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Twistin' the Night Away: Perverted Nostalgia in How I Learned to Drive

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As the lights dim on the audience, the first thing we hear in Paula Vogel's 1997 play *How I Learned to Drive* is a disembodied voice: "Safety first – You and Driver Education"; then "*the sound of a key turning the ignition of a car*." Immediately we know that this play is taking us somewhere; the engine is ready and we're just waiting on our driver. But once Li'l Bit, the narrator and "a softer-looking woman in the present time than she was at seventeen," appears on stage, she puts the car in reverse, taking us to the past. If Vogel's title didn't already direct our attention to the past, the beginning of the play certainly does.

After telling us "It's 1969. And I am very old, very cynical of the world, and I know it all. In short, I am seventeen years old," Li'l Bit introduces us to her childhood and adolescent sexual trauma in the 1960s (Vogel 9). Li'l Bit's sarcasm shines through in this moment, assuring the audience that she is 'okay'—that she can poke fun at this traumatic part of her childhood. This play has the capacity to be funny and light, which distorts common ideas of what stories about pedophilia, incest, and sexual coercion 'should' be like. How we deal with trauma and the past individually and nationally can be equally deviant. This moment at the beginning of *Drive* shows the audience that this play deals with memory in a similar way to Daniel Marcus who writes about political use of the past in the 1990s and 1980s. Marcus claims that "the cultural presentation of the past…is fragmented and only intermittently historical in any coherent way" (194). Due to the commodification of nostalgia in the 1990s, Marcus views the past as generally

divorced from history and fragmented with postmodern sensibilities, opting for subjectivity and questioning the notion of hard and fast 'history.' Marcus references the 1998 movie *Forrest Gump* as a prime example of this: by placing Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump in historical footage, the movie alters the national historical archive while simultaneously capitalizing on cultural memory and nostalgia for post-World War II America. Marcus does not write about drama, but his conceptualization of cultural representations of the past are useful when looking at *Drive.* Vogel does not depict national history like *Forrest Gump,* rather she uses Li'l Bit's memories to show us how nostalgic representations of the past infiltrate individual memory the same way they do with collective memory. Vogel positions the 1960s as a perpetrator of trauma, and specifically sexual trauma. Through postmodern dramaturgy, *Drive* offers an allegory about the perverted relationship between the 1990s and the 1960s.

Vogel's play follows Li'l Bit, a fortyish-year-old woman, who recounts a sexually abusive relationship with her pedophilic uncle-in-law, Peck. Though Li'l Bit recounts her traumatic relationship with her uncle, the play does not opaquely characterize Peck as evil. Just as memory can become faded over time, Li'l Bit's memory of Peck is complicated. They are joined by a Greek Chorus that plays family members, classmates, and others. By filling in the rest of Li'l Bit's world, the chorus serves as different 'public' perspectives, reminding us that this story and relationship does not live inside a vacuum. Told through fragments of scenes, hopping through the 1960s and 1970s, the script is signposted with a driving lesson framework galvanized by the chorus. The play is punctuated by titles such as: "Driving in First Gear," "Idling in the Neutral Gear," and "You and Reverse Gear" that dramaturgically reflect Li'l Bit's story arc. Refracted through her memory, the audience catches glimpses into Li'l Bit's relationships with her family, her body, and her sexuality.

Li'l Bit speaks to us from the 1990s, a decade marked by its cultural and political return to the past. Along with Marcus, plenty of scholars plenty of scholars have commented on how 1990s popular culture, like film, television, and fiction, utilized the past that hinged on historical iconography and mass spectacle.[1] With President Bill Clinton's 1992 election, Marcus quotes a "Washington Post writer [who] proclaimed that, 'we are on the brink of a renaissance of spirit that will make the '60s look like a dress rehearsal,' a new era of frankness, emotional depth, and experimentation in popular culture" (172). Somewhat paradoxically, however, American culture continued to return to the past. Blockbuster movies, sitcoms on television—more accessible than ever before in the 1990s—returned to the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Part of this nostalgia centered on utilizing iconic moments from national history and inserting oneself into those moments—like Forrest Gump at the Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pool. While theater is not considered popular culture, drama like *Drive* also drew from the past, looking to examine American culture on a more intimate scale. This tension between new and old—experimental and traditional—is a conflict that runs through the nineties, culturally[2] and politically.

The 1990s political sphere invoked the past, collective memory, and nostalgia for strategic purposes surrounding elections and political agendas. Colin Harrison characterizes the relationship between the 1990s and the 1960s as "ambivalent," yet *Drive* shows that the two decade's interactions are ultimately perverse. Evoking the sixties became a tool for both President Bill Clinton and the political right. Harrison illustrates the inextricable link between

[1] See Daniel Marcus, Lauren Berlant, and Colin Harrison among others.

[2] In Joanna Mansbridge's chapter on *Drive* in her book on Paula Vogel, she writes "the popular music situates Li'l Bit's memories within the broader cultural memory, infusing the troubling subject matter with a pop culture aesthetic" (127). On the matter of music, Vogel notes: "please have fun…Other sixties music is rife with pedophilish (?) reference: The Beach boys…Gary Pickett and the Union Gap's 'This Girl Is a Woman Now,' etc." (6).

