

# THE MALS QUARTERLY



AUTUMN 2009

# DARTMOUTH MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES QUARTERLY

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Dear MALS Community,

Welcome to the Autumn 2009 issue of the MALS *Quarterly*. We are pleased to publish two Creative Writing pieces: *A Day at the Beach with my Father* by Christian Ayers, and *The Gentleman Farmer* by Matt Hull. Two Cultural Studies pieces, *The Undercover Minstrel Show* by Jess Guernsey, and *Eclipsing Meaning: Žižek's Reading of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Derridean Deconstruction* by Stephen W. Freeborn, also grace the pages this season.

The Editorial Board feels that these four pieces show a snapshot of some of the best current work going on in MALS. We hope that these works can generate some important discussions within the MALS community, and hope you enjoy reading them!

Sincerely,

Alex Corey  
*Editor-In-Chief*

*autumn 2009*

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#### MALS *Quarterly* Mission Statement

The Dartmouth MALS *Quarterly* is the quarterly journal for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. The journal is broad in scope, and accepts submissions of any scholarly or creative work from current MALS students and all MALS alumni. It is a priority that all work is accessible to the full disciplinary range of MALS community members.

Our primary goal is to publish the best current work being done in MALS from the four tracks: Globalization, Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, and General Studies. Through publishing this work, we intend to initiate and encourage scholarly dialogue and discussion within the MALS community.

#### Cover Art

Our cover design features *What Use*, by writer and artist Brian Zalasky. The photograph was taken in Oxford, England during a three week writing seminar at Oxford University. The program is one of two study abroad opportunities available in the MALS program.

#### Submissions may be sent to:

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## The Undercover Minstrel Show

Jessica Guernsey

Roger and Hammerstein's *The King and I* complicates notions of race and cultural appropriation, mimicking the popular political sentiments of its 1950s American audience. The film features Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a narrative device within its diegesis through "The Little House of Uncle Thomas," and as a metafiction, with the events of the film replicating those of the novel. Furthermore, the Orientalist treatment of the Siamese characters of the film iterates the paradigms of blackface minstrelsy, the first indigenous popular American cultural product, which in itself prominently featured refigurations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. All of this slippery intertextuality and cultural appropriation within Walter Lang's *The King and I* (1956) serves to illustrate and palliate white American fears of miscegenation, both cultural and literal, by presenting an imaginary environment of integration, and removing the perceived threat of African American bodies from the discourse.

Nearly a century after the Civil War, America's racial politics were finally catching up with its purported ideals. The post-WWII era ushered into the popular imagination a new vision of the American dream, yet the Euro-American hegemony generally withheld its privileges from African Americans, especially in the South. Tensions built during the 1950s as black citizens became bolder in their demands for equal rights, culminating in the literal battle to integrate public facilities, especially schools. Throughout the racial tumult, which rivaled the 1850s both politically and socially, popular depictions of race relations delivered myriad approaches to the problem. The complexity of race relations in the 1950s, as with the 1850s, demanded popular texts to reflect and unravel different ideologies concerning race in order to confront them in the relative safety of popular entertainment. Americans in both eras were not homogenous in their politics or discourse on aspects of race. In the South, violent citizens and political infrastructures worked to squelch any racial discourse which aimed to integrate African American bodies or culture into the white mainstream. One tactic for dispensing liberal ideologies to those potentially resistant is to disguise them through traditionally safe narratives.

In America, the blackface minstrel show emerged and evolved as a testing ground for the white working class to mitigate their relationship to black slaves and slavery as an institution. Eric Lott discusses the advent of the minstrel show in the decades leading up to the Civil War, and its persistence in popular culture throughout the Nineteenth Century in his book *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.<sup>1</sup> He argues that there are "two narrative paradigms of minstrelsy's origins: one in which mixing takes place by an elision of expropriation, through absorption (in both senses); the other in which it takes place by a transfer of ownership, through theft."<sup>2</sup> This passage indicates the white cultural habit to fetishize and steal from the cultural products of African Americans in order to diminish the perceived threat of the African American male, embody those "traits" which whites found so threatening, and enact a more benign transaction of black bodies than that perpetrated in slavery. Blackface achieved this palliation of threat through both parody and creation. In lampooning African American dialects and cultural forms, minstrels actually invented a new cultural form which was a mix of black culture and white assessments of black culture. A similar appropriation and invention routine occurs within Orientalism.

Orientalism in American popular culture endures as an artistic device, despite its racism.<sup>3</sup> According to Edward Said's treatise on Orientalism, the West creates representations of the East as

exotic, highly sexualized, and barbaric in order to justify colonization of the East.<sup>4</sup> The similarities of blackface minstrelsy and Orientalist minstrelsy emerge from the hegemonic caste's need to subjugate the Other, while assuaging guilt and fear of this subjugation. *The King and I* uses Orientalism, or "yellowface" minstrelsy to avoid mocking African Americans—caricatures of the Eastern Other were evidently more acceptable to the mores of American audience, and more effective for the ideology of the script. The blackface minstrel, and the black face are both present in and absent from the film, like white men present in and absent from blackface minstrelsy. Orientalism, which shares some of its codes with minstrelsy, takes the edge off from the more threatening aspects of stereotypical African American male and Euro-American male identities by replacing them with the innocuous stereotypes of the Asian male.

Yul Brynner, in his role as the King of Siam, embodies the Oriental minstrel. The most apparent evidence of this role is his maquillage. Although not the ebony greased-cork worn by blackface minstrels, Brynner does use make-up to noticeably darken his complexion. His manner of speech follows the blackface technique of both inventing and lampooning an ethnic dialect, and he engages in multiple song and dance numbers. Lott writes of the minstrel character, "Bold swagger, irrepressible desire, sheer bodily display: in a real sense the minstrel man *was* the penis, that organ returning in a variety of contexts, at times ludicrous, at others rather less so."<sup>5</sup> Yul Brynner's King certainly embodies each of these aspects of minstrel performance. His role as the Orientalist minstrel opens one of the dominant racial analogies active within the film; the Siamese characters, and especially the King, represent the white hegemonic class of Americans, especially the white American man. Although the King holds slaves and reneges on his promise to Anna for a house (which she never gets—an indication of the reparations promised freed slaves after the Civil War), his spritely deportment, "scientific" mindedness, and humorous "Orientalness" make his moral transgressions appear as mere idiosyncrasies. The constant display of his svelte physique and sexual virility assuage the white male preoccupation with the size and aptitude of his penis. For the white audience of the film in the 1950s, these traits both mask and devilify the white American male, allowing for his later redemption by Anna.

