PERFORMING OBJECTHOOD: THE FETISHIZED DOLL AND THE AESTHETICS OF RACIALIZED PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on material and narrative tradition of the doll within the conceptual framework of the fetish. Tracing the doll's development across colonial, intellectual, and aesthetic discourses, I analyze how its physical and symbolic transformations reflect racialized, gendered, and ideological conditions that shape subjectivity and ontology. By drawing on William Pietz's genealogy of the fetish, Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, and Freud's psychoanalysis of fetishistic disavowal, I locate the epistemological instability of the fetish in colonial violence. At the same time, I examine how gendered and racialized connotations of the fetish, embodied in the doll, permeate literary and cultural texts.

Each chapter analyzes a different configuration of the doll as fetish. The first chapter concentrates on E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" as an early representation of woman-as-object animated by male projection. The second chapter contrasts Samuel Richardson's Clarissa with Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman to demonstrate how patriarchal surveillance and display practices enact fetishistic possession and aestheticization. Finally, in the third chapter, I analyze the Black, female body as a scriptive site for the projection of racialized generational trauma and the consumption of Black suffering in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. With reference to Robin Bernstein's theory of "scriptive things" and Saidiya Hartman's critique of racial affective spectacle, I argue that Morrison's novel both stages and critiques the fetishization of Blackness through narrative form.

Across these three chapters, I position the doll not only as a symbol or a motif, but as a performative object that scripts and enacts gendered and racial ideologies. By examining its presence in literature and material culture, this project reveals how the doll, as a fetish, functions as a mechanism of aestheticized violence, bodily abuse, and representational control.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse porte sur la tradition matérielle et narrative de la poupée, envisagée dans le cadre conceptuel du fétiche. En retraçant le développement de la poupée à travers les discours coloniaux, intellectuels et esthétiques, j'analyse comment ses transformations physiques et symboliques reflètent les conditions racialisées, genrées et idéologiques qui façonnent la subjectivité et l'ontologie. En m'appuyant sur la généalogie du fétiche élaborée par William Pietz, la théorie marxiste du fétichisme de la marchandise, et la psychanalyse freudienne du déni fétichiste, je situe l'instabilité épistémologique du fétiche dans la violence coloniale. Parallèlement, j'examine comment les connotations raciales et genrées du fétiche, incarnées dans la poupée, imprègnent les textes littéraires et culturels.

Chaque chapitre explore une configuration différente de la poupée en tant que fétiche. Le premier chapitre s'intéresse à « L'Homme au sable » de E.T.A. Hoffmann comme une représentation précoce de la femme-objet animée par la projection masculine. Le deuxième chapitre met en contraste Clarissa de Samuel Richardson et The Edible Woman de Margaret Atwood afin de montrer comment les pratiques patriarcales de surveillance et d'exposition produisent une possession fétichiste et une esthétisation du corps féminin. Enfin, le troisième chapitre analyse le corps noir féminin comme site scriptible pour la projection d'un traumatisme racial intergénérationnel et la consommation du malheur noir dans The Bluest Eye de Toni Morrison. En mobilisant la théorie des « objets scriptibles » de Robin Bernstein et la critique de l'esthétique affective raciale de Saidiya Hartman, je soutiens que le roman de Morrison met en scène et critique à la fois le fétichisme de la négritude à travers sa forme narrative.

À travers ces trois chapitres, je considère la poupée non seulement comme un symbole ou un motif, mais comme un objet performatif qui structure et met en œuvre des idéologies genrées

et racialisées. En examinant sa présence dans la littérature et la culture matérielle, ce projet révèle comment la poupée, en tant que fétiche, fonctionne comme un mécanisme de violence esthétisée, de maltraitance corporelle et de contrôle représentationnel.

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To my parents, thank you for seeing me through my studies. I am so grateful I could share this moment with you. I love you guys!

I dedicate this work to the emancipation of all living beings.

And to my vast collection of dolls.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Dolls have existed in human culture since their appearance in Ancient Egypt, in the form of flat wooden dolls that resembled women, with beaded hair and a body that widened at the hips ("Paddle Doll"). Shaped like a paddle, hence the name "paddle doll," these figures were not playthings. Their beaded hair and long torsos suggested that they were instead used as percussive instruments by performers at "religious ceremonies associated with the goddess Hathor" ("Paddle Doll"). In ancient Greece and Rome, dolls were offered to goddesses by "marriageable girls" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Often fashioned with "ancient rag, or stuffed, dolls have been found … crocheted of bright wool and others with woolen heads, clothed in coloured wool frocks" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Historically, dolls have thus been associated with women, ornament, ritual, and performance.

Later, when they began to circulate throughout sixteenth and eighteenth-century German and French consumer culture, dolls were known as a commodity, a plaything, a fashionable miniaturized girl. The doll's association with commodities has remained central to its conception, and now, in the twenty-first century, they are everywhere. Dolls in the twenty-first century proliferate through almost every channel of commodity culture: they appear in visual media such as film, television, theatre, and dance; and they are sold as high-end collector's items, mass-produced children's toys, and mystery figurines in "blind boxes," a more recent cultural phenomenon that exploits the thrill of uncertainty and chance, similar to the mechanics of gambling. Despite the doll's primary status as a consumer object, its narrative tradition reveals an underlying cultural anxiety. Commonly portrayed as a haunted or possessed object in fiction—especially in horror films—the doll is simultaneously positioned as an innocent toy and a cursed vessel. This dual positioning, between innocence and unease, reveals the doll's deeper structural

contradictions. What underlies this persistent narrative ambivalence, then, is the doll's formation as a fetishized object.

A multivalent construction, the doll serves as a site for the synthesis of shifting ideological values throughout history, which it then embodies. This synthesis can be observed in material culture, where the doll's constant reformation and different stylizations reflect changes within the cultural, historical, and economic landscape. These changes often manifest in evolving aesthetic norms. At the same time, the concept of the fetish emerges throughout various modes of discourse: in anthropology, it is observed as a cultural artifact; in Marxist theory, it refers to the distortion of market value relative to use value; in psychoanalysis, it is a pathological response to sexual anxiety; and, in feminist aesthetics, it operates as a mode of control and desire relative to gendered aesthetics and collection practices within nineteenth-century material culture. The fetish's shifting significance—across categories, cultural contexts, and eras—results in its ontological collapse, which makes it a liminal object and status. The same is observed in dolls.

Dolls are often portrayed in stories about transient or artificial sentience, including *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* by Hans Christian Andersen (1838), *Raggedy Ann Stories* by Johnny Gruelle (1918), and *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman (2002). All of these stories involve a narrative about object-to-person slippage, in which toys momentarily come to life before reverting to an object; or the inverse, as in *Coraline*, which portrays dollhood as an existential threat. But perhaps the most influential of these stories about ontological slippages is E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1817), which I analyze in this thesis. Both the doll and the fetish emerge as objects that embody collapses between aesthetic form and assigned meaning. Meanwhile, both serve as objects that transmit and obscure their shared histories of gendered and racialized violence. The concept of the fetish overlaps the doll in function, but also through shared

epistemological and cultural entanglements shaped by processes of projection, disavowal, and commodification. By reading the doll through the framework of the fetish, I demonstrate how its various portrayals within the literary tradition are charged with racialized and gendered codes of significance. By doing so, I expose how the doll and the fetish's mutual implications of colonial violence have been covertly suffused into mass culture and intellectual discourse. While the doll is merely one among many fetish objects in material culture, I argue that its relationship to fetishism is crucial in revealing the ongoing aesthetic and bodily subjugation of racialized and feminized individuals through sexualized commodity culture. This is due to the doll's human form, its prevalence through history and the contemporary, its recurring depiction in fiction as a manipulated body, and its normative associations with femininity.

To interrogate the doll's status as a transhistorical object, I research its movement across three distinct time periods, geographies, and social contexts: sixteenth-century Portuguese colonialism in West Africa, eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Enlightenment Europe, and twentieth-century postbellum America. Following this genealogy—from sites of imperial contact, into discourses of intellectual essentialism, and the racialized landscape of American modernity—I track the doll's transformation from ritual object to mass-market commodity. As a vessel for disavowal and reconfiguration, the fetishized doll both reifies and conceals histories of colonial, gendered, and racial violence, a dynamic reflected in its shifting form: from stylized female effigies made of wood and corn husks to glass-eyed girls with porcelain skin and blonde hair.

My methodology combines historicist close reading with feminist, genealogical, and postcolonial frameworks. By drawing on material culture, aesthetic theory, and critical historiography, I trace how the fetish—and the doll, as its aestheticized, gendered analogue—

move across literature, thought, and history. I also engage with Marxist and Freudian theory to demonstrate how their respective treatments of the fetish have permeated modern theory with Eurocentric and gendered assumptions. My approach, which is also implicitly shaped by Foucauldian models of power and knowledge, is equally committed to aesthetic form: how the doll looks, moves, and is made to mean. I treat the doll as both a narrative object and a carrier of ideology that shifts over time but never fully derails from its origins.

I conduct close readings of literary texts from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. The earliest is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), followed by Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1817). The final two texts, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), mark a shift into mid-twentieth-century feminist and postcolonial fiction. The corpus moves through Enlightenment and Romantic texts to late modern narrative to reflect the historical trajectory of the doll and the fetish. I begin by situating the fetish in the context of imperial mercantilism in West Africa to establish its structural relation to the doll. I then examine the doll as a gendered fetish across eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, before turning to its racialization in American consumer culture. This trajectory—from colonial West Africa, through Enlightenment Europe, to postbellum America—demonstrates how the doll, as a fetish object, preserves and recirculates racialized and gendered violence through aesthetic substitution and symbolic disavowal.

In the first chapter, I locate the fetish's origins within the context of imperial mercantilism and Enlightenment-era ideological substitutions of fixed material. Drawing on William Pietz's genealogical study of "The Problem of the Fetish" (1985-7), I trace the concept's emergence through material and linguistic exchanges shaped by colonial contact. Pietz frames the fetish as a product of mediation between intercultural misunderstandings, of belief systems,

social values, and economic structures. The fetish is thus a hybridized historical object that reflects the epistemic violence of cross-cultural misunderstanding and mistranslation. I situate my discussion in this genealogy to identify the doll as a fetish based on their shared instability and slippage across categorical boundaries. The goal of this chapter is to define the doll's emergence within a history of colonial violence and argue that its fetishized status is foundational to its construction as a figure of both aesthetic appeal and terror.

My approach to Pietz focuses on defining the doll itself as a fetish. Importantly, his problematization of the fetish does not rest on its medieval associations with occultism. Rather, the "problem" of the fetish arises from its indiscriminate and widespread application across western social sciences, where it became racialized as irrational, primitive, and perverse. I trace how these associations persist in Marx's critique of "commodity fetishism" in *Capital* (1867), and Freud's psychoanalytical theories of "Fetishism" (1927) and "The Uncanny" (1919). Both draw on Enlightenment conceptions of the fetish yet fail to acknowledge its colonial genealogy. Consequently, they reinforce its racial and gendered coding despite repurposing its language in theory. Freud and Marx's omissions result in the epistemological displacement of the fetish: it becomes dislodged from its historical context in abstraction, while perpetuating the assumptions embedded in its origins. By triangulating Pietz, Marx, and Freud in a reading of "The Sandman," I demonstrate how the doll-as-fetish carries the implications of manipulation, along with gendered and racialized violence, Otherness, and category slippage.

"The Sandman," is the primary text in this chapter, as it illustrates an early example of the doll-as-fetish model in the automaton Olympia. Hoffmann's use of misidentification operates as a rhetorical device that places a human woman and a wooden doll in suggestive ontological proximity. Misrecognition produces slippages in identity—fractures in perception that result in

aesthetic and symbolic substitution. Through a process of fetishization, the woman transforms into a doll. In becoming a fetish, the woman is dispossessed of autonomy and animated only by male projection. Fetishism, in this context, reveals the mechanism through which women are rendered into objects—figures of use, pleasure, and fantasy. I map this process onto Freud's theory of fetishism, where the fetish emerges from a simultaneous repression and disavowal of pathological sexuality (155). In particular, I focus on Freud's theorization of the fetish as an abnormal attraction to a non-sexual part of a woman's body that forms in response to the male fear of castration (152). He claims that the sexually anxious male mediates his fear by reconfiguring his attachment to the phallus by substituting it for a female body part which retains its "last impression … before the uncanny and traumatic one" (155).

The uncanny, a defining characteristic of the modern doll in popular culture, conveys a sense of discomfort with the possibility of an object being secretly alive. While Freud directly names the uncanny in relation to the fetish, he never mentions Olympia, whom he identifies in his essay on the uncanny. From this omission, I identify a deeper inconsistency in Freud's application, with the argument that Olympia and the female fetish serve similar purposes as objectified female figures animated by the projection of male desire. Freud largely constructs the doll's uncanniness as a result of its aesthetic properties, visible in "waxwork figures" and "ingeniously constructed dolls and automata" (135). Freud's psychoanalytical framing of the fetish and the uncanny reveals two themes central to the doll. His interpretation of the fetish—as the projection of a disavowed phallic attachment to a female body part that then represses its "uncanny and traumatic" impression by reconfiguration (155)—reduces women to containers for male anxieties and desires.

The fetish, as a sexualized non-sexual female body part, is understood as a vessel for

disavowing and concealing uncanny, traumatic mental impressions. At the same time, Freud defines the uncanny figure by its aesthetic form, which becomes unsettling in its ontological uncertainty. Freud's definition of the uncanny, which he associates with the broader category of dolls and wax figurines, is explicitly related to the character of Olympia, a sexualized figure as well as an uncanny one. By neglecting to include the discussion of dolls in fetishism, Freud suggests the idea that fetishes are natural, biological processes, while women's bodies are essentially sexual objects. This inconsistency of application reveals a commitment to patriarchal modes of thought. Therefore, I consolidate Freud's theories by applying both to a reading of Hoffmann, which maps Olympia as the embodiment of the relationship between the uncanny and the fetish.

At the same time, my engagement with Marx focuses on his theorization of commodity fetishism as a system in which social relations are displaced onto objects, which then render labor invisible and value abstract. Marx's use of the mystical language of fetish to critique the distortion between market and use value replicates a similar process of ontological rupture. While he critiques the mystification of commodities, he also naturalizes a term shaped by imperial violence: by describing value distortion through the racialized language of magic and necromancy. By drawing attention to Marx's rhetorical choices, I show how he participates in the same ideological processes he seeks to expose: the displacement of material significance through epistemic assumptions. When framed with a view to uphold racial and historical accountability, Marx's model of commodity fetishism can be repurposed to demonstrate how capitalist systems distort value and meaning by suffusing racialized imagery into the circulation of commodities.

In the second chapter, I expand my doll-as-fetish argument by analyzing how fetishism, voyeurism, and control manifest in the narrative treatment of female objecthood. Through a

reading of Richardson's *Clarissa*, I examine how women are made into objects through the fetishistic mechanisms of surveillance, confinement, and bodily control. My reading is primarily structured around Emily Apter's theory of the cabinet as a "fetishistic space of perversion" (43), and the erotomaniac male collector with a "virulent … attachment to things" (55), to examine how Clarissa's body becomes a site of fetishistic projection, coercion, and abuse. This chapter focuses on constructing Lovelace as an erotomaniac collector figure, whose theatrical manipulations and voyeuristic obsessions reduce Clarissa to an object of possession and manipulation. Specifically, I trace Clarissa's movement throughout different spaces of confinement to track her transition into dollhood: first, she appears as a young woman trapped in her room, evocative of the image of the damsel in the tower; then, as the unwilling leading lady in Lovelace's spectacle; finally, as a figure in a doll box, the coffin. By weaving the fetishistic logic of Enlightenment-era material culture with the symbolic mechanisms of gendered control, I argue that Clarissa models a shift in the fetish from colonial artifact to domestic spectacle, where the female body is fetishized through performance, spatial restriction, exhibition, and bodily assault. In the context of *Clarissa*, the doll becomes a figure through which the aesthetics of performance and presentation function as both concealment and violation.

