year, on Qi Xi, the Chinese Valentine's Day. The representation of Chinese women as stars or the moon contributes to the traditional ideal of white, radiant skin as being beautiful.

The traditionally desired body shape and size of Chinese women can be understood by looking at the perceptions of beauty present in Chinese folktales. The Tang Dynasty, also known as the Golden Age of China, brought forth a new ideal of beauty: plumpness. In previous dynasties, slender bodies were viewed as most beautiful, however that gradually changed as overweight and fat qualities began to symbolize wealth and power. Unlike in the modern era, fatness during the Tang Dynasty meant that a person was wealthy enough to afford food. In "The Parasols", for example, Yang-Tsu goes in search of a parasol to please his wife so that she may stop crying. In the end, his wife, Yu-Nu, is described as no longer having "red eyes from crying", but rather as being "well nourished and plump" (Balázs 79). This sudden change in her physical appearance reflects the idea that larger bodies were traditionally viewed as healthy and beautiful in Chinese culture. The main female character in another Chinese folktale called "The Clay Child" is also depicted as "strong and fat" (Balázs 145). This admiration of a plumper figure is embodied by Yang Guifei, previously mentioned Great Beauty, the most famous Chinese Court Lady, and consort of Emperor Xuanzong. Her rounder and more curvaceous features became the staple of beauty during the Tang

Dynasty and influenced other Chinese women of the time to follow the trends she set in regards to looser fitting clothing and more relaxed hairstyles ("The Importance of the Fat Lady"). The effects of Yang Guifei are evident in "The Parasols" and "The Clay Child" as plumpness is narrated in a positive light and seen as beautiful.

Chinese beauty standards have undergone significant changes with the transition from traditional to contemporary ideals and the spread of Western culture. Traditional beauty standards in East Asia have consisted of rounder bodies and faces as well as a greater emphasis on facial features rather than body shape. According to Jaehee Jung's survey of twenty-three female students from Donghua University in Shanghai, traditional beauty expectations vary from dynasty to dynasty. Respondents noted that slenderness was preferred in the Sung Dynasty and the Han Dynasty whereas plumpness was preferred in the Tang Dynasty. Although, a round face remained a consistent ideal of beauty throughout the dynasties. This is because in Chinese culture, a round face with full, rosy cheeks is viewed as a bringer of good luck and good fortune. Many of these traditional views, however, have been left behind in favor of more modern values. For example, round faces are no longer as desirable as they once were. In Old China, a pointy chin was unappealing because it was similar in appearance to a fox's face. Having a pointy chin in the past led people to believe that a woman was promiscuous and unfaithful to her husband due to the negative characteristics associated with foxes (Jung 1). In the modern era, a pointy chin is actually considered desirable as well as a defined jawline and a smaller face overall. Smaller bodies are also now the most common expectation for women's appearance. One student pointed towards the modern standard of thinness, stating, "Women tend to be slimmer and slimmer in our modern society" (Jung 1). Fashion magazines and other Western media have had a great impact

on Chinese beauty standards. The supermodels depicted in such media are, for the most part, tall and slim-figured. There exists a stark contrast between the Tang Dynasty and now. Back then, plumpness symbolized wealth because people could afford to eat more food, but today, thinness symbolizes wealth because it means that people have the money and time to spend on gym memberships, dieting, healthier foods, and the like.

The shift in China from traditional to more Western beauty standards has proven harmful in a variety of ways. From plastic surgery to eating disorders, the body dissatisfaction due to changing beauty standards has caused many to go to great lengths to achieve their ideal of beauty. Online challenges to measure thinness have gone viral in China as well as in other Asian countries. The collarbone challenge that emerged in 2015 on Weibo, one of China's largest social media platforms, measured how many coins could balance inside of a person's collarbone. The theory was that the more pronounced a person's collarbone was, the thinner they were. Another challenge, the A4 waist challenge, involves placing a standard sheet of A4 paper length wise in front of the torso. If the paper covers the person's waist then they are deemed to have the ideal body type. These types of challenges encourage Chinese women to alter their bodies to fit often unachievable standards of thinness.

