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Birthing and Mining in John Donne’s “To His Mistress Going to Bed”

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Abstract
This paper uncovers an aspect of “To His Mistress Going to Bed” that has largely been ignored by critics of the poem, namely, the poem’s interest in the interrelationship between power, geological exploration, and childbirth. Over the past twenty years, social historians and historians of medicine have explored early modern accounts of childbirth, making it possible for scholars to recover the historical context framing Donne’s depictions of childbirth. Placing “To His Mistress” within this historical context forces us to rethink a number of critical assumptions about the poem: in particular that the poem concerns sex but not procreation. In this paper, I explore the implications that medical beliefs about reproduction and the medical politics of childbirth had for Donne as he set about trying to dramatize male desire and uncover the hidden interior of the female body. My historical analysis reveals how the poem fits within the early modern conversation about women’s reproductive power and artificial birth. By illuminating interwoven references to childbirth with references to mining, I situate Donne’s poem within the larger early modern conversation about women’s reproductive power and artificial birth. This repositioning has important implications for Donne’s sexual politics and the medical context informing his work.

Keywords
Medicine in Literature, John Donne, Caesarean Section, History of Obstetrics, Mining Metaphors, To His Mistress Going to Bed, Early Modern Childbirth

1. Introduction
Most critics of John Donne’s famous elegy “To His Mistress Going to Bed”
have concentrated on the poem’s portrayal of women. Some critics have examined the explicit colonization of the mistress’s body. Others have investigated how Donne’s poem opens the mistress’s body to anatomical exploration. Few critics, however, have extended their analyses to suggest that anything more than a “discovery” is taking place in the poem, be it a geological, anatomical, or sexual discovery. Most scholarship rests upon the assumption that the speaker’s aim is sex. For instance, Tom MacFaul quotes the poem as an example of “Donne’s belief in sex as an end in itself” (MacFaul, 2010). MacFaul even goes so far as to reject the possibility of sex being procreative in the poem, insisting “procreation is brought up in order to be dismissed” (MacFaul, 2010).

By concentrating on sex and ignoring procreation, scholars overlook what I consider to be the poem’s interest in generating and harvesting minerals and humans. My view, contrary to what MacFaul has argued, is that the poem begins and ends with references to procreation because procreation is, in fact, the speaker’s aim. To put it another way, references to procreation reveal that the speaker aims to extend his reproductive role by participating more fully in the birthing process. Yes, the speaker hopes to have sex with his mistress, but I will demonstrate that interwoven references to childbirth and mining in the poem disclose the speaker’s underlying desire to participate in the delivery of his own child. This interpretation challenges the work of critics who disregard the speaker’s desire to extend his reproductive role. By acknowledging this desire, I re-evaluate the interrelationship between power and childbirth. Additionally, my findings place Donne’s poem within the larger early modern conversation about

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1 Although an “obviously degenerate text” was printed in 1654 and another version of the poem published in 1669, manuscript evidence suggests that the poem may have been “written in the 1590s when Donne was studying at the Inns of Court or working for Sir Thomas Egerton” (Bell, 2010). Robin Robbins, the editor of the Longman annotated edition of Donne’s poems, even suggests that the poem may have been inspired “by a public performance of Romeo and Juliet” (Robbins, 2010). Publication of the poem was delayed because the licenser of the 1633 Poems refused to print “To His Mistress” (Pebworth, 2006). Although the poem was not published until 1669, editors and critics generally agree that the poem circulated before 1669 in manuscripts. In this paper I rely mainly upon the text of “To His Mistress” found in the Westmoreland manuscript.

2 In an ecofeminist reflection on the links between environmental and sexual exploitation, for instance, Bill Phillips observes that “Donne’s poem makes the purpose of the colonies quite clear: they are to be exploited” (Phillips, 2004). Similarly, Achsah Guibbory notes that Donne’s poem expresses “a desire to possess and thus master the colonized women” (Guibbory, 1990). Likewise, R.V. Young and M. Thomas Hester highlight the poem’s colonial politics, arguing that the poem critiques England’s colonial efforts by presenting the New World as a ravaged woman and the explorer’s motives as lusts for power and wealth (Young, 1987; Hester, 1987).

3 For example, Jonathan Sawday argues that Donne’s poem evokes the image of Andreas Vesalius opening the dissected female body with his hand on the title-page of the Fabrica (Sawday, 1995). Likewise, Iona Bell argues that “the woman’s naked body [is] a genuine discovery” in Donne’s poem because “anatomists were only just beginning to chart the woman’s body when Donne was writing the poem” (Bell, 2010).

4 As Raymond-Jean Frontain succinctly puts it, in the poem “sexual intercourse is the ultimate means by which one person can fully know and be known by another” (Frontain, 2011).

5 Marian Dodsworth, for instance, dismisses William Frost’s suggestion that Donne evokes a “daring transsexual metaphor attributing female birth pains to a male speaker” (Frost, 1976) by saying that Donne’s speaker is simply “showing himself capable of empathy with a woman’s point of view” (Dodsworth, 2008).
women’s reproductive power and artificial birth.

The theme of childbirth is introduced at the start of Donne’s poem, when the speaker cries “until I labour, I in labour lie” (Donne, 2010).6 Donne returns to this theme at the close of the poem when the speaker begs his mistress to “show” herself to him “as liberally as to a midwife” (Donne, 2010). In these lines, the speaker transgresses the boundaries of gender and imagines himself playing both the mother and the midwife. He labours like a mother but uses his “hands” to explore his mistress’s body like a midwife (Donne, 2010). Interestingly, when the speaker describes himself exploring his mistress’s body, he uses the language of geology instead of the language of anatomy. The speaker pictures his mistress as a “mine of precious stones” and envisions himself uncovering “gems” (Donne, 2010). He uses a geological metaphor to describe himself entering into the “new-found-land” of his mistress’s body (Donne, 2010). Recent studies in the history of alchemy and geology shed new light on the speaker’s conflation of mining and childbirth, which previous scholarship on “To His Mistress” has not addressed.7 As I will outline, these studies offer insights into the relationship between alchemy, mining, medicine, and artificial generation and add weight to the argument that “To His Mistress” is concerned with artificial birth.8

Applying current research in the history of alchemy and geology to Donne’s poem, I will argue that there is an image of the speaker performing a caesarean section on his mistress’s pregnant body underlying the poem’s more obvious sexual subtext. In the late sixteenth century, male surgeons began to enter the birthing room and perform caesarean sections on living patients. The operation was controversial, in part, because it deviated from the natural birthing process. Often, in early modern texts, caesarean birth serves as an example of artificial birth and is figured in relation to mining. By digging into the earth, geologists were thought to work in much the same way as surgeons.9 Just as the geologist

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6The word “labour” had a variety of meanings in the early modern period, including “to suffer the pains of childbirth,” “to work the land,” and “to work a mine” (OED, 2013).
7Tara Nummedal establishes a close relationship between mining, medicine, and alchemy (Nummedal, 2007). William Newman relates alchemy to recent scientific advances in cloning and in-vitro fertilization (Newman, 2004). Newman reveals how “the followers of Paracelsus transferred the apex of human ingenuity from the fabrication of synthetic gold to the making of an artificial man” (Newman, 2004). Similarly, Ku-Ming Chang connects alchemy to current research in genomics and molecular biology and asserts that “theorists and practitioners of alchemy often investigated problems in mining and metallurgy, but many were equally interested in pharmacy and medicine” (Chang, 2011).
8The OED defines “artificial” as “a substitute for... something which is made or occurs naturally” and something that is “constructed by human skill” (OED, 2013). The caesarean section was performed as a substitute for a natural birth and demanded extraordinary surgical skills. Additionally, early modern medical practitioners figured the operation in opposition to natural birth. For example, seventeenth-century obstetrician François Mauriceau writes that a surgeon performs “the most dangerous of all surgical operations” when “the birth is contrary to nature” (qtd. in McTavish, 2005). Similarly, seventeenth-century midwife Louise Bourgeois associates the surgeon with “artificial intervention” (qtd. in McTavish, 2005). In using “artificial,” I not only echo medical practitioners but also place the caesarean section within the early modern debate about nature versus art. William Newman explains that in the sixteenth century this debate extended to include the Paracelsian idea that “alchemists could create an artificial human being, a homunculus, within a flask” (Newman, 2004).
9Several other scholars, including Jonathan Sawday and Elizabeth Harvey, have explored the connections between surgeons and geologists more fully, commenting on the similarities between the exploration of America and the human body and the inclination to apply eponyms to both geological and anatomical landmarks (Sawday, 1995; Harvey, 2002).
cuts apart the body of the earth to extract minerals, the surgeon performs a caesarean section to extract a child. Moreover, like the geologist who reduces Mother Earth to a mine, the surgeon reduces the human mother to an incubator. The caesarean section allows the surgeon to participate in a surgical birth, diminishing the role played by the mother. By imagining himself mining his mistress’s body, the speaker in “To His Mistress” imagines a new birthing process in which the man labours to deliver the child. In this paper, I will examine the extension of the speaker’s reproductive role. Specifically, I will consider how Donne describes this extension using geological and anatomical language. Collapsing the distinction between minerals and humans, mining illustrates how early modern scientists manipulated the maternal body. Within the context of the poem, references to childbirth are combined with references to mining to create a metaphor for the male struggle to control reproduction. Donne’s use of the metaphor in “To His Mistress” suggests, within the context of the poem, that a man might be able to use artificial methods of birthing to extend his reproductive role.

Following my argument that the birthing-mining metaphor opens the possibility of the speaker extending his reproductive role, I will complicate the point by illustrating how the poem works to reveal the inadequacies that motivate this reproductive fantasy. The speaker envies his mistress’s ability to give birth, so he imagines himself participating in a geological birthing process. His fantasy enables him to fulfill his desire to participate more fully in the reproductive process but ultimately stems from his fear of being excluded by and yet dependent on women. His fear manifests itself in his attempts to control his mistress and replace the midwife. Janet Adelman, writing about the function of caesarean birth in Shakespeare’s Macbeth, states that “the fantasy of caesarean self-birth is the answer to the mother’s power over her feeding infant: if vulnerability comes of having a mother, the solution is to be self-born, not of woman born” (Adelman, 1992). Like Macbeth, Donne’s poem stages a fantasy of male birth. However, Donne’s poem also acknowledges the irony of such a fantasy: in trying to dominate his mistress, the speaker concedes that she is powerful; in trying to extend his reproductive role, the speaker admits that it is limited; and in trying to diminish the importance of the mother, the speaker imagines himself giving birth. These paradoxes relate to the irony of fatherhood in the early modern period—although society emphasized the importance of paternity, without the aid of genetic fingerprinting, it was an inherently unstable concept.

10Here, I apply Mervyn Nicholson’s suggestion that male envy “spins out fantasies of its own making that fulfill its wishes and fears” to Donne’s poem (Nicholson, 1999).

11Before the seventeenth century, women gave birth within a female space: they were surrounded by female friends and treated by midwives. Men, for the most part, were excluded. Although the caesarean section provided men with the opportunity to enter the birthing room and assist with difficult deliveries, they were still largely dependent on the mother, who had to give consent before the operation could be performed, and the midwife, who had to send for the surgeon in the event of obstructed labour (Wilson, 1995).

12MacFaul explains that fatherhood involved “a strange mixture of freedom and obligation, of uncertainty and fixity” (MacFaul, 2010). Katherine Park clarifies that “the precarious nature of fatherhood centered on the fact that men could never know for certain if their children were, in fact, their own” (Park, 2006). “The realities of conception, gestation, and childbirth, all of which fore grounded the mother’s contribution to generation” undermined the importance of the father’s contribution (Park, 2006).
was destabilized by the uterus, “the dark, inaccessible place where the child’s tie with its father was created, its sex determined, and its body shaped” (Park, 2006). As I will illuminate further, Donne’s speaker, who tries metaphorically to establish masculine authority over the uterus, cuts to the core of paternal anxieties—he reaffirms the importance of the uterus and, in so doing, re-establishes maternal power. Perhaps this is why, at the end of the poem, it is the speaker, rather than his mistress, who stands “naked first” (Donne, 2010).

The homological thinking that underlies Donne’s rhetoric of childbirth compares human life to mineral life. This particular comparison of human and mineral generation is not unique to Donne but rather has its origins in works on alchemy and geology, which describe minerals in human terms. Donne’s understanding of mining is likely drawn from these texts as well as from other literary texts that align mineral births with human births. Although William Newman and Lawrence Principe have identified links between alchemy and artificial generation and Bill Phillips and Carolyn Merchant have pointed out links between mining and rape, scholars have yet to comment on the connections between mining and caesarean sections. One of my challenges in what follows, then, is to establish how early moderns connected mining to caesarean sections and to account for the significance that this connection has for the way that Donne’s poem represents male efforts to control childbirth and gender relations more generally. What emerges from such an analysis is the recognition that the birthing-mining metaphor functions in this poem as a reflection of ambivalent social attitudes towards advances in obstetrics. The poem registers the historical moment when male surgeons began to practise midwifery and responds to social concerns about surgical births. To this extent, the caesarean section in “To His Mistress” does not solve the problem of paternal anxiety but rather explores the possibilities of artificial birth. My analysis of Donne’s poem will interest other scholars writing about Donne and the history of medicine. Beyond this audience, however, my analysis will speak to those who care about the larger issue of the medicalization of childbirth.13

2. Birthing, Mining and Metaphor

Other early modern poets employ the birthing-mining metaphor, but Donne’s use of the metaphor is distinct on several accounts. Donne presents mining as a type of artificial birth that depends upon the labour of the man rather than the woman. Other poets, however, use mining as a metaphor for man’s attempt to hasten the natural birthing process. For example, Margaret Cavendish “Earths Complaint” laments the brutal mining of the earth’s body (Cavendish, 1653); Aphra Behn in “The Golden Age” imagines an time when the Earth is allowed “[yield] of her own accord her plenteous birth, /Without the aids of men” (Behn, 1662). 

13The medicalization of childbirth is still a current issue. In a recent article in the British Journal of Medicine Richard Johanson, a professor of obstetrics, Mary Newburn, the head of policy research, and Alison MacFarlane, a professor of perinatal health, report increasing rates of unnecessary obstetric interventions in normal births across the developed world (Johanson, Newburn, & Alison, 2002).
A. Frayne

2000); and Andrew Marvell in “To His Coy Mistress” connects the womb-tomb dichotomy to the carpe diem motif (Marvell, 2003a). These examples center on the scientific manipulation of the timing and rate of birth. In contrast, the caesarean section receives more mythical treatment in Marvell’s “The Unfortunate Lover.” In this poem, the lover’s mother is shipwrecked at sea and “split against the stone, /In a Caesarean section” (Marvell, 2003b). This caesarean section is not described as a scientific procedure but rather as the mythical birth of a hero. The Roman emperor Gaius Julius Caesar and the god of medicine Asclepius were both born by caesarean section.14 Caesarean births were regarded as “highly auspicious” because they were thought to produce children “free of the weakness implied by being birthed by and therefore dependent on a woman” (Park, 2006).

Donne’s use of the birthing-mining metaphor in “To His Mistress” differs from these examples in that the poem does not center on the hastening of the natural birthing process or the mythical roots of the caesarean section but rather focuses on gender dynamics in the birthing room.15 It registers the particular historical moment in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when male surgeons and new science first began to dominate the birthing room (Sheridan, 2010). When the speaker in Donne’s poem figures himself as a miner and surgeon, he imagines a birthing process that privileges the efforts of the man over the woman. Thus, the speaker figuratively usurps both the mother and the midwife.

At this stage, I would like to point out that my argument that Donne’s poem focuses on medical politics assumes that Donne was interested in medicine. Fortunately, my assumption has grounds, as other scholars of Donne, like Don Cameron Allen (1943), John Carey, Gary Kuchar, Jonathan Sawday, and Richard Sugg have written about Donne’s medical knowledge.16 Donne likely became fa-

14The Imperial Book gives an account of Caesar’s birth (Park, 2006).
15Donne’s poem may have been written in the late sixteenth century, when the caesarean section was still considered “a feasible operation on the living women” (Eccles, 1982). By the mid-to-late-seventeenth century, however, practitioners and patients alike had started to lose faith in the operation—probably because, in practice, very few mothers survived. Adrian Wilson explains that in the sixteenth century it was unlikely that a mother would survive the caesarean section because the operation was carried out “without knowledge of aseptic precautions” (Wilson, 1995). Along the same lines, Louis Schwartz reports that during the seventeenth century—especially from the 1630s to late 1660s—maternal mortality rates increased rapidly because practitioners had no concept of medical hygiene (Schwartz, 2009). He writes that in London, these rates were “the highest ... experienced in the period” (Schwartz, 2009). These rates coupled with alarming reports of mothers dying during caesarean births overshadowed much of the excitement that had initially surrounded the medicalization of obstetrics in the sixteenth century. Indeed, Wilson asserts that midwives and mothers in the seventeenth century delayed calling for the surgeon because he was associated with fear and death (Wilson, 1995). This historical context explains, in part, why Donne’s poem differs from the other poems mentioned, which were written in the seventeenth century. In contrast to Donne’s poem, these poems do not present caesarean birth as a practical alternative to natural birth but rather figure caesarean birth as a brutal procedure, which prevents the mother from giving birth naturally.

