

Unmasked, Unspoken 'Theory in the Flesh' in Danielle Evans' *Before
You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*

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I am a product of the U.S. university system. I have learned to mask my own agenda--my own desires for social justice, spiritual transformation, and cultural change--in academic language. I use theory as a vehicle for extending the personal outward and making new connections among apparently divergent perspectives. Because it seems to hide private feelings, desires, and deeply held beliefs behind rational, objective discourse and abstract thought, theory can be more persuasive for some readers. As you'll see in the following pages (if you choose to read them, that is), while I've partially unmasked myself--let the mask slip, as it were--I cannot entirely remove it. I now replace my mask, a mask which doesn't fit quite as well as it did before I wrote the words you've just read.

-AnaLouise Keating, *Gloria E. Anzaldúa Interviews/Entrevistas*

Forethought

In her short story collection, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*, Danielle Evans makes implicit racism visible to the eye. She relies on character and form to fill in subtext, but most importantly her work demands the reader to understand the coded world in which all of her characters live. Subtlety runs deep in Evans' narration to the point where it taps into the epicenter of what it means to be marginalized right this very moment. Her stories show the ways racism is navigated and resisted. This thesis is my literary exploration of modern day implicit racism in America. Prejudice is still persistently expressed through actions and words even if it is not the premeditated racism of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and lynching. All forms of racism function to render its subjects physically and psychologically incapacitated in the world. Evans elucidates the types of silent violences that her characters are fighting. As overt racism has receded from sight, so too have its obvious indicators. Racism is now deeply internal, psychological, physiological, and spiritual. How can we talk about race in the 21st century? We can't really. We can't talk about racism because it is skillfully concealed in normative language and behavior. My entry point into this literary exploration is fundamentally about the inconvenience of language. In the perpetuation of racism, language is actually quite skillful, but in the attempt to reveal its

¹ Anzaldúa, (Keating 164)

existence on the receiving end, it is almost impossible.

I am concerned with the systems and coping mechanisms designed in response to the evasiveness of racism and sexism. The two main theorists who have served as models for writing subtext, and whose concepts shape my understanding of this collection are W.E.B. DuBois in *Souls of Black Folk* and Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. They both attempt to reveal another reality, which is only possible because of the consciousness they possess in two worlds. Double consciousness--living between two worlds, dwelling on a borderland, is essential to one's ability to speak about being on the receiving end of marginalization. So too does Evans' work exhibit multiple planes of existence and split consciousness. Her characters grapple with Anzaldúa's concept, *la facultad*, the primitive, pre-cognitive sensibility acquired by oppressed minorities; it is a theoretical lens through which to read Evans' narration and character interactions. DuBois writes in the time of overt racism, but his writing's "lifting up the veil" endure, because he never suggested that implicit racism was any less real than explicit racism.

Danielle Evans published her collection of short stories, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* in 2010. The collection has two epigraphs, one by Audre Lorde, and another by Donna Kate Rushin. Evans titled her collection after a line in Rushin's "The Bridge Poem." The poem locates pertinent themes of the collection. We are signaled towards a dysfunctional unwillingness to communicate around issues of race and gender. The speaker identifies herself as a body on a borderland. She acts as a bridge of understanding between everyone in her life--a body that props up the failings of others. The most important sentiment in the poem to grasp going into the stories, is that the speaker is sick and tired of holding up the burden of other people's dysfunction. This inability to communicate is perpetuated throughout the stories and theory this thesis brings together. Our society is hell-bent on communicating rationally through words, and we ignore the

immense amount of communication that comes from the body, even as it relates to something as perilous as racism.

Just as I was trying to articulate what exactly about Evans' work resonated with me, I fell into the arms of Anzaldúa's, *la facultad*. The concept stems from her assumption that racism operates on a different level of consciousness and requires a shift, even, in the way the west historically imposes a separation of mind and body. In *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa's critiques this Cartesian dualism and argues that pre-rational forms of experience from the body should not be dismissed as superstition. People who live in the borderland space, of neither mind nor body, spiritual nor physical are "forced to become adept at switching modes," and this is certainly an iteration of double consciousness (Anzaldúa 59).

We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to "real" events. (Anzaldúa 60)

Thus, when someone experiences prejudice in America now, it might be as small as receiving a sensation from a look; and if we don't give credence to the intelligence of the body, then we can say, *racism doesn't exist, you just imagined it*. *La facultad* is an emblematic remnant of the cultural extermination of pre-Colombian, Afro, indigenous, non-western cultural practices of mind and body. It is an intuitive power acquired in marginalized people with somewhat mysterious origins.

La facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (Anzaldúa 60)

Although Anzaldúa's definition of *La facultad* is specific in this work to oppressed minorities, I believe she means that all humans have the capacity for it--that it generally manifests when there is a need. Marginalized is a categorization anyone can be pushed into. Evans explores

the intuitive qualities of some of her white characters as well. For the purpose of reading these stories, there are three iterations of *la facultad* that I find useful. Most urgently, the faculty manifests as a hypervigilant protective mechanism. Second of all, it is an overall understanding of physiological intelligence whether through literacy in nonverbal communication, or through inhabiting the thoughts and feelings of others. Finally, it manifests as anticipation armed with futurity, which takes on intuitive, prophetic qualities.

La facultad is more than a heightened sense of perception; it serves a purpose for the oppressed. For those who experience harsh forms of alienation, it is a source of self-preserving power.

Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest--the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. These people "...who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity)" are in need of some faculty. (60)

It is protective mechanism developed for "Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world" from dangerous acts of violence and bigotry (60). This unconscious literacy in the subterranean maps of the human psyche allows for prophetic anticipations to avoid hurt. This faculty can be so anticipatory that it roams into the intuitive.

When we're up against a wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away. We'll sense the rapist when he's five blocks down the street. Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us. (60)

The latent, unknowing part of this faculty is important to emphasize, as it is all taking place on another level of consciousness. *La facultad* clearly finds its ideological roots in double consciousness; they are two utterances of the same idea. DuBois also brings us the language of another plane of consciousness, spiritual in nature. Like *la facultad*, double consciousness has a spiritual, split-world component which facilitates a gifted sensing and seeing: "...the Negro is a

sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight.” In black folklore, being born with the veil means having psychic powers or visions of the dead.² DuBois uses the veil as metaphor for second sight, but also a barrier between the black world and white world. Black people are born within the veil, a place white people cannot see into unless it is lifted as DuBois does in *Souls of Black Folk*. The veil, however, “...yields him [the negro] to no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self in the eyes of others” (215). The veil allows blacks a special way of seeing--a type of sight that anticipates the gaze of the white world, *but* as much as the veil is a revelation, it effectively obscures. It acts as a barrier preventing the white world from properly seeing the black world. The white world misreads those in the other world and it is the cause of much desperation. The idea of bridging two worlds or a borderlands is essential to both double consciousness and *la facultad*: “One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (215). It is precisely these warring ideas in one body that all of Evans’ stories address, through the lens of Rushin’s poem, as a source of reluctance and fatigue.

In his process of lifting the veil, DuBois illustrates that the surface phenomena of being black is really a complex struggle between physical and spiritual survival. This struggle produces negative symptoms, which if not perceived unveiled, could be attributed to the inferior nature of blacks. He divulges the intricate straining of black life.

...the black man’s turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful strivings has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness,--it is the contradiction of double aims...for he had not but half

² The veil is another term for a caul, or membrane covering the face at birth. Pretty consistently across cultures, caul births signify uncanny or special powers. In African American Folklore it indicates psychic powers--the ability to see into the spirit world.

a heart in either cause. (215)

Mere existence is a contradiction or as DuBois puts it, a problem. Evans helps us come to terms with these “hesitant and doubtful strivings” in her stories. In the 21st century being a person of color is still a problem and it is this condition of existence which DuBois claims the Negro uses his fortitude to keep from being “torn asunder.” Racist societies impose limitations on existence. We may not have “overt” racism, but the fight for existence, surviving trauma, and the anxiety of the future still plays heavily in day to day racial interactions. All we need is a little faith in things unseen to believe it.

Evans’ work is quiet. Where great women of color authors of the first and second wave feminist movement fought to make their voices heard with more of a racket, Evans’ is subtle about her meditation on race and gender. Even though Evans operates in the implicit, it is not to say that she is reverting back to the age of scholarship where issues of race have been silenced. Toni Morrison is part of this tradition of making race/gender audible and visible, and gives us a perspective on the headway accomplished in racial scholarship that came before Evans:

Silences are being broken, lost things have been found and at least two generations of scholars are disentangling received knowledge from the apparatus of control, most notably those who are engaged in investigations of French and British Colonialist Literature, American slave narratives, and the delineation of the Afro-American literary tradition. (Morrison 21)

Evans comes after the age of breaking silence. She writes on the shoulders of giants who have repaired some of the cultural erasure through historical and fictive work. She has the privilege of writing the unspeakable because others have unearthed and rebuilt a foundation. Instead of masking race or unmasking race, Evans operates within the language of race (or the lack there of). Contemporary works of fiction by women of color are important because they are able to talk about the recent and the historical.

Ultimately, how can I argue that Evans is doing something different by writing implicit

racism, which cannot be adequately expressed through language? I think the answer is intimately connected to one's position to the veil. We have to have *la facultad* to understand the sort of literary contribution the stories are making. Because words are inadequate in a sense, the form is more telling. In fact I would argue that *la facultad* is important for reading any short story. I believe this is why the short story for is a liminal form. With the limited space to explicate, short stories rely extensively on interpretation of subtext through feeling. They are temporally oriented towards the ending, requiring a reverence for gut instinct. The form necessitates a sixth sense and an intelligence counterproductive to the western mind. Lesley McDowell and Ellen Burton Harrington argue that short fiction is a particularly hospitable, salient form for women and socially marginalized people. Along with length and end-orientedness, short stories have a particular movement quality that Paula Moya argues is perfect for race, as an action performed.

How does it feel to be a problem?: Unspeakable

*I've had enough
I'm sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody*
-Donna Kate Rushin, "The Bridge Poem"

DuBois begins *Souls of Black Folk* with a personal forethought, imploring his readers to reach into strange and hidden territory. He guides us into the overwhelming impossibility of his mission, "...to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand Americans live and strive" (DuBois 213). DuBois' language reveals the fundamental belief that what he is expressing goes beyond what words can accomplish. The ambiguous language of double-consciousness can be traced from *Souls of Black Folk* all the way to Evans' stories.

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy...They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately....To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. (213)

For DuBois, there is ever and *unasked* question. Word repetition such as "unasked" and phrasing

such as “answer seldom a word,” along with DuBois expressing perceived nonverbal cues, brings us to the non-language of bridging two worlds. DuBois gives us a baseline as an early theorist of implicit racism, while Toni Morrison and Evans venture on. Morrison continues with the discourse that we do not have the capacity to speak about race. In her essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” she argues, “Thus in spite of its implicit and explicit acknowledgement, “race” is still virtually an unspeakable thing...” (Morrison 17). She recoils against the predicament that, “...the mention of “race” is either inevitably or elaborately, painstakingly masked” (17).

Evans is similarly concerned with the inconvenience of language. Her stories are filled with nonverbal communication, which she primarily achieves by writing under the assumption that all bodies are texts. For her black women are textual *nonsecrets*--they have no privacy and limited ownership over their bodies. In “Someone Ought to Tell Her There’s Nowhere to Go,” Georgie, a soldier in the Iraq war, is sent home for being violently out of control in bouts of PTSD. He is traumatized by feeling responsible for the deaths of two little girls. Their father was forced to cooperate with the US army and that got the whole family killed. In his time back at home, he tries to connect again with his old romantic interest, Lanae, and her daughter. When he sees Lanae again he describes her as having little to hide about her body: “He’d found himself silently listing these nonsecrets, the things about Lanae he was certain of: she couldn’t bake, there was a thin but awful scar running down the back of her right calf, her eyes were amber in the right light”(88). Evans has Georgie introduce the idea of a nonsecret in such a brief moment, but it is a significant one that allows us to see the relationship between a body as text and privacy.

Sara Ahmed addresses the body as text through emotion. She argues that emotional reading binds bodies. Emotions move horizontally through a series of associations (signs, figures, and objects) allowing for an open historicity (Ahmed 89). Bodies can be read as a timeline where

aspects of the past are read in the present. The human capability of reading the body to discern the deep fabric of societal and historical consciousness is another way of talking about the intuitive. Just like the speaker in "The Bridge Poem," marginalized bodies can be the foundation for translation. When a body is a nonsecret it means that the body has no authority over what is written about it. Often black women's bodies are either social property of the public,³ or they are invisible. The nonsecret/secret dichotomy echoes the act of being unveiled or veiled--just as Morrison talks about unmasking and masking. Having a veil comes from a place of knowing, but the veil itself keeps the veiled one from being known. There is no language to justify why certain bodies are nonsecrets. Sights and feelings, a form of double-consciousness, replace words.

In a few of her stories, Evans plays with the idea of secrecy and hiding--unspeakable things. "Harvest," is a story about Angel, a black Ivy League college student who winds up pregnant. She lives with a group of her minority girlfriends and a white girl, Laura, who comes from humble means. Laura is considered one of them, until she starts donating her eggs for money. She takes on a whole new persona, becomes glamorous, and stops associating with her roommates. Evans juxtaposes Angel's surprise pregnancy with Laura's capitalization on her eggs. Angel feels she can only confide in Laura about her pregnancy and Laura ends up accompanying her to the abortion clinic. Throughout the story, Angel vacillates from wanting anonymity to wanting to be known. She wants to hide out from the world, secrets are comfortable: "Me, I wanted to be the spy, I liked secrets" (Evans 67). The idea of hiding is important because it is a source of protection, but the fact that a black woman's body is a nonsecret makes Angel's striving for secrecy urgent.

In "Someone Ought," Georgie starts to baby sit Lanae's four year old child who was kicked out of daycare for hiding: "'She hides too much,' she [Lanae] said. 'Every time they take the kids

³ If a black woman isn't hypersexualized or acting in servitude as a maternal figure, she is hard to digest by the public eye.

somewhere, this one hides, and they gotta hold everyone up looking for her. Last time they found her, she scratched the teacher who tried to get her back on the bus.’ ” (92). When Georgie is alone babysitting Esther, he asks what she is hiding from: “‘Nothing,’ Esther shrugged. ‘I just like the trip places better’ ” (93). She hides and violently defends herself, even though she says she perceives no threat. She protects herself and hides from “nothing” because she can’t articulate what she is hiding from. When she hides away and cuts off her connection to others, she is not only safe, but free to imagine herself in other places.

Certain bodies are a map onto which people can place implicit biases, a body can be abused. The actions around abusive misreading are unspeakable. Such misreadings are a source of much desperation. Thus, Evans’ stories are largely about the limitation placed on living for black women, men, and children. This limitation is part of the unspeakable in its unveiled form. In “Snakes,” Tara goes to visit her white grandmother in the South while her parents, who are Anthropologists, take a trip to Brazil. Tara spends the summer there with her cousin whose parents dumped her there to go on a cruise. From the beginning the grandmother has it out for Tara. Even though Tara’s grandmother makes sure her grandchildren are the epitome of young ladies and feels the need to parade them around at the Country club, the slightest infraction from the girls results in a lot of unwarranted, hateful behavior towards Tara.

The moment Tara arrives, her grandmother is incensed by her cornrow braids. She immediately registers the grandmother’s emotional response: “But for the expression on her face, the way her eyes went from startled to angry as she said *Unbelievable*, she looked remarkably like my mother” (Evans 30). Her grandmother orders her to take them out: “You’re a perfectly decent-looking child, and for whatever reason your mother sends you here looking like a little hoodlum” (31). She hadn’t even unpacked her belongings before her grandmother decided she was a

troublemaker, though she proves to be far less misbehaved than her blonde cousin. “Troublemaker” and “hoodlum” are words that recall mere existence as a problem. The words are evocative of the damning language that voices the already existent institutional restrictions on ways of being black, and in this story they begin in the home with family. Perhaps the most interesting part about this imposed limitation on being, is that a black person can experience the sight of these impositions even when they are not true. Tara is well aware that her existence is a problem because she easily accepts and understands the perceptions of her grandmother.

If we spoke about the misreadings of black bodies then we would have to admit that many innocent, undeserving people go unprotected, have little privacy, and are staving off mental and physical extermination. But these realities are effectively veiled, masked, and unfelt, simply because reality is what can be rationally explained--something that will always seem murky if the veil is not lifted. And the veil cannot be lifted with just words.

Body as Text (Subtext)

*I do more translating
Than the Gawdamn U.N.
-Rushin, “The Bridge Poem”*

One of the most fascinating aspects of *la facultad* is the ability to read bodies. As readers we can read body as text in two ways. We can read in Evans’ exposition the overwhelming number of instances where characters perform their personality through their bodies, faces, and voices. Or, as the characters scrutinize each other, we can we read their scrutiny--these are the particular ways Evans writes the unspeakable.

Our attention is simultaneously called to each character’s need to read through surface phenomena and to the subconscious compulsion in which it occurs. In “Snakes,” Tara registers subtle emotional cues when her grandmother takes her and her cousin to the country club to go swimming. When an acquaintance comes up to the grandmother to chat she asks, “Who are these

little dolls you have with you" (34)? When the grandmother introduces them as her granddaughters, Tara picks up on the woman's emotional response.

Marianne's face flickered for a second, and then resettled into its previous blank enthusiasm.

"Ta-ra," she said stretching it out like it was two words. "This one must be Amanda's." Amanda was my mother's name, but the way she said *Amanda*, she might have been saying *the earthquake* or *the flesh-eating disease*. Still, I didn't think much of her identifying me right away. Of course I was my mother's daughter: I had her eyes, her heart-shaped mouth and one dimple smile, her round face, only darker. (34)

Tara hears the emphasis in her name. The woman struggles over it like something foreign and hard to say. She also hears the subtext to her mother's name, as something disastrous. The older Tara telling us this story knows that the woman recognized her as Amanda's child not because she has her mother's features, but because it would be considered problematic for a white woman to marry and have a child with a black man. Little Tara registers the things going on in between this woman's words, even if she is not yet consciously aware of the meaning.

In "Harvest," Angel reads her boyfriend's hopeless attempt at verbal affection. She translates it for us so we can understand what she felt when she heard it: "I could hear the subtext to it, the desperate chord underneath. I love you. I love you enough" (77). In "Someone Ought," Georgie seems to have sensitivity to other people's feelings. Instead of acting on his own desires, he is compelled to act according to the information he receives from his readings of others: "...she came home and sat beside him on the couch and kicked off her flats and began to rub her own tired feet with mint-scented lotion; it was only his fear of upsetting something that kept him from reaching out to do it for her" (102). There is a sense that life is crafted around body language and the unspoken. Georgie's attention to facial cues is also extremely important: "...he wanted to tell her about the girl, the way she'd smiled at him, and scan her face for a flicker of jealousy. Then he remembered he'd earned the smile by lying." (103) He is so proficient in the subterranean that he can anticipate a nonverbal action and the outcome, all in his imagination.

Beyond reading bodies there is a deeper sensing to *la facultad* that Anzaldúa goes into personal detail about. She voices the prophetic sensations of everyday life.

I walk into a house and I know whether it is empty or occupied. I feel the lingering charge in the air of a recent fight and lovemaking or depression. I sense the emotions someone near is emitting--whether friendly or threatening. Hate and fear--the more intense emotion, the greater my reception of it. I feel a tingling on my skin when someone is staring at me or thinking about me. I can tell how others feel by the way they smell, where others are by the air pressure on my skin. (Anzaldúa 61)

The deeper, extrasensory perception, or what DuBois calls second-sight, is that element of perceiving danger, racism and the spiritual world that is hardest to talk about because it requires hurdling over philosophical, religious, and societal acceptance of physical reality as only the reality. Prophecy is something we hardly ever address in dominant culture, and yet Evans somehow captures these sensations. When Georgie was in Iraq and he first meets the little girls who were killed, something called him to make contact with them: "Usually, Georgie stood back and kept an eye out for trouble, let the lieutenant do the talking, but this time he went over to the girls himself, reached out his hand and shook their tiny ones, moist with heat and fear" (95). Their fear was palpable to him on a precognitive, physiological level. He felt something bad was going to happen to them, which compelled him to leave his prescribed military role of hypervigilance, to take their hands. Perhaps he recognized that in an instant, these little girls were being initiated out of their innocence, and into an understanding that their death was around the corner. He didn't want them to die scared.

