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FROM THE SPACES BETWEEN: PARATEXTUAL ELEMENTS AS A MODE OF RESISTANCE IN TILLIE OLSEN'S SHORT STORY "O YES"

*"What is the unspoken saying? What does it mean?
To what extent is dissimulation a way of speaking?"*

– Pierre Macherey

In his important text, *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) quoted above, French literary theorist Pierre Macherey notes the ambivalent qualities of silence. Although conventional wisdom suggests silence as an absence of expression, Macherey posits that silence can also be a *presence*, arguing that evoking silence is not necessarily a passive act but also a means of resistance. In this essay, I would like to consider spacing between the words in a literary text as a form of silence. This theoretical groundwork allows for a nuanced understanding of how American author Tillie Olsen employs textual silences, or spaces, within her short fiction to call attention to problematic, racist ideologies present in America during the mid-twentieth century. As such, this essay analyzes Olsen's short story "O Yes" (1961) to illustrate how Olsen's innovative use of spacing and other elements serve as a means of critiquing oppressive systems of power.¹

It makes sense to begin this analysis by considering how to categorize these textual spaces—or silences—in works of literature. How should an extra space on the page be classified? What should we call a typographical element that is so small it may be overlooked by the untrained eye? Coined by French literary theorist Gérard Genette, the term "paratext" is best-suited to classify such textual elements. According to Genette, paratext includes the many components that frame a literary work, including a book's cover, prologue, index, epilogue, dedication, and so forth. Arguably, typography, margins, and the spacing or justification of the text within a work of literature is also paratextual. In spite of their prominent placement in a book, paratextual features are sometimes ignored and overlooked by readers. Beth A. McCoy argues that this "matrix

¹ "O Yes" was first published as "Baptism" in the literary journal *Prairie Schooner* in 1957. It was later re-titled and included Olsen's collection of short fiction *Tell Me in a Riddle* (1961). In the essay, I have tried to represent Olsen's text as close to the original publication as possible. Any non-standard spacing between words of non-standard line breaks are purposeful.

of spaces” is “frequently unnoticed and even disdained” (156). Conversely, paratextual components can shape a reader’s entire interpretation of a text. According to Genette and Marie Maclean, the paratext helps to make a book “present” and “to assure its presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and its consumption” (261). Genette and other scholars also describe the paratext in relationship to borders and border-crossings. Genette and Maclean argue that paratextual items are at the “fringes” of the book, suggesting paratext is “an undecided zone” which is “between the inside and the outside” (261). This definition gestures toward the liminality or in-between-ness of paratextual elements. Because of the paratext’s classification as an undecided and marginal zone, the paratext has been a topic of analysis for those who study gender, sexuality, and race.

Many contemporary scholars, in fact, have developed understandings of paratext in relationship to oppressive structures of power. Some readings of paratext figure it in terms of dominance and submission—that is, the paratext is considered “subservient” to the dominant, primary narrative. American literary critic J. Hillis Miller brings focus to the prefix “para,” noting it signifies exteriority. For Miller, “para” indicates “a thing which is situated at once on this side and on that of a frontier, of a threshold or of a margin, of equal status and yet secondary, subsidiary, subordinate, like a guest to his host, a slave to his master” (219). Such an entity, according to Miller, “is not only at once on both sides of the frontier which separates the exterior and the interior; it is also the frontier itself, the screen which creates a permeable membrane between the inside and the outside” (219). Interiority and exteriority are key terms in discussions regarding the limited scope of the Western literary canon; such conversations explore how women’s experiences have been both inside and outside of written histories, reminding us that women writers have been frequently marginalized, suppressed, or ignored.

In addition to reading the paratext in relationship to gender, there are also implications for analyzing paratext as a means of resistance against racist ideologies. Beth McCoy reads the paratext as a space of liberation for African-American authors, arguing that, “the paratext is territory important, fraught, and contested. More specifically, its marginal spaces and places have functioned centrally as a zone transacting ever-changing modes of white domination and of resistance to that domination” (156). Paradoxically (and perhaps because this space *is* over-looked), the same site that has been ignored becomes a locus for confronting ideologies that silence or misunderstand minority voices. In “O Yes,” Tillie Olsen calls attention to the breakdown in communication between black and white people through her use of spacing between the words and other paratextual elements in the stories. Olsen’s textual spaces serve as visual reminders of the racial divide in America as well as allude to how expressions from marginalized people were perpetually silenced by racist ideologies and government policies.