16Consider Carey’s argument that “allusions in [Donne’s] works show that he was widely read, for a layman, in medical literature and tried to keep himself abreast of current research” (Carey, 1981). Furthermore, take into account Kuchar’s observation that “few texts exemplify the changes that early modern discourses of anatomy had on the conceptions of the body more dramatically than John Donne’s Devotions” (Kuchar, 2001).
miliar with medicine during childhood, since his stepfather, John Syminges, was a physician and the president of the Royal College of Physicians (Sugg, 2005). In addition, Donne’s literary works reveal a fascination with anatomy and disease. For example, in “The Comparison” Donne refers to surgery when the speaker states that “in searching wounds the surgeon is/As we when we embrace or touch or kiss” (Donne, 2010). Similarly, Donne traces the circulatory system in “The Second Anniversary: Of the Progress of the Soul” (1612) when the speaker asks “know’st thou how blood which to the heart doth flow/Doth from one ventricle to th’othergoe?” (Donne, 2010). In short, given Donne’s knowledge of medicine, disease, and the body, it is reasonable to conclude that he would also have been aware of the politics of medicine.

3. Medical and Historical Context

Having just established Donne’s interest in medical practice, I want now to discuss the political changes being made to the medical system in the early modern period. In the early sixteenth century, medicine emerged as a profession and physicians, who were trained in universities, became members of the Royal College of Physicians and acquired status in the community (Brodsky, 2008). The College was established, in part, to distinguish properly educated practitioners, like midwives and surgeons (Ostovich & Sauer, 2004). However, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, midwives and surgeons fought to understand medical theory in order to challenge the notion that they were “uneducated” practitioners. Bridgette Sheridan observes that, in Paris, “the struggle between surgeons and physicians for status in the medical hierarchy played an important role in men’s entrance into the birthing room” (Sheridan, 2010). Midwives and surgeons began to compete for patients, especially pregnant patients who required care during pregnancy and childbirth (Sheridan, 2010). Gender dynamics ensured that women were eventually excluded from the medical hierarchy: they were not instructed in new medical practices (Sheridan, 2010; Phillips, 2007). Midwives were disparaged by male practitioners for their lack of knowledge and labelled as “cunning women” who

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17When Donne turned eleven, his family moved into a house adjoining St. Bartholomew’s Hospital (Carey, 1981). Sugg notes that “the founding papers for the Lumleian were in fact signed in the family home in 1582” (Sugg, 2007). Carey concludes that, given where Donne grew up, he “would have had the chance to imbibe medical chat from an early age” and “the routines of medication and surgery [would have impinged] still more on [his] consciousness” (Carey, 1981).

18In 1518, Thomas Linacre established the College of Physicians in London (Brodsky, 2008; Ostovich & Sauer, 2004).

19Before the seventeenth century, surgeons and midwives had focused primarily on practise rather than on medical theory (Sheridan, 2010).

20They were “excluded from the Schools of Anatomy,” which forced them to be more reliant on male practitioners for assistance with obstructed births (Phillips, 2007). Additionally, they were forbidden from practicing surgery. For instance, in 1540, a Guild of Surgeons was founded in London, which specified in its statutes that “no carpenter, smith, weaver, or woman [should] practice surgery” (qtd. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 1990). The early modern hierarchy of medical knowledge also allowed male practitioners to devalue midwives’ experiential knowledge of childbirth, arguing that they were ignorant and unfit to practice obstetrics (Phillips, 2007).
tried “to excel men” (Guillemeau, 1612). They were also associated with sexual licence: “Mother Midnight” was a term used interchangeably in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for a midwife or a bawd (Phillips, 2007). Eventually, male practitioners displaced midwives. As Lianne McTavish reveals, this shift happened all across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but occurred “most quickly and completely in England” (McTavish, 2005). Tensions over control of the birthing process are strikingly evident in Donne’s poem, suggesting that Donne was aware of the gender politics surrounding the medicalization of childbirth. Donne’s speaker struggles with female control over childbirth and attempts to reassert male dominance by excavating his mistress’s body.

In the early modern period, the caesarean section was a topic of some controversy in the debate over which procedures midwives should be allowed to perform. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski reveals that midwives actually performed caesarean sections in the twelfth century, but once the operation was performed post-mortem it interested surgeons and medical writers as a form of dissection (Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 1990). Then, in the fifteenth century, surgeons began to describe themselves performing the operation on living women (Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 1990). Along these lines, sixteenth-century physician François Rousset insists that the caesarean section can be performed “without risk to the life of either mother or child” (Rousset, 2013). In 1586, translator Caspar Bauhin added an appendix to Rousset’s treatise, which included a description of the caesarean section performed in 1500 in Switzerland (Worth-Stylianou, 2013; Todman, 2007). This account is the first recorded case of a mother and baby surviving a caesarean section (Todman, 2007). Jacob Nufer, a pig gelder, allegedly performed the operation on his wife, Elizabeth, after her prolonged and ineffectual labour (Todman, 2007; Reiss, 2003). Elizabeth went on to give birth to five other children by vaginal deliveries (Todman, 2007). Sixteenth-century physician Jacques Duval also maintains that the caesarean section can be successfully performed on living women (Duval, 1612). Duval claims to have witnessed surgeons operating on livingwomen

Midwives were often accused of providing women with contraceptives and abortifacients (Phillips, 2007). Lianne McTavish adds that in England “childbirth became a part of medicine between 1720 and 1770” (McTavish, 2005).

This occurred “after the clergy, who provided medical care in the early Middle Ages, were forbidden in the twelfth century by the church to perform procedures that involved shedding blood” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 1990).

A Latin translation of Rousset’s treatise, New Treatise on Hysterotomotoky or Childbirth by Cesarean, was published in 1586 in Gynaeciorumlibri, a compendium of works on obstetrics and gynaecology (Worth-Stylianou, 2013). An English translation of the third section of Rousset’s text was published in 1723 with William Cheselden’s A Treatise on the High Operation of the Stone (Worth-Stylianou, 2013).

Herbert Reiss questions the authenticity of this account because “even if [the] woman had escaped death from haemorrhage or infection ... it is inconceivable that she could have had so many subsequent vaginal deliveries without uterine rupture” (Reiss, 2003).

Duval’s text, On Hermaphrodites, Deliveries of Women and the Treatment which is Required After Childbirth (1612), is thought to have circulated fairly widely as copies of the text exist in public libraries across Europe (Worth-Stylianou, 2013).
However, it is important to note that not all of Rousset’s and Duval’s colleagues shared their enthusiasm for the caesarean section.

In contrast to Rousset and Duval, seventeenth-century midwife Jane Sharp expresses doubts about the caesarean section. According to Sharp, although male “physicians and [surgeons] say that [the caesarean section] may be safely done without killing the mother,” it should never be performed “whilst the Mother is alive” (Sharp, 1671). Along the same lines as Sharp, sixteenth-century surgeon Jacques Guillemeau writes that despite “[beliefs] that such a cesarean section can, and should, be practiced while the woman is still alive,” he “cannot advise” it because “of the five women on whom [he witnessed] this operation [being] performed, none survived” (Guillemeau, 1609). In the same way, Bishop Godfrey Goodman warns against the caesarean section:

You shall see sometimes the bellies [of mothers] opened, the flesh rent, the tunicles [sic] cut in sunder, to finde out a new passage for the poore infant, who must come into this world through the bowels of his dead mother, and upon his first approch, may be justly accused, and arraigned for a murderer.

(Goodman, 1616)

Goodman, like Sharp and Guillemeau, expresses doubts about the possibility of a mother surviving the caesarean section. Indeed, given the alarming mortality rates and the gruesome descriptions of the operation, it is no wonder that the caesarean section was usually performed in the early modern period post-mortem, so that a surgeon could extract a living fetus from the body of a woman who had died in childbirth (Park, 2006). The church strongly supported this practice called fetal excision, as it allowed the fetus to be baptized (Park, 2008). Male practitioners were taught surgical techniques and the new science of anatomy, which enabled them to perform fetal excisions and caesarean sections (Sheridan, 2010; Phillips, 2007). As demand for these procedures increased, midwives experienced difficulties maintaining their clientele (Sheridan, 2010; Phillips, 2007). Thus, the caesarean section played a pivotal role in ensuring that midwives were marginalized from medicine.

4. Literary Links between Medicine and Geology

The comparison of the caesarean section to mining hinges on the fact that both practices dissect a maternal body in order to extract something valuable. Mining involves the location of a mineral deposit, the “excavation of open pits” in the ground, and the extraction of the ore body (OED, 2013). In order to access a mineral deposit, a miner must first remove the overburden or the soil and rock that sit above the deposit. This exposes the ore body and allows for extraction and processing. Once the ore body has been processed it becomes valuable. Mining becomes a form of dissection when it is imagined in human terms. Early
modern people envisioned the earth as a nurturing mother. As the sixteenth-century alchemist Basil Valentine articulates, the earth “is itself fed by the stars and is thereby rendered capable of imparting nutriment to all things that grow and of nursing them as a mother does her child while it is yet in the womb” (qtd. in Merchant, 1980). Thus, mining the earth is like dissecting a mother. The miner, much like a surgeon, cuts apart the body of Mother Earth in order to extract her children before they can be naturally born. Early modern people believed that metals grew from seeds in the womb of the earth (Merchant, 1980). These seeds, maturing under the earth’s crust, were eventually born to the earth’s surface (Merchant 1980). Metals extracted through mining were therefore like human children, wherein mining was like the caesarean section.

John Taylor’s poem “The Travels of Twelve Pence” describes minerals in human terms and connects mining to the caesarean section. In Taylor’s poem the speaker imagines a twelve pence “relating how he first was born and bred” (Taylor, 1630). The twelve pence recounts:

There from my Heathen Dam, or mother Earth
With Paines and travaile, I at first had birth.
A hundred strong men-midwives, digg’d their way
Into her bowels, to find where I lay
With Engines, Spades, Crowes, Mattocks, & such matters,
They ripp’d & tore her harmlesswombe to tatters,
And but they did within the mid-way catch me,
They would have dig’d to Hell it selfe to fetch me. (Taylor, 1630)

The twelve pence describes his extraction in terms of a human birth: he endows the earth with a “wombe” and “bowels,” and he imagines “strong men-midwives” extracting him (Taylor, 1630). The twelve pence specifies that the men “digg’d their way” into the earth to extract him and that they “tore her harmless wombe” in the process (Taylor, 1630). This description implies that the twelve pence was not born naturally but rather by caesarean section. In the early modern period, male practitioners usually performed the caesarean section. “Men-midwives” Goodman explains, use “the strength of their limbes” and “the hardness of the hearts” to perform the operation (Goodman, 1616). The brutality of the operation and the lack of empathy demonstrated by surgeons who performed it posed questions about the ethics of caesarean sections and mining.

As the mining industry expanded in England and across the New World, the ethics of mining came into question. For some, the metaphor of the earth as a mother posed an ethical constraint. Margaret Cavendish, for example, in “Earth’s Complaint” meditates on the cruelty of mining:

O Nature, Nature, hearken to my Cry,
Each Minute wounded am, but cannot dye.
My Children which I from my Womb did beare,
Do dig my Sides, and all my Bowels tear:
Do plow deep Furroughs in my very Face,
From Torment, I have neither time, nor place.
No other Element is so abus’d,
Or by Man-kind so cruelly is us’d. (Cavendish, 1653)

Similarly, in the widely popular *Natural History*, Pliny emphasizes “the indignation felt by our sacred parent” when we “penetrate her entrails, and seek for treasures” (qtd. in Merchant, 1980). In the *Fairie Queen*, Edmund Spenser writes that it is a “sacrilege to dig” in “the quiet wombe” of the earth (qtd. in Merchant, 1980). These authors believed that mining was an unethical violation of a living organism. Behn envisions this violation as sexual, and she laments a past time when men “made no rude rapes upon the virgin Earth” (Behn, 2000).

Early modern scientists, Merchant notes, believed that “nature’s womb harboured secrets that through technology could be wrestled from her grasp” (Merchant, 1980). This belief spurred the exploitation of the colonies and the “looting” of the New World’s mineral wealth (Phillips, 2004). In a sense, geologists were thought to be capable of dominating both the earth and the female body.

Geologists, and others interested in learning about the earth and its minerals, often looked to alchemical texts for information. However, they were faced with “a bewildering variety of text” because some texts “explained the generation of metals and minerals in the earth,” while others outlined “the basic components of all metals, mercury and sulfur” (Nummedal, 2007). In addition, alchemical texts occasionally used metaphors that “[drew] on vegetable and human generation and growth” to describe chemical processes (Roberts, 1994). Take, as an illustration, Michael Maiher’s alchemical treatise *Symbola aureaemensiæ*, which uses a metaphor of human generation to express the formation of the Philosopher’s Stone:

The stone, just like a man, is conceived from a mixture of two seeds, masculine and feminine, is transformed into an embryo through impregnation, is born into the light of day, is nourished with milk, grows, [and] reaches maturity. (qtd. in Roberts, 1994)

In contrast to Maiher, who uses human generation as a metaphor for chemical processes, sixteenth-century physician and alchemist Paracelsus uses chemical processes as “the fundamental model for explaining natural processes in the physical universe as well as within the human body” (Principe, 2013). “Paracelsian chymistry,” Newman elaborates, “advocated a considerable expansion in the domain of alchemy” and “a similar widening took place in Paracelsus’s view of

28Phillips explains that the imagined rape of the earth was a reflection of man’s struggle to assert ownership over the land and the female body (Phillips, 2004). “The woman’s body,” Phillips asserts, “[became] a commodity” like the New World, which needed to be “explored, measured and divided up” (Phillips, 2004).

29Warren Dym observes that mining officials frequently turned to alchemical theory when trying to understand the origins of metals (Dym, 2008). Likewise, Nummedal states that the authors of alchemical texts often “aimed in part to educate potential investors in the methods and processes of . . . mines and metallurgy” (Nummedal, 2007).

30Principe explains that Paracelsus generated a “chymical worldview” that connected “the formation of minerals underground, the growth of plants, the generation of life forms, as well as the bodily functions of digestion, nutrition, respiration, and excretion” (Principe, 2013).
the power of alchemy to replicate natural products, leading him and his followers to the position that human creative power was practically unlimited (Newman, 2004). De naturarerum, a work supposedly written by Paracelsus in 1537, recounts “the generation of homunculi,” which are artificial humans (Newman, 2004), insisting that “there was not a little doubt and question among the old philosophers whether it even be possible to nature and art that a man can be born outside the female body and [without] a natural mother” (qtd. in Newman, 2004).

Feminist critics have made much of the alchemical birth of the homunculus, which takes place in an alembic vessel rather than the womb of the earth. According to Sally Allen and Joanna Hubs, the alembic vessel allowed male alchemists to seize “the embryo from the womb of the earth” and imagine a birth in a man-made vessel (qtd. in Long, 2010). In their reading of Maier’s Atalanta, Allen and Hubs claim to observe “an obsession with reversing, or perhaps even arresting, the feminine hegemony over the process of biological creation” (qtd. in Long, 2010). Maier’s image of male Wind carrying a child in his belly, Allen and Hubs assert, attests to this obsession (Long, 2010). What Allen and Hubs imply is that the facet of alchemy focused on the creation of the homunculus aimed to diminish the woman’s role in reproduction. However, this is not to say that alchemy was entirely motivated by male anxieties about women’s reproductive power but rather that these anxieties figured in some alchemical texts. It is important to realize that although the followers of Paracelsus “are responsible for transforming the homunculus from a topic of some rarity to one that is eventually “taken up mainly by literary authors,” the topic was rejected by most alchemical authors in the seventeenth century (Newman, 2004). What is crucial to this paper, however, is whether or not Donne takes up the topic of the homunculus and registers anxieties about women’s reproductive power in his depictions of alchemy.

References to alchemy in two of Donne’s poems—“Love’s Alchemy” (1633) and “The Comparison” (1633)—suggest that Donne was familiar with the topic of the homunculus and interested in the links between alchemy and human reproduction. Editors and critics of Donne frequently note that he mentions alchemy in his writings. For example, Parisa Shams and Alireza Anushiravani, in a recent study of mystical alchemy in Donne’s poetry, write that “when Donne [seeks] to depict and symbolize the process of purification, he [calls] on alchemy” (Shams & Anushiravani, 2014). References to alchemy in “Love’s Alchemy” and “The Comparison” connect it to pregnancy and mining and are particularly relevant to my discussion of the birthing-mining metaphor in “To His Mistress.” The speaker in “Love’s Alchemy” begins by stating “some [men] have deeper digged Love’s mine than [he]” (Donne, 2010). Here, the speaker draws an implicit parallel between alchemy and mining by connecting both sub-

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31 Newman goes on to state, “the homunculus, as artificial human, was the crowning piece of man’s creative power” (Newman, 2004).
32 Newman identifies similar motivations “in a pseudonymous work ascribed to Thomas Aquinas, called De essentiriesensentarium,” which cites the creation of the homunculus as “evidence against the theory that there is a female seed contributing to human generation” (Newman, 2004).
jects to love. Then, at lines 7 and 8, the speaker imagines a “chymic” who “glori-
ifies his pregnant pot” (Donne, 2010). In these lines, the speaker connects al-
chemy to human generation and alludes to the creation of the homunculus. In
“The Comparison,” the speaker describes the creation of gold out of “the earth’s
worthless dirt” using “the chymic’s masculine equal fire” and “the limbeck’s
warm womb” (Donne, 2010). Notably, here, the speaker uses the language of
human reproduction to describe an alchemical process. In the early modern pe-
riod, medical authorities upheld Galen’s theory that the man’s body was dry and
hot, while the woman’s body and womb were moist and cold (Maus, 2005). Im-
portantly, these qualities were thought to make men and women fertile; six-
teenth-century physician Juan de Dois Huarte Navarro writes that woman “was
by God created cold and moist, which temperature, is necessary to make a
woman fruitful and apt for childbirth” (qtd. in Maus, 2005). Thus, in figuring
the alchemist’s fire as “masculine” and the alembic vessel as a “warm womb,” the
speaker alludes to medical theories about gender difference and fertility (Donne,
2010). Moreover, the speaker suggests that the alembic vessel might serve as a
kind of male womb.