Tuptim (played by Rita Moreno), the only developed slave character in the story, introduces *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the film. First, she asks Anna for the novel to practice her English, and later stages a theater production, which she entitles "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" to impress the British ambassadors with the Western sensibilities of the Siamese (although implicitly for the King to express her despair at being his slave). Here, the Orientalist minstrel show divulges its roots in blackface. Before the serialized version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was bound in novel form in 1852, minstrel shows began appropriating its scenes.<sup>6</sup> During the 1850s and 1860s, hundreds of iterations of the novel were adapted for the stage, each version with its own ideological devices, changed from the original text into whatever best conveyed the sentiments of its perceived audience. *The King and I* uses a metafiction of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a reproduction of plot devices, and as a member of its plot action in "The Small House of Uncle Thomas." The narrative arc of the film loosely follows that of the novel. The most outstanding moments of correlation happen after Tuptim's stage production of "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" which functions to enhance the moral thrust of the film's melodrama and to more clearly relate the de-Africanized text of the film with the overt American abolitionist message of the book.

The replacement of blackface minstrel characters with Orientalist minstrel characters in the scene of "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" complicates classical notions of minstrelsy in several ways. First, all of the characters except Uncle Tom and "King Simon of Legree" wear white face make-up instead of the traditional blackface. Underneath the white paint, the Asian facial structure is evident, revealing the racial appropriation in play. This betrayal of the Asian portray-

ing the “white” relates to the King’s role as the hegemonic white male throughout the film. Under this logic, the minstrelsy which classically would have been performed by white men in blackface directly correlates to the Asian in whiteface. Uncle Tom literally wears a caricatured black mask, and plays only a nominal role in Tuptim’s interpretation of the scene, while “King Simon of Legree” wears a demonesque “Oriental” mask in order to emphasize his correlation with the villainized King.

**“The miscegenation that occurs in *The King and I* through various cultural exchanges works to demonstrate the potential evolution of both cultures under similar circumstances.”**

Secondly, the provocation of racist stereotypes against African Americans is erased from the performance of “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” by erasing the African American characters themselves. Of course, historical minstrel performances of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* excluded African American actors from the stage. However, as Lott points out, the white minstrel performer was transformed into an African American in the imagination of the audience.<sup>7</sup> Within “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” the Orientalist stereotyping and caricature are laid

on so thick that this expropriation of American (or Western) culture by the Oriental effectively subverts the original appropriation of blackness by whites.

Deborah Kerr in her role as Anna plays an African American in our bizarre minstrel show. Her character depicts two key archetypes of African American representation in American popular culture with roots in minstrelsy: the Mammy and the Uncle Tom. Both of these types act as moralizing forces within American racial melodrama, creating a sympathetic black character to whom white audiences could attribute their pre-existing notions of race, and through whom they could experience catharsis. In her book on racial melodrama, Linda Williams writes “melodrama is the alchemy with which white supremacist American culture first turned its deepest guilt into a testament of virtue.”<sup>8</sup> As a Mammy, Anna teaches compassion to the Siamese children through kind cultural exchange (such as the song “Getting to Know You”) and through her sly manipulation of the King. Her embodiment of Uncle Tom proves more complicated. As an archetype, Uncle Tom represents the emasculated, passive African American male content to serve his white master. Anna fits this mold in some respects; as a female she presents none of the threat perceived in the black male. However, her role in *The King and I* relates much more closely to the Uncle Tom character portrayed in the novel than the perversion which describes the archetype.<sup>9</sup>

Stowe’s Uncle Tom demonstrates religious fortitude and universal goodwill. Although Tom himself does not attempt escape, he encourages Eliza in her endeavor for freedom. Furthermore, Tom employs passive resistance against Simon Legree by refusing to beat a fellow slave girl, revealing his commitment to his principles, even at the expense of his own suffering. Anna’s fortitude in her own moral code aligns her with Tom. She accepts most of the petty demands of the King (including keeping her head lower than his), while openly condemning slavery. Throughout the film Anna commiserates with Tuptim, both symbolically by introducing her to the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and literally by helping her to rendezvous with her lover, Lun Tha. At the climax of the film, when the King intends to whip Tuptim for her attempted escape, Anna courageously defends her, and insists that if the King will whip Tuptim, Anna will not turn away and allow the abuse to pass unwatched. This demonstration of passive resistance reflects the burgeoning practice of civil disobedience adopted by the fledgling Civil Rights movement. Anna’s refusal to be intimidated by the King’s whip and her insistence on witnessing the spectacle of violence borne from hegemonic dogma and vanity reflects the aim of the Civil Rights movement to create a whole nation of witnesses to the violence inflicted on African Americans in the South.

Aside from the whipping scene, the climax of the film could also be the “Shall We Dance?” number performed by Anna and the King, in which they tromp around the ballroom in an act of ersatz sexual intercourse. This scene consummates the relationships of “love and theft” which have developed throughout the film. Lott argues that generally love and theft “have as their purpose the resolution of some intractable social contradiction or problem that the issue of expropriation represents. That of the first [love] is miscegenation; that of the second [theft] slavery itself.”<sup>10</sup> If the scene directly after “Shall We Dance” confronts slavery itself, then Anna and the King’s dance certainly creates a double-climax in which miscegenation occurs. Linda Williams argues that within American racial melodrama there often exists a “miscegenation scene” which serves to present racial integration under the auspices of the sympathy evoked by the melodramatic genre.<sup>11</sup> In *The King and I*, neither Anna nor the King evoke sympathy at this point in the plot, but the foreplay of cultural appropriation porn which precedes this scene (in “The Small House of Uncle Thomas”) primes the characters and the audience for some symbolic race-mixing.

Anna, portrayed onscreen as a white woman, a black woman, and a black man, and the King, representing both a Siamese and a white man, not only engage in miscegenation with their sexual charade, but also with their racial charades. Both characters play already miscegenated roles through their simultaneously multiple racial types. Furthermore, the scene culminates the cultural integration of the two characters, which also functions as a type of miscegenation. As discussed at the beginning of this essay, the racial integration of public facilities in Southern America, and the sometimes violent resistance it provoked, represents one of Lott’s “intractable social contradictions” which can be mediated by minstrelsy.

Thus, the miscegenation that occurs in *The King and I* through various cultural exchanges works to demonstrate the potential evolution of both cultures under similar circumstances. One example from the 1950s of such an evolution in popular culture by cultural miscegenation is rock ‘n’ roll, embodied by Elvis Presley and his contemporaries. Of course, the physical absence of African Americans from the film evades a direct ideological confrontation with the audience, many of whom explicitly disapproved of integration, as it was conflated in the American imagination with miscegenation. Nonetheless, the pervasiveness of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* within *The King and I* keeps American racial melodrama just below the surface of its narrative, working in a tradition of passive resistance which, evolved from the actions of Uncle Tom, eventually helped to win the battle for Civil Rights.