In a review by Grace Laidlaw, Evans talks about why she chose to pursue fiction instead of anthropology. Her response was that she felt she could find the truth better in fiction (Laidlaw 2). Fiction, prophetic imaginations, and alternate realities are all forms of truth--and Evans' instinct towards fiction writing speaks to her allegiance to deeper realities.

Hypervigilance and Limitation: Reckless Resistance

Bring me all of your dreams,
 You dreamer,
 Bring me all your
 Heart melodies
 That I may wrap them
 In a blue cloud-cloth
 Away from the too-rough fingers
 Of the world.
 -Langston Hughes, "The Dream Keeper"

Evans demonstrates that in order to understand black people you can't ignore the multiple planes of existence they occupy, one of which is to protect themselves from psychological and physical extinction. Existence on multiple planes requires double-consciousness or *la facultad*. The choices of existing are limited; either one needs to be consumed by hypervigilance or alternatively to be so proficient at reading the world that they are prophetic. If one of these choices is not observed, one lives life unprotected and reaps the consequences.

One critic, Arianna Stern argues that Evans' characters make sudden and rash decisions at the end of the stories and that the repetitive story structure is self-consciously "fiction-y" and distracting (Stern 1). I would challenge her and argue that this repetition is revolutionary; these sudden and rash impulses, something I would summarize as recklessness, are significant. Recklessness doesn't make sense in an explicit society, but it does in an implicit society because it is a form of resistance.

The story "Virgins" deals with this theme of recklessness. It is a coming of age story about vulnerable young black teenage girls. The girls don't have very much protection. Their working mothers aren't around much. There is no mention of their fathers. All they have is each other and their friend Michael. The inside of their coming of age experience is not a cautionary tale about making reckless decisions as a teenager, but is rather, more seriously about what happens to young black people and girls when the world has no qualms about taking advantage of them. Coming of age stories are often centered on recklessness, but Evans evaluates the consequences of letting

one's guard down and submitting to the danger of the world. All of her characters tend to err when they decide they are tired of the consuming hypervigilance of their life. Her characters are world weary, but resilient in a way that brings to life the seeing oneself in the eyes of another. Even though her stories were not conceived originally to be a collection, all of the writing echoes the quiet theme of being *inside* double consciousness, and Evans makes us feel what it is like to be "sick of seeing and touching / both sides of things" (Rushin, lines 2-4).

Evans sets the scene in "Virgins" with Erica, Jasmine, and Michael listening to Tupac Shakur's "Me Against the World" on the radio the day he died, as an anthem for their unfolding story. In the song Tupac asks "Can you picture my prophecy?" and "The question is will I live? No one in the world loves me/ I'm headed for danger, don't trust strangers" (Shakur, lines 9, 23-24). Tupac sets the tone for survival, as he asks if he will live.⁴ The language in this story hovering over the expectation for sexual abuse alludes to the weight of impending physical and psychological extinction. Women often expect sexual abuse. In the foreground of the narrative they go swimming at Mr. Thompson's house, but lurking in the background is the sentiment that the world has prepared them not to trust just anyone. The subtextual question is *what does it mean to be a problem?* It means being a me against the world. Or rather in a black woman's case, what does it mean to be a deviant disposable body? Historically black women weren't just field hands, but sex slaves, objects to map deviant sexual behaviors onto, slave breeders, wet nurses, surrogate mothers, house servants, etc. Their disempowered bodies had many uses, making it disadvantageous to kill them as opposed to a threatening black man. The black female body still carries a disposable "usefulness" today either realistically or as an emblem of history.

⁴ Tupac Shakur was shot in September 7, 1996. In his album *Me Against the World*, he has multiple songs alluding to a death around the corner, most notably "Lord Knows" and "If I Die 2nite." Another significant example of prophecy of death is MLK's last speech "I've been to the mountaintop speech" in which he prepares the crowd for his inevitable death, and less than 24 hours later is shot.

Tupac's question is, will I live? but the underlying question for these girls is, "will my body be used and will my spirit live through it?" The girls are wary. There's this sense all the way through that they understand how easily their bodies can become disposable--how they are there for the taking.

When you were alone, men were always wanting something from you. We even wondered about Mr. Thompson sometimes, or at least we never went swimming at his house without Michael with us...We were not stupid, though. We'd had enough nice guys suddenly look at us the wrong way. (Evans 4-5)

Erica, the narrator, is fully aware of her vulnerability in each scene, yet she still ends up in compromising situations. Jasmine, Michael, and Erica decide to go clubbing with fake IDs in the city. The girls automatically get in, but Michael doesn't. They go in flirting with older guys and trying on different personas. By the end of the night, the girls become drunk and careless and end up with a group of unsavory guys they don't know. Michael and his brother come to save Erica from the scary situation and Erica, sick of Jasmine's selfish behavior chooses to leave her friend to reap the consequences of her decision to be alone with the guys.

That night Erica settles into a reality that she can never be fully protected. In fact, the predicament of naively believing in protection as a borderland dweller is explored by Anzaldúa: "We lose something in this mode of initiation, something is taken from us: our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance" (Anzaldúa 61). Erica has lost whatever innocence she still had and accepts fully not just her vulnerability, but her limitation. She relaxes into the idea that she can't run from danger anymore.

I did understand then that there was no such thing as safe, only safer; that this, if it didn't happen now, would happen later but not better. I was safer than Jasmine right now, safer than I might have been. (Evans 25)

Late in the night after Erica goes home with Michael and his brother knowing she can't go home after she told her mother she'd be spending the night at Jasmine's, Michael's older brother comes

to her and tells her she is beautiful. As they start to kiss we see her struggling, using her dogged strength: “He kissed me hard, like he was trying to get the last drop of something, and I kissed him back, harder, like I wanted to get it back”(25). Eventually, she relents and lets him take her virginity: “I kissed him and he kept going and I didn’t stop him” (26). Afterwards, Erica crawls into bed with Michael not wanting to be alone after all that happened. She reflects on the feeling of being beside him, something closest to safety, when an exchange of *la facultad* they shared earlier flashes before her. When Erica and Jasmine got into the club and Michael didn't, he grabbed Erica’s wrist and warned her: “You be careful with yourself, all right?” Jasmine pushes into the club while Erica is upset about leaving Michael, their protector, behind:

She [Jasmine] rolled her eyes. “Whole room full of people and you’re worried about Michael. He can take care of himself.”

I knew Michael would be all right. It was me I was worried about. (17-18)

Instead of sticking to what they knew, which was that someone was going to want something from them if Michael wasn’t around to protect them, they delved into unprotected territory. As Erica lays in bed, she relives the moment.