The imaginary alchemists in “Love’s Alchemy” and “The Comparison” seem
to possess their own wombs, in which they experiment with minerals. Within
these poems alembic vessels serve as surrogate wombs and allow alchemists to
experiment independent of Mother Earth. Mining, on the other hand, does not
afford geologists such independence. Geologists could not replace Mother Earth
because they were utterly dependent on her ability to generate metals. The only
way for a geologist to escape from such dependence was for him to replace the
metaphor of “Mother Earth.” Merchant observes, “the metaphor of the earth as a
nurturing mother [began] to gradually vanish as a dominant image as the Sci-
tific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and rationalize the world view” (Mer-
chant, 1980). The Scientific Revolution undermined the importance of the
female earth by replacing the “organically oriented mentality” with a “mechani-
cally oriented mentality” (Merchant, 1980). This mechanical mentality inspired a
new, male-centered metaphor: “the earth as a machine” (Merchant, 1980). Thus,
although the geologist could not actually escape from the earth, this mechanical
mentality allowed him to imagine himself escaping from the maternal figure.
The geological obsession with escaping from the earthly mother mirrors the an-
atomical obsession with subverting the human mother. This anatomical obsession
is not only evident in medical practices like the caesarean section but also in dis-
sective practices. Anatomists were fascinated by the female reproductive organs.
These organs had “an emblematic status as exemplary objects of dissection” be-
cause they represented “the body’s hidden interior” (Park, 2006). “The task of the
scientist,” Sawday asserts, “was to voyage within the body in order to force it to
reveal its secrets” (Sawday, 1995). The scientist used his new “mechanically or-
iented mentality” to discover and exploit the secrets of the female body (Mer-
chant, 1980). In so doing, the scientist transformed the female body into “a machinelike
body,” which could be harnessed and controlled (Merchant, 1980).
Donne brings different threads from geological, alchemical, and anatomical discourses together in his birthing-mining metaphor. Donne describes surgical birth through a mining metaphor because the connection between the earth and the mother is already made through the metaphor of Mother Earth. Moreover, to describe a surgical birth in terms of mining presents the opportunity to subvert the metaphor of Mother Earth, diminish the importance of the human mother, and reinvent the birthing process so that it privileges the efforts of the man over the woman. Mining represents a different method of birthing and conveys the possibility that the mother’s role in birthing might be reduced. By deploying a set of innovative, geological associations, Donne’s mining metaphor allows readers to see the potential for an artificial, male-dominated birthing process.

5. The Birthing-Mining Metaphor in “To His Mistress”

“To His Mistress” was written in the 1590s when childbirth was shifting from a domain of female control to a division of male medical practice. Taking this historical context into account, tensions over control of childbirth become apparent in Donne’s representation of the speaker’s relationship with his mistress. For the speaker there are tensions inherent in submission to the authority of women in what was otherwise a patriarchal culture. The speaker’s fantasy of control over childbirth stems from his desire to dominate women and reassert masculine authority in the birthing room. Through a series of comparisons, the speaker systematically constructs his fantasy: he compares male labour in sex and surgery to female labour in childbirth, men’s hands to women’s vaginas, medical examinations to sexual encounters, surgeons to fathers, mines to wombs, children to gems, paternal bonds to maternal bonds, and gynaecological books to women’s bodies. However, the female rituals of childbirth and the physics of gestation and birth spill over into the speaker’s fantasy, making the links between childbirth and female power impossible to ignore. Thus, despite the best efforts of the speaker, women in the poem do not become submissive and unnecessary but rather remain powerful and essential. Donne uses dramatic irony at the end of the poem to undermine the speaker’s attempts to subvert the mother and the midwife and reveal the insecurities motivating the speaker’s fantasy of artificial birth.

Ovid’s Amores 1.5—an early elegy that Donne reworks in “To His Mistress”—describes Corinna, a courtesan or adulterous woman, being undressed and caressed by her lover (Hadfield, 2006). Corinna enters her lover’s room “draped in a loose tunic,” which her lover tears off during a brief struggle (Ovid, 2011). Following this struggle, Corinna and her lover engage in sex: they “[weary themselves] and [lie] exhausted together” (Ovid, 2011).33 Donne leaves out some

33Andrew Hadfield discusses the similarities and differences between Ovid’s text and Donne’s poem in more detail, insisting that Donne’s poem is “replete with Ovidian sexual energy and tension” and explaining how Donne’s poem “[makes] use of the tried and tested comparison between the arts of love and the arts of war, implicit in Ovid’s erotic writing” (Hadfield, 2006). Likewise, Jonathan Post explores similarities between “the Ovidian erotic poem” and Donne’s poem, arguing that Donne uses Ovid’s “potentially pornographic matter” but makes it more “aggressively [sexual]” and “politically edgy” (Booseqtd. in Post, 2006).
details of Ovid’s text from his poem—the speaker does not, for instance, have
sex with his mistress at the end of the poem—but he also makes some additions,
the most notable of which is the conceptual metaphor mining is caesarean child-
birth. From the start of the poem, the speaker talks about himself in reproduc-
tive terms; at line 2, the speaker figures himself as a mother in “labour” (Donne,
2010). When the speaker compares himself to “a midwife” at the end of the
poem, he again makes reference to the concept of childbirth (Donne, 2010).
However, in the middle of the poem, the speaker describes his mistress in geo-
ternal terms: he compares her to a “new-found-land” and to a “mine of precious
stones” (Donne, 2010). By interweaving references to childbirth with references
to mining, Donne creates the overarching conceptual metaphor mining is child-
birth or, more specifically, mining is surgical childbirth. This conceptual meta-
phor complicates the gender dynamics at work in Donne’s poem, as it brings to
mind early modern debates about reproduction and the medical politics of
childbirth. In allowing the reader to comprehend the speaker in relation to a
mother and a midwife, the birthing-mining metaphor brings into focus the
speaker’s desire to extend his reproductive role. The speaker conceptualizes his
relationship with his mistress in terms of a struggle for reproductive power, al-
luding to the battle between midwives and surgeons for control over the preg-
nant female body. Moreover, when the speaker compares his mistress to a
“mine” (Donne, 2010), he uses mining to conceptualize how he might extend his
reproductive role. As mining was partially understood and talked about in terms
of a caesarean section in the early modern period, mining provides the speaker
with a metaphorical way to participate in the birthing process. Ultimately, the
birthing-mining metaphor suggests that what is at stake in Donne’s poem is re-
productive power: the speaker envies the mother’s ability to give birth and the
midwife’s ability to participate in the birthing process. His childbirth fantasy
opens the possibility of men replacing women in the birthing room and gaining
control over the reproductive process.

Donne calls attention to human reproduction at the start of his poem. The
speaker, in the second line, contrasts the male-female roles during sex with a
pun on the word “labour” (Donne, 2010). He begs his mistress to let him “la-
bour” or work sexually, evoking the age-old metaphor of “coitus as ploughing”
(Greene, 1989). This metaphor reinforces the traditional male-female roles in
reproduction by defining the woman as the passive land that is ploughed by the
active man. Aristotle’s biological theory held that it was the active male principle
that created an embryo, while the passive female principle provided nutriment
(Merchant, 1980). However, the speaker’s pun also evokes the biblical sense of
the word “labour.” Labour, in Genesis 3.19, is a penalty for sin. Because Adam
and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, God declares that man must labour in the
ground (by “the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread”) and woman must labour
in childbirth (“in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children”) (The Holy Bible,
1932). The speaker, who echoes God when he says: “Until I labour, I in labour
lie” (Donne, 2010), underlines the gender divide set forth in Genesis. However, the speaker also transcends this divide. “In labour lie” he states, imagining himself to be “[bringing] forth children” (The Holy Bible, 1932). Here, the speaker figuratively takes on a transsexual role, picturing himself to be labouring both in sex and birth. Additionally, he draws attention to the uncertain nature of fatherhood. Uncertainty, the speaker implies, springs from the fact that he cannot be sure that his labour during sex is connected to his mistress’s labour during childbirth. If he were able to beget and birth his child, then he would be able to be certain of this connection. “Until I labour” the speaker asserts, “I in labour lie,” subtly suggesting that until he is able to beget and birth his own children, he will have to suffer the pains of uncertainty (Donne, 2010). Unfortunately, the speaker’s anatomy prevents him from giving birth to his own children naturally.

While it is physically impossible for the speaker to give birth, the caesarean section provides him with a way to “labour” in childbirth. The surgeon who performs the caesarean section “labours” in surgery in order to extract a child from the body of the mother.34 The mother’s role in reproduction is reduced because she does not give birth to her child vaginally. Thus, although the speaker cannot give birth to a child naturally because he lacks a vagina, with his “roving hands” he can perform a surgical birth (Donne, 2010).35 The surgeon, who uses his hands to deliver a child, is akin to the midwife. However, whereas the midwife inserts her hands “up into the womb” in order to determine the presentation of the child or “draw forth” the child (Sharp, 1671), the surgeon uses his hands to make an incision into the mother’s womb and “fetch” the child through the mother’s abdomen (Mauriceau qtd. in Eccles, 1982).36 The difference here lies in the way that the surgeon renders the mother’s vagina unnecessary. Indeed, insofar as the surgeon extracts the child through the mother’s abdomen, he replaces the vagina with a man-made opening. The caesarean section provides the speaker with a metaphor for birthing that deemphasizes the importance of the vagina. The surgeon who performs the caesarean section, in a sense, overcomes the physical impossibility of a man giving birth.

The poem not only figures the speaker in relation to a surgeon but also to a father. Given that references to reproduction structure the reader’s understanding of the function of sex in the poem, the speaker, who tries to seduce his mistress, 35

34Surgeons were often described as performing “manual labour” (McTavish, 2005).
35In the early modern period, men’s hands were already associated with childbirth because writing was often compared to birthing. For instance, Sir Philip Sidney uses childbirth as a metaphor for poetic creativity in the first sonnet of Astrophil and Stella, when the speaker, who is attempting to find “fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,” exclaims: “Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes, /Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite, / ‘Fool,’ says my Muse to me, ‘look in thy heart and write’” (Sidney, 2006). Here, Sidney draws a comparison between a writer and labouring mother. In addition to Sidney, many other poets compare writing to birthing. For an overview of this poetic tradition see Maus, 2005 and Sacks, 1980. For a discussion of how Donne fits into this tradition see H.L. Meakin, 1998.
36The surgeon’s hands might also be thought of as replacing the midwife’s hands in that the surgeon takes over when the actions of the midwife have been unsuccessful. Obstetrician Grantley Dick-Read articulates this idea, stating that the surgeon should intervene “when hands are not sufficient” (qtd. in Eccles, 1982).
stress into bed, might be thought of as a prospective father. The simultaneity of literal seduction and figurative birthing scenes alludes to the potential connection between the surgeon and the father. “As liberally as to a midwife show/Thyself,” says the speaker (Donne, 2010), conflating a seductive striptease with a medical examination. The speaker uses the adverb “liberally” to describe how he wishes his mistress to behave (Donne, 2010). “Liberally” means “freely” or “licentiously” and may imply that the speaker wants his mistress to behave “lewdly” (OED, 2013). The potential connection between the surgeon and the father was a cause of great concern in the early modern period. Male practitioners or “men-midwives” that specialized in gynaecology and obstetrics were often accused of being “sexually rapacious” and “promoting fertility” with their “own seed” (King, 2007).37 The tale of Agnodice, retold by Guillemeau and Catherine de Roches, touches on the potential connection between the surgeon and the father (Read, 2010). Agnodice, an Athenian girl disguised as a man so that she can practise medicine, is berated as “a seducer and corruptor of women” because she examines female patients (Read, 2010). Donne’s speaker, who intends to examine and seduce his mistress, calls attention to the potentially erotic nature of the medical examination. In addition, he gestures towards the infidelity of his mistress. Although the poem connects the speaker to a surgeon and a father, it does not figure him as a husband.

At this point, some readers may want to challenge my interpretation of the poem by pointing out that a verbal variant of line 46 may, in fact, imply that the speaker and his mistress are married. In about one-third of the early manuscript versions of “To His Mistress” line 46 reads: “There is no penance, much less innocence” (Pebworth, 2006). This version of the line, Ted-Larry Pebworth explains, “supports the idea that [the speaker’s mistress] is either a bawd or a married woman being urged to commit adultery” (Pebworth, 2006). This version essentially suggests that sex between the speaker and his mistress would be neither penitent nor innocent (Pebworth, 2006). However, in two-thirds of the manuscript versions line 46 reads: “There is no penance due to innocence” (qtd. in Pebworth, 2006). This version of the line “supports the idea that the speaker is coaxing his new bride into the nuptial bed” (Pebworth, 2006). If the speaker and his mistress are married, then their sex is innocent and therefore requires no penance (Pebworth, 2006). As the text of “To His Mistress” that was printed in 1669 reads “due to” rather than “much less” at line 46, most modern editors of Donne’s poem print this variant (Pebworth, 2006). However, Pebworth notes that some editors “[accept] the ‘much less’ version of the line as Donne’s original wording and have seen the ‘due to’ version as an attempt—either by choice or through necessity—to make the poem more acceptable by suggesting that the couple are married” (Pebworth, 2006). Jonathan Post explains why Donne may

37Phillips reports that men who practiced gynaecology ran the risk of being accused of adultery because people suspected that they were actually seducing and pleasuring women during medical examinations (Phillips, 2007). Recommended treatments for “uterine melancholy and distemper” included sexual intercourse and masturbation (Eccles, 1982). However, when prescribed or administered by male practitioners, these treatments were sometimes condemned as fornication.
have felt the need to alter his poem, writing that the “aggressive sexualized form of distinctly English literature” that emerged from experimentations with Ovidian elegies in the sixteenth century was “perceived by the authorities as politically disruptive” and, as a consequence, many works were banned and burned (Post, 2006). In addition, in the Westmoreland Manuscript line 46 reads “much less” (Pebworth, 2006). The Westmoreland Manuscript is considered to be one of the most authoritative texts of Donne’s work. Palaeographer P.J. Croft suggests that Donne’s friend Rowland Woodward probably copied this manuscript from one of Donne’s holographs (Robbins, 2010). Pebworth’s suggestion that line 46 may have been changed to make the poem less scandalous and Post’s reasons as to why Donne may have changed the line, convince me that in the earlier versions of the poem the speaker and his mistress were probably not described as being married. Taken in conjunction with the fact that poem was initially considered “so scandalous by the licenser of the 1633 Poems” that he refused to publish it in that volume (Pebworth, 2006), line 46, to my mind, suggests that the speaker and his mistress are about to engage in adulterous sex. If this is the case, then Donne destabilizes male power in the poem by suggesting that the mistress is about to defy the authority of her husband by having sex with the speaker.

While encouraging his mistress to be unfaithful to her husband, the speaker worries that she will also be unfaithful to him. The speaker voices concerns about women’s sexual freedom and the threat this freedom poses to patriarchal society. His concerns echo attitudes toward female sexuality that were being expressed by medical writers in the early modern period. For example, Helkiah Crooke insists that women are “more wanton and petulant than males,” which makes it near impossible for men to trust them (Crooke qtd. in Hobby, 2001). He warns that women, “mad for lust,” might “invite men” to their beds (qtd. in Hobby, 2001). Along the same lines, physician John Sadler cautions men that

the imaginative power [of women] at the time of conception... is of such force that it stamps the character of the thing imagined upon the child: so that the children of an adulteresse may be like unto her own husband as though begotten by another man; which is caused through the force of the imagination which the woman hath of her own husband in the act of coition. (Sadler, 1636)

Both Crooke and Sadler outline the problematics of female power: women are difficult to control, yet their sexual freedom threatens patriarchal ideas about family and kinship, which rest on “descent through the male line” (Park, 2006). Likewise, Donne’s speaker struggles to come to terms with his mistress’s sexual freedom. On the one hand, he tries to convince his mistress to exercise her freedom and commit adultery. On the other hand, he recognizes the importance of fidelity—an early modern man could only be certain of his child’s paternity by restricting his wife’s sexual freedom. The speaker underscores the importance of fidelity when he cries “my kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned”
Infidelity, the speaker implies, threatens a man’s family or “kingdom.” The speaker betrays his apprehensions about his mistress’s infidelity when he says that her “white robes” are like those worn by “heaven’s angels” and “ill spirits” (Donne, 2010). Although he claims that he will “easily know... these angels from an evil sprite,” his explanation—a joke about penile erections and piloerection—suggests that he is actually unable to tell the difference between a faithful “angel” and an unfaithful “sprite” (Donne, 2010). Moreover, the implication is that he is also unable to tell the difference between a child of his and the child of another. Essentially, the speaker highlights physics of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, all of which emphasize the mother’s reproductive contribution and power. The speaker, unsettled by his mistress’s power and jealous of her reproductive abilities, says: “Gems which you women use/Are like Atlanta’s balls, cast in men’s views” (Donne, 2010). He inverts the myth of Atlanta and Hippomenes, suggesting that he feels emasculated by his mistress. Troubled by her procreative power, the speaker imagines himself dominating his mistress by excavating her body.

