LURe

Literary Undergraduate Research

LURe is a peer-edited journal devoted to publishing rigorous works of undergraduate scholarship on any literary text, film, literary theory, or cultural study.

By publishing academic papers from undergraduates, *LURe* opens up a forum for dialogue and discussion within the academic community, provides a medium for recognition of exceptional work, and encourages students to view themselves as vital members of the intellectual community they inhabit.

LURe would like to thank Mr. Lucian Bitner of the University of West Georgia for his invaluable assistance compiling this issue; Dr. Pauline Gagnon, Dean of the UWG College of Arts, Culture, and Scientific Inquiry, and Dr. Rochelle Elman, Chair of the UWG English, Film, Languages and Performing Arts Department, for their support; the faculty of the English Program for their promotion of, contributions to, and support for the journal and its staff; and the faculty advisors, family, and friends of *LURe*'s staff and authors, without whom the work published in this issue would not be possible.

Cover Art: Keri Jones and Leah Mirabella

LURe:

Literary Undergraduate Research

VOLUME 11 FALL 2021

Uncovering the Star of David: How Call Me by Your Name Reveals the Relationship Between Jewish and Homosexual Identities 5
Michael B. Amrami, Macauley Honors College at Queens College

A Unique Approach to the Holocaust 17
Megan Anderson, Brigham Young University

Ogres and Others: The Multifaceted Gender Movie Shrek 28
Grace Beagles, University of West Georgia

Re-visioning the Body of the M/other Through a Matrifocal Stream of Consciousness Narrative: Elisa Albert's After Birth 34
Anna Bushy, Concordia College-Moorhead

Frankenstein's Monster is ~~kind of~~ an Incel 43
Mackenzie Collins, Columbia University in the City of New York

Devolution Anxieties in The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde 48
Ema Davis, Columbus State Community College

The Sexual Body as the Political Body in Kathy Acker's Empire of the Senseless 53
Kiera Gilbert, Michigan State University

The Myth of Queer Agony: Homoeroticism, The Media, and Censorship 65
Andrea Hansgen, University of Dayton

Shake Down: How Western Politics Fails to Define Sovereignty in Shell Shaker 77
Noah Hill Isherwood, Berry College

Recognizing the Nefarious as Normal 82
Marah Hoffman, Lebanon Valley College

The Influence of Edward Said and Orientalism in the Twenty-First Century 90
Catherine O'Reilly, University of Illinois at Chicago

Foucault in a Spacesuit: Modern Panopticism, Discipline, and Among Us 94
Tegan Pedersen, University of West Georgia

The Potential of Forbidden Stories: Using Fictional Narratives to Challenge Ontological Boundaries and Encounter the Elusive 109
Michael A. Thomas, Webster University

Art, Labor, and Masculinity in the Poetry of B.H. Fairchild 126
Patrick J. Wohlscheid, College of Charleston

The Awful Power to Punish: Reevaluating Audience Engagement in the Face of Interactive Cinema 134
Sabrina Zanello Jackson, Carnegie Mellon University

Uncovering the Star of David: How Call Me by Your Name Reveals the Relationship Between Jewish and Homosexual Identities

Michael B. Amrami, Macauley Honors College at Queens College

In 2017, Italian film director Luca Guadagnino released a film adaptation of Andre Aciman's Call Me by Your Name (2007). He presents the storyline of Elio Perlman, a seventeen-year-old Jewish teenager living in Lombardy, Italy, who meets an attractive doctoral student named Oliver and portrays the sensual tale of love between them as the two characters soon discover the "beauty of awakening desire over the course of a summer that will alter their lives forever" (Rotten Tomatoes). While much of the film is in Italian, the film grossed over 40 million dollars internationally and in the US, showing how the coming-of-age tale has impacted a worldwide audience despite it being partly in a different language. Moreover, it won an Oscar and BAFTA Award in 2018 for "Best Adapted Screenplay" and was nominated for other awards such as "Best Motion Picture of the Year" and "Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role" (Oscars).

However, accolades for the film seem to always ignore or overlook its Judaic elements. Writer and prize-winning film critic Joanna Di Mattia expresses that the film is generally acclaimed for how it accurately presents the thematic coming of age process, while emphasizing the significance of the family as a support system for teens figuring out their sexualities (Di Mattia 12). According to film critic Molly Haskell, the film takes "a resolutely non-hysterical, non-polemical approach to homoeroticism, treating sexual encounters with a kind of unhurried, tactile sensuality" (Haskell 31). The many explicit reli-

gious elements found in the book are often overlooked in the film. As Josefin Dolsten writes in her article, "Why 'Call Me By Your Name' is such a Jewish movie," for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, André Aciman reveals in an interview that he "would never have been able to write this book without Jewish content" (Dolsten 1). In analyzing the significance of Judaism in the film, the values Guadagnino attempts to portray are made more apparent—specifically the significance of Elio's Jewish identity—while ultimately reinforcing the film's implications. The prevailing opinion that since Elio and Oliver are both homosexual characters, it leads them to suppress their homoerotic feelings for one another is undoubtedly valid; yet, the film's tendency to interweave Judaic elements with the characters' homosexual identities renders this viewpoint incomplete. Analyzing the attitudes of Elio and Oliver within the sociocultural and Jewish framework in which the film was written demonstrates that the way the characters enact their homosexual feelings and approach their identities is largely influenced by their religious culture and social circumstance. In fact, this film suggests that we may better understand the challenge of their relationship through the lens of their struggles faced as Jews by revealing the risky, simultaneous embracement of Jewish identity and homosexual identity, which eventually opens the door to a deeper sense of intimacy.

In the film, while laying down on the grass with Oliver, Elio proclaims: "I love this, Oliver" (Call Me by Your Name 00:55:19–00:55:20). Oliver then suggests, "Us, you mean?" and begins to rub Elio's lips with the gentle movements of his fingers (00:55:38–00:55:39). Before continuing in the moment of intimacy, Oliver states: "We've been good. We haven't done anything to be ashamed of, and that's a good thing. I want to be good" (00:56:58–00:57:02). In Call Me by Your Name, Elio and Oliver clearly are in a homosexual relationship, given that the two men sexually desire one another. However, through this scene, Oliver explains to Elio that he wants "to be good," revealing that there are specific moral attitudes that are influencing how Oliver understands this homosexual relationship. In order to better understand what influences Oliver's moral understanding of his relationship with Elio, it is necessary to understand what made him express a desire to "be good."

In recent discussions of homosexuality, a controversial issue has been whether or not homosexuality is accepted under Jewish law. According to the Torah, or Jewish scripture: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination;

they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:30). In other words, the Torah condemns the act of sexual intercourse between men and suggests that this act is such a sin that it should be punished by death. However, although the Torah serves as the fundamental basis for Jewish practice, each sect of the Jewish religion invokes its literal meaning on different levels, giving rise to Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism.

Rabbi and author Ammiel Hirsch writes that according to Orthodox values, "Orthodox Judaism is without question about the search for absolute truth. [And,] that [absolute truth] is contained in our holy Torah" (Hirsch 5). Essentially, this is saying that Orthodox Jews interpret holy scriptures literally, and that the words of the Torah are law to them. In light of this, in the Bibliography of Contemporary Orthodox Responses to Homosexuality, Professor Rabbi Uri C. Cohen suggests that "Orthodoxy cannot permit homosexual sex" (Rabbi Cohen 1). While it's never directly stated in the film, there are certain elements demonstrated through the fatherly figures that cause one to believe that Oliver's family follows Orthodox Judaism. For example, when talking to Elio years after his internship with the Perlman family, Elio says on the phone that "they know about us," with "they" implying his parents and "us" meaning their homosexual relationship (Call Me by Your Name 02:06:05–02:06:07). Oliver responds saying that "my father would've chartered me off to a correctional facility [if he knew about us]" (02:06:26–02:06:29). The fact that Oliver says that he would be chartered off to a correctional facility is revealing, as it implies rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is the process of restoring a person back to a normal life. Thus, Oliver is implying that his father thinks that being in a homosexual relationship is not part of a normal life-course, which is a view many Orthodox Jews have in regards to homosexuality. In understanding the qualities of Orthodox Judaism, it's logical that Oliver grew up as an Orthodox Jew, given his father's condemning attitude towards homosexual relationships.

On the other hand, there are cues that allow the audience to claim that Elio's family practices Reform Judaism. Reform Jews believe that "Reform determines what Judaism is and not the other way around" (Hirsch 6). Furthermore, "Reform Judaism has by its very nature accorded a good deal of authority to the individual" (Hirsch 6). In other words, reform Jews do not follow the Torah as literally as Orthodox Jews do and believe in creating their own interpretations of the holy scripture. Understanding the strict rules against homosexuality, we can

expect the typical response a gay son would receive from an Orthodox father. However, Elio's father rejects the Orthodox perspective. After Oliver left Italy, Elio and his father sat down for a conversation regarding what Elio's experience was like having Oliver around. He says:

> Maybe it's not to me you'll want to speak about these
> things, but, umm, feel something you
> obviously did. Look, you had a beautiful friendship.
> Maybe more than a friendship. And I envy you.
> (Call Me by Your Name 01:59:31–01:59:51)

Through these sentences, Elio's father shows that although he knows about the intimate relationship between Elio and Oliver, he is still compassionate and sympathetic towards this relationship. In recognizing that Elio might not want to speak to him about "these things," his father appeals to pathos in his audience because expressing one's homosexual emotions to a parent is a very intimidating moment for most teens or adults who are coming out (01:59:35).

His father concludes his speech by saying how he "may have come close, but I never had what you two had . . . how you live your life is your business" (02:00:54–02:01:15). In these concluding lines, his father is seen giving approval to Elio to fulfill any type of relationship he desires. He contends that the love he has for his wife is nothing like the relationship Elio had with Oliver, and he therefore envies Elio because of that fact. He believes that his son should fulfill any feelings of love he possesses, no matter if they are for a man or for a woman. This evidently strays from the typical Orthodox response, which would instruct one to strictly follow the rules of the Torah and would condemn any form of homoeroticism. Rather, it's a reformist response, as his father gives "authority to the individual," which in this case is his son (Hirsch 6). Hence, it's evident that both Elio and Oliver's Jewish identities have affected the ways in which they approach their homosexuality. This careful analysis is absent from the existing conversations from the film, yet it is crucial to recognize as it can evidently lead to a deeper understanding of the film's messages.

According to Manohla Dargis, a writer for The New York Times, Call Me by Your Name "progresses through evasions and encounters, with Elio advancing, Oliver receding and their circling narrowing. The two don't (can't, won't) always say what they mean" (Dargis 11). The scene of Elio and Oliver laying on the grass by the lake clearly satisfies

the statement of "Elio advancing, Oliver receding[,]" as Oliver pulls Elio off of him when he tries to continue making out (Dargis 11). To understand Dargis' statement that "[t]he two don't (can't, won't) always say what they mean," we must analyze what each of the words—"don't," "can't," and "won't"— suggest. The word "won't" implies that the characters have a choice: they are choosing not to say what they mean. Yet, why won't they say what they mean? The word "can't" suggests that there's an external force stopping them from saying what they mean. Lastly, due to the fact that they "won't" and "can't" always say what they mean—they "don't." Therefore, if we were to reorganize Dargis' language according to this order, we have: "[t]he two [won't, can't, and therefore don't] always say what they mean." This structure reveals how the characters have a choice of whether or not they would like to say what they mean, but something stops them, which results in them not revealing their feelings in many scenes in the film. After analyzing the scene and understanding the existing conversation concerning Jewish views on homosexuality, I contend that Oliver and Elio's Jewish identities affect the way they demonstrate their homosexual feelings towards one another.

Since the Torah condemns a sexual relationship between two males, it may be implied that Oliver "(can't, won't) [say] what [he] mean[s]" because if he does, he would have "committed an abomination" according to his Orthodox background (Dargis 11; Leviticus 20:30). Oliver later marries a woman, confirming how religion prevents him from fulfilling his homosexual desires. Thus, this verifies Oliver's statement that says: "I want to be good" (Call Me by Your Name 00:57:00–00:57:02). Provided that Elio is a Reform Jew and his family interprets scripture in a less strict manner, he is more willing to make advances on Oliver because he does not see homosexuality as a direct sin. Alternatively, since Oliver is an Orthodox Jew and his family follows Jewish scripture literally, it makes sense that he constantly recedes from these advances because he fears sin. The boys' respective attitudes towards homosexual acts parallel their Jewish upbringing.

While exploring the Judaic group of each character, we must also confirm that the two are intimate in order to satisfy the fact that the characters indeed are in a homosexual relationship. To understand the intimacy between the two characters in the scene by the water, the study of proxemics can be applied. According to research done by anthropologist Edward Hall, as explained by Professor Saul Greenberg in Interactions magazine, proxemics refers to "an area of study that

identifies the culturally dependent ways in which people use interpersonal distance to understand and mediate their interactions with other people" (Greenberg 42). Specifically, there are four proxemic areas, which include: "intimate, personal, social, and public" (Greenberg 42). Essentially, proxemics studies the amount of space between interacting individuals and suggests that depending on who one's with, the amount of space will differ. In an intimate setting, proxemics indicate that the two individuals who are communicating will be close to one another. For example, a married couple is likely to sit close together due to the attraction they have for one another compared to strangers who likely would distance themselves from any contact. By addressing the fact that Elio and Oliver fall into this category of intimacy, it can be confirmed that the two in fact have homoerotic feelings for one another and are in a homosexual relationship.

However, the quote also suggests that there are cultural forces that determine how intimacy looks between people, as suggested by the words: "culturally dependent" (Greenberg 42). For example, in Jewish culture, Orthodox Jews believe in the idea of men and women being shomer negiah [the prohibition against touching members of the opposite sex until marriage]. This expresses the idea that before marriage, men and women are not to have any physical contact with anyone who falls out of their immediate family because this will allow them to look past one another's physical attraction. In recognizing this cultural dependence, it allows the audience to notice how the way in which Elio and Oliver enact their homosexual feelings is shaped by their religious culture.

After having a nosebleed that excuses him from a family lunch, Elio sits in a private room alone trying to recover. Oliver sits beside Elio, his legs making physical contact with Elio's as he strokes them, satisfying the proxemic definition of intimacy. This scene is significant because it suggests safety and trust as the two conceal their homosexual identities, perhaps due to their religious culture. The fact that this intimate moment is taking place in this private space implies that the two characters feel safe and have a sense of trust with each other (Call Me by Your Name 01:00:33–01:01:34). For example, during the scene where Elio meets Oliver at the central square and asks Oliver, "Are you happy I came here?" (01:33:30–01:33:32) Oliver glances in front of him and behind him to see if there were people around and responds to Elio, saying, "I would kiss you if I could" (01:33:37–01:33:40). The fact that Oliver looks around him to see if

anybody is watching him suggests that when put in a public space, Oliver is hesitant to be seen with Elio in an intimate manner. However, when in the private room, he is able to act genuinely with Elio. This is significant for Guadagnino's audience because it addresses the difficulty in "coming out" and revealing one's homosexual identity to society, especially in the context of religion.

Furthermore, as Elio caresses Oliver's chest in an intimate manner, he notices that Oliver is wearing a Star of David—this leads him to say "I used to have one of these" (Call Me by Your Name 01:01:04–01:01:06). When Oliver asks why he never wears it anymore, Elio responds saying that his mother says they are "Jews of discretion" (01:01:11–01:01:12). In saying that his family is discrete about their Judaism, Elio suggests that there's a risk involved with being Jewish, which can be furthered to suggest that there's a deeper intentionality between the linking of the Jewish identity of his family and his homosexual relationship that may explain why the two mask their relationship from society. Thus, the film may in fact suggest that we can better understand the challenge or nature of the relationship through the lens of the struggle they face as Jews.

The main goal for many homosexual couples is to "come out of the closet," which means that they will reveal their homosexual feelings to the people around them. This film is popular amongst its audience because it reflects this hesitancy and insecurity many gay people suffer from, just as Oliver is having difficulty being intimate with Elio in a public setting. The film even furthers the concept of "the closet" by placing the men in a situation bound by religious restrictions and social norms, highlighted by the discussion of the Star of David. In a way, the private space in which Elio and Oliver have an intimate moment in can be representative of the "closet" that many gay people find themselves stuck in. The two are hiding their identities from the rest of the world because they don't feel secure in a public setting. The scene thus suggests the feeling of security in being hidden away from society. By presenting a discussion of the Star of David around Oliver's neck and addressing the necessity of its discretion, Guadagnino interlinks the concealment of both Jewish and homosexual identities.

In the words of Joanna di Mattia, "[t]he act of touching Elio, after their intimacy earlier that day, is undeniably an act of worship and desire—the kiss Oliver plants on Elio's foot before leaving confirms he is keen to touch more" (Mattia 12). This statement encapsulates the spectrum of opinion amongst most viewers and critics of the film. To

understand Mattia, one must analyze her diction. The word "worship" is defined as a feeling of adoration to someone, which can be compared to religious homage. Therefore, Mattia is suggesting that Oliver's intimacy in the scene is "undeniably" religious in nature. Furthermore, besides just being "an act of worship[,]" Mattia suggests that the act of touching Elio is also an act of "desire." The word "desire" in this specific instance refers to an intense sexual appetite or feeling towards someone. Thus, she reveals that there exists an intense desire within him for Elio, even though he conceals his identity. It's also important to address the fact that Mattia combines both of these attitudes, saying that Oliver presents both "worship and desire." Given that worshipping something is a religious act and desiring is a sexual act, do the two attitudes coexist for the characters? I contend that Mattia's quote seems to intend that there is a deep connection and conflict between religious affection and this specific type of homosexual feeling and love.

According to a research experiment done in 2014 by Eleonora Patacchini et. al, for many males and females "in the Catholic countries Ireland, Italy, France, and Portugal, support [for homosexuals] is much lower [than in] northern, Protestant countries" (Patacchini 1065). In understanding the sociocultural context in which the film is set, it makes sense that Oliver and Elio feel unsafe in the eyes of society. Patacchini shows us how in Italy during the time, a relationship like theirs wasn't accepted by society, therefore they desired to conceal their relationship. The rest of the scene in the private space is spent with Oliver questioning why Elio doesn't wear his Star of David anymore, with Elio responding that it's because his mother regards his family as "Jews of discretion" (Call Me by Your Name 01:01:11–01:01:12). This is confirmed through Elio's words in the beginning of the film, where he emphasizes how "besides [his] family, [Oliver's] probably the only other Jew to step foot in this town" (00:10:34–00:10:39). This was likely said because during the time the film was set, many Jews "had experienced the troubled years of the 1970s and 1980s in which anti-Israeli resentment was virulent [in Italy], particularly on the left" (Jewish Virtual Library). A decade after in the early 1990s in Lombardy, there were political scandals and the Northern Lombard League even began producing racist slogans and fascist salutes which led to "anti-Semitic outbursts in sports stadiums (rival teams being referred to as 'Jews'), desecrations of Jewish cemeteries, and violence against foreign immigrants" (Jewish Virtual Library). Thus, it makes sense that the Perlmans are Jews of discretion, considering the rampant anti-Semitic propaganda associated

with the time period in which the film takes place. In having the intimate encounter between the actors intermix with the talk of having to conceal a Jewish identity, it's logical that the two would correlate since both homosexuality and Judaism were elements of society that have not yet been accepted in the time the film was set. However, this correlation can be furthered.

By analyzing their relationship within this specific contextual Jewish framework and considering the preexisting notions regarding homosexuality in Italy during the time, we can fully grasp the deeper messages of the film and comprehend what Mattia intends in her aforementioned quote. One of these messages is about the shared experience between being observant Jews and being homosexual men. According to the sociocultural framework in which the film takes place, someone who is homosexual and who is a Jew makes them monstrous in two ways, which places pressure on the characters to hide their feelings and beliefs. This context allows us viewers to realize that there is a risk involved with having their identities. To understand why this risk is demonstrated in the film, we must analyze the progression of the relationship between Elio and Oliver.

The scene in which Elio and Oliver are in a private room presents a confession about the challenges of being a Jew. Their Jewish identity, taking a risk, and being transparent opens the door to a deeper intimacy. In all the moments before the Star of David scene, Elio doesn't wear his Star of David necklace because of the risk in being Jewish. However, Oliver doesn't have a problem with openly displaying his own necklace. Immediately after the scene in which Elio and Oliver discuss their Jewish values in the private room, a new scene is introduced where Elio is seen swimming and is now wearing his Star of David necklace. This is significant because during the scene that was set in a private room, Elio addresses that he is a Jew of discretion. Now, however, due to his relationship with Oliver, he moves away from this discretion and is willingly going against the expected values of the society in which he is in, shown as he embraces his Judaism by wearing his necklace.

The fact that there is a simultaneous embracement of Jewish identity and homosexual identity leads to the deeper sense of intimacy. The film demonstrates how, although the characters are violating cultural expectations of who they should be, their love for one another and their love for their Jewish identities is non-dangerous, even in this culture where there is such a high level of risk involved. Rather, the film sug-

gests that their relationship is actually beautiful because together, the two can safely navigate both of these cultural systems that deem them as monsters with the love they experience for each other. This appeals to the film's audience because it shows that no matter the risk involved, whether it be religious or in society's expectations of an ideal relationship, the beauty of love can prevail. This gives the audience impetus to fight against the factors that restrain them from coming out, since Elio and Oliver were able to experience beauty in their relationship even though they understood the risk involved. This feeling of love, therefore, is not a dangerous entity; rather, it's quite beautiful.

Following an analysis of Call Me by Your Name, it's evident that the film's religious and social elements have contributed to its success and worldwide recognition. In failing to address the sociocultural and Jewish framework of the film, we viewers clearly may not fully understand the messages Aciman intended in his novel, which have influenced Guadagnino's film. However, noticing these factors provides us with further insight on the deep intimacy between Elio and Oliver and allows us to comprehend the significance of the relationship between Jewish identity and homosexual identity as portrayed in the film. With the growing LGBT movement present in contemporary society, Guadagnino invites his audience to challenge the criticism they may receive by others as homosexuals because through his film, he illustrates how although expressing one's identity in the midst of widespread disapproval is undoubtedly risky, this risk is what makes love powerful and a force that will endure throughout the entirety of human existence.

MICHAEL AMRAMI is a Senior undergraduate of the Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, where he is completing his B.A. in Neuroscience-biology and Psychology with minors in Health Sciences, Math and Natural Sciences, and Chemistry. Michael originally composed this essay for his first College Writing I course, "Writing Monsters." He plans to pursue a medical degree in surgery and ultimately establish mobile clinics internationally to improve access to medicine and education in low-income communities abroad.

WORKS CITED

"Anti-Semitism in the European Union: Italy." *Jewish Virtual Library*, Dec. 2003. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/anti-semitism-in-the-eu-italy-jewish-virtual-library.

Call Me by Your Name. Directed by Luca Guadagnino, Memento Films International, RT Features, M.Y.R.A Entertainment Frenesy Film La Cinefacture, 2017.

"Call Me by Your Name." *Rotten Tomatoes*, www.rottentomatoes.com/m/call_me_by_your_name/.

Cohen, Rabbi Uri C. *Bibliography of Contemporary Orthodox Responses to Homosexuality*. 2nd ed., ATID, 2006, pp. 1–13.

Dargis, Manohla. "Review: A Boy's Own Desire in 'Call Me by Your Name.'" *The New York Times*, 24 Nov. 2017, p. 11, www.nytimes.com/2017/11/22/movies/call-me-by-your-name-review-armie-hammer.html?referrer=google_kp.

Di Mattia, Joanna. "BEATING HEARTS Compassion and Self-discovery in Call Me by Your Name: A bittersweet story of young love gained and lost, Luca Guadagnino's Call Me by Your Name also manages to dramatise the roles of sympathy and support networks in the process of coming of age–especially for those whose sexualities may not align with the norm. JOANNA DI MATTIA dives into this sumptuous film and examines its handling of growth, grief, relationships and risk." *Screen Education*, no. 91, 2018, p. 8–15. *Gale Academic OneFile*, search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.198633178428998

Dolsten, Josefin. "Why 'Call Me By Your Name' Is Such a Jewish Movie." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 8 Jan. 2018, p. 1, www.jta.org/2018/01/08/life-religion/5-jewish-things-about-call-me-by-your-name.

Greenberg, Saul, et al. "Proxemic Interactions: the New Ubicomp?" *Interactions*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2011, pp. 42–50.

Haskell, Molly. "Call Me by Your Name." *EBSCO*, Nov–Dec. 2017, pp. 30–31, web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=13&sid=5dd47820-0d26-4769-9868-e2fcc708c9de%40sessionmgr120.

Hirsch, Ammiel, and Yaakov Yosef Reinman. *One People, Two Worlds: a Reform Rabbi and an Orthodox Rabbi Explore the Issues That Divide Them*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2002, pp. 5–6.

Levine, Baruch A. “Leviticus.” *My Jewish Learning*, My Jewish Learning, 2001, www.myjewishlearning.com/article/leviticus/.

Patacchini, Eleonora, Giuseppe Ragusa, and Yves Zenou. “Unexplored Dimensions of Discrimination in Europe: Homosexuality and Physical Appearance.” *Journal of Population Economics*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2015, pp. 1045–73. *ProQuest*, doi.org/10.1007/s00148-014-0533-9.

“The 90th Academy Awards | 2018.” *Oscars*, 2021 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 4 Mar. 2018, www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/2018.

A Unique Approach to the Holocaust

Megan Anderson, Brigham Young University

The authentic picture of Vladek in his prison uniform sends the reader's head into a tailspin as they close *Maus II*. *Maus* is a comic book written by Art Spiegelman, though, unlike other comic books, it addresses the Holocaust where the characters are represented as cartoon animals. Zoomorphism gives its readers a false sense of security—one could imagine the Holocaust to only be a nightmarish story. But the Holocaust is not a story; it happened. After a quick read of *Maus*, one can promptly develop an appreciation for Spiegelman's unique and artistic ability to paint a picture of suffering, loss, pain, and liberation in the Holocaust in a disconnected way. He pulls away from the reality of the story, then abruptly forces his audience to face the hard, raw facts that these things did happen and that the mice depicted were people. The cats treated the mice so animalistically it was shockingly human. And, we realize, people did do that. Spiegelman's medium and method for exploring the Holocaust is uncommon when compared to other Holocaust literature texts, which are typically written in narrative form. The tone Spiegelman takes when describing his personal experiences, combined with the characterization of his animal survivors, present a strong gauge of his efficacy in using a comic form to deliver such a delicate subject.

CARTOON ANIMAL CHARACTERIZATION IN A COMIC BOOK

At first glance, the cover of *Maus* catches one's attention and interest. Pictured is a swastika with a catlike face in the center, distinguished by its whiskers. In the shadow of the symbol are two mice huddled on the ground. Without a profound glance, the viewer can see the relation-

ship that the artist is depicting between the cats and the mice in light of the Holocaust and how they are symbolic for Jews and Germans. Most people understand the predatory relationship between cats and mice, but to put them together in such a representative manner could seem to the reader disrespectful, even blasphemous.

However, Spiegelman drew his inspiration from sources written before the Holocaust took place. On the front cover of *Maus II*, a quote is given from a German newspaper article dating back to the mid-1930s: "Healthy emotions tell every independent young man and every honorable youth that the dirty and filth covered vermin, the greatest bacteria carrier in the animal kingdom, cannot be the ideal type of animal . . . Away with Jewish brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse! Wear the Swastika Cross!" (Spiegelman 4). The notion that Jews are comparable to mice was not an idea invented by Spiegelman. Rather, it was an idea from the cats themselves. To the Germans, Jews were the embodiment of vermin requiring immediate extermination. Spiegelman toys with this metaphor in his comic book, yet the effect is not intended for the reader to follow the directions of propaganda and exterminate rodent Jews. He draws sickening moments that seem to go against the very nature of humanity, but he uses cartoon animals to soften the blow. For example, Spiegelman depicts a moment in Auschwitz complete with drawings of cats and mice as follows: "Some kids were screaming and screaming. They couldn't stop. So the Germans swinged them by the legs against a wall . . . and they never anymore screamed. In this way, the Germans treated the little ones what still had survived a little" (Spiegelman 108). The severity of this violence is not as heavy as if Spiegelman were to draw humans like it actually happened. This shields his readers from reality, yet still conveys what happened. If the reader would so choose, this scene could merely be a display of bestial animals and their victims and have that be the end. This being said, the reader is aware of the cat and mouse metaphor, and the larger comic tiles at the end of the scene allow the viewer to take a moment to realize the reality of it.

Others have noted the significance of cartoon characterization in Spiegelman's *Maus* and its effect on Holocaust literature in the way that Spiegelman puts a fictional spin on it. In the *Journal of American Culture*, Mark Cory examines comedy as a literary device employed by Spiegelman in *Maus*. He concludes its overall effect: "When its incongruity was exploited to the fullest, humor has served as a metaphor for evil, but in later works, the trend has been, if anything, to use humor to

soften the 'cosmic significance' of the suffering depicted in this literature" (Cory 39). In essence, Cory is explaining the wall that Spiegelman has built for his readers. He argues that the wall that Spiegelman built is humorous, as he is using cartoon animals to replace Jews and Germans in World War II. In addition to an emotional barrier for the reader, this characterization provides a divide for Spiegelman himself as he "seeks to deal with [his] profound estrangement from his father and his father's religion" (Cory 38). This estrangement is most notable when Art asks his wife in *Maus* whether or not he should depict her as a mouse because she was Jewish or as a frog because she was French. Spiegelman depicts his separation from his parents' religion with humorous cartoons. He puts up a blockade between himself and reality by making it all fiction, thus disassociating himself with his family's religion. It also separates him from the trauma that continues to plague his family. Spiegelman's rare depiction of the Holocaust adds an element of humor that hides the genuine woes of both him and his characters. He keeps this tragic historical event away from his readers, but also from himself.

More journals note the usage of comic books as a whole to address the Holocaust and how this medium is a distinct, effective way to display such events. Ofra Amihay admires Spiegelman's use of comics in contrast to the rest of the comics of his era. She notes how he is different from the satirical sex-drugs-violence comics from his area to create something that is much more meaningful. She observes that "The verbal and visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of words and images, and such works seem to make it clearer than ever" (Amihay 1). As Spiegelman is breaking away from the stereotypical genre of comics, he is creating a new form of art that speaks to his audience visually. This provides clarity for his message. Adding on to what Amihay said, Asta Vrecko acknowledges Spiegelman's carelessness for what a comic book is meant to convey. Rather than using it in the way that the general public expects, Spiegelman uses comics to showcase another genre, that is, Holocaust literature. This effectively conveys the Holocaust in a way that has not been seen before. Vrecko applauds: "With his pioneering work, Spiegelman has at once posed and dismissed the question about the 'appropriate-ness' of comic art for such a serious topic. *Maus* has not only transcended this question, but it has achieved considerably more by addressing certain impossible issues and topics" (Vrecko 2). Spiegelman instills awe in his audience through the art of conveying the Holocaust clearly

with comic books as a medium. It is never-been-done-before art where Spiegelman effectively teaches his reader how the Holocaust has impacted him and his family.

Zoomorphism and comic books have different effects on Spiegelman's audience. It provides an emotional barrier for the readers from the shocking events of the Holocaust. This shields the audience from the severity of the Holocaust. Zoomorphism and comic books also create a humorous barrier in which Spiegelman protects himself from association with the mouse characters that portray his family. And, finally, we note the recognition that Spiegelman received for using comic books to tell his story. This unique medium provides clarity which makes it more effective in addressing a difficult subject such as the Holocaust.

TONE

Another unique element of Spiegelman's *Maus* is the tone that he employs to illustrate certain events from the Holocaust. He paints a picture of his parents' tragic pasts, the war that destroyed his home country, and the people that hated his comrades for their religion. One would expect a depressed tone from Spiegelman or perhaps one of remorse or nostalgia. Instead, he hits his audience with a straightforward coarseness that delivers his family's story in a very factual manner free from any emotion. For example, in *Maus II,* Spiegelman portrays himself, Art, narrating certain events and the success that he has received for writing *Maus I*. He says, "Vladek died of congestive heart failure on August 18, 1982 . . . In May 1987 Francoise and I are expecting a baby . . . Between May 16, 1944, and May 24, 1944, over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz . . . In September 1986, after 8 years of work, the first part of Maus was published. It was a critical and commercial success . . . In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.)" (Spiegelman 41). This deliberate, cold-cut version of history creates an emotional separation from events that very much involve him. To the reader, the way that Spiegelman writes about his research would seem as if he did not care about his father's experiences during the Holocaust. Yet there is a sense of duty coming from him that conveys his desire to tell the world about the mice and cats that are human beings. Not to teach the Germans a lesson, per se, or to exclaim to every dictator that they should never repeat history. Rather, Spiegelman conveys the need to write, to feel, and to understand. Additionally, this form of tone used to address the Holocaust directs the attention to

something not often seen in writing about the Holocaust: not that it was sad, or bad, but that it happened.

Though dutiful, Spiegelman's detached tone can be contrasted with other Holocaust literature texts that utilize pathos to unfold this tragic scene. His rare detachment does not show the intimate relationship that many of the Jews had with Death, nor does he show character development or improved attributes over time as is seen in most stories. In *The Book Thief,* Markus Zusak designates the narrator as Death, which adds gravity and an acquaintance to the Holocaust that *Maus* does not. Utilizing a sentimental tone, Zusak gives voice to Death as he describes a scene with an army of Jews marching to their deaths: "Their gaunt faces were stretched with torture. Hunger ate them as they continued forward, some of them watching the ground to avoid the people on the side of the road. Some looked appealingly at those who had come to observe their humiliation, the prelude to their deaths" (Zusak 392). Zusak paints a vivid picture of the extreme suffering that the Jews went through. He is sure to show every detail of their dismal situation, from their bony cheeks to the haunted looks in their eyes. In this scene, Zusak pulls his audience to stare directly into the anguished face of humanity. It forces one to feel some of the emotions that the characters felt. This is held in contrast to *Maus*, where the deceptive pictures of expressionless cartoon mice allow the reader to ignore the characters' emotions. Zusak and Spiegelman both educate their readers on the Holocaust, but they engage the readers in different ways (Zusak uses emotions whereas Spiegelman relies solely on facts and events). Through these lenses, a student of the Holocaust can gain a more expansive perspective of history.

Another example found is in *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl.* Anne Frank provokes the reader to share sentiments with its characters. She invites her audience into her personal life as a Jew hiding from arrest in Amsterdam. She puts her inner thoughts on display for the viewer to admire and contemplate. Different from *Maus*, which seems pessimistic in comparison, she reveals small tidbits that she has learned despite the difficulties that she withstood. She laid snippets of her thoughts out in writing: "Where there's hope, there's life. It fills us with fresh courage and makes us strong again . . . In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart . . . People are just people, and all people have faults and shortcomings, but all of us are born with a basic goodness" (Frank). Looking at these examples, one can see Anne Frank's hopeful tone as she contemplates

the freedom that postwar life could offer. Even during times of great oppression, she chose to see the good in other people and to give them the benefit of the doubt. Spiegelman does the opposite. At the end of *Maus I*, he presents dialogue between Art and Vladek that shows his negative perception of his father. In this scene, Art is angry at his father for throwing away his mother's journals about her experiences during the Holocaust. In his anger, he accuses Vladek of being a murderer: "God damn you! You—you murderer! How the hell could you do such a thing!!" (Spiegelman 159). His blunt commentary in the scene exposes Art's consistent insensitivity towards his father. His father explained that he wanted to rid himself of bad memories, but Spiegelman does not listen; he shows no respect for his father's hardships. This differs greatly from the reverent tone used to talk about victims in *The Book Thief*. Not only that, but after this confrontation, he does not provide any further insight or inner feelings about it. This differs from Anne Frank's reminiscent tone in her diary. Spiegelman's tone and approach to the Holocaust are coarse in comparison to the texts mentioned above. Although all of these texts communicate what transpired during World War II, Spiegelman's unique tone gives a very abrupt, cold-cut attitude that differs from other sentimental texts that address the same subject. Using this contrast, we can see that Spiegelman sings a different tune than other forms of Holocaust literature. That is, he makes it less of a study of humanity and more of a statement of transpiring events. In essence, he widens the scope for how the Holocaust is discussed through his disconnected approach.

In addition to his seemingly disinterested tone surrounding the Holocaust, Spiegelman's tone also creates a divide between himself and his family's religion, which has been mentioned previously. As part of his disconnected tone, Spiegelman never really reveals his inner feelings or opinions. He does not say that he is entirely against Judaism, but some of his drawings show that he prefers to not call himself a Jew. This is most evident in the beginning scenes of *Maus II* when he draws Art sitting at a desk, but instead of drawing himself as a mouse (the animal that he uses to represent Jews), he is only shown wearing the mask of one. Also, in the introduction of *Metamaus,* a book that he wrote years after the second half of *Maus,* he shows Art ripping off the mouse mask while saying, "I can't breathe in this thing" (Spiegelman 9). Thus, his detached tone also separates him from his family's religion. He does not claim to believe in the faith that brought his parents so much grief. However, this disconnect cannot be attributed to the war because this

semblance of disdain towards religion contrasts with other renowned Holocaust literature authors. Nobel Prize-winning Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel was admired for his undying faith in Judaism despite his experiences in Auschwitz. In 2016, *The New York Times* commended his faithful example in his obituary: "Still, he never abandoned faith; indeed, he became more devout as the years passed, praying near his home or in Brooklyn's Hasidic synagogues. On the airplane that was to take him to Israel . . . he sat shoeless with a friend, and together they hummed Hasidic melodies" (Berger). Wiesel was a faithful, influential Jew to the end. He continued to dutifully live the religion that, one could argue, only brought him grief. Also mentioned in the obituary were quotes depicting Wiesel's desire to continue to be a source of good. He wanted to show God how grateful he was for being one of the few to survive the Holocaust. Despite the Hell that others put him through, Wiesel wanted to give Heaven to his fellowmen. Spiegelman's tone reveals that he does not share this sentiment. He does not believe that God protected his family from death in the concentration camps. He is skeptical of his father's mention of a Jewish rabbi telling him that he would survive, and does not believe that God played any role in his survival, nor does he feel the need to thank Him for it.

To continue to show contrast with Spiegelman's views, we can look at Corrie Ten Boom, who wrote *The Hiding Place.* Though not Jewish, she still suffered many hardships as a devout Christian hiding Jews in the Netherlands. Undeterred by imprisonment in a concentration camp, she preached forgiveness and gratitude for God's grace. She showed this God-given forgiveness when she forgave one of her prison guards after the war: "And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives along with the command, the love itself" (Ten Boom). Corrie's book and life are focused solely on her love for God and her love for others as children of God. Her audience can see Corrie's character develop into a more faithful Christian as she endures the horrors of World War II. She can look at everything she suffered from an eternal perspective and she thanks God for it. Again, her pious views are not shared with those of Spiegelman. He does not take heart when he hears of his father's prayers being answered, nor does his parents' survival story strengthen his faith. Spiegelman's tone keeps his father's faith at a distance, and that absence of interest in his religion shows the reader that he does not care for it.

Essentially, Spiegelman's tone sends thought-provoking messages to his audience about the Holocaust and the Jewish religion. Despite the relation that he has to the Holocaust, his tone conveys it in a very factual manner, as if only to say that it happened. We can contrast that with other texts that dig deeper into the humanity of the war and that show the more emotional side of the Holocaust. And finally, we see that his tone establishes a divide between himself and his family's faith. Regarding Spiegelman's tone, it is unique to other examples of Holocaust literature, making it a reputable contribution to what has already been said.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Another important component of *Maus's* contribution to the literature discussion on the Holocaust is the way Spiegelman incorporates his own experience as he interviews his father. Despite the intimate familial connection that Spiegelman has with the Holocaust, he conveys it in a way that is anything but that. Weaved between Vladek's tales of woe is Spiegelman's perception of his father. This gives his audience a more complete picture of who his father was long after the war. He does not leave out any details of the shaky relationship between him and his father. Each time that he refers back to the present, the audience is confronted with more and more of Art's annoyance towards his father as a person, or his father's obsessive possessiveness with money, or their arguments with each other about seemingly fruitless subjects. For example, in *Maus II,* he shows Art and Francoise complaining about Vladek. Francoise begins,

> 'It's so claustrophobic being around Vladek. He straightens everything you touch. He's so anxious.' 'He never learned how to relax.' 'Maybe Auschwitz made him like that.' 'Maybe. But lots of the people up here are survivors—like those Karps—if they're whacked up it's in a different way from Vladek.' (Spiegelman 22)

Art's disdain for his father's actions is not covered up for the sake of ethos. No one is immune to family feuds, not even a father and son who regularly discuss the father's traumas in the Holocaust. In a way, these moments show that these people are real. It shows that a survivor of the Holocaust yells at his second wife and preserves matches as if they were treasures. The way Vladek is represented shows that life went on

after his sweet reunion with Anja. And, despite what other Holocaust books would tell you, it shows that not every person that survived the death camps learned their lesson and became a saint. Spiegelman utilizes his father's personal experience to give a broader perspective on the heroic survivor of the Holocaust. And actually, he shows that his father could not be further from that.

In *Metamaus*, Spiegelman is interviewed on his relationship with his father, and he delves into the reasons why he chose to show his father in such a negative light. In response to the interviewer asking him about his concerns about characterizing Vladek, he says, "I was trying not to sentimentalize: it never had occurred to me to try to create a heroic figure, and certainly not to create a survivor who's ennobled by his suffering—a very Christian notion, the survivor as a martyr" (Spiegelman 33). Spiegelman has no innate desire to respect his father's image, and instead decides to show his audience who his father was. One can infer that the second-generation Holocaust victims would have a different perspective on Holocaust survivors. The survivors' children can see other sides to their parents than just the liberated victim. In his book *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark,* James Campbell demonstrates this parent to child relationship with Holocaust survivors saying, "'We were supposed to revere them—they were martyrs of anti-Semitism—but in reality they were often ruined, angry, depressed, impatient people whom you could never figure out.' '[The children of survivors] had this special knowledge about suffering. And they seemed to resent it'" (Campbell 55). Here, Campbell analyzes the response of Spiegelman to his father's post-traumatic actions, asserting that in response to his father's extreme reactions to trauma, he reacts likewise. We can see that Spiegelman created *Maus* to come to terms with his parents' pasts and to realize more fully the events that transpired. However, it was also a way for him to cope with the current situation of his parents nearly thirty years after the events of the Holocaust. Spiegelman's position as a second-generation Holocaust survivor provides a unique perspective on the survivors and how life continued after the genocide. Andrew Gordon from Harvard University agrees: "Spiegelman writes *Maus* to . . . assert his own suffering and to overcome the influence of his parents . . . The Holocaust had toxic effects on his parents, enhancing their neurotic traits and distorting their relationship with their son" (56). Gordon acknowledges Spiegelman's negative reactions to his parents' victimized pasts and the effects that it might have on him. Most people would not consider this, but when

reading *Maus,* the tension between him and his father is apparent. One could attribute it to his father's past, but Spiegelman does not reference that at all when displaying their familial tensions. Rather, he seems to be, as Gordon says, "overcoming" some of the demons that the Holocaust gave to him through his parents. Essentially, Spiegelman's open portrayal of his tense relationship with his father makes *Maus* a unique contribution to the genre of Holocaust literature in the way that his father is portrayed as a Holocaust victim, only years later.

CONCLUSION

It is no easy feat to write about a father's horrific experience in the Holocaust—let alone to represent it with such a unique medium as a comic book where the characters are presented as cats and mice. Yet despite the distance that this characterization presents, there is still no question as to whether or not these horrific events occurred. Spiegelman's dutiful, straightforward tone contrasts with other texts by skipping the sentiments and going straight for the fact that the Holocaust happened. Finally, his delivery of his family's story provides a unique window into the postwar details of Holocaust survivors that many other texts do not offer. *Maus* provides a different way of studying the Holocaust, one that expands the scope of how these horrific stories can be better understood. Despite Spiegelman's efforts to detach himself from the Holocaust, he still leaves a deep footprint on the Holocaust literature bookshelves.

MEGAN ANDERSON is an English major with a minor in Professional Writing and Rhetoric attending Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Her paper, "A Unique Approach to the Holocaust", was written for her Writing Literary Criticism class. She enjoys reading works from the British Victorian period and aspires to someday write like her favorite authors Charles Dickens and Lorrie Moore. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree, Megan plans to become an editor.

WORKS CITED

Amihay, Ofra. "Passing under Separation: Comics Representations of the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall." *Journal of Graphic*

Novels & Comics, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013, pp. 278–96. doi:10.1080/21504857.2012.670653.

Boom, Corrie Ten. *The Hiding Place*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2015.

Campbell, James. *Syncopations: Beats, New Yorkers, and Writers in the Dark*. University of California Press, 2008.

Cory, Mark. "Comedic Distance in Holocaust Literature." *The Journal of American Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1995, pp. 35–40. doi:10.1177/0163443706065029.

"Elie Wiesel, Auschwitz Survivor and Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Dies at 87." *The New York Times*, 2 July 2016.

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl*. W. Ross Macdonald School Resource Services Library, 2016.

Gordon, Andrew. "Philip Roth's *Patrimony* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: Jewish Sons Remembering Their Fathers." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, Jan. 2005, pp. 53–66. doi:10.3200/prss.1.1.53-66.

Spiegelman, Art, and Hillary Chute. *MetaMaus*. Pantheon Books, 2011.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I: a Survivor's Tale / My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon Books, 1997.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II: a Survivor's Tale: and Here My Troubles Began*. Paw Prints, 2010.

Vrecko, Asta. "Representations of Trauma: Davide Toffolo's Italian Winter." 28 Aug. 2015.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Picador/Pan Macmillan Australia, 2019.

Ogres and Others: The Multifaceted Gender Movie Shrek

Grace Beagles, University of West Georgia

The way we view ourselves is largely influenced by society, which not only judges how we behave but also makes assumptions regarding our gender identities. Movies and other forms of media have begun to depict the societal pressures to conform to a particular image, one that often reaffirms the "desirability of heterosexuality" (Francis 340). The *Shrek* series, particularly the first and second movies, depict gender as the grounds for extensive "othering." In the first movie, Shrek and Donkey journey to Duloc to discuss Lord Farquaad's banishment of fairytale creatures to Shrek's swamp, a circumstance that is promised to be resolved upon Shrek safely returning Princess Fiona from a dragon-guarded tower. Shortly after the rescue, Shrek and Fiona fall in love, and Fiona decides to transform into an ogre and marry Shrek instead of Lord Farquaad. Their happily ever after becomes much more complicated in *Shrek 2* when the newlyweds are invited to a celebration in their honor at the kingdom of Far Far Away, home to Fiona's less-than-thrilled parents. While Fiona's dad attempts to kill Shrek, Shrek sets out to transform both himself and Fiona into humans in hopes of making Fiona happy and gaining the approval of her parents. After several obstacles and the intervention of fairy powers, Shrek and Fiona have a closer relationship with her parents and decide to return to their life in the swamp as ogres. While they are animated children's movies, *Shrek* and *Shrek 2* contribute to larger discussions about the performativity of gender and how identifying as something other than what society expects results in pervasive stereotyping, discrimination, and "othering."

Scholars agree that society plays a major role in establishing standards that restrict the fluidity of gender. Socialization is a huge part of a process that Calvin Thomas describes as "making meaning" (Thomas 27). In his book on critical theory, he explains that "we are each born as inadequate little animals, rough beasts that must be *turned* into human children through laborious linguistic processes of *socialization*" (Thomas 32). We are shaped by society from the moment we are born. A huge learning curve occurs as we age during which we discover what we are *supposed* to do and how to do it. Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" discusses gender as being a learned construct. She similarly acknowledges that rather than be "passively scripted with cultural codes" that decide how one *should* be, "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Judith Butler 526, 523). We quickly discern the scripts that society constructs so that we may better align with its expectations, desires, and norms. Society functions as a judge, waiting to either approve or punish one for their compliance or lack thereof with the social scripts created. Over time, though, we continue to redefine what it means to be human, thereby encouraging individuality and expression of gender identity.

Two of the fairy tale creatures in *Shrek*, the wolf and Pinocchio, perform their genders in ways that push the traditional boundaries of masculine and feminine. The wolf from *Little Red Riding Hood* enjoys the grandmother's clothes that he puts on to dupe Little Red Riding Hood. He wears her pink nightgown and matching cap all throughout the *Shrek* movies and seems to have found a new comfort in cross-dressing, which forces viewers to disassociate him from being the "big bad wolf" portrayed in *Little Red Riding Hood* (Martin Butler 62). This "gender-confused wolf," as the fairy godmother refers to him in *Shrek 2*, is not only included for comedic purposes but also serves to depict how gender identity does not always align with the appropriate gender performances taught by society (*Shrek 2* 00:25:53–00:25:55; Cook 4). Pinocchio, a character who has long been studied by scholars, is also included in the *Shrek* movies. His wooden nose, which grows in size each time he tells a lie, is not only a phallic image but also seems to be a feature that is too expressive for his liking. Having been transformed into a human, he exclaims that he is a "real boy now," signifying a desire to be human and a longing to have his identity be accepted and reaffirmed (*Shrek 2* 01:16:13–01:16:15). Still, he prefers to wear women's underwear, a secret that becomes apparent on

a mission to help Shrek save Fiona from unknowingly falling in love with Prince Charming. After he follows Donkey's instruction to "say something crazy like 'I'm wearing ladies' underwear'" and his nose fails to grow, Gingy tugs on his pants, revealing a pink and red thong (*Shrek 2* 01:08:44–01:08:46). The group laughs, making Pinocchio feel "ashamed and vehemently [refuse] to admit that he feels more comfortable in ladies' underwear" (Martin Butler 63). Such denial and feelings of shame are common for gender non-conforming individuals in that they "often face discrimination and even physical danger" (Cook 18). Through these two characters alone, the films express that the socially-defined binary of masculinity and femininity is much more complicated and blurred than traditionally thought.

By including an ugly stepsister who rebels against the traditional gender image expectations, the movies go a step further in exploring the complexity of gender as well as society's need to re-evaluate its standards. As a bartender at The Poison Apple, the stepsister is dressed like a woman in every scene that she is depicted in. She has facial hair in the form of a five o'clock shadow, which covers her rather blocky face that has been painted with a lot of makeup. Her purple dress is just tight enough to showcase her form and low enough in the neck to accentuate female breasts, a feminine image that is complemented by a braided updo and dangling hoop earrings. When King Harold approaches the bar counter and asks for the "ugly stepsister," he, upon seeing her, exclaims, "Ah! There you are" and draws back in shock and disgust (*Shrek 2* 00:28:19–00:28:25). Not only is she viewed as unsightly by society in the fictional movie, but she has also become "one of the prime targets of criticism" because of the contradictory mixture of male and female features (Martin Butler 63). Articles have even been written about her in which she is classified as "a male-to-female transgender" and "a she-male" (Martin Butler 63). While these labels may be accurate descriptions for this character, the movie's primary focus lies in addressing how gender non-conforming individuals exist in society and are capable of contributing to society in the same ways that gender-conforming individuals are. Here, the stepsister is in a position to help others by fixing their drinks as well as connecting them to the fairy godmother. She is not invaluable as many societies, who view gender as being a clear distinction between male and female, often assume.

Shrek is discriminated against most of all because of his ogre identity, which does not explicitly relate to his gender but does result in

the harshest ostracism and "othering" of all the non-conforming characters. His green skin, excessively large body, and swamp lifestyle are unconventional to humans, making him a "violation of aesthetics" (Melchiori and Mallett 261). He struggles with finding happiness and comfort in his identity as an ogre when around humans because of the way they stereotype him and make him feel uncomfortable. Throughout the movies, people stare at him condescendingly and even approach him with sharpened pitchforks and other weapons, ready to torture and kill him. In addition to this physical discrimination, Lord Farquaad informs Fiona while Shrek is within earshot that "[she doesn't] have to waste good manners on the ogre. It's not like it has feelings" (*Shrek* 01:08:20–01:08:26). Society sees no reason in treating ogres nicely or with any ounce of respect because they are perceived as different from humans in that they do not behave in the same ways or have the ability to possess real emotions. In fact, ogres are simply inconveniences as evidenced by Lord Farquaad saying to Shrek that, "Really, it's rude enough being alive when no one wants you, but showing up uninvited to a wedding" (*Shrek* 01:17:18–01:17:24). This discrimination extends into *Shrek 2* when he enters Far Far Away, a civilized kingdom that regards outsiders as "uneducated, volatile, and 'problems' that must return to where they 'belong'" (Pimentel and Velázquez 10). Shrek's feelings are rarely made evident outside of intimate atmospheres, though. During one of these moments with Donkey, he compares himself to an onion, having many layers but never being given the time of day to be understood. In many ways, he is a "lonely hero whose outward appearance masks underlying chivalrous qualities" (Roberts 6). Being forcibly removed on numerous occasions and constantly made to defend himself, his physical capabilities seem to stem from the need to protect himself and those he loves. The "othering" that he faces as an ogre does not compare to the treatment that the other non-conforming characters receive, which speaks to the judgmental nature of society as a whole.

Many studies have been conducted on the larger implications of the *Shrek* series, specifically on the ways in which it allows young audiences to understand the dangers of stigmatizing people for their individual identities. The creators of the series understood the power of animation, especially the level of intentionality in creating the individual characters and fine-tuning discrete setting details. Consequently, the series is laced with larger themes like strained relationships with in-laws, a problem that is not acknowledged often in fairytales, and

accepting people for more than their appearance (Parry 154). Just as the psychologist Lev Vygotsky believed that adults play a central role in developing youth's understanding and comprehension of specific topics, movies create enthusiasm for having difficult conversations about stigmas and stereotyping (Mills 38). *Shrek* and *Shrek 2* definitely showcase the ostracism that results from not obeying society's desired mold. The ways in which the wolf, Pinocchio, and the ugly stepsister perform their genders sets up the space needed for discussing the ways that Shrek is ostracized for being a different individual entirely. As a whole, the movies work to underscore the overwhelming negative reaction towards individuals who defy social expectations, thereby urging viewers to evaluate their attitudes so that they may become accepting and even welcoming of those thought to be "other."

GRACE BEAGLES is a Senior English major and Creative Writing minor at the University of West Georgia. Her published paper was written as a final research project for a Research and Methodology course. Grace's favorite literary genre is Young Adult literature. After graduation, she plans to continue her education by pursuing a master's degree and a career in either graphic design or marketing.

WORKS CITED

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–31. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.2307/3207893.

Butler, Martin. "Re-Imagined Bodies and Transgendered Space: Sites for Negotiating Gender in Shrek Movies." *Gendered (Re)Visions: Constructions of Gender in Audiovisual Media*, edited by Marion Gymnich et al., Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010, pp. 59–78.

Cook, Maria. *Gender Identity: Beyond Pronouns and Bathrooms*. Nomad Press, 2019, pp. 1–22. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*.

Francis, Becky. "Gender, Toys and Learning." *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 36, no. 3, June 2010, pp. 325–44. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/03054981003732278.

Melchiori, Kala J., and Robyn K. Mallett. "Using Shrek to Teach About Stigma." *Teaching of Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 3, July 2015, pp. 260–65. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1177/0098628315589502.

Mills, Kathy A. "Shrek Meets Vygotsky: Rethinking Adolescents' Multimodal Literacy Practices in Schools." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 54, no. 1, Sept. 2010, pp. 35–45. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1598/JAAL.54.1.4.

Parry, Becky. "Reading and Rereading 'Shrek.'" *English in Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 148–61. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1111/j.1754-8845.2009.01037.x.

Pimentel, Octavio, and Paul Velázquez. "Shrek 2: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation's Influence on Identity." *Journal of Latinos & Education*, vol. 8, no. 1, Jan. 2009, pp. 5–21. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/15348430802466704.

Roberts, Lewis. "'Happier Than Ever to Be Exactly What He Was': Reflections on Shrek, Fiona and the Magic Mirrors of Commodity Culture." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 45, no. 1, Mar. 2014, pp. 1–16. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1007/s10583-013-9197-4.

Shrek. Directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson, DreamWorks Pictures, 2001. *YouTube,* tv.youtube.com/watch/nodQDFUKVJ4?vpp=2AG0Cw%3D%3D&vp=0gEEEgIwAw%3D%3D.

Shrek 2. Directed by Andrew Adamson, Conrad Vernon and Kelly Asbury, DreamWorks Pictures, 2004. *YouTube*, tv.youtube.com/watch/nkl7Ohnk_2I?vpp=2AGIJw%3 D%3D&vp=0gEEEgIwAw%3D%3D.

Thomas, Calvin. "Lesson One: 'The world must be made to mean.'" *Ten Lessons in Theory: An Introduction to Theoretical Writing*, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 27–33.

Re-visioning the Body of the M/other Through a Matrifocal Stream of Consciousness Narrative: Elisa Albert's After Birth

Anna Bushy, Concordia College-Moorhead

Bodies, and especially women's bodies, have always been a source of taboo within Western culture. Even when tracing the history of feminist criticism, one can detect how feminist literary scholars have neglected productive theoretical treatments of women's bodies. Elaine Showalter provides examples of such shortcomings: prior to the Women's Liberation Movement, feminist criticism sought to elevate androgynous representations of writings, bodies, and imaginations to achieve "universality" (177–78). Later on, the Female Aesthetic risked sexist essentialism in "its emphasis on the importance of the female biological experience" (Showalter 180). While work has since been done within gender theory, fat studies, and the body-positivity movement to create an effective discourse surrounding bodies, the wider culture still struggles to find the language necessary to meaningfully talk about bodies. It is especially difficult for the wider culture to discuss bodies that are othered due to their aesthetic deviation from the figure of the slender, able-bodied, white male that has been standardized by patriarchal mythologies. The body of the mother is just one example of a body that has been othered in this manner, and it is this body that will be situated at the center of this literary analysis.

Elisa Albert's matrifocal novel *After Birth* is a postmodern text that engages in meaningful discourse surrounding the body of the mother through the point-of-view of Ari, a new mother and gender studies PhD candidate. It is in her stream of consciousness that Ari thoughtfully, humorously, and authentically articulates the reality of topics that patri-

archal society is quick to dismiss as taboo: birth, motherhood, and particularly bodies of mothers. Thus, I argue that through Adrienne Rich's concept of re-vision, Ari's character reimagines several cultural narratives perpetuated through corporeally oppressive, patriarchal mythologies that depict female bodies, though especially the body of the mother, as other. Such a re-visionary mode is made possible through Albert's stylistic implementation of Ari's matrifocal stream of consciousness. However, before I address my argument, I will establish the theoretical frameworks underpinning my analysis of *After Birth*, which include notes from body, feminist, and motherhood theories.

Women's bodies and mothers' bodies, in particular, have long been a point of paradoxical contention within patriarchal societies. Adrienne Rich illuminates the contradiction that exists within perceptions of women's bodies and mothers' bodies in her explanation of how patriarchal mythology constructs the female body as "impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, [and] a source of moral and physical contamination" while simultaneously imagining the mother's body as "beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, [and] nourishing" (*Woman* 34). As such, it becomes apparent that a tension exists within this *imagining* of mothers' bodies and the ways in which they are actually *perceived* by society. Rich notes that "[i]n order to live a fully human life we [mothers] require not only *control* of our bodies (though control is a prerequisite); we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence" (*Woman* 40). Thus, because the mother does not have so-called "control" of her body since she produces breast milk, her hormones fluctuate, she releases discharge, she bleeds, etc., mothers are perceived as not being permitted to achieve status as "fully human" in how it is defined by the patriarchal mythologies that Rich discusses. As a consequence, the bodies of mothers are effectively othered within society, which also provides the basis for understanding the necessity of matrifocal narratives.

In an era where the "contemporary aesthetics ideal for women" reign supreme, Susan Bordo explains the need for "an effective political discourse about the female body" in order to subvert such corporeal falsities (167), including those Rich discusses. I suggest that such discourses can be created by matrifocal narratives, which include *After Birth*. Bordo claims that effective political discourses about the female body have three tenets: first, they must think of power as a "network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions

of dominance and subordination in a particular domain"; second, they must analyze "the mechanisms that shape and proliferate—rather than repress—desire, generate and focus our energies, [and] construct our conceptions of normalcy, deviance, etc."; and last, they must construct a discourse that allows us to actually "confront the mechanisms" that create the conditions for "the subject" to become entangled with the "forces that sustain her own oppression" (167). When it comes to crafting an effective discourse about mothers' bodies, specifically, I suggest that matrifocal narratives provide a promising solution, as they fulfill each one of Bordo's previously mentioned conditions.

Matrifocal narratives, as defined by Andrea O'Reilly, are produced by "feminist writers and scholars alike" who "endeavor to unmask motherhood by documenting the lived reality of mothering" (5). The reason as to why I contend that such narratives, including *After Birth*, have the ability to create an effective political discourse about mothers' bodies, in particular, is because they are rooted in the following principles of matricentric feminism, which I have adopted from O'Reilly: first, they "contes[t], challeng[e], and counte[r] the patriarchal oppressive institution of motherhood"; second, they seek to amplify the experiences/perspectives of mothers by "correct[ing] the child centeredness" that has functioned as a mechanism of power to normalize the erasure of such outlooks; and third, they regard mothering "as a socially engaged enterprise and a site of power" in order to confront the oppression of mothers (7). It is significant to note that these particular principles, which are only a small selection of the several O'Reilly offers, are in perfect alignment with Bordo's aforementioned conditions for creating an effective discourse on female bodies. For this reason, I have selected *After Birth* as the subject of my analysis here, as the previously mentioned qualities of matrifocal narratives assure their ability to create effective political discourse surrounding mothers' bodies, an important contextualizing factor to my argument.

Now that I have established the theoretical frameworks I will be drawing upon throughout my argument, I would like to dedicate the rest of my essay to *After Birth*. As I will contend, *After Birth*'s narrator, Ari, re-visions the oppressive cultural narratives that surround female bodies, and especially mothers' bodies. Re-vision, as it is defined by Rich, is "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction" as "an act of survival" and the "refusal of the self-destructive of male-dominated society" ("When" 18). Thus, it is through this re-visionary mode that Ari addresses at least two

oppressive cultural narratives insistent upon women's subservience to the contradictory, patriarchal idealizations of female bodies and mothers' bodies, as Rich discusses. While I acknowledge that Ari addresses more than two cultural narratives throughout *After Birth*, for the purposes of my argument here I focus primarily on the cultural narratives surrounding breastfeeding and giving birth.

As the first example of an oppressive, contradictory cultural narrative surrounding the body of the m/other, we can look to patriarchal society's conception of breastfeeding, an issue frequently taken up by Ari. As Ari describes breastfeeding, "It's fantastic, these babies and my boobs," yet she realizes "[p]eople don't want to hear about . . . babies enjoying the living hell out of breasts as supreme source of endless free nourishment and good health" since it "remains taboo" (Albert 133). When remembering that patriarchal mythologies, which are ingrained into Western cultural narratives, characterize mothers' bodies as "beneficent" and "nourishing" (Rich, *Woman* 34), it seems illogical that breastfeeding remains taboo. However, when one recalls what makes female bodies "fully human" within patriarchal mythologies, it is a patriarchal and medicalized "control" that comprises the prerequisite to personhood (Rich, *Woman* 40). When a woman is breastfeeding, her status as "fully human" cannot be attained, as producing breast milk indicates a lack of "control" over her body and bodily processes. Thus, Ari is othered not only within the context of how patriarchal society controls bodies through exclusive expectations of personhood, but also within the context of how the larger society and medical establishments work in tandem to control women's decisions about their own bodies in an attempt to undermine belief and trust in their own corporeal autonomy through facilitating internalized misogyny. For these reasons, Ari and breastfeeding mothers effectively become not only a mother, but m/other.

One can observe this contradictory, cultural narrative in action when Ari breastfeeds her son Walker in front of her father. In this situation, her father is "obviously uncomfortable with [her] exposed tits, [wears] a stupid transparent look of disgust, and [leaves] the room whenever possible to avoid looking at [her]" (Albert 51). Here, it is important to note that although Ari's father appears "uncomfortable" around her exposed breasts as she feeds Walker, he displays no "disgust" when discussing his grandson's circumcision (50–51). Thus, it becomes apparent that Ari's father is uncomfortable with the body of the m/other, not the body of the man, as she represents what is subhuman and other

within patriarchal society due to the taboo that lies within the cultural narratives surrounding the intersections between her body, corporeal autonomy, and breastfeeding. However, by confronting the oppressive cultural narrative that surrounds traditional breastfeeding, a viewpoint demonstrated by her father, Ari effectively works to re-vision it by offering an alternative, pro-breastfeeding perspective.

Though Ari is the primary focus of my argument regarding the re-vision of cultural narratives influenced by patriarchal mythologies, I would like to briefly acknowledge that Ari's friend Mina, who is also a new mother, is complicit in perpetuating a different angle of the patriarchally-constructed cultural narrative regarding breastfeeding: bottle-feeding. By refusing to bottle-feed her son Zev with infant formula despite her trouble producing breast milk—"I am not giving this fucking kid a fucking bottle! I just birthed him in a fucking bathtub!" (Albert 79)—Mina demonstrates her subscription to the patriarchal mythology that a mother should be "beneficent" and "nourishing" (Rich, *Woman* 34), and when she cannot fulfill these conditions by breastfeeding, she has somehow shamefully failed as a mother. I bring this point up because though it is problematic, Mina's perspective functions to nuance the cultural narrative at play in an attempt to craft a discourse that encourages readers to, as Bordo explains in her aforementioned principles underpinning effective political discourses about the female body, "confront the mechanisms" that create the conditions for "the subject" to become entangled with the "forces that sustain her own oppression" (167). Thus, Mina's perspective on bottle-feeding is an important point to consider within this matrifocal narrative, as it highlights a mechanism utilized by patriarchal society and medical establishments to control and perpetuate cultural narratives that undercut a mother's ability to embrace various forms of motherwork in how they create oppressive, misogynistic expectations regarding the beneficent body of the mother.

In addition to re-visioning breastfeeding, Ari also re-visions another cultural narrative constructed by patriarchal mythologies: giving birth. The title of her narrative sets the stage for this re-vision to occur, as it confronts the reader with a cultural narrative that makes patriarchal society uncomfortable through its unadulterated engagement with "after birth," a phrase associated not only with the incredibly material reminder of the artifact colloquially referred to as "afterbirth," but the messy body-ness that represents a time when the female body does not signify what it is supposed to within the wider culture. While this novel

can be critiqued on grounds of its engagement with the harmful dichotomy associated with procedural and vaginal births, what is important is that Ari addresses both aspects with candor. Simply by giving testimony to the trauma of "how she had been cut in half for no good reason" for Walker's caesarean delivery (Albert 93) and providing Mina with a platform to tell the unabridged, authentic version of her natural birth story—every "cacopho[nous]" bit of it (108–13)—Ari re-visions the cultural narrative that comprises giving birth. In this cultural narrative, since mothers' bodies should be "pure," "sacred," and "asexual" (Rich, *Woman* 34), they cannot be the site of "dissolving stitches" (Albert 93), a "crazy storm" of contractions (112), or a "monster[ous]" uterus (120). Thus, by addressing the reality of different childbirth experiences and mothers' bodies during/after birth, Ari re-visions the cultural narrative that unrealistically constructs the romanticized idea of a relatively painless, uncomplicated, and joyful birth experience.

Now that I have explained how Ari re-visions two cultural narratives regarding the body of the m/other, it is important for me to address the style of the narration, which I argue plays a foundational role in creating the re-visionary mode of the novel. Ari's narration is characterized by a matrifocal stream of consciousness, which holds significance within three spheres: the literary, the psychological, and the political. First, in regards to the significance of her matrifocal stream of consciousness within the literary sphere, this particular narrative technique creates a textual space that allows for Ari to express herself in a re-visionary mode contrary to traditional forms of patriarchal and masculine expressions of narration. In so doing, because Ari's matrifocal stream of consciousness does not conform to masculinist forms of narration, it serves as a metaphor for how this novel is not restricted by contradictory, patriarchal expectations of women's bodies; this includes those expectations that posit what it means to "live a fully human life" (Rich, *Woman* 40), as Ari clearly does so. Furthermore, this style of narration allows for the text to develop a tone that is specifically Ari's, which reinforces her ownership of the narrative as *hers* and not belonging to the previously discussed cultural narratives subject to her re-visionings.

In addition to the importance of the literary's role within Ari's re-visionings through a matrifocal stream of consciousness, the significance of the psychological is also important to consider. The psychological nature of this style allows for Ari to weave between anecdotes, memories, imaginings, emotions, etc., in a way that allows for her re-visions to be unfettered by the social/cultural confines she normally conforms

to within public situations. For example, after Ari's new shift-mate at the co-op explains that she doesn't know if "*women and chocolate"* is "*a woman thing, per se,*" Ari internally indulges her stream of consciousness:

> O-ho, the second-wave police are out. Heaven forbid it might be true that female bodies are different. Heaven forbid we admit that living in these female bodies is different. More terrible and more wonderful. Because, what? We might lose the vote? Because we might get veiled, imprisoned? Best deny it, deny it, make it to the Oval Office, win, win, win. (Albert 139)

Despite the thoughts circulating through her consciousness, Ari brusquely replies to the woman, "*Oh, it's definitely a woman thing*" and walks away (139). Thus, if it were not for the novel's narrative style, the reader likely would not have been privy to Ari's real thoughts on the situation, which allows for this particular re-vision of the culture of silence on bodily differences, along with the previously mentioned re-vision of cultural narratives surrounding breastfeeding and giving birth, to occur through the psychological.

Last, to draw upon my earlier discussion of how O'Reilly's definition of matrifocal narratives fulfills Bordo's tenets for creating an effective political discourse about the female body, the style of Ari's narration also allows for re-vision to occur through the political. Ari's matrifocal stream of consciousness facilitates the creation of an effective political discourse on the mother's body, as she analyzes motherhood as an institution, identifies the cultural narratives responsible for shaping normative understandings, and creates meaningful conversations on such topics. In so doing, this satisfies Bordo's three conditions for creating effective political discourse on the female body, which include thinking of power as a "network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain"; analyzing "the mechanisms that shape and proliferate—rather than repress—desire, generate and focus our energies, [and] construct our conceptions of normalcy, deviance, etc."; and crafting a discourse that allows us to actually "confront the mechanisms" that create the conditions for "the subject" to become entangled with the "forces that sustain her own oppression" (167). As one example of how Ari's re-visionary, matrifocal stream of consciousness mesh-

es with the political with regards to Bordo's understanding of its role within effective discourse about female bodies, she thinks:

> Adrienne Rich had it right. No one gives a crap about motherhood unless they can profit off it. Women are expendable and the work of childbearing, done fully, done consciously, is all-consuming. So who's gonna write about it if everyone doing it is lost forever within it? (185)

In this passage, the reader can observe how Ari utilizes her stream of consciousness to address the institutional positioning of motherhood within capitalism, which she suggests is a mechanism of political power that serves to oppress mothers and motherwork by commodifying their experiences and profiting off of their unpaid labor. She also poses a question regarding who will write about motherhood in an effort to create effective discourse on their corporeal and social experiences with motherwork. In so doing, her matrifocal stream of consciousness endeavors to re-vision the institution of motherhood and the body's role within it by engaging with the political, as well.

Perhaps one of the key takeaways from Ari's matrifocal stream of consciousness comes from an imagining of her mother, who advises her, "*Be a body. It's happening anyway*" (Albert 180). Ari's narrative remains consistent with her mother's advice, as she re-visions several cultural narratives surrounding the body of the m/other, including breastfeeding and giving birth, which have been influenced by corporeally oppressive, patriarchal mythologies that have been infused into misogynistic cultural narratives. By engaging with such cultural narratives in order to re-vision the body of the m/other as the normal, authentic, and resilient body of the mother, Ari's narrative also analyzes the institution of motherhood and the mechanisms of power that oppress mothers' bodies, successfully creating an effective political discourse on the intersection between the female body and the mother's body. Thus, through her matrifocal stream of consciousness, Ari's audience learns that it is okay not only to *"[b]e*" a body, but that it is okay to accept and embrace one's body in all of its normal, messy, and wonderful body-ness.

ANNA BUSHY is double-majoring in English Literature and Global Studies at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. She is also

double-minoring in Women's and Gender Studies and Environmental Studies. She would like to give special thanks to Dr. Karla Knutson for her mentorship and support throughout the composition of this essay. Following her graduation from Concordia in May 2022, Anna intends to pursue a graduate program in English literature and critical theory, where she hopes to expand her knowledge of topics in feminist, post-colonial, and ecocritical literary studies.

WORKS CITED

Albert, Elisa. *After Birth*. 2016 ed., Mariner Books, 2015.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. 10th anniversary ed., University of California Press, 2004.

O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*. Demeter Press, 2016.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton, 1995.

---. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1972, pp. 18–30. *JSTOR*, doi. org/10.2307/375215.

Showalter, Elaine. "A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, edited by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. 168–88.

Frankenstein's Monster is ~~kind of~~ an Incel

Mackenzie Collins, Columbia University in the City of New York

"*If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear*" (Shelley 148)

The above nausea-inducing quote passionately arouses the ethos of 4chan and straight white male angst. Unfortunately, that quote was not found in an anonymous internet forum; it is a direct quote from the unnamed creature in the novel *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Shelley and first published in 1817. The comment is eerily similar to the type of comment that would be made by someone who self-identifies as an "incel" on the internet. The term incel is a portmanteau for the phrase "involuntary celibate," a phrase that describes individuals who are classified as celibate, although not due to their own volition. Incels believe they deserve to receive sexual relations from women, but that women unfairly withhold these relations from them based on superficial biases. Incels often resort to physical and emotional violence because of this perceived injustice and blame their victims and others for their actions. When the creature's words and actions are compared to those of known incel ideologues and incel culture, it is evident the creature exhibits the same incel tendencies to resort to physical violence because of perceived discrimination and then blame their actions on others. While Frankenstein was written over two hundred years ago, and the specific term incel with its contemporary connotation has only been used for

two decades at most, themes of incel ideology are evident in the novel *Frankenstein* through the character of Victor Frankenstein's creature.

The creature exhibits a deep insecurity surrounding his physical characteristics, a similar trait of many incels. Bruce Hoffman defines in their essay, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," that "the incel worldview is grounded in . . . their understanding of society as a hierarchy where one's place is determined mostly by physical characteristics" (Hoffman 567). The creature believes his physical characteristics place him at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and he is therefore unjustly excluded from the companionship of other humans. The creature is well aware of social hierarchies and admits to Victor that "the strange system of human society was explained to me . . . of rank, descent, and noble blood" (Shelley 122), and then continues, "I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man" (Shelley 123), confirming that the creature believes his physical attributes place him at the bottom of the social hierarchy and unequal to other men. Shannan Palma reiterates a similar sentiment in regards to incel culture in her essay, "Entitled to a Happy Ending," stating that "incels frame themselves within the lowest tier of sexual desirability. They argue that their own . . . bodies and larger heads evolutionarily predispose them to lose out in females' mate selection" (Palma 329). This insecurity continues to permeate the creature's mind as he tells Victor of finding a picture of a beautiful woman in the pocket of his first victim. Initially, the creature is attracted to the woman in the photograph, but after some time he is once again enraged, stating, "I remembered that I was forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright" (Shelley 145). The creature believes, because of his physical characteristics and placement in the social hierarchy, that a beautiful woman would never greet him with anything other than disgust. This insecurity and perceived discrimination often results in rage or physical violence in Frankenstein's creature and incels alike.

A main tenet of incel culture is a misogynistic belief that men innately deserve to have sexual intercourse with women. When faced with rejection, incels often resort to anger, and this anger evolves into physical violence. After Frankenstein's creature is faced with rejection, he believes it is imperative that Victor, his creator, produces for him a mate of a similar appearance and threatens violence against Victor if he

refuses. The creature states the above quote, "If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear" (Shelley 148) as a threat to compel Victor to fabricate the creature a mate. The quote is eerily similar to a statement written by Elliot Rodger, an infamous incel terrorist, in which he states, "[I]f I cannot have it, I will do everything I can to DESTROY IT" (Rodger 145). Rodger is referring to sex in this quote from the manifesto he posted online right before he committed an act of terror in Isla Vista, California, killing six people, including himself, and wounding fourteen others. The creature had a very similar belief that he deserved a female companion, and he continually threatened Victor, also stating, "I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of your birth" (Shelley 148). The belief of entitlement to a woman's body led Frankenstein's creature to commit acts of physical violence, as did the infamous incel Elliot Rodger.

After committing acts of violence and murder, Frankenstein's creature blames his actions on others, much like incels blame their violent aggressions on women. Incel logic, which Shannan Palma refers to as "fairy-tale logic" (323), leads its membership to believe the reason they are involuntarily celibate is because women's choices of sexual partners are inherently biased and superficial. Incels believe "that women are intrinsically shallow and make dating decisions based largely on physical attractiveness" (Hoffman 567), and because of this decision-making process, incels are unfairly excluded from sexual activity. This exclusion is often conflated with maltreatment, and grows into a staunch resentment or hatred of women; in some cases, this resentment spurs the incel to commit physical violence. Any actions or feelings of the incel are justified and then blamed on women because they were the instigators of the initial resentment, and "to the incels' minds, it is women, then, who are responsible for their isolation and rejection—and women are therefore the primary targets of incels anger and violence" (Hoffman 567). This fairy-tale logic is documented in Elliot Rodger's manifesto where he laments, "[A]ll I ever wanted was to love women, and in turn to be loved by them back. I am the true victim in all of this . . . Humanity struck at me first by condemning me to experience so much suffering! . . . I will punish everyone" (146). Rodger blames his violent actions on the people who he believes caused his suffering, much like when the creature tells Victor, "I am malicious because I am miserable" (Shelley 147), blaming the murder he has committed not on himself for enacting it, but on the people who have caused his misery.

The creature follows a very similar thought process to that of Elliot Rodger. After seeing the photograph he stole from his first murder victim, the creature begins to resent the woman in the picture and tells Victor he does not understand why "[he] did not rush among mankind, and perish in the attempt to destroy them" (Shelley 145), this being the method by which Rodger met his end. This details a narrative where the creature believes violence is an apt response to the rejection he feels. After leaving the scene of the murder, the creature finds a young woman in a barn and begins to resent her beauty as well, deciding to frame her for the murder he committed while also blaming her for his own actions, stating, "not I, but she, shall suffer; the murder I have committed because I am forever robbed of all that she could give me, she shall atone. The crime had its source in her: be hers the punishment!" (Shelley 145). The creature is unwilling to admit to the murder he committed, instead deciding to place the blame on a random woman he found asleep in a barn because he believes that his own misery and violence should be blamed on anyone but himself. Therefore, it is not only the murders the creature commits that make him similar to an incel, but also his reasoning for committing them and his justification of them through victim blaming.

Frankenstein's monster never asked to be created so horribly, or created in general, but did anyone truly ask to be created? Existence may be terrible, as the creature learns early on in his life, but that does not entitle anyone to go on a murderous rampage whenever they see the profile of a beautiful person on Tinder that will never swipe right on them. The violence Frankenstein's creature inflicts because of the rejection he feels is very similar to violent retribution incels inflict when they feel rejected by women. This similarity between incel culture and Frankenstein's creature is represented in the creature's deep insecurity of his physical appearance, his violent acts of retribution when demanding a mate, and his blaming of others for his own violent aggressions. Psychologists have concluded that incel ideology is not a mental health issue, but it is still not well understood why so many men subscribe to the belief that women having agency over their own sexual activity is grounds for resentment or violence from men. In the case of the creature, it seems that being created haphazardly in a dorm room laboratory by an undergraduate biology major who then immediately abandons you will eventually lead to a subscription of Incel Monthly.

Mackenzie Collins (Pen Name: MACK VONNEGUT) is a recent graduate from Columbia University in the City of New York. They are an award-winning playwright and a published poet; this will be the first publication of their critical writing. Post-graduation Mack somewhat foolishly hopes to begin paying off their student loans while continuing their career as a writer. Please keep them in your thoughts.

WORKS CITED

Hoffman, Bruce, et al. "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 43, no. 7, 2020, pp. 565–87, doi:10.1080/1057610x.2020.1751459.

Palma, Shannan. "Entitled to a Happy Ending: Fairy-Tale Logic from 'Beauty and the Beast' to the Incel Movement." *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2019, p. 319–37, doi:10.13110/marvelstales.33.2.0319.

Rodger, Elliot. "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger." Newsball, newsball.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Elliot-Rodgers-My-Twisted-World-Manifesto-Complete-146-pages-Compliments-of-NewsBall.com_.pdf.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Penguin, 2003.

Witt, Taisto. "'If i Cannot Have It, i Will Do Everything i Can to Destroy It.' the Canonization of Elliot Rodger: 'Incel' Masculinities, Secular Sainthood, and Justifications of Ideological Violence." *Social Identities*, vol. 26, no. 5, 2020, pp. 675–89, doi:10.1080/13504630.2020.1787132.

Devolution Anxieties in The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Ema Davis, Columbus State Community College

The Victorian Age brought about amazing scientific progress and expanded humans' understanding of how the universe works. The fields of geology, astronomy, and biology changed how people viewed time, space, and themselves. During the Victorian Age, new scientific discoveries challenged people's ideas about humanity, which inevitably led to anxieties concerning the moral collapse of society. Evolutionary biology in particular posed uncomfortable questions regarding human nature and morality. Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* expresses the Victorian anxieties of devolution and the rise of immorality that the new ideas from scientific progress posed.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, published in 1886, concerns the amiable Dr. Henry Jekyll and his evil alternate personality, Edward Hyde. Jekyll believes that humanity has a dual nature of good and evil, which Jekyll himself struggles with, and creates a serum to separate the wicked side of his personality from the good. When Jekyll takes the serum, he transforms into Edward Hyde, a violent and animalistic personality of questionable humanity. While Jekyll is described as a man bearing "every mark of capacity and kindness" (Stevenson 776), Hyde is "a being inherently malign and villainous" (Stevenson 802). The transformation of the congenial Jekyll into the reprehensible Hyde reflects the Victorian anxieties of devolution and immorality that were brought about by the theory of evolution.

Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, introduced the theory of evolution: that populations evolve through natural selection. In 1871, Darwin published *The Descent of Man*, which

applied evolutionary theory to humans and emphasized the similarities between humans and animals. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote that "man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World" (Darwin 616). Darwin's theory also challenged anthropocentrism and the idea that humanity has a special role in the world compared to other species. Darwin's theory forced people to see humans as connected to animals, as opposed to viewing man as "the work of a separate act of creation" (Darwin 616). Influenced by Darwin's ideas, degeneration theory was formed during the Victorian Age as well. Degeneration theory was "based upon the reverse progression of the evolutionary process" (Erdem 12). Evolution and degeneration theory thus created anxieties about a possible decline of humans' moral and physical character and of human devolution into an animal-like state, which would pose a danger to society as a whole.

The character of Edward Hyde encompasses Victorian anxieties of degeneration. Hyde is a devolution of Jekyll. Hyde is repeatedly described as animalistic, primitive, and smaller than the intelligent, agreeable, and handsome Jekyll. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Jekyll describes his evil side, in the form of Hyde, as "less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed" (Stevenson 808). Jekyll's descriptions of transforming into Hyde echo the process of devolving rather than evolving. Jekyll describes a transformation as follows, "I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy" (Stevenson 806). Jekyll's transformation has the appearance of evolutionary theory in reverse: a human being becoming smaller and degenerating into a less developed being. Further demonstrating the connection between Hyde and proto-humans is the manner in which Hyde is described. In one of his acts of violence, Hyde is described as breaking out in an "ape-like fury" (Stevenson 778); in another act of violence, he "maul[s]" a body (Stevenson 805). The language describing Hyde is animalistic: he is like an ape, and he "mauls" people as an animal would instead of "murdering" them like a human would. Thus, when Jekyll transforms into Hyde, he becomes like the hairy quadruped that Darwin proposed as an ancestor to humans.

The degeneration of Jekyll into Hyde is not only a physical decline, but also a moral one. The immoral behavior of the lower entity Hyde parallels Darwin's writings. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote "there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians"

(Darwin 618). In his book, Darwin described a sighting of indigenous people and compared them to man's ancestors. He wrote of them, "[T]hey had no government, and were merciless to everyone not of their own small tribe. He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins" (Darwin 618). Darwin's writing about man's "immoral" origins created anxieties among the Victorian people about a possible moral decline in society. After all, if every man's origin is primitive and violent, there is a danger that violent inclinations will emerge, and destruction will ensue.

In addition to primitive states being attributed to "brutal" indigenous people, devolution was associated with criminal behavior in general, as evidenced by criminologist Cesare Lombroso's *The Criminal Man*, published in 1876. In *The Criminal Man*, Lombroso argued that criminals can be identified by their outward appearance due to having a genetic makeup that resembled an earlier stage of human evolution (Tie 114). Thus, criminals acted violently because their genetic makeup suited them to the harsher days of primitive times rather than the civilization of the Victorian Age. This view was applied to indigenous people who were viewed as violent savages. Therefore, Victorians found it quite alarming when Darwin wrote that the people of Victorian England were related to "a savage who delights to torture his enemies" (Darwin 618). If such evil is a part of the whole of human nature, the Victorian qualities of "earnestness, moral responsibility, [and] domestic propriety" are threatened (Robson 5). If people were to devolve—rather than evolve—into these earlier human states, they would be predisposed toward criminal behavior and have no ability to be moral even if they wanted to.

Like Darwin, Stevenson recognized an intrinsic dark side to human nature. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, while Jekyll separates his evil aspect from himself, thereby creating the alternate personality of Hyde, Hyde is still a part of Jekyll. Jekyll transforms into Hyde and commits atrocious acts while assuming the Hyde personality, rather than Hyde existing as a completely different entity and acting outside of Jekyll. Jekyll describes the human condition as containing both good and evil, "I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both" (Stevenson 799). Jekyll's attempts to separate evil from himself fail; even after the development of the separate Hyde personality, Jekyll and Hyde are described as sharing

"the phenomena of consciousness" (Stevenson 808). In the end, it is implied that Jekyll commits suicide upon the realization that his new batches of serum do not work and, therefore, he would remain stuck as Edward Hyde once he involuntarily transforms again. The evil side of Jekyll is never erased and remains a part of him throughout the story, despite Jekyll's attempts to take the evil outside of himself.

Darwin knew that people would react to his theory with both distaste and delight: distaste at the idea that humans could be related to lower life forms and delight at the idea that humans could evolve into higher forms in the future. He wrote, "[W]e are not here concerned with hopes or fears, only with the truth" (Darwin 618). Darwin's theory made Victorians anxious about what a relationship to "lower" and less moral beings means about themselves as humans. Jekyll expresses this fear of evil within the self, "I became, in my own person, a creature . . . solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self" (Stevenson 808). Despite Jekyll's attempts to erase his evil, the evil cannot be defeated and remains an inherent part of him. Victorians shared Jekyll's anxieties, but, perhaps, as both Darwin and Stevenson suggest, it is better to live with the unfavorable truth about oneself than try to do the impossible and change who one is. After all, fears and hopes cannot change the truth.

EMA DAVIS is studying English at The Ohio State University, and she has a degree in Paralegal Studies from Columbus State Community College. She wrote her essay "Devolution Anxieties in The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" for her British Literature class at Columbus State. Ema will graduate from Ohio State in Spring 2022. After graduating, Ema would like to teach English abroad before attending law school.

WORKS CITED

Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* 10th ed., vol. E., *The Victorian Age*, edited by Catherine Robson. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2018, pp. 615–19.

Erdem, Esra. *The Concept of Human and Monster in Mary Shelley's* Frankenstein *and Robert Louis Stevenson's* The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. MA Thesis. Hacettepe University, 2019, www.openaccess.hacettepe.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11655/7946/10218873.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed 19 July 2020.

Robson, Catherine. "Introduction." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* 10th ed., vol. E, *The Victorian Age.* W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2018. pp. 3–29.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* 10th ed., vol. E*., The Victorian Age*, edited by Catherine Robson. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2018, pp. 767–809.

Tierney, John. *Key Perspectives in Criminology*. Open University Press, 2009.

The Sexual Body as the Political Body in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*

Kiera Gilbert, Michigan State University

Kathy Acker's Empire of the Senseless is a politically charged novel that explores the destructive disease of heterosexual love and its ability to disrupt female sexual liberation. Acker is an unconventional novelist best known for her strong sexual imagery and content appropriation. The novel follows the journeys of a young girl, Abhor, and her male counterpart, Thivai, as they move from adolescence to adulthood navigating the dichotomy between illusionary freedom and liberation. The fragmented style of the book, broken apart by inserted stories and flashbacks, alludes to the fragmented identities created within the characters under the oppressive systems of Western government. Acker wields themes of sexual violence, power, and class to unveil the rigid and unforgiving class notions formed by a capitalist economy that continues to dictate and destroy female sexual liberation in Western society. Acker's critics have defined her use of sexual violence as a way to shock readers and break consent between the reader and the author. In Anna Ioanes' article titled "Shock and Consent in Feminist Avant-Garde: Kathleen Hanna Reads Kathy Acker," she argues, "This feminist avant-garde formation deployed pornographic depictions of sexual violence to elicit a modified form of shock that often-left readers feeling violated or wounded themselves" (175). Examining the private body of liberated female sexuality reveals that even those bodies of minor characters of whores, fortune tellers, and pirates are defined by the body politic. Acker's female character Abhor functions as the representation of a woman in a patriarchal society, and in this revelation, Acker indicates that female sexuality is defined by economics. In doing this,

Acker establishes sexual liberation as a state of being both politically and economically liberated.

Acker distinguishes Empire from her other works because this novel is a chaotic political commentary and social critique. Acker takes a socio-political approach to break down the male-female binary in her novel by creating a male-female duo and illustrating each character's explorations of their own sexuality. This breaks down the essentialist view that men and women's inherent sexual needs and desires are differentiated by biology. Acker wields Abhor and Thivai's relationship to prove that specific socioeconomic and sociopolitical dogmas have impacted the way people view desire. Each character views sex differently, yet their appetites are not dictated by their gender but rather by their environments. Acker utilizes concepts such as this to present a new argument about the perception of women and desire in the United States during the 1980s. These ideological differences are crucial to recognizing how Acker attempts to deconstruct and destabilize perception surrounding women and sexuality in her novel.

Western institutions and social systems were created to cater to and nurture male success and desires. They have been shaped to satisfy men and assist them in becoming the most prosperous members of society. From Aristotle's proposals of philosopher-kings and aristocracies to John Locke's theories on representative democracy, power dynamics have been theorized and proposed to hold the attention and power of men whilst breeding competition and moral strength within them. This system was conceived to benefit men, and Acker adapts this idea to model the struggles that lower-class women face at the hands of the subsequent class systems constructed in this environment. Acker's model for this woman is Abhor, her female family members, and their own sexual experiences. In Knowledge/Power, Michel Foucault argues that power in such a system is merely an illusion: "I believe the great fantasy is the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of wills. Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but the materiality of power operating on the bodies of individuals" (55). Free-will and the ability to make choices is dictated by the true-nature of the power held by the individual. As Foucault explains, social constructs are not agreed upon by all members within a society, but rather the most powerful members of society determine the rules and those below must follow. This is an image Acker explores throughout Empire of the Senseless as she begins to analyze the distinction between perceived freedom and concrete autonomy. In Foucault's model,

men hold the strongest and most true forms of power because they are the creators of modern societal institutions.

It is essential to note that dominance cannot occur without oppression; in Living a Feminist Life, Sara Ahmed remarks, "One form of wills judges other wills as willful wills. One form of will assumes the right to eliminate others" (67). Ahmed's claims enhance the image of capitalism's oppressive and exploitative nature. Wealth and pay gaps are utilized to protect those at the top while developing an illusionary feeling of security in those that are merely economic puppets. Throughout history, economic power has translated to political power, thus societal relations are inherently political; societal notions have always been controlled by these two institutions. Sexual desire has been used to establish a market in which men benefit from the economic exploitation of female sexuality. Foucault explains, "There also appeared those systematic campaigns which, going beyond the traditional means—moral and religious exhortations, fiscal measures—tried to transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behavior" (History of Sexuality 26). As Foucault demonstrates, sexuality has economic value, meaning that sexuality is inherently political, because economics too, are inherently political.

In her analysis of the Situationists, Emilia Borowska notes, "The Situationists argued that in modern capitalist societies all real-life experience is mediated by images and that people were spectators of their own lives'" (164). An acknowledgment of the ways that economic systems have infringed on personal freedoms and experiences is essential in acknowledging how sex has been exploited to benefit the patriarchy. The industrialization of sex through pornography and vulgar imagery in the 1970s and 1980s began to rattle the societal expectation of sex. To watch others engage in the act was allowable, but to partake in it by oneself became both evil and revolting. This is the way the economy worked to deprive women, particularly of pursuing their sexual fantasies. In fetishizing sex, society created a taboo that weaponized any sexual act. To be told how to properly enjoy sexual pleasure, while also policing its validity, stole sexual liberation from many women, rendering them helpless and merely bystanders in their sexual turmoil. This tumultuous relationship with sex has gone on to shape a toxic image of female sexuality, and in turn, revoked any space for a woman to experience sexual freedom.

In a letter to the Algerian revolution, Thivai writes, "We are telling you this only because we used to live among the English and had to en-

dure their refusal to talk about sex" (Acker 205). This repression works to break down the complex relationship between the sexualization of women in media while unveiling the secretive nature of the discussion surrounding sex. This dynamic engineers a manifestation of silence, suppressing the ability of women to communicate and question their sexualities. Abhor is forced to watch herself be stripped of her ability to engage with her sexual desires; women must watch as their free will is dismantled by society. The lack of power experienced by each character leaves them in a position of helplessness, and as Abhor explains, "The problem with following rules is that, if you follow rules, you don't follow yourself. Therefore, rules prevent, dement, and even kill the people who follow them" (Acker 219). Out of options, Abhor realizes to escape this conservative ideology, she must leave society and forge her own path. The dominant narrative adhered to by the masses cannot simply be defeated by her and her comrades. To experience true freedom, she must leave and establish her path.

Acker constructs a decisive economic paradigm using the perceptions surrounding the First World and the Third World. The First World is a powerful Western ideology that dominates the global stage, "So within an urban center, you have your First World and your Third World. And most of us belong to the Third World; that's quite true in our daily lives" (Schloder and Martin 49). Countries model themselves in the image of the First World because this is where the power is held, while on the other side of the spectrum lies the Third World. It is the less powerful majority. The First World may not be larger than the Third World but it is the dominant power; this region holds political, and economic power therefore it is the ruler of all lands. The lives of those in the Third World are dictated and controlled solely by those of the First World, but most people are a part of the Third World. This class distinction is an indicator of the separation between both the elite and the working class on an economic level; however, this analogy also recognizes the inherent social helplessness of those that fall into the Third World country group. There is a false sense of free-will created here which constructs an illusionary sense of love and security. A man explains to Abhor, "We're still human. Human because we keep on battling against all of these horrors, the horrors caused and not caused by us" (Acker 69). This is a prime example of the way those in lower classes are manipulated to continue to fight for a cause that is not theirs while pushing them to believe that each member of society is motivated by the same plight. To keep those in this group happy, they must feel

as if they are free, ignoring that their actions and beliefs have all been dictated by the hands of the dominant group. Further exploring this class dynamic, Acker investigates how economics have impacted the role of female sexuality in society. Class culture is one of the strongest weapons deployed against women in capitalist societies. Class is heavily tied to the ruling economic system, and the favorable nature of one within the system dictates the rules that they make and how these rules are enforced.

In a 1988 interview, Acker stated, "Good bourgeois behavior and sexuality don't quite go hand-in-hand" (Schloder and Martin 63). Women of the elite classes are viewed as having higher moral standards and that do not engage in sexual or indecent endeavors. The character of the elite woman is used as the archetype for a good woman and by proxy a good wife. The concept of the "whore" has always been attributed to "immoral" and "filthy" women. This phenomenon persuades women to repress their sexual desires so that they, too, may be viewed as upstanding and morally sound women in society. Acker later explains the role of economics in this perception: "Certainly for women, what's happened is because women were defined by their sexualities for so many years, they were either wife or whore, and that's how they earned their living" (Schloder and Martin 40). In Acker's analysis of the heterosexual relationship, she initiates a contrast regarding the representation of sexuality regarding being with men. To engage in sex within the confines of a relationship constructed the "wife" and enjoying it outside of this devised the "whore." The idea of the whore is multi-faceted: the whore is liberated sexually and exercising her body for her economic gain, and, because of this, she is demonized. Acker describes the linguistic tactic used to isolate these women, noting, "And to the extent that language is used, that language is changed and used in order to exert political power and control in certain ways" (Schloder and Martin 55). To act on sexual needs outside of patriarchal standards cannot occur because the woman no longer serves the needs of the superior male, but the needs of herself. To curb this idea, the practice of this form of sex was demonized, and women that partook were ostracized and alienated.

As Abhor grows older and begins to navigate her sexuality, she finds herself to be vile and disgusting because she wants to satiate her sexual desires: "And yet I knew I was evil cause I was fucking. So, I knew daddy would kill me if he caught me fucking. I don't know how I knew this" (Acker 11). Abhor is unable to understand how she knows

this is wrong, but this can be attributed to the subliminal messaging women experience as young children. Young girls are taught to value a sacred form of love, marriage, and sex. In the political realm of sexual encounters, women having sex with their husbands are praised, while the woman that engages in other forms of sex are referred to as whores, harlots, and prostitutes. The curbing of female sexuality begins at an early age and it is employed to dictate the sexual desires of these girls as they grow and enter adulthood.

This conditioning further affects the way Abhor views women, but Thivai breaks down these perceptions best, saying, "As I approached adulthood, I learned there are three types of females: dead, dumb, and evil" (Acker 21). Evil, as discussed above, refers to women perceived as being the "whore." These women chase their desire, they seek out sex. Dumb indicates that a woman is married. These women that have chained themselves into destructive marriages and have submitted to patriarchal notions. Abhor's grandmother functions as a model of the wife: "She married a rich man who owned part of the garment district. The poor can reply to the crime of society, to their economic deprivation retardation primitivism lunacy boredom hopelessness, only by collective crime or war. One form collective crime takes is marriage" (Acker 7). Marriage is a punishment, and in being in this relationship with a man, the woman involved slowly loses pieces of herself until there is nothing. Enraged by his own marriage, and the departure of Abhor's mother, her father remarks, "Whatever good is possible between any man and woman marriage destroys" (15). Marriage is a destructive crime, as it slowly destroys both partners, and as evidenced by Abhor's mother, women rarely survive it. The last woman is different, because she is representative of the decayed female identity. While not physically dead, she may as well be. She has been broken down by society and can neither conform to being evil nor being dumb. stuck in purgatory, she begins to decay.

Acker scrutinizes the evolution of sexuality as her characters age throughout Empire of the Senseless. Abhor's journey begins in her grandmother's youth and continues until Abhor herself reaches adulthood. Borowska explains Acker's use of time through Friedman: "Hence, as Friedman has observed, Acker's literary world is 'filled with sets of disrupted moments', and 'instability and unpredictability provide a liberating context'" (178). In contrast, my reading of Abhor's sexuality reinforces Acker's use of time as a way to demonstrate the shifts of sexuality throughout a woman's lifetime. Throughout Ab-

hor's journey, