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Annika Northrop
jiur@southern.edu

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Dr. Linda Tym

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Critics return to Christina Rosetti's "In An Artist's Studio" for her brilliance not only in language and structural choices, but also in depicting feminist themes of passivity and objectification. She writes in the structure of a Petrarchan sonnet; Petrarch, an Italian Renaissance scholar, created the structure and theme of an Italian, Petrarchan sonnet through penning a collection of poems admiring one woman ("Sonnet"). Rosetti's use of this sonnet form, then, is appropriate because of the tradition of Petrarchan sonnets associated with males admiring females from afar. Indeed, Rosetti's language suggests the artist admires the woman he paints; he paints her as figures with positive rather than negative connotations: "a queen in opal or in ruby dress, / A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens, / A saint, an angel" (lines 5-7). In fact, the woman "with true kind eyes" looks at the artist as he paints, and she is "not wan with waiting" (Rosetti, lines 10, 12). The woman is patient as she sits before the artist; she is the ideal passive model. However, the word "nameless" suggests that the artist paints her without preserving her individuality. His paintings turn her into objects of his imagination, and as she acquires the forms of queen, girl, saint, and angel, she becomes a nameless model. The last two lines of the sonnet illustrate her passive role in a subtle yet shocking shift: the artist paints her "[n]ot as she is, but was when hope shone bright; / Not as she is, but as she fills his dream" (Rosetti, lines 13-14). The repetition of the words "not as she is" reveals that the artist's portrayal of the woman's identity is inauthentic; he paints her as *he* wants her to be. This last word

"dream" intended to rhyme with "dim" in line twelve is the only slant rhyme in the sonnet. This diverted structure with a rhyme that is not consistent with the rhyme scheme emphasizes the theme: the artist's depiction of the woman's identity is twisted for his own benefit. Line nine reads, "[h]e feeds upon her face by day and night" (Rosetti). The artist performs the action of feeding, which is "[t]o gratify, minster to the demands of…to sustain" ("feed, v."). The artist, therefore, satisfies himself by viewing her face to produce in art. Since he paints her as he wants her to be for the purpose of gratifying himself, he relegates her to a sphere below himself; he is the creator, and she is the passive bearer of his interpretation.

This brief analysis of Rosetti's poem discusses the same themes of female passivity, the male gaze, objectification, and exploitation with which feminists from the nineteenth throughout the twenty-first century have wrestled. The first women's rights convention, the Senaca Falls Convention, was held in 1848, so when Rosetti penned her poem in 1856, society was just beginning to recognize feminism as an organized movement ("Seneca Falls Convention"). However, women did not win the right to vote until 1918 in the UK and 1920 in the US ("Women's Suffrage"). Throughout the twentieth century, then, feminist theorists were concerned with society denying women (as Other than man) subjectivity, like Simone de Beauvoior argues in *The Second Sex* (1949) and Virginia Woolf argues in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) relates the topic of men subjugating women to artistic production: Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to explain the root of the male gaze objectifying women in cinema. Since each woman, because of her "lack of a penis, impl[ies] a threat of castration and hence unpleasure," men try to escape this "castration anxiety" through voyeurism, "asserting control and subjugating the guilty person" (Mulvey 1961). Susan Stewart in *On Longing* expands the topic of voyeurism through terms of commerce. To Stewart,

voyeurism exists "not in the domain of lived reality but in the domain of commodity relations" (1240). While Stewart heightens the sense of dehumanization and objectification that voyeurism causes, Susan Sontag explores photography, specifically, as a tool of voyeurism. In *On Photography*, she explores the nature of photography as a "tool of power" and the implications of society using photography to exploit (Sontag 5). Twentieth-century theorists examine the ideology of a male society that subjugates women.

At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the conversation expanded from man's objectification and subjection of women, which creates women's need to reclaim their rights, to consider the legitimacy of originally creating that oppressive, patriarchal ideology. Authors began to both offer women the right to participate fully in society, and also to explore the implications and consequences of women's contributions. Specific to the realm of the aesthetic, authors Annette Kolodny and Isobel Armstrong extend the right to form aesthetic judgements to people who, historically, have not had power. In 1980 in "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," Kolodny questions who should have the right to make aesthetic judgements, because the way people view art impacts society. Armstrong, in *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000), expands this idea in arguing for a democratic aesthetic: the opinions of all people should matter. This idea implies that women can create their own ideology, make their own judgements, and create their own identities. If women have the right and the power to create their own meaning, then, authors like Donna Harraway and Sara Ahmed negotiate how women can form identity and agency within contemporary society. Ahmed, in *Living a Feminist Life*, agrees that the feminist movement is necessary because "sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression" exists and perpetuates in society (5). She then moves past this assertion to explore

how to negotiate a feminist identity where, historically, women have been pushed aside. The turn of the twenty-first century brought new discussion to theory that gave power to women to create their own meaning as separate from men.