I looked at the back of his ears and thought about a few hours earlier, about him holding my wrist, telling me to be careful with myself. I reached to pull him toward me. I remember the feeling of his thumb and index finger right there on my pulse as I had nodded yes. (26)

Jasmine ventured into the club with an agenda to get drunk and meet guys and in the process put herself and her friends in danger. She didn’t care anymore. We never find out what happened to her that night. Jasmine and many other black people are perceived to make illogical, scary, and reckless decisions, when in fact they are just choosing to live. In the end as readers, we feel disappointed that Erica was irresponsible with herself. She chose to lose her virginity to the guy who didn’t care about her, who she didn’t feel safe with, but when the story ends with her next to Michael, she relives the moment where she nods yes, this time, as if to consent to life. The story ends with one nonverbal gesture as she says yes to an exposed freedom. Erica, just like the speaker

in Rushin's poem indicates that she is sick of being a bridge to other people, instead she says: "Forget it/ Stretch or drown / Evolve or die /The bridge I must be / Is the bridge to my own power / I must translate / My own fears / Mediate / My own weaknesses" (Rushin, lines 44-49). This is precisely the self-consciousness DuBois argues that black people do not have. Like any group of kids, they want to do something reckless for once without having to respond to their second sight. The "sudden and rash decisions" that Stern refers to are deliberate acts of rebellion against their conditions of existence.

"Snakes" is also a coming of age story meditating on sense of safety and the ways the prospect of losing safety can drive a child mad. Tara's grandmother tells her that there is a child-eating python on the loose, slithering through pipes and bodies of water as a punishment for running off. Tara is *so* affected by her fear of the python that she refuses to leave the house for weeks. Her Imagination runs wild with the idea. She sits only in the middle of rooms and sleeps on the edge of her bed. Tara's white cousin was over it in no time, but Evans seems to be commenting on the hypersensitive reaction Tara has to impending danger. The biracial girl's sense of safety is toyed with, and it sends her into survival overdrive. So much so, that she starts to act irrationally.

In "Someone Ought to Tell You There's Nowhere to Go," Lanae breaks up with Georgie before he goes to Iraq. She says, "I'm not waiting for you to come home dead, and I'm damn sure not having Esther upset when you get killed" (Evans 87). The narrator adds, "She was fiercely protective of Esther, kept her apart from everything, even him" (87-88). In the end, Lanae had the right instinct to be so harshly overprotective. Georgie pretends to be Esther's father so that he can enter her in to win a contest to get expensive tickets to a teen pop idol concert. They make a video milking the fact that he is a soldier. Esther wins the contest, but the whole scam gets found out.

Lanae receives all kinds of hateful responses—words that are psychologically violent towards a little girl: “People from Iowa to goddam Denmark have been calling my house all day, calling my baby a liar and a little bitch. She’s confused. You’re confused. I think you need to go for a while” (112). This story has a lot of nuanced commentary on limitation. Even though technically Georgie acts morally corrupt by having Esther lie, the story has us commiserate with him as he is the only one in the story actively trying to protect her innocence, while ignoring his own inability to do so. In response to Esther complaining about her classmates, Georgie tells her things that the narrator argues he cannot deliver on: “ ‘Well, I’m back now, and you’re not going to let stupid people bother you anymore,’ Georgie said, even though neither of these promises was his to make”(94). Later he takes her to a store where she first expresses her desire to go see Mindy, the pop singer. Even though she is four she perceives that the price of the tickets are too expensive and pretends not to want them. “‘I don’t really wanna,’ she said. It’s probably dumb anyway” (101).

He followed her eyes to the ticket price and understood that she’d taken in the number of zeroes. He was stung for a minute that even a barely five-year-old was that acutely aware of his limitations, then charmed by her willingness to protect him from them. It shouldn’t be like that, he thought; a kid shouldn’t understand that there’s anything her parents can’t do. (Evans 101)

Georgie tells Lanae about the concert, and Lanae shoots it down immediately as inappropriate, completely missing Georgie’s point about shielding Esther from her own limitation. Georgie keeps defending the Mindy concert not because of the actual event, but because he wants to address the underlying toll of *la facultad* Esther is beginning to have on her life. Georgie wants to protect her, instead of her trying to protect the people around her for their own inability to provide for her. He wants to absolve her from having to think about that so young. Things escalate pretty quickly. Lanae’s current boyfriend, Kenny, calls the matter nonsense, and Georgie insults him by rashly commenting on his inability to pay for the tickets even if he wanted to: “‘She can’t,’ said Georgie. ‘You can’t afford it.’ ‘Fuck you man.’ ”(104). During this exchange between the two

disempowered black men who are emasculated by their inability to provide for a little girl, their body language becomes hyper-aggressive as if they were about to start a fight, but then Kenny leaves and abruptly slams a door. Lanae chastises Georgie for his behavior: "You need to try harder. And this Mindy shit? Esther will forget about it. Kids don't know. Next week she'll be just as worked up about wanting fifty cents for bubble gum"(104). Lanae downplays the strife, however subtle it may be, and is either completely unaware or in denial about the level of hypersensitivity her daughter has.

The ultimate moment of verbalizing a trapped existence is a scene in Iraq after Georgie's behavior has gone out of control. He thinks he sees one of the little girls who was killed, alive again in the street. He goes up to her and starts shaking her angrily for playing dead. One of his friends tries to tell him that the little girl is not the one who was killed. When the girl runs away crying, Georgie says, "The fuck you think she's running to so fast, anyway? Someone out to tell her there's nowhere to go" (98). There's no escape, hiding, and no running away.

In the stories "Snakes," "Virgins," and "Harvest," the protagonists all have a resistant longing towards a better quality of existence. When Tara's grandmother admits that she lied about the snake, Tara is driven out of the house to play. But in the end, the fear of being hurt was overcome by the need to end this feeling of danger hanging in the air and Tara took agency in the matter by inflicting injury on herself. As a cry for recognition, she jumps off of a tree into the rocky end of a lake where she could have died: "I'd been, for the second time that summer, less afraid of the fall than what else I thought awaited me" (63). This was her release, her way of escaping the psychological violence of her grandmother. Her need for recognition is not too dissimilar from the affirmation we got from Erica in the end of "Virgins." Tara hurtles herself into danger as if to say, *I exist. I matter.*

In *Harvest*, Angel longs for wholeness, which she thinks her pregnancy might fulfill: “I wanted to be full...They felt “full” in their abdomens, swollen with potential for life. I had wanted that forever and had never felt it yet” (82). In the waiting room with Laura, she decides to keep her baby. The story ends with her saying, “I watched my feet as though they belonged to someone else. I looked up at the sky, feeling grown and full of something sad and aching to be known” (85). “Aching to be known” seems to be the resounding feeling between protagonists. When they are underdeveloped, like Esther, they have an aching to be unknown--to hide away. When they decide they desire an exposed freedom, they would rather be nonsecrets, however vulnerable that leaves them. All of these cases, a nod yes, a jump into a lake, looking up to the heavens, are nonverbal acts initiating the protagonists into this liberated but dangerous world of resistance.