The level of slimness that is now desired in modern Chinese society is near impossible to achieve through healthy practices. This has created a larger market for plastic surgery and has encouraged disordered eating. China and South Korea are each believed to have now surpassed the United States in terms of rates of body dissatisfaction and eating disorder rates (Jung 1). The thin body that is desired by many Chinese women cannot be attained through exercise and diet alone. Thus, the Chinese Language Institute reports that "as of 2018, the Chinese plastic surgery market is worth 70 billion USD"

(Yeromiyan 1). More and more people are seeking cosmetic surgery procedures due to the influence of South Korea and social media. Each year, millions of Chinese tourists visit South Korea to undergo operations to alter the shape of their nose in addition to double eyelid surgery, chin shaving surgery, and glutathione injections (Yeromiyan 1). Though glutathione injections which slow the pigmentation of skin, thus ensuring a paler, white complexion are more unique to Asian countries and have remained unchanged for the most part, the other most common surgeries performed in China and South Korea are a direct result of the spread of Western ideals.

Most Chinese women tend to have wide, flat noses and over half have monolids, an eyelid shape wherein the skin of the upper eyelid is covered and there is no fold that divides the lid into two parts. With the growth of social media, Chinese beauty standards have been altered in favor of European features. Instead of a wide, flat nose, many Chinese women desire to have a tall and narrow nose bridge and instead of monolids, they covet the double eyelids that the majority of Westerners already have. A round face shape is also no longer considered as beautiful in Chinese culture as it once was in more traditional settings. The defined jawline and pointy chin that can be seen in Western countries is now the ideal face shape and has led to the popularity of mentoplasty, or chin surgery (Yeromiyan 1). These Western standards, now Chinese standards, are reflected through the beauty filters that are most commonly used. Most Chinese beauty filters whiten the skin, enlarge the eyes, narrow the nose, and define the jaw of those who use them. Beauty filters such as these have become increasingly popular in China and other Asian countries, so much so that it is difficult to find a social media post that remains unfiltered.

The impact of Chinese female folktale characters and goddesses has been greatly reduced by the contemporary Western standards that have taken precedence over traditional perceptions of beauty. In the

digital age, the spread of information has become much more immediate and accessible. As a result, Chinese beauty standards have been westernized greatly and led to increased rates of body dissatisfaction and therefore eating disorders as well as plastic surgery. Many inherently East Asian features are no longer considered beautiful as European features have dominated social media platforms around the world. Although some Chinese beauty standards have remained the same such as white skin, a large number have completely flipped and are now the opposite of what was once considered traditionally beautiful. This mass culture standardization of beauty contributes to a larger problem. Though a number of companies today still reflect traditional, folkloristic standards of beauty, the effect of globalization has become clear. Chinese goddesses and other female figures continue to influence Chinese culture today, however when it comes to beauty, several of the traditional concepts present in ancient Chinese folklore have been swapped out in favor of contemporary views originating from the West.

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Utopia & Dystopia in Postcolonial Constructions of Place

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At first glance, the blockbuster sci-fi film *Black Panther* and the nonfiction novella *A Small Place* may not seem like they have much in common. *Black Panther,* directed by Ryan Coogler, is a fantastical cinematic depiction of a fictional African nation—Wakanda—untouched by colonization and almost completely immune to postcolonial conditions. As a consequence, Wakanda not only has the capacity to sustain itself, but also has the potential to liberate the entire African diaspora. The film operates as an imaginative media piece digestible and enjoyable for, rather than critical of, all audiences. On the other hand, *A Small Place,* written by Jamaica Kincaid, is a jeremiad text critiquing the postcolonial condition of Antigua and everyone involved in it: the colonizing Western outsiders and the colonized Antiguan peoples. Through its highly critical lens, colonization is presented as a source of great shame for Westerners and a source of great suffering for Antiguans.

What, then, bridges these two texts, when they are seemingly disparate in nearly every aspect? One is textual, nonfictional, and critical; the other is cinematic, fictional, and imaginative. It is a shared underlying principle: they both artistically construct place in ways that explore, negotiate, and challenge "Eurocentric" norms of storytelling and history-making (Mafe 2023), whether it is Wakanda in *Black Panther* or Antigua in *A Small Place.* By doing so, these media pieces

serve as postcolonial texts, even if they approach their unique postcolonial project from different standpoints—one optimistic, even utopian; the other pessimistic, even dystopian. *Black Panther* creates a utopia that aims to imagine an alternative future of a non-colonized society, and *A Small Place* creates a dystopia that aims to critique and resist the postcolonial condition.