When the speaker imagines himself delving into his mistress’s body, he uses the language of geology, rather than the language of anatomy, to describe his actions. Thomas Greene argues that the speaker’s actions are “provocative” because he does not reveal the anatomical objects that he discovers (Greene, 1989). Instead, the speaker describes his discoveries in geological terms:

O my America! My new-found-land!
My kingdom, safest when with one man manned!
My mine of precious stones! My empery!
How blessed am I in this discovering thee! (Donne, 2010)

Envisioning his mistress as a geological entity, the speaker imagines himself colonizing her. He aligns his anatomical exploration with exciting discoveries taking place in the New World. Discovering her body’s interior, the speaker suggests, is like a voyage into the “new-found-land” that will uncover “precious stones” (Donne, 2010). These metaphors of “dominion and wealth” inspire in the speaker a desire for the “experience of absolute possession” (Greene, 1989). The speaker divulges this desire by repeating the possessive adjective “my.” While the speaker’s “earthy soul may covet” his mistress’s buried jewels (or children), he relies on two responses (a response to sexual arousal and a response to strong emotions or cold temperatures). While the speaker assumes that he will experience these two responses under different circumstances, in reality it is possible that he will experience these responses together. Scientific data suggests that heightened emotions, like fear or anxiety, can result in both penile erections and piloerection (Roze, Oubary, & Chédru, 2000; Barlow, Sakheim, & Beck, 1983). Taking this data into account, the reader might conclude that the speaker’s method for telling the difference between angels and sprites is flawed.
dren), the placement of “my” reveals that his rational soul “covets” his mistress’s body (Donne, 2010). He covets her body in a sexual sense, yes, but the speaker also longs to dominate his mistress’s womb, which would allow him to control the birthing process. Dominating the womb will enable the speaker to overcome “the precarious nature of fatherhood,” which stems from the mother’s physical connection to her child (Park, 2006).

Like the surgeon who severs the umbilical cord, the speaker imagines himself disturbing the connection between his mistress and her child. “To enter into these bonds is to be free,” exclaims the speaker (Donne, 2010), underlining the freedom that comes from interrupting the bond between mother and child. In interrupting this bond, the speaker is able to sever figuratively the mother’s connection to her child and establish his own connection. The speaker replaces feminine bonds with masculine, implicitly replacing maternal bonds with patern al. He says: “There where my hand is set, my seal shall be,” inviting a comparison between the caesarean section, which begins where his “hand is set,” and a “seal” of paternity (Donne, 2010). Other scholars have noted that “seal” refers both to an imprint that is used to authenticate a document or ensure ownership and to a penis (“Seal”; Greene, 1989). However, “seal” might also refer to a surgical seal: Paul, in Romans 4:11, defines the circumcision of Abraham as “a seal of righteousness” (The Holy Bible, 1932). In this sense, the metaphorical caesarean section might allow the speaker to figuratively imprint a seal of paternity upon his child. The child born by caesarean section has been removed from his maternal origin and introduced into a masculine realm (Adelman, 1992). In this realm, the woman’s reproductive contribution and role in childbirth is de-emphasized. As Park notes, the child born by the caesarean section is marked by “maleness” and “prowess” because he has been birthed by a man (Park, 2006). Donne’s speaker imagines himself participating in the birthing process and extracting a child of distinctly male origin, whereby he evokes the fantasy of male birth.

While referencing this fantasy, the speaker compares his mistress to a “mystic book,” alluding to gynaecological texts (Donne, 2010). Although critics and editors of “To His Mistress” typically interpret “mystic books” as religious texts, if the word “mystic” is taken more generally to mean “mysterious,” “secret,” or “concealed,” then “mystic books” may be interpreted as books of secrets (OED, 2013; Donne, 2010). In lines 39 - 43 the speaker establishes a connection between books and women—specifically, he implies that opening a book is like seeing a woman naked. This implication links “mystic books” to gynaecological texts, which contained information about women’s “secrets” and diagrams of naked women. Monica Green outlines how in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gynaecological texts entitled “the secrets of women” emerged “out of the general interest in sexuality and generation” and “gradually [grew] into a specialized literature that fused natural philosophical concerns to understand generation with medical concerns to control it” (Green, 2008). These texts were read
by “different classes of Latin and vernacular readers,” including “physicians, religious men, natural philosophers, and elite laymen,” all of whom “participated in a shared discourse on women” (Green, 2008). Essentially, these texts provided men with a way to learn and talk about “the hidden processes of generation” (Green, 2008). In Donne’s poem, when the speaker compares women to “mystic books,” he alludes to texts that demystify the inner workings of the female body (Donne, 2010). Playing on the comparison between books and women, the speaker says that while “lay men” may only see the “coverings” of these books, he “must see” these books “revealed” (Donne, 2010). He asks his mistress to “show” her body to him, so that “[he] may know” her as intimately as a “midwife” (Donne, 2010). Gynaecological texts enabled men to adopt the perspective of the midwife: women were often depicted naked, with their genitals or wombs exposed. Green reminds us that “men had no means of control” over the female reproductive system “except by attempting to know and understand” it (Green, 2008). Thus, in Donne’s poem, the metaphorical comparison of books to women underlines the speaker’s desire to understand and control his mistress’s body.

In a final twist, Donne’s poem ends by making it obvious that the speaker has failed in his rhetorical attempts to master his mistress. He may have ordered her to take “off,” “unpin,” “unlace” and “cast” off her clothes, but these commands have proven useless (Donne, 2010). For all the speaker’s orders and claims of superiority, she has defied his authority and refused to undress. In a last effort to regain control over the situation, the speaker resorts to removing his own clothing: “To teach thee, I am naked first” (Donne, 2010). However, by adopting a strategy of teaching by example, the speaker inadvertently disempowers himself. By stripping naked, the speaker effectively takes the place of his mistress, whom the reader expected to be standing naked at the end of the poem. Ironically, the speaker is “naked first,” while his mistress is wearing “more covering than a man” (Donne, 2010). The “secrecy” of the mistress’s body subverts the speaker’s attempt to establish masculine authority. As the speaker puts it, women, with “their imputed grace,” must “dignify” men (Donne, 2010). The representation of women as virtuous or powerful beings, who must confer honours upon men, conveys a sense of the power of the hidden female body.

For an analysis of these lines in relation to apocryphal Marian traditions see M. Thomas Hester, 1987.

Gynaecological texts taught male practitioners about the female reproductive system, enabling them to compete with midwives, who possessed “experimental knowledge of medical and obstetric practice” (Park, 2006). However, these texts were also a source of knowledge for the public. Within these texts and other midwifery manuals, men could read about what went on in the birthing room (from which they were usually excluded) and view women’s genitalia (which was a privilege usually reserved for the husband and the midwife). Moreover, these texts afforded men control over women’s bodies. For instance, men could learn about the female orgasm and the clitoris, which Columbus Fallopius “discovered” in the sixteenth century (Harvey, 2002). Eccles explains that in the early modern period there was a prevalent belief that a woman had to orgasm in order for her to emit seed and become pregnant, so knowledge of the clitoris would, in theory, allow a husband greater control over his wife’s ability to conceive (Eccles, 1982).

For example, when he claims that he is her sovereign and discoverer.
female body, in being more “covered” than that male body, resists men’s attempts to scrutinize and understand it. It can only be “revealed” by a woman who chooses to “dignify” a man with knowledge of her body (Donne, 2010). The female body in the early modern period was often anatomically reduced to the uterus, which became a symbol for the body’s interior. However, the uterus was an organ that could only be revealed through surgery (or caesarean section), which required the woman’s permission. Thus, subtly undercutting the power dynamic so far established within the poem, Donne ends by re-establishing women’s control over their bodies.

Donne’s strategy to first present the speaker’s fantasy of masculine dominance and then undermine the speaker and reassert female power speaks to the complexity of the gender constructs operating within “To His Mistress.” After he has exposed himself to his mistress, the speaker becomes aware of the inverted power dynamic. He asks her: “Why than [sic], /What need’st thou have more cov’ring than a man?” (Donne, 2010). However, rather than asserting male power with his question, the speaker unwittingly undermines all of his previous commands by giving his mistress the opportunity to speak and the power to disagree with him. He reveals that his authority over her depends on her. Inverting the conventions of the blazon, which Nancy Vickers explains descriptively dismember and silence women, Donne ends his poem with the speaker waiting for his mistress to speak (Vickers, 1981). When one returns to the speaker’s earlier fantasy of reproductive control, this ending stresses that just as the power of the speaker depends on the willingness of his mistress, so the power of the surgeon depends upon the mother. Ultimately, through this final twist, Donne exposes the irony undercutting the struggle for power between men and women occurring both within the poem and, more broadly, the medical community.

6. Conclusion

In its metaphorical exploration of childbirth, “To His Mistress” depicts the progressive possibilities of artificial birth, while simultaneously exposing male anxieties about women’s reproductive power. The poem is a product of, and a reaction to, the transient historical moment when medical authority over women’s bodies and childbirth was shifting to male practitioners. The speaker’s desire to transcend his reproductive limits, his various challenges of women’s

43Sawday, discussing dissected figures from Berengarius’ Isagoge Breves (1522), states that the woman’s “identity ... is entirely determined by the uterus, to an extent that ..., the uterus, in effect, is the woman” (Sawday, 1995). Similarly, Park clarifies that “women’s anatomy was reduced functionally to their organs of generation” (Park, 2006).

44Sawday explains that female cadavers were “an altogether rarer commodity” than male cadavers, making it difficult for men to learn about female anatomy except though surgery (1995). “The womb or uterus,” he maintains, “was an object sought after with an almost ferocious intensity in Renaissance anatomy theatres” (Sawday, 1995). It is not surprising that Donne chooses to make the uterus the implicit focus of his blazon, which is, after all, a kind of rhetorical dissection.

45Unless the surgeon is summoned by the mother or the midwife and given permission by the mother, he cannot perform the caesarean section.
control over reproduction, and his repeated attempts to assert masculine dominance over the female body reflects both the problematica of a female-centered birthing process and the fear that men may actually play a relatively minor role in reproduction. Participating in the debate about women’s reproductive contributions, Donne’s elegy embodies a central tension: although early modern society emphasized the importance of the father, the physics of pregnancy and childbirth emphasized the importance of the mother. Thus, the poem shows patriarchy to be a fundamentally unstable concept.

Donne’s poem suggests that early modern patriarchal society was disturbed by new reproductive models, which threatened male superiority by suggesting that men and women might be more biologically similar than previously thought. The speaker uses the birthing-mining metaphor to envision a stable concept of family and kinship that does not depend upon a woman. The speaker metaphorically reinvents the birthing process so that he supersedes his mistress and gains additional control over the reproductive process. However, at the time, medical practitioners had began to refute the Aristotelian notion of men being the more “perfect” sex by arguing “that men and women [were] equally perfect in their sex” (Maclean, 1980). Similarly, medical practitioners began to suggest that men and women contributed equally to generation—for example, Sharp writes that “there must be a conjunction of Male and Female for the begetting of children” and “there must be a perfect mixture of Seed issueing [sic] from them both, which virtually contain the Infant that must be formed from them” (Sharp, 1671). Donne’s poem suggests that anxieties about the blurring of sex distinctions may have fuelled men’s enthusiasm for artificial birth. Donne’s poem is striking evidence that men may have perceived the natural birthing process, which emphasized the importance of women, as a threat to their masculinity.

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A Study of “Hand” Metaphors in English and Chinese—Cognitive and Cultural Perspective

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Abstract
Our ordinary conceptual system by means of which we live, think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Human body undoubtedly has been the most important cognitive status in human being’s cognition. This paper studies the metaphor concerning hand as a source domain on the basis of linguistic evidence. It seeks to find out the differences and the similarities between English “hand” metaphors and Chinese “hand” metaphors, then to explore the causes of the universality and variations from cognitive and cultural perspectives. This paper will, to a certain degree, be helpful to the vocabulary and rhetoric teaching in English and Chinese.

Keywords
Hand, Metaphor, Cognitive Perspective, Cultural Perspective, English, Chinese, Comparison

1. Introduction
Metaphor has been an important topic of research and analysis from Aristotle to the present. For more than 2000 years, it was generally recognized as a fundamental figure of speech, especially in literature. In contemporary research, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) revolutionized the concepts of metonymy and metaphor. They found that metonymy and metaphor are not merely rhetoric devices that people have always believed them to be. Instead, they function also in people’s conceptual system and play a significant role in shaping how people think and behave. Lakoff and Turner (1989) expanded its traditional territory from rhetoric and literary criticism to various fields that overlap, to different degrees, on the common ground of cognitive science, including linguistics, semiotics, philosophy, psychology, neurology and anthropology. What impresses us...
most is that the cognitive tradition of metaphor studies has been revitalized, and with the strong claims that people think metaphorically, metaphor has exploded as a topic of interest in the humanities and social sciences over the past twenty-five years.

The human body is often regarded as the dimension to measure things surrounded, as said by the sage Protagorus, “Man is the measure of all things”. (cited from Wang, 2002: p. 88) We all have hands. Due to the great importance of hands, people tend to conceptualize the world in terms of them, which, in turn, gives rise to abundant metaphorical expressions in language. In previous papers, many studies have been done on the comparison between English and Chinese body metaphor. However, little work has been on “hand” metaphors. Inadequate attention has been paid to them in the realm of cognitive science. Our physical, social and cultural experience provides many possible bases for “hand” metaphors.

Confronted with the above-mentioned problems and challenges, the present study attempts to address some key issues concerning “hand” metaphor understanding. This paper is a case study of English and Chinese “hand” metaphors. It attempts to test the contemporary theory of metaphor from general cognitive and cultural perspectives relying primarily upon dictionary-based meanings of words related to “hand”. So the present work is to study the metaphor concerning “hand” as a source domain on the basis of linguistic evidence. It seeks to find out the differences and the similarities between English “hand” metaphors and Chinese “hand” metaphors, then to explore the causes of the universality and variations from cognitive and cultural perspectives.

2. A Comparison of Metaphors on “Hand” between English and Chinese

It goes without saying that hands are one of the most important external body parts with which we deal with the external world. And the main functions of our hands are their uses. Thus, “hand” expressions are important and abundant use among all the cultures of the world. Theoretically, the synchronic corpora of “hand” might be similar between different languages from the perspective of the functional semantic categories on the hypothesis of the same functional use of “hand”. Therefore, the paper tries its best to collect various forms of the linguistic data so as to present a reasonable classification. The Chinese corpora the paper used are mainly from Modern Chinese Dictionary (sixth edition) (to hereafter to as: Lv & Ding, 2012). And the English corpora in this paper on “hand” metaphors are from Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (Sixth edition) (to hereafter to as: Hornby, 2010) and Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (8th edition) (to hereafter to as: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 2017). According to Hornby (2010), the original periphrasis on “hand” is “the part of the body at the end of the arm, including the fingers and thumb”, which can be translated as “手” in Chinese.
2.1. Similarities of Semantic Category of “Hand”

2.1.1. “Hand”→ “Ones Who Performs a Particular Job”

A hired hand on the farm
A ranch hand
All hands on deck!
Two portraits are painted by the same hand.
All hands to the pumps!
选手 (player), 能手 (dab hand), 拖拉机手 (tractor driver), 助手 (assistant), 扒手 (pickpocket), 旗手 (flagman), 副手 (assistant), 打手 (gorillas), 帮手 (helper), 一把手 (boss).

2.1.2. “Hand”→ “The Motion of Hand”

Hey you! Get your hands off.
Those two can’t keep their hands off each other—they never stop kissing and cuddling.
I’ll kill him if I ever get my hands on him.
I saw Pat and Chris walking hand in hand through town the other day.
He handed his basket to Scraps and said: “Keep that, until I get out of prison.”
“Hands up!” she said calmly, holding the revolver to his head.
Rosie, remember you should always hold my hand when we cross the road.
They weren’t kissing or anything—they were just holding hands.
I wish you’d try and look smart instead of just standing there with your hands in your pockets!
他赶紧跑来搭手。 (translation: He hurries to help me.)
这封信从一个人转手到另一个人直到每个人都看过。 (translation: The letter passed from one to another until everyone had read it.)
人够多了，您就不用插手了。 (translation: You don’t have to join in. There are more than enough people on the job already.)
她打了我，所以我才还手打她。 (translation: She hit me, so I struck her back.)
这项工作我刚接手。 (translation: I’ve just taken over the job.)
得知这个消息，他高兴得手舞足蹈。 (translation: He jumped for joy on being told the news.)
一些粗暴的人对自己的儿子大打出手，直到他们有了还手之力才肯罢休。 (translation: Some violent men beat up their sons, until the boys are strong enough to hit back.)
他常常明知我手忙脚乱，还要调皮捣蛋。 (translation: He often plays up when he knows I’m in hurry.)

2.1.3. “Hand”→ “Handwriting”

His hand was illegible.
Most of his letters were typed, but we’ve found a few personal ones written in his own hand.
I’ve never seen such an untidy hand! Your writing is barely legible.
He writes a good hand.
2.1.4. "Hand"→ "Skill, Ability"

An old/numb/poor/bad hand
The comedienne tries her hand at singing and dancing for the first time.
He has a light hand with pastry, i.e. makes it well.
Guy’s made a marvelous bookcase—I had no idea he was so good with his hands.
He wants to try his hand at singing.

2.1.5. "Hand"→ "Control, Possession"

What he concerns is not to let the property get out of his hands.
The reception was already in the hands of the florists and caterers.
He wants to keep the management of the firm in his own hands.
Welsh has suffered badly at the hands of the dominant English language.
How many people have died at the hands of terrorist organizations since the violence began?
The school allowed the teacher a free hand in her treatment of the children.
The football fans have got completely out of hand.
I bet he had a hand in it.

2.1.6. "Hand"→ "Sides, Aspects"

On the one hand I’d like the job which pays more, but on the other hand I enjoy the work I’m doing at the moment.
She’s caught in a dispute between the city council on the one hand and the
education department on the other.

The country is dominated by a power struggle between the communists on the one hand and the nationalists on the other.

On the one hand I should like to give the child a great deal of freedom but on the other hand I don’t want him totally out of my control.

It brought out his better side.

Buckets of water passed from hand to hand to put the fire out.

简直不可思议,我一进去她就开始对我上下其手。(translation: It was unbelievable! I walked in there and she was all over me.)