Each of these theoretical perspectives reveal common trends in feminist concerns from the nineteenth century, when Rosetti penned her poem, until the twenty-first century. Contemporary authors Claire Harris in "After Image," Dionne Brand in "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater," and Ali Smith in *How to be both* engage with issues of male objectification of women to be able to engage with the process of women reclaiming power over their own identities, and they do so through depicting artists painting or photographing women. Harris and Brand are both Canadian and were both born in Trinidad; their work intersects feminism with a perspective of persons of color. Scottish author Smith, however, approaches feminism from the perspective of gender studies. While Harris in "After Image" depicts a woman in the process of reclaiming the power to create meaning, Brand in "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater" shows Mammy Prater as a woman who has already reclaimed that power. It is Smith, in *How to be both*, however, that reveals the true potential of feminism through the actions of an artist, Francescho, who uses their agency to give power and purpose to individual women and masses of poor workers.

Harris' "After Image" is a poem of twenty-nine lines separated into four stanzas where a woman, the subject of a male photographer's pictures, tells her story in first person. There is no discernable rhyme scheme or consistent rhythm; the poem is shot through with spaces, which gives the poem a fragmented feeling: "these past years dipped in the chemistry / of your rage

your jealousy / the calm selective exposures of tenderness" (Harris, lines 3-5). In these lines, the spaces between descriptions give separate portions of the story, which mirrors

distinct photographic snapshots: “these passed years dipped in the chemistry of your rage” utilizes enjambment so that although the words wrap around to the next line, the phrase still describes one connected snapshot; “your jealousy” describes another, separate shot, and “the calm selective exposures of tenderness” describes still another. The woman relates her romantic relationship with the photographer, therefore, in terms of his photography in both content and structure: she says their relationship is mixed with light and darkness, and she describes this relationship using fragmented snippets, which resemble separate pictures.

The mode the woman uses to tell her story mirrors the photographer’s treatment of her in their relationship and his depiction of her in his art. He gives her tenderness through “selective exposures,”; “selective” is “characterized by choice,” which means the man deliberately chooses to give the woman tenderness inconsistently (“selective, adj.”). Furthermore, exposure in photography controls how much light ends up in the picture; in other words, the man’s tenderness has shades. The choice of how much tenderness to give the woman and when implies that he gives her tenderness when it will benefit himself. This deliberate choice of withholding or giving places the man in the position of power in this relationship. Sontag describes photography as a “tool of power” and possessing a camera as having “transformed one person into something active”; “only he has mastered the situation” (5, 7). The man is, therefore, in the position of power not only in his relationship with the woman, but also as in his position as the photographer.

Holding the position of power allows the male to objectify the woman and dominate his portrayal of her. As the photographer, the man objectifies the woman through voyeurism: “having a camera has transformed one person into something active, a voyeur” (Sontag 7). Stewart describes the implications and consequences of voyeurism when she writes that the body

"becomes an image, and all manifestations of will are transferred to the position of the observer, the voyeur. The body exists not in the domain of lived reality but in the domain of commodity relations" (124). As the active voyeur, the photographer reduces the woman's body to a commodity. As an object, the woman's will and agency disappears; therefore, photography has the potential to "[turn] people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (Sontag 10). Mulvey examines the implications this has for the woman as the subject of a man's artistic production; in a patriarchal culture, woman is bound "by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (1955). In other words, when the male photographer objectifies the woman through voyeurism and exerts power over her as the active creator of meaning, he relegates her the passive participant, the carrier of meaning.

In the second stanza, the woman says: "you brought the same passion to this view as you / brought to life always framing

always testing / new angles sacrificing any truth to arrange reality / to trap title

make tame / my mouth wry" (Harris, lines 11-15). The woman addresses the man in second person; the direct address signifies that she assigns blame to him. Furthermore, the verbs in this section reveal the action of the photographer in controlling the woman and her surroundings to achieve his desired outcome: "framing," "testing," "sacrificing," "arrange," and "make tame" denote active manipulation. The adjective "wry" preceded by "my mouth" connects the emotional response of the woman to the man's manipulation. The *OED* defines "wry" as "[t]hat has undergone twisting, contortion, or deflection" and "wry look" as "one expressive of displeasure or dislike" ("wry, adj. and adv."). The woman's mouth, therefore, mirrors the man's actions as well as her own response to the situation. In his pictures and in her

facial expression, she is contorted; she does not enjoy the photographer's manipulations. Sontag writes that a photographer is inextricably bound with manipulating the photographed: photography necessitates a "shady commerce between art and truth"; furthermore, photographers are "always imposing standards on their subjects" (4). "Imposing" means that the photographer is projecting his will onto the photographed against the photographed subject's will. As a result, the woman came to depict the photographer's projections: "I came to illustrate detachment

crisp / sharp as the winter morning in the camera" (Harris, lines 6-7). The phrase "came to" is in the past tense; it implies that she becomes detached where she was not before, which suggests a lack of agency. As a result of her relationship with the photographer, she comes to look detached. Her look of detachment in the photos mirrors the photographer's act of detachment in the very act of taking a photograph. Sontag points to this connection between the photographer and detachment when she says that "[b]etween a photographer and subject, there has to be distance"; using a camera "can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment" (9). The photographer stands from a distance as the objective viewer and artist, and the woman comes to represent the man's meaning in the pictures rather than creating her own.