Coogler's Wakanda in *Black Panther* functions as a utopia and furthers the postcolonial movement by imagining and even modeling positive, progressive futures for postcolonial societies. To understand the utopian elements of *Black Panther*, one can turn to Gregory Claeys' work distinguishing between utopia and dystopia. Of Claeys' definition of utopia, four components are most useful for our understanding of the film. First, utopia is comprised of, though not reducible to, a certain reconstructive "mentality" that questions normative structures and reorders them in more "satisfactory" ways (Claeys 150). Claeys describes this as an "[investment] in the future" or the "concept" of the future, to compensate for the ways in which the present is "deficient" (Claeys 150). Second, utopia is defined not by the level at which its infrastructure is advanced or futuristic, but instead by the ability of its sociocultural structures to foster community among its people (Claeys 155). For example, a busy kitchen during the holiday season may at first not seem utopian, yet its communal, synergetic energies transform it into a utopia. Third, utopia creates among its inhabitants "enhanced sociability"—that is, sociocultural structures within which individuals feel supported, uplifted, and integrated into a larger community (Claeys 151). Finally, utopia, especially in "literary utopianism," may feature "fantastic projections" that "verge on the utterly impossible;" however, they must also to some extent be realizable and conceivable in objective reality (Claeys 148). It is these elements—a reconstructive mentality, communal

socio-cultural systems, enhanced sociability, and realizability—that constitute a utopia, according to Claeys.

All of these utopian elements can be observed in *Black Panther's* Wakanda. The utopian mentality of reconstructing pre-existing structures is manifested in a literal, visual reconstruction of an African nation that seamlessly combines advanced technology and indigenous traditions in its institutions. For example, Wakanda is designed to be an integrated mix of glistening technology, lush greenery, and patterned, traditional design (Coogler 00:13:19-00:13:40). Similarly, T'Challa, the king of Wakanda, uses advanced military equipment such as Kimoyo beads and a teeth necklace that transforms into armor (Coogler 00:38:00-00:40:09), with designs that pay tribute to African jewelry making practices (Taylor 2023 and Camera 1993). Notably, it is this *integration* of technology and tradition, the reconstruction of normative systems, that makes Wakanda utopian, not merely the presence of technology in itself. Beyond reconstructivism, Wakanda's sociocultural system is predicated upon its isolationist principle, which builds a sense of communal identity. T'Challa posits in a conversation with Nakia that Wakanda is "not like other countries," and if they were to open their borders to the world, the people "could lose [their] way of life" (Coogler 00:33:28-00:34:34). This implies that the Wakandans have a strong sense of identity in opposition to outside countries, and that their identity is so integral to the nation's structures such that revealing it could result in the nation's demise.

Regardless of the veracity of T'Challa's beliefs, Wakanda does have enhanced sociability, the third component of a utopian world. Wakandan people find their individual purpose, as well as group support and identity, in their tribe, whether they are in the military Dora Milaje (Coogler 00:14:26-00:14:32) or the defensive border tribe (Coogler 00:34:48-00:35:47). Even if they are part of different tribes,

most Wakandans are connected, as illustrated in the kingship battle ritual (Coogler 00:19:51-28:30). They have shared dances, chants, rituals, and beliefs. Even the Mountain Tribe, which expressed dissatisfaction with Wakanda, still respects the outcome of the battle ritual, because they are integrated into Wakanda as a whole (Coogler 00:27:03-00:27:47). Finally, as much as Wakanda is fantastical, it has some amount of realizability and applicability to modern times. When Killmonger, a Wakandan-born American, returns to exact revenge on the Wakandans and Westerners who did him wrong, he explains how a Wakandan empire can liberate the African diaspora through transnationally dispersed military resources (Coogler 01:29:49-1:39:19). This suggests—objective veracity aside—that there is potential for a Wakanda-like utopia to take form in the real world if African societies had the resources to do so. This potentiality gives Wakanda a touch of realizability needed for a utopian imagination of place.