## References

1. An anecdote speaking to this persistence of blackface well into the Twentieth Century: According to my grandmother, my grandfather, Robert Guernsey, acted as the interlocutor in a blackface minstrel show in Lebanon, NH in 1954, two years before the film release of *The King and I*.
2. Eric Lott. *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 57.
3. For an overtly racist Orientalist representation in American film, see Mickey Rooney as Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961).
4. Within the US, the staging of the Korean Conflict in 1950 might have introduced a political motivation for the creation of Orientalist texts, as Communism became conflated with the Eastern Other. With the US spearheading the campaign against Communist North Korea (and ultimately the Soviet Union), popular culture mandated the inclusion of Orientalism within its texts in order to bolster popular support for a war over both ideals and global dominance. The use of minstrelsy and Lott's concept of "love and theft" makes sense in this context, as the Korean Conflict pits persons of the same race against each other, so the Northern Other and the Southern ally must be both differentiated and absorbed, respectively. So, by creating caricatures of "Asians" (in which all disparate Asian cultures are conflated through Orientalism), American audiences engage the same device with which they mitigated slavery and abolition.
5. Eric Lott, pp. 25-26
6. Eric Lott, p. 213.
7. Eric Lott p. 100
8. Linda Williams. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to OJ Simpson*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 44.
9. Anna's dead husband is named Tom, possibly as a device to call to mind Uncle Tom and thus form an implicit association between herself and Stowe's character.
10. Eric Lott, p. 57
11. Linda Williams, p. 180.



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**Jessica Guernsey** is in her second year in the MALS program. Her concentration is in Cultural Studies.

## A Day at the Beach with my Father

Christian Ayers

It was a sizzling summer morning in July of 1995. When imagining Texas, most envision wind-swept plains and dusty, red horizons, but the gulf coast is another world. The sun blazes perennially on the nearby Gulf of Mexico, and the air remains thick with steam and ocean smell. The day was typical for mid-summer Corpus Christi: hot air breathed down your neck, the tar of the road was putty, streams of sweat ran down your spine and settled on your lower back. The streets were empty, air conditioning units were humming, and warnings of heat stroke filled the airwaves.

I would have been contented by a day of cartoons or a trip to the arcade, but my father had planned a fishing trip weeks before. He rescheduled his appointments, purchased a new fishing pole, and awoke at six o'clock to buy fresh bait from vendors at the docks. He packed his navy blue 1989 Chevrolet Suburban with weights and hooks, lines and an ice chest. There was energy in his gait, excitement in his eyes, and I knew that a complaint about the weather would have been a feeble excuse. I thought trips like these were meant to transform me into a man, and the last thing I wanted was to thwart such an endeavor.

We climbed in the car around seven o'clock and drove the half hour to the water. We exited far along the state highway running parallel to the shore. The beach was devoid of people. The sun stood directly overhead shining brilliantly on the fine sand, breaking into a million pieces that seared my eyes. We drove onward for several miles, the car bouncing and skidding on uneven ground, but I didn't see anyone. The beach was virgin, unspoiled; we drove miles in silence. I had never been so far into Padre Island, a thin stretch of uninhabited beach that runs over a hundred miles south to Mexico, and as we pressed forward I felt like I was seeing something fresh and uncharted. The beach's dazzling whiteness extended fifteen miles behind us by the time he stopped the car.

We unpacked our equipment and walked to the waves. The white glare reflected off the ripples like a thousand needles, stinging my eyes as I casted into the break. Sweat poured from my forehead, flowing across my face and covering my body. My father was drenched, and his shirt was caked with salt. We stood in the waves together for over an hour, casting repeatedly and talking of various things. Extreme heat is not good for fishing, and I don't remember a single fish biting in that hour. By noon, my shadow had retreated beneath my feet, and I could barely stand. Hot air blasted my face and body from all directions, and darkness started to creep in slowly. I sat down in the water, which provided little relief, and my pole slipped from my hands. I don't remember ever feeling so miserable. My face burned, the sweat stung my eyes, and my legs were noodles. Suddenly everything went dark.

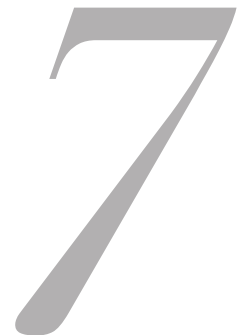
Ice water flowed over my face, and my father laid me in the front seat of the Suburban. The fishing equipment had been packed neatly in the back seat, and he began to drive north along the Gulf. I was ashamed of my weakness. I nursed the water jug slowly as he drove toward the city. The beach stretched before us again, barren and pulsating with heat.

A single dark spot appeared on the horizon amidst the fiery amber of the sand.

"What's that?" I asked.

"I don't know," my father said.

**"I thought trips like these were meant to transform me into a man, and the last thing I wanted was to thwart such an endeavor."**





The speck was nearly five miles away. We approached it slowly. Eventually the spot became a rectangle, and gradually the rectangle became a dark blue truck. A mile away from the truck, I glanced at my father. He stared ahead anxiously.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Nothing,” he said.

Within a minute we were almost even with the truck, though still a quarter mile inland. I looked to the water to see if anyone was fishing but saw nothing in the red glow. The beach looked as barren as it had hours before. I looked at the truck again, straining to see the passengers, but still saw no one. The heat had driven everyone away, leaving the beach deserted and private.

When we passed the truck, I leaned to the right and squinted through my window, and what I saw was undeniable: a man felling another man.

“Don’t look!” my father screamed. I turned my head away quickly, staring forward wide-eyed. He hit the accelerator and we sped onward, careening over the uneven ground. In a few minutes, the truck was merely another speck in the brilliant white, but I did not dare to look back. I glanced sidelong at my father. His eyes remained fixed on the road. Within a few minutes we crossed over to the freeway and were racing home. A half hour later we pulled into the driveway. I had recovered from my blackout and helped my father hose down the poles, clean the ice chests, and set the tackle box in our storage room.

“Son?” my father said when we had finished.

“Yes sir,” I responded.

“You did well out there. We’ll go again when it’s not so hot.”

We never spoke of the incident.



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## Eclipsing Meaning

### Žižek's Reading of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Derridean Deconstruction

Stephen W. Freeborn

At a first glance, Rubin's famous vase takes on the appearance of an antique amphora, which, upon closer viewing, appears as the silhouette of two profiled faces. This optical illusion is based on the reversal of the space surrounding the perspective objects. In artistic terms, the two objects are seen in positive and negative space and are mutually reliant in order to provide context for each. Psychologists, social scientists, philosophers, and cultural critics have used this negative-positive space relation as a metaphor to describe the subject's relation to the object, authenticity in relation to occurrences/events, contextual issues of cultural constructs, and other issues of identity formation. The benefit of using the negative-positive space metaphor is that by shifting the perception of the subject's relation to the object, the construction of the original relationship can be brought into a tension, allowing for a critical analysis to be formed. Ultimately, the tension created in the use of this metaphor produces a questioning of previous ontological constructions, which can then be used to examine the authenticity of the formation and allow for an alternative view to be constructed.