1960s nostalgia in the 1990s and President Clinton: in the wake of Clinton's denial of smoking marijuana in college and as "the nation's first 'boomer' president, to his opponents he became a symbol of the threat that the counterculture posed to the nation's core traditions" (12). In his 1992 presidential campaign, a hopeful Clinton used the popular figures of 1960s nostalgia, Elvis and President John F. Kennedy, to his advantage. The 1960s were also a moment of socially progressive legislation, and Clinton appeared to follow in that tradition, however, after becoming president, he lacked the verve to really live up to the 1960s figures he evoked, deflating as a viable political figure. Harrison writes that "the memory of the 1960s…became the site of conflict, as members of the 'sixties generation' came to assume positions of power and fought bitterly over what that decade ought to mean" (3). *Drive* articulates that Li'l Bit's memory of the 1960s from the 1990s is not so much a site of conflict, but rather an intimate space of trauma by placing Peck as the embodiment of the 1960s.

Drive gives a different perspective—in scope and scale—on the decade's conflation of private and public. Vogel presents a less sensationalized reading of sexual trauma; instead, through devices like the Greek Chorus, she shows us the lessons we have individually, culturally, and politically learned about how to deal with trauma and sexual trauma. Clinton's election and presidency contributed to what Lauren Berlant calls 'the intimate public sphere:' which "renders citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere" (5). By integrating the private into the public and the political, sexual misconduct came up more frequently than before in the 1990s. Suddenly people were subjected to scrutiny or praise based upon how they lived behind closed doors. Clinton's impeachment over his relationship with Monica Lewinsky[3] and Anita Hill's

[3] The story of Clinton and Lewinsky's 'affair' came out a year after *Drive* premiered. I will attend more to this fact later.

1991 testimony against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas are two moments that situate *Drive,* its story about sexual trauma, and the characterization of Peck and Li'l Bit in a nineties discourse. These two political, and personal, events were plastered around national news cycles; and these two women in particular, Hill and Lewinsky, received public attention and backlash. Since the sexual deviancy depicted in *Drive* takes place between two non-blood related family members—not elected officials and public servants—this play extends an opportunity to examine how the public inserts itself into private sexual trauma.

Vogel taps into these cultural and political fixations in *Drive* to show how history and memory are not antithetical, rather, they are each integral to the other's conception. When this play premiered, reviewers categorized it as a memory play. A memory play centers around one narrator who guides the audience through their past, like Tom in Tennessee Williams's 1944 play *The Glass Menagerie* or Gallimard in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly,* written in 1988. The genre of the memory play allows for discoveries of an individual character's practices of remembering, which lets the audience in on the *extremely* intimate. Vogel, instead, "has described *Drive* as 'a history play,' explaining further, 'It's a way of using history to see what we are naturalizing now'" (Mansbridge 125). *Drive* turns the spotlight on how remembering and reflecting on the past is an integral tool to how we learn national and cultural lessons, especially lessons about gender, sex, and trauma. Harrison indicates that in the 1990s, "the very modes of remembering and representing [the past] had become problematic" (3). The problem of memory is its distortive practice; history and memory are similarly fallible modes of archiving.

Vogel situates Li'l Bit's individual memory amongst a national cultural nostalgia. *Drive* is not only a play that occupies narratives and explores discourses laid out in the decades where it takes place, the 1990s and the 1960s, but as dramatic critic and scholar Elinor Fuchs writes:

"theater becomes not simply a metaphor but a structural element in a series of world-cultural narratives" (151). *Drive* becomes a part of those decades' narratives. Just as Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* is the emblematic 'memory play' of early twentieth century American drama, *How I Learned to Drive* is an American memory play that is representative of 1990s cultural and political discourses rooted in nostalgia for the 1960s. Yet, Vogel characterizes this nostalgia as perverted and traumatizing rather than idyllic.

The Greek Chorus as an Embodied Public

At the beginning of the play, Li'l Bit tells us that in her family, "folks tend to get nicknamed for their genitalia": like Peck and B.B.—for blue balls. The Female Greek Chorus, as Li'l Bit's mother, helps explain this to the audience, telling us the story of how Li'l Bit's nickname came to be: "right between your legs there was…just a little bit," referring to her vagina as a newborn baby (Vogel 12). Characters are referred to as private parts publicly. These nicknames are indicative of not only her family, but also of the decade and the play's attitudes towards the private and the public: there is no separation between the two spaces.