他左右手都能写字。(translation: He could write either hand.)

契约成立，从现在起你便是我的左右手。(translation: Contract is established, from now on you is my right-hand man.)

我是新任的经理，你们将在我手下工作。(translation: I am the new manager and you will be working under me.)

我觉得我手面已很阔绰，而且这样做无损于我的贫困。(translation: I found that I had been a rich man without any damage to my poverty.)

秘书速办了手头事情。(translation: The secretary dispatched the matter at hand.)

2.1.7. “Hand”→ “Unit of Length”

The horse stood 20 hands.

一手掌大(as big as a hand).

2.1.8. “Hand”→ “The Feeling”

The warm, dry, luxurious hand of silk.

这块料子手感柔和。(translation: This fabric feels soft.)

2.1.9. “Hand”→ “Assistance, Concern, Approval”

He gave the old man a hand with his heavy bundles.

We have been working hand in glove with our European partners to beat our American competitors.

Give me a hand with the chores.

He has found to be hand in glove with the enemy.

War and suffering go hand in hand.

We have the situation well in hand.

The affair is no longer in my hands.

I've left the department in Bill’s very efficient hands.

过道里放满了自行车，碍手碍脚的。(translation: The corridor is crowded with bikes which get in everybody's way.)

这次的司法介入, 坚决而有力的打击, 都令广大球迷额手称庆。(translation: The judicial intervention, determined and powerful blow have made the majority of fans clapping and cheering.)

甘地当即垮倒在地, 还同时按印度教的方式, 以手加额, 表示宽恕凶手。(translation: Gandhi crumpled instantly, putting his hand to his forehead in the Hindu gesture of forgiveness to his assassin.)
They argue a lot, but they always kiss and make up.

2.1.10. “Hand” → “Order, Sequence”
An account that was as unreliable as most information got at third hand.
A bauble of little worth that went from hand to hand.
He got all the information at second hand rather than from original sources.
I only heard the news at second hand.
The report of the attack came at second hand.
All children are expected to have had hands-on manager and like to know exactly what everyone is doing.
He was the Prime Minister’s hand-picked choice to lead the investigation into police corruption.

2.2. Varieties of Semantic Category of “Hand”
Besides all the similarities, of course, there are also some diversities of the word “hand” in both Chinese and in English. That’s mostly due to the different cultural background and the different living styles.

Only exist in Chinese:

2.2.1. “Hand” → “Handcuffs, Fetters or Chains”
不手 (free from fetters and handcuffs)

2.2.2. “Hand” → instead of “head”
陈知其罪，授手于我。（translation: Chen knows his sin and gives his head.)

2.2.3. “Hand” → “寸口” (A Person’s Pulse on the Wrist) in Traditional Chinese Medicine
三阴在手 (three yins at a person’s pulse on the wrist)

Only exist in English:

2.2.4. “Hand” → “Pointer on a Clock, Dial, etc.”
The hour/minute/second hand of a watch

2.2.5. “Hand” → “(Dated) Promise to Marry”
He asked for her hand.

2.3. Summary
On the basis of the above evidence taken from the Chinese lexicon and the English lexicon, we may conclude that our bodily experience plays a prominent role
in the emergence of linguistic meaning. The word “hand” and its phrase demonstrate that much of functional meaning originates from bodily experience and that the body and its behavior in environment are bearers of meaning.

There are more similarities in the semantic meanings than the varieties in Chinese and English. From the comparisons above, we have got the following similar usages:

1) “hand” to refer to end part of the human arm below the wrist
2) “hand” to refer to the indication of the motion of hand
3) “hand” to refer to style of handwriting
4) “hand” to refer to skill in using the hands
5) “hand” to refer to personal possession, control, direction, supervision
6) “hand” to refer to one of two sides of an issue or argument
7) “hand” to refer to unit of measurement, about four inches
8) “hand” to refer to the feel of cloth or leather or tactile reaction to its textural qualities of smoothness, flexibility, softness
9) “hand” to refer to assistance or aid, participation, applaud
10) “hand” to refer to order, sequence.

And we still have the varieties between the Chinese lexicon and English lexicon. Those, form the semantic point view, mainly due to the different culture and the various life styles.

There are the following expressions which have exclusively existed in Chinese:
1) “Hand” is often used as handcuffs, fetters or chains
2) “Hand” is used instead of “head”
3) “Hand” can be used to refer to “寸口” (a person’s pulse on the wrist) in traditional Chinese medicine.

However, there are only two entries in English, which are quite unique from Chinese. They are:
1) “Hand” can be referred to pointer on a clock, dial, etc.
2) “Hand” can be referred to promise to marry.

Thus, from the semantic meanings’ point view, in order to get a clear idea of the similarities and differences among the hand expressions both in Chinese and in English, we have the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The similarities</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ones who performs a particular work</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the motion of hand</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handwriting</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skill, ability</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>control, possession</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>sides, aspects</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unit of length</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>the feeling</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>assistance, concern, approval</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>order, sequence</td>
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<td>+</td>
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</table>
The varieties of Chinese and English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>handcuffs, fetters or chains</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>寸口 (a person’s pulse on the wrist)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pointer on a clock, dial, etc.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promise to marry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Reasons for the Similarities and Varieties of “Hand” Metaphors in English and Chinese

With the abundant expressions of the “hand” phrases, we can infer that: it is the wide use of our hands in routine works, human beings formed the semantic lexicon of “hand” in the same way, in that, no matter in Eastern or Western cultures, and “hand” performs the same functions from the practical daily lives.

Then, how can these coincidences of forming the same “hand” lexicon took place even if they are under different cultures and backgrounds? Are there the same mechanisms of cognition? And do they share the similar motivations of the metaphoric and metonymic conceptualization and categorization?

3.1. Universality in Metaphor

All these metaphors are based on some underlying similarities between human body and concrete objects. “Similarity is the sharing of certain features.” (Goatly, 1997: p. 16) Similarities between the two languages can be attributed to the common human bodily experience and physiological structure of human body.

It is generally recognized that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical by mapping concrete domains onto abstract domains. And metaphorical mapping is said to be not random, that is, conceptual metaphors are grounded in basic human experience. As we have mentioned in the above chapter, we can imagine that our ancestors got to know the world from getting to know the space and themselves, so the space concept and body parts are the two main bases for our formation of abstract concepts. Turner (1987) stated that the human body is the important source of metaphor about social components and disintegration. “Body is a kind of environment (part of nature), and also the medium for itself (part of culture). Body lies rightly in the combination point where human labor acts on nature through media such as writing, language and religion. Therefore, body definitely lies in the combination point between the world’s natural order and the world’s cultural result.” So our ancestors’ thought had a feature of “body cognition” and they often considered the human body and experience as the criteria to measure the world around. This is determined by the cognitive order of human beings. Human beings firstly get to know the solid, corporeal and concrete things around themselves, which surely include the human body and its organs. Then when cognition comes into further advanced stage, human beings begin to consider the things they are familiar with as the bases to know, to expe-
rience and to describe other things in the world, especially those immaterial, abstract and indefinite things. So expressing abstract concepts with the help of words of concrete things has formed the correlative metaphor language between different concepts (including metaphorical language of the human body).

3.2. Cultural Variation

Reasons for the differences between the two languages are a little complicated, which requires us to get to the root of specific cultures, since the bodily experience can only tell what possible metaphors are and whether these potential metaphors are actually selected in a given culture is largely dependent upon the cultural models. According to Quinn (1991), it is a cultural model that plays a major role in constituting our understanding of the world and constrains the selection of metaphors.

People’s way of thinking is greatly influenced by culture. Facing the same thing, people from different cultures tend to observe and grasp the clue from different perspectives. Different perspectives of observation will in turn influence associations, a basic component of metaphorical understanding, which is caused by images. Association contains nationality. Different associations will directly form different tropism.

For example, dog is metaphorically used to refer to people in both English and Chinese, but the metaphorical meanings fall into two polarities. In the western world, dog is raised as pet and regarded as a friend of people, so commendatory metaphorical meanings are formed in English.

4. Conclusion

The fact that similar body parts and similar expressions are found in different languages like English and Chinese supports the claim that metaphor is not arbitrary but motivated by bodily experiences. The existence of shared conceptual metaphors between the two languages supports the claim that metaphor is a product of cognition or thinking, not just a literary device.

On the other hand, there are some differences between the two languages. This is because the two languages are not related and they are used in different societies with different cultures and different environments. Although this thesis has attempted to make a complete analysis of “hand” metaphors from a cognitive semantic point of view, it’s difficult to image how human beings think in a metaphorical way and how human beings understand non-literal meanings. This is because human mind is so complex. Moreover, this paper has compared “hand” metaphors of only two languages: English and Chinese. There is a need for further studies to compare “hand” metaphors across a large number of languages. As the human body is the same everywhere, understanding the extent to which a broad range of language is similar or different in their body metaphors should improve our understanding of human cognition.
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Discussion on Inspiration Theory in Chinese Classical Aesthetics

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Abstract

The Chinese classical aesthetics starts from the simple theory of interaction between the heart and object, and has made smart and rich interpretations on inspiration thinking in art creations, and is full of the dialectical thinking flame of “unity” and “disunity”: both emphasizing unexpected “cherishing by chance” and emphasizing voluminous “knowledge accumulation and treasure storage” in the potential gestation; as for the approach of acquiring inspiration, both highlighting the perceptual “tacit understanding”, and highlighting the soul and object correlated “soul comprehension”; as for the stimulation and trapping of inspiration, both showing appreciation to the digression “reflection” of “ingenious nature, without fabrication”, and highlighting the timely materialization of “chasing and catching in a hurry”.

Keywords

Inspiration, Enlightenment, Intuition

1. Introduction

Inspiration is a remarkable topic in the field of aesthetics. Through the ages, aestheticians put forward many insights, accumulating plentiful research achievements. However, because of the differences between Chinese and Western culture, western aesthetics pays attention on logic, understanding and reason, profound and comprehensive. Different from it, Chinese aesthetics advocates more about nature, feeling, intuition and experiencing. Thus, the aspiration of Chinese aesthetics is usually presented in a way of empirical experience and narration. Though Chinese aesthetics lacks of the clear and insightful description in western aesthetics, it has its own characteristics of rich implications and vitality. Its attentions on the individual aesthetic experiences, sentiment of
life in the universe and appreciation for natural charm clearly focus on the clarity in the depth of human’s heart, and are full of infinite creative thinking. At the same time, they wander from unity and disunity with the dialectical thinking flame. The thesis reflects Chinese classical aesthetics inspiration theory on the basis of western aesthetics “the other mirror”. It explores inspiration’s potential gestation, accidental generation, the approach of acquiring and trapping inspiration in the view of psychological aesthetics. It is a simple attempting to reveal the mystery of inspiration thinking and get through artistic creation concepts of both China and the West in all the times.

2. The Potential Gestation of Inspiration: Unexpected Cherishing by Chance and Voluminous “Knowledge Accumulation and Treasure Storage”

Though Chinese classical aesthetics does not directly put forward the concept of “inspiration”, it has a lot of theoretical discourse about the inspiration thinking, for example, “Xing”, “Gan Xing” or “Xing Hui” are prominently emphasized as the synonyms of inspiration. As Xie Zhen’s Si Ming Poetry wrote: for poetry, joys and sorrows are all from Xing, if there is no Xing, all words will be in vain. In Lu Ji’s Wen Fu, there is a sentence:”the creation of state is not controlled by himself but the natural mind and he can’t decide whether the inspiration should go or not”. Ancient Chinese often emphasized a sudden and unpredictable inspiration which is not controlled by mind. As Guan Xiu said in Yan Shi, you can hardly find Xing, but sometimes it let itself come out. Some writers even don’t believe or do not recognize that the masterpiece which is written out by his or her inspiration is not his or her ideas but the god’s work or help. According to Zhong Rong’s Xie Huilianin of Shi Pin, in which he quoted The Xie’s families Words, in which Xie Lingyun told that “the spring grass grow on the side of pond” was not written by himself but the god, and as Lu You’s Article said, article is generated from nature and it just be written by chance ...

Just as Chinese aestheticians, western aestheticians also have a theory which is created through a special power from inspiration, as Claudel said, poem is just for the soul, not heart. I am here but I am not stubborn. When the writing brush is worn out, you will see the truth which is as same as the Dao’s viewpoint which is “when you feel lonely you will have an emotion, then get a realm” (Qian, 1984). They are in the same place between poem and mystery, and poem is original from realm not heart, French priest Henri Bremond said,” Just as what religion can communicate directly with God and convey God’s words to be a prophet. when they are able to understand unknowable things, see the invisible things and insight the sightless things, the insight and the mystery of poems are also mysterious, profound and insightful (Qian, 1984). Inspiration which is viewed as God’s will possessed by God is colored with a kind of mysterious color by these acquaintances is the secret and mysterious poetry simultaneously.

On the surface, in the view of Western and Chinese classical aesthetics the in-
Inspiration is deified. However, in fact, they are different from each other. Poetry god is regarded as the origin of inspiration in Western classical aesthetics and it is the poetry god who possesses the writer and makes the artist getting into an obsessed creation state that a writer absolutely lost himself. As Plato thought, whether a great poem can create a poet or not, the key point is that if the writer can get the inspiration which is transported by poetry god, the inspiration theory of “as God’s help” is obviously covered with a coat which is tailored by the idealism and mystical experience of religion. Compared with Western classical aesthetics, although Chinese classical aesthetics regards the coming inspiration as “poetry god’s help”, it pays more attention on the hidden inevitability behind contingency of inspiration, namely “Cherishing by chance”. Chinese traditional aesthetics puts more attention on the efforts which are produced by subject itself in usual life and also keeps a watchful eye on the amassing experience and has an indomitable urge for thought object.

In the view of Chinese classical aestheticians, inspiration comes from the creation subject’s own artistic conditions: knowledge accumulation, artistic experience and life practice are the basic conditions of gestating inspiration; long-term mental effort and persistent pursuit of artistic objects are the dynamic conditions; energy, enthusiasm and vitality are the physiological conditions; the subject’s relax and clear mental state are the psychological conditions of stimulating inspiration (Zheng & Li, 1987).

Second, long-term mental effort and persistent pursuit of artistic objects are the dynamic conditions to initiate inspiration. Chinese ancients realized that erratic inspiration especially showed appreciation for the people who has a painstaking effort with the spirit of “For you I am pining myself away without regret”. It is a hard work of accumulation and recondite gestation in daily lives that enlighten the creative subject in a sudden and urge the inspiration to be burst in a twinkling. Just as Yan Yu who said in his Cang Lang Shi Hua, “inspiration brewed in heart, it will be unaffectedly understood as time passes”; In Zhao Mei Zhan Yan, Fang Dongshu pointed that “when you persist in thinking for a long time, you will make your head be full of thoughts and then have a wonderful inspiration.” Inspiration is always experiencing a pop-up process when art is brewed from quantitative change to qualitative change. The more a writer pursues the thought subject, the more information the writer will accumulate in his head. Thus the mental field will have a qualitative leap. Therefore, Guan Zi considered that thinking, thinking, rethinking and then ghosts and gods would attach on your mind, but it is not the ghost or god’s effort, but the vital essence which is the most important thing for the thinker. The creative subject’s desire and persistent efforts are the dynamic foundation of generating inspiration which speed up the acquisition of inspiration. So the ancients always emphasize that without the hardship that you have to wear out your iron shoes, there is no delight of inspiration that you get it without effort.

Next, inspiration requires good physiological and psychological conditions.
Liu Xie had written in his *Wen Xin Diao Long*: Following the development of emotional state, natural and harmonious, reconciling the train of thoughts and smoothen emotions; if one studies excessively, he will feel tired and exhausted, this is the general principle of temper. Only brimming with energy and spirit, mind and emotions will be harmonious and healthy, and thoughts will be creative and fluent; otherwise, people will be tired in spirit and energy and then have no idea and gain nothing. At the same time, Liu Xie also thought that writer’s quiet psychological condition is also important: polishing the thinking lies in the visional peace, purifying one’s soul and body and washing one’s mind in a clean and pure word. Only in a free and relax condition can the mood focus on the object, and exclude the interference of the utilitarian heart and external things to enter a aesthetic mental state, free and divine, bringing the flow of ideas and having a ultimate state of inspiration. Therefore, in order to provide the best physical qualifications and psychological space, creative subject should have a free and relax mentality to maintain essence and energy.

3. The Approach of Acquiring Inspiration: Tacit Understanding and Soul Comprehension

Different from the “God inspired God-man dual opposition theory” of western aesthetics, Chinese classical aesthetics starts from the conception of philosophy ontology that is the union of nature and man. It always emphasizes the apperception comprehension of the essence of universe and nature. And it acquires inspiration actively from the interaction between the heart and object.

If subconscious information storage is the internal force or internal cause of inspiration, then the prototype enlightenment is the external force or external cause of inspiration. According to the research achievements of modern psychology, inspiration is a kind of cheerful encounter by chance between the subject and object. The forceful stimulation of outside accidental factors forms the brain’s nerve center into being intense excitement, which will activate different precipitates in the subconscious mind and combine them to the excitement, to produce high-energy activity effects, to trigger cranial nerve’s voltage changes and chemical changes. In this way, inspiration is stimulated. At this moment, the right cerebral hemisphere which is responsible for imaginable thinking will force the left cerebral hemisphere which controls abstract thinking to give way and out of control. This is the condition that soul and object correlated, subject and object unified. Wang Guowei described the condition as: Not knowing what is subject, what is object.