Slavoj Žižek chooses the negative-positive space metaphor in order to produce a critique of German idealism. Understanding this theory to mean that one's understanding of the thing-in-itself is based on the operators of the mind, German idealism posits that functions of the mind interpret the subject or object, producing a complete phenomenal picture. Žižek's claim is that this movement has been misinterpreted in concluding that the entirety of meaning of a subject or object can be found within itself. As a result of this misinterpretation, Žižek argues that the totality of philosophical thought produced after German idealism needs to be discarded and that a shifting of perspective will provide for an authentic understanding of these theories. He justifies this shift by arguing that despite the operations of the mind, a remainder will always exist that cannot be assigned a place. By focusing his attention on Hegel, Kant, and Schilling, major contributors to German idealism, Žižek metaphorically shifts his gaze from the traditional analysis of these philosophers' ideas to an alternative one. Therefore, the implications arise that the mind cannot produce the total essence of a being, but instead, part of the identity is formed from outside or remains unaccounted.

The origin of Žižek's critique lies within the fields of philosophy and psychoanalysis, and can be understood in terms of Richard Rorty's explanation of the shift that occurred in philosophy after Hegel produced his treatise of the mind in his text, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Rorty's text, *The Linguistic Turn*, advances the theory that, post-Hegel, a schism occurred in which two hermeneutic divisions formed. On one side of the schism the argument suggests that philosophy needs to become embedded within the measured sciences. The claim relates to the idea that forward movement can only occur when the ideas presented can be measured in concrete terms. On the other side of the schism the argument suggests that philosophy needs to be rooted within linguistics as language lies at the core of thought.

Siding with the measured sciences, in particular psychology, Žižek argues that this unaccounted space can be understood through the use of Lacanian analysis, specifically Jacques Lacan's use of the Real. By using Lacanian analysis, Žižek posits that the individual can only understand himself by projecting an illusion of his identity to make the reality of the 'I'; this illusionary projec-



tion is a constructed self that is limited in its function due to language. By using Lacan, Žižek works to produce a re-imagination of ideological, cultural, and phenomenological constructs with the goal being to draw out a new and truer interpretation that produces a tension and calls into question previously held assumptions that were once assumed in German idealism.

As mentioned, Žižek positions himself and Lacan on the side of measured sciences within the realm of psychoanalysis. In opposition, Žižek selects Jacques Derrida for the opposite schematic side, in the field of linguistics. Despite this split though, both Lacan and Derrida locate the beginnings of their analysis within inadequacies found in Freud in their attempts to address phenomenological developments of the mind and ontological issues of being. For Lacan, Freud's limitations are to be found in theories of development in the unconscious and conscious parts of the mind. As an alternative, Lacan suggests that the unconscious and conscious parts of the mind need to be divided into three categories: the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. Starting with the pre-linguistic stage known as the pre-symbolic, Lacan argues that each category acts in a specific developmental capacity leading to the total phenomenological core of an individual. On the other hand, Derrida chooses to approach Freud's issues in isolating the unconscious through linguistic developments to be found in his

**“Žižek posits that the individual can only understand himself by projecting an illusion of his identity to make the reality of the ‘I’; this illusionary projection is a constructed self that is limited in its function due to language.”**

concepts of the trace and *différance*. Accounting for the inability in accessing an origin, he claims that it is not necessary to explain such a space and that attention should instead be given to the play a signifier has in producing a reading of a text.

While Lacan and Derrida do differ in fields, they both arguably work a form of deconstruction upon the concept of being and its relation to the world. This phenomenological question is one that both deem important and work to develop, and confusion seems to arise

from this area. As well, both theorists are noted for being obscure in their language, electing to use poetic terms to describe issues of being. As a result, while Lacan and Derrida have not necessarily been discussed in comparative terms (with the exception of Andrea Hurst and Michael Lewis), Žižek does see the connection and chooses to tackle the issue in order to critically assess the effectiveness of a Derridean reading on Lacan. While the overarching aim of this essay is to trace Žižek's use of positive and negative space in relation to ideological, cultural, and phenomenological constructs, it will serve a double function: pursue the question raised by Žižek with respect to the comparison or difference between Lacan and Derrida as well as, at the same time, raised some concerns on the solidity of Žižek's cultural criticism. After presenting Žižek's critique of a Derridean reading of Lacan, it will be argued that Žižek not only misinterprets Derridean deconstruction, but that he also provides a limited and skewed vision of Lacanian terms. This then leads one to doubt his thesis that a Derridean reading proves to be limited when examining Lacan. Ultimately, this reading will provide doubt over Žižek's use of Lacan in reexamining global constructs.

In terms of the current conversation, Žižek's use of negative-positive space translates into a critique of Derridean deconstruction and its relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis. In his essay, “The Eclipse of Meaning”, Žižek begins with a question posed by Rex Butler in which the Australian psychologist asks how Lacan's theory differs from deconstruction. His response lays the groundwork for the rest of the essay: “My hypothesis is that the Derridean deconstructive reading of Lacan reduces the corpus of Lacan's texts to a doxa on Lacan which restricts his teaching to the framework of traditional philosophy” (Žižek, 206). Žižek argues that deconstruction is a tempting reading as it provides

for a convenient way to produce a spontaneous philosophy of psychoanalysis, one that Lacan even occasionally “yields to its temptation” (Žižek, 206). By beginning with Lacan’s understanding of the pre-symbolic space and the shift from this realm of the Real to the symbolic realm, he begins his discussion of the misreading by working through what he argues are the traditional interpretations of Lacan’s notion of the Real and its applications within psychology and political theory. Ultimately, by shifting the perspective of the Derridean analysis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek works to reveal the limiting nature a deconstructive reading of Lacan offers.

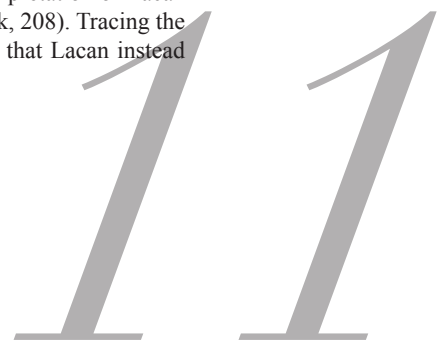
Beginning with Lacan’s understanding that the presymbolic Real is the beginning stage of the individual, Žižek explains that each act can be understood as the desire to return to this unattainable position. However, the moment one enters into the symbolic order, the presymbolic Real is forever lost because of the limitation of language, what Žižek refers to as ‘symbolic castration’. As a result, every object the individual encounters is used as a substitute for the lost original and is limited due to language:

The moment we enter the symbolic order, the immediacy of the presymbolic Real is lost forever: the true object of desire (‘mother’) becomes impossible-unattainable. Every positive object we encounter in reality is already a substitute for this lost original, the incestuous Ding rendered inaccessible by the very fact of language – therein resides ‘symbolic castration’. The very existence of the human qua being-of-language stands thus under the sign of an irreducible and constitutive lack. We are submerged in the universe of signs which forever prevent us from attaining the Thing. (Žižek, 206)

The introduction of the Thing demonstrates a possible way to mimic a return to the presymbolic Real in representational form, but it also leads into a possible misreading of Lacan. The Thing acts as a replacement for the unattainable object of desire: “A productive way out of this deadlock is provided by the possibility of *sublimation*, when one picks out an empirical, positive object and ‘elevates it to the dignity of the Thing’, i.e., turns it into a kind of stand-in for the impossible Thing” (Žižek, 207). Sublimation replicates and replaces the missing presymbolic Real by representing the Thing as a duplicate of the original. The act of replacement of desire with the Thing is where Žižek suggests that Lacan’s theory can be misconstrued. He does so by citing an example of a Lacanian interpretation of Antigone in which the claim is that Antigone’s “clinging to her desire” demonstrates a “lethal obsession with the Thing which cannot achieve sublimation and therefore gets lost in suicidal abyss...” (Žižek, 207). Instead, Antigone’s choice to hold on to the desire and refusal to supplant it with a weaker replacement is truer to Lacan’s treatment.

Rather than follow through with this development, Žižek shifts his attention to the political consequences of this reading of Lacan, perhaps as an indirect response to Antigone’s position. Understanding that the political sphere exists in an ambiguous relationship between the subject and the public Thing, the relationship is split between the individual’s drive to obtain their personal desire and also their communal drive to push toward the fulfillment of the community’s desire. Within this split, a distance is required in order to maintain the illusory feature of the communal bond. According to Žižek, the Thing must remain distanced and can “appear only in retreat” (Žižek, 208). Any movement to obtain its positive ontological consistency will result in its dissipation. In essence, in order to maintain a balance, “the Thing (freedom, for example) has to remain a regulative ideal – any attempt at its full realization can lead only to the most terrifying tyranny” (ibid).

At this point in the essay, Žižek reminds the reader that while this interpretation of Lacan might prove convincing, that it in fact is “an ‘idealist’ distortion of Lacan” (Žižek, 208). Tracing the problem to the focus on the negative assignment of the desire, Žižek proposes that Lacan instead



intends on interpreting the Real “*qua* drive [as]...the agens, the ‘driving force’, of desiring” (ibid). He continues his interpretation by referring to the potential positive aspect of the drive:

This ‘active’ (and not purely negative) status of drives, of the presymbolic ‘libido’, induces Lacan to elaborate the myth of ‘lamella’. In it, he deploys – in the form of a mythical narrative, not of a conceptual articulation – the ‘real genesis’, i.e., what had to occur *prior* to symbolization, *prior* to the emergence of the symbolic order. (Žižek, 208)

Žižek locates what he claims to be a truer interpretation of Lacan when he argues that “the passage from the radically ‘impossible’ Real...to the reign of the symbolic law, to desire which is regulated by Law, sustained by the fundamental Prohibition, is not direct” (Žižek, 209). The misreading of Lacan is located in the idea that the Real drifts away into the unattainable distance when the shift between the presymbolic and symbolic realms occurs. Instead, he argues that “something happens *between* the ‘pure’, ‘pre-human’ nature and the order of the symbolic exchanges, and this ‘something’ is precisely the Real of drives” (ibid). A true interpretation of the Lacanian Thing is not as a replacement for the impossible Real, but as “the very universe of drives” (ibid).

Now that the foundation has been laid regarding the traditional misreading, Žižek turns his attention to deconstruction to see how this interpretation fails to capture Lacan. He begins by referring to Derrida and his concept of the supplement:

In a way reminiscent of the Foucauldian endless variations on the complex heterogeneity of power relations (they run upwards, downwards, laterally), Derrida also likes to indulge heavily in exuberant variations on the paradoxical character of the supplement (the excessive element which is neither inside nor outside; it sticks out of the series it belongs to and simultaneously completes it, etc.). (Žižek, 210)

While Žižek construes Derrida’s supplement as being paradoxical and exuberant, it in fact relates clearly to the signifier’s role in relation to the play of the structure. In his essay, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida refers to the movement produced by the play of the signifier as being supplementary: “One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center’s place in its absence – this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*” (Derrida, 289). The sign acts as a supplement for the lost center and produces the possibility of interpretation, one that is used and then discarded. According to Žižek though, Lacan differs from Derrida because he “*directly offers a concept of this element*, namely the concept of the Master-Signifier, S1, in relation to S2, the ‘ordinary’ chain of knowledge” (Žižek, 210), a concept that is defined as the “structural ambiguity itself” (ibid). Using the Master-Signifier as a description of the way knowledge is gained and processed, Žižek posits that the Lacanian supplement adds to the descriptive Center instead of taking away from it and that this supplement is the “condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of the Centre” (Žižek, 210). Žižek concludes that the Lacanian supplement is “the Centre itself ‘in its becoming’” (ibid) and is to be understood as the movement of the drive rather than a fixed sign. The action of the drive becomes the supplementary Master-Signifier, which provides for the foundation of the individual to come to terms with the loss of the presymbolic Real.

Žižek’s interpretation of Lacan and Derrida falls short though. His intention is to demonstrate how deconstruction differs from Lacanian psychoanalysis, but his treatment of the supplement and the center does not produce a full reading of Derrida’s interpretation of these terms. In fact, his

selection proves to be too limited and forgoes Derrida's reading of Lèvi-Strauss in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," which would greatly clarify where the clear difference between Lacan and Derrida resides. Žižek's failure to address this reading seems egregious because Derrida refers directly to the issue of the center and the supplement in his reading of myth:

The discourse on the acentric structure that myth itself is, cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. It must avoid the violence that consists in centering a language which describes an acentric structure if it is not to short change the form and movement of myth. Therefore it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical discourse, to renounce the *episteme* which absolutely requires, which is the absolute requirement that we go back to the source, to the center, to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on. (Derrida, 286)

Derrida argues that in order to maintain the acentric structure of the myth, the absolute center needs to remain absent due to the origin having been lost and having become unattainable. By substituting the play of signs in the place of the absent center, one is able to interpret the trace of the lost origin and produce a reading.