The Male, Female, and Teenage Greek Chorus, as a dramaturgical framework as well as a grouping of characters, helps us place *Drive* in the physical and public world, dramatic theory of the 1990s, and the past itself. The chorus members showcase the postmodernity of Vogel's playwrighting. Fuchs describes postmodernism as a "flight from modernism: a revival of the classical, the figurative, the decorative. Postmodernism was inherently backward-looking and nostalgic" (144). In a very concrete and perhaps obvious way, the Greek Chorus has classical origins. In ancient Greek theater, the Chorus was a voice of the public, pointing the audience to how they, as a collective body of citizens, should feel and react to what occurred on stage. Vogel's chorus is figurative as they stand in as other characters and for us the audience. And

they're decorative in the ways they become spectacles of the structure of the play. In Vogel's notes, she urges "directors to use the Greek Chorus in staging as environment and, well, part of the family" (6). Vogel intends for them to transcend the space as characters and even actors by having them construct the world for the audience. The Greek Chorus is integral to Vogel's dramatic devices that place the play and its central perverted relationship in a larger world; they are the embodiment of the intimate public sphere. *Drive*'s postmodern dramaturgy is nostalgic, after Fuchs, but this nostalgia is distorted by the Greek Chorus. Through their many roles, we see how the past can be traumatic in the moment as well as in memory and how we are taught traumatic lessons from our family and larger communities.

The Greek Chorus reenacts the original sites of sexual trauma, shame, and gender performance for Li'l Bit, showing that in *Drive,* nostalgia is not picturesque, but menacing. They almost act as Li'l Bit's teacher assistants as well as the teachers themselves when Li'l Bit is experiencing moments rather than talking to us as the narrator. These lessons are shown to us through flashbacks to her childhood and adolescence. As shown in the first family dinner scene— "a typical family dinner"—her family talks crassly about Li'l Bit's body as well as their own. Li'l Bit teaches us how her family works, occasionally telling us what will happen beforehand: someone will bring up Li'l Bit's body, and eventually her grandfather will make enough sexist and sexual remarks like "how is Shakespeare going to help [Li'l Bit] lie on her back in the dark?" that Li'l Bit will leave the table (14). This scene takes place in 1969, and as Li'l Bit guides us through the scene, she carries an understanding that her family members were her first teachers. This familial and familiar space is where she was first sexualized; the first time we really watch the Greek Chorus, we are watching a perverse conversation. Nostalgia for

childhood is, popularly, a yearning for a lost innocence. In *Drive,* the nostalgia for childhood is not idealized, rather her memory depicts her childhood as traumatizing.

Besides playing specific characters, the Greek Chorus also functions as a theatrical device that Li'l Bit uses to her benefit. In one of these instances, we see the Greek Chorus switch from playing Li'l Bit's distressing family to a part of the sound design. Halfway through *Drive,* the Greek Chorus members and Li'l Bit engage in the second part of a three-part scene that is spaced throughout the play titled "On Men, Sex, and Women" (Vogel 29). As Li'l Bit's mother, grandmother, and grandfather, they answer her questions about sex: if it hurts, why everything hurts for girls, and why there is always blood. That devolves into a conversation between her mother and grandmother about what is 'appropriate' to tell Li'l Bit about the 'truth' of life. Li'l Bit's mother berates her mother for not helping her when her husband was still with them. Li'l Bit's grandfather replies the same way he did back in the day: "You Made Your Bed; Now Lie On It." In an outburst to the audience, from the present, Li'l Bit cries out "Oh please, I still can't bear to listen to it, after all these years—." Suddenly, the chorus members break into song: "Do-Bee-Do-Wah...Shoo-doo-be-doo-be-doo; Shoo-doo-be-doo-be-doo." The chorus, in this moment, does not have control over themselves, instead they are used as theatrical devices, and in this case used as sound design objects rather than actors to change the scene: "*The Male Greek Chorus…out of his open mouth, as if to his surprise, [sings] a base refrain from a Motown song*" (31). Their three-part harmony blends into a recorded song, and the scene has finished its transformation. This moment insinuates a lack of consent: the chorus members make noise without knowing why and they are used for a brief moment as a part of the play's design. They become puppets espousing 1960s nostalgia by singing a Motown tune. Marcus remarks that "in the postmodern era, the power of conservative nostalgia comes from its promise to recover lost

stability" (116). Here, the invoked 1960s nostalgia through music is a moment of instability, twisting how nostalgia is usually used in popular culture.

The chorus is also a part of another theatrical framing device: the driving lesson titles. Through this framework, we see that this memory play implicates others in its practices of remembrance. These titles help guide the audience through the story and also keep the metaphorical driving lesson intact. Under the production notes, Vogel specifies that "in production these [titles] should be spoken in a neutral voice (the type of voice that driver education films employ). In the [1997] New York production these titles were assigned to various members of the Greek Chorus and were done live" (Vogel 6). This difference in staging produces different meanings. Vogel is already playing with the optics and ways of making meaning through disembodiment: for example, the scenes of sexual contact between Peck and Li'l Bit at the beginning and end of the play.[4] By having the framing device spoken through voice-over, there is a sense of an omnipotent speaker that is not Li'l Bit having control over the course of the narrative. And the voice affect that Vogel recommends using is extremely bureaucratic, which would further make the titles some sort of outsider intruding on the play. If the members of the chorus speak the titles, then they are implicated in the lessons taught throughout the play. They also take some control over Li'l Bit's narration, just as she did not consent to the lessons she was taught, she does not always have clear control over her memory of said trauma. This convergence of speakers categorizes this play as not just a memory play, but as a history play, like Vogel proclaims. History is not a singular individual's memory, but rather a collective memory; history is not dormant but active in shaping the present and the future.

[4] I will attend to these scenes in the final section.