Because of Wakanda's reconstructivist integration of technology and tradition, internally communal socio-cultural system, enhanced sociability, and potential for implementation in the real world, it fits within Claeys' definition of a utopia. Further, by functioning as a utopian world, Wakanda helps catalyze a positive, possible future for postcolonial nations (Suchocki 59). Historically, there are various examples of the artistic conceptualization of utopias leading to the concretized implementation thereof. Vivien Greene notes how, for example, a utopian story by journalist Edward Bellamy in 1888 inspired the creation of real-life communities following the principles of the society he imagined (3). Another case in point: utopian socialist Charles Fourier's imagination of community became integrated into the planning of utopian settlements such as Utopia, Ohio in 1844 (Greene 3). Although these may be antiquated examples, they help establish the transformative effect of utopia on the

construction of socially advanced societies, which can be productive for the advancement of postcolonial societies.

Whereas *Black Panther* uses utopian elements to create a constructive imagination of place, Kincaid's characterization of Antigua as a dystopia functions as a critique of colonization and the postcolonial condition. As a result, the text furthers the postcolonial movement by breaking the silence around pain and suffering. To discern the dystopian elements present in *A Small Place*, we turn again to Claeys, who provides four components of dystopia that can be useful for our understanding of the novella. First, dystopia is characterized by political and societal structures that utilize punishment and fear to control individuals' behavior (Claeys 156). The result is a "repressive society" where people's freedom and access to resources are infringed upon (Claeys 162). Second, because of this fearmongering and restrictiveness, individuals become alienated from each other (Claeys 156). Where, in utopias like Wakanda, people find support among each other, in dystopias this characteristic is not present. Bonds between people are weak; "friendship and trust" are greatly diminished (Claeys 156). Third, dystopias are not usually intentional; they simply "happen" (Claeys 160), usually against the creators' and/or inhabitants' will. This is in opposition to utopias like Wakanda, whose goals and ends are deliberate. Finally, dystopias, especially in the literary sense, are meant to blatantly lament the loss of freedom in the face of insurmountable institutions such as political systems and imperialist projects (Claeys 172). These components—systemic punishment and fear, alienation among inhabitants, unintentionality, and lamentation of loss—constitute a dystopia in Claeys' definition thereof.

In Kincaid's characterization of Antigua in *A Small Place,* one can observe dystopian elements at play. Although Antigua is chronologically past the times of English colonization, colonizers

certainly used punishment and fear to control Antiguans, and such psychological and cultural damage might even still be lingering in the present day. Kincaid describes the "destruction of people and land" from colonization: a punishment Antiguans suffered only because they were non-English, and because they had to be controlled as a colony (24). Colonizers controlled Antiguans' speech and language, and punished them for violation of language laws (Kincaid 25). Even their movement was being controlled in establishments on Antiguan soil (Kincaid 27). To the present day, Kincaid describes how Antiguans are taught in "Hotel Training School" to be "good [nobodies]" and "good servants" (55). I would describe this as insidious fearmongering and control, though not blatant, because refusing to partake in such a system can result in the threat of diminished employment opportunities. Kincaid also states that Antigua feels like a "prison," implying that different dimensions of social systems present in the nation have an underlying sense of fear, restriction, and control. The second dystopian component of interpersonal alienation is also present in Kincaid's Antigua. Kincaid laments that Antiguans do not get along in harmony, but instead "imprison and murder each other," "corrupt [their] societies," and act like "tyrants" (34-35). Individuals are not economically uplifted through communal resources; instead, they must resort to corruption (Kincaid 59). These examples are a few of many that illustrate the lack of sociability and harmony among people in dystopian Antigua.

