



## Creativity, Self, and Society (CSS)

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Faculty of Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University

Creativity, Self, and Society Online Working Paper Series

No. 05/ NICTC

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*Issue: Negotiating Identity and Creativity in Times of Crisis*

### **Creating Destruction: *I May Destroy You* and the Self in Crisis**

Pinky Chung-man Lui

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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To cite this paper:

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## Creating Destruction: *I May Destroy You* and the Self in Crisis

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Pinky Chung-man Lui

Pinky Chung-man Lui is a PhD student of English literary studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is a recipient of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship 2020-2021. Her research focuses on feminist criticism and modernism; she is currently working on the women's autobiographical novels for her PhD thesis; e-mail: pinkyluicm@gmail.com

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### Abstract

Created, written, co-directed, and executively produced by British creator Michaela Coel, *I May Destroy You* (2020) is an autobiographical television series released in the midst of Covid-19, and centered around Arabella and her journey of rebuilding herself after a rape trauma. This article will examine Coel's television series as a contemporary, Black feminist autobiographical text that explores the Black and female self in crisis through self-writing. Using her personal experience, Coel creates a story of destruction where the woman in crisis must deconstruct her past to build herself back up using writing as a self-help tool. In the process of doing so, Arabella learns to use anger as a tool, as many Black feminist writers have done so in writing before, to make her wounds transparent so she may begin to heal and transform. Self-writing stands as both a destructive and creative process that eventually helps the artist to confront her own darkness and self in crisis, reinstating her power through reclaiming her agency to speak. *I May Destroy You* as the end-product of such a process demonstrates how anger, when deliberately harnessed, can be transformed into a power for self-renewal and one that inspires reflections and change in its surrounding.

### Keywords

autobiographical television, anger, feminism, sexual assault, authorship

Defined as “a platform for important policy announcements and agenda-setting speeches”, the James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture is the keynote address at the Edinburgh International Television Festival since 1976 (“MacTaggart Lecturers Archive”). In 2018, Michaela Coel became the first Black female creator to deliver the lecture as a new powerhouse in the English television industry who writes, produces, directs, and acts in her own television series. Coel's lecture, however, was not one concerning important policies or agendas; it was a personal recollection and reflection on her journey so far as a young Black female artist who embraces her identity as a ‘misfit’ and tells her story “about the world from [her] view” which is “rarely found on TV” (Coel, “MacTaggart”). The absence of stories about misfits by misfits also encourages Coel to write *Misfits: A Personal Manifesto* (2021), an extension of the lecture and an important essay that deepens our understanding of her creative career, which is built around her experience of growing up in Tower Hamlets as a second-generation working-class immigrant. This experience became the blueprint for her

one-woman monologue *Chewing Gum Dreams* (2012), which was adapted by Coel herself into *Chewing Gum* (2015-2017), with which she won the British Academy Television Awards for Best Female Comedy Performance as well as for Breakthrough Talent for her role as the screenwriter in 2016.<sup>12</sup> The success of *Chewing Gum* brought Coel fame and the opportunity to deliver the MacTaggart Lecture. Yet when the audience expected her to talk about the next comedy project, Coel shared an incredibly personal and traumatic event that eventually inspired her second autobiographical television series *I May Destroy You* (2020), which this article will focus on. Coel shares that while writing season two of *Chewing Gum*, she went out for a drink the night before an episode script was due, and next she “emerged into consciousness typing season two, many hours later”, with a flashback that tells her she has been sexually assaulted by a stranger (“MacTaggart Lecture”). The lecture was the first time that she publicly talked about her trauma, but it was only the beginning. Two years after the lecture and 191 drafts later, *I May Destroy You*, a twelve-episode series co-produced by BBC and HBO was released in June 2020. Created, written, co-directed, and executive produced by Coel, it is a story that exposes, dissects, and accepts the self in crisis by “actively twist[ing] a narrative of pain into one of hope and even humor” (Misfits). Besides trauma around consent, the series also explores the experience of a young Black woman in London. Arabella Essiedu, Coel’s fictional double portrayed by Coel herself, is a novelist struggling to write her second novel. Returning from her writer’s retreat in Ostia, Arabella meets up with friends for a drink the night before a draft deadline in a bar called Ego Death where her drink is spiked and she is raped by a stranger. In the arc of twelve episodes, *I May Destroy You* presents a reckoning within Arabella, concerning her trauma, her understanding of inequalities, relationships, and most importantly, herself. The name of the series prompts the audience to ponder on the identities of the “I” and the “you”; who is destroying and who is at the receiving end. This threat of destruction keeps hanging above the characters and the audience and it wavers depending on how Arabella handles her recurring crises. Coel’s self-writing in television gives an original perspective of how a Black feminist writer shares their experience by presenting a writer character, who like herself, is fighting an internal battle with one’s self. The capability to destroy or the power to create both reside within the author; it is the will to channel anger into power that instills intimacy into *I May Destroy You* in which both Coel and Arabella reclaim their narratives and identities as a survivor and a creator. This article will examine *I May Destroy You* as a contemporary, Black feminist autobiographical text that explores the Black and female self in crisis through self-writing, navigating anger between the possibilities of creation and destruction.

*I May Destroy You* stands as a unique television series in its heartfelt portrayal of trauma, particularly sexual assaults. In the age of political correctness, particularly after the Harvey Weinstein scandal, mainstream movies and television series have largely become more sensitive to the portrayal of sexual violence. In the television industry particularly, there is an emergence of “woke” TV, that is television series that is sensitive to the need to be politically correct in our contemporary society in relation to racism and sexism. For example, Netflix’s *13 Reasons Why* (2017-2020), *Sex Education* (2019- ) and Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017- ) all include rape as a part of the narratives and handle the issue with extreme care because now the personnel involved in the making of television, from writer to producer and the relatively new position of intimacy coach, are all held accountable for the media they produce and how they handle the portrayal of triggering issues on screen. *I May Destroy You* stands out among these woke TV shows because of its sharpened focus on rape as trauma, as the series revolves around the sexual assault with no way or attempt to sugarcoat it, as well as its representation of a young Black and female self in crisis. While the series received generally positive reviews and praises for Coel’s writing and acting, the series was snubbed by the 78<sup>th</sup> Golden Globes Award in 2021. This was received poorly on the Internet as the public questioned how a Netflix light-hearted comedy series *Emily in Paris* (2020- ) gained a nomination for Best Television Series in the Musical or Comedy category while *I May Destroy You* was not even acknowledged. This raises concern because Coel’s series is seen as a “woke” feminist TV show that is socially and politically relevant and speaks for countless sexual assault survivors in the Post-#MeToo era, as well as the silenced Black voices in the Black Lives Matter movement. Deborah Copaken, one of the writers of *Emily in Paris*, wrote to support Coel and criticise the marginalisation of the series by the Golden Globes.<sup>3</sup> In her essay, Copaken states that “*I May Destroy You* did not get one Golden Globe nod is not only wrong, it’s what is wrong with everything” (Copaken). *Emily in Paris*, a simple sit-come about a young white American woman struggling to work and navigate her single life in Paris, continues the tradition of escapism in entertainment where the audience simply enjoy the media without thinking about the real-life issues that have been ignored or glossed over. *I May Destroy You* refuses to offer this escapism from a young Black woman’s perspective and exposes racism and sexism embedded in the everyday life; the series comes in an extra sensitive time regarding giving voice to Black and queer people. The series was released on 7 June, 2020 amid worldwide protests against police brutality and racism triggered by the murder of George Floyd on 25 May, 2020. Coel’s series was a breath of fresh air on television that echoes similar issues, in particular, the criticism of police incompetence when

it comes to reporting, investigating, and persecuting sexual offenders. *I May Destroy You* became one of the Black voices that was fighting for acceptance in mainstream media, and in particular, one that screams the personal afflictions are political. Therefore, both the success and failure of the series point to a more deep-rooted issue in the entertainment industry as well as revealing how the public selects and absorbs entertainment.