The Greek Chorus members are delineated by their gender and age: Male, Female, and Teenage. By splitting up the chorus by gender, Vogel further points to how we learn gender, specifically cisgender, norms and marks the chorus members as universal stand-ins. Joanna Mansbridge writes that "the metaphor of the driving lesson rein-forces that gender is not something that originates in the body, but something that is taught" (132). The titles in the middle of the play exemplify this thought process the most. During a scene in the middle of the play where we visit Li'l Bit's experience in ninth grade, the driving lesson titles are: "Good defensive driving involves mental and physical preparation. Are you prepared?" later, "Good defensive driving involves mental and physical preparation. Were you prepared?" and finally, "Were you prepared?" (Vogel 35-7). These titles, possibly spoken by an invisible voice, possibly by the chorus members themselves, are showcasing a lesson in victim-blaming. By putting the onus on Li'l Bit as the 'driver' to be 'prepared,' the audience learns how young girls are taught to hate their bodies, to allow sexualization and objectification from others, and to blame themselves for anyone else's actions.

This scene that depicts ninth grade has three parts, one where a boy makes a lewd joke about Li'l Bit's breasts being fake, another in the gym showers with other girls, and finally at a school dance. At the dance, and after Li'l Bit rejects a dance with a boy, the Female Greek Chorus says to her: "you know, you should take it as a compliment that the guys want to watch your jiggle. They're guys. That's what they're supposed to do" (Vogel 38). Here, Li'l Bit learns a lesson in gender norms and hyper-sexualization from her peers, though she also learns these lessons from her family—both of whom are played by the Greek Chorus. They function as the personal, vocalizing and blending the private sphere with the public by being so open without any sense of shame. This runs counter to the nostalgic modes of family that right-wing

Republicans sought after Clinton's election and certainly after Lewinsky and Clinton's affair became public.

As devices of Li'l Bit's memory, the Greek Chorus are contributing in multiple ways to the how the narrative of the play expands and contracts. And they contribute to the larger discourses around the distortion and perversion of memory. As a body of people, they are three individuals who move swiftly through the play, like chameleons. In *Drive* they act as stand-ins for the public and individuals, keeping in line with the intimate public sphere's obsession with the private and the national. As a 1990s play, writing in the midst of postmodernism, Vogel's use of framing devices like the Greek Chorus asks us to look back and question lessons we were taught by our families and by our communities.

Southern Charm and Sexual Citizenship: Peck and Clinton

Uncle Peck, the contradictory character whose actions are well-discussed in scholarship about *Drive,* is a familiar sort of white man. I offer a concrete way to interpret Peck: as a figure akin to President Bill Clinton, a man whose "need for public life and his sometimes-confused explanations for his actions drew attention to his vulnerability" (Zaretsky 19). When we first meet Peck, Li'l Bit describes him as a married man (Vogel 9). We learn that he is her uncle at the end of the scene; we don't learn that he married into the family until two scenes later. The more time we spend with Peck, the more complex he becomes. Just as the public spent more time with Clinton, he unraveled in the national eye. These are two vulnerable and coercive men under scrutiny by individuals and the public, yet they are ultimately treated fairly due to their characterization and their whiteness. They are able to capitalize on the past while perverting it.

Uncle Peck and Bill Clinton are birds of a feather in a few ways. Both are southern, Peck is from South Carolina while Clinton is from Arkansas. Both are also treated and characterized

quite fairly regardless of their misconduct. Vogel's treatment of Peck has always been some part of the discourse around *Drive*: he is the preparator of sexual coercion and pedophilia, yet Li'l Bit ambiguously forgives, or at least accepts, him at the end of the play. This all stems from Vogel's characterization of Peck. In the midst of the Lewinsky scandal, Clinton was still liked by Americans,[5] which arose from Clinton's characterization that began before his election. Following in Clinton's footsteps, Peck invokes nostalgic figures from the sixties, which leads to a forgiving though also contradictory reading of Peck that parallels Clinton's own fall throughout his presidency. Ultimately showing their web of relationships—Li'l Bit and Peck, Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton, Clinton and the nation, Peck and his community, the 1990s and 1960s—to be is traumatic.

The relationship explored in *Drive* between Peck and Li'l Bit and the Lewinsky and Clinton scandal are not exceptional, rather the questions they raised about sex, intimacy, family, and trauma were swarming the collective consciousness. A year after *Drive* premiered, the Lewinsky and Clinton affair came to light, sparking judgement, outrage, and excitement across the nation. Clinton's right-wing opponents decried his character, Lewinsky was skewered by press, yet as he was impeached, Clinton was generally liked by the public. A sex scandal in the highest elected office of the country brought sexual deviancy to the forefront of the public's mind, years after Anita Hill's testimony and the beginning of the 'intimate public sphere.' Harrison praised Clinton's "ability to create a powerful affective relationship between the people and the presidential office, cultivating intimacy as an element of his public authority as few presidents had managed to do before him" during his campaign and the early years of his presidency (5). This 'cultivated intimacy' was overrun when his affair with Lewinsky broke. The

[5] "60 percent support for Clinton, 30 percent opposed, and 10 percent undecided" (Zaretsky 27).

iconic line "I did not have sex with that woman" coupled with the kind of relationship that they had made "the act [come] across as incest," so much so that "to some extent, all male-female relations, and certainly 'father/daughter' relations, such as the quasi-incestuous relation between Clinton and Lewinsky, had come under a cloud of suspicion." Amid this scandal, larger conversations and revelations around childhood sexual abuse "encouraged the belief that paternal incest was commonplace' (Zaretsky 26). Although *Drive* predates the announcement of Clinton's deviancy, both men and their relationships are exemplary of that moment in the decade.