In her book *Silences* (1974), Olsen explores the numerous ways silence pervades women's writing, distinguishing between what she calls "natural" and "unnatural" literary silences in the work of female authors. Olsen calls attention to how the literary canon celebrates white, male authors whilst overlooking female writers. She declares this omission a "silence," and discusses numerous other "hidden silences" in the field of literature; there are numerous works composed by women that have been "aborted deferred, [and] denied" (8). These silences, according to Olsen, often occur when a female author's writing is waylaid by heteronormative roles prescribed for them such as marriage, motherhood, and other domestic responsibilities. In *Silences*, Olsen draws on her own life and literary experiences to develop claims about how political, economic, and social forces silenced many female literary voices.²

While Olsen offers a robust discussion of silences in her non-fiction, she uses textual silences (spacing and pauses) in her short story "O Yes" to consider how black voices have been systematically suppressed in America. Such paratextual elements in Olsen's story function as a form of literary mimesis, reflecting the limits and boundaries set by racial and economic hierarchies in the United States. That is, Olsen's irregular and non-standard spacing between lines, words, and paragraphs reflects the gaps and separations between black and white people in America. Olsen's narrative style is often broken and fragmented, making the story difficult to decipher. These difficulties mirror the chasm in communication between racial groups in mid-twentieth century America that continue to resonate today.

In short, Olsen employs a number of paratextual elements in "O Yes" to describe a fading friendship between two teenaged girls: Pariale, who is black, and Carol, who is white. The demise of their friendship also serves as an allegorical critique of racist ideologies and segregation policies present during the time the story was published. "O Yes" begins at Pariale's baptism, a ceremony that signifies her transition into an adult member of the church. The sub-plot of the story echoes the primary one in that it explores the girls' transition into high school and the adult American society which forbids such inter-racial friendships. As Rebekah Edwards notes in the foreword to Olsen's *Tell Me A Riddle* collection, the two are, "forced apart by the formal and informal tracking of the American public school system of the 1950s, and by the systematic racial segregation that it supports" (xv). Several characters in the story reiterate this viewpoint, implying the impossibility of the girls' friendship in a segregated society, but

2 Though her career began in the 1930s and lasted well into the latter part of the 20th century, Olsen's résumé is punctuated by a number of gaps in between publications. She began her one and only novel, *Yonondio from the Thirties*, in the 1930s, but it remained unfinished and unpublished for four decades until she completed it in 1974.

Carol's mother Helen offers an optimistic reflection at the end of the story, visualizing a future in which the girls may rekindle their friendship.

As noted earlier, the story is comprised of fragmented and overlapping narratives. The cacophonous quality of the narrative occasionally renders it difficult to follow, but the plurality of voices in the story reflects the various dialects present in mid-twentieth century America, many of which were ridiculed or suppressed. Part One of "O Yes" is told from Carol's perspective as she observes Pariale's baptism ceremony. This event appears to be the first time Carol has visited her friend's church—which is an exclusively black congregation. Carol and her mother, "are the only white people...sitting in the dimness of the Negro church that had once been a corner store" (43). Shortly after the opening of the story, readers experience a dissonant churning of songs and screams filtered through Carol's perception. Carol's impression of the house of worship is cloaked in her fear and misunderstanding, signifying her exotification of the church members as well as latent prejudices.

Carol's thoughts about the church cast it in increasingly violent terms as the narrative moves forward, describing the first sounds she hears as, "powerful throbbing voices" (43). Later, Carol hears "ladders of screamings" and "drumming feet of ushers running;" Pariale's mother Alva is described as "chanting" (44). Such word choices correspond with stereotypical imaginings of African mysticism and tribal magic common in racist stereotypes prevalent at the time of publication. The intensity of the service is overwhelming for Carol, though she is surrounded by people who love and care about her, including Pariale, her mother Alva, and Carol's own mother, Helen. The frenetic vocalizations and energetic worship of the church members overload Carol's senses and she almost faints during the service, granting her a ready excuse to exit the church shortly thereafter. Though the majority of Part One of the story is told from Carol's perspective, it meaningfully closes in the reflective thoughts of Alva, Pariale's mother.

In Part One of "O Yes," Olsen uses paratextual elements to indicate themes of separation between races in America. The spacing in the text symbolically indicates the rifts in the social fabric of the country during the time the story is set. As the story unfolds, Carol's stream-of-consciousness narrative reveals that she and Pariale—whom she used to affectionately call Parry—have been friends since early childhood. Sitting next to Pariale in the warm church evokes pleasant memories from the past, and demonstrates how the two friends used to share a common childhood language that transcended their differences. In the church, Pariale's arm feels "so warm" to Carol that before she realizes it, she has started up "the old game from grade school, drumming a rhythm on the other's arm to see if the song could be guessed" (39). In the past, the two girls were so intimate that differences in their race did not seem to change or influence their

affection for one another. As the sermon commences, Carol slips into a sleepy reverie of childhood memories about shared rhymes and play:

O voice of drowsiness and dream to which Carol does not need to listen. As long ago. Parry warm beside her too, as it used to be, there in the classroom of Mann Elementary... And as the preacher's voice spins happy and free, it is the used-to-be play-yard. Tag. Thump of the volley ball. Ecstasy of the jump rope. Parry, do pepper. Carol, do pepper. Parry's bettern Carol, Carol's bettern Parry...

Did someone scream? (43)

This scream shakes Carol out of her recollections. Though she is seated next to her best friend and her own mother, Carol is afraid and disoriented, hinting at her prejudices but also denoting that the powerful emotions expressed in the church are too much for her to endure; the bare emotion of the service is unfamiliar. The passage above demonstrates several of the paratextual elements that Olsen employs throughout the story, including a lack of quotation marks, the use of italics to indicate the internal monologue of a character, and a non-standard ellipses to indicate a passage in time (four periods rather than three). Such paratextual elements highlight Carol's feelings of disorientation; the shock of the scream and the non-standard type-setting jolt readers out of the quiet childhood memory. The passage ends in a question, rather than in a definitive statement, alluding to a trope of misunderstanding which is present throughout the story. Did Carol *really* hear a scream, or is it simply fervent, passionate worship? In this scene and several others throughout the text, readers are left with such queries.

While the moment described above highlights the bond that the two girls formerly shared, Olsen's use of vernacular speech in the story calls attention to the emerging rift between Carol and Pariale. While Carol speaks in American Standardized English, Pariale has a "new way she likes to talk" (40). Pariale's "jive talk" or African American Vernacular English (A.A.V.E.) alienates Carol and makes her feel out of place. Her feelings are complicated by the fact that Carol is concerned that someone from school might see her at the church. As the narrator explains, "The youth choir claps and taps to accent the swing of it. Beginning to tap, Carol stiffens. 'Parry, look. Somebody from school.' 'Once more once,' says Pariale, in the new way she likes to talk now. 'Eddie Garlin's up there. He's in my math'" (38). Later, as Carol is leaving the church, Pariale calls her a "little ol' consolation prize" and tells her there is, "no need to cuss and fuss. You going to be sharp as a tack, Jack" (45). Parry's comments are a bit glib, considering her best friend "almost fainted" during the emotional worship session, but perhaps Pariale views the "almost" fainting spell as a ruse or quick means to leave the service.

The story's consideration of expression extends beyond the conversations between Carol and Pariale. For Carol, the voices of the parishioners are swirling dissonance; their songs fuse together and in their disharmony sound ominous. Carol thinks that if

the sounds of the service were a record, “she would play it over and over” in order to “untwine the intertwined voices, to search how the many rhythms rock apart and yet are one glad rhythm” (38-9). Constance Coiner explores the significance of the multiple perspectives in the story, explaining that:

unless readers/listeners make connection among a variety of voices, many of which are foreign to their own, the potential for genuine democracy latent within the cacophony of heteroglossia is lost. If they remain unconnected from each other, the competing voices lapse into a white-noise excess of sound that becomes unintelligible. (72)

The narrative structure of the story uses overlapping phrases and voices to present a heteroglossia found in American culture, and these overlapping voices demonstrate the disconnection between Pariale and Carol’s different cultural and social groups as well as society at large.

In the text, Olsen also describes such instances of “white-noise” as rushing water. Carol’s feelings are likened to drowning, a metaphor with multiple, weighted resonances. The water evokes the ritual cleansing of baptism, but likewise alludes to the perilous waters of the Atlantic as Africans were kidnapped and transported by force across the Middle Passage against their will. At the beginning of the narrative, the baptismal tank “gleams” and is described as if it is “pouring from the ceiling, the blue painted River of Jordan” (37). As the story progresses, the water imagery evokes feelings of danger rather than serenity. The water that Carol envisions in the church is not symbolic of resurrection, but of death and drowning. Carol thinks of the service as, “bubbling, swelling, seething” (39). Such signifiers insinuate a tumultuous ocean and the swelling and seething becomes too much for Carol to endure. She is overwhelmed, glimpsing “the white hands of the ushers, fanning, foam in the air; the blue-painted waters of Jordan well and thunder; Christ spirals on his cross in the window—and she is drowned under the sluice of the slow singing and the sway” (44). Like a dam about to burst, the “sluice” of the service is powerful, pushing down on Carol.

While Olsen demonstrates Carol’s anxiety through paratextual elements, her use of such elements throughout the story indicate a politics of space that questions racial hierarchies in mid-century America. Another example of such a paratextual element occurs when Carol scans the interior of the church and a gold-lettered sign catches her eye (38). Lines from the *Bible* (John 14:6) are represented as demonstrated:

REJOICE				
D		L		
O	IS		O	
G			V	
				E
I AM THE WAY		THE TRUTH		THE LIGHT

While the quotation could be interpreted as an illustration, the configuration of this representation is more complex, reflecting an acknowledgement and critique of the structures of power that frame American society. If one tries to read the sign from line to line, the letters seem to be in no particular order and are meaningless. In order to see what the sign says, one has to back up and look at the bigger picture—one has to take in the black letters set against the white background. The challenge of reading the lines highlights themes of misunderstanding which permeate the text. The shape of this sign—the pyramid—again reflects a hierarchal structure that echoes American society where a only a few are at the top of the structure; and like the Egyptian pyramids, America too, was built via slave labor.

This textual illustration profoundly demonstrates how paratextual elements such as typography carry meaning beyond what is written. As Frank Serafini and Jennifer Clausen argue, “typography of written language not only serves as a conduit of verbal narrative,” but “serves as a visual element and semiotic resource with its own meaning potentials” (2). This pyramid-shaped arrangement of letters is such a resource with its own potential. Serafini and Clausen also describe typography as a “mode” that can be used for “a range of social purposes. Each mode does different semiotic work and communicates or represents meanings in different ways. Visual images, design elements, written language and photography for example all use different material and semiotic resources to represent meanings” (3). Throughout “O Yes,” Olsen uses such elements to generate meaning beyond what is indicated at the sentence level; many of the pages take on an illustrative quality that alludes to the marginalization of people of color in America.

As the narrative continues, Olsen employs non-standard spacing to signify the preacher’s call and the choir and congregation’s responses back to him. The spacing of these passages evokes a rhythmic quality that falls on the ears like the ebb and flow of waves. The breaks between the lines replicate the cadences and the back-and-forth between the preacher and his church. Readers experience the sway of the sermon through Olsen’s use of non-standard line breaks. Listeners may come to embody the rhythm of the sermon and so there is a performative as well as symbolic quality to the paratextual elements. At the beginning of the sermon, the pastor’s call and the choir’s responses intersperse the text—interrupting Carol’s thoughts as demonstrated in the following passage:

Singing, little Lucinda Phillips fluffs out her many petticoats; singing, little Bubbie bounces up and down on his heels.

Any day now I'll reach that land of freedom,

Yes, o yes

Any day now, know that promised land. (38)

The spacing in this passage isolates the brief lines of the preacher from the greater text. The space around the words calls attention to them but segregates them from others, representing how the expressions of people like the preacher are also sequestered and alienated. Because there is no period bringing the sentence to a full stop, however, the call for freedom reverberates and lingers. Though the second half of this passage appears to indicate the preacher's voice, Olsen does not use quotation marks and thus, these words are not attributed to one person, rather they become a form of communal discourse, spoken by all. It is not clear if these words are being sung by the choir, Bubbie, or if they are spoken by the preacher as part of his invocation. Additionally, the last three lines of the passage, like many other refrains in African-American spirituals, indicate a coded, double message. The "land of freedom" refers to religious salvation—or a heavenly afterlife as the ultimate respite from oppression—but the words also gesture towards the anticipation for equality in America. Like Carol, readers also must "untwine" what they read and hear, and listen closely to make sense of the passage's multiple implications.

As the story moves on, the sermon picks up velocity, and Olsen continues to use non-standard spacing to set off the religious phrases of the church members from Carol's thoughts. What appear to be the preacher's words spliced with the choir's responses take over several pages of the story. The titular phrase "O Yes" is frequently repeated and in passages such as the following, Olsen refrains from using quotation marks or attributions, which results in a communal quality of the sermon:

Yes. He raised up the dead from the grave. He made old death
behave.

Yes. Yes. From all over, hushed.

O Yes

He was your mother's rock. Your father's mighty tower. And he gave
us a little baby. A little baby to love. (42)

The spacing in the passage above also brings attention to structures of grammar and how some forms of speech are alienated or ignored by those in power. The irregular spacing and lack of punctuation marks break rules regarding "standard" English punctuation. Such paratextual elements point toward a number of important considerations about race, voice, and expression. First, the dialogue between preacher and congregants eventually overtakes the entire narrative for several pages. While minority voices are often ignored and suppressed by those in power, at the textual level, the voices of black people in the story have ample space to express themselves, such as shown in the following:

Yes

And that burden you been carrying – ohhhhh that burden – not for
always will it be. No, not for always.

Stay with me, Lord

I will put my Word in you and it is power. I will put my Truth in you
and it is power.

O Yes

Out of your suffering I will make you to stand as a stone. A tried
stone. Hewn out of the mountains of ages eternal.
Ohhhhhhhhhhh. Out of the mire I will lift your feet. Your tired
feet from so much wandering. From so much work and wear and
hard times.

Yes (42-3)

While some paratextual elements are ignored, the ones in these passages are difficult to overlook.

The preacher's words resist being limited to one line or to following the rules of "proper" line breaks, indicating another important implication. The preacher's voice does not comply to the standards of punctuation set by white authors and grammarians, and thus, his voice is outside of such bounds and limitations. His voice breaks free from the prison-house of grammar, it supersedes it. The sermon's lack of proper punctuation also hints at another critical idea about race and voice. The passage resonates with the famous words of feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde, who notes, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (112). Here, Lorde asserts that people of color in America will need to use their own modes of expression to take on the oppressive political schema. The storefront church serves as a celebration of black speech acts which oppose the grammar and speech of those in power.

While such passages of the story indicate the subjectivity of the preacher and his congregation, Carol's viewpoint concurrently disrupts and demonizes those voices. Much of Carol's inner monologue exoticizes the black people in the church; her thoughts reveal racist imagery that portray the black congregation as ferocious and violent in their worship, even though she is best friends with a black girl. This incongruity parallels an incorrect and enduring myth about racism which is, as John Eligon states, the notion that "proximity to blackness immunizes white people from having attitudes that are rooted in racism or doing racist things" (6). In Carol's mind, as noted, most of the events of the service are framed as being animalistic or violent, even though she is there with her best friend. In her Carol's mind, the moans in the church are followed by a "lunge of shriek," a "thrashing" noise, and a "trembling wavering scream" (47). The piano is imbued with its own violent streak, thought of by Carol as, "whipping, whipping air to a froth" (47). Carol's thoughts also reflect what African-American scholar and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois importantly denotes as the "color line" in his seminal text *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Though Carol and Pariale have been

friends since they were small children, Carol is not familiar with Pariale's community; she seems to exotify the congregants and is apparently scared of them, illustrative of how the color line creates boundaries and barriers between black and white people.