As the detached photographer, the man uses snapshots to impose his own meaning onto the woman as the subject; these isolated moments lead to a fragmented portrayal of her identity. The structure of the second stanza adheres to this fragmentation: every line except for the first and the last has one or more spaces, and only the first line is enjambed. This format creates the picture of eight snapshots, and the fragmented structure mirrors how the photographer manipulates the woman's reality using isolated moments. Sontag calls this way of seeing the world, through photographic snapshots, a way that "denies interconnectedness, continuity" (17). The pictures are a shallow version of the woman, and the man does not acknowledge the depth

and multiplicity involved in accurately depicting her. The woman says, “I have assembled me from all your pictures,” which implies that the photographer’s depiction of her is not whole: the multiple snapshots that the man takes are only an assemblage of his reality (Harris, line 21). The woman continues to name the pieces of herself that she has taken from the photos: “I took my feet from *woman outlined in* / *crumpled bed* my eyes from *crescent whites repeated* / my breasts from *whore*” (Harris, lines 22-24). Labeling the woman’s surface in an isolated moment does not acknowledge connection between the pictures, depth to the woman’s identity, and relationship between the man and the woman apart from how he arranges her. Sontag asserts that accepting this surface-level understanding “is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks” (17). Because the man’s interpretation of the woman lacks depth and because he relegates her to the role of object in snapshots, he limits her ability to actively exist and create.

The woman, however, is not content with remaining the subject of the man’s manipulations and the carrier of his meaning. The women relates her story through a poem, and “poetry” is from the Greek word *poētēs*, which means “doer, creator” (Cuddon 546). Although the man seems to have control over her, the very act of telling her story through poetry, using “I” and “you,” maintains her control over the entire poetic narrative: the woman is telling her own story in an act of creation. She further makes a stake on her agency in the way that she tells her story in a structure that mirrors the very mode of her exploitation; ironically, she uses snapshots of language to depict herself reclaiming her identity from within the photographer’s manipulation, just as the photographer uses isolated photos to create her in his art. In the same way that poetry takes ordinary ideas and language and transforms them into what is particular and new, the woman takes the photographer’s method and transforms it into an act in the process

of her own liberation. Specifically, at the point where she first reveals her negotiation of reclaiming herself and her agency, the format of the poem shifts to fewer spaces. She says: "I have come from your camera's clarity / to the shifting complexity of truth / I am whole again / I have assembled me from all your pictures" (Harris, lines 18-21). There are no spaces in this passage. When the woman says that she has reassembled herself from the man's multiple snapshots, she says she is becoming whole in a way that is connected. Her style reasserts her control over her identity. While the photographer's camera held a "clarity," the woman's assembly involves "the shifting complexity of truth"; the representation of her in a way that does not reduce her to a shallow object requires complexity. The woman does not lose herself within the man's manipulation; through a first-person poem, the woman is now the agent in the active, difficult process of rediscovering her own identity.

The end of the poem reveals the woman's continued, unfished negotiation with her reclaimed power. The word "assembled" is an action verb; the woman moves from the passive role to an active role. She is not content with the photographer's portrayal of her as a shallow object, which the last line of the poem indicates: "I know I am not through with you yet" (Harris 34). The *OED* defines the verb "am" as "[t]o come into existence," and "not finished" is a verb denoting continuality ("am in be, v."). The woman's struggle is a continued process, and this process explicitly involves the man as "you" in this phrase: the woman is reasserting her complex existence as a valued maker of meaning to the man who reduced her to an object.

Ahmed writes of women's efforts to exist in a world that relegates them to passivity: "Feminism requires supporting women in a struggle to exist in this world"; to combat this, "we create new ways of being when we have struggled to be" (14, 18). Kolodny expresses Ahmed's idea that feminists create new ways of existing in terms of language. She asserts that women

writers, who "come into a tradition of literary language and conventional forms already appropriated, for centuries, to the purposes of male expression, will be forced virtually to 'wrestle' with that language," and they do so in an effort "'to remake it as a language adequate to our conceptual processes'" (Kolodny 2150; Stanley and Robbins qtd. in Kolodny 2150). Harris' poem depicts the woman's wrestle with how to remake her world and how to create her own identity and meaning through language: the poem depicts her evolution into the maker.

While Harris depicts a woman's continual process of reclaiming power to create her own identity, Brand's "Blues Spiritual of Mammy Prater" shows a woman who has already reclaimed this power. The poem is fifty-one lines of free verse; however, the length, the lack of any rhythm or rhyme, and the poem spread over three pages appears like prose shortened and refined into poetry. Before the poem begins, Brand includes the words in italics: "*On looking at 'the photograph of Mammy Prater an ex-slave, 115 years old when her photograph was taken*'" (14). These words signal their exclusion from the rest of the poem yet give valuable context. Mammy Prater is likely a Black woman who lived a life of toil. The phrase "was taken" is also noteworthy for its passive tense. The photographer does not perform the action in this poem; in fact, the photographer is too insignificant even to be named. The only other time the author references the photographer is in line forty-six, and the author describes the photographer as "superfluous," which means "unnecessary, redundant" and "trivial" (Brand, line 46; "superfluous, adj. and n."). The artist is irrelevant because the full significance of the photograph rests on Mammy Prater. Since she is the subject who takes control of the photographing process, the photographer is insignificant.