One of the most complex scenes of Li'l Bit and Peck's relationship is their last interaction. This is, dramaturgically speaking, the climax of the play. After she has gone to college and turned eighteen, the two of them meet up in a hotel room to celebrate her birthday and end up lying down together on the bed. While Peck "*looks as if he's trying to soak her into his pores through osmosis,*" the Greek Chorus and Li'l Bit deliver a "Recipe for a Southern Boy" together. Through this recipe, Li'l Bit is coming to terms with her attraction and love for Peck, even though she also knows that their relationship is harmful and doesn't want to continue seeing him. Some of the ingredients include:

> FEMALE GREEK CHORUS. (*as Aunt Mary*) A drawl of molasses in the way he speaks…
> LI'L BIT. Warm brown eyes—
> FEMALE GREEK CHORUS. (*as Aunt Mary)* Bedroom eyes—
> MALE GREEK CHORUS. A dash of Southern Baptist Fire and Brimstone—
> LI'L BIT. A curl of Elvis on his forehead— (52)

The recipe goes on for a page, each line sliding into the next, creating a type of vortex that sucks Li'l Bit deeper into this idealized version of a 'southern boy'—not a man. This moment invites us as the audience to contribute to the recipe, since it is a collaborative moment amongst the characters. A recipe, as a form, requires prescription and revision. By having two members of the Greek Chorus strengthen the recipe with their own additions, we catch a glimpse of public and

personal perception at work. The chorus members and Li'l Bit are both using Peck as the exemplary 'southern Boy' in order to instruct others, as well as placing Peck within the constraints of this recipe. We have seen these chorus members play multiple people, and here the Female Greek Chorus plays Aunt Mary specifically. Not only do these two women who are central to Peck add to this recipe individually, but they are collaborating: "*While Peck lies, his eyes closed, Li'l Bit rises in the bed and responds to her aunt*" (52). Aunt Mary knows this recipe already, Li'l Bit is adding onto what is already in front of her. At the end of the recipe, the Female Greek Chorus seems to encourage Li'l Bit to touch Peck: beckoning her to "reach out with your hand and" (53). This recipe devolves into not only a recipe for a 'southern Boy' but also a recipe—and a lesson—on how to interact and engage with one.

Outside of *Drive,* this recipe seems to be transferrable onto other charismatic southern men, specifically Clinton. The final ingredient, "A curl of Elvis on his forehead," evokes a specific 1960s nostalgia straight out of Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. Marcus devotes a whole chapter in his book to how Clinton used Elvis[6] and former President John F. Kennedy to "to reinflect meanings of the 1950s and 1960s for contemporary America…[placing] Clinton symbolically as the inheritor of popular cultural and political legacies. Clinton answered Republican nostalgia with his own connection to an American past, to claim allegiance to familiar icons of American greatness" (150). By citing Elvis, Vogel aligns Peck with Clinton, in order for Peck to also "claim allegiance to familiar icons of American greatness."[7] The choice to

[6] Elvis and Clinton also both appropriated "heavily from black cultural forms" (Marcus 157). To see the campaign strategy in action, watch Clinton play Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" in 1992 on Arsenio Hall's television show. See also Toni Morrison's *New Yorker* article "The Talk of the Town" from 1998 in which she calls Clinton the nation's first Black president.

[7] A different icon of American greatness that Vogel aligns Peck with is Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's novel *To Kill A Mockingbird.* In Peck's character description, Vogel writes: "Despite a few problems, he should be played by an actor one might cast in the role of Atticus" (5).

insert Elvis here makes sense when following Li'l Bit's story: this is where she succumbs, for a moment, to her attraction to Peck though a poetic wormhole. This allusion to Elvis is one way that we see Vogel invoke sixties nostalgia in the same way that Clinton did in the early nineties and shows how Clinton and Peck are alike. Both are scrutinized by others: Clinton by the nation and Peck by characters that act as both people he has personal relationships and the 'public.'

In this moment we all succumb to this idyllic picture of a 'southern man.' Breathing in Li'l Bit's memory, we are invited to sensually indulge in scents, textures, tastes, and sentimental imagery. Clinton's own recipe of Elvis and John F. Kennedy allowed voters to revel, or perhaps wallow, in a sepia-toned past. At the end of the recipe, however, just as "*Li'l Bit rises above her uncle and looks at his mouth; she starts to lower herself to kiss him—and wrenches herself free"* (Vogel 53). While Li'l Bit lies to Peck about how she didn't feel anything, we are all jostled from the nostalgia and remember the circumstances. Vogel shows how we are haunted by the past—the chorus whispers refrains from the recipe to Li'l Bit as she denies her feelings—and that the romantic past is distortive.