Recognition

I'm sick of filling in your gaps

*Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed limitations*

*Find another connection to the rest of the world
Find something else to make you legitimate
-Rushin, “The Bridge Poem”*

Aching to be known is the type of recognition that those underneath the veil seek from the larger world. The white world is primary to all others in our society’s implicit hierarchy. Its self-centered visibility--the acceptance that the white experience is the only experience, is sustained by its refusal to truly recognize the black world. Most white people do not have the proper sight to see through the veil; thus true recognition cannot exist, only comparisons. Evans’ writing suggests that black people grapple with feelings of inadequacy as they navigate a world of comparison, and rarely a world of recognition.

Double consciousness sets up the two worlds where the weighing of worth occurs. DuBois talks about comparison, “...of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused

contempt and pity” (215). While DuBois speaks more in the language of the social and spiritual, Frantz Fanon gives us a more psychological perspective, which rounds out *la facultad* as a concept both spiritual and psychological in nature. In *Black Skin White Masks*, he takes it as a truth that the black man embodies comparison (Fanon 185). When the black man comes into contact with another, the interaction is reduced to measuring his being against the other. This is a constant sensitive barometer for the black man’s newly acquired worth after slavery and perhaps an obsession for fear of losing such contingent worth. Going hand in hand with comparison, Fanon discusses the Hegelian concept of recognition.

Man is human only to the extent to which he tried to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions. His human worth and reality depend on this other and on his recognition by the other. It is in this other that the meaning of life is condensed. (191)

To recognize another is to affirm her humanity. The act suggests that on some level you are the same--both human. The idea of sameness or the loss of this idea is the root of supremacy and race dysfunction.

There are multiple instances of double-consciousness comparison in “Harvest.” Angel thinks about the changes Laura has undergone after receiving money from donating her eggs, transitioning from being one of “them” to a distant white girl: “Impostor or not, she could hide her inadequacy behind salon lightened hair and a thousand-dollar leather coat. Sitting next to her, I did not feel analogous” (82). Angel decides that she wants to keep her baby, but she needs money to do it. Laura offers up her latest egg donating pay check. Angel analyzes the worthiness of her and Laura’s reproductive body. She compares how much exactly the worth of the life inside her differs from her white friend. She concludes that her body and her baby are disposable. She explains it socio-economically, but the subtext is that black life is worthless.

It seems wrong to me, that money should be the difference between a baby and not-a-baby.

I had a thing inside me that I could not afford, and Laura had things inside of her that she couldn't afford not to sell, and on the other end of it there were women spending tens of thousands of dollars to buy them because they felt their own bodies had betrayed them. (84)

This moment is also an interesting meditation on the relationship between poor whites and poor blacks in America who are often pitted against each other for a right to resources. Both groups are exploited, but Laura can rise above it by selling parts of herself and by having "salon lightened hair." Still, Angel doesn't think about Laura as a representative of inequity in social mobility. She doesn't think Laura owes her anything.

I didn't think I deserved it, not really, nor did I think she owed me. I think the universe was a whole series of unfulfilled transactions, checks waiting to be cashed, opportunities waiting to be cashed in, even if they were opportunities made of your own flesh. I thought it was a horrible world to bring a child into, but an even worse world in which to stay a child. (85)

Laura seems to reluctantly disagree with this sentiment and does something revolutionary as she offers up some of her white privilege to Angel, so that she can start a life. Tangled up with this idea of comparison is the idea of sameness. When Laura gives Angel the money, it's because she doesn't believe they are any different or that she deserves to have more than Angel does. She unlike Angel believes that they are deeply connected, not just by a set of random transactions, but by a set of choices. Angel aborting the baby would have some lasting effect on Laura just as Laura not giving Angel money would have lasting effects on Angel. Laura is a really interesting character. She has *la facultad* and double consciousness as a white woman, seeming to stem from her position from the lower class.

Laura and Angel both see each in the eyes of the other. In small moments they inhabit each other's existence and think the thought of others. In the waiting room, Laura explains how she had been to an abortion clinic before with her older sister: "I was sitting there waiting for her, and I kept thinking everyone in that room knew someone who knew someone who knew me, and they

were all thinking it would be me next, and I'd show them, it never would be" (82). Angel comes to Laura's defense and says "It's not you" (82). But Laura says something peculiar to Angel in response, "Isn't it" (82)? Which is to say *I am you*. She recognizes Angel. Evans writes Laura to be the epitome of a white ally. Going back to Anzaldúa's idea of giving value to imaginative events, even though Laura is not pregnant, she feels "analogous" and understands the necessity of giving some of her power to Angel.

In the very end of "Someone Ought," Georgie is bombarded with reporters asking how he could have possibly let the lie with Esther escalate so far, why he would do something so amoral.

"How," the reporters wanted to know, "did this happen?"

Their smugness made him angry. There were so many things they could never understand about how, so many explanations they've never bothered to demand. How could it *not* have happened? (112)

Georgie responds almost with a plea. A plea for no comparison, a plea to see his existence unveiled. He wants an understanding only someone like Laura could provide. A recognition that his act was a valiant, rebellious one, part of a fight to keep a girl innocent. He failed, but doubly because no one acknowledged the importance of his effort. This story is particularly sad because Georgie's worth is never really recognized by another.

Evans also deals with the idea of inhabiting another's body and analogousness in Georgie's character. Georgie thinks about Lanae and her boyfriend, Kenny's interactions: "It bothered him to think of Kenny putting his hand on her that way...Kenny who'd probably never be gentle enough to notice what her body did while it was his" (89). Georgie is hyper aware of recognizing other people's existences. Not only does he probably know what his body does when it is Lanae's, but he can imagine that Kenny does not know. Georgie's imaginative, anticipatory experiences continue as he thinks of Lanae potential reactions to the things he says. He is able to imagine them because he is an unrecognized person: "He could imagine the face she made when she refused to

comment, the steely eyes, the way everything about her could freeze” (112).

Though this thesis is primarily concerned with those behind the veil, recognition requires the participation of those without. Whiteness needs to be discussed. Sara Ahmed guides us through the discourse of hate in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* from the perspective of white nationalist groups. She starts by asking how hate organizes collectives to read the bodies of others. Hate shapes bodies and the worlds that the bodies occupy. In response to feeling their sense of being under attack or their imagined claim to land and rights as being taken away, whites offensively direct hate towards the other. Like Fanon, Ahmed acknowledges the fear of losing the associations to things that give value to our sense of self. We protect these associations fiercely and express hatred towards those who threaten to take them away. White nationalist groups refuse to recognize the humanity of other competing minority groups. If they did, they would have to believe that their humanity is analogous to those they have deemed inferior. Senses of entitlement do not just lie within extreme groups, but permeate the attitudes of liberal and conservative senses of whiteness across the board. Laura has *la facultad* because she is able to recognize her and Angel’s humanity without them coming into conflict.