Brand uses repetition, the most prominent poetic device in this poem, by repeating the phrase "one hundred and fifteen years" four times to emphasize that Mammy Prater waits for

one-hundred and fifteen years to take her photograph (lines 2-3, 13, 18, 33). Brand repeats "she waited" or "to wait" or "waiting" eight times in the poem (lines 1, 2, 5, 16, 19, 27, 33, 42). Mammy Prater waits until "the technique of photography was / suitably developed / to make sure the picture would be clear / to make sure no crude daguerreotype would lose her image" (Brand, lines 5-9). The "daguerreotype" was "[o]ne of the earliest photographic processes, first published by Daguerre of Paris in 1839, in which the impression was taken upon a silver plate sensitized by iodine, and then developed by exposure to the vapour of mercury" ("daguerreotype, n."). This process took 60-90 seconds of the subject of the photograph sitting absolutely still. It is not that Mammy Prater is uncapable of sitting for 60-90 seconds; the repetition of "waited" as well as "one-hundred and fifteen years" indicates that Mammy Prater is not only used to, but also fully capable of waiting. Instead, Mammy Prater does not want to use a daguerreotype because she is afraid the picture will not be clear and "lose her lines and most of all her eyes" (Brand, line 10). She waits "for a surface sensitive enough / to hold her eyes" (Brand, lines 35-36). Mammy Prater waits until a photograph will capture accurately the full depth and breadth of her eyes, and the action of deliberately choosing to wait places Mammy Prater in the active position.

Mammy Prater uses her active position to depict her eyes through the photograph. Brand repeats "her eyes" or "those eyes" eight times in the poem (lines 4, 10, 17, 32, 36, 38, 41, 51). Interestingly, Brand never directly describes Mammy Prater's eyes, but instead, references Mammy Prater's eyes through analogy. Brand describes Mammy Prater's eyes as "her will," which means an "inclination *to do* something, as contrasted with power or opportunity" (line 41; "will, n.1"). Mammy Prater's eyes are synonymous to her intentional choice of taking her photograph, regardless of whether or not she has had power in the past. In fact, as a slave, Mammy Prater has not been in the position of power, yet in the present moment, she uses the

active position to photograph herself. Brand also describes Mammy Prater's eyes as "her meticulous account" (line 41). Her "account" is a synonym for her story. Mammy Prater's story lies in her eyes: she "took care…to write in her eyes what her fingers could not script" (Brand, line 38). Mammy Prater's eyes, then, are her account of life, but what is significant is that Mammy Prater is the author. Though she was formerly subjugated, she has regained the position of power to create her own meaning in her story. Rather than the photographer imposing his own meaning onto the subject, the subject herself creates.

Indeed, as a former slave, Mammy Prater's life was pain and labor-filled. Ahmed writes that the sexual exploitation and oppression that endure in the world "cannot be separated from racism," and slavery is "central to the exploitation of labor under capitalism" (5). As a former slave, Mammy Prater experienced this racism and exploitation of labor. She became "a mule" and ploughed fields, which left "their etching on the gait of her legs" (Brand, line 25). These years of pain left their mark on the way she walked, and "her feet had turned to marble, / her heart burnished red" (Brand, lines 30-31). Marble is "a type of something hard, inflexible, durable" and also associated with tombstones ("marble, n."). Mammy Prater is old and near death, and her marble feet in this photograph document her life of subjugation. Her heart compared to the color red signifies that Mammy Prater's heart is flaming and angry, and Brand names the subject of this hatred in line fourteen when Mammy Prater wonders if her patience will allow her "to avoid killing a white man" (14). The article "a" signifies the lack of particular: white males are the object of Mammy Prater's anger. They are the primary figures who have exploited her.

Mammy Prater, however, is unique in the way she handles this exploitation. Her endurance without retaliation reveals her story as an example of "feminism as happening in the

very places that have historically been bracketed as not political" (Ahmed 4). For years, Mammy Prater endured misuse in silence because she was in the position of subjugation rather than power, and to speak out would have meant to be discounted, bracketed. Mammy Prater's way of responding to this suffering is to wait for the day when she can take control of her identity and tell her story.