The third component of Claeys' dystopia is its unintentionality. Although not directly stated by the book, one can safely assume there was nothing deliberate on the Antiguans' side about being colonized and entering a desolate postcolonial condition. Unlike Wakanda, whose ends of prosperity and abundance were deliberately strived for and achieved, Kincaid's postcolonial Antigua manifests ends of inequality and corruption that were and are

certainly not contrived by Antiguans but are suffered by them regardless. Finally, Kincaid's creative act of writing *A Small Place* and characterizing Antigua in this way makes her Antigua a literary dystopia, a blatant "statement of loss" in the face of uncontrollable hegemonic institutions (Claeys 172). Kincaid writes:

> "...what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and most painful of all, no tongue" (31).

The long list of inadequacies cements this section and the entire novella as a jeremiad for loss. The items that she lists here, specifically, also relate to larger systems over which she has no control: geographical borders, land ownership and control, social systems, and linguistic systems. This sense of helpless agony makes *A Small Place* a literary dystopia.

Kincaid's characterization of Antigua as a society permeated with fear and alienation, and its inadequacies as unintentional but painful regardless, keeps *A Small Place* in alignment with Claeys' definition of a dystopia. Moreso, by constructing Antigua as a dystopian society, Kincaid contributes to postcolonial activism due to the political efficacy of dystopian imaginations. As Libby Falk Jones asserts, conceptualizing dystopias 1) gives voice to the anguish of the dystopia's creator, and that of the people represented by the creator, 2) pushes for the urgent "need" of resistance and revolution, and 3) acknowledges the "courage and beauty" of those willing to speak on issues of inequity and injustice (11). Kincaid can accomplish these aims through her dystopian characterization of Antigua, critiquing and resisting Western impacts and imaginations of the Antiguan nation.

In this paper, I have explained how *Black Panther*'s Wakanda and *A Small Place*'s Antigua function as utopia and dystopia, respectively, and how each of these imaginations of place serves postcolonial activist projects in unique ways. Although each text, by virtue of its functioning as a utopia or dystopia, has great value as a standalone piece of postcolonial media, there is also value in reading them side-by-side. Together, both texts function as a damnation of the "white man's burden," a colonialist concept that white people have to "[civilize]" and nurture non-Western people, because they are "degenerate" and incapable of sustaining themselves (Said 52). According to this hegemonic ideology, Europeans have a "life-giving power" that they must generously bestow upon the "silent and dangerous" colonized country (Said 57). With the aid of Europe, the East then is "[represented]" and "[animated]" (Said 57)—it is unable to achieve self-expression and autonomy on its own. These white supremacist notions are condemned and challenged by constructions of both Wakanda and Antigua in different ways; together, they demolish the argument of the "white man's burden." *A Small Place* illustrates the objective impact, destruction, and ruination caused by white colonizers invading a nation, arguing that colonization is detrimental rather than beneficial to the oppressed nation. *Black Panther* depicts how advanced, well-developed, and nurturing a non-Western, African society would be if it were untouched by colonization. Put together, the two texts assert the argument that white colonizers have no right or need to physically and psychologically invade nations, not only because they are inhumane and ineffective at disseminating their systems, but more importantly, because these nations are perfectly capable of flourishing on their own.

Postcolonial texts such as *Black Panther* and *A Small Place* are vital to our reckoning of the postcolonial condition, which is burdened with the histories and legacies of colonialism. The brutal physical and

psychological violence incurred by this system—which has historically existed in more blatant forms yet contemporarily manifests in insidious, neocolonialist structures–deeply impacts ways of thinking and being for postcolonial communities in the global arena. On this transnational stage, postcolonial nations are set back by such painful histories and are compared to colonizing nations along the binary of developing or developed. Postcolonial nations and their colonizing observers often wrestle with the question of when the former's gap between *developing* to *developed* will be reached. I argue that such a binary should not exist in the first place, and it is the ever-evolving process of becoming, of nation-building, that is more productive for the postcolonial movement. As this process of postcolonial identity unfolds, texts such as those previously described are vehicles of imagination, inventiveness, and creativity, which, as described by Leela Gandhi, can work to implement a psychological and cultural "departure from the colonial past" (6). These new visions of the postcolonial world can take many forms—dystopian texts, utopian films, and all in between—and, when consumed and read together, fill in each other's gaps to produce a rich discourse of postcolonial imaginations, theorizing, and activism.

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From the editorial board of Articulāte, congratulations to all the writers whose work was chosen for the Spring 2024 issue!