For Lacan, the presymbolic Real can also only be discussed in terms of loss due to the limited function of language and the symbolic realm. A return to the Real is impossible, which is observable in the production of the drive and desire. What Žižek suggests is that Lacan locates a permanent replacement of the lost center in the form of the Master-Signifier, the universe of drives, whereas Derrida chooses to keep the center empty. It is at this point though that Žižek's misreading of Lacan becomes apparent. In his attempt to locate Lacan outside of the traditional philosophical/psychoanalytical position, he loses sight of Lacan's true intention, which is that this loss of the Real, produced during the shift from the presymbolic to the symbolic (otherwise known as the mirror-stage) is essential to the formation of the individual's sense of identity. Žižek argues that this reading forces Lacan into "...modern structuralist and or existentialist philosophemes of constitutive lack..." (Žižek, 208). However, a different reading of Lacan demonstrates that the shift is necessary and that a fixation on the Real will only limit the individual's development:

This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The *mirror* stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. Thus to break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* into the *Umwelt* generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications. (Lacan, 1288)

Referring to the need to move past the circular pattern of shifting from the *Innenwelt* to the *Umwelt*, it can be construed that Lacan does not argue that the individual should remain in relation to the Real by supplementing the loss of the center with the universe of drives, but that this constitutive lack helps to shape the perception of the individual *I* in relation to socially elaborated situations. In these terms, Lacan seems truer to a deconstructive reading than the alternative Žižek attempts to produce.

After his treatment of the Master-Signifier, Žižek turns his attention to what he refers to as the "*Mutatis mutandis*" (Žižek, 210): the coupling of voice and writing. Žižek posits that Der-

rida locates the metaphysics of presence within the “illusion of ‘hearing-oneself-speaking...upon the illusionary experience of the Voice as the transparent medium that enables and guarantees the speaker’s immediate self-presence” (ibid). It is at this point in the argument that Žižek clarifies his understanding of the Derridean concept of *différance*. According to Žižek, this term is understood as “the constant and constitutive deferral of impossible self-identity” (Žižek, 211) with the understanding that there are multiple possibilities and that each demonstrates a value in-itself. The impossible self-identity is representative as the lost origin and that it is only through the trace of writing that one can come in the briefest of contacts with its reminiscence. Žižek strongly states that the voice is not to be understood as a symmetrical reversal to Derrida’s concept of writing. He argues that the Lacanian voice exists prior to writing in the transparent self in which it appears within the subject’s self-presence. The voice equates to “the ‘self-identity’ resid[ing] in the fact that the voice qua foreign body which undercuts my self-presence ‘from within’” (Žižek, 211). Therefore, the tension exists between the voice of the inner-presence and the voice of the external presence. Contrary to Lacan, the Derridean voice is the “medium of illusory self-transparency” (ibid) in which the structure continuously fails to maintain itself, which reveals that voice is already tainted with the trace of writing and thus, introduces “an interspace, a gap, into the voice’s pure self-presence” (ibid). Žižek posits that the Lacanian voice can be distinguished as a drive and is therefore caught in a circular movement. This movement fails to obtain the Real of an antagonism rather than a Derridean identity and carries a trace of the Real in the form of “quilting”, which provides for the signifier: “voice is that which, in the signifier, resists meaning: it stands for the opaque inertia which cannot be recuperated by meaning” (Žižek, 212). Making a connection to the supplement, the Lacanian voice is the residual trace left from the Real existing between life and death in the form of a spectral haunting. However, unlike Derrida’s trace, Žižek argues that this voice is more of an “‘undead’ monster, not a ‘healthy’ living self-presence of Meaning” (ibid).

As such, Žižek suggests that the location of negative space within the interpretation of these two theorists is another distinguishing feature between Derrida from Lacan. According to Žižek, the Derridean subject always remains substance, whereas the Lacanian subject functions in the opposite – a lack of substance. Žižek explains this statement by referring to Derrida’s work, *Grammatology*, in which he interprets the text to mean that despite the play that exists between the subject and the structure that a kernel of the subject remains preserved. Explaining that, for Lacan, this formation is in opposition, Žižek argues that the center is formed out of the act of the drive instead of the implantation of a specific object to be used for the time and then discarded. To explain further, the drive refers to an action or movement in which the subject locates and possesses as a supplement to the trace of the Real left in the form of a displaced inner voice. The Master-Signifier provides for the possibility of negative space in that it chooses not to fill or replace the space with a stand-in. Rather, it makes use of the space through the construction of a movement in which the individual can exist in a perpetual state of motion, always working toward the desired object, never replacing it, and knowing that the journey is in fact home.

Turning to Hegel in order to best demonstrate this Lacanian concept, Žižek makes use of the logic of the negation of negation: “The ‘negation of negation’...stands for the horrifying experience which occurs when, after sacrificing everything considered ‘inessential’, I suddenly perceive that the very essential dimension, for the sake of which I sacrificed the inessential, is already lost” (Žižek, 216). The individual recognizes the horror of having sacrificed the inessential in order to gain the essential. In an Oedipal twist, it is only afterward that the essential has become unattainable and are both now lost. Žižek’s claim is that Lacan believed that it is in this negative non-space or state of emptiness that one comes to define the subject in a continual push of the supplement and the Center. Žižek insists that Hegel’s whole point is that the “subject does not survive the ordeal of negativity: he

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effectively loses his very essence and passes over into his Other” (Žižek, 217). Žižek’s claim is that while Lacan understands that the subject can only be understood through what is not substance, he argues that Derrida insists on there always being a substance in the subject. He understands the Derridean reading to suggest that the notion of the subject will always have a minimal self-presence that remains the same beneath the changes that occur within the subject. The Hegelian reading though, leads Žižek to believe that the subject is always affected by shifts from the decision to give up the inessential for the essential. The result is that the subject’s substance remains absent.

At this point in Žižek’s essay, he breaks from the critique of the Derridean deconstructive reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis to digress on an obscure example from Paul Claudel’s *Coûfontaine*-trilogy, one that was originally mentioned in Lacan’s analysis of *Antigone*. Žižek goes into a drawn out summary of the events that occur within the first part of the trilogy, *The Hostage*. After numerous pages of summation of the events, he draws a parallel to *Antigone*, mentions Dostoyevsky, Saint-Just, Robespierre, Communism, and Catholicism. Each point is to be understood as a Hegelian negation of negation; however, Žižek is sporadic in his attempt to isolate the similarities. He then ends his essay with a final example from an obscure text from Slovene literature: France Prešeren’s *Baptism at Savica*. Unfortunately, Žižek’s digression continues to the completion of his essay in which he fails to return to his original thesis. He does return to the question of the *doxa*. Instead, Žižek turns to Hegel and his philosophical opponent, Kierkegaard, with the claim that they both share a similar logic concerning the ‘sacrifice of the sacrifice’. It is on this note that he ends his essay: “It is only through such a double movement of the ‘sacrifice of the sacrifice’, which bereaves the subject of its entire substantial content, that the pure subject *qua*  $\$$  emerges, i.e., that we pass from Substance to Subject” (Žižek, 229). With no choice but to infer Žižek’s meaning of the ‘sacrifice of the sacrifice’ and its relation to the claimed limitations that a Derridean deconstructive reading produces on a Lacan’s psychoanalysis, it seems that the key lies in Žižek’s understanding of the substance and how, for Lacan, the subject continuously strives to fill a void, but is unable to because it is the location of the universe of drives. Through a deconstructive reading then, it seems that Žižek is claiming that Derrida reads this space as being occupied by substance. It seems though that Žižek’s failure to return to his thesis calls into question the entirety of his claim, suggesting that he perhaps has lost his original focus and has foundered.