Mammy Prater tells her story through her photograph; specifically, she waits "to put those eyes in it" (Brand, line 4). "Put" is a word in which "the application of force is expressed, or more or less implied" and which means "to exert oneself; to strive *for* a specific goal" ("put, v."). Mammy Prater exerts force in striving to place her story in a photograph; she exhibits control over the way that others view her. This depiction of herself is a legitimate form of art. According to Armstrong, art should "uncoupl[e] the aesthetic and privilege" (4). In fact, "the basis from which to develop a democratic aesthetic," the meditation and feelings that produce art, is common to every person and the ordinary person (Armstrong 3, 2). In other words, the ordinary, unprivileged person's judgements, which flourish into art, matter. Mammy Prater personifies this ideology in the way she, as a formerly set-aside slave, takes ownership of her story produced through art. She controls the representation of her identity, which is legitimate because of the right that every person has to produce art based on their own experience and significant both because of the lack of control the photographer has, and also because of her former status as a subjected slave. Mammy Prater even took control of the photographing process, which is typically controlled by the photographer: "she planned it down to the day, / the light, / the superfluous photographer / her breasts, / her hands… / her eyes" (Brand, lines 44-51). Mammy Prater has already reclaimed this agency. She uses her photograph as a culminating act of displaying her reclamation and reassertion of control over herself and her identity.

In both Harris and Brand, women who were once objectified and subjugated actively take back their agency. In Ali Smith's *How to be both*, however, one artist uses their agency to influence others. Smith studied at Cambridge for her Ph.D. in American and Irish Modernism; she is an experimental writer who frequently subverts expectations for the narrative conventions of plot, setting, form, point of view, language, and characterization. Amy Elkins interviewed Smith for the Los Angeles Review of Books, and Elkins expertly words Smith's craft:

> You'll have a difficult time describing the work of novelist Ali Smith without using analogies to the other arts: a wordsmith, hammering out new shapes of the novel form; a collage artist, making texts that cut and paste across history, medium, and personhood, revealing the edges between things; a sculptor chiseling our contemporary moment with its fractured landscapes of identity into glaring relief.

In *How to be both*, Smith blurs lines and thwarts expectations in a brilliant maneuvering of time, space, language, and characterization. Smith challenges normative single-setting texts by setting George, as the main character, in twenty-first century Cambridge and Francescho, as the second main character, in fifteenth century Renaissance Italy. George is navigating her mother Dr. Carol Martineau's death, and these two settings connect through Carol's love for Francescho as a Renaissance painter. Carol knows Francescho as Francesco del Cossa, who painted a fresco at the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, Italy as their most well-known work. The narrative not only flashes between these two settings, following George and Carol's experience as well as Francescho's personal experience and artistic career, but also converges the two settings with Francescho trailing George as a ghost.

Carol's character pushes against society's conventional injustice. Since Carol is dead, the reader encounters Carol entirely through a third-person, limited point of view. The narrator

focuses on George's thoughts and memories, which paint Carol as continually disturbing and displacing through her language and actions. Carol is a woman with feminist tendencies: "the wrong sort, or bad sort, the one who speaks her mind, who writes her name, who raises her arm in protest" (Ahmed 6). Carol speaks out and, therefore, is an integral member of the feminist community. Carol has complementary degrees in art history and women's studies, holds "quite an important job at a think-tank," and publishes opinion pieces in the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, and American newspapers (Smith 20). After Helena Fisker, George's best friend, hears about Carol through George, she describes Carol as "[q]uite a political person" and a figure who "did disruptive stuff on the net" (Smith 99). Carol was one of the original four designers of "Subverts"; the newspapers called her one of the "Subvert interventionalists" (Smith 69). Subverts were pictures or pieces of information that would randomly appear on webpages; specifically, Carol would "subvert political things with art things," and vice versa (Smith 69). Carol's first Subvert was a list of female art students who went to college in London during three years in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. This list had the name of Edna, one of the most talented art students, whose husband suppressed her creation of art (Smith 93-94). When the papers reveal Carol as associated with Subverts, the newspapers call Carol "gauche," which is "[w]anting in tact or in ease and grace of manner, awkward, clumsy" (Smith 70; "gauche, adj."). The newspapers dismiss the Subverts as if calling Carol awkward and clumsy will negate the purpose of her work. Ahmed calls such instances where feminist perspectives are disregarded "brackets," where a person "put[s] questions like phallocentrism or sexism into brackets" to be able to engage primarily with patriarchal concerns (8). The newspapers' dismissal of Carol's activism illustrates an instance of the feminist perspective being bracketed—set aside, discounted—as if the "gauche" style of the Subverts would negate the potential power

they had to incite change. Carol responds to this dismissal by reinventing the world from her own point of view. She takes a word with negative connotations and changes it into a trait that a person should aspire to be. She subverts criticism by turning it into a strength: “And gauche, she says, is one of my favourite words. Always be gauche, George. Go on. I dare you” (Smith 70). Carol’s response is “a description of the world from the point of view of not being at home in it” and, through this experience, Carol “[comes] up against a world” and “[tries] to transform a world” (Ahmed 13, 14).