Emily Apter is central in this chapter, as she theorizes fetishism as a distinctly gendered and aestheticized mechanism. In *Feminizing the Fetish*, she configures the fetish as a material, feminized collectible that emerges from the bourgeois collecting culture of the nineteenth century. Both a site of eroticized spectacle and consumerism, Apter's notion of cabinet fetishism provides the framework I use to analyze how spaces of display and possession—like a jewel box or brothel—function as sites where women are transformed into fetishized, collectible objects. Apter's interpretation of erotomania as a pathological attachment that collapses desire,

objecthood, and domination thus enables me to position Lovelace as a collector-lord whose manipulation of Clarissa reflects the sexualized and consumerist logic of fetishism. In particular, I focus on how Clarissa's movement across different cabinet spaces within the text trace her slippages: between object and human, and between different modes of spectacle. Marx is also relevant to this chapter, as his model of commodity fetishism can be applied to the reduction of women to their "use value," determined by their fertility, which is further contracted by the social value of virginity. Marxism in this chapter reveals the patriarchal structures which treat women as biologically essentialized commodities.

This chapter briefly turns to Atwood's *The Edible Woman* to frame Peter, Marian's antagonist, as a modern iteration of the male erotomaniac. As in *Clarissa*, I map Marian's movement through narrative space to track her transformation into a sexualized object. I focus on her aestheticization—particularly the visual language used to describe her physical transformation—to link her eroticized appearance to postwar orientalist imagery. My reading interrogates how Peter's voyeuristic gaze and fetishistic staging of Marian's body, through puppetry and photography, exposes the way in which gendered fetishism is reconfigured in a mid-twentieth-century consumerist context, where femininity and desirability are legitimated through the commercialization of eroticized stylization, form, and racialized otherness.

In the third chapter, I bring together the racial, gendered, and aesthetic dimensions of fetishism that I have been tracing throughout this thesis in a reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This chapter marks the return to the racialized context to demonstrate the recursive nature of dolls and fetishes. From the fetish's origin in the mercantile space of West Africa, then adopted into western intellectual discourse, the fetish and the doll now return to racialized landscape of postbellum American consumer culture. While previous chapters are rooted the

fetish in colonial epistemologies and patriarchal structures, I shift to a reading of how Blackness is aestheticized, instrumentalized, and annihilated through the mechanisms of visibility and affect. My reading of *The Bluest Eye* is primarily conducted through Robin Bernstein's theories on performance and material culture. In particular, I focus on framing both the narration and the characters as "scriptive things," objects in material culture including books and dolls which contain both the repertoire—pertaining to "the embodied memory of traditions of performance"—and the archive, related to written and textual material (12). The scriptive thing reveals power dynamics between people, narratives, ideas, and materialities. By focusing on identity as a scripted performance in *The Bluest Eye*, I argue that the novel engages reader participation in fragmenting, pursuing, and reassembling Pecola's story as a means of depicting violence and trauma.

As the novel prompts readers to trace Pecola's disappearance from the narrative, the various formal disruptions—of narration, structure, and chronology—mirrors the ontological slippages that disfigure and dehumanize Pecola. From personhood, to thinghood, and finally objecthood, Pecola transforms into a broken fetish doll through the various forms of violence enacted upon her. In this way, Morrison denies the reader the comfort of sentimentality or catharsis. Rather, she choreographs a sort of readerly reenactment—what Saidiya Hartman might call a "public [display] of suffering" in *Scenes of Subjection* (17)—that forces the audience to confront the mechanisms by which Black pain is made visible only through performance. The book is structured to resist the trap of empathy that Hartman critiques, and instead call attention to the reader's need for self-reflexivity of narrative engagement—that is, the awareness of how one consumes a piece of literature. My reading interrogates how form stages the scripts that commodify Blackness, particularly of girls and women: from milk cups, candy wrappers, picture

shows, and the architecture of the novel itself, material culture synthesizes with narrative to direct the reader to participate in rituals of aestheticized racial violence through consumption.

By framing Pecola as a topsy-turvy doll and a Topsy-like figure, I draw from Bernstein's reading of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a repertoire of spectacularized Black suffering to expose the inaccessibility and contradiction within white sentimental narratives that frame emancipation as absorption or domestication. In Bernstein's analysis, Topsy's conversion to whiteness—a condition of social belonging and safety—relies on the erasure of her Blackness. In Morrison's narrative, the emancipation given to Topsy through cultural assimilation is subverted to instead portray a grotesque perversion of a salvation ritual that ultimately destroys Pecola by finalizing her descent into objecthood, as she loses control over her own body while her mind endlessly replays obsessive thoughts over the imaginary blueness of her eyes. This subversion reveals how the logic rooted in white sentimentalism imagines Black salvation only as conformity, self-erasure, and subjection.

Thus, Pecola embodies a formal and thematic resistance to the fantasy of assimilation. While Topsy is saved, Pecola is instead cast further from narrative legibility. Her descent into madness is not just tragic, but structural. By refusing the arc of conversion, Morrison instead exposes its violent terms: what must be given up, lost, or surrendered, to achieve that closure. For Pecola, it costs everything: her sense of self, her agency, her awareness. As a broken doll and an inverted Topsy, Pecola embodies the fundamental tensions between Blackness and whiteness, and whose narrative erosion reflects the impossibility of sentimental resolution. Through Bernstein's frame, I show how Morrison weaponizes the tropes of sentimental fiction to expose their failures, and to demonstrate how Blackness is made into a site of projection, disavowal, gendered violence, and racialized fetishism.

My reading of *The Bluest Eye*'s scriptive dynamics reveals how the novel stages its own critique of narrative structure, aesthetic form, and sentimental modes of racialized, gendered consumption. Drawing on Bernstein, I argue that the novel's fragmentation and narrative absences formalize the dynamics of racial fetishism that Morrison seeks to critique. The reader's pursuit of Pecola across the novel's ruptured timeline acts as a sort of reproduction of the narrative gaze that fetishizes and erases her. The novel, like the dolls it critiques, becomes a scriptive, performative object—one that scripts reading practices and implicates the reader in the aesthetic, formal, and narrative structures it deconstructs.

To that end, this thesis traces the doll across time, place, and genre to demonstrate how its formal logic—its function as a fetish, its ontological instability, its mimetic; that is, performative relationship to gender and race—is neither accidental nor incidental. The doll emerges as a central mechanism through which social structures are aestheticized, naturalized, and enacted. Whether within Enlightenment theory, sentimental fiction, or contemporary Black literature, the doll operates as both a narrative figure and a material product of the power structures in which it is embedded.

By treating the doll as a fetishized scriptive object, I reveal how gendered and racialized violence continues to be obscured, reconfigured, and performed through the aesthetics of innocence, spectacle, and disavowal. Throughout these chapters, I argue that the doll does not simply represent femininity or Blackness, but actively participates in scripting their performances. Across its various displays and articulations, the doll carries within it the remnants of colonial and patriarchal structures that continue to define subjectivity through its proximity to objecthood. The doll is never inert.

Chapter 1: The Liminal Doll and the Fetish in E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Sandman"

William Pietz identifies "The Problem of the Fetish" in its "sinister pedigree" (Pietz 1). The sinister quality of the fetish might be attributed to its hybridized origins, which determine its "conceptual doubtfulness and referential uncertainty": etymologically, in Christian concepts of witchcraft and artifice; historically, in imperial expansionism; and discursively, in European intellectualism (Pietz 2). Pietz traces the modern fetish to Charles De Brosses, who coined the term *fétichisme* in 1757 as a contrast to "polytheism" (40). Fetishism is a French translation of the pidgin word *fetisso*, deriving from the original Portuguese *feitiço* (40). Positioned within a "theoretical frame … of Protestant Christianity's repudiation of any material, earthly agency" (Pietz 40), the novel concept of fetishism is rooted in Europe's epistemological misrepresentation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century West African material culture, which was then essentialized via Enlightenment-era rationalism. This misrepresentation is a synthesis of cross-cultural ideological substitution and imperial mercantilism, which constructed the perception of Africa as a resource-rich land inhabited by a lawless and uncivilized population. As it emerges from a "mercantile intercultural space created by the ongoing trade relations between cultures so radically different as to be mutually incomprehensible," the fetish is thus inherently intersectional, or liminal (23-4).

The word *feitiço* was used in the late Middle Ages to connote "magical practice" or "witchcraft performed by persons of humble status" (2), labelled by the Portuguese as the "heathen equivalents" for Christian sacramental objects including crosses and crucifixes, a conflation "across antagonistic social codes [which] came to take on concrete significance, after complex cross-cultural social places developed outside Portuguese imperial control" (38). This usage is reflected in the first listed definition of "fetish" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* to

mean “any of various objects used as charms or amulets by the Indigenous peoples of the Guinea Coast and the neighbouring regions of West Africa, and believed to have magic powers” (*OED* def. 1.a.). Later, *fetissos* were understood as “quasi-personal powers and material objects that were capable of being influenced both through acts of worship, such as making food offerings, and through manipulations of material substances” (40). The earliest recorded instance of this meaning is in Samuel Purchas’s travelogue, *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (1613): “Hereon were set many strawmen Rings, called *Fetissos* or *Gods*” (OED def. 1.a.).

As the fetish “is proper to neither West African nor Christian European culture,” it might then be understood as the result of hybridization, a product of African cultural practices configured through the language of European social theories that belongs to “no proper historical field other than that of the history of the term itself” (11-24). Protestant merchants visiting the coast explained African social order as based on values underpinning the worship of *fetissos*, while framing their resistance to “rational” trade relations in terms of their reputed “irrational propensity to personify material” (23). The European perception of Africans as “irrational” assumes that they understood “causality through principles of chance encounter and personification,” an “intellectual error… considered responsible for [their] supposedly distorted manner of valuing material objects, their superstitious religious practices, and their perverse social order which … was perceived by Europeans to be based on fear, credulity, and violence” (23). The fetish object is empowered with meanings beyond its materiality, yet these meanings are always represented by its own status as an object. As an object charged with meanings that extend beyond its material form, the doll is also a fetish, and their relationship becomes evident in their shared liminality. The fetish refers to an immaterial value embodied by an object, “neither fully personal gods, nor fully impersonal charms or amulets” (40), while its primary

attribute and "central theme" is "its status as a value-bearing material object" (40). Similarly, the doll can be defined as a material object attached to immaterial value. Like the fetish, the doll is a material object whose value rests on aesthetic capital determined by cultural legibility within the Eurocentric and patriarchal context.

Pietz maps the fetish's conceptual development through three phases, which also correspond to its shifting terminology: the arrival of Portuguese travellers to West Africa in the fifteenth century and their "initial application of *feitiço* and *fetiçaria* to African objects and practices; the development of the pidgin *fetisso* by middlemen groups outside the Portuguese empire during the sixteenth century; and the treatment of the term in Protestant—especially Dutch—texts in the seventeenth century" (2). European travel to West Africa mostly comprised merchants who believed it to be "the source of the world's gold" (36). Among them was the universal view that the "Guinea" was a "land of complete social orderlessness" (36). Their assumptions on Africa's "lawlessness" led to their demonization of the *feitiço*, an object worn by Africans "which itself embodied an actual power resulting from the correct ritual combination of materials" (36). While the *feitiço* "stressed its use as an instrument to achieve a concrete, material effect," its "status as an object of worship was central to the idea of the *idolo* (37). The distinction between the *idolo* and the *feitiço* eroded over time, which led to the novel concept of the fetish, a perversion of African ritual practices constructed as the "heathen equivalent" of Christian objects of worship (38).

The fetish, originating in Portuguese colonialism then repackaged and distributed through European travel writing, was adopted into eighteenth century anthropological studies on primitive religion, before ultimately being appropriated by modern western social sciences. This process essentializes the fetish as necessarily perverse, because it models a non-western

sociocultural construction that actively misrepresents the things it describes. The crux of the issue with the fetish, as Pietz suggests, is its indiscriminate application across "a variety of disciplines that claim no common theoretical ground—ethnography and the history of religion, Marxism and positivist sociology, psychoanalysis and the clinical psychiatry of sexual deviance, modernist aesthetics and continental philosophy" (22). In spite of its varied applications, Pietz identifies four themes that "consistently inform the idea of the fetish: (1) the untranscended materiality of the fetish … (2) the radical historicality of the fetish's origin … (3) the dependence of the fetish for its meaning and value upon a particular order of social relations which it, in turn, reinforces … and (4) the active relation of the fetish object to the living person (self and body) of an individual; a kind of external organ directed by active powers outside the affected person's conscious will" (22). As an effigy of the girl and woman, the doll framed as a fetish makes a rather compelling case insofar as it externalizes the human body while concentrating its powers outside the conscious will.

The "untranscended materiality" of the fetish is indeed its primary dimension, as the word itself derives from the Portuguese words *feitiço*, *feiticeiro*, and *feitiçaria*, which referred to "the objects, persons, and practice proper to witchcraft" (24). Pietz explains that the Christian notion of witchcraft, in terms of the fetish object, "was determined by theological explanations regarding the false sacramental objects of superstition" (24). The idea of the fetish is also informed by "the Church's general theory of idolatry, whose logic required that material 'idols' have the status of fraudulent manufactured resemblances" (24). At its origin, the "fetish" speaks to a misrepresentation of African cultural objects through the distinctly Protestant language of idolatry and broader Christian concepts around witchcraft. The fetish thus positions itself at the site where matter or body is "viewed as the locus of religious activity or psychic investment," but

with a distinctly racial and "taboo" charge (23). The "untranscended materiality" of the fetish might also be viewed in terms of the effigy: it is an object that has been endowed with a "hidden power" or significance that somehow transcends its materiality yet remains bound by it at the same time. The concept of fetish speaks to a process of transformation, where the essence of something is abstracted from beyond itself and then attributed to its physical form. On the notion of being "hidden," there is a sense of "secrecy" in the fetish: as a sort of private recognition of an object's hidden power that only the fetishist might access. The fetish, in this sense, speaks to ritualistic worship where secret meanings have been embedded in an object. At the same time, they also carry implications on raciality and civility.

The idea of a "hidden power" lacks specificity on its own, so I define my usage of the term not only in reference to the ritualistic activity cited in Purchas' travelogue, but also to the deeply intimate and embodied experience of identity formation—what might pertain to the "psychic investment" referenced in Pietz (23). As Pietz delineates the hybridized origins of fetishism, he simultaneously criticizes how its modern "appropriation as an ideological term" by European theorists including Kant, Marx, and Freud has obscured its West African context (23). In the context of identity formation, the doll is a fetish in the sense that it is an effigy. The doll as a plaything or figurine becomes a mirror for self-image, where people project themselves onto the doll. Within wider consumer culture, dolls are fetishistic in the way in which they embody the idealized and consumable female figure, which is also sexualized.

Ironically, although twentieth-century social sciences often fail to acknowledge the legacy of "fetish" in colonialism, its application across these disciplines remains largely informed by the same ideas that descend from colonialist concepts—of primitivity, perversion, and distortion—that defined its original usage throughout the fifteenth- to seventeenth centuries.

Freud, in particular, relies on such concepts to articulate his understanding of the fetish. Perhaps due to its positioning within psychological discourse, Freud's concept of the fetish remains dominant throughout popular discourse and continues to inform the sociocultural attitudes and practices associated with the term.

In his essay, "Fetischismus," Freud traces the formation of a fetish to the simultaneous "repression" and "disavowal" of pathological sexuality (155). Within a framework of psychoanalysis, he explains that a fetish presents as an abnormal attraction to a non-sexual part of a woman's body that forms in response to their fear of castration, "for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger" (152-3). Freud suggests that the fetish is a psychological compromise to manage the anxiety, which emerges from the relational logic of a male child who perceives his maternal figure's lack of a penis as an existential threat to his own (153). Thus, the fetish is "a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and … does not want to give up" (152-3). If the fetish is indeed a mental compromise that substitutes a phallus symbol for a disembodied part of a woman, then it is understood to serve the following purposes:

1. To reconcile the male child's fear of castration with his sexual desire by
    a) "Endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects" (154).
    b) To "triumph over the threat of castration" and protect themselves against it (154).
2. And, in turn, avoid becoming a homosexual by "transmuting" the symbol of the penis to another part of the woman's body (154).

Freud's theory essentializes a dialectical relationship between the male and female figure relative to the fetish: the man is the fetishist; the woman is the fetishized. Or, in his own words,

the “normal prototype of fetishes is a man’s penis, just as the normal prototype of inferior organs” that must be fetishized to become adequate “is a woman’s real small penis, the clitoris” (157). In Freud’s view, the man holds the power to impress his psychology onto the material object, while the material object is embodied in the woman. As a result, the female figure is essentialized as an object—for male pleasure and identity formation. A similar dynamic that comes to mind might appear in Hegel’s lord-bondsman dialectic, albeit within a different context.