Oppressed minorities use *la facultad* to defend themselves against harm, most specifically acts of racism. Whites misguidedly read the proximity of non-white, “deviant” bodies as threats against the security of whiteness. Without such misreadings white identity would lose meaning. Ahmed essentially argues that the emotional reading of hate binds bodies to their white privilege. I believe that the emotional mythologizing of whiteness as special, links to a loss of the primordial sense of self, which non-whites have had to maintain as a double consciousness--a form of spiritual recognition behind the veil. Ahmed’s theory matches up closely with Fanon’s idea of comparison. I argue that regardless of race, we are all comparing and measuring our worth for fear of losing

whatever we have. The difference is that proponents of whiteness believe that they have a birth right to such value, while non-white or deviant bodies recognize the contingency of their existence. Sub-humanity is always a near reminder for those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in this world. The worth that the oppressed has gained manifests not as privilege, but as a necessity for survival. Evans portrays many of her white characters as having non-resilient and world-weary senses of identity. I believe that she portrays the breaking down of white privilege in her characters compassionately, as recognition that it is only a misguided attempt to hold on to a mythological self--underneath which there is little to soothe a troubled soul, not even a second consciousness.

Form

I want to write from the body; that's why we're in a body.
-Anzaldúa (Keating 65)

Short stories possess a perfect spareness and fast-paced brevity. If the reader isn't cautious, what is written in between the lines can easily evade her. The brevity of the short story requires a quick-wittedness and a reverence for gut instinct. Evans' stories have an open flightiness. Conventions that ground us in this world--a sense of time, history, and emotion, collapse leaving a horizontal horizon. This environment of collapsed conventions creates a fifth dimension-like domain. The domain allows us to experience *la facultad*, which does not concern itself with normal conceptions of space and time. In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai analyzes the emotion anxiety. She cites Ernst Bloch who argues that "All emotions 'refer to the horizon of time' but that anxiety belongs to the group of 'expectant emotions' that "open out entirely to this horizon" (Ngai 210). For all intents and purposes, we could look at *la facultad* as a form of anxiety armed with futurity. Along with the temporal, Ngai argues that anxiety has a spatial dimension where one can project or displace her feelings onto another by locating in another what one refuses to recognize in one's

self--a sentiment much in agreement with Fanon and Ahmed. Such misreadings are forcible projections of the deviant. The question about anxiety is not just *when?* but also *where?* (212).

Evans exercises temporal flexibility in her stories. In "Snakes," there is an unfixed horizontalness to time allowing Evans to play with the sensitivity of emotions.

That much hasn't changed in sixteen years--not the weather, not my sense of Tallahassee, then and now, as a place where your skin crawls with the sensation that something urgent is about to happen, but you never know what, or when. (Evans 27)

Collapsed time has a few effects, one is that it facilitates *la facultad*. "Snakes" is a particularly interesting story to analyze, because *la facultad* doesn't just occur on the character level, but the structural level. Something about Tallahassee's sensation hasn't changed for sixteen years for the narrator and that is intimately connected with the unique way that short stories play with time. In as many ways as possible, we are told the ending in the beginning. We are made to anticipate something, and that forces us to use our extrasensory abilities--to be hypervigilant. As readers our position to time is peculiar. Tara speaks about feelings she had as a child, but the feelings are also reenacted in the place many years later, presciently creating the feeling of the ending before we come to it. Thus we feel what is coming as she recalls what happened in hindsight. The sense of anticipation is created for the reader through setting, place, and character, which mirrors the way that the narrator feels about Tallahassee as a place of impending psychological and physical trauma. Our imaginative eye gives us permission as readers to feel as Tara feels. Like Anzaldúa described, we feel "the lingering charge in the air" from an incident sixteen years ago through Tara's older self-narration. Our skin crawls--and this opening description fundamentally becomes about feeling and not words, tapping into the intellect of the body. The power of narration is uncanny in its ability to make us respond to things that aren't even "real," that are fictitious.

Tara tells the story of a childhood experience from the perspective of adulthood. Therefore, when we hear the little girl's story, we hear it with the omniscience of a woman looking back on

the past. Even still, Evans is able to make the voice of the narrator child-like. The effect is that the little girl has foresight and immense sensitivity to the coded language around her to the point where the text takes on psychic qualities.

The ultimate instance of *la facultad* in this story was foreshadowed in the beginning with the acknowledgement that something lingered in the Tallahassee air---something bad was going to happen, but it was impossible to tell when. There was no language for it. Tara jumps off of the tree, her cousin is blamed for pushing her and she spends the rest of her life atoning under the psychological violence of their grandmother.

Another way of talking about horizontalness is addressing access. How do we access the different parts of a hierarchical racial world? The speaker in Rushin's poem identifies her body as a form of access, a bridge. Access occurs on multiple levels. Evans' characters act as bridges. What they do in the stories with their bodies helps us to read in between the lines and to complete the story. On another level, the story itself creates access. Paula Moya argues that stories transport people through space and time and give readers who wouldn't otherwise, access to racial, gendered, or ethnic ways of being. The reader experiences what Moya calls "world traveling." The literary creations of authors can bridge cultural and temporal divides. For example, because Evans adequately recreated the feeling of being a black teenager in "Virgins," the reader is able to enter into the world of a black girl. Moya also argues that a good piece of multicultural literature can effectively ravel forwards and backwards in space and time, allowing for a critical analysis of society. Though I think a lot of African American literature is really famous for looking back critically at the past effects of overt racism, I think it is important to capture this unraveling in time and space through contemporary literature. In her review, Laidlaw identifies the important function of time in the stories.

Evans' treatment of time has thematic implications for her work. In the minds of her characters, the line between the present and the past often is blurred. "I think readers will notice how present the past is in the book," says Evans. "Again and again, characters find that they can never fully escape their histories. (Laidlaw 1)

The stories are not just future oriented, the presence of the past is strong. Evans' work has this quality of acknowledging the past, but also recognizing that something new is happening. Rather than an orientation backwards or forwards there is an important multiplicity of the two.

Theory about what exactly the short story accomplishes, is surprisingly limited. In his dissertation, Kurt E. Bullock is concerned with neglect in the realm of critical studies on the short story form. He acknowledges that through its temporal and spatial play, the short story creates a measured "effect" on the author, reader, and text. We experience the narrative and the short story frames our lives as it frames the lives of its characters. He argues that the short story mimics our everyday experiences. Because of the short story's fixed ending, the events of the story end before they begin, just as our daily experiences begin and end before we become aware of them. The form allows for us to experience narrative the way we experience life, which is on a certain level without awareness. The short story to him suggests a timeless and spacelessness, the same collapsed horizontalness Ahmed, Ngai, and Moya touch upon, which I believe is represented in Evans' work as a way of talking about the intuitive. Bullock believes that the disruptive constraints of language in the form create an ambiguity that the reader is forced to work out. I argue that short stories facilitate the intuitive to the point where the reader of the short story needs *la facultad* in order to grasp the implicit meanings within these ambiguities. The short story is a form in which every image counts.⁵ Short stories are primarily about subtext. There isn't enough room to be explicit. "Snakes" happens to be an extreme example, but the form demands the intuitive. I believe the short

⁵ In an interview when asked what is appealing about the short story form, Edwidge Danticat said that the form is impressionistic like a painting or a poem, and that every image counts.

story is not a popular literary form because everyone does not has access to this faculty.

The short story form is not as male dominated as other forms, it feels apart from the patriarchal agenda. Lesley McDowell addresses the political act of a woman writing a short story. She compares short story telling to Scheherazade's having to tell a story every night to save her own life, and the urgency of her having to do so quickly. She contends that historically, time and patience were not given to women's voices. Women had to rush to speak before someone attempted to silence them. She argues that this is why women excel at the short story form. In this way, the patriarch doesn't need the short story form. If we think of the short story as an act of self-preservation or an urgency to build a bridge in Evans' case, then the short story is about needing to be heard. The fast-paced brevity is an emblem of that urgency.

Not only are short stories apart from the patriarchy, but they are more broadly apart from mainstream culture. In *Scribbling Women and The Short Story Form*, Ellen Burton Harrington argues that the short story is an "outlaw form" perfect for the liminal writer. The constrained domestic lives of women worked well with the short form, rather than what Henry James calls the "loose baggy monster" of the novel. It was a way to get writing in that wasn't excessive, there was no time get lost in a form where every page didn't have merit"(Harrington 4). The form itself is a home for different kinds of knowledge: "The short story is a vehicle for various kinds of knowledge, knowledge which may be at odds with the 'story' of dominant culture" (8). She quotes Edgar Allan Poe about the impressionistic aspect of the form, he argues that there is "a strong undercurrent of *suggestion* run continuously beneath the upper stream of the tranquil thesis" (571) (Harrington 5). Poe's meditation on suggestion and subtext fits well with the idea that Evans' narration and even use of the form facilitates a recreation of reading with *la facultad*. Harrington also touches on the idea of short stories being end-oriented and therefore anticipatory in a way that

combines the past and present. Using Mary Rohrbeger, Harrington identifies the form as being an ideal vehicle for writing non-verbal expression.

All of the characteristic devices of the short story finally relate to this end: juxtapositions that create montage patterns, the accumulation of details forming networks of images that become metaphors, the layering of time and place, the meshing of antithesis--joy and sadness, waking and dream, even life and death--tonal reverberations operating paradoxically, as a means for non-verbal expression...(7)

Even though Evans' characters are sick of being a bridge, her work in some ways places itself as a bridge for all of the characters who don't want to be anymore. In her chapter "Another Way to Be: Women of Color, Literature, and Myth," Moya defines race and ethnicity to be something that can never be pinned down as a stable "thing." Rather, race and ethnic identities are actions that people do. Race is in its honest definition, amorphous and hard to pin down, which is one of the reasons we cannot speak about it. It evades meaning, further alluding to its residence in the emotional body. The short story is not only a hospitable form for outlawed genders, but for race, in its persistence to move towards a fixed end. She argues that it is crucial to see race and ethnicity as an action in order to understand the fixed social systems in which we are participatory. Though Evans never speaks explicitly about institutional racism, she fractures the seamlessness of vision outside of the veil. She somewhat violently makes us see the bridges holding everything together, and implicates us all in upholding a reality that completely invalidates the existence of young men, women and children. In this way, we are able to see the infrastructure of racism and sexism and by virtue institutional racism. Similarly, Hilary Herbold examines the instability of race. She argues that it has no footings, an action that moves and therefore necessitates short story form movement. Evans speaks the unspoken and gives a horizontal access to knowledge, just as DuBois gave us as he lifted the veil to the world of the black person. Evans' stories are future oriented, but they also reach backward to form temporally fused works. With history in our minds and the future in our anxieties we can adequately experience the present with no fallacies about

reality.

Afterthought

The act of writing fiction is honoring a commitment to the imaginative. It is a covenant to the power alternate realities have over us. Evans grants her character's freedom in the end of these stories. There is something tyrannical about protective mechanisms. Where we hold ourselves back from one thing, we limit ourselves from another. On the other hand, the stories themselves act as bridges of communication, taking up the burden the characters feel. In "Snakes" especially, the story takes on the persona of *la facultad*. The story is a political act, like Scheherazade. The story is an effort to normalize the relevance of the intuitive and emotional body. "Harvest" is a statement to be more empathetic-- to feel sameness so that there is no need for a veil to divide worlds.

I read these stories and *Borderlands/La Frontera* in two very different compartments of my life. Yet they called themselves together in my mind rather urgently. Not until I had settled on *la facultad* as a theoretical framework for these stories did I make the discovery that in 1983, Gloria Anzaldúa edited an anthology of work written by women of color called *The Bridge Called My Back*--the very anthology "The Bridge Poem" appeared in. Nearly 30 years later, Danielle Evans took part of "The Bridge Poem," and titled her collection of short stories after a line in the poem, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*. Even before I made the discovery that Anzaldúa's work in *Borderlands / La Frontera* and Evans' stories needed to be studied together, Evans had already placed herself in a tradition which echoed the ideas of her work. She gestured to the exact woman of color discourse in which she wanted her stories to be read and understood. The gesture was clear to me.

These stories spoke to me and at first I didn't know why. My body understood and I was summoned by feelings of recognition. My attraction to *la facultad* is personal. I sensed that I too

dwell in between two consciousnesses. My life, like the characters in the collection is crafted around the unspoken. It's a form of literacy I have always wanted to see acknowledged in literature. I am hypervigilant. The people around me are wedded to a subconscious compulsion to protect themselves. The trauma they feel is very real to me. My mother is eerily intuitive. I have more family members than I would care to count who are "reckless" with their lives. The stories offer a visibility to my world, and Anzaldúa offered me answers to why such compulsions exist. Anzaldúa argues positively for a return to an older, pre-Christian, pre-enlightenment way of paying homage to feeling. While Danielle Evans seems to argue that aspects of *la facultad* are disruptive and tiring. *La facultad* is a function of something bigger and the circumstances in which it is needed are bad--a direct result of people of privilege wilfully ignoring and denying their capacity for the sensations of life. If the members of our implicitly racist society spent more time feeling analogous, sensing each other, and giving value to those sensations; if we read without abusively misreading, then life would suddenly become much safer.

If I can't live in a world where my planes of existence are recognized, then in the meantime, to answer the question of whether this thesis is arguing *la facultad* positively or negatively, I ask another question. Would I as a woman of color rather feel safe or feel free? My argument is not separate from my body. Before I wrote this thesis, I would have wanted only to be safe. Now, I recognize that I have an aching to be known. This piece of writing is my affirmation--my hurtle from a great height, a gesture to say *I exist, I matter*. I have come out of hiding. Yes.

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