Just as Carol’s character is subversive and, therefore, receives criticism for her nonconformity, Francescho’s character and art is subversive. However, Francescho’s disruption is subtle: Francescho outwardly conforms to conventions of a Renaissance painter. Francescho was born in Ferrara but works as a painter in the cities of Bologna, Venice, and Florence, the birthplace of Renaissance painting. The Italian Renaissance, a period between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, held a revival of interest in classical antiquity. Nobles or the Catholic church commissioned much of Renaissance art, which resulted in strong religious themes; artists also drew inspiration from classical themes and historical situations (“Renaissance Art”). As a Renaissance painter, Francescho’s painting seemingly conforms to these themes. Borse, the Duke of Ferrara, commissions Francescho near the end of their life to paint three months of a whole year in a fresco on the walls of Borse’s palace (Smith 291). This fresco not only was commissioned by a wealthy noble, but also incorporates classical mythology and religious themes (Smith 294). This conformity suggests Francescho is a typical Renaissance painter.

The reader encounters Francescho’s story through Francescho’s ghost, who narrates their story retrospectively, but in the first person, which gives the reader a more direct account of Francescho’s experience. Furthermore, Smith uses language for Francescho’s story that is more

radical and slippery than the language she uses in the Cambridge setting: sentences become longer and run together with frequent colons, dashes, and italics. This scattered form closely mirrors Francescho's thought process: "hey : you : can't hear me?...call me unknown painter of the school of whatever you like I *forgive you* I don't care—don't have to care—good" (Smith 191). The run-on sentences, uncommon punctuation, and radical shifts between word formatting show a disregard for sentence borders and typical expectations for punctuation. This first-person insight shows a thought process that reveals subversion in Francescho's characterization.

As Francescho narrates the early days of their life, Francescho describes their mother's passing away. Francescho grieves her loss by wearing only their mother's clothes until, finally, Francescho's father proposes that Francescho "wear [their] brother's clothes" to obtain proper schooling and training as an artist because, the father says, "nobody will take you for such training wearing the clothes of a woman" (Smith 217, 218). From then on, Francescho studies and practices to become an artist wearing clothes characterized as men's clothes. From the beginning of the narrative, Francescho does not describe themself as female. Only later in Francescho's narrative does the reader discover that Francescho was born with biologically female body parts, but lives as a man to further their career as a Renaissance artist. Smith, through Francescho's identity, blurs distinct lines to disrupt expectations for gender. Milly Weaver, in "Reading Words alongside Images: Ali Smith and Visual Portraiture," discusses the assumption that Francescho is male because of what Francescho wears as revealing that Smith's "emphasis on the perception of others stresses that in discerning gender, outward appearance is determinative" (544). Smith describes Francescho's identity as dependent on outward appearance, or clothes, and when the reader expects Francescho to be male because of the clothes Francescho wears, Smith covertly exposes the reader's own bias and the danger of

expecting this kind of gender clarity. Smith's work "stage[s] conversations to do with gender and identity, and with the limitations of narrow categorization in both respects" (Weaver 543). By assigning Francescho a rigid gender identity, the reader would limit Francescho's potential as a subversive character.

In fact, Francescho's fluid gender identity contributes to motivations that are radically different from typical expectations for male motivations. Francescho has a friendship with a rich boy named Barto. When Barto takes Francescho to a "house of pleasure" in Bologna, Smith details Barto and Francescho entering this experience differently (Smith 262). Barto seeks an experience in this pleasure house that mirrors the male photographer's in "After Image": just as the photographer exerts his dominant position over the photographed woman to exploit her for the benefit of his art, Barto also intends to be in the dominant position and take pleasure from another person. "Pleasure" is the "indulgence of physical, esp. sexual, desires or appetites; sensual or sexual gratification. **to take one's pleasure:** to have sexual intercourse" ("pleasure, n."). In the phrase "to take one's pleasure," the word "take" is worth noting for its function as a verb performing action; to take is "to gain possession of…by force" ("take, v."). To tell Francescho that they are going to the pleasure house, Barto says, "[w]e're going hunting" (Smith 262). The word "take" also has explicit connotations to hunting: "of an animal: to seize or catch (prey)" ("take, v."). Barto describes his expedition in this pleasure house through the metaphor of hunting, and comparing sexual intercourse to hunting implies taking possession of prey by force. Barto, therefore, intends to take the pleasure of another person for his own benefit. It follows that Barto perpetuates the ideology that woman is simply the bearer of meaning. Mulvey explains the root of this ideology that man creates meaning and woman simply carries it through psychoanalysis and Freud's concept of the castration complex. Because the woman represents

the reality of the male's fear of castration, the woman is the bearer of this fear; therefore, for a man, "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person" (Mulvey 1961). In Mulvey's terms, Barto gains pleasure from controlling women because they are guilty of representing what he fears. Following this reasoning, women cannot exist apart from their relation to the phallus. They cannot, therefore, create their own meaning, agency, and power; they are subject to man's control.

Barto's expectations are grounded in the typical transactions of a sexual economy with men as the figures in power. Within "power" as "the action of structuring the possible field of action of others by the deployment of one or more reigning institutional codes," the prostitutes' possible field of action is restrained by the codes governing sexual transactions (Straznicky 613). For example, when a man enters a pleasure house, he carries the expectation that he will pay a woman for sexual pleasure, and the woman will deliver. The possible actions are governed by and restrained to the specific codes of this sexual transaction. In this house of pleasure, the woman assures Francescho that "the friend you came in with, it's already arranged it's on him" (Smith 263). In other words, Barto has already arranged to pay the woman to give sex to Francescho. The woman continues to act in a way that fulfills her part of the sexual transaction by pulling Francescho into another room and "shut[ting] the door" (Smith 263). Francescho says, the woman "was pulling me towards the bed" and "unbuttoning her front" (Smith 263, 264). By taking Francescho into a private room and undressing, she prepares to give Francescho sex to uphold the terms of the transaction.