Freud observes in his studies a “number of men whose object-choice was dominated by a fetish” (152). Freud’s choice to frame the fetish in terms of the man as victim of his own sexual fixations, however, undermines the historical and cultural associations of the word, while misrepresenting its issues. For even in Freudian terms, it is clear that the fetish does not dominate the object-choice of men, but rather, the female body which transforms into a fetish through the objectifying, heteronormative, Oedipal male gaze; this process of sociocultural domination, ironically, is replicated in the very work that seeks to challenge it. By neglecting the deeper power dynamics involved in the creation of the fetish revealed by its colonial origins, Freud advances the fetish as a psychological “ailment” with no real significance in the external world (152).

Although Freud frames the fetish in terms of neurosis and the castration complex, he still expresses ideas related to its original usage—to describe transformation, ritualistic worship, and effigies—in his reasoning. Freud’s fetish, which figures as a female body part made to retain the phallus symbol’s “last impression … before the uncanny and traumatic one” (155), simultaneously disfigures and objectifies a woman’s body. This effect results from the suggestion that the female body’s role as a vessel for channeling pathological sexuality is a natural outcome that results from “primitive” biological attachments. The implication becomes especially clear in

Freud's example of the "Chinese custom of mutilating the female foot and then revering it like a fetish after it has been mutilated," but it is also maintained in his assertion that "the meaning of the fetish is not known to other people," an occulting of meaning that speaks directly to the idea that the fetish, as in its original definition pertaining to magical charms or amulets, conceals a "hidden power" (153-7). Freud's theory of the fetish is irresponsible. It mishandles the fetish's origins in the material cultures of West Africa, as observed by Portuguese settlers, while also relegating women to objectified and biologically essential roles in the mediation of pathological male sexuality. By assuming that the male fear of castration is caused by "his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ" (153), a belief rooted in evolutionary biology, he not only neglects to acknowledge the patriarchal charge of such assumptions, but reinforces them through obfuscation.

As the maternal figure herself becomes an effigy for disavowed male castration anxieties and pathological sexuality in Freud's fetish theory, he simultaneously perverts its original context through the racially charged language of primitivism, while the language of rationalism disguises his objectification of women. Such misrepresentation constitutes a form of epistemic violence. While parts of a woman's body transform into effigies of the phallus, the fetish is sexualized and pathologized, irrespective of the original contexts in which it emerged. The result is a social, cultural, and historical displacement of the fetish and, by extension, the doll. Instead of being sacred, the fetish or doll becomes uncanny. In turn, this process transforms the doll from ritual object to one marked by perversion.

Olympia's dynamic with Nathaniel in "The Sandman" makes an especially compelling model to demonstrate dollhood as a condition of perverted material significance, or the slippage between person and object. In Hoffmann's story, the female body serves as a mirror and vessel

for Nathaniel's fears, desires, and sense of identity. Nathaniel's narration is marked by an overwhelming sense of dissociation, hatred, and resentment. His letter at the outset of the text concludes with a vow to "avenge [his] father's death," a freak accident caused by the mythical figure of the "Sandman," whose true identity he believes is "the most hideous" Coppelius (4-5). Nathaniel's trauma of witnessing his father's death haunts him for the rest of his life, while his descent into madness manifests in his "evil [moods]," expressed in his dark and disturbing poetry (10).

Clara resists Nathaniel's indulgence in his inner terror and darkness. Her resistance estranges him from her, while he turns his attention and affection towards the "beautiful statue" of Olympia, an eerily still woman who "seemed to… [sleep] with her eyes open" (Hoffmann 6-10). Nathaniel is transfixed by Olympia's physical form as a "very tall and slender lady, extremely well-proportioned and most splendidly attired," but it is in her utter silence that Nathaniel achieves the assent that Clara refuses to surrender (6). Nathaniel falls in love with Olympia because of her lack of autonomy; her stillness allows him to project his need for validation and understanding onto her incapacity for speech. A silent woman is a compliant woman. Olympia, as the silent woman, is also a wooden doll who has no thoughts, feelings, or will of her own. Olympia is beautiful and obedient, which makes her well-suited to Nathaniel's needs, who views the female body as an extension of himself. "The Sandman" is a narrative about mental projections impressing themselves upon material objects—bodies, in particular—which endow them with hidden power or value.

Freud defines "The Uncanny" as an aesthetic quality that arouses the psychological response of "repulsion and distress" (123), the effects of which are also associated with "the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfillment, secret harmful forces, and the return of

the dead" (154). The "secret harmful forces" that cause the uncanny are especially reminiscent of the "hidden powers" bestowed on the fetish; Freud substantiates this comparison when he refers to the "hidden nature" of the uncanny itself (124). Freud, citing Jentsch, also refers to the uncanny as a sense of dread arising from "doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might perhaps be animate" (135). These feelings can come from "persons and things … processes and situations" that induce feelings of the uncanny through their undefinable liminality (135). Especially notable are the examples of "waxwork figures" and "ingeniously constructed dolls and automata" (135), including Olympia, whom he identifies as prototype of the uncanny doll in his own reading of "The Sandman," which becomes foundational to his theory.

Lifelike only in countenance, with eerily measured movements, Olympia's uncanniness is marked by the uncertainty of her animation—the doubt as to whether she is alive or not (135). In the question of whether something seemingly animate is truly alive, the inverse emerges in the possibility that "a lifeless object might perhaps be animate" (135). Thus, the issue of ontological slippages—from personhood to objecthood—emerges in the doll. While the doll is uncanny, its implications of liminality and "hidden value" also makes it fetishistic. While Freud's reading of Hoffmann's narrative explores the dimensions that make Olympia uncanny, his analysis fails to realize how her body is fetishized, even though both the uncanny and the fetish pertain to notions of concealed meaning. The uncanny conveys a sense of discomfort with the possibility of an object being secretly alive, while the fetish is constructed as a female body part becomes animated in its disembodied state by the meaning attached to it. Interestingly, despite naming the uncanny in his discussion of the fetish as the last impression of the disavowed phallus symbol "before the uncanny and traumatic one" (155), Freud never returns to Olympia in his essay on

fetishism. In response to this inconsistency, I use Freud's frameworks to demonstrate how Olympia embodies a distinctly doll-like duality—of the fetish and of the uncanny. In Hoffmann, this effect is achieved through a combination of several mechanisms. First, she is portrayed as an object of male—specifically, Nathaniel's—desire. Second, Nathaniel experiences his longing and desire for Olympia by secretly watching her in her private spaces; he is a voyeur. Third, Olympia is a purely material substitute for Clara.

The most obvious of these mechanisms is, of course, Olympia's apparent sexual appeal, but what makes it distinctly fetishistic is the way in which Nathaniel seems to be the only character who perceives it. Other characters react to Olympia with disgust, unease, and wry amusement; when she attends a ball, she becomes the object of "quiet, scarcely suppressed laughter … among the young people in every corner" of the room, while "in her step and deportment there [is] something measured and stiff, which [strikes] many as unpleasant" (12-13). Even the "organist of the cathedral" expresses his disapproval with a "gloomier face than usual" when Nathaniel makes a public display of his desire for Olympia (12).

These varied negative reactions are summarized by Sigismund, Nathaniel's friend, who expresses his concern over Olympia by asking "how a sensible fellow like [him] could possibly lose [his] head over that wax face, over that wooden doll up there," given that everyone else finds "Olympia quite uncanny, and prefer to have nothing to do with her" on the account that "she seems to act like a living being, and yet has some strange peculiarity of her own" (13-14). To justify his disapproval, Sigismund refers to Olympia's more overtly uncanny characteristics, including "her glance [which is] … so utterly without a ray of life" and her "strangely regular" pace, where "every movement seems to depend on some wound-up clockwork" (14). Nathaniel resists Sigismund's observations with indignation and bitterness. This tension between

Nathaniel's internal desires and the external world's rejection of them renders Olympia a fetish. Olympia's doll body thus serves as a site for the projection of both desire and unease, which endow her with the hidden powers of the fetish and the uncanny.

Freud asserts that the "meaning of the fetish is not known to other people" and therefore becomes "easily accessible" to the fetishist, who can "readily obtain the sexual satisfaction attached to it" (Freud 154). Indeed, Olympia's appeal seems perceptible only to Nathaniel, who worships her with such frenzied devotion that he becomes hysterical—or pathological, as Freud suggests of the fetish. While others around Nathaniel find Olympia repulsive and bizarre, he relishes the opportunity to interact with her. At the ball, Nathaniel feels such intense possessiveness over Olympia that he would "[murder] anyone who approached [her]" to dance, but he is pleasantly surprised to find that it happens "only twice," and that she remains seated until he eventually dances with her himself (13). Within public social dynamics, Olympia's off-putting presence makes her easily accessible to Nathaniel. Privately, Nathaniel's primary mode of engagement with Olympia before ever meeting her in person is by observing her through her bedroom windows, where he first sees her. Voyeurism is yet another avenue by which Nathaniel easily and covertly derives pleasure from Olympia.

This habit becomes so compulsive, that even while writing a letter to Clara, Nathaniel finds himself staring at Olympia's "seductive sight" through Coppelius' glass "as if impelled by an irresistible power" (12). In this moment, it appears as though Olympia has a strange, almost supernatural power over Nathaniel; thus, the spiritual threads of the fetish begin to emerge. The mere image of Olympia holds such power over Nathaniel that when, one day, he finds her windows "completely covered," he falls into "utter despair, filled with a longing and a burning desire" (12). Nathaniel runs outside the town-gate, where he meets Olympia for the first time and

suddenly “Clara’s image … completely [vanishes] from his mind” (12). If the fetish is indeed a product of pathological male desire, then Nathaniel’s obsession with Olympia can certainly be classified as neurotic based on his disproportionately intense emotional reactions to her. But more importantly, Nathaniel’s desire for Olympia is pathological in the way that it merely conceals his trauma from witnessing his father’s death.

Freud’s construction of the fetish involves a dual process of “repression” and “disavowal” to manage castration anxiety (Freud 154). This dual process reflects in Nathaniel’s relationships with Clara and Olympia. If the fetish comprises the “last [retained] impression [of the penis] before the uncanny and traumatic one,” then Clara’s position within this triangular dynamic can be located in the uncanny (155). By tracing Nathaniel’s development through the creation of fetish, the precise moment of “disavowal” is identified in his rejection of Clara when he “[springs] up enraged and, thrusting [her] from him, cries: ‘Oh, inanimate, accursed automaton!’” (Hoffmann 10). Nathaniel literally “disavows” Clara away by shoving her away from him while calling her an “accursed automaton” (10). If we recall Freud’s essay on “The Uncanny,” we might refer to the automaton as a particularly uncanny motif. If we also consider the details of Nathaniel’s childhood household, which consisted of his mother, some unidentified siblings, including a younger sister, and a “servant girl” (4), it appears that his father was its sole masculine authority figure. In the loss of his father, Nathaniel also loses a formative, masculinizing influence, which might be metaphorized as a sort of “castration.” In fact, Freud directly acknowledges this parallel—between the trauma of losing a father, and the trauma of castration anxiety—when he refers to his analysis of two young men who had lost their fathers at the ages of two and ten, and their resulting neuroses (155-6). Freud observes that the death of their father constituted “a piece of reality which was undoubtedly important, [which] had been

disavowed by the ego, just as the unwelcome fact of women's castration is disavowed in fetishists" (156).

When Clara criticizes Nathaniel's poetry, she resists being made a conduit for his repressed feelings of hatred and, by extension, rejects the role of the fetish who represses the fetishist's traumas. To that end, Nathaniel's reaction to Clara's pleas that he throws that "mad, senseless, insane stuff into the fire" can be described as a sort of visceral disgust (10). Nathaniel's recollection of the circumstances surrounding his father's death appear inconsistent, such that his memory of finding his father dead "on the floor of the smoking hearth … with his face burned, blackened and hideously distorted" conflicts with the image he describes of him in his coffin, with "his features … again as mild and gentle as they had been in his life" (4). While I do not suppose it would be possible to restore fully a burned and "hideously distorted" face on a corpse, the implication remains that Nathaniel's father was burned to death by an explosion. When Clara asks Nathaniel to throw his poetry in the fire, she activates the original trauma, which demonstrably makes her "the uncanny and traumatic impression" of a metaphorical castration by his father's death (Freud 155).

In this process of repression and disavowal, Nathaniel represses and disavows Clara by forgetting her, while using Olympia as a substitute for her companionship, an object which "now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor" (154). Indeed, it is clear that Olympia serves as Clara's successor, evidenced by the way in which Nathaniel's approval of Olympia (and simultaneous disavowal of Clara) is premised on her perceived understanding and acceptance of his musings which Clara finds repulsive and redundant: "Poems, fantasies, visions, romances, tales—this stock [is] daily increased by all sorts of extravagant sonnets, stanzas and canzoni, and he [reads] them all tirelessly to Olympia for hours on end," who sits while "looking

straight into her lover's eyes, without stirring" (Hoffmann 14). Olympia's stillness is contrasted against Clara's animation; she "neither [embroiders] nor [knits]" and "never [looks] out of the window" (14). In this dynamic, Olympia occupies the role of a passive female body on which the man projects his secret desires and fantasies. Her unwavering gaze is a narcissistic pool in which Nathaniel sees and admires himself. At the same time, even Clara's and Olympia's physicalities reflect Freud's theory that every fetishist has "an aversion … to the real female genitals, [which] remains a *stigma indelebile*": Clara is a human woman, while Olympia is a clockwork doll (Freud 154).

If we read Nathaniel's relationship to Olympia as the relationship between a fetishist to his fetish, Nathaniel's mental collapse and eventual death can be read as extensions of Freud's theory. Freud's fetish is an object that compartmentalizes a pathological fear of castration; it does so by "transforming" the visual impression" of the phallus into a sexual attachment to a disembodied part of a woman through a process of disavowal and repression. Consequently, the female body becomes an effigy that is now bound to a sexual attachment that stabilizes the pathological male psyche's sense of reality and identity. When Olympia becomes Nathaniel's "beloved," she also becomes an object that sustains him and makes his ego cohere. For this reason, her apparent understanding of Nathaniel becomes vital to his mental wellbeing. Olympia, as an object, affirms Nathaniel's sense of reality, his perception, and the feelings that live within him; at the same time, she also conceals his traumas. When Nathaniel discovers Olympia in pieces—her "deathly-pale countenance had no eyes, but black holes instead"—and he realizes that his stability was maintained by an illusion of a "lifeless doll" all along, his sense of reality falls apart, like the fetishized doll that sustained it (Hoffmann 15).

Not unexpectedly, the consequences of such upheaval are catastrophic. Nathaniel ends up

leaping off a tower gallery in what appears to be a psychotic episode. He shrieks and paces, "frantic with rage and anxiety" (17). His puzzling death might seem initially inexplicable. Yet when read in conjunction with Freud's discussion on the two young men, where he distinguishes between neurosis and psychosis on the basis that, "in the former the ego, in the service of reality, suppresses a piece of the id, whereas in a psychosis it lets itself be induced by the id to detach itself from a piece of reality," it is clear that it merely traces the extremities of fetishism (Freud 155). As a fetish, the fracturing of Olympia also entails the dissolution of the reality, the fantasy, and the stability she maintains for Nathaniel. His condition shifts from neurosis, where the id (madness) is regulated by the ego (the fetish), to psychosis, a complete detachment from reality caused by the id overriding the ego.

The implications in Freud's construction of the fetish involve not only its association with an essentially disfigured female body, but the idea that female genitals are somehow inferior, and that homosexuality is pathological. As an alternative to the fetish, Freud suggests that another manifestation of the "mental ailment" caused by castration anxiety is the development of homosexuality. He questions "why some people become homosexual" in response to the "fright of castration at the sight of a female genital," while others "fend it off by creating a fetish" (154). This suggestion, which associates homosexuality with fetishism, has actively contributed to the harmful and stigmatizing narratives that portray non-conforming sexuality as a symptom of mental illness, a stigmatization that contributes to the ongoing marginalization of the sexually Other. And while the stigmatization of female genitals is indeed a social reality, Freud fails to explain why or how. The mistreatment of the fetish expands beyond its misrepresentations to become the misrepresentation itself. That is, Freud's theory not only reflects existing distortions—of sex, gender, history, and culture—within intellectual discourse, but also serves as

a site of epistemic violence, where meaning is actively displaced and reconfigured through a Eurocentric and patriarchal framework that obscures the complexities of its historical context. It is clear that Freud's fetish informs—as it is simultaneously informed by—the displacement of narratives: in the colonial mistranslations by Portuguese settlers in West Africa in the *fetisso* (Pietz 3), now replicated in his articulation of psychoanalytical and sex theory. The colonial fetish has now been displaced in the Oedipal man by a castration anxiety.