To conclude, while Žižek does successfully demonstrate a difference between a “true” Lacanian interpretation in regard to his analysis of the drive acting as the center, a Derridean deconstructive reading cannot arguably be claimed to produce a false one. Both Lacan and Derrida were contemporaries who lived parallel lives and discussed parallel issues. However, while they often acknowledged each other’s presence, they chose to minimize the critiquing of each other’s work. Some would argue that this avoidance was a sign of disrespect for their theories. However, another explanation, leads us back to Richard Rorty who, incidentally was a hard critic of Derrida. Mentioned earlier, the split in philosophical thought after Hegel produced two distinct paths, one toward the sciences and the other toward linguistics. As has already been established, Lacanian theory suitably fits within the field of psychoanalysis, one that falls within the sciences. Derridean deconstruction though, fits on the opposite side of the spectrum, in the field of linguistic analysis. The true distinction lies in that Lacan and Derrida choose to operate within different fields and that these fields pose different questions and suggests different solutions. While Lacan is required to tackle the question of

**“Žižek’s failure to return to his thesis calls into question the entirety of his claim, suggesting that he perhaps has lost his original focus and has foundered.”**



the pre-symbolic and the space before language, Derrida is able to dismiss it as lost and focus on the play of language and its relation to the subject. He is able to fill the void with a supplement and use it as a temporary replacement that can be discarded. Žižek loses sight of the Derridean supplement as well as how the Lacanian shift from the presymbolic realm to the symbolic is treated in relation to the center. As well, in dismissing Derrida's method as being incomplete, Žižek fails to recognize the value of the horizontal positioning of the signified as this then allows for multiple readings giving weight to multiple angles. In order to have Lacan move away from Hegel's circuitous dialectical trap, it is essential to implant a Derridean reading on to Lacan, suggesting that the voice and writing produce a similar act of creation and destruction. So while Žižek denies that Derrida does not make Lacan's last move of the negation of the negation, it can be argued that the act of destruction does exist in Derrida's reading, but that it is only afterward that the meaning can be interpreted as it is in Lacan's supplement.

Rather than concede that Žižek is misguided and therefore should no longer be considered, his essay does still maintain a value in that it opens up a discussion of how and if Derrida and Lacan can be used to discuss the concept of negative-positive space. While both maintain firm differences in discourse, their theories both work to develop an explanation of the shifting from negative to positive space and the traumatic effect it can cause. Andrea Hurst and Michael Lewis both attempt a coupling of these theorists, but in different manners. Hurst, in her book, *Derrida Vis-à-vis Lacan*, works to demonstrate the comparison between Lacan's Real and Derrida's notion of the plural logic of the aporia. Lewis, on the other hand, chooses to develop the notion of the remainder in terms that it represents the bestial pre-language essence of a being, and that by working through a Derridean deconstructive reading of Lacan, one can grasp this phenomenon. The promising development lies in acknowledging differences in fields and then establishing parallels between Lacan and Derrida rather than attempting to subsume one over the other. Both attempt to explain the phenomenon of negative space, but through the lens of their own discipline. Derrida perhaps articulates this difference best in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" when he concludes that there are two possible interpretations of this concept:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of the man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology – in other words, through his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. (Derrida, 292)

While Lacan looks to the Real as a defining split that informs the subject's identity through the use of the drive, with the hope of working toward deciphering a truth that escapes play, Derrida no longer looks to an origin. While Derrida is able to dismiss this question of an origin, Lacan needs to answer it, as his field requires a comprehensive approach to the origin of the individual. In both positions, the center of discussion focuses on how to treat this negative space and whether it is possible to acknowledge and work with it. While Lacan chooses to affirm its place, Derrida lets it go as unattainable. It is within this framework that the true distinction between these two theorists exists and where Žižek's interpretation falls short. As a result, Žižek's misreading of Derrida and Lacan creates doubt regarding his use of Lacan within other analyses as well as requires a reexamination of his claim regarding German idealism.

## Footnote

1. Signifying the barred S.

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## The Gentleman Farmer

Matt Hull

The table was heavier than he remembered. He had moved it out here from the stone shed just a couple of months ago, after the last frost and before the crocuses poked out their sleek purple heads. He left the umbrella stand where it was, centered on a large slab of slate, near the northwest corner of the patio and very close to the greenhouse. Guests always commented on how spectacular Lily's flowers were: orchids in full view, hardly obscured by the glass. This was a woman who did not mind a compliment, cultivated them in fact, just as she did her plants.

Caleb spread his wings as far as they would reach, his fingertips just curling about the metal frame of the table, barely getting a firm enough grip on it to walk, balancing the glass with his stomach so that it would not slip out and crash to the ground, shatter. Lily turned toward him, having finally loosened the stranglehold that the dandelion's roots had on the dirt, exclaimed, "Oh, do be careful, Caleb. Why don't you set it down and I will help you move it. You said that it wasn't all that heavy. I can help."

"Oh, no, it's just a bit cumbersome is all. I've moved it before by myself. I'm fine. I'm just gonna set it on the driveway so that we can get this deck cleaned up right."

"Well, okay, then." She said it as if she didn't believe him, then saw him gain momentum, whisk the table across the space, set it down gently in the gravel.

"We might as well move the chairs and side tables off then, too." With that, she put her trowel on the low, capped stone wall that surrounded the entire patio, save for the sections that butted up against the two buildings that it spanned, that and a wide entranceway leading from the driveway. Lily moved toward a huddle of chairs, each one of them costing approximately what Caleb made in a week at Scribe. She could only lift one at a time, though they weighed mere pounds. Expensive as they were, Caleb thought that they should have been heavier. He grabbed two at a time, placed them with the others, and then went for the chaises, the teak tables. Soon the patio sat naked, save for a few planter barrels strategically placed, brimming and full, the umbrella stand, all immovable.

"So," Caleb began as he surveyed the project, "what are we doing, just weeding and then sweeping?"

"Yes. That would be the name of the game. I assume that you know how to weed properly?"

Caleb used to get annoyed by Lily's deprecating comments, as if a trained monkey couldn't weed a deck. He had learned over the past months, though, that she didn't mean it the way it came out; it was just that her delivery always seemed to lack a certain sympathy. Now, when appropriate, he shot back subtle reminders that he was fully capable of whatever chore she might delegate. Lily did not suffer fools easily. Fortunately, Caleb was no fool.

"Oh, yeah, I prefer to use my bare hands, really get down there with my fingertips, get 'em at the bottom of the root so they don't come back anytime soon. Luckily, I don't have a manicure to worry about, so I don't have to fumble with gloves and a spade." He hoped that he hadn't gone too far.

"Yes, that is, indeed, lucky."

The unlikely pair continued to work in relative silence, Caleb pausing only to remove his shirt, and, occasionally sweep up the area where he had pulled up blades of errant grass and nameless, brawny vegetation whose sole purpose on this planet, it seemed, was to be difficult. Caleb thought

that he knew quite a few people who served the same exact purpose. After about twenty minutes, Lily suggested that she might take a short break to make them some lemonade.

“You must be thirsty, what with this heat.” As she looked at him—telling rather than asking—she continued, “Oh, and your shoulders are getting pink, Caleb. I’ll bring out some lotion so that you don’t get a burn.” He often worked around the Farm with no shirt on. He thought in the beginning that Lily’s very proper nature might not allow a worker to expose himself like that, but she had never said a word about it. In fact, until now, he thought that she might not have even noticed at all.

“That sounds like a great idea, Mrs. Williams. And thanks. I thought that by now that I’d be tan enough not to burn, but I guess not. I have some sunblock in the cottage if it’s a hassle.”

“Oh, not at all. I have some wonderful lotion that I order from mail-order catalogue that is just the best! I’ll bring it out with the lemonade. You just keep doing what you’re doing.”

She stood, removed her gloves, leaving the trowel on the ground. Wiped her forehead with the back of her wrist, fluttered the high v-neck of her t-shirt as if to create some kind of internal breeze. Placed the gloves on the wall, about five feet from where she had previously laid the spade. She had made a fair amount of progress, about the same as Caleb. Not bad for an old lady.

“Back in a jiffy. Keep up the good work, Caleb, this is really starting to shape up.”

He suspected that this was the end of Lily’s menial labor for the day. She walked purposefully across the patio, unofficially assessing his handiwork. Climbed the side steps to her house, opened first the screen door and then the wooden one, red as a lacquered nail. Their house had central air-conditioning; the ungainly outdoor unit hidden expertly, in the back, by a privet hedge that needed occasionally to be trimmed, shaped. Thus, doors were shut tight in the summer, though like his, never locked.

Both the front and the back doors were black. Caleb wondered as he watched her go what the meaning of one red door might be, he was sure that he had heard it before couldn’t remember. Something to do with warding off evil spirits or good karma or a sign of welcome. He couldn’t place it. Seemed that there was so much information that he used to know, so much that he had already forgotten. Would have to look it up sometime, realized that he could do it tomorrow, that he didn’t have shit to do. Wondered what it was like to get old and forget things in earnest; hoped that he lived long enough to find out.

Sadie’s doggie door was around back, of course, so as not to prove a visual blight on any of the entrances that guests used. When Caleb entered the Williamses’ home, which was rare, he too used the back door, always careful to take his shoes off before leaving the mud room and entering the kitchen to feed the animals. He never went any further than that. Celeste watered the plants, kept the rest of the house during their extended vacations.

Lily must have awakened the pooch upon entering, because not a minute later, Sadie tore around the side of the building, surprisingly, no ball in her mouth. She crashed into Caleb with the force of a tiny wrecking ball, nearly bowling him over as he crouched, plucking, balancing on the rounds of his feet.

“Oh my goodness, gracious!” Caleb said with genuine affection, in a voice that he reserved for friendly animals and all babies. “And where have you been, young lady? Little nap? Huh?” He scratched her ruff.

She looked at him as if she might actually answer. All of a sudden, this dog, Caleb’s best friend at the moment, an animal that didn’t even belong to him, reminded him of how little he had, of what had just happened not an hour before at the pizza place, of everything that he had lost.

“You’re a good girl, Sadie.” He patted her on the back, leaned forward and gave her a peck on the top of the head. She returned the favor with a quick lick to his nose. He pulled away, fast.

“Yuck. No kisses.”

He shooed her away; she retreated to the shade of a big elm, the cool grass of the side yard, gnawed at the bottom of one paw as if to remove a thorn, or a burr. Caleb began to think. Memories of his old life—an existence rich with friends and with sex, with relative happiness—he realized that those things were now gone. Began to feel emotions that he loathed: remorse and regret and impatience and confusion. The feelings pushed tears from his heart and toward his eyes; he tried to stifle them, failed. Heard the side door swing open, quickly retrieved his t-shirt from where it lay just few yards from him, and wiped his face with it.

Lily carried a bulbous pitcher filled with sweet, yellow nectar. Sliced lemons thin and round as the summer sun floated at the top. She carried one tumbler, thick clear plastic, decorated with blockish cubes of ice. She set both down on the wall closest to where he had been working. She caught him wiping at his eyes.

“What’s the matter, Caleb? Are you all right?”

Yeah, fine, just a bit of dust, that’s all. I’m fine.”

Not considering for one second that a grown man would be crying on her patio in the middle of a bright day in early June, she replied, matter of factly:

“Well, rinse your face from the hose before you have your lemonade, then, we don’t want you blinded.”

Caleb laughed a small laugh. “I’ll do that. Thank you for the drink.” He looked at her, eyes a bit red, but not so bad. She saw that he was indeed, fine.

“I need to tend to some correspondence before Jack gets home.” Caleb understood this to mean that she had a few magazines to read, maybe some catalogue orders to place. “So I’m going to leave you out here to finish up if you wouldn’t mind.” He didn’t. “And I was thinking about a couple of things while I was fixing the refreshments.” Uh-oh. “All those Brown Jordan chairs and the big table could really use a good scrubbing, I don’t think that it was done properly this spring.” She had never told him to scrub them before, just to rinse them off. “Do you think that you might be able to get that done after you finish weeding?”

“Of course, Mrs. Williams, no sweat.”

“Wonderful. And teak does need a good oiling once in a while, you’ll find a canister in the greenhouse, between the WD-40 and the indoor plant fertilizer on the middle shelf in the potting room. And Caleb, about Saturday, plan on sticking around until about 2, there might be just a couple things that Jack might want to get done before you traipse off.”

“No problem at all, ma’am.” He added the ‘ma’am’ for effect, to get her back for “traipse.”

“Very good. Don’t forget to apply some of this lotion, or else you won’t have much fun on the beach, now, will you?”

She pulled a crinkled metal tube, label written in French, topped with a round twist cap from her hip pocket, placed it next to the pitcher.

“Thank you, for everything.”

“You are quite welcome. Just place the L’Occitane on the back stoop when you’re done. I’ll retrieve it later.” She whistled for Sadie, who seemed to have rid herself of the offensive object on her foot, because she bolted to her mistress’ side without so much as a hobble, followed her back into the house.

Caleb walked, slowly, to the side of the greenhouse, twisted the spigot and waited for the hot, settled hose-water in the coil to purge itself onto the greedy ground, turn cold. He washed his eyes, briefly, then drank deep from the steady, pulsing stream. He knew that the lemonade would be far too tart and sweet to quench his thirst.

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