The Golden Globes controversy, nevertheless, allows more people to get to know Coel and her work. *I May Destroy You* did receive critical praise that acknowledges both its political significance and most importantly, Coel's artistic valor as a writer. . The series received awards from the British Academy Television Awards, Independent Spirit Awards, GLAAD Media Awards and NAACP Image Awards, with the latter two focusing on celebrating the presentation of LGBTQ and people of color. After the Golden Globes controversy, *I May Destroy You* received their long-overdue American nod at the 73<sup>rd</sup> Primetime Emmy Awards; in addition to eight nominations for the series, Coel became the first Black woman to win an Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing for a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie.

Her win among other celebrations of Black-centric productions further fuels a wave of intense criticism on how systematic racism and sexism persist in the entertainment industry as major award shows and most productions remain "white-washed". In the "Hollywood Diversity Report 2020: A Tale of Two Hollywoods" conducted by the Division of Social Sciences at UCLA, females of color take up only 13.3% of the overall share of credited writers and 7% of the overall episodes directed in cable scripted shows from 2017 to 2019 (Hunt and Ramón). Coel, who was born in London from Ghanaian parents, holds unprecedented creative control as well as full rights ownership over the series in her deal with HBO, after turning down an offer from Netflix which would have denied her the ownership of the series (Jung). In the time of a global pandemic, the world is forced to stay indoors, and streaming services have become more important for entertainment. The Parisian fantasy crafted by Copaken and her co-writers is welcomed, but I would suggest *I May Destroy You's* straight look into trauma is needed and representative of our time. Coel's refusal to compromise for an "easy" viewing experience is holding the television audience accountable for the media they consume. The importance of accountability, or even simply making responsibilities visible is crucial to *I May Destroy You* as the series highlights storytelling. Throughout Arabella's journey in the series, her progress or lack of it is measured by her ability to write

down her experience and feelings, which means making her pain, anger, and strength visible in words, Arabella moves on from a static world of hurt to one of healing and movement.

Furthermore, the series' refusal to offer escapism is a continuation of the exploration of anger in Black feminist autobiographical text. The history of Black autobiography written in English specifically is associated with the history of slavery in the United States, such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861). Jacobs published her autobiography under the alias 'Linda Brent' to protect her identity. The use of an alias does not affect the authenticity of the narrative; it highlights Jacobs' very act of writing as a defiance against the silencing white majority and her strength in revisiting her personal trauma in writing. Linda's long journey to liberation is the beginning of many similar journeys described in Black women's autobiographical writing; María Pilar Sánchez Calle suggests that some "recurrent motives in Black women's autobiography are those of the journey and the home" as "[t]he journey constitutes a metaphor for Black women's life experience in search of themselves" (162). Even after the abolishment of slavery, the journey motif that is associated with self-searching continues to be a core part of Black women's autobiographical text. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), both well-known examples of contemporary Black women's autobiography, present a journey in which the "I" escape from sexual abuses and racial prejudices in search for self-renewal. By using their own lives and names, Angelou and Lorde explore their experience as a Black woman in relation to trauma, grief, anger, and hope "in search of a space for personal freedom and autonomy" (162). Indeed, anger is a great part of the driving force behind these texts, including *I May Destroy You*. In an essay titled "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism", Lorde expresses that when Black women let out anger over their mistreatment, "the expression of [their] rage as useless and disruptive" are "the two most popular accusations" (120). The angry Black women stereotype has confined the representations of Black women on screen, repeatedly depicted by the white majority in the creative sector of the entertainment business as irrational and poorly educated. It is difficult for Black women to be taken seriously as they rage over the crises they are put in because of systematic racism, sexism, and poverty. What Lorde proposes is to channel that anger because "Everything can be used. Except what is wasteful/ (you will need/ to remember this when you are accused of destruction" (120). She continues to explain that every woman "has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful" that when "[f]ocused with precision [...] can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change"

(120). This female rage can both destroy and create; to leave the anger unused, unharnessed would be a waste because it can be our fuel to work “against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being” (120). *I May Destroy You* continues this Black feminist effort of channeling anger into creativity in its representation of trauma.