Marx approaches the problem of the fetish from a different perspective. His use of the term "fetishism" in *Das Kapital* is applied to his critique of capitalism and commodity culture. As Marx operates within a framework of socioeconomic theory, he only briefly and indirectly engages with the historicity of the fetish yet appropriates the term to describe a process in which the "social relation between … products" undermines their supposed "objective character" (Marx 47). Marx begins his discussion on "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" with an observation that "a commodity, at first sight, [is] a very trivial thing, and easily understood" (47). Of course, initial impressions are rarely comprehensive, so Marx's next observation seems only inevitable: analysis of the commodity "shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (47).

Immediately, Marx's discussion on fetishism traces a throughline that exists in almost every use of the term: the relationship between object and its "hidden" or "secret" meanings. As Marx proceeds to describe the commodity's more evident properties, as a "value in use … capable of satisfying human wants" and a "product of human labour," he also gestures toward another relationship that appears intrinsic to the fetish—that of transformation, where "man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature" into "something transcendent" (47). The commodity, therefore, is also the fetish. Marx appears to have thought

so, since he defines “fetishism” as a set of social relations that attach themselves to “the products of labour,” which then transform them into “commodities” and are thus “inseparable from [their] production” (48). In other words, Marx’s fetishism involves a process where commodities are endowed with autonomous power in their self-contained value, which decontextualizes their origins in human labour. At the same time that commodities are appraised by the abstract social relationships attached to them, “the magnitude of [their] value by labour time is [made] a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in [their] relative values” (49).

Fetish, according to Marx, pertains to the economic displacement of value and meaning. Value “converts every product into a social hieroglyphic,” or, in simpler terms, abstractions (49). Marx also analogizes the commodity fetishism of capitalist society to “the religious world,” where “the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life” (48). In a “society based upon the production of commodities,” Marx suggests that “the religious world is but the reflex of the real world,” and that the Christian “*cultus* of abstract man” reflects the capitalist treatment of “products as commodities and values” (51). Protestantism thus emerges as “the most fitting form of religion” in the world of the commodity. Marx’s choice to associate Protestantism with commodity culture seems to refer to the *fetisso* and its origins in the intercultural mercantile spaces of West Africa, where Portuguese Protestants viewed the objects tied to West African cultural practices as symptomatic of an “irrational propensity to personify material” (Pietz 23).

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of Marx’s argumentation is his choice to contrast the commodity-oriented bourgeois society with “ancient Asiatic and other ancient modes of production,” which he describes as being “extremely simple and transparent” as they are apparently “founded on the immature development of man” (Marx 51). Marx reasons that

because ancient “trading nations” are culturally and infrastructurally underdeveloped, they are unequipped to produce complex systems of meaning (51). As such, their capacity for forming “social relations within the sphere of material life … are correspondingly narrow” (52). By extension of this line of thinking, “narrowness is reflected in the ancient worship of Nature, and in the other elements of the popular religions” (52). According to Marx, this “religious reflex” vanishes only when the “practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to Nature” (52). The “primitive” culture that Marx invokes is an obvious reference to the ones that were constructed in Enlightenment-era ethnographies and social theories on fetishism, as described by Pietz.

Several issues with Marx’s argumentation begin to emerge here. In choosing to frame non-western belief systems as “primitive” or “immature,” Marx reinforces the notion of western rationality that has become synonymous with Enlightenment-era thought. That European thinking was built on the language of imperialist expansionism. Marx takes a racially loaded term—“fetish”—and repurposes it in his critique of capitalism without interrogating its colonial origins. There is a certain irony in the contradiction of using imperialist notions to criticize capitalist structures. Some might call it a case of class reductionism. Instead of understanding “fetishism” as a term shaped by colonial violence, Marx treats it as a natural metaphor for the distortion of value under capitalism and even uses the racialized language of witchcraft to describe “the whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy” (50). Thus, Marx participates in the very process of inquiry that he critiques in his essay: “man’s reflections on the forms of social life, and consequently, also, his scientific analysis of those forms, take a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development” because he seeks to decipher “not their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but their meaning” (49).

Marx's theory results in the contextual displacement of a term that carries a deeply specific and colonial pedigree. Just as Marx's commodity fetishism erases or obscures the labour of production, his own use of the term "fetishism" obscures the material, ideological, and historical conditions in which the concept itself was produced. Despite Marx's radical anti-capitalist positioning, his mistreatment of the term "fetishism" reproduces the same issues found in Freud, where western intellectuals turn non-western concepts into abstract theoretical tools without engaging with their original contexts.

Notwithstanding the colonialist and patriarchal sentiments espoused in both Freud and Marx, their theories of the fetish become crucial to navigating the strange and liminal condition of the doll; as an object that is not quite a commodity nor an effigy, both fetishistic and uncanny, the doll oscillates between motion and stillness. While Freud's theory of the fetish reveals its status as an objectified and sexualized female body, metaphorized by the doll, Marx's critique provides a framework for tracing its presence in commodity culture, as well as its racial implications.

By examining the social, historical, and intellectual treatment of dolls—as an entity and as an abstraction—I suggest that it is indeed a fetish object—one that is necessarily and fundamentally rooted in the history of colonial and gendered violence. At the same time, the doll is not just an inanimate object, but an identity that determines the material and social realities of women, girls, and the feminine.

Chapter 2: Erotomania and the Female Doll in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*

While both Freud and Marx construct the fetish as an object endowed with a secret or hidden power—either by a psychosexual fixation or the social relativization of exchange value—the frameworks they provide are inadequate to fully engage with its historical, material, and ideological conditions. As Freud reinforces the notion of fetish as feminine, he simultaneously legitimates the stigma around femaleness and homosexuality by framing a social, historical, and cultural problem as a medical condition. Marx, on the other hand, reproduces the Enlightenment-era urge to primitivize the non-Western world in contrast to the comparatively "evolved" European society, even as he critiques capitalism. In both cases, their incongruent and contradictory theoretical applications of fetish ironically undermine its material and gendered status. This chapter addresses the epistemological oversights of Freud and Marx by reframing the fetish as a model of female thinghood. By applying Emily Apter's theories on fetishism and erotomania to a reading of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), I map the doll's female body as the site for manipulation and control. I end the chapter with a brief reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969).

In a synthesis of Freudian psychoanalysis, Marxist socioeconomic theory, and feminist critique, Apter describes the fetish as a "cabinet secret or hidden agent that displaces the boundaries between propriety and proprietorship" (43). This description reframes the fetish as not merely a theoretical abstraction, but as a physical object in which in libidinal and social economy "meet and become intertwined on the body of the fin-de-siècle courtesan"—an embodiment of feminized aesthetic economy (44). Drawing upon Pietz's anthropological construction of fetish as "magic talisman," Apter simultaneously structures her approach around a demonstration of how "feminine 'charms,' whether acquired for the household or the

whorehouse, possessed and infected with erotomania the very master collector whose aloofness and control were believed to be impregnable" (43). By engaging with Apter's framework of the fetish as a "female collectible" (43), I trace the distinctly feminized status of dollhood to its implications of violence against women.

Apter defines the cabinet as a "fetishistic space of perversion" where collectible objects, such as "curios, antiques, and personal memorabilia," accumulate and are put on display (39-43). While cabinets function similarly to a museum, they are also distinct in their domesticity as a necessarily "private place"—a "newly defined" bourgeois interior (39). By examining what Apter calls the "spatial metaphor crisscrossing the high associations of connoisseur collecting with the low associations of the prostitute's peep show" (43), we can trace the cabinet's dual status—both as an eroticized object and fetishistic site of voyeurism—to its influence on the doll's formation, not only as a cultural and literary motif but also as a physical object that circulates in the material and commercialized world.

In its various manifestations throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and architecture, the cabinet is established as a private and domestic space divided by gender, "zones forbidden to the opposite sex, such as the man's study or *salle d'antiquités* and the woman's dressing room or boudoir" (39). Apter notes that this division of leisure spaces into gendered "zones" imbues the cabinet with a "forbidden" atmosphere which, in effect, transforms it into an "architectural fetish" (39). As a space forbidden to the opposite sex, the cabinet's fetishism might be linked to the notion of "hidden" or "secret" values or processes. At the same time, the gendering of the cabinet synthesizes the bourgeois act of collecting with the commodification of a sexualized female body to transform the "*fille de noce*," or the nineteenth-century courtesan, into "an erotic commodity or collector's item" (43). In the transformative and fetishistic space of

the cabinet, prostitutes become “marketplace idols”—a feminist reconfiguration of the Marxist fetish (44).

Alongside the commercialized spaces of the nineteenth-century novel depicting a “visual cacophony of culturally relativized, historically dislocated commodities,” Apter reveals a parallel in the medical variety of cabinet fiction, a “quasi-literary … mixture of doctor’s memoir, nosological observation, and *roman à tiroir* (frame novel),” wherein doctors divulge their “most disturbing professional secrets” (40). Apter notes the striking resemblance of this genre to “bedroom dramas or alcove pornography,” fictional works that utilize voyeurism to intrigue and “titillate the audience”—or, in Apter’s words, “by lifting the curtains on forbidden scenes of adultery and libertinage” (40). Accordingly, Apter identifies cabinet fiction as a counterpart to the prostitution novel, which “typically featured narrative snapshots of the client choosing among girls proffered like objects in a display case” (41). By indulging in both fetishistic voyeurism and revelatory eroticism, the cabinet displays women’s wares as might happen in a brothel.

Since the cabinet’s designation as an erotic space can be attributed to its role in facilitating audience voyeurism, it would appear that Olympia’s bedroom in “The Sandman” is no bedroom at all, but, in fact, a quasi-prostitutional cabinet specifically designed by Coppelius to invite Nathaniel’s voyeuristic gaze and entrap him. Olympia is therefore as much a Freudian fetish as she is a collectible object catering to the nineteenth-century bourgeois sensibility—an enticing, “seductive sight” in a glass display (Hoffmann 12). By watching Olympia in her room through a spyglass, Nathaniel indulges in his very own peep show.

The cabinet’s transformation into the prostitutional space, along with Olympia’s dual status as sexual fixation and collectible, demonstrates a process within cabinet fiction that Apter

describes as “a set of slippages,” namely moments when authors collapse distinct ideas into one another: “object mania to erotomania, from household fetishism to brothel decadence, and from the medical genre of the doctor’s secret cabinet to the voyeuristic literary representations of prostitutional curiosities” (Apter 43). These conflations ultimately transform the courtesan into the collectible object. If the doll is a liminal body, then the fetish is the force by which things become liminal. The fetish is transformative. The doll, as the fetish object, can thus be mapped across multiple registers: as a narrative figure, a social category (in Apter’s example, as the courtesan), a collectible, a commodity, and a cultural effigy. What unites these different manifestations of the doll is their shared entanglement with femininity and the dynamics of control and manipulation.

In the set of slippages described by Apter, the dissolution of “object mania [into] erotomania” becomes particularly relevant to the issue of the fetishized doll (43). As the cabinet’s voyeuristic portrayal of the objectified woman raises her to the status of a coveted collectible item, it also facilitates what Apter describes as “the propagation of object manias … that virulent form of attachment to things which the nineteenth century dubbed *érotomanie*,” or erotomania in English (55). Emerging from nineteenth-century case studies of “severe outbreaks of erotic frenzy” that, in the most extreme cases, culminated in “physical attacks on the beloved,” erotomania can be summarized as an “aggravated, toxic desire” or, more broadly, as obsessive object attachments which can sometimes manifest in the act of collecting (56). The concept of erotomania as a product of the nineteenth-century cabinet can then be identified in both medical discourse and literary tradition.

When observed in women, Apter notes that erotomania is interpreted as a neurosis similar to hysteria to serve as a “medical euphemism for inadequately mastered sexual urges” which

present with “exaggerated nervosity, convulsions, and exaggerated lewdness” (56). Erotomania, when applied to women, reinforces the idea that they are inherently “embodied” in their identity and defined by their materiality or corporeality. Like Freud’s theory on fetishism—which situates maleness within the abstractions of the mind and the psyche while simultaneously constructing women in the image of bodies marked by their lack of a phallus—the fetishistic notion of erotomania achieves the same objectifying effects by locating it in “female hysteria,” an obsolete illness thought to be caused by the female womb.

The medicalization of erotomania also reveals the contradictory treatment of bourgeois women to their working-class counterparts: while manic behaviour of the bourgeois woman is concealed or “discretely sanitized with the help of a professional lexicon,” the same symptoms are classified in the wider context as the “temperamental defects of the ‘born prostitute’” (56). The conceptualization of erotomania, which combines the essentialization of an objectified female body with notions of concealment, reveals a form of fetishism that misrepresents the clinical identity of women based on their social strata—two fundamentally misaligned categories.

To link erotomania to Freudian fetishism, Apter refers to nineteenth-century physician Benjamin Ball and his diagnosis of erotomaniacs based on the presentation of a “central delusion projected by the subject onto a living person often so remote from the patient that he or she was reduced to the status of an inanimate object or fetish substitute” (56). Apter notes that while the theories of psychiatrists such as Ball contrast with those of Freud by focusing more on the “psychotic, paranoid workings of object delusion … than on the libidinal investment of actual inanimate objects within an economy of sexual fixation … both nonetheless projected an almost caricatural image of the frenzied relay between lack and desire characterizing the erotomaniac’s

behavior" (57). The difference between concepts of male and female erotomania exposes a notion of gendered materiality similar to that observed in Freud's theory on fetish: while pathological male sexuality is framed within the psyche, in females, it is instead associated with her purportedly dysfunctional reproductive organs.

Erotomania describes an obsessive fixation in which the patient, through a delusional belief about someone with whom they have no relationship, reduces that person to "the status of an inanimate object or fetish substitute"—like a tyrant "mad with love … lording over [a] surrogate object of desire" (56). Richardson's *Clarissa* offers a compelling model of this dynamic in its portrayal of the relationship between Clarissa Harlowe and Robert Lovelace. Despite Richardson's novel preceding the concept of erotomania by over a century, my reading demonstrates that the term is not only fits the themes of obsession, objectification, and control, but also reveals how Clarissa and Lovelace's doomed dynamic reproduces the very process in which an object delusion or "aggravated, toxic desire" transforms the woman into a doll or a "fetish surrogate" (56).

There is a distinct theatricality to Apter's concept of the fetishistic cabinet as a "space of perversion" and erotomania (43-4). As a stage for "advanced debauchery," where erotic and melodramatic bedroom fantasies unfold through "sadomasochistic ritual" or self-orchestrated beatings (47), the cabinet's "built-in stereoscopy" transforms the reader into a "spy" or voyeur by projecting an imaginary witness (47). If applied to Robert Lovelace, Richardson's infamous rake who loves performance and disguise, then the various spectacles he engineers throughout the text to coerce, deceive, and violate Clarissa reconfigure the spaces of the novel into fetish cabinets. These confinements also convert Clarissa into a fetish object herself, or more precisely, into a doll.

Lovelace's dehumanization of Clarissa is central to the novel's plot, but her physical lack of agency precedes even his influence. Before Lovelace, Clarissa's father, Sir Harlowe, firmly forbids her from leaving her room or writing to her friends; she is "not to be seen in any apartment of the house" (Richardson, 1:154). Clarissa's detainment is premised on various disputes with her family: their vehement disapproval of Lovelace and her perceived rapport with him; her resistance to marrying the man they have selected for her, the ill-mannered yet immensely wealthy Roger Solmes; and the resulting fear that she might conspire with Lovelace against their will.

Tensions escalate. Clarissa's home becomes an oppressive environment, such that her mother intrudes upon her in her own room and demands to read her private letters (1:172). The image of Clarissa in her room evokes the image of Olympia in the window, two dolls trapped in display cabinets to be gazed upon. Through bribery, Lovelace uses a servant proxy to transform himself into a spectator-spy of the Harlowe household peep show and Clarissa, its unassuming showgirl (1: 233). The risqué charge of the inaccessible Harlowe property—with Clarissa as its constituent—draws Lovelace out of the shadows. One night, he appears to her from "behind a stack of wood" and, with the spirit of a thespian starring in his own drama, "[throws] open a horseman's coat" to reveal his identity before throwing himself at her feet while expressing "great concern" over her home situation (1:237-8).

Roleplaying as a knight errant, Lovelace manipulates Clarissa into trusting him against her better judgment and lures her away from home with promises of freedom. She hesitates at the last moment and, "struggling vehemently," urges him to release her hand (3:6). Lovelace pretends to give Clarissa a choice in the matter, a hollow gesture undermined by the next sequence. As Clarissa prepares to re-enter the gate, he suddenly snatches the key from her hands

and flies to the lock. In a mock-attempt to open the door, Lovelace fumbles the key around in a panic and "instantly a voice from within cried out, bursting against the door, as if to break it open, and, repeating its violent pushes, "*Are you there?—Come up this moment!—This moment!—Here they are—Here they are both together!—Your pistol this moment!—Your gun!*" (3:15-16). As if acting on cue, Lovelace seizes upon Clarissa's confused fear and compels her to join him in flight, so she runs with him to his uncle's chariot before she realizes it (3:16).

The commotion ends up being a fabrication, and the extent of Lovelace's obsession—with control, manipulation, and theatrics—reveals itself in his prior instructions to servant-made-spy Joseph Leman in the event that Clarissa should "want to go back" (3:22):

> If you hear our voices parleying, keep at the door, till I cry Hem, hem, twice … Perhaps, in struggling to prevail upon the dear creature, I may have an opportunity to strike the door hard … Then you are to make a violent burst against the door, as if you'd break it open, drawing backward and forward the bolt in a hurry: Then, with another push, but with more noise than strength … cry out (as if you saw some of the family), Come up, come up instantly!—here they are! Here they are! Hasten!—This instant hasten! And mention swords, pistols, guns, with as terrible a voice, as you can cry out with. Then shall I prevail upon her, no doubt… (3:23)

Through this elaborate scheming, Lovelace emerges as an actor, playwright, and scene director of his own cabinet fiction. By providing a script for his supporting actor and designing the mise-en-scène, his plan to abduct Clarissa in her disorient and terror is a success (3:22). This initial abduction triggers a sustained struggle between captor and captive, which unravels across a series of theatrical interventions throughout the novel orchestrated by Lovelace.

After Clarissa's initial escape from Lovelace, she hides in Mrs. Moore's lodging house in

Hampstead (4:350). He eventually tracks her down and, under the guise of a married lawyer with a gouty limp—a characterization meant to signal harmlessness—maneuvers himself to her room (5:20). Clarissa opens the door, and Lovelace describes the moment with a sense of reverence or ecstasy, as she "[blazes] upon [him] … in a flood of light … a meridian sun" (5:20). Lovelace's intrusion is premised on a fabricated story about his search for an apartment with a closet "large enough to hold a cabinet [his wife] much values … it has many jewels in it of high price" (5:20). As Lovelace describes this cabinet, he gazes upon Clarissa and suddenly breaks from his script to declare that "nothing so valuable as the lady I see, can be brought into it" (5: 20). This impassioned outburst, though one among many in Lovelace's theatrical monologues, stands out in its literal enactment of Apter's cabinet metaphor as a space of ownership, display, and fetishism. By comparing the "jewels … of high price" to Clarissa, Lovelace invokes the image of the cabinet as a jewel box while casting Clarissa as its gem (5:20). Even as Lovelace implies that Clarissa is too valuable to be kept in a cabinet, he simultaneously expresses the desire to acquire her as a collectible object and absorbs her into its aesthetic economy.

The contradiction in his praise suggests not that Clarissa is too precious to be contained, but that her very resistance to him makes her especially collectible. Lovelace's choice to compare Clarissa to a jewel can also be traced to commodity fetishism, when Marx writes about the contradiction of exchange value: "Riches (use value) are the attribute of men, value is the attribute of commodities. A man or a community is rich, a pearl or a diamond is valuable" (Marx 53). Using a Marxist model of patriarchal sexual economy, women emerge as commodities whose use value is appraised by their fertility—the capacity to conceive and birth children. On its own, the use value of women might appear functional or pragmatic. Commodity fetishism, then, pertains to the application of moral abstractions—of virginity and sexualized virtue—to

serve as additional parameters that contract women's use value. The virtue of virginity is therefore a social hieroglyphic. While the woman's use value is reduced to her reproductive functionality, it also rests on the public perception of her sexuality; even if a woman proves demonstrably fertile, conception out of wedlock makes her a worthless commodity. Conversely, a chaste woman can be made worthless through gossip or scandal. Men acquire women as riches, while women become apparatuses to sustain their legacies through birthing their heirs.

If Apter's female collectible and her "charms" could possess or infect "with erotomania the very master collector whose aloofness and control were believed to be impregnable" (Apter 43), and Ball's erotomaniac projects their "central delusion … onto a living person often so remote … that he or she was reduced to the status of an inanimate object or fetish substitute" (56), then Lovelace would appear a clinical and literary erotomaniac obsessed with Clarissa, his fetish substitute—or "charmer" (1: 194)—as he so frequently calls her. The self-appointed collector-lord of a "pretty *lady-like* tyranny," Lovelace imagines himself a poet, a lover, a goddess-maker: "I must have a Cynthia, a Stella, a Sacharissa, as well as the best of them" (1:195). His domain is the cabinet, that eroticized space where he collects virginal women to cast as the *vedettes* of his romantic melodramas. As a curator and a pervert, Lovelace's "vehement aspiration after … novelty" drives his insatiable urge to invent women and "create beauty, and place it where nobody else could find it" (1:195-6). But like Apter's aloof master collector, he is easily bored. Thus, "when [his] new-created goddess has been kinder than it was proper for [his] plaintive sonnet," he loses interest (1:196).

Clarissa's continual resistance to Lovelace's emotional and sensory onslaught—meant to woo, to daze, to intimidate—only amplifies her forbidden allure. To the master collector, jaded with entitlement and dulled by abundance, her defiance is an intoxicating and irresistible novelty.

Perhaps, then, there is truth to Lovelace's claim that never has he been "so strangely affected before" as he has been by Clarissa (5: 20). The strange affection that he mistakes for "the name of Love" is more accurately described as a ravenous compulsion to possess and acquire, combined with an unrestrained appetite for melodramatic indulgence (1:196). Clarissa's unwavering commitment to virtue thus makes her Lovelace's ultimate prize—the coveted holy grail among women unconquered, the destined leading lady of his "plaintive sonnet" (1:196). As the Latin root of her name—*clarus*—suggests, Clarissa is indeed born to be a shining star (Harris 344).

Framed as Ball's clinical erotomaniac, Lovelace's "central delusion" derives from a fixation on Clarissa predicated on his desire to conquer and corrupt her virtue, which he believes is "founded rather in *pride* than *principle*" (3:103). Although Ball's diagnosis problematizes a kind of physical distance suggestive of parasocial attachment, I propose that Lovelace's relationship to Clarissa achieves the same effect, as it is entirely built upon false representations. Throughout the novel's vast and labyrinthine text, he rarely fails to perform—whether for himself, through the self-indulgent displays of overwrought theatrics in his monologues; or for others, by staging interactions with calculated dramatic flourish. Semi self-reflective in his conscious presentation, Lovelace seems acutely aware of his artificiality and revels in it.

While Lovelace's tendencies to romanticize and self-stylize betray a habit of dissociation, the sense of interpersonal distance articulated by Ball is reflected in his fundamental misunderstanding of Clarissa's character. Self-aware but inauthentic as a consequence, Lovelace is incapable of comprehending sincerity; to him, it is just another form of posture. His self-consciousness is damning in its deluded narcissism. Inauthenticity makes it impossible to engage with the world beyond performance, yet these performances are, in fact, desperate attempts to

construct meaning in his world poisoned by ennui. Clarissa demonstrates at least partial awareness of her position within Lovelace's production when she reflects on her "indelicate and even shocking circumstances," in which she is "but a cypher, to give him significance, and [herself] pain" (4:1-2).

At Hampstead, after Lovelace derails his own script as the gouty lawyer, he finds it "impossible to conceal [himself] longer from her, any more than (from the violent impulses of [his] passion) to forbear manifesting [himself]" (5:21). In a reenactment of an apparent favourite from his repertoire of theatrical flourishes—the unmasking—Lovelace unbuttons his cape, pulls off his "flapt, slouched hat," and throws open his "great coat … like the devil in Milton"—an "odd" comparison, he admits (5:21). Ironically, the comparison to Milton might be his most lucid yet. From a personal peep show into Clarissa's apartment, Lovelace has now transformed the scene into a sentimental drama, with the guests and staff at Mrs. Moore's lodgings as its spectators.

To convince and escort Clarissa's return to London, Lovelace disguises two prostitutes to pose as his aunt Lady Betty and his cousin Miss Montague, whose true identities he reveals through their other names: Lady Betty is Barbara Wallis, while Miss Montague is Johanetta Golding (5:206-7). Then, assuming the role of costume designer or dollmaker, Lovelace contemplates how he should dress them: "Lady Betty in a rich gold tissue, adorned with jewels of high price"—a repetition of his earlier comparison between Clarissa and the jewels in the cabinet—and "cousin Montague in a pale pink, standing an end with silver flowers of her own working" (5:207). The ruse works, the trap is set, and Clarissa, "[suspecting] nothing," follows Lovelace's phony relatives to her reimprisonment at Mrs. Sinclair's brothel (6: 65).

When Clarissa is tricked and abducted a second time, Apter's cabinet metaphor evolves—

first a jewel box, now a brothel—to become fully realized in the physical space of the prostitutional cabinet. With his troupe of whores ready to be dressed and directed, Lovelace stages the finale of his tragic burlesque starring Clarissa, set at the intersection of erotomaniacal debauchery and fetishistic transformation. The ultimate iteration of Apter's prostitutional cabinet, Mrs. Sinclair's brothel is the site where cheap tricks become expensive jewels, where women become props and playthings, where exploitation dresses up as decadence. The whorehouse is therefore the pervert's playground.

As the coach drives through unfamiliar streets Clarissa knows "nothing of," she comes "within sight of the dreadful house of the dreadfullest woman in the world" and recognizes it from her previous confinement, when she was first alerted to its dangers (6:65). During Clarissa's initial stay, she feels something amiss in the measured affectations of the women around her: she notices how her temporary attendant "is very likely and genteel; too genteel indeed … for a servant. But what [she likes] least of all in her, she has a strange sly eye … Half-confident" (3: 288); and then realizes that "Mrs. Sinclair herself … has an odd winking eye; and her respectfulness seems too much studied … for the London ease and freedom" (3: 288). To deepen Clarissa's unease amid the house's undercurrent of duplicity, Lovelace reveals that he has told everyone there—"the widow before her kinswomen, and before [her] new servant … that indeed [they] were privately married at Hertford" (3:219). Now, upon returning, but not yet aware that it is a brothel, Clarissa lapses into a state of intense, perhaps primal, terror and refuses to step out of the carriage (6:66).

Clarissa's fear of the house is not directly tied to her previous entrapment, but her fear feels primal insofar as she senses the house as something cursed, as if imbued with a supernatural force she cannot explain: "My heart misgave me beyond the power of my own

accounting for it, for still I did not suspect these women. But the antipathy I had taken to the vile house, and to find myself so near it, when I expected no such matter, with the sight of the old creature, all together, made me behave like a distracted person" (6:67-8). In this instance, Clarissa describes a sudden onset of dread, not caused by any visible or immediate threat but by her sheer proximity to a place she did not expect to see again. Combined with the reference to disorientation and subtly altered behaviour, her account appears to unwittingly convey a sense of inevitability and hypnosis.

To compound Clarissa's disarray, Lovelace and his prostitute castmates feign concern as the sequence erupts into a cacophony of voices. The faux Lady Betty calls for a maid to bring a "glass of hartshorn and water" while coaxing Clarissa out of the coach. Lovelace, pretending to advocate for her, makes a show of mock-defiance against his pretended aunt. Clarissa, insisting that she is "quite well," pleads with the coachman to "drive on" (6: 66). Drawn by the commotion, a crowd forms around the coach while the fraudulent Miss Montague weaponizes shame to urge Clarissa out; claustrophobia and confusion are the tools of her coercion. And so, "pressed, and gazed at … [by] the women so richly dressed, people whispering; in an evil moment," out steps the trembling Clarissa into "Lady Betty's" arms and the trap springs shut (6:68).

As Clarissa crosses the "guilty threshold" of Mrs. Sinclair's door, a ceremonial procession begins (6:68). Breathless with joy and exasperated triumph, the fake Lady Betty leads Clarissa, "the poor sacrifice," down the hall and "into the old wretch's too well-known parlour" (6:68-9). Here, at the climax of Lovelace's grotesque parody—a fetishistic pantomime of possessive, twisted love—he summons a swarm of nymphs to carry the virginal offering to his altar. A marionette as skilled as her collector-lord in the art of pageantry, Lady Betty lulls

Clarissa into a sense of false security with her voice "so gentle, so meek, so [low] … drawling out, in a puling accent, all the obliging things she could say" (6:69). This dazzling display of "conscious dignity" by a "woman … glittering with jewels" leaves Clarissa in awe (3:69).

Tea, as a motif fraught with ceremonial symbolism of decorum and gentility, is the centerpiece of this unholy procession, while the "tea-table"—a stage for performing female etiquette—becomes the altar (6:69). Clarissa is presented with her ceremonial rites: "made to drink two dishes, with milk, complaisantly urged by the pretended Ladies helping [her] each to one" (6: 69). Now, "stupid to their hands," Clarissa takes the third and final drink—the tea—and "almost [chokes] with vapours; and could hardly swallow" (6:69). In the "fatal inner house" of Mrs. Sinclair's brothel, this perverse tea party is actually a profane imitation of domesticity (6:69).

The tea, with its "odd taste" is part of the charade (6:69). In Lovelace's pageant of deceit, prostitutes are disguised as noblewomen and "stupefying … potions" are disguised as "*London Milk*" (6:69-74). "Now stupid, now raving, now senseless," Clarissa loses her consciousness and sole remaining claim to bodily autonomy. The ritual is complete, and Lovelace concludes the ceremony by announcing it to Belford in the novel's shortest letter: "And now … I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives" (5: 222). Through a ritual of coercion, drugging, and rape, Clarissa thus becomes the newest addition to the faded *vedettes* of Lovelace's dramas past, trapped in his lair of venereal rot.

Lovelace's cabinet, now unambiguously prostitutionalized, no longer occupies the conceptual and transient space of spectacle but materializes in the brothel: a set piece for miniaturized, artificial domesticity concealing a festering, sexualized ruin—a dollhouse, of sorts. Sally and Polly, associate-whores of Mrs. Sinclair, are just two of the abandoned toys in his

collection: “creatures who, brought up to high for their fortunes, and to a taste of pleasure, and the public diversions, had fallen an easy prey to his seducing arts” (3:306). Behold, the slippage of “household fetishism to brothel decadence” (Apter 43).

Lovelace’s goddess-making refers to a process of invention, wherein women are transformed into eroticized archetypes. At the same time, these aestheticized affectations expose a system of structural misogyny in which men can trivialize their sexual consumption of women through fantasy, while women suffer the ruinous socioeconomic consequences of their apparent fall from virtue: disownment, the loss of marriage prospects, and unemployability. Many are left with few options but to work as prostitutes to survive, as do Sally and Polly. Lovelace is not only aware of these conditions, but weaponizes them against Clarissa in an attempt to coerce her into marrying him.

When the spell wears off and Clarissa regains consciousness, Lovelace threatens her reputation by warning that, in choosing to remaining single after her rape, she would be “refusing to save [her] own and [her] family’s reputation in the eye of the world … For, if [they] are married, all the disgrace [she images she has] suffered while a single lady, will be [his] own; and only known to [themselves]” (5:353). Rather than concede to Lovelace’s plan, Clarissa chooses social and spiritual withdrawal, and dies from an unspecified illness—referred to only as “broken heart” (6:189)—among strangers. Clarissa’s death results from her absolute refusal to be absorbed by the patriarchal sexual economy. Her illness, then, seems less a matter of the heart than the final, bodily manifestation of systemic violence. As if in recognition of the very mechanisms that have corrupted her body—excess, and the commodification of women as sex objects—Clarissa orders her own casket, like a doll box awaiting shipment (7:127). She becomes a doll, but on her own terms: not a marionette in Lovelace’s cabaret, but in death, the

embodiment of fetishistic violence.

Richardson's use of the phrases "seducing arts" (3: 306), "blackest artifice," and "studied deceits" (5: 233) to describe Lovelace's fabrications evokes imagery of the anthropological fetish in its associations with witchcraft, charms, and curses. In *Clarissa*, the ritualized language of *fetissos* originally used to describe West African totems is reconfigured as the fetishizing force behind Lovelace's deceptions, tools by which he uses to transforms women into sex objects. Through a multivalent portrayal of pathological sexuality, *Clarissa* models how fetishism enacts misogynistic violence, whether through a Marxist critique of commodity fetishism and excess, Apter's theory of the cabinet fiction, Ball's psychosexual theory on erotomania, or Pietz's postcolonial critique of fetish itself. In *Clarissa*, the fetish is not merely an amulet or charm, nor a lifeless automaton incapable of speech. It is the force by which women transform into objects, while drivel becomes performance. It is "aggravated, toxic desire" (Apter 56), as well as its fallout.

Although expansive in its portrayal of gendered violence, Richardson's text remains largely disengaged from the colonial lineage of fetish, unsurprising given its context as an Enlightenment-era novel written prior to the abolition of slavery. To bridge this gap between eighteenth-century and contemporary fetish discourses, I turn briefly to Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, a novel that frames the fetish as an orientalised ornament.

Despite their vastly different historical contexts, both Atwood and Richardson depict fetishistic violence within aesthetic and sexual economies. Like *Clarissa*, Atwood's novel traces a process by which the male collector reduces the woman to an aestheticized sex object, which manifests in her physical or mental deterioration. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian's narration often meanders through elaborate descriptions of interiors filled with trash and trinkets: a regency-style

house with “pioneer brass warming-pans strung on the wall,” a “many-pronged spinning wheel on the second-floor landing,” a “ragged regimental flag behind glass,” rows of “oval-framed ancestors,” and a “hall table with [an] écru doily and [a] round brass tray” (14-15). The floor in Ainsley’s room is “covered by a treacherous muskeg of used clothes with ashtrays scattered here and there” (19). Clara’s house, in particular, is jarring in its depiction of how gendered expectations consume women: “The grass on the doormat-sized lawn had not been cut for some time. On the steps lay a neatly decapitated doll and inside the baby carriage was a large teddy bear with the stuffing coming out … the stairs of the back porch … were overgrown with empty bottles of all kinds, beer bottles, milk bottles, wine and scotch bottles, and baby bottles” (37). Amidst the clutter, Marian finds Clara “in the garden, sitting in a round wicker basket-chair with metal legs … now in her seventh month [of pregnancy] she [looks] like a boa constrictor that has swallowed a watermelon. Her head, with its aureole of pale hair … [seems] smaller and even more fragile by the contrast” (37). The image of extinguished ambition and exhausted motherhood, Clara is a tragic figure. While the headless doll on her porch is a visual metaphor for her lack of identity beyond her role as a mother, the mess itself signals stagnation, as if she “simply stood helpless while the tide of dirt rose around her, unable to stop it or evade it” (44). Dolls are the symbols of female passivity—a metaphor that evolves when Marian transforms into the centrepiece of Peter’s household gala.

Peter loves to collect objects—especially when they are exoticized, like the Japanese camera lenses he raves about with the pedophilic womanizer Len Slank (81). His collection mostly comprises functional tools including weapons: “two rifles, a pistol, and several wicked-looking knives” (69). In *The Edible Woman*, male mania for collecting is associated with violence. The camera lens and the rifle are therefore parallel motifs for fetishistic transformation

of bodies into objects. While the rifle turns living creatures into objects through physical violence—like the rabbit that becomes game (81)—the camera lens is used to transform women into flat images, an apparatus for aestheticized fetishism. Comparatively subdued to Lovelace, his baroque counterpart, Peter's fixation on the aesthetics of performance manifests in his curated conventionality. With skin "clean and white and new … unusually smooth for a man's" and an "ordinariness raised to perfection" (72), Peter almost seems inhuman, like a Ken doll in disguise. If Lovelace's dollhouse is the jewel-encrusted brothel, then Peter's dollhouse is his eerily sparse apartment, where he parades a dolled-up Marian.

In preparation for Peter's party, Marian discards her "mousy" look and wears a "short, red, and sequined" dress that she "[doesn't] really think … [suits] her" (240). On Peter's suggestion, she also "[has] something done with her hair" by getting a makeover at a salon, which she imagines as a medical procedure where she gets "strapped" down into a "doctor's chair to have stitches taken out" (241-2). Marian's short red dress, too tight for her to fasten or remove by herself (245), is reminiscent of the Chinese *qipao* or *cheongsam*. Dressed in red, with dark hair and pale skin, Marian achieves Peter's ideal vision for her—orientalist in its fetishism, which he admits when he tells her she would "look great in a kimono" after an uncomfortable tryst in the bathtub which leaves her feeling like a "lavatory fixture" (73). To immortalize Marian in her oriental and eroticized form, Peter puppeteers her to pose for photos by directing her to "stand … by the guns and lean back a little against the wall," then to "stand a little less stiffly … and [not] hunch [her] shoulders together … [to] stick out [her] chest, and [not] look so worried" (266).

Marian in red is an ornamental object, a passive woman. Marian in red is also a doll. Marian in red belongs in the museum's "Oriental section," among the "many pale vases and

glazed and lacquered dishes," on the "immense wall screen … covered with small golden images of gods and goddesses" (211). In *The Edible Woman*, the fetish is a distinctly orientalised performance of femininity, a symbol commodified and embodied Otherness. However, Marian's fate reconfigures Clarissa's ultimately tragedy by resisting the sentimental tendency to romanticize exhibitions of embodied suffering. While Richardson chooses to frame Clarissa's emancipation in the act of dying, this portrayal of victims of sexual violence reinforces harmful assumptions about the disposability of women's bodies—that is, the idea that one cannot recover from sexual assault without discarding their own body.

Atwood subverts this trope by reframing it as an act of self-consumption—a literal reclamation of a material body through eating. At the end of the novel, Marian reclaims her agency and restores her first-person voice and subjectivity after she creates and consumes a cake she stylizes after herself. In a reproduction of her nightmarish experience at the beauty salon, she meticulously "operate[s]" on the cake (310). She nips and tucks at the sponge, then decorates it with layers of frosting, with flourishes like a "burst of exuberance" while adding a "row of ruffles around the neckline" and "more … at the hem" (310). Through this baking ritual, Marian engages in a performance of self-determination via the creation of an effigy. Later, she serves the cake doll to Peter "with reverence, as though … carrying something sacred in a procession, an icon," who retreats in fear and confusion (312). By seeing through the cake's creation—from ritual combination, to ornamentation, and then delivery—Marian reclaims her image and sense of self via an edible proxy. In contrast to Richardson's Clarissa, who surrenders her body to sustain her virtue, Atwood demonstrates through Marian how reclamation can be symbolic.

Chapter 3: Rag Dolls and Racial Conversion in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

As I established in the first chapter, the fetish is both an entity and an abstraction. On the one hand, it is a tangible object, such as a doll. On the other hand, it is a force—a mode of transformation enacted through repression and disavowal. In the second chapter, I argued that the fetish doll—constructed as a distinctly feminine object—contains the commodified female body that circulates within an aestheticized patriarchal sexual economy. Yet the fetish doll's colonial genealogy remains unresolved. In this third chapter, my intervention proceeds through a reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as a reconfiguration of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both texts engage the concept of racial beauty and conversion. Whereas Stowe imagines Blackness as an essentialized condition shaped by enslavement, abuse, and incivility, Morrison exposes it as a social designation that persists beyond abolition. In *The Bluest Eye*, Blackness is not an ailment to be remediated by whiteness, but a structural epithet marked by skin tone, wealth, and cultural legibility. In other words, the relationship between Blackness and whiteness is not materially fixed, but produced through dialectical opposition. To map the relationship between Blackness and whiteness, I frame Pecola Breedlove as a fetishized doll: a racialized commodity disfigured by desire, manipulation, and consumption. As I argued through a reading of *Clarissa*, femaleness is shaped by patriarchal spectacle. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's collapse into racialized objecthood demonstrates how Blackness is constructed through commodified colonial violence to be consumed by white supremacist aesthetics.

To unify the doll's gendered and material conditions with its raciality, this chapter shifts focus to antebellum and postbellum America with a view to tracing the development of racialized dollhood in relation to subjection, nostalgia, and consumerism. I conduct my reading in conversation with Robin Bernstein's theory of dolls as "scriptive things"—material objects that

structure performances of race, gender, and power in both theatre and play (12). In particular, my framework is rooted in Bernstein's analysis of the Black doll's materiality relative to the "thinglike" condition of Blackness, which she interrogates in her own reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (44). I also draw on Saidiya Hartman's critical historiography of slavery as spectacle in *Scenes of Subjection* to demonstrate how nineteenth-century sentimentality—such as Stowe's—constructs the Black body as a fetishized container for imagined white or "near-white" suffering (Hartman 20).

Bernstein defines the scriptive thing as a piece of material culture that invites "behaviors that its maker did and did not envision" (12). An object containing the repertoire—the "embodied memory of traditions of performance"—as well as the archive, the repository of written and textual material, the scriptive thing is "both an artifact of and scriptive prop within a performance" (12). Its simultaneity therefore "captures the moment when dramatic narrative and movement through space are in the act of becoming each other" (12). Like the fetish, a force and vessel for transformation, the doll directs and embodies performance. And as a scriptive thing, the doll functions as a contrivance designed to prompt and coordinate "meaningful bodily behaviors" into performance (71).

Bernstein's study engages with the doll as a crucial component that associates childhood with "slavery's most foundational … question: What is a person?" (16). The doll's central ambiguity—between personhood and thinghood—can be traced from Freud's reading of Hoffmann and the uncanny quality of lifeless objects that yet appear lifelike. When dislocated from Freud's Eurocentric psychoanalytical framework and reconfigured in American social politics, however, the uncanny doll reveals itself as a symbol of racial anxiety. Citing Bill Brown, Bernstein calls it the "American uncanny," the postbellum anxiety to redefine "the 'boundary'

between human and thing" (17). Accordingly, dolls became a popular medium for "the cultural effort to objectify and later reobjectify African Americans … because all stories about sentient dolls reorganize the boundary between human and thing" (17).

Indeed, Bernstein identifies "dollness itself [as] a racial category that denotes servitude," as seen in characters like Olympia in "The Sandman" and Lovelace's prostitute associates in *Clarissa* (18). In the antebellum and postbellum contexts, where notions of racial slavery underpinned "much doll literature and … the physical property of specific dolls," dolls then became encoded with "racial politics beneath a cloak of innocence" (18). The fetishistic quality of repressed meaning resurfaces in the racialized doll. Specifically, the racial politics of dolls as scriptive things manifests in the Black doll's materiality. In the nineteenth century, Black dolls were made of "gutta-percha, a form of resilient rubber" that enabled "them to survive rough play that would destroy a doll made of porcelain or wax" (71). In addition, many were decorated with wide smiles, or "cheerfully hideous [grins]" that suggested "that violent play was acceptable, even enjoyable" (69-71).

While Bernstein notes that "the materiality of black rubber dolls configures blackness as an elastic form of subjectivity that can withstand blows without breaking" (71), the rough play these dolls endured was not merely enabled by materiality, but scripted by cultural narrative. One example that Bernstein includes is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which inspired Frances Hodgson Burnett to re-enact various plot scenarios such as Eva's death, in which she cast a "white doll as Eva and herself as 'all the weeping slaves at once'" (69). In another scene, she reimagines the Black doll—originally used to portray Topsy—as Uncle Tom, then casts herself as Simon Legree and "bound the [Black] doll to a candelabra stand and whipped it, "[f]urious with insensate rage" (69).

Burnett's whipping of the Topsy doll reveals its fetishistic, hidden power: the covert reconfiguration of slaveholding, enslavement, and violence as "racially innocent fun, as American love"—and the deformation of America's collective memory of slavery (149). Bernstein attributes this reconfiguration to "kinesthetic memory": a bodily movement triggered by a scriptive thing that is "stylized through its citation of gender, class, age, race, and other categories of analysis" (73-4). The scriptive thing transforms actions into performances that signal social identity, while these performances act as "a way of 'thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable'" (73). Thus, Burnett's "performance of whipping" (71), prompted by the materiality of the Black doll and scripted by Stowe's narrative, is a conditioned response that replicates racial violence and oppression—the viciousness of which cannot be uttered in words—while it reinforces the idea that Blackness is a condition shaped by abuse (74). As such, when asked to explain herself, "the normally articulate girl could but stammer, 'I was—only just—pretending something'" (74).

As the Black doll is animated by the narrative of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a performance of racialized brutality, it also demonstrates the Black body's interchangeability: between Topsy and Uncle Tom, between objecthood and personhood. This reveals Blackness not as a component of identity, but as the condition of nondescript, opaque personhood. Since the Black doll is less a representation of an individual than a mannequin figure, identified primarily by its "blackness … [and] its grin" (71), it is precisely the lack of distinction that identifies Blackness. The treatment of Black dolls—as interchangeable conduits for reenacting violence committed under an ongoing legacy of racial oppression—traces a process of person-to-object slippage, in which Black human bodies are dispossessed of identity and reimagined as rubber dolls. The objectified Black body then becomes a scriptive thing in dollhood, because "objects become things when they

trigger … kinesthetic memory" and "performance is what distinguishes an object from a thing" (73-4).

Bernstein differentiates objects from things. Whereas an object is "a chunk of matter that one looks through or beyond to understand something human," a thing "asserts itself within a field of matter" (72). Things script behaviours, while objects do not. An object is compliant and behaves as intended, while a thing is unpredictable and "forces a person into an awareness of the self in material relation to [it]" by disturbing the distinction between person and object (73). A thing, then, reveals a "particular subject-object relation" rather than gesturing towards the object itself (73). Bernstein attributes this ontological disruption to an "animative power" that endows the object with agency: "an object becomes a thing when it invites a person to dance," and in being acted upon, appears to animate (72-4). The object is inert, descriptive matter that signals "something beyond itself" (74). Things, by contrast, actively participate as "performatives" that directly invite movement and meaningful action (74). The thing, therefore, occupies the transient space between object and person. In its liminal state, its identity is not contained within its materiality, but defined through its relation to a perceiving subject. Similarly, the "thinghood" of the objectified Black body is not generated by its physicality, but a result of their relational positioning within a racialized aesthetic economy structured by whiteness.

Burnett's simulation of whipping Uncle Tom can also be traced to Hartman's critique of nineteenth-century affective theatre, in which "the crimes of slavery are not only witnessed but staged" through "public displays of suffering [including] … the pageantry of the trade, the spectacle of punishment, circulating reports of slavery's horrors, [and] the runaway success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (Hartman 17-20). In this case, the Black doll as a scriptive thing invites participants to stage spectacles of Black suffering—in turn processing the lived experiences of

racialized people through the imaginary, the fantastical, and the dramatic. For the purpose of "[bringing] the suffering near" those unaffected and forge "the ties of sentiment," the Black body is reduced to a "vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others" (19). The result is the reification of Black personhood as a symbol of embodied suffering.

Though these exhibitions were designed to inspire empathy for the enslaved subject, that empathy, understood as a "projection of oneself into another," ultimately transforms the slave's "captive body" into a proxy for sentimental projection (19). This "masochistic fantasy" is therefore a fetishizing force that configures the Black body as an interchangeable conduit for imagining white suffering (19). The reliance of nineteenth-century abolitionist rhetoric on empathetic identification to "affirm the materiality of black sentience" ironically reinforces the belief that "black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body … to make this suffering visible and intelligible" (19). As a consequence of the Black captive's historical objecthood and ontological entanglement with whiteness, they must be supplanted in the white imagination to be given expression to their suffering and be seen as human—a dilemma that Hartman locates between "the denial of black sentience and the obscurity of suffering" (20).

The role of imagination in expressing Black suffering through empathetic identification can be considered a form of play. The consumption of spectacularized Black suffering replicates the Enlightenment-era consumption of newspapers and novels, as both generate what Bernstein calls "mass [ceremonies]" inspiring emotional responses that inform collective national identity and memory. In the twentieth century, these textual conduits for "imaginative play" will also be developed as "mass-produced commercial products" including dolls (Bernstein 153). Burnett's play practices can then be situated in the interstice between nineteenth-century affective theatre

and modern consumer culture, where the Black body circulates as a commodity, a plaything, and an interchangeable vessel for performing slavery as spectacle. The harm perpetuated by spectacularized violence and empathetic identification is both representational and ontological. Hartman argues, if "pain extends humanity to the dispossessed and the ability to sustain suffering leads to transcendence, [then] the spectral and spectacular character of this suffering … effaces and restricts black sentience" (Hartman 20). In other words, the very structures that appear to affirm Black personhood through suffering instead reduce it to spectacle and, in so doing, limit the expression of Black sentience to scenes of sensationalized violence. At the same time, they transform Black bodies into aestheticized commodities that move others through their capacity to emote and feel pain.

The spectral mechanism of empathetic identification Hartman critiques in *Scenes of Subjection* appears to mirror the object-to-person and race slippages that Bernstein observes throughout twentieth-century doll repertoires and archives. Whereas the Black body is configured as a "vehicle of the other's power, pleasure, and profit" while "the white or near-white body … makes the captive's suffering visible and discernable" in nineteenth-century affective theatre (20), the Black and white rag dolls that follow in the twentieth century are embedded with the visual language of blackface (Bernstein 168). In this context, the topsy-turvy doll emerges as a physical metaphor for Blackness defined through whiteness, where the presence of one obscures or destabilizes the other, and where racial identity oscillates between fixity and transience. Within this unstable dynamic—between the collapse of Black and white, of object and person, and of play and subjection—*The Bluest Eye* situates its characters.

At the intersection of Bernstein's theory of ontological slippages through thinghood, Hartman's concept of phantasmic Black suffering, and Burnett's play practices with Black dolls

is Pecola Breedlove—a Topsy-like figure whose body becomes a site of transfer for projections of generational trauma. Pecola's status as a fetish object denies her the agency of self-determination. She is what others need her to be: "black e mo" (Morrison 65), a "nasty little black bitch" (92), or simply a vacuum of "static and dread" (49). These words, each supplanting Pecola's sense of self, dissolve her personhood into objecthood. Meanwhile, her ugliness and vulnerability transform her into a mirror that reflects the fears of those around her—of rejection and weakness—to prompt a variety of reactions, including rage, repulsion, and resentment often expressed through physical acts of violence. This makes Pecola not an object, but a thing that induces self-conscious awareness in those who perceive or interact with her. Consistent with Bernstein's "thinghood," Pecola disturbs the person-object distinction by destabilizing the "binarized positions" that ostracize her and embrace others (Bernstein 73). Pecola's ugliness is not innate. Rather, it is defined by her social distance from whiteness and perpetuated by the repertoires of idealized white femininity—such as the images of Shirley Temple and the mascot Mary Jane (19, 50 Morrison)—which embed the concept of racial beauty within mass culture.

In the liminal state between object and human, Pecola becomes a fetish, a doll-like being akin to L. Frank Baum's Patchwork Girl of Oz, whom Bernstein compares to Topsy based on their mutual depictions in skin-whitening practices. Both were illustrated in the same year holding a powder puff, despite the fact that "neither Stowe's Topsy nor Baum's Patchwork Girl ever powders her face in the text of the respective novels" (Bernstein 169). Through these parallel portrayals, the sentient rag doll is identified with the Black girl as two beings marked by their attempts to transcend racial otherness. Concurrently, Topsy's name is indicative of a "sense of incompletion, a call for closure" (168). Because the word "topsy" had "no independent meaning" when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first published, Bernstein suggests that "the name

'Topsy' … demanded that the reader supply 'Turvy'—or 'turned' … [which] foreshadowed the character's inevitable turnaround, her conversion" (169). Pecola is similarly characterized by incompleteness—not in name, but in her unfulfilled personhood. Unlike Topsy, however, Pecola never undergoes the narrative arc that absorbs her into white domesticity. Instead, she is placed at the extreme margins of the novel, both narratively and spatially. Even when the white sentimental gaze that redeems Topsy reaches Pecola, it does not heal, but disfigures. As a subversion of Topsy, whose wish to "change races, to be 'skinned and come white'" is realized through domestication (169), Pecola's body becomes a repertoire of the Black girl's impossible striving for whiteness.

Pecola's marginality is an insidious force. It may initially appear benign, perhaps even mistaken for shyness. Yet this illusion is destabilized by the non-linear form of the book itself: it begins by revealing that Pecola has been raped by her father, Cholly, and has become pregnant with his child, which she miscarries. This revelation occurs before the rest of the narrative proceeds into a relatively chronological structure, which then prompts the reader to search for Pecola throughout the book, so as not to lose her largely silent presence amidst Morrison's polyphonic narrative. In this sense, *The Bluest Eye* scripts a mode of reading that directs readers to chase after a character toward her gradual disappearance from the story. Just as Topsy's name calls for closure, the fragmented storytelling in *The Bluest Eye* compels readers to stitch Pecola back together. Morrison gestures toward this scriptive quality in her foreword, where she explains that the fragmented structure of the novel was conceptualized to resist the "comfort of pitying [Pecola]" and instead probe the reader's complicity (xii). By breaking the narrative "into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader," Morrison resists enabling the impulse of empathetic identification which Hartman critiques. In doing so, she denies the reader a passive

role while reconfiguring the text as a "speakerly, aural, and colloquial" thing that resists containment by the sentimental gaze (xii).

While the novel directs reader engagement, Pecola is at once scriptive and scripted. As opposed to Bernstein's construction of the thing as an object with agency, Pecola's thinghood is characterized by its lack thereof. Beat by her mother into the "fear of growing up, fear of other people, [and] fear of life" (128), Pecola's capacity for self-representation is limited to expressions that disguise her loss of agency as deference. On the surface, these gestures might appear innocuous and agreeable, if not mildly apathetic: when Claudia asks Pecola whether she would "like some graham crackers," she responds with "I don't care" (19); later, when Frieda asks her what she wants to do, she repeats the phrase "I don't care" and adds that she can do "anything [they] want" (26). But when viewed within the context of the years of abuse that produced it, Pecola's deference implicates bodily harm as a mechanism of fetishistic transformation—from personhood to dollhood—and her passivity in speech reflects the unreadable indistinctness Bernstein observes in Black dolls. While Pecola's objectification is produced by abuse, this condition scripts her performance of objecthood through silence. Pecola's Blackness, as the racialized embodiment of scripted dollhood, enacts a self-perpetuating cycle of dehumanization.

Pecola's Blackness is not solely defined by its passivity, or removal from whiteness; it becomes crucial to the definition of white beauty via negation. That is, it is an essential component within the dialectics of racial beauty. Similar to Topsy—a "minstrel-influenced caricature" whose body resulting "from generations of 'ignorance' and 'vice'" is framed against Eva's "'deep eyes' and 'noble brow' [from] generations that were 'high-bred'" (Bernstein 44)—Pecola's Blackness produces the aesthetic of whiteness by embodying what it must not be.

Bernstein locates Topsy's origins in the minstrel tradition alongside Johnny Gruelle's Raggedy Ann and Baum's Scarecrow of Oz, at the intersection of performed and embodied Blackness—where dolls, books, and extravaganza permeate popular culture with the "logics and visual tropes" of minstrelized racial caricature (163). Each of these characters, whether through performance or materiality, were animated by "blackface minstrelsy" (149). As Bernstein demonstrates, Raggedy Ann and the topsy-turvy doll are particularly compelling embodiments of the various slippages that redefine the boundary between object and person, as well as between Blackness and whiteness.

While the Scarecrow's "soft, light body" which scripted harmless violence was adopted as a "central quality of Raggedy Ann, who is frequently and harmlessly thrown through the air" (166), her design "quoted the Golliwogg's triangular nose, woolly hair, geometrical face, and American flag-like costume" (159). Her face also emulates John R. Neill's blackface-inspired Scarecrow illustrations: "flat surface, triangular nose, perfectly round eyes, and semicircular smile" (163). But Raggedy Ann's whiteness, like "the minstrel performer's cork-blackness, is always temporary": she "always contains within her the idea of racial flip-flops; the promise or threat of racial transformation" (174). Her white skin evokes the "white side of the topsy-turvy doll," or Topsy, "in the act of whiting up" (171), yet "the black side [still] promises to crop up" (174). Bernstein demonstrates how blackface visualizes a racial dialectic in which Blackness actively produces and defines whiteness:

> The black-and-whiteness that underlay Topsy, the Scarecrow, And Raggedy Ann … enact not racial admixture but … the simultaneity of blackface … [holding] blackness and whiteness both in distinction and in tender contact … [to perform] a blackness that did not obliterate whiteness but that instead produced and shaped it. The white

> performer in blackface, like the topsy-turvy doll, gained form from what showed and what hid, from whiteness-and-blackness. (168)

While whiteness relies on Blackness to give itself form, it does so by reinforcing racist contrasts.

To Pecola's Topsy, there is Maureen Peal as Eva: "a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back … as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care" (Morrison 62). Maureen Peal, with "sloe green eyes" and "something summery in her complexion," is the embodiment of racialized desirability: light-skinned and wealthy (62). Bernstein's visual metaphor of the topsy-turvy doll—two dolls conjoined at the hip, one Black and one white—might explain Maureen's instantaneous affinity for Pecola. The abruptness of Maureen's friendliness is emphasized by Claudia's narration, when she remarks on how she "suddenly animated" and "put her velvet-sleeved arm through Pecola's and began to behave as though they were the closest of friends" (67). Although Claudia's impression of Maureen is mostly informed by feelings of jealousy, her role as Morrison's voice of agency within the novel ensures that her personal biases do not distort Maureen's apparent intentions beyond what is perceptible. And so, "surprised … but pleased," Claudia's reaction inadvertently reveals an underlying sense of disingenuousness in Maureen's behaviour, while failing to register the subtle power dynamics being weaponized against Pecola—however unconsciously (68).

The image of the topsy-turvy doll visualizes the logic behind Maureen's intimacy with Pecola to reveal it as strategic. As opposed to a sincere gesture of friendship, it functions as an attempt to frame her own social worth in comparison to Pecola's, just as Blackface defines whiteness through polarized proximity. This moment embodies the kind of "racial flip-flop" that Bernstein describes, which also replicates in the dialogue when Maureen learns Pecola's name.

She asks whether it is a reference to *Imitation of Life*, "the picture show … where this mulatto girl hates her mother cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral" (67). Irony begins to unfold on multiple levels: although a reader familiar with the film may recognize the ironic reversal between the Pecolas of *Imitation of Life* and *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove does not. While the shared names of these two aesthetically contrasting characters might initially appear as an external authorial gesture, a rhetorical device operating beyond the narrative world, it is later revealed that the connection exists within the story itself.

After Maureen's summary of the story, the page breaks at Pecola's dejected reaction of "Oh," spoken with "no more than a sigh" (67). As Pecola's reaction reinforces the assumption that Pecola in *Imitation of Life* refers to the mother, the reader flips the page to reveal a rupture in expectation that mirrors the topsy-turvy doll's physical logic, in which flips and reversals uncover what is hidden. Indeed, the opposite turns out to be true when Maureen ends the exchange with a flippant comment about how "[Pecola] was so pretty"—effectively subverting previous assumptions on the account of "prettiness" (68). While Morrison uses irony to challenge racialized assumptions about beauty and ugliness, she also reveals how children like Pecola might internalize such standards. At the same time, this moment demonstrates how the concept of racialized beauty scripts opposing modes of self-presentation for those deemed either ugly or beautiful. While Pecola is conditioned into deference, Maureen is afforded the privilege of performing altruism. Therefore, Maureen's instant attachment to Pecola cannot be reduced to an expression of power; rather, it demonstrates how Pecola's vulnerability, made visible by her Blackness, scripts a sentimental response of white-adjacent pity.

The final layer of irony in this scene is unveiled when the reader learns that Pecola's mother, Pauline, went to the movies religiously throughout her pregnancies. At the movie theatre,

she was introduced to the idea of "physical beauty" which "stripped her mind, bound it," and made her "collect self-contempt by the heap" (122). It is likely, then, that Pecola's name is in fact a reference to *Imitation of Life*—one that contains both Pauline's disavowed self-hatred and her projected desires, embodied by the beautiful "mulatto girl [who] hates her mother cause she is black and ugly" (67). Pecola, by name, is a fetishized vessel. Though named after an ideal of racialized beauty, she comes to embody the ugliness that haunts her mother. To Pauline, Pecola is similar to the candy bar that removes one of her decayed front teeth. While the sweetness of candy offers momentary gratification, it brings Pauline pain instead, as it pulls her tooth "right out of [her] mouth" and nearly makes her cry (123). The pain is a physical sensation, but it can also be attributed to a sudden, mortifying fracture in her self-perception that, "in [her] head," she "had good teeth, not a rotten one" (123).

By losing her front tooth, Pauline's fantasy of "absolute beauty," once sustained by the fleeting magic of picture shows, is extinguished (122). Pecola, born ugly, fails to realize the hope her name carries. Pauline, moreover, recollects her birth with subtle disillusionment: "the baby … looked different from what [she] thought" (125). Both Pecola-as-vessel and the candy bar destabilize the expectations attached to them and thus expose the ephemeral promise of fulfillment through consumption, whether of sweets or media. This disruption marks their shift from objecthood to thinghood, as their unpredictable materialities prompt Pauline's awareness of her own marginality within a racist aesthetic economy that denies her access to the privilege of beauty. After losing her tooth, Pauline resigns herself and "[settles] down to just being ugly" (123).

Pecola's movement through the novel's social dynamics maps her construction as a dually articulated doll-like figure: a racialized object in material culture, like the topsy-turvy

doll, whose ugliness dialectically produces white aesthetic value; and a psychic vessel within the ontological structure of the fetish, where her body becomes a site of projection and disavowal. As if scripted by her own "thinglike" materiality, Pecola internalizes Pauline's self-loathing to reproduce it through "kinesthetic memory," including the act of eating candy for gratification. Whereas Pauline consumes candy at the movie theatre—a dual consumption of racialized beauty ideals and confectionaries—this ritual resurfaces in Pecola's relishing the Mary Jane candies, where the transcription of beauty imagery onto wrappers transforms the confection into a fetish object. Pecola's interaction with the Mary Jane candies performs a process of commodity fetishism, in which visual fantasy combines with sensory pleasure to obscure the racial and ideological work it performs.

The hidden, fetishistic power of the Mary Janes reveals itself within the context of Pecola's consumption. When she purchases them from the corner shop clerk, Mr. Yacobowski, his hovering gaze decides—"somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view" (48)—that she is not worthy of a glance. After exiting the store, Pecola reflects on the interaction and concludes that Mr. Yacobowski's refusal to recognize her as human is caused by her Blackness: a condition of "static and dread … that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (49). The "inexplicable shame" left by the encounter then bleeds into Pecola's modes of engagement (50). The dandelions she once viewed with affection, which she thinks are pretty but others deride as weeds, no longer reciprocate her love (47). The silence of the dandelions echoes Pecola's feelings of rejection, transforming them into scriptive things that expose their material relation to one another. And in the recognition that rejection constitutes ugliness, she follows the dandelions' script and thinks, "They *are* ugly. They *are* weeds" (50).

The realization causes Pecola to feel resentment in the same way her ugliness disappoints

Pauline. And although that flash of anger affords her a brief illusion of control—because "there is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth"—it does not hold, as she lacks the kind of "sense of being" that could sustain and be sustained by it (50). The anger quickly reverts to shame and despair, the pain of which overwhelms her with the urge to cry—much like the candy bar does to Pauline when it pulls her tooth. But "before the tears [could] come," Pecola "remembers the Mary Janes" (50). The candies, each wrapped in "pale yellow paper," carry the image of "little Mary Jane," whose "smiling white face … blond hair in gentle disarray, [and] blue eyes" look out at Pecola from "a world of clean comfort" to invite her inside (50). There, in Mary Jane's world of beauty and comfort, Pecola finds solace in its fleeting sweetness: "She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (50).

While the incantatory use of repetition transforms Pecola's act of consuming candy into a ritual of conversion-through-consumption, it reifies Mary Jane's status as a fetish object. The omniscient third-person narration emerges as an uncanny presence in the novel. It gives expression to Pecola's feelings, and it acknowledges the artificiality of images that she herself cannot recognize, such as Mary Jane's "petulant, mischievous" eyes, which "to Pecola … are simply pretty" (50). When contrasted with Claudia's narration—which articulates a logic clearly childlike in its innocence, such that she is unable to recognize the disingenuousness of Maureen's friendliness toward Pecola—the third-person narrator's rhythmic cadence appears hypnotic. The omniscient narrator thus discloses itself as the voice of the unseen forces within the text—of "The *Thing*" Claudia identifies with the gaze "that made [Maureen] beautiful, and not [herself and Frieda] (74). Pecola, afflicted with the liminal condition of thinghood, is at once aware of her human subjectivity yet powerless to resist the forces that erode it. In short, Pecola does not

merely internalize abuse; rather, it slowly displaces her humanity from within, a process that she witnesses with helpless, passive awareness.

Despite the extensive abuse that Pecola suffers, she remains a thing, not an object. Even through her trauma, her awareness—the capacity to recognize abuse, to yearn, to imagine a better life—prevents her descent into objecthood. But Pecola's agency, which she barely holds, is ultimately surrendered in the only choice she is ever permitted to make: to seek hope for herself, in a world that gives her none. In her most vulnerable state, Pecola approaches Soaphead Church to ask for the mercy shown to Topsy, for the conversion into whiteness that emancipates. Her request is her final human gesture before collapsing into a broken doll.

Soaphead Church, a fraudulent psychic medium and miracle worker, sells people the idea of hope: in relief from distress, in the fulfillment of love, and in the recovery of what is lost or stolen (173). To do so, he offers false clarity. Soaphead Church, whose real name is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, descends from the legacy of a British nobleman's runoff. In the early nineteenth century, when "a Sir Whitcomb … introduced the white strain into the family," he chose to do the "civilized thing for his mulatto bastard … [and] provided it with three hundred pounds sterling, to the great satisfaction of the bastard's mother, who felt that fortune had smiled on her" (167). From one generation to the next, the family preserved its "Anglophobia … [and] married 'up,' … lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features" (168). In the desire to prove "De Gobineau's hypothesis that 'all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help,'" they were an industrious and orderly lot (168). Unfortunately, their preoccupation with "preserving the blood of the noble group that created [them]" led to inbreeding, which produced Elihue's father. And from his abusive father, Elihue learned a twisted form of "education, discipline, and the good life" (169). Born of self-erasure, internalized

racism, and delusions of grandeur—all shaped by the monogenetic ideology Bernstein identifies in Stowe, which differentiates Topsy's "cringing" stiffness from Eva's "prince-like" grace (Bernstein 44)—Elihue became proficient in "the fine art of self-deception" (169). Ironically, Soaphead Church believes that "to name an evil [is] to neutralize if not annihilate it" (164).

An inheritor of illusory white superiority and disavowed lechery, believed to be a "noble right," Elihue relishes the meaningless performance of power—like his relatives who "emerged in the powerless government offices available to the native population" (168). Thus, when Pecola stands before him with "her hands folded across her stomach, a little protruding pot of tummy" (173), and asks for blue eyes, "the most fantastic and … logical petition he had ever received … a surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her" (174). Profoundly touched by the "little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes"—a wish that "seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment"—Elihue is overcome with an outrage that "grew and felt like power" (174). Through his pity rooted in monogenetic white supremacy and sentimentalism, he enacts the violence of Stowe's logic in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by performing a reversal of Topsy's miracle on Pecola.

To circumvent his impotence, Elihue resorts to offering false promises. "With a trembling hand," he initiates a stylized performance of salvation by making "the sign of the cross over [Pecola] … [as] his flesh crawled" (174). And "in that hot, dim little room of worn things" in the most charged and inspired display of his life, he finds himself "chilled" (175), because the power he holds over Pecola is almost too sublime. To sustain this feeling, Elihue tricks Pecola into feeding his landlord's old dog, Bob, a poisoned piece of "dark, sticky meat" (175). He promises her that "if the animal behaves strangely, [her] wish will be granted on the day following this

one" and opens the door (175). She "steps over threshold" (175).

From his window, Elihue watches the scene unfold—a grotesque spectacle that he scripts, stages, and enjoys at a distance: After eating the meat "in three or four gulps … the dog [looks] up at [Pecola] with soft triangle eyes"—and erupts into a coughing fit (176). Gagging, "choking … [and] stumbling … he [moves] like a broken toy around the yard" while Pecola watches him die (176). The result is the ritual sacrifice of a girl and a dog. While Pecola does not die in the physical sense, her fulfillment of Elihue's murderous compulsion and fantasy of control finalizes her collapse into objecthood—her reduction into "a chunk of matter" that merely signals "something beyond itself" (Bernstein 72-4). In this case, Pecola signals Elihue's perversion. To demonstrate the fetishism of white sentimentality—that which supplants the Black body in white imagination (Hartman 20)—Elihue consumes Pecola's suffering through a process of empathetic identification. In a letter to God, he juxtaposes her abandonment with the desertion he felt after his divorce from Velma. He weaponizes a child's pain—expressed through her innocent but misguided wish for belonging—to rationalize his own pedophilic cravings.

He frames Pecola's yearning alongside his pedophilia as parallel consequences of God's failure to prevent the circumstances that produced them, and absorbs her suffering as an extension of his narrative of self-victimhood. While Elihue tells himself that his "wish for the dog's death was humane, for he could not bear … to see anything suffer … it did not occur to him that he [is] really concerned about his own suffering" (171). He applies the same self-serving logic to Pecola. The cruel irony, then, is that he does give Pecola what she asks for: erasure. When Pecola lies in bed and "[covers] her head with the quilt," she implores God to "make [her] disappear" and "[squeezes] her eyes shut" (45). "Little parts of her body" start to "[fade] away" piecemeal: "her fingers … one by one; then her arms … her feet now … the legs

all at once … her stomach would not go … but finally it, too, [goes] away" until only her eyes remain—"they [are] always left" (45). As she finishes reflecting on her inability to make her eyes disappear, she expresses her wish for blue eyes because if they "were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (46). Pecola's wish for blue eyes is a wish to experience and perceive love, to feel safe. Elihue grants her wish by hollowing her mind and filling it with lies she can believe. Yet to believe them, Pecola surrenders all agency, physical and mental. She "[spends] her days … walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she [flails] her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly … intent on the blue void it [cannot] reach—" all the while obsessing over an endless, comparative measure of self-worth based on the imaginary blueness of her eyes (204).

Like Bob, who stumbles around the yard "like a broken toy" (Morrison 176), Pecola becomes a broken doll. Through puppetry, Elihue turns Pecola and Bob into props that reanimate the tableau of the "green and white house" in a twisted parody, revealing it as the scriptive force of the novel itself. It is the stage, the script, and the dollhouse. It is a miniaturized model of the novel's progression, and the incantation which summons the characters and props it names—"the house" as the storefront, "the family" as the Breedloves, "Jane" as Pecola, "the cat" as Geraldine's cat, "Mother" as Pauline, "Father" as Cholly, "the dog" as Bob, and "the friend" as the imaginary product of Elihue's miracle and Pecola's madness—to perform the choreography it scripts for them (3). It is the "unseen force" the omniscient narrator invokes through text, which structures the entire narrative. The exception is Claudia, whose first-person voice disrupts its logic.

In the end, Pecola is destroyed by the forces that script the repeated violations of the

deepest parts of her body and mind, the same forces that racialize her. While Elihue does not "touch" Pecola, his exploitation of her mirrors Cholly's assault. Where Cholly's violence is driven by impulse and confusion, Elihue's constitutes an intellectualized and conscious act of manipulation. One is bodily, while the other is ideological. Both converge to fully transform Pecola into a fetish doll: a site of disavowal, a container to hold "all of [the] waste … dumped on her … which she [absorbs]" (205). Like the topsy-turvy doll, Pecola models the dialectical relationship between Blackness and whiteness: "her simplicity [decorates] … her guilt [sanctifies] … her pain [makes] … [others] glow with health" (205). Her ugliness makes beauty beautiful.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have mapped the fetishized doll as an object fraught with material and symbolic value, which developed throughout its integrations within colonial, psychoanalytic, sentimental, and consumerist discourses. What emerged as a ritual apparatus in West African cultural practices was transformed into a colonial mistranslation, then reified into Enlightenment theory, sentimental narrative, and twentieth-century commodity culture. Across each of these contexts, the doll is reshaped by dominant forms of discourse, yet its core function remains consistent: to script, stage, and direct performances of gender, race, and objecthood. First, I engaged Pietz's problematization of the fetish to establish the doll's relationship to fetishism. Then, to demonstrate how Enlightenment-era intellectual discourse naturalized the colonial assumptions that Pietz identifies in the fetish, I examined how both Freud and Marx repurposed the language of fetishism to articulate social theories without acknowledging or engaging its imperial genealogy, thereby concealing and recirculating racist and patriarchal assumptions across multiple registers.

Despite their influence, Marx and Freud constitute only a fraction of a larger mechanism that configures aestheticized meaning, truth, and value through colonial power structures. Their theories, although critical of things like capitalism and repression, nonetheless rely on the same racialized and gendered tropes they claim to expose or destabilize. The fetish, in their application, serves not as a site of inquiry into colonial or patriarchal violence, but as a metaphor abstracted from its historical and material genealogies. I trace these ruptures, between intent and application, back to Pietz's genealogy of the fetish and a reading of Hoffmann's "The Sandman" to reveal how abstraction itself becomes a tool of erasure, displacement, and dislocation—a procedure through which colonial violence is not only made intelligible but naturalized in theory.

In my application of Freudian fetish theory to Olympia's construction in "The Sandman," aestheticized materiality and identity slippages—such as misidentification, projection, and symbolic substitution—reveal how the fetish is a gendered object. While my application of Freudian fetishism to Olympia calls attention to his methodological inconsistencies, it also demonstrates the ways in which the female body is made desirable only in absence, or stillness: her autonomy, her voice, and her interiority are erased. This erasure effectively leaves behind a husk, or shell of a woman-shaped figure whose desirability is contingent on her silence. Olympia does not speak; she is spoken for. Her body becomes a vessel for disavowing and repressing male anxieties, while her blank, characterless beauty is akin to a screen for projecting fantasy. Her fetishization is also enabled by her lack of bodily agency, such that she cannot acknowledge her own lifeless mechanism. Olympia is not uncanny because she is lifelike, she is uncanny because she animates male desire without participating in it. Even in her musical performances, she unsettles with her inhuman perfection—almost everyone except Nathaniel finds her repulsive or frightening. While Freud figures Olympia's dollness through her uncanny aesthetic form, the interpersonal dynamics Hoffmann illustrates between them shows that her dollness is also fetishistic, conditioned on her movement and expression—or lack thereof.

This relationship between projection and paralysis is augmented when read alongside Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Where Freud's fetish disavows castration anxiety through substitution, Marx's fetishism conceals the labour that gives the commodity its value. Both frameworks operate on erasure: the woman's interiority, the worker's effort, the historical forces that shape both. As Olympia becomes desirable by her stillness and silence, she also mirrors the commodity whose origin, in work and suffering, is concealed by a presentable, outwardly pleasing appearance. Just as Nathaniel sees love in Olympia's blank gaze, the

consumer derives value from the commodity's form. Indeed, Olympia is not made with love, but with the nefarious intentions of deceitful mad scientists. Her desirability is engineered, not earned, much like the appeal of the commodity is manufactured to obscure the systems that lie behind its development.

If Clara is the human counterpart to Olympia, then Clarissa in Samuel Richardson's novel can be read as both the woman and the wooden doll at once. Clarissa, whose name shares the same Latin root as Clara—*clarus*, meaning light (Harris 344)—embodies a similar association with clarity, individuality, and self-possession. As Clara's resistance of objectification results in her substitution by Olympia, their ontological proximity—the precarious boundary between woman and object—is mirrored in Clarissa's gradual physical dissociation from her body, which ends in her death. By moving from "The Sandman" to *Clarissa*, I recentre the violence of fetishism from metaphor and allegory to a detailed portrayal of embodied suffering by a human woman, I reconfigure the fetish from abstraction to embodiment.

In *Clarissa*, the doll is no longer a silent, uncanny wooden doll; she resists and is punished for it. Clarissa's collapse into objecthood is not immediate nor inherent. It is meticulously staged: through confinement, isolation, manipulation, displacement, and eventually, through physical and psychological violation. These forces, which I situate within Emily Apter's fetishistic cabinets, "spaces of perversion" (43), process Clarissa's transition into a collectible, controllable, and sexualized object. Lovelace's manipulation of her body and environment reflects the structure of the dollhouse. It is an architecture of stylized subjugation that scripts her movements and limits her autonomy. Within these spaces, she is renamed, cast into roles without her consent, and physically coerced. In contrast to Olympia, whose stillness masks the violence of her creation, Clarissa's stillness at the end of the novel is the finalization of sustained

assault—a transformation into a lifeless form that reflects the eroticized spectacle of suffering, delivered in a doll box of a coffin. Yet Clarissa's death is not a total loss. If Olympia's silence constitutes submission, Clarissa's is a refusal. Her final act of rejecting Lovelace's control is through the reclamation of her virtue in death. This gestures toward an expression of agency that Olympia is never permitted. Here marks the differentiation between thinghood and objecthood, as articulated in Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence*: a thing is capable of spontaneous action, which prompts the subject into an awareness of its material relation to the object. Conversely, an object is a "chunk of matter that one looks through or beyond to understand something human" (72). Accordingly, Nathaniel's interactions with Olympia reenacts that dynamic. Olympia is not seen as herself, but as an object to be looked through—a visual surface upon which male desire, anxiety, and fantasy are projected.

Despite the triumph of Clarissa's death, Richardson's portrayal of female bodily reclamation reproduces the same logic of the dehumanizing sexual economies that he critiques. Specifically, his treatment of Clarissa and her act of agency reinforces the idea that a woman's bodily worth is informed by her sexual virtue—abstracted as the concept of virginity. The idea that Clarissa must relinquish her body in order to preserve her virtue suggests that a woman cannot reclaim herself after a sexual violation without also surrendering her life. As such, the novel reaffirms the notion that spiritual integrity and therefore, legibility as a subject, is inextricable from bodily purity. Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* reframes reclamation, when Marian engages in a creative and performative baking ritual. She reclaims her body by creating a cake stylized as herself, a doll in cake form, which she makes from scratch and meticulously decorates with excitement and "exuberance" (310). This sequence is described as a "sacred … procession" (312), a kind of ceremonial self-becoming. When she serves the cake to

Peter and he rejects it, she reclaims her subjectivity by returning to the first-person mode of narration.

Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* embodies the most devastating articulation of fetishistic violence in this thesis. Though she survives being raped and impregnated by her father, a resistance against the same sentimental spectacles that gave Clarissa a crowd of admirers to witness her and mourn her triumphant death, Pecola is invisible, discarded, and forgotten. Her survival is not triumphant; it results in a psychic collapse when she is wholly dispossessed of her bodily autonomy and awareness. Like Olympia, she is reduced to a state of objecthood, but her transformation is not metaphorical. It is enacted through social erasure and internalized violence. In contrast to Clarissa, who finds a form of agency in her death, Pecola is never afforded even the illusion of choice. She is trapped in a recursive loop of self-reassurance and flailing movements that she cannot control, a broken doll animated by the lingering force of harm—Soaphead Church's false name, which she sometimes invokes while thinking about the guarantee of his miracle. Indeed, "to name an evil [is] to neutralize it, if not annihilate it" (164). Unfortunately, Pecola does not know his real name.

Pecola's transformation reveals the full significance of fetishism. Although concealed through various artistic and ideological movements, the racialized and gendered charge of the fetish is unveiled when in contact with the Black female child. Through the consumption of the images of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane, whether through cups of milk or candies, the images of innocent girlhood which permeate mass culture reveal its underside—the Black figure hidden on the other end of the topsy-turvy doll.

An area for further study in this would be the doll's relationship to queerness. While my research focuses on the gendered and racialized coding of the doll, its associations with queer

identity formation and embodied otherness invites much discussion of how the doll informs notions of gender role and ideals within non-heteronormative spaces. This area of study is especially relevant in the twenty-first century, with the popularization of ballroom culture in mainstream media through programming such as *Rupaul's Drag Race*, a fashion and performance competition for drag queens, queer-coded burlesque performers of femininity. Similarly, the doll's imagery of artificial, and highly ornamental femininity has been adopted into transgender culture, where transgendered women (transwomen) sometimes call each other "doll" as a term of endearment.

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