Peck's deviancy does not *make* him a citizen; however, Peck and Clinton show that white men can capitalize off of nostalgia in order to maintain their status. Peck is characterized by Vogel, or perhaps by Li'l Bit, as a confidant to Li'l Bit. He understands her and believes in her unlike anyone else in her life. Yet, he molests her. Seeking an explanation for Peck is central to *Drive*; at the end of the play, Li'l Bit wonders if he was abused as a child, a question the audience, no doubt, wonders as well. He transgresses our national norms around family and sex, but he is forgiven at the end of the play. Michael Kimbrough, writing about the ethics of Vogel's depiction of pedophilia, claims that *Drive* "simply promotes what the Constitution aims to guarantee and secular humanism endorses, that Uncle Peck, and by extension all pedophiles, be

afforded all the rights of a lawful citizen and regarded as one among equals" (48). Kimbrough complicates the political implications and manifestations of the intimate public sphere, which makes "acts that are not civic acts, like sex, [bear] the burden of defining proper citizenship" (Berlant, 5).

Peck offers us a chance to understand him more while washing dishes after a family dinner. He explains why he drinks to Li'l Bit: "there are some people who have a…a 'fire' in the belly. I think they go to work on Wall Street or they run for office.[8] And then there are people who have a 'fire' in their heads…you've got a 'fire' in the head…I have a fire in my heart. And sometimes the drinking helps" (Vogel 46). This philosophy acts like a piece to a larger puzzle that seeks to explain Peck. His understanding of people tells us more about his point of view than it necessarily tells us about *him*. We understand that he is wounded, which, borrowing Berlant's definition, makes him an American citizen: "a person traumatized by some aspect of life in the United States" (3), in this case his veteran status. By displaying this philosophy, Peck asks us to categorize ourselves. No matter where our 'fire' is, Peck ropes us into aligning ourselves alongside him; we are close to him than we might think.

Kimbrough speaks to Vogel's characterization of Peck, "In *Drive*, the pedophile is not a generalized evil that can safely be ostracized as an anonymous, transgressive other. Instead, the other is made radically the same. Peck is one of us. He lives in our families, eats at our tables, and cares for our children" (61). This sounds eerily like presidential campaign rhetoric: he drinks beers, he goes to movies, and he walks his dog like us. Vogel employs the same strategies as Clinton did to close the gap between himself and the public. Marcus addresses descriptions of Clinton during his first term as president in popular media: "USA Today listed his 'formative

[8] Clinton "had a deep, personal need for politics and for the public sphere" (Zaretsky 18).

influences' as 'hamburger drive-ins and Elvis movies,' constructing a prototypical adolescence of the late 1950s and early 1960s for the new president" (173). This is, once again, utilizes the past for strategic purposes, leading to a twisted nostalgic relationship. Clinton, as a white man in power, is able to manipulate nostalgia to his advantage despite his deviancy. Micki McElya discusses Clinton's 'white-trash' identity throughout his impeachment, and notes that "his critics fear that if not exposed deviant, his behavior and background could be accepted as normative" (158). Yet, by aligning himself with iconic white men from the sixties, Clinton's status as a white heterosexual man—not to mention president—stays intact despite his deviancy. Peck is a Clinton-type: Li'l Bit's remembrance of him is wrapped up in the same nostalgia that Clinton used to get elected. Peck's association with the past, and specifically the 1960s, marks the relationship between the 1990s and the 1960s as perverse. Despite both of the men's misconduct, they are ultimately treated with forgiveness by the public and Li'l Bit.

Dramatic Citizenship: Li'l Bit in the Driver's Seat

Lastly, I turn to our narrator, Li'l Bit: the source of these memories and the playwright-figure. We witness Li'l Bit's concentrated and intricate memory and see how to achieve healing after trauma. Yet, she shows us that the past is sitting in the backseat. Li'l Bit practices, what I would term, dramatic citizenship by performing a twisted, and forgiving, memory. I have molded the term dramatic citizenship after Lauren Berlant's Diva Citizenship. While Diva Citizenship is preoccupied with public displays of citizenship, from Black women specifically, dramatic citizenship takes place when someone dramatically re-enacts trauma. Dramatic citizenship grants a more privileged space in which the citizen in question can have control over her dramatic narrative. By dramatizing her memory, Li'l Bit is "calling on [us] to change the social and institutional practices of citizenship to which [we] currently consent" (Berlant 223); she calls for

radical empathy. In *Drive,* Li'l Bit's privileges allow her a more breathable, artistic, less rigid memory practice through the dramatic reenactment of her story.

The 1990s began with an extremely public instance of sexual harassment that came to the forefront of national news media and conversation: Anita Hill's testimony against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in 1991. This rise in women publicly speaking out against their harassers offers a way to look at *Drive* and put testimony, drama, and memory in conversation with each other. After President George H. W. Bush nominated Thomas, Hill testified during the confirmation hearings that he sexually harassed her when she worked for him. Thomas was confirmed, and Hill was reprimanded by Thomas's supporters. In contrast to Li'l Bit, Anita Hill's testimony and emotional labor was pushed aside—though considered nationally and culturally important—and received racialized and gendered backlash for holding her male harasser accountable. Berlant classifies Hill's testimony as a moment of "Diva Citizenship [which] occurs when a person stages a dramatic coupe in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege" (223). Berlant coined this term when thinking and writing about Black women and fictional characters; Diva Citizenship is a distinct mode of Black femme citizenship and spectacle. Vogel does not specify race in her character descriptions—although Peck's alignment with Atticus Finch clues us to his race—and major productions have generally cast white actors as Li'l Bit.[9] Li'l Bit certainly has privilege on the theatrical stage as a white, cisgender, and heterosexual woman. And she has the privilege of time, and healing. Her memory is private, yet, how remembers publicly with the audience differs from other public figures subjected to sexual misconduct like Anita Hill and Monica Lewinsky.

[9] Identity-conscious casting would offer very different ways of reading this play. I am in this moment, however, assuming whiteness.

Anita Hill's public testimony required her to expend emotional labor in a myriad of ways, most notably by adhering to the form of a testimony. Li'l Bit, on the other hand, is not bound by a testimonial mode of remembering in her memory play. Emotional labor is defined by Arlie Russell Hochschild as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display." Hochschild continues: "this labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (7). Hill was subjected to perform emotional labor while reliving traumatic experiences because of the public space she testified in. The form of a testimony also requires the speaker to remember succinctly and ideally chronologically. [10] There is no room to wonder and no room to lie; everything said is 'official.' These expectations are only exacerbated and scrutinized more when women testify, and even more so women of color. Monica Lewinsky, on the other hand, experienced nonstop publicity after she was named as Clinton's 'other woman.' Lisa Duggan and Berlant attend to this:

> The very publicness of the sexual and legal rhetoric that saturated the airwaves enabled a proper teller to say something raunchy or punchy and then, innocently, to ask, whose fault was it anyway, whose excesses of fascination produced these jokes, as though Starr/Clinton/Lewinsky/Jones forced us to play with their exposure?" (5)

With nowhere to hide from the public eye, Lewinsky became the subject of joke after joke.[11] The media adapted the Clinton and Lewinsky affair into a comedy, or a drama depending on what channel or program you watched, but Lewinsky did not have control over that dramatization like Li'l Bit has in *Drive*. The theater gives a uniquely intimate public space for Li'l Bit where she

[10] I can't help but think of Christine Blasey Ford's testimony in 2018 against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh here. The difference between Kavanaugh's questioning and her testimony was, and is, stark.

[11] See Caroline Pate's article in *Bustle,* "Proof that Slut Shaming Hurts," that copy and pastes late-night television jokes about Lewinsky. See also John Oliver's interview with Lewinsky on *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*'s episode titled "Public and Online Shaming" from March 2019.

isn't required to perform the same emotional labor. Here she ditches testimony in favor of the dramatic, and in turn, follows more closely to how memory actually works.

While we might hold expectations of what a victim-narrative looks and sounds like, Li'l Bit, by dramatically depicting her memory and trauma, subverts those expectations. At the mid-point of the play, Li'l Bit skips ahead from her childhood to 1979 for "a long bus trip to Upstate New York" where she meets a senior in high school (28). They start flirting—at this point Li'l Bit is twenty-seven years old—and she predicts their entire interaction a moment or two into their conversation. In this narrative slice, she reminds us that this is *her* play by relaying this brief memory like a playwright:

> And, dramaturgically speaking, after the faltering and slightly comical 'first act,' there was the very briefest of intermissions, and an extremely capable and forceful and *sustained* second act. And after the second act climax and a gentle denouement—before the post-play discussion—I lay on my back in the dark and I thought about you, Uncle Peck. Oh. Oh—this is the allure. Being older. Being the first. Being the translator, the teacher, the epicure, the already jaded. This is how the giver gets taken. (Vogel 29)

Here Li'l Bit maps out sexual intercourse as if it is a play, dramatized with an arc. This makes the case that the only way for her to heal from the sexual trauma that Peck inflicted onto her was to dramatize their relationship. This dramatic structure, however, is not *Drive*'s structure. Mansbridge notes that "*Drive* employs a nonchronological structure, using detours and reverse movements to mimic the workings of memory" (126). This structure is not only distinct from the above passage, but also distinct from the form of the testimony. Graley Herren writes about healing and trauma in *Drive* and uses Meike Bal's categories of memory to do so.[12] The third category, 'traumatic memory,' "recurs…not as a narrative about the past but as a dramatic re-enactment in the present" (106). With this type of memory, trauma is relived consistently.

[12] The other two categories are "habitual memory" and "narrative memory." See Bal's book *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* for more.

Reflecting on her childhood from the nineties as the writer of her memory play, Li'l Bit shows that the nostalgia for the past, and the sixties, is a traumatic memory.