Ancient Chinese starts from this regularity of inspiration to understand the lucky encounter of aesthetic subject and object. In their opinion, the stimulation of inspiration is the process of interaction between the heart and object. This interaction’s trapping has two forms: tacit understanding and soul comprehension. The former is direct perception and the latter is intuitive understanding. Their coexistence and complementation constitute the inspiration thinking pattern of
Chinese classical aesthetics.

First of all, the accidental stimulation of reality is an important motivation of stimulating inspiration. Chinese classical aesthetics considers natural species as the powerful factors that arouse inspiration thinking. When aesthetic subject’s psychological pattern accord with nature’s inner mechanism to some extent, it is likely to come into being a sudden flash of inspiration, a condition that more affective and creative than ever before. Just as Ge Lifang had said in the Rhythm of poets’ note: “comprehending objects with passions, then there will be Xing”. At the moment of perceptual tacit understanding, by the artistic intuitive ability, creation subjects can instantly understand the aesthetic connotation that accidental object contains. And they can also dive into the life essence of aesthetic objects. They integrate their emotions into the life of objects, making a fusion of feelings and sceneries; subliming creativity and vitality; delighting emotions and promoting physical and mental pleasure. As the aesthetic experience motivated in instant intuition, the inspiration will be presented in a clear way of thinking. Such a process is just like Yuan Shouding’s description in the fifth volume Discussion On The Article of his Zhan Bi Cong Tan, when seeing the view, one will have a coincident feeling and have a wonderful circumstance, as well as the description that preparing everything as need, and waiting a good occasion for emotion in a right way, the action will never out your mind” in Liu Xie’s Wen Xin Diao Long.

In this pattern of “tacit understanding”, content conception is an important medium opportunity that connects the communication between nature and human and stimulates inspiration. And this content conception is not confined to sceneries. It can be a person, a kind of natural phenomena, an accident, a story, an anecdote and so on. As the accelerant of inspiration, this incidental person, matter and object are frequently fresh and vivid. It is easy to stimulate intuitive comprehension instead of obscure or difficult. At the same time, the information that the stimulant delivers must have a sort of isomorphic correspondence with the aesthetic experience and aesthetic situation that the creation subject accumulates subconsciously. The relationship may complement some element that the new aesthetics presentation group lacks; or it inspires writers to compose new presentation imagination and then to find new aesthetic connotations. Just as Song Lian, a famous literatus in Ming dynasty, had said in Ye Yi Zhong’s collected works: when feeling things, there are something in heart, then opening a way for a burst of inspiration. Of course, not all the objective factors can motivate inspiration. This requires creation subjects to have good artistic qualities and intuitive abilities. They are also able to have peculiar sensibility and be observant to surroundings. So that they can seize object’s prominent features and aesthetic connotations, and finish the leap from life presentation to art presentation. As Xie Zhen had said that poets need nature’s mystery, waiting a good occasion to feel the view and then burst out, although one searches it with all energy, it is not easy to be found. Therefore, Chinese classical aesthetics pays
more attention to “subtle enlightenment” and subject’s spiritual awareness. Usually, it uses some words like “nature’s mystery”, “God-given inspiration”, “sudden enlightenment” to describe inspiration thinking in art creations. For ordinary people, content conception seems common. However, it has profound meaning for these highly sensitive artists. In their eyes, the content conception is the key point of artistic conception and stimulation of inspiration.

Certainly, accidental stimulation is not the only approach to acquire inspiration. Except for relying on objects, subjects can start from memory image and resort to creative imagination to fulfill the creation of art presentation. Chinese classical aestheticians hold the opinion that except for the direct perception: tacit understanding by stimulating, there is another way to acquire inspiration called intuitive perception by initiative acquisition that is through meditation and following natural conscience. Creation subjects overlook the universe in meditation, feeling the natural rhythm of universe and life; experiencing the real existing memory presentation that accumulated in deep-psychology; vivifying the intensions, thoughts, emotions and impressions which potentially live deep in the mind. These elements cohere and integrate with each other to reach a sudden open and clear condition where human and nature united as one, instead of being a chaotic state.

As Xie Zhen’s wrote in Si Ming notes on poets, any writing which is written in a quiet room is very hard to created, but never predict that the poet will appear in a sudden. As the wonderful sentences are germinated in heart, the writing brush is also tasted in mouth, no one is left alone to accord with the situation of Xing. And Zhang Yanyuan also wrote in The notes on famous painting of all generations, one should keep the spirit in mind and concentrate his attention to it, as well as Xie Hui, a person in the Ming dynasty, had wrote in The collected works’ preface of Fou’s sing: keep silent and think to keep spirits to be connected with interests. All these poetic prose demonstrate a kind of contemplation, tacit comprehension and an insight into the slightest details of the universe.

We can see that in the view of Chinese classical aesthetics, there are many approaches of acquiring inspiration, such as touched by the sceneries, intuitive understanding, stimulated by triggering medium, or potential gestation. Of course, both direct perception and intuitive perception are the form of intuitional experience, which don’t rely on reasoning. It is the stimulation of information hidden in the brain. And it is a conversion from subconscious to consciousness. Just as the poet Ai Qing said “The acquisition of inspiration is the most cheerful encounter between the poet’s subjective and objective world.” (Ai, 1979) This encounter is a kind of intuitional experience that looks for movement from stillness. It needs to eliminate other psychological distractions, stimulate neural regions in depressive conditions, and activate some relevant memory presentations that in the deep subconscious mind. Because of this, Chinese classical aestheticians emphasize that the acquisition of inspiration depends on the aesthetic subject to get rid of outside distractions and limitations of sense. They need a
kind of pure, empty and quiet mentality condition that cannot be disturbed to fully comprehend life consciousness. As Liu Xie’s Wen Xin Diao Long Thinking where he said polishing the thinking lies in the visional peace, purifying one’s soul and body and washing one’s mind in a clean and pure word. In a pure and empty aesthetic mental state, cranial nerve eliminates distractions and works at great tension around some question. All kinds of information materials in the mind are turned over, arranged and processed. As long as the time is ripe for, they would break through the coverage of subconscious, bring consciousness to the surface. Therefore, different from western aesthetics which emphasizes subject’s ecstasy; Chinese aesthetics pay more attention to cultivate subject’s aesthetic mood state. This empty and quiet state unifies nature and human, purifying the mind and arousing people’s interest. Jiao Ran in Tang dynasty had described this kind of state in a poetry that sometimes when encountering a fresh burst of inspiration, there would be a lot of creative creations as if by divine intervention.

4. The Stimulation and Trapping of Inspiration: “Ingenious Nature without Fabrication” and “Chasing and Catching in a Hurry”

Though inspiration is very important to the success of creation, it is not an easy or usual option. When talking about aesthetics, Chinese classical aestheticians always emphasize that it is out of human’s control. As Yang Wan had wrote in his The three days before midwinter: “one is easy to be drunk, but a piece of poet is got by chance”, the preface of autobiography of Xiao Zixian in the Book of Liang’s history had wrote that “Every time, when I want to write something, I am especially lack of the idea of my essay, and it all need to appear by itself instead of using power”; Lu Ji wrote in his Wen Fu: inspiration is based on my mind but its appearance is not controlled by myself. Ancient Chinese find out it is useless to spend time seeking poetry. At the same time, they search effective approaches to acquire inspiration by dialectical thoughts. Based on their creation experience, they made real and graphic revelation of the process of stimulating inspiration.

Chinese aestheticians firstly attach great importance to people’s physiological and mental mechanism. They suggest using the brain in a proper and balanced way. Liu Xie give some advice to writer in his Wen Xin Diao Long-thinking, “in writing, please be sure that your heart is clear and bright, and pay more attention on adjusting and dredging to make you have a good temperament. If you are upset, please don’t keep on writing, go out and make your mind open. It is that when you have a good mood, you can write something, or you never should write anything. Using a free way to relax yourself, a live and jovial mood to dispel tiredness.”

In his opinion, overtime thinking makes the brain overtired and dries up literary thoughts. And if writers violate physiological mechanism to create, at this
time, it will only disorder the mind. So it is important to adjust and guide human’s physiological and mental mechanism in order to clear and gentle the inner heart, then start to create better works. If feeling distracted and thoughts blocked, the creation subject should stop intensive activities and relieve fatigue in a pleased way, so that the inspiration can be stimulated. This is the reason that Xiao Zixian said: “ingenious nature without fabrication.”

Now it seems that the classical aesthetics’ view of ingenious nature without fabrication accord with the modern psychology’s research achievements. Modern psychology thinks that brain’s excitement and inhibition adjusted to the best state, is the physiological basis of inspiration production. If the brain has been working for a long time in a highly excited state, it will lead to extreme mental fatigue and inhibit the activity of the cerebral cortex. At this time, if the creation subject gives up focusing on meditation to have a rest. This will distract the subject’s attention and inhibit the original excitement center temporarily. But brain cells’ activities don’t stop completely, and the original surrounding cortex cells turn into excited state. The subconscious mind around the excited center will be stimulated. At that time, the activity of nerve cells increases greatly and a large number of potential stored information is inspired. Then it will get rid of the conventional way of thinking and develop freely and quickly, and break the fixed neural connections under usual inertial thinking mode. In the mean time, various presentations are disrupted and reassembled. The rigid thinking mode is destroyed and then the irregular connections and self-awareness are constructed again. At this moment, once the particularly active subconscious activities are impacted by some factors, they will rise to the ideological level just like the sudden volcanic eruption, and stimulate the burst of inspiration. Xie Lingyun, a famous poet had described his good verse in his dream as “spring grass grows on the side of pond”, “the verse is inspired by God”. It was obtained under the situation” thinking of poetry all day” while the inspiration appearing when he went to bed.

Therefore, if the writer feels thoughts blocked, there is no need to spend time making some reluctant creations. They might as well try to use the “digress reflection”, just as the saying goes” it is a better choice to appreciate flowers and listen to birds singing when there is no creational inspiration.” In Guan Zhui Bian, Qian Zhongshu displayed the process and motivating mechanism of inspiration in a vivid and lively way: At the moment of stimulating inspiration, generally the writer has given up long-time contemplation to other things, because further exploration is just a vain attempt except for increasing tension and anxiety. So they’d better start all over again, distract their attentions, change the environment and audio-visual field, and enlarge new information space. During the period of “digress reflection”, which seems useless and sell the dummy, though conscious activities have been interrupted, thinking activities don’t stop but converting to the level of subconscious mind. A number of information materials enter the subconscious field quickly with the track of former thinking,
re acted in the information database. An outcome of this is that the ideological gate opens, with sudden enlightenment and flow of inspiration. From this, “di gress reflection” is another way to break off the fixed thinking pattern. It seems accidental; in fact, it has other intentions of directionality. The subject’s internal feelings and logical laws provide guidance for the writer’s thinking. In this way can bring the breakthrough of unusual thinking mode (Qian, 1986).

The burst of inspiration is accidental and fleeting. Su Shi, a great ancient poet, had described the contingency and evanescence of inspiration as, “the moment a hare is flushed out, the falcon swoops down”, “subtle verse with fluent expression and quick-thinking”, “chase the wind and clutch at shadows”. That is to say the inspiration will disappear quickly if not obtained in time. The images in sudden insight are of instability, uncertainty and obscurity. They are partly hidden and partly visible and need the consideration, selection and extraction to become clear and lively. Just as Shao Yong, a philosophe of Song, had said in his *Leisurely and comfortable time:* “In my spare time, cultivating my spirit by writing make me feel happy, when I have not written anything, I can feel everything around me and forget myself, and the sentences naturally appear in my mind, then the poet is got by chance, there are some mysterious place where I can’t grasp, but just a little inspiration will make me be clear and bright. Thus, creation subject needs to properly mobilize and organize all the information materials by consciousness, and make them materialized in text form. By doing this, the clustered images under the depths of subconscious are organized and arranged in order and presented one by one. They may find the main idea, or complete the artistic images, inspire the plot and conception, or stimulate emotions, or collect some good phrases, and so on.

Of course, the control of consciousness should be moderate and cannot be too anxious, otherwise, going too far is as bad as not going far enough. At this point, the inspiration sparks in the bud are fuzzy and fragile. With the collision of consciousness and subconscious, the neuronal connections just established are still fragile. The brain is easily disturbed by distractions, transferring the excitement of cerebral cortex and killing the breakthrough ideas. Maybe it will cut off just established temporary contact between neurons, or cause the ossification and linearization of the contact, or influence each other, causing the disorders of mind and interrupting inspiration. Therefore, it is necessary to capture the inspiration in time and start the creation quickly as soon as inspiration comes. But don’t hurry to deliberate and refine details, otherwise, it is easy to block the channel where unconscious activities transfer to consciousness, making inspiration fled in a moment. Of course, the materialization of inspiration requires effective techniques and skills. In the hard process of writing practice, writers not only develop a sensitive thinking and intuition perception, but also become familiar with effective skills of materialization so that they are able to catch and present the sympathetic feelings vividly when inspiration explodes in a moment.

In a word, in the field of Chinese classical aesthetics, inspiration is an unex-
pected creative sudden insight after the progressive thinking broke off. There exists some inevitable factors behind the contingency: long-time stored knowledge experience provides optional premise for inspiration; long-time research guides the inspiration a right direction to achieve breakthrough; strong emotion requirements and indomitable urge for art objects provide supporting force; abundant energy, acute intuitive perception, accurate strain capacity, and the effective regulation of the brain’s excitement and inhibition are the physiological factors; the stimulation of outer information is the external cause of inspiration; a state of relaxed and clear mind is the psychological condition that conceives inspiration; skillful writing skills and literal skills provide necessary materialized foundation for chasing the valuable flash of inspiration timely.

It is worth mentioning that Chinese classical aesthetics’ inspiration thinking has the same subtlety with the Buddhism’s insight theory: In the way of thinking, it breaks the unexplainable conventionality; on the state of mind, it pays attention to intense meditation and concentration; as for spiritual experience, it is intuitive comprehension that goes beyond utility and correlates soul and object; on the achievements of thinking, it is unique quaintness that known by heart and out of the ordinary; during the process of obtaining mood, it catches unexpected insight after a period of contemplation; as for the external opportunities, it is the unexpected encounter between subjects and objects where the sceneries evoke subject’s feelings; about the subjective conditions, it is an unexpected cherishing by chance after voluminous knowledge accumulation and treasure storage.

Chinese classical aestheticians start from their own creation experience, on the base of the simple theory of interaction between the heart and the object, they make a real, tactful explanation and revelation to the thinking characters, artistic functions, acquiring methods, mental mechanism, gestation and catching of inspiration. This revelation doesn’t attach importance to the structure of logic, critical thought and system. It pays more attention to the life experience, intuitional understanding and description of inspiration. It values the creator’s life experience and knowledge accumulation and subject’s spiritual awareness. And it attaches importance to the cultivation of the subject’s inherent spirit, creation sentiment and aesthetic mental state. It values spiritual accordance and interaction between aesthetic subjects and objects. And it also encourages acquiring inspiration actively from the interaction between the heart and object for the moment. Though this theory of inspiration is not the same incisive as the western aesthetics, it has its own flexible explanation space and it reflects Chinese classical aestheticians’ precise cognition to the psychological characteristics of art creation. It has commensurability with western inspiration theory. Both can be implemented without coming into conflict. As a result, taking the theory of modern aesthetics and psychology as reference, digging deep into the Chinese classical aesthetics’ radiance of theory, and finding out the common principle of aesthetics between Chinese literature and western art, is undoubtedly an important academic sector that is worth researching and concerning under the context
5. Conclusion

Chinese traditional aesthetics of inspiration thinking can be roughly divided into two kinds: the type of intuitive perception triggered inspiration and the type of intuition understanding spontaneous inspiration. Both are intuitive experience, not involved in reasoning, paying great attention to the “wonderful” and the writer’s spiritual thinking. Chinese style inspiration thinking and Buddhist enlightenment have many similarities: in the way of thinking, they are innovative thinking, break through the thinking set, can only understand but cannot be expressed in words; in the creation of the state of mind, they are empty static state, without distraction; in the spiritual experience, they are intuitive wisdom, beyond utilitarian, all-inclusive, heart and things together; in the thinking achievements, they are unique, extraordinary and full of wit and humour; in the process, they have experienced a cudgel thinking and suddenly see the light; in the external opportunities, they are moved by sight, accidentally across between the subject and object; in terms of the subject, they all require long-term creative training and get excellent works by chance with a high skill.

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Travel as Subversion in 19th Century Black Women’s Narratives

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Abstract

Race and gender proved to be two daunting obstacles for African American and Afro-Caribbean women in the 19th century; thus success outside those domains often depended on women’s ability to keep a strong feminist stance. Prescribed female roles and racial prejudice hindered many in their ambitions and endeavors. This paper argues that some 19th century black women’s narratives, however, point to a body of resistance texts in contention with prescribed roles for such women. The textual personas of such narratives transcend the confines of home and racially-configured communities. In fact, the narratives foreground a female agency where personal worth and identities are reconstructed through traveling and working in the global arenas and economies of the 19th century world.

Keywords

Black Women, Agency, Liminality, Transnational, Travel, Subversion, Narrative, Transgression, Travel/Travelers, Imperialism and Female Agency

1. Introduction

International travel, both voluntary and forced, was instrumental in fostering a new world economic structure (capitalism) as well as central to inspiring a distinctive literary tradition of travel writing. Captive Africans as both the commerce and the creators of new world commerce developed a unique narrative tradition based on the results of their forced movement between continents. As primary victims of the new capitalist order, they were subject to categorizations and constructs that shaped their discursive presence in the resulting transatlantic discourse. Such categorization was particularly evident in representations of the black woman. Epistemological power and status of race and gender were, indeed, defining constructs for all new world women. While a genre known as the
slave narrative emerged as a counter discourse to such “master narratives,” investigations of a particular body of narratives focusing on black women’s travel interrogate the notion of geographic boundaries and social condition as defining factors of black womanhood in the construction of the African Diaspora of North America. Considerations of autobiographical narratives of black women, like those of Mary Jane Seacole (1990) and Nancy Gardner Prince (1995), deconstruct and liberate the image of black women from their textual status as inferior creatures bound to the plantation or the domestic sphere, because, though they were well aware of the proper comportment expected of free “ladies” of color and of their station, these women engaged in activities that would be considered by their contemporaries as extraordinary. Seizing travel and writing as a liberatory mode of expression, they gain agency as speaking subjects rather than as objects in a hegemonic master narrative.

2. Critical Scholarship

While there are numerous scholarly critiques of international travel, Edward Said’s classic study Orientalism (1978) was among the first to help inspire a distinctive literary analysis of travel accounts as a discourse. Others, especially feminist critics, followed with studies of these texts along gender lines. In her book, The Witness and the Other World (1991), for example, Campbell (1991) studied medieval European travel accounts, including works by pilgrims, merchants, and explorers. She interpreted these works in light of the Crusades, European expansion in the early modern era, and European domination of the world in modern times. By her account, pilgrimage and the quest for trade directly foreshadowed crusade and conquest, so Campbell viewed medieval travelers themselves as agents of European imperialism. Pratt (1992) offers a similar analysis in her book, Imperial Eyes Travel Writing and Transculturation. In the text, she looks at European travelers who visited Africa and South America during the 18th and 19th centuries. According to Pratt, accounts of these travelers contributed to imperialism by producing for imperialist readers a world that was ready for European domination.

This focused attention on European travel and travel writing loses sight of the larger global context of travel and travel writing, which were by no means monopolies of European and Euro-American peoples. Bentley (2004) studied travel narratives and suggests that:

In a way, all historical thinking and all historical writing deal with travel accounts. They do not necessarily involve the physical removal of historians’ bodies to distant lands, but they require historians to engage with different interests and perspectives in the world of the past, which some scholars have likened to a foreign country. Even one’s own society can seem foreign when a historian explores the changing political, social, economic, cultural, environmental, and technological conditions of earlier ages, not to mention different beliefs, values, and customs of times past. Yet travel ac-
counts representing the observations and experiences of individuals who visited foreign lands constitute a special category of primary source for historians (Travel Narratives).

There are, as well, others whose works have been paramount to the study here, among them Fish, 2004; Gunning, 2001; Foster, 1994 and Haywood, 2003. Davies’ (1994) seminal study, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. Boyce Davies’ work carefully re-situates black women writers as agents whose diasporic identities involve a unique critique of their impact on the process of empire-building in the Atlantic world.

The current work contributes to and extends this critical work by offering a rereading of literary representations of migrations or “removes” of black people, especially women in the U.S. and the Caribbean, where women become the speaking subjects of the migratory experience. The contention here is that such re-readings reveal a re-spatialization of the discursive as well as geo-political maps of the African Diaspora experience in the Atlantic world. Specifically, the travel narratives of Prince (1995) and Seacole (1990) deconstruct a cultural memory which has tended to marginalize black women’s impact on defining and shaping the contours and character of the historical discourse of African people in the Americas. Travel narratives represent one of these sites of cultural memory, and one can argue that the narratives of these women have the effect of disrupting the power status of race and gender as defining constructs; they further interrogate nationalist narratives of belonging and geographic boundaries as containing discourses of black female identity.

### A Theoretical Framework: Victor Turner and Liminality

Turner’s (1975) and van Gennep’s (1960) studies on liminality provide a critical perspective for this paper. One perplexing question might be how was travel possible when black women’s lives in the 19th century were among the most economically, socially, and politically circumscribed? From a critical perspective, however, it can be argued that black women have primarily existed in a liminal state in European and American societies, as social hybrids within the imperialistic, hegemonic patriarchies of these societies. States of liminality, as Turner (1975) suggests, represent unlimited possibilities from which social structures emerge. While in the liminal state, he argues, human beings are in between the social structure, temporarily fallen through the cracks, so to speak, and it is in these cracks, in the interstices of social structure, that they are most aware of themselves. It is thus a state that fosters identity-formation, as it is—in Turner’s perspective—a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point. During the liminal stage, the between stage, one’s status becomes ambiguous; one is neither here nor there, one is “betwixt and between” fixed points of classification, and thus the form and rules of both his/her earlier state and his/her emerging state are suspended. He argues that it is from the standpoint of this marginal zone that the great artists, writers, and social critics have been able to
look past the social forms in order to see society from the outside and to bring in a message from beyond it.

In van Gennep’s *rite of liminality* (1960), a phase of ritual passage/initiation, the liminal zone is potentially dangerous as the individual is between social roles. While this subaltern or marginal position may reassert the authority of one discourse or group over another, the oppressed group can also use their marginality to subvert the hegemony of authority (Forgacs, 2000). Black women then, in this paradigm, negotiate not only a world where sexism and racism collude to hold them prisoners, but they also liberate themselves by actively engaging their liminal space and renegotiating both geographical and discursive maps of their existence. The extent to which the experiences of travel reshape Prince’s (1995) and Seacole’s (1990) conceptualization of identity, belonging, and self is of critical importance in this study. Cultural identity, migration, homelessness, exile, and borders-metaphoric and geographic—are links in the expression of new world Africana women’s identity during and immediately after slavery; thus the study here elaborates this dimension of their experiences and underscores key insights about the uniqueness of their travel writings.

In the lifetime of Nancy Prince and Mary Seacole, prescribed female roles and racial prejudice hindered many in their ambitions and endeavors, but these particular writers reveal a constant resistance to the expectation that women’s work is nurturing children and husbands and that black women’s roles were those of servitude and enslavement. It is remarkable to note that the textual personas in these women’s narratives transcend the confines of their home and racially-configured communities. In fact, Prince and Seacole find their personal worth and identities working in the global arenas and economies of their 19th century world. If, as it has been suggested, Frederick Douglass’ narrative depicts the ontology of black manhood under slavery (Smith, 1991), then it might be claimed that Prince and Seacole, among others present an ontology of potential black womanhood during the height of liberatory struggle of African people in the New World. In real terms, acts/actions of self-creation represent dramatic assertions that black women are individuals and not just objects owned and trampled between the weight of socio-economic oppression. “Though they were living a restrictive environment…their movement is not [just ‘the break away from the imprisoning community [but rather] a reenactment of America’s secular drama of selfhood” (Foster, 1985: p. 33). Historically, not a lot of scholarly attention has been paid to 19th black women’s narratives. Fortunately, as a result of the publication of the Schomburg Collection of Writing by 19th century black women, a number of seminal studies have appeared in the last 30 years (Lowenberg & Bogin, 1977). One such scholar, Busia (1991) refers to women’s autobiography/biography as “a mode of rebellion and liberating history” (1991, p. 88). Thus the ability of women “to inhabit their own stories and to become the subject of their own histories can be of itself an act or gesture of rebellion” (Busia, 1991: p. 89). In the process they give a mediation on the community and by extension their role in it. Since Prince and Seacole could speak/write themselves, they are
the agents of their own texts. As articulating selves they were speaking and
self-inscribing selves, and this became their new identity in an environment that
attempted to discursively and physically contain them in an enclave of slavery
and servitude.

One scholar whose work occupies a seminal status in the field of travel narratives is Fish (2004). Her study, Black and White Women’s Travel Narratives (2004), undertakes critical examinations of the travel literature produced by Nancy Gardner Prince and Mary Seacole and a re-consideration of Margaret Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes (1844). All three women stepped outside the “women’s sphere” of domesticity and created public reputations for themselves, in part by employing travel accounts to help shape liberating role models for women contending against enforced domesticity. Fish (2004) makes clear that her goal is to ensure that Prince and Seacole, two black women, receive similar centrality to Margaret Fuller in global cultural studies. This work is part of a shift away from a white-dominated paradigm of travel literature studies. This re-centering of the black woman’s experience in travel provides a vastly more accurate and representative depiction of travel as a common human experience. Fish (2004) contextualizes Fuller, Prince and Seacole within the development of what she refers to as a resisting agency gained by an ability to transcend locations of containment and thus transgress predetermined social stations prescribed for them by white male power structures.

The journey accounts of Nancy Gardner Prince and Mary Jane Grant Seacole represent a case of intellectual and political resistance to racial and gender inequalities gained through their observations and experiences of travel and are, thus, subversive. Neither of them was on a tour for tourism’s sake or had the financial ability to undertake an extended voyage; rather, they were women of modest means who traveled with definite motivations which defied the oppressive institutions created for women of the 19th century which limited their access to professional opportunities, philanthropic and activist efforts, and reflective observation. They are contemplative testimonies on how some oppressed women gained a sense of themselves and their subjectivity through geographic shifts in time and space. Such descriptive cartographies give evidence of the writers’ witness to an imperialist agenda of American and European nations, one where the construction of state power and capital formations subordinated the lives of women, peoples of color, and numerous disenfranchised classes. Thus, as Fish (2004) has suggested, their travel accounts are in contestatorial dialogue with and subvert master narratives of nation and nationhood, class, race and gender.

3. Nancy Garner Prince: From New England Kitchen to Imperial Court

In his review of Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund’s study, Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations, Pulugutha (2011) notes their definition of travel writing as “an interdisciplinary genre.” Pulugurtha goes on to say that it “has
become an important area of study” and that it is “closely linked to issues of Imperialism, Diaspora, multiculturalism, nationalism, identity, gender, globalization, colonialism and post-colonialism” (2011, p. 1):

It brings into play ideas of transculturation, the idea of the centre and the margin, border crossings, hybridity, location and displacement. Travel entails a movement away from a familiar place and location to an unfamiliar one, a new place, one that is different from one’s home. This difference may often pose threats to one’s identity as it brings into purview ideas of the self and the other. Hence travel and travel writing raise important questions. How does postcolonial travel writing represent this idea of identity, self and otherness? (Pulugutha, 2011: p. 1)

The border crossing, self awareness aspect of travel is observed by Nathaniel Hawthorne in an 1826 travel sketch describing a trip on a steamboat across the Canadian lakes. Hawthorne wrote that as a passenger, one is afforded “opportunities for a varied observation of society” (qtd. in Haywood, 2003: p. 51). Hawthorne’s “varied observation” indicates that a large and diverse group of people was traveling in nineteenth-century America. Writing as a passenger “in the grand cabin,” Hawthorne describes the condition of travel and his fellow travelers from a position of privilege, glossing over passengers of the other sections as the “commonality and multitudes.” (qtd, in Haywood, 2003: p. 51). However, among those traveling on the decks of such steamboats were women whose voyages and reasons for travel contrasted greatly with Hawthorne’s.

One such passenger on ships like Hawthorne describes was Nancy Gardner Prince. Born a free black in Massachusetts, she wrote her narrative, A Black Woman’s Odyssey through Russia and Jamaica, in 1850. “Prince begins her narrative by identifying herself as what Frances Foster refers to as “a member of a strong but peripatetic family group” (Foster, 1985: p. 28):

I was born in Newburyport, September 15th, 1799. My mother was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts—the daughter of Tobias Wornton, or Backus, so called. He was stolen from Africa when a lad, and was a slave of Captain Winthrop Sargent; but, although a slave, he fought for liberty. He was in the Revolutionary army and at the battle of Bunker Hill…My grandmother was an Indian of this country; she became a captive to the English, or their descendants…My father, Thomas Gardner, was born in Nantucket; his parents were of African descent… (Prince, 1995: p. 1)

Her work is a unique opportunity to examine nineteenth-century racial and gender constructs through the eyes of someone who felt the effects of such oppressive social practices. And yet, Prince’s narrative is not about being oppressed but is a testimony to the contentious nature of travel for the oppressed in that hers is, instead, a journey of self-discovery and self-fulfillment. Prince’s narrative depicts a woman far from trampled by the weight of societal oppression. While still a young girl, she rescued her older sister from a brothel and worked to sup-
port her mother, sisters and brothers. She married Nero Prince, a founder and
Grand Master of the Prince Hall Freemasons in Boston (Grimshaw, 2010).

After their marriage, they traveled to Russia where Nero Prince was attached
to the court in St. Petersburg of Czar, Alexander I. While her husband was busy
at court, Prince demonstrated her entrepreneurial skills by opening a boarding
house and making and selling infant clothing. This activism on her part, even in
a state of homelessness (liminality) in a strange land, extends both the geo-
graphic and the literary map of 19th century black womanhood. Collins (1990)
notes that concrete experience, is important as a criterion of meaning in African
American women’s thought systems. Prince captures this concreteness in her
detailed descriptions of Russian life and remarkable adventures at the court of
Czar Alexander I at a time when most of her African American sisters in the U.S.
and the Caribbean were in bondage. Her text bears witness to and records re-
markable historical events. She not only comments on slavery in the U.S. but al-
so describes the great 1824 flood of St. Petersburg, the deaths of Emperor Ale-
ander I and Empress Elizabeth, and the political turmoil which followed the Re-
volt of 1826. Prince’s business grew, and she hired several employees. She earned
additional income by boarding children, and her interest in child welfare led her
to establish an orphan’s home in St. Petersburg, as well as assess the conditions
of people in the society around her, who seem to have been a class below her
own:

The first twenty months after my arrival in the city, notwithstanding my
often infirmities, I labored with much success, until I hired with and from
those with whom I mostly sympathized, and shared in common the disad-
vantage and stigma that is heaped upon us, in this our professed Christian
land … I [know I] am a wonder unto many, but the Lord is my strong re-

Prince’s narrative recounts details of historical events that she witnessed in
not only Russia, but in Copenhagen and the West Indies. She offered eyewitness
accounts of a major natural disaster, commentary on political upheaval in St.
Petersburg, and her insights on the great cholera epidemic of 1831 (Bosin, 2017).
As a black woman—and from her position of liminality in both her American
and Russian worlds—Prince renders a perspective on these events that is rela-
tively uncommon to the traditional telling of history. Her account of her near-
death experience in the 1824 flood, while personal, sheds light on the devastation
and loss that this natural disaster represented and adds a black female voice to a
trans national disaster that would have been covered otherwise by transconti-
nental white male voices from Europe and America:

I made my way through a long yard, over the bodies of men and beasts, and
when opposite their gate I sunk; I made one grasp, and the earth gave away;
I gasped again, and fortunately got hold of the leg of a horse, that had been
drowned. I drew myself up, covered with mire, and made my way a little
further, when I was knocked down by striking against a boat, that had been washed up and left by the retiring waters; and as I had lost my lantern, I was obliged to grope my way as I could, and feeling along the walk, I at last found the door that I aimed at. (1995: p. 25)

With journalistic precision, she recounts the bloody suppression of the uprising in St. Petersburg after the unexpected death of Alexander 1st in 1826:

“… [T]hey [ordered] the cannons fired upon the mob...the scene cannot be described; the bodies of the killed and mangled were cast into the river, and the snow and ice were stained with blood of human victims; as they were obliged to drive the cannon to and fro in the midst of the crowd, the bones of those wounded, who might have been cured, were crushed...The scene was awful; all business was stopped....” (Prince, 1995: p. 25).

This passionate description of the scene is among the rare eye-witness accounts of the event written by an English-speaking woman. As a black woman relating and commenting upon these events, Prince created a narrative of unusual interest, particularly as she often noted the favorable treatment she and her husband received abroad, contrasting it with the racism she encountered at home. Prince also discussed her friendships with the Russian royal family and with the American abolitionists Lewis Tappan and women’s rights activist, Lucretia Mott. Returning to Boston in 1833, she met a minister from Jamaica, where slavery had been abolished and became determined to go where, as she said, “I hoped that I might aid, in some small degree, to raise up and encourage the emancipated inhabitants, and teach the young children to read and work … and put their trust in the Saviour” (1995: p. 48). After trying unsuccessfully for some time to raise the money to go to Jamaica, she finally went in 1840 as a Christian missionary. In order to establish a “Free Labor School,” she writes, “I collected [money] in Boston and vicinity, New York and Philadelphia” [but] “was obliged to take fifty dollars from my own purse [to make up the required sum]” (1995: p. 60). Later, to establish a school for destitute children in Jamaica, Prince self-published the pamphlet *The West Indies: Being a Description of the Islands, Progress of Christianity, Education, and Liberty among the Colored Population Generally* in 1841.

Her pen became her armor in a war for justice when her narrative exposed conditions and circumstances in Jamaica immediately following emancipation, which she learns about first-hand from her conversations with ex-slaves themselves. The text provides a rare primary source of information on resettlement ships headed for Sierra Leone (1995: pp. 58-59) in one instance and ships of slaves headed for Texas in another where she writes, “Were I to tell all my eyes have seen among that people, it would not be credited” (1995: p. 61). Though Prince reports that all of her hard work for what became the Free Labor School in Kingston, Jamaica was sabotaged by corrupt co-workers, that she defined herself ultimately as a spiritual healer and entrepreneur is clear.
In her study, *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*, Moody (2003) observes that the narrative of Nancy Prince refuses to characterize black people according to the popular discursive portrayals, as pathologized victims.

Comparing *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1850) with the narrative of the West Indian slave Mary Prince (1810), Moody suggests that, while both texts condemn slavery and chronicle experiences of blacks in the West Indies (Mary Prince as a slave and Nancy Prince as a missionary), Nancy Prince’s autobiography “endorses self-reliance and depicts African Americans as figures of agency and accomplishment” (2003: p. 79). Frequently displaying an “embittered attitude toward Christianity” (2003: p. 91), Moody argues, “Prince gives us a travelogue that places greater emphasis on the secularity rather than the religiosity of her experience …” (2003: p. 91). By the end of the narrative, Prince has reconciled herself to herself in her own terms. She has become much more experienced, authoritative, and self-assured and contributed an invaluable record of life as a free black woman in the nineteenth-century by leaving an extraordinary legacy of achievement at the communal, national and international levels.

4. Mary Seacole, “The Yaller Doctress” (1805-1881)

Florence Nightingale is a name with which many are probably familiar as the nurse who was famous during the 1800s for helping soldiers during the Crimean War. However, not many people know of her contemporary at that time, Mary Seacole, who also served on the front lines of the Crimean War as well. Unlike Florence Nightingale, however, Mary Seacole was a Jamaican woman of color whose narrative (*The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, first published in 1857) respatializes Nightingale’s experiences and the global event which catapulted Nightingale to fame. As a black woman, Seacole had little support for her endeavors and also received little recognition for her extraordinary contributions to the sick and injured on the front lines of that great war in which she played no small part. Her narrative is composed of 19 chapters and a conclusion and is a geo-literary remapping of the maritime interstices of Nancy Prince. Like Prince, Mary Grant Seacole significantly intervenes within and reconfigures discourses of war, medicine, and imperialism in the 19th century Atlantic world (Fish, 2004). Born of a Scottish father and an Afro-Caribbean mother, Mary Seacole carved out an identity for herself by appropriating two roles similar to those assumed by Prince: healer and entrepreneur, both liminal designations for black women in the 19th century. On these foundations her identity was shaped. She claims public space and redefinition by negotiating her marginal status, conveniently alternating her self-proclaimed identities as “the yellow doctress” of the Caribbean and Central America and the battle-field “Mother Seacole,” healer of the Crimean War. Jamaica was at the time of her birth a slave society, and although technically “free,” Seacole’s family had few
civil rights, including the right to vote, hold public office and enter the professions.

However, the laws excluding women from the medical profession did not prevent Seacole’s mother from practicing the traditional female profession of healer outside of the mainstream. She was well known in the town and taught, what Seacole called “Creole medicine,” to her daughter; this included the treatment of wounds, diseases and other ailments. The Creole medicine which Seacole and her mother practiced was not only relegated to the margins by its association with Afro-Caribbean traditions but doubly denigrated because it was dispensed by women. As well as being a “doctress,” Seacole’s mother and then her daughter were also businesswomen who ran a hotel in Kingston frequented by British army officers. Seacole’s liminal existence as a Jamaican creole, a hybrid identity between the white British overlords and the Jamaican slaves, seems to have fueled her passion for travel, for as soon as she was able, Seacole took off on an extensive journey around other islands of the Caribbean, visiting Cuba, Haiti, the Bahamas, and Central America, as well as mainland America and England (“Mary Seacole,” BBC, 2008).

On these travels she expanded her knowledge to include European medical ideas which she added to her traditional repertoire. From her narrative account, as Sandra Gunning (2001) suggests, Seacole was consistently drawn to liminal spaces or “frontier sites” not frequented by women, especially women of color. Seacole negotiates the politics of white space and makes consciousness use of the ideological fissures that promoted her own economic aims. One of the first key points of information that she shares with the reader is how she became a “doctress,” as she was called in her day, following in her mother’s radical footsteps:

My mother kept a boardinghouse in Kingston, and was, like very many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress; in high repute with the officers of both services, and their wives, who were from time to time stationed at Kingston. It was very natural that I should inherit her tastes; and so I had from early youth a yearning for medical knowledge and practice which has never deserted me. When I was a very young child I was taken by an old lady, who brought me up in her household among her own grandchildren, and who could scarcely have shown me more kindness had I been one of them; indeed, I was so spoiled by my kind patroness that, but for being frequently with my mother, I might very likely have grown up idle and useless. But I saw so much of her, and of her patients, that the ambition to become a doctress early took firm root in my mind; and I was very young when I began to make use of the little knowledge I had acquired from watching my mother, upon a great sufferer—my doll (1990: pp. 1-6).

Seacole reports growing up in a loving environment where she was well-educated. She married Edward Seacole in 1836, but her husband died some months after their wedding closely followed by the death of her mother, all of which she recounts in the first few pages of the narrative. The remainder of the
text is devoted to her travels, healing and entrepreneurial activities in the Caribbean, Central America, and Russia.

The death of Edward Seacole and Mary's mother left her to fend for herself. This she did admirably by practicing the healing arts learned from her mother and creating medicinal remedies for all sorts of ailments. She took over her mother's boarding house and continued her work. Some of Seacole's customers were military doctors, she noted, from whose medical knowledge she benefitted. What she ultimately masters is a method of treating Cholera, the dreaded disease which killed hundreds of thousands in various parts of the world during the 19th century. While Seacole was in Panama, where she went to help set up a business with her brother, there was an outbreak of Cholera. Here, she was given the label, “the yellow doctress” by the local population who highly respected her because of her tireless efforts to treat the Cholera victims. Writing about this experience, she gives her assessment of the causes of the disease and the extraordinary autopsy she performed in order to better understand how to treat it:

… [They] never stirred a finger to clean out their close, reeking huts, or rid the damp streets of the rotting accumulation of months. I think their chief reliance was on “the yellow woman from Jamaica with the cholera medicine.” Nor was this surprising; for the Spanish doctor, who was sent for from Panama, became nervous and frightened at the horrors around him, and the people soon saw that he was not familiar with the terrible disease he was called upon to do battle with, and preferred trusting to one who was. It may seem strange, but it is a fact, that I thought more of that little child than I did of the men who were struggling for their lives, and prayed very earnestly and solemnly to God to spare it. But it did not please Him to grant my prayer, and towards morning the wee spirit left this sinful world for the home above it had so lately left, and what was mortal of the little infant lay dead in my arms. Then it was that I began to think—how the idea first arose in my mind I can hardly say—that, if it were possible to take this little child and examine it, I should learn more of the terrible disease which was sparing neither young nor old, and should know better how to do battle with it. I was not afraid to use my baby patient thus. I knew its fled spirit would not reproach me, for I had done all I could for it in life – had shed tears over it, and prayed for it. (1990: p. 44)

If we consider the regional…. affiliations encompassed by Seacole’s narrative, then Panama marks the geographical and social intersection of Native American, Anglo-American, African, and Latin American nationalities—that is, the complex political life of the American side of Paul Gilroy's black Atlantic, including but also extending beyond the British Caribbean empire, including other forms of imperialism and local contests for autonomy. This places Seacole in the position of participant-observer in a politico-economic drama which will ultimately draw the lines of U.S. and British imperialism in the Caribbean and Central American regions to the present day.
Her narrative also shows her sympathy for American slaves and exploited laborers engaged in building the canal. She does not fail to take the Americans to task for their racism, expressed even as they toast her for the outstanding work she did relative to the Cholera. She attempts to capture the speech as well as the tone of this racism:

“Well, gentlemen, I expect you’ll all support me in a drinking of this toast that I du —. Aunty Seacole, gentlemen; I give you, Aunty Seacole —. We can’t du less for her, after what she’s done for us —, when the cholera was among us, gentlemen —, not many months ago —. So, I say, God bless the best yaller woman He ever made —, from Jamaica… I expect there are only tu things we’re vexed for —; and the first is, that she ain’t one of us —, a citizen of the great United States —; and the other thing is, gentlemen —, that Providence made her a yaller woman. I calculate, gentlemen, you’re all as vexed as I am that she’s not wholly white —, but I du reckon on your rejoicing with me that she’s so many shades removed from being entirely black —; and I guess, if we could bleach her by any means we would —, and thus make her as acceptable in any company as she deserves to be —. Gentlemen, I give you Aunty Seacole!” (1990: p. 46)

Angered and unimpressed, Seacole replies:

“Gentlemen, I return you my best thanks for your kindness in drinking my health. As for what I have done in Cruces, Providence evidently made me to be useful, and I can’t help it. But, I must say, that I don’t altogether appreciate your friend’s kind wishes with respect to my complexion. … and as to his offer of blessing [for] me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without any thanks. As to the society which the process might gain me admission into, all I can say is, that, judging from the specimens I have met with here and elsewhere, I don’t think that I shall lose much by being excluded from it. So, gentlemen, I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners.” (1990: p. 46)

Seacole is careful here to invert perceived white male privilege by a careful rendering of speech which consigns the American soldier to an inferior class and educational status. Later, Seacole leaves Panama and returns to Jamaica in time to fight another cholera epidemic, during which time she learns of the dire situation of the British in the Crimea.

In 1854 as the Crimean War was escalating, Seacole heard about Florence Nightingale’s financing and organizing Britain’s first corps of trained nurses. She organized her supplies and travelled to London to see how she could help, perceiving the need for her skill in treating Cholera, Yellow Fever, typhoid and other disastrous illnesses. However, she was refused by everyone and the British War Office never even gave her an interview. Undaunted by the experience, though, Seacole decided to travel to the Crimea and build her own hospital with her own funding:
Heaven knows it was visionary enough! I had no friends who would help in such a project… who would understand why I desired to go, and what I desired to do when I got there. My funds, although they might, carefully husbanded, carry me over the three thousand miles, and land me at Balaclava, would not support me there long; while to persuade the public that an unknown Creole woman would be useful to their army before Sebastopol was too improbable an achievement to be thought of for an instant … (1990: p. 73)

She was well aware of the discrimination she might face, as well as potential other dangers, but despite it all, she decided to go to the Crimea as a sutler:

Need I be ashamed to confess that I shared in the general enthusiasm, and longed more than ever to carry my busy (and the reader will not hesitate to add experienced) fingers where the sword or bullet had been busiest, and pestilence most rife. I had seen much of sorrow and death elsewhere, but that had never daunted me; and if I could feel happy binding up the wounds of quarrelsome Americans and treacherous Spaniards, what delight should I not experience if I could be useful to my own…[that is the British]… suffering for a cause it was so glorious to fight… for!…I made up my mind that if the army wanted nurses, they would be glad of me, and with all the ardour of my nature, which ever carried me where inclination prompted, I decided that I would go to the Crimea; and go I did, as all the world knows. (1990: p. 75)

When Seacole arrived there in 1856, she tried again to join the Nightingale nurses but was refused acceptance. Constraints of race and class became a formidable barrier to sisterly cooperation in this case, and so she established the British Hotel near Balaclava using her own money. Seacole went regularly to nurse the wounded on the front lines of the battlefield dispensing medicine, meals and other supplies. When she used up all her savings to obtain necessities, she sold medicines and meals to the soldiers to keep going.

The Crimea, like Panama, can be seen as examples of Turner’s Liminal places or “third spaces.” And the work of healing, as well, represents a marginal activity (Victor Turner). Such third spaces can range from borders, to no man’s land and disputed territories, to crossroads, spaces which people pass through but do not live.Not only did she aid wounded British soldiers, but French and Turkish soldiers as well. At Scutari and Sebastopol, she becomes “Mother Seacole” no longer “the yaller doctress” of Panama and Jamaica. This new identity, as her narrative attests, is a bold assertion of self-affirmation, revealing her attainment of agency along with this geographical and literary remapping of her identity. She writes in the chapter, “My Work in the Crimea”:

I HOPE the reader will give me credit for the assertion that I am about to make, viz., that I enter upon the particulars of this chapter with great reluctance; but I cannot omit them, for the simple reason that they strengthen
my one and only claim to interest the public, viz., my services to the brave British army in the Crimea….I can follow a course which will not only render it unnecessary for me to sound my own trumpet, but will be more satisfactory to the reader. I can put on record the written opinions of those who had ample means of judging and ascertaining how I fulfilled the great object which I had in view in leaving England for the Crimea; and before I do so, I must solicit my readers’ attention to the position I held in the camp as doctress, nurse, and “mother” …. (1990: p. 76)

Even though she was a shrewd business woman with a hotel and sutler business, she focuses the reader’s attention to her charitable work as a healer on the battlefield:

My acquaintance with it began very shortly after I had reached Balaclava. The very first day that I approached the wharf, a party of sick and wounded had just arrived. Here was work for me, I felt sure. With so many patients, the doctors must be glad of all the hands they could get. Indeed, so strong was the old impulse within me, that I waited for no permission, but seeing a poor artilleryman stretched upon a pallet, groaning heavily, I ran up to him at once, and eased the stiff dressings… Then his hand touched mine, and rested there, and I heard him mutter indistinctly, as though the discovery had arrested his wandering senses “Ha! This is surely a woman’s hand.” I couldn’t say much, but I tried to whisper something about hope and trust in God; but all the while I think his thoughts were running on this strange discovery. Perhaps I had brought to his poor mind memories of his home, and the loving ones there, who would ask no greater favour than the privilege of helping him thus; for he continued to hold my hand in his feeble grasp, and whisper “God bless you, woman—whoever you are, God bless you!”—over and over again. (1990: p. 78)

Seacole’s experiences were vastly different from those of the majority of black women in the Atlantic world during the time period. In 1850 the infamous Compromise of the same year established a Fugitive Slave Law in the United States giving greater power to federal authorities in exchange for admission of California to the union as a free state. Black female slaves did not have the opportunity to learn to read and write and thus remained silent witnesses in their own narratives. With few exceptions like Harriet Jacobs, most of Nancy Gardner Prince’s American contemporaries did not achieve literary agency. In Jamaica, as in other Caribbean colonies in the early to mid 19th century, most black women were enslaved. Enslaved women of the U.S. as well as Jamaica suffered sexual abuse at the hands of their white masters, overseers, or relatives and friends of their white owners (Lowenberg & Bogin, 1977).

Mary Seacole, however, transgressed the limits set for most of her kind. Her travel represents a clear subversion of her destined place in the society. Moreover, she left her healing touch on many areas affected by epidemics such as cholera and yellow fever which few medical professionals of the time could even at-
tempt to cure. In her narrative, she tells us that through her common sense approach and gentle herbal remedies she was able to recover more people than the scientifically trained medical men. Hygiene, sanitation, warmth, and isolation as well as nourishing food were at the basis of her treatments, together with herbs, poultices, and mustard plasters. She wrote the following near the end of the narrative, she speaks of the potential contentious impact of her narrative while embracing the power of her voice as a black woman in transatlantic space:

In the last three chapters, I have attempted, without any consideration of dates, to give my readers some idea of my life in the Crimea. I am fully aware that I have jumbled up events strangely, talking in the same page, and even sentence, of events which occurred at different times; but I have three excuses to offer for my unhistorical inexactness. In the first place, my memory is far from trustworthy, and I kept no written diary; in the second place, the reader must have had more than enough of journals and chronicles of Crimean life, and I am only the historian of Spring Hill; and in the third place, unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all. (1990: p. 89)

The Crimean War offered a fertile ground for her talents, but Mary Seacole faced racism in her attempt to join the official group of nurses under the supervision of Florence Nightingale. In contrast to Florence Nightingale’s outstanding administrative and statistical achievements, Mary Seacole’s contribution was very much at the forefront of hands on healing out on the field of combat and at the docks among the wounded and sick. Because of her extraordinary work, Mary Seacole was awarded medals from Britain, Turkey and France in commemoration of her work with the soldiers of all nationalities. However, not until 1954 (the anniversary of the outbreak of the Crimean War) was her name resurrected by the Jamaican Nurses Association who wished to name their proposed headquarters in Kingston ‘Mary Seacole House’ (Robinson, 2006: p. 199). Finally, an exhibition called “The Wonderful Mrs. Seacole” went on display at the Florence Nightingale Museum in London in 2007. The occasion marked not only the 200th anniversary of the British suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, but it was also the 150th anniversary of the publication of Mary Seacole’s autobiographical narrative. Seacole’s narrative confirms that she, like Nancy Prince, was a successful negotiator of ambiguities and interstices, of a subversive movement from within the marginal spaces constructed for women like her into the international arena of a tumultuous century. As Sandra Pouchet Paquet (1992) notes, “Mary Seacole’s narrative celebrates her adventures and underscores her rejection of domesticity as restricting and frustrating” (1992: p. 651). Her risk-taking travel exploits, knowledge of business, herbal medicine and hands-on nursing are directly relevant to society today.

5. Conclusion

Bell Hooks (1990) argues that a definite distinction must be made “between that
marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance—as locations of deficit radical openness and possibility” (Hooks, 1990: p. 208) because, she suggests, it is a “site of resistance” being “continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is [blacks’] critical response to domination” (Hooks, 1990: p. 208). Prince and Seacole seized radical possibility; they made “radical creative space which affirmed and sustained [their] subjectivity” (Hooks, 1990: p. 209) and gave them “a new location from which to articulate [their] sense of the world” (Hooks, 1990: p. 209). Thus, despite the fact that the travel of these women was challenging without a doubt, their experiences can hardly be seen as locations of deficient but instead as what Bell Hooks sees as sites of radical possibility and spaces of resistance. As Haywood (2003) points out, “they were already defying accepted definitions of female behavior by choosing not to stay home in pre-determined spaces and roles … They were traveling, which itself constituted a potential breach of the public/private dichotomy, as traveling was an activity generally preserved for men”. As blacks traveling during the height of slavery and Jim Crow Segregation, they violated other social practices and faced the possibilities of immobility and enslavement or servitude (Haywood, 2003: pp. 55-56).

Prince and Seacole’s legacies directly confront racist/sexist myths about power and leadership that have evolved from patriarchal, Eurocentric definitions of these terms. Their specific “ethic of caring and personal accountability” (Collins, 1990: pp. 215-216) as articulated in their travel narratives shaped the nature of their lives, their identities and the work that they did in intruding a black female voice into the imperial narrative of the Atlantic world. Cooper (1990) asked in A Voice from the South who would capture the voice and achievements of black women. One could say that Prince and Seacole, for certain, knew that the task was one for the women themselves. Their narratives are arguably examples of activism and writing expanding the geography of the African Diaspora by renegotiating both the physical & discursive spaces to which 19th century black women were consigned.

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