Francescho's behavior, however, does not conform to that of a man entering a house of pleasure to engage in a sexual transaction. Before Francescho and the woman enter the private

room, Francescho says the woman "tried to take my satchel from me but it had my drawing things in it : I hung on to it" (Smith 262). Francescho values their drawings more than pleasure. Moreover, when the woman pulls Francescho towards the bed "by the strap of the satchel," Francescho "pull[s] against the strap back towards the door" (Smith 263). Instead of moving towards the bed to have sex, Francescho backs away from the bed. When the woman takes out her naked breast, she asks, "Don't you like me?" producing "a shrug" from Francescho (Smith 264). Francescho's shrug shows their indifference at her breasts as a commodity of sex. The woman responds to Francescho's indifference by offering other services to fulfill the transaction: "We'll get you another girl…You like yellow hair? You like younger?...You prefer a man?" (Smith 264). After Francescho shows no interest in these other options, the woman asks who they would like to have sex with, and Francescho answers, "I don't" (Smith 264). Instead, Francescho "sat down on the bench at the end of the bed : I opened my satchel, unrolled the paper, got out my board" (Smith 265). By indicating that they do not want to have sex and beginning to paint the woman instead, Francescho thwarts expectations for the sexual transaction.

Francescho's indifference toward having sex with the woman indicates that Francescho does not see her through the lens of desire and pleasure as a commodity to be exploited for their own sexual pleasure. Francescho instead looks at her through the eyes of an artist: the light was "candle-undulate : it was best over the bed where she now was, dark and prettily pointed of face against the bedclothes" (Smith 265). In *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry describes beauty as necessarily inciting replication: "when the eye sees someone beautiful, the whole body wants to reproduce the person" (4). Francescho recognizes the beauty in the woman and, as an artist, desires to replicate her on paper. Francescho does not produce this replication, however, as

the one in the position of power, who is intending to subjugate the woman. The *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* discusses power in terms of how it affects the subjugated: power "is in its own right a productive force, that it makes possible specific conceptions of what one can know about oneself" (Straznicky 613). As typically the one subjugated, the woman has specific conceptions of who she is that follow from her position within the power structure. This view of her identity extends to reveal her expectations for how Francescho would depict her: "I've been done before…Your kind usually likes to draw more than one person, no? People in the act, or –. *Oh*" (Smith 267). The woman thinks that Francescho would draw her as an object, a sexual commodity; she lumps Francescho into the "kind" of artist who draws pleasure and sells it, but the dash reveals a pause and "*Oh*" with italics for emphasis shows that the woman is surprised by the painting. Again, Francescho subverts her expectations. When the woman asks for the painting, Francescho gives it to her for the price of lying to Barto and telling him that Francescho had a good time (Smith 268). The woman asks, "[t]hat's all you want for it?" (Smith 268). Rather than take pleasure from the woman, viewing her as an object for sex or an object to be exploited for the sake of their art, Francescho *gives* to her. Francescho gives her the painting without asking for sex, and in tearing down the conventions of the sexual transaction that typically would place Francescho in the position of power, Francescho frees the woman from viewing herself as subjugated.

The reader can assume that this drawing depicts the woman as a person rather than a commodity, which then frees the woman from viewing herself as such, because of the effect that Francescho's drawings have on multiple other women in the pleasure house. Kolodny emphasizes that critics should study "'[t]he way art helps people to order, interpret, mythologize, or dispose of their own experience'" (Robinson qtd. in Kolodny 2149). Indeed, Francescho's art

helps its subjects re-interpret their own experience. After Francescho draws a number of girls, the Mistress of the house calls Francescho to her and demands that they stop drawing at the house. She says the pictures cause the girls to "get airs and graces. They come to my rooms and they ask me for more of a cut"; furthermore, "they decide to choose a different life. And all the ones who've gone have left by the front door, unprecedented in this house which has never seen girls go by anything but the back" (Smith 275). Using the front door is "unprecedented" because it implies the girls' bold renunciation of their role as less important than the customers who use the front door. Marxist criticism connects power structures to art and the effect that art has on life: it is, indeed, possible for art to "transform life" and "[serve] as a vehicle of emancipation" (Kellner 98). Francescho's art subverts typical power structures and structures of exchange in a house of pleasure; in tearing down these structures, Francescho makes it possible for the prostitutes to view themselves as worthy of a different life. As a result of Francescho's pictures, the women are emancipated: they gain the confidence to exit by the front door, no longer a commodity that customers push aside and that the mistress relegates to the back door. The art thwarts the expected norms for the lives of prostitutes and paints them as worthy of pursuing a life that would give them more. Whereas both the lives of the woman in Harris' poem and Mammy Prater in Brand's were changed by the acquisition of power, Francescho uses their own power to gift power to multiple women. This embodies the idea of the potential that feminist theory has: "We use our particulars to change the universal" (Ahmed 10). Francescho uses their particular identity to give worth and agency to others.