DuBois' concept of the color line referred to, of course, the physical and geographic barriers between black and white people in the Jim Crow-era south, evidenced in segregated schools, shopping areas, restaurants, and other public spaces. As DuBois theorized, though the color line constructs such obvious forms of racist barriers, the color line also generates more concealed modes of racial segregation. Building on DuBois' conception of the color line, Heather M. Dalmage coins the term "borderism" to describe the experience of living near to and negotiating the color line. "Borderism," she writes, "is a unique form of discrimination faced by those who cross the color line, do not stick with their own, or attempt to claim membership (or are placed by others) in more than one racial group" (40). Both Pariale and Carol have been crossing the color line, inhabiting a borderland space, but the events of the story signify that their crossings will end soon as each of the girls transition into a new stage in their lives. Carol's white privilege allows her to step into Pariale's world, while the reverse would not be likely.

In the story, the service reaches its climax, resulting in an intense montage of sounds and images. It is difficult to decipher who is saying or thinking what by the end of this passage. The moans that Carol hears are described as war cries and she feels suffocated. As the text outlines, "The voices in great humming waves, slow, slow (when did it become humming?), everyone swaying with it too, moving like in slow waves and singing, and up where Eddie is, a new cry, wild and open" (48). The intensity is too much for Carol, and in a moment of wish fulfillment, "she is drowned under the sluice of the slow swinging and the sway (48). In these final moments of the service, the narrative becomes disjointed, grotesque, and bizarre, and then: "Shhhhh. You almost fainted, lambie" (49). This comment shakes Carol out of her stupor and reminds readers that she is in a safe and supportive space. Situated next to her mother, her best friend and her best friend's mother, Carol is surrounded by caring individuals. Alva, Pariale's mother, gently holds a cup up to Carol's mouth, encouraging her to drink. Alva faults herself for Carol's reaction. "I blame myself for not paying attention," says Alva. "You not used to people letting go that way" (46). "You not used to hearing what people keeps inside, Carol" (46). Indeed, Carol's response might not be simply explained as latent racism. Perhaps the power of the emotional release and response was simply too overwhelming for Carol to endure. It is not that Carol is scared of the people, but stunned by the pain they express within the service. Perhaps, Carol, like many other white people, is oblivious to the fear and agony that black people in America suffer through. While such torment is part of the everyday experience for the congregation,

such suffering has not been audible nor visible to Carol until the moments in the church. The outpouring of pain and suffering that Carol hears in this space leads to an affective experience that is too much for her to bear.

Though most of the story in Part One is comprised of Carol's thoughts, the final moments of the section segue into Alva's inner reflection. This stream-of-consciousness narrative explores Alva's connection to the church, which comprises close to a full page. Her thoughts are presented in italics in one single, lengthy block of text. By closing Part One, Alva reclaims the space of the story (and the church) for herself and for the other worshippers. While Carol has interpreted the sounds in the church as frightening and violent, the communal space is Alva's source of strength. Alva's long consideration of the support the church community provides reveals her personal struggles as well as those of the community of black women. She recalls:

When I was carrying Parry and her father left me, and I fifteen years old, one thousand miles away from home, sin-sick and never really believing, as still I don't believe all, scorning, for what have it done to help, waiting there in the clinic and maybe sleeping, a voice called: Alva, Alva. So mournful and so sweet: Alva. Fear not, I have loved you from the foundation of the universe. (47)

In this passage, Olsen reveals why the church is so important to Alva and other women. Alone, and a single, teenaged mother, Alva turned to this community where she could give voice to her pain.

Alva's long reflection contrasts surreal, grotesque images with those of salvation and strength. The section alludes to how black women like Alva must balance their maternal duties with the terror of living in racist America, such as demonstrated below:

And a little small child tugged on my dress. He was carrying a parade stick, on the end of it a star that outshined the sun. Follow me, he said. And the real sun went down and he hid-den his stick. How dark it was, how dark. I could feel the darkness with my hands. And when I could see, I screamed. Dump trucks run, dumping bodies in hell, and a convey line run, never ceasing with souls, weary ones having to stamp and shove them along, and the air like fire. Oh I never want to hear such screaming. (47)

The images of dumped bodies indicate spiritual torture, but also evoke those of brutalized bodies that were tortured and abused in the Antebellum South and well into the segregation era and beyond. The conveyor belt insinuates the objectification of black bodies as property, not persons, and this moment reveals the specter of violence present in the minds of black mothers in America living in fear that their child may become the victim of racist violence.

While the imagery above is violent, revealing themes of physical and psychic enslavement, Alva's meditation ends in verses of exoneration and freedom: "*The rise and fall of nations I saw. And the voice called again Alva Alva, and I flew into a world of light,*

multitudes singing, Free, free, I am so glad" (47). These final lines are emancipatory and empowering, pointing toward freedom and happiness through metaphysical transcendence. By ending this section in Alva's voice, Olsen reclaims the space for the black voices within the text. Alva's viewpoint brings the section to a close, and thus, she has the "last word" in this section of the story.

Similarly to Part One, Part Two of "O Yes" also features multiple narrative perspectives. The second movement of the story again tells the story through several voices and perspectives—mostly female—creating a plurality of voices. The story's mode of narration varies between an omniscient narrator, Carol's point of view as well as Helen's. Like in the church, it is sometimes difficult to "untwine" all the voices. While the multiple voices at the church seem to function as a communal voice, Carol and Helen's home does not feature such a shared viewpoint. The multiplicity of voices in both sections shows that while people may be physically close to one another, the divide of the color line brings discord and uncertainty. Part Two seems to take place immediately following the service. The section opens in Helen's reflections about the obvious rift between Pariale and Carol. Helen is disheartened by the dissolution of the girls' friendship, but her older daughter, Jeannie, and Helen's husband, Len, claim that it is "natural" for Pariale and Carol to part ways as they begin to conform with adult social mores. Although Helen is saddened by the demise of the girls' relationship, Jeannie calls the process "sorting," and tells her mother it cannot be avoided due to the social norms of their community. Len and Jeannie criticize Helen for taking Carol to the church and belittle her for believing that Carol and Pariale will continue to be friends in high school. Len tells her that she and Alva "ought to have [their] heads examined," for taking Carol to the church (47). This conversation between Helen, her husband, and daughter Jeannie maps out many of the injustices of the color line. Jeannie, who attends the same high school that the girls will attend, has a detailed understanding of the context of the color line in the social and educational setting. She tells her mother to "grow up," and that "Pariale's collecting something else now. Like her own crowd. Like jivetalk and rhythm and blues. Like teachers who treat her like a dummy and white kids who treat her like dirt; boys who think she's really something" (53). Thus, Jeannie gives voice to another perspective regarding crossing the color line.

After this conversation, there is a time lapse in the story. A few months after the baptism, Carol becomes ill with mumps, and Pariale brings her homework from school. The exchanges between the two are once again awkward, and at the end of the story, Carol admits to her mother that she and Pariale are no longer friends anymore. Carol explains that, "a lot of the teachers and kids don't like Pariale when they don't even know what she's like. Just because" (54). Helen, however, proposes that there is hope for the friendship to continue, even though Carol has felt disconnected from Pariale

since the service. The dissolution of the friendship once again highlights the strange ambiguities of the color line.

While Carol appears to be saddened by the loss of her friendship, she seems to be most affected by how the voices she heard during the service continue to resonate in her mind. The agonized shrieks reverberate within Carol's memory; she cannot forget the overpouring of emotion. Several months after the service, Carol, "choked and convulsive," asks, "Mother, why did they sing and scream like that? 'I hear it all the time'" (54). Now that Carol has heard the pain and agony of those in her friend's community, she does not seem to be able to drown it out. Edwards explains that "Olsen was uncompromising in her belief that we must make a world in which 'full humanhood' is possible, a world in which human dignity and the full development of people's capacities are cherished and nurtured. She was fierce in her insistence that people working together for social justice would make this world possible" (xi). Olsen's thoughtful placement of spacing and textual silences allows the readers, like Carol, to stop and really listen to the voices. Hearing and really listening to the marginalized voices like those shared in the church is but one step in moving toward the full humanhood the Olsen envisioned for everyone in the United States.

As the story draws to an end, Helen attempts to answer Carol's questions about the service. As a white woman, Helen can only presume to provide Carol with the answers she seeks. This section is also spaced oddly, with irregular line breaks that make the passage fragmented and disjointed:

Emotion, Helen thought of explaining, a characteristic of the religion all oppressed peoples, yes your very own great-grandparents—thought saying. And discarded.
Aren't you now, haven't you had feelings in yourself so strong they had to come out some way? ("what howls restrained by decorum")—thought of saying. And discarded.
 Repeat Alva: *hope ... every word out of their own life. A place to let go. And church is home.*
 And discarded.
The special history of the Negro people— history?—just you try living what must be lived every day—thought of saying. And discarded. (54)

Because of the non-standard line breaks and lack of punctuation marks, it appears that Helen only thinks the words rather than speaking them out loud to Carol. She does say to her daughter that she and Pariale, "may be friends again. As Alva and I are" (54). Helen gives voice to the possibility that a future United States may rest upon the values of social justice and mutual respect. Helen struggles, however to explain the present world to Carol; she also seems to lack the proper language for it as she has not experienced racism. In the very last lines of the story, however, Helen's reflection indicates that women of all races share a similar voicelessness. As the narrator explains, "her own need leapt and plunged for the place of strength that was not—where one could

scream or sorrow while all knew and accepted, and gloved and loving hands waited to support and understand” (55). In this final line, Olsen seems to indicate the voicelessness of women extends beyond race, although much of the story has pointed exclusively toward the pervasive limitations placed on black speech acts in American society.

Circling back to Pierre Macherey’s hypothesis posed at the beginning of this essay, silence can and indeed does carry meaning, and within the short story “O Yes,” Tillie Olsen uses textual silences – the very spacing between words and sections of text – to call attention to the relative voicelessness of marginalized people in America. There can be power in silence, but moving this idea even further, Olsen’s story insinuates that there is also power in stopping to listen to those who are crying out to be heard. The story implies that listeners who are in a position of privilege must pause to listen to the vocalizations of those who are not often heard. Just as in the story, the plurality of voices present in American discourses must be “untwined” so all the expressions, voices, and dialects, especially those that are marginalized, are received and acknowledged.

Indeed, Olsen not only presents a myriad of voices within the space of “O Yes,” but she also ingeniously employs the paratext, the very black and white of the page, its spaces and gaps, to highlight how the expressions of people of color in America are sequestered and separated from dominant modes of discourse. This innovative use of paratextual elements functions on multiple levels, for much of what has been theorized about the paratext applies to the very voices that Olsen develops. If the paratext assures the presence of a literary work in the world, then this paratextual story assures the presence of the multiple voices in America. The paratextual elements that Olsen employs are by definition, situated at once inside and outside of the frontier. Thus, the stylistic choices in the story underscore how black people like those who comprise the church congregation, as well as those like Carol and Parialee engaging in borderism, inhabit a liminal space, both inside and outside the American political system. Likewise, the story draws attention to the ambiguities present during the era of the color line through its use of challenging, ambiguous components of the text. In the end, the very blank spaces, pauses, ruptures and absences in the story that may be overlooked, just as the speech acts of people on the margins are overlooked, become a powerful a source of alternative presence highlighting the need to stop and listen to such voices.

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Abstract: Coined by French literary theorist Gérard Genette, the term "paratext" describes any number of elements that frame a work of literature, including indexes, illustrations, tables of contents, as well as typographical elements such as the spacing between words and textual margins. This essay begins by exploring how, historically, such paratextual spaces have served as sites for literary protest and subversion of racist and sexist ideologies, in order to bring focus to American author Tillie Olsen's innovative use of such elements in her short fiction. This essay specifically analyzes Olsen's use of paratextual spacing and typography in her short story "O Yes" (1961) to demonstrate how such formal elements serve as a mimetic reflection of the division between black and white people in the mid-century 20th century. In short, Olsen employs marginal aspects of the text to consider and reflect upon the marginalization of African-Americans during the time the story was published. Olsen's irregular and non-standard spacing between lines, words, and paragraphs reflects the gaps and separation between people living in America and displays the cacophony of voices present in such a divided landscape.

Keywords: African-Americans, Baptism, borderism, paratext, segregation, typography