The precision of channeling anger, which includes the understanding of it, situates transparency as a principle of the series. Transparency in storytelling, in the case of *I May Destroy You*, is the act of casting away the public visage of pretense and conformity. The sensitive subject of traumas is difficult to discuss in media because it is often uncomfortable. Putting trauma as the centre of the series, Coel utilises transparency as a strategy to create a narrative that is honest not only to oneself, but to the audience as well. The series refuses to extenuate the severity of sexual assault and its aftermath for the victims by presenting as realistic a narrative as possible. The series is able to achieve this level of transparency in storytelling because on the level of production, Coel’s control as producer, writer, and lead actress helps ground the series on her experience and vision. Coel writing her trauma into Arabella, who in the series also writes her trauma, demonstrates how the female writer processes anger over her sexual assault and the social reaction towards the violation. As Coel explains, transparency is essential in self-writing because it is uncertain “if you can develop unless you are being transparent with yourself because you’re not investigating who you are in a transparent way” (GQ Heroes). Writing autobiographically requires the creator to be prepared for the destruction of their own understanding of themselves, because being transparent with yourself means being critical with yourself. Coel shares that self-writing means “you’re looking at parts of you that ideally you don’t have to see or maybe you are realizing you have thoughts that aren’t in line with who you proclaimed as a person [...] but then you get to work on them and get to keep working and developing” (GH Heroes). The purpose of this transparency helps the writer to develop as it demands the writer to review and react. In other words, the writer must perform a certain degree of deconstructing the self and reconstructing her experience to present a narrative for others. So the audience cannot see Coel and Arabella as the same person as the latter is the product of precise editing, yet one may choose to see Arabella as an extension of Coel’s trauma and strength. In fact, Coel does not consider *I May Destroy You* to be an autobiographical series because it is inspired by her experience and is still fictional (Carr). One can say that Coel deconstructs her experiences and scatters them in different characters that were born from the contemplation over the trauma. Stating that the series is not autobiographical puts a necess-



ary distance between the characters and her experience so that a more expanded net of narratives is possible. For example, the storylines surrounding Kwame's sexual assault, Terry's relationship with a trans man, and Theodora as a problematic white feminist are fictional yet they come together to present a more diverse, realistic, and transparent representation of our contemporary political and cultural dynamic.

Diving into the complexity of *I May Destroy You*, one feature that defines the series is its emphasis on the act of storytelling. The series begins by showing the audience essentially the storyboard of the entire narrative; the first frame of Episode One "Eyes Eyes Eyes Eyes" is Arabella's bedroom walls covered in note cards; as the series progresses, the audience will come to recognize the note cards are the hard work of Arabella outlining her second book *January 22nd*, the date when Arabella was drugged and assaulted. As the many note cards suggest, Arabella's narrative is fragmented yet carefully laid out to make sense of what has happened through deconstructing the past for linear storytelling. Arabella's journey of recovery is divided into two parts, a recovery from the rape trauma in the present and the recovery of her self which requires the audience to travel back and forth in Arabella's memory together, and they must work simultaneously. The first two episodes work chronologically from Arabella's return to London to her reporting the crime to the police after realizing she was raped. Having set the chronological present, the series offers three flashback episodes to give more context to Arabella's stories. Each flashback episode takes the audience further back in Arabella's life; Episode Three, "Don't Forget the Sea", shows Arabella and Terry's first trip to Ostia where they meet Biagio; Episode Six, "The Alliance", takes the audience further back to Arabella's high school days; Episode Ten, "The Cause The Cure" reveals how Arabella's childhood was split between her separated parents' houses. As the audience knows more about Arabella in different stages of her life, Arabella in the present also progresses closer to the publishing of her novel, which signifies recovery and her entry into a new phase of her life.

In fact, Arabella's progress in writing is closely intertwined with her state of mind. Arabella's debut novel, *Chronicles of a Fed-Up Millennial*, is not discussed at length in the series, but the title suggests that she tends to use her writing as an emotional outlet. As the series begins, Arabella's usual writer's block is worsened by the assault and the insensitive manner of how her agents handle the traumatized Arabella. Instead of letting her rest, they stand firm on the



the contractual schedule and would only pay for therapy sessions and send a fellow writer named Zain Tareen to help. However, when the two writers grow intimate and have sex in Episode Four, “That Was Fun”, Arabella finds out Zain has taken off the condom without her consent during sex and only apologized when he is caught by saying he thought Arabella knew. The audience follows Arabella’s thought process, which at first makes nothing much of the incident until the following episode when we learn through a podcast named “Tea and Two Chicks” that non-consensual condom removal, or stealthing, is a common violation done by men, and there is “actual Reddit forum where men share tips and tricks” to deceive their sexual partner (“...It Just Came Up”). This realization has shaken Arabella as she is once again assaulted as well as betrayed by someone she trusts, which makes her become more sensitive towards how women are often cheated by the patriarchal society in terms of sexual abuse. Therefore, she takes a chance in the Writing Summit to take a stand against the rapist that she knows. It is a pivotal moment in the series, one that makes Arabella a feminist social media icon later and one that shows Arabella has begun making use of her rage. As she is supposed to read her work in progress among other aspiring writers, including Zain, Arabella makes a sudden yet unflinching announcement to hold her rapist accountable, declaring “Zain Tareen is a rapist” and “he is a predator” (“...It Just Came Up”). Speaking in a calm and formal way, Arabella continues to explain that Zain “placated [her] shock and gaslighted [her] with such intention that [she] didn’t have a second to understand the heinous crime that had occurred” (“...It Just Came Up”). The mentioning of crime makes this declaration essential as part of the series’ political messages is that rape is not taken seriously by the officials, or the perpetrator is rarely caught or punished by the law. Arabella’s earlier conversations with the police officers also prompt her to criticize how society views rape; stealthing or any other form of rape is still rape and no adjective should lessen its severity. Arabella ends her announcement by stressing that Zain is “not ‘rape-adjacent’, or ‘a bit rapey’, he’s a rapist under UK Law” (“...It Just Came Up”). After this shocking speech, the audience starts standing up with phones recording Zain’s panicked escape from the auditorium. A line spoken by Terry captures this moment of holding a criminal accountable—“you’re going to feel it”, the humiliation, the judgment, the shame (“...It Just Came Up”). This exposé of a predator makes Arabella a social justice warrior on social media, a feminist icon that encourages others to confront their abusers and speak up for the victims.

However, this fame also ignites and incites anger within Arabella over the injustice on women like her to an extent, she is pushed towards the edge away from her trajectory of

recovery to the potential of self-destruction. The channeling and balancing of anger become crucial towards the latter half of the series as Arabella feels distraught by the fruitless investigation on her drug-assisted rape. In Episode Eight, “Line Spectrum Border”, the desperate Arabella makes an impromptu trip to Biagio, to the latter’s dismay who eventually locks her out of his apartment and threatens her to leave with a gun. Isolated and hopeless, the final scene of the episode is a turning point of the series as Arabella goes to the beach alone. The scene echoes Episode Three as both episodes end on the beach; “Don’t Forget the Sea” ends with an honest and bonding scene with Arabella and Biagio sitting on the beach as the latter shares his past, while “Line Spectrum Borders” shows Arabella revisiting the same place. With no more international data, Arabella is cut off from the world she knows, including friends and family in London and social media. This state of isolation is eerily peaceful as the scene is filled only with the sound of waves. Leaving her phone and notes behind, Arabella walks straight into the water to a non-diegetic hymn, and the episode ends with the image of Arabella fully submerged underwater. The audience is left confused whether it is a suicide attempt or a visual representation of how Arabella feels, overwhelmed by tides of emotions. While there is no official interpretation, Coel suggests that Arabella is embracing what scares her, which is the sea. Furthermore, the majority of the human body consists of water, Coel suggests that Arabella is a part of the water as the water is a part of her (British GQ). The awareness of the body here echoes the key trauma of the series with rape being a bodily violation; the body is forever the site of the crime, and the victim has to carry that darkness with her wherever she goes. Throughout the episodes, Arabella grows to know herself and tries to “gather up the darkness that she needs to overcome the trauma”, with one of the sources of the darkness being herself (British GQ). When Arabella greets the sea, she greets herself and absorbs both the destructive power of the sea and the vitality of the waves. It is a form of baptism in which Arabella finally sees both the danger and the power embodied by her. In the next episode, “Social Media Is a Great Way to Connect”, Arabella dresses up as a dark avenging angel prowling the streets of London, no longer terrified of the darkness for she has become one with it.

After the turning point of the series, Arabella goes back into writing as she struggles to put her darkness into words. Yet the darkness supports her when she accidentally seeks out Zain, who must work as “Della” to publish a new book called *The Sundial*. Still stuck in a rut with her book, Arabella finds herself infatuated with Della’s book published by their mutual agent, and therefore, seeks out Della for help. However, realizing that Della is Zain, Arabella is pre-

pared to display her assertiveness and get past being the “victim” by telling him that “I’ve gone underneath, underneath into the darkness and that darkness is now in me, looking at you” (“Would You Like to Know the Sex?”). Arabella has claimed her own power to both defend and destroy after going underneath her own memory as visualized in the self-drowning scene. This action of looking is Arabella’s way of holding men accountable, letting them know that she is not afraid because they are not the only ones who observe the details of boundaries and borders. As Arabella explains to her therapy group of sexual assault survivors, men like Zain all feel entitled to “see what boundaries and violations women might be banging on about” and they feel the thrill of dominating, enjoying the luxury of controlling that grey area (“Line Spectrum Border”). But Arabella has learnt that we must look at the aggressors face-on because “if we see you it means we’re with you, tiptoeing in the line right behind you, and in that place where rules, clarity, law and separation cease to exist we will explain exactly what we mean by violation” (“Line Spectrum Border”). Holding the men accountable for their unacceptable behaviors, calling them out for any form of violation, demands a certain darkness from the women. Instead of being terrified, Arabella comes to be terrifying not through violence, but by making men aware of her power from her arsenal of anger, as proposed by Lorde, which helps her stare straight into the aggressors and let them know that she too can and will destroy. By creating destruction, or the possibility to destroy as indicated by the series title, Arabella reclaims her power to speak and terrify; as she says to Zain before accepting his help, “[she] might seem a little more terrifying than the last time [he] saw [her]”. This time Zain finally does what he promises and helps Arabella organize her notecard wall into multiple narratives. Zain doesn’t understand Arabella’s new narratives as “[he] thought [she was] writing about consent” (“Would You Like to Know the Sex?”). So does Arabella, but after all these reflecting and reexamining, she has reached a new understanding regarding the stories she wants to tell. Her autobiographical text is not solely about consent or has its roots wrapped around her trauma. In fact, Arabella’s novel in *I May Destroy You* and the TV series celebrate love between friends, families, women, and the self. The rape incident stimulates this herculean task of reinventing the self but it does not define Arabella or Coel; as the creator, Coel and Arabella hold the power to define themselves through their writing. After Zain leaves, Arabella keeps rearranging the cards with flashbacks, scenes from the previous episodes, suggesting the series we have been watching is the hard work of Coel and Arabella making sense of their experience, feelings, and writing. Turning trauma into art, for both women, means harnessing the creativity within the power of destruction, within the opportunity to rebuild.

This capability to destroy is ultimately tested in the final episode of the series, “Ego Death”. After finally seeing her rapist, a white man named David, in the bar again at the end of Episode Eleven, the audience is left wondering what Arabella will do. Coel gives her audience three scenarios of what Arabella and her friends can do, one of revenge, one of forgiveness, and one of absorption. The first scenario has Arabella accidentally killing David as she is beating him up, and the second one has Arabella trying to see that David became a rapist due to his own trauma and proceeds to comfort each other before calling the police to arrest him. In this article, I would like to extend on the last, and the most confusing one. In the third scenario, Arabella actively talks to David in the bar and invites him to the bathroom to make out. The next scene shows them having sex in Arabella’s bedroom with Arabella being in a dominating position. The next morning, Arabella finally lets David go after the latter says, “I’m not going to go unless you tell me to” (“Ego Death”). David has become more than a person, but the physical embodiment of Arabella’s trauma, her fear, which means he is a part of her, absorbed into the self in crisis in the process of recovery. In a surreal shot, the audience sees two Davids leaving her bedroom, the one on the bed, and the one under the bed from the first scenario. In the end of all three scenarios, we see Arabella returning to her notecards on the wall, continuing her work that will ultimately become her book, and in “reality”, *I May Destroy You*. The last episode is a demonstration of the limitless potential of Coel/Arabella’s creativity; the audience never gets a confirmation as to which fantasy is real, or maybe none of it is. As Angelica Jade Bastién remarks in her review of the series finale, “[i]f trauma is a closed loop, fantasy is a field of endless potential” (Bastién). Coel decides to open the doors to the audience to ponder on Arabella’s “showdown” with the rapist. The fact is it is not important to know how Arabella resolves her trauma with her rapist because the power to overcome her trauma resides with her. In the end of the series, we see Arabella publish her novel *January 22nd* independently, holding the utmost control over the presentation of her creation as Coel does with the series. It is a satisfying end to see Arabella having overcome the trauma and put it into words, and realizing that *I May Destroy You* allows the audience to be a part of this journey of retelling and stepping above trauma. At the end of the episode, Arabella sits down to read the foreword of her book for the attendants of her launch party; Coel has Arabella break the fourth wall for the both of them, saying “thanks for coming” to all of us who are listening and watching (“Ego Death”). We have participated in the creative process of Coel’s self-destruction, dissecting her traumas, her memories, and even the many ways in which her creativity can go, to find the best ways to tell her story. As the bar name and the final episode title suggest, Coel has killed her “ego”,

her tie to reality in the Freudian sense. The three fantasies demonstrate the death of the ego in which Arabella's desires to destroy are executed; but the self is reconstructed through Arabella's capability to harness her anger and channel it into creativity. This ending consolidates *I May Destroy You* as a circular metafiction; a journey that begins when it ends. It is a demonstration of power on Coel's part as the creator; while she cannot be rid of all crises, her story is no longer defined by the challenges she faces but by the strength she gathers.

In the end, Coel never makes clear the identities of the "I" and "you" in her series' title. What she does, instead, is to show vulnerability alongside strength in every character, particularly Arabella. It shows the reflections and growth that Coel has had from this self-writing project, and her determination to speak for those who are not free to do so. Returning to Lorde's essay, she says that "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" (126). Throughout the series, Arabella learns more about the people around her and the hardship that was hidden from her to protect her during her difficult time, such as how her mother remains silent regarding her husband's affair for the sake of their children. The journey of recovery for Arabella is not only from the rape trauma, but an active mission to recover missing pieces of her life, including people who she learns to imagine complexly. Coel manages to imagine different shackles in her television series to create a complex and realistic world where everyone is in some form of crisis. Aside from Arabella's own strength, the series emphasizes female solidarity, particularly the sisterhood between Arabella and Terry, who share a motto that is repeated throughout the series: "your birth is my birth, your death is my death" (*I May Destroy You*). The significance of their bond and their understanding of each other, both young Black British women, is the ultimate form of female solidarity that Lorde advocates for, which not only links the women's freedom together, but also their life and death metaphorically. It makes sense that Arabella dedicates *January 22nd* to Terry as a sign of their rebirth, a celebration of their survival despite all the traumas and darkness. As a Black feminist autobiographical text, *I May Destroy You* ends on an intimate note of unity and peace; Arabella and Coel have both restored their agency through self-writing, and in the difficult process, successfully navigated their way within themselves through anger and darkness and reached the power within. Returning to *Misfits: A Personal Manifesto*, Coel ends it by saying that "[she's] going to try to be [her] best; to be transparent; and to play whatever part [she] can to help fix this house", which refers to our society as the "faulty house" we all live (91, 94). Arabella's story in *I May Destroy You* shows

how misfits may come together and become transparent with themselves and each other about crises, so that in unity they may fix the faulty house by taking responsibilities and accountability, however temporarily. Destruction of this faulty house is necessary for a repaired one to be created; as Coel writes with anger for the debilitating crises, so does she with hope that ebbs and flows – one only has to brave the water regardless.

#### Notes

1. Coel wrote the play and played the role of Tracy Gordon. She won the Alfred Fagon Award in 2012.
2. Based on the monologue, Coel continued her writer and actor roles in the television production. The sitcom premiered in 2015 on E4, a free-to-air television channel in the United Kingdom. The series joined Netflix in the following year. The second and final series was released in 2017.
3. Coel includes Copaken in her thank you list in *Misfits: A Personal Manifesto*.

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