Francescho's ability to change others' lives expands as their career continues. Smith connects the two settings of her novel through Carol's love for Francescho's art, and while Carol is still alive, she takes George to visit the Schifanoia Palace at Ferrara where Francescho's

crowning fresco, commissioned by Borse, still exists. As Carol stands before this fresco, her analysis of Francescho's art reveals the mixing of the political with art and the tendency of the art to lack concrete borders, which are themes that run throughout the novel and closely connect to Carol's own characterization. About the fresco, Carol says:

> Things happen right at the front of the pictures and at the same time they continue happening, both separately and connectedly, behind, and behind that, and again behind that, like you can see, in perspective, for miles. Then there are the separate details, like that man with the duck. They're all also happening on their own terms. The picture makes you look at both—the close-up happenings and the bigger picture. Looking at the man with the duck is like seeing how everyday and how almost comic cruelty is. The cruelty happens in among everything else happening. It is an amazing way to show how ordinary cruelty really is. (Smith 53)

Smith writes her first sentence as a run-on, which heightens the content of the sentence discussing the interconnectedness of the art from the particular, small details of the picture to the larger painting. The words "on their own terms" indicate nonconformity. Carol's note that looking at the picture reveals "how everyday and how almost comic cruelty is" shows how Francescho easily integrates cruelty into the picture, which reveals an instance of Francescho's subtle, subversive advocation for political justice. In Francescho's final act of political commentary, Francescho paints "next to the figure of Borse at the heart of the crowd waiting for justice a hand—with nothing in it" (Smith 322). Francescho then leaves Ferrara.

Francescho's work suggests Borse's oppression rather than justice, and it does not stand unrecognized. In fact, it incites inspiration among the local field workers, who linger under Francescho's justice scene, let flowers hidden in their jackets fall to the ground, then bow to

Borse (Smith 355-356). Just as Francescho outwardly conforms to the conventions of a Renaissance painter, the commoners are outwardly compliant: they move on from the painting when asked, and they bow to their ruler as expected. However, the commoners are an example of "the normative impact of art on life" (Kolodny 2149). In small, subversive acts of defiance, they linger under the justice scene and dedicate flowers to it. The workers honor the impact that Francescho's art has on their lives in igniting a candid spark. The art's spark has the power to illuminate the recognition of injustice and, through that recognition, incite advocacy.

Francescho is not considered the best, most renowned Renaissance artist of their time and, in fact, frequently laments Cosmo's notoriety above their own (Smith 194-195). Francescho's work, however, incites movement and change. It impacts individual women and poor masses of workers in an authentic portrayal of women without exploitation and in a fresco's political advocacy against injustice. Smith paints a subversive novel with characters that blur lines of gender identity and with narrative conventions that defy convention. This subversion tears down structures of power to give women the power to find new and different identities and agency, and it also tears down structures of power to give masses of ordinary field workers hope.

In "After Image," Harris depicts a woman who has been exploited, objectified, and relegated to the realm of passivity actively in the process of reclaiming her right to create her own existence. Just as the photographer portrayed her through isolated moments without depth or connection, the woman uses a structure that mirrors snapshots to depict her experience. Since she writes her story in first person, she completes an act of creation through poetry. She controls the depiction of her existence in the poem, and she ends with the line, "I know I am not through with you yet," which indicates the continual process of her re-empowerment. In Brand's "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater," Mammy Prater has already regained power from the slave-owners

who have set her story aside. She is the sole actor and creator of meaning in the photograph and in the poem; the photographer is irrelevant. Mammy Prater takes control of the photographic process and the representation of her experience. Smith's *How to be both* expands this idea of power from the particular person's struggle to regain power to the universal effect that this reclamation can have on others. Through characters with identities and careers that are subversive to society, Smith focuses on the power that individuals have to give power to others and to help them reorganize their identity, worth, and agency within the world. Francescho uses their own power over their identity to subvert the expectations of a typical sexual transaction for a house of pleasure and produce art that impacts the lives of women: after giving pictures of the women instead of taking pleasure from them, four women decide to seek different lives. Francescho's crowning fresco with political commentary gives masses of commoners the courage to commit subtle acts of political rebellion. Even though there is inspiration in one particular person regaining the power to form their own identity and agency within the world, Francescho uses their particular story to give power and worth to others. Feminism is not unconnected snapshots of stories and lives but "a movement" (Ahmed 3). Feminism is

> a collective. A collective is what does not stand still but creates and is created by movement. I think of feminist action as like ripples in water, a small wave, possibly created by agitation from weather; here, there, each movement making another possible, another ripple, outward, reaching. Feminism: the dynamism of making connections. (Ahmed 3)

This ripple movement is where the true potential of feminism lies: in the continual forward motion and movement, in the collective and growing power of giving power to others.

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