The staging of Peck and Li'l Bit's sexual interactions clues us into how Li'l Bit not only copes with these traumatic memories as the narrator, but also how her memory turned perverse. Vogel composes destabilizing stage directions in the two instances where we see Peck and Li'l Bit engage in intimacy on stage. In the second scene of the play, Li'l Bit and Peck sit in "*two chairs facing front—or a Buick Riviera, if you will…the two sit facing directly front. They do not touch. Their bodies remain passive. Only their facial expressions emote"* (Vogel 10). Herren describes this scene as "downright bizarre" and "strange" (107-8). Detachment is key: by removing real representations of intimacy, for instance when, "*Peck bows his head as if praying. But he is kissing her nipple,"* the audience must question what they are actually watching (Vogel 11-12). Herren cites theorist and playwright Bertolt Brecht's theory of defamiliarization, or, the alienating effect, in which "the performer wishes to appear alien to the spectator" instead of bringing the audience "as close as possible to the events and the characters being presented" (Brecht and Bentley 131-2). In her article, Herren mentions Brecht to indicate how Li'l Bit uses defamiliarization as a coping mechanism when returning to her traumatic past (108). By practicing dramatic citizenship as the playwright-figure, Li'l Bit has control over the representation of these moments of traumatic sexual intimacy.

The penultimate scene of the play: what Li'l Bit titles "The First Driving Lesson," is perhaps more alien than the second scene. This scene stages the first time that Peck molested Li'l Bit when she was eleven. Instead of passively depicting Peck and Li'l Bit's sexual interaction like in the second scene, here "*The Teenage Greek Chorus member stands apart on stage. She will speak all of Li'l Bit's lines. Li'l Bit sits beside Peck in the front seat. She looks at him*

closely, remembering" (Vogel 56). This choice is distinctly postmodern in it's "dispersed idea of self" (Fuchs 9). We watch Li'l Bit, as herself in the 1990s looking back, "remembering," but we hear the Teenage Greek Chorus's voice speak Li'l Bit's lines. Vogel makes a specific note that the Teenage Greek Chorus should be "a young woman who is 'of legal age,' that is twenty-one to twenty-five years old who can look as close to eleven as possible…if the actor is too young, the audience may feel uncomfortable" (Vogel 5). Yet the effect of this penultimate scene is already discomforting. Fragmented and alienating, this glimpse into the beginning of their perverse relationship is twisted even more so by Li'l Bit's behavior. As she goes through the blocking of the scene, she physically adlibs, showing us how she remembers Peck now: "*She leans against him, closing her eyes…Li'l Bit puts one hand to Peck's face, to stroke him. Then, she takes the wheel…Peck puts his hands on Li'l Bit's beasts. She relaxes against him, silent, accepting his touch"* (56). We witness simulated molestation on stage, but we see Li'l Bit fondly accepting her traumatic past. She gives in to a perverse nostalgia that allows Peck to escape with little scrutiny from her—and perhaps the audience. Li'l Bit practices dramatic citizenship and has more control over her narrative than other 1990s victims of sexual misconduct, like Hill and Lewinsky. Yet, Vogel ultimately shows how this perverted nostalgia for the past thrives off of forgiveness—which is how Li'l Bit ends the play.

Conclusion

Drive ends with Li'l Bit in a car, flooring it. But she's not alone. As she prepares to drive: "*Li'l Bit adjusts the rearview mirror,* [and] *a faint light strikes the spirit of Uncle Peck, who is sitting in the back seat of the car. She sees him in the mirror. She smiles at him and he nods at her. They are happy to be going for a long drive together*" (Vogel 58). While Li'l Bit has forgiven Peck, Vogel reminds us that we cannot drive away and leave our past in the dust.

Regardless of our healing processes, we carry our pasts with us: as individuals, our bodies remember our traumatic pasts.

Bessel van der Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in Healing of Trauma,* first published in 2014, is a nonfiction phenomenon in bookstores and reading lists. In this self-help book, one of van der Kolk's suggestions is to 'rescript your life': advising that "most people are hesitant to go into past pain and disappointment—it only promises to bring back the intolerable. But as they are mirrored and witnessed, a new reality begins to take shape…it gives you permission to feel what you feel and know what you know" (307). Van der Kolk suggests a kind of dramatic citizenship; in rewriting traumatic memory, a person can give space to their "inner world" and become more confident (308). We witness Li'l Bit achieve this level of healing throughout her memory play; *Drive* shows how, as individuals, we can heal from trauma.

Yet in the public, repairing and reducing harm is not as simple. Dramatic citizenship is not the most inclusive, accessible, or even sustainable way for survivors to reclaim their lives after trauma. Women and victims of sexual trauma who exist in the public sphere cannot write the script themselves when media continues to take control of narratives and teeters between treating folks like subjects or objects. White, cisgender, heterosexual patriarchal power structures support themselves by inflicting trauma on those that do not benefit from these systems of power. Nostalgia is perhaps one of these structures' strongest tools. It gets men elected into office, for instance Ronald Reagan's slogan "Let's Make America Great Again," later adapted by Donald Trump for his own campaign. Vogel, and history, warns us that nostalgia is effective in its distraction, handsome in its distortion, and dangerous in its allure.

After a tumultuous twenty-four years, *How I Learned to Drive* is set to have its Broadway premiere next year with the original cast reprising their roles. I can't help but wonder how audiences will receive this story when sexual misconduct and harassment is even more prevalent in everyday life and cancel culture seeks punishment. The roads these days have different rules than they did in the 1990s; we could all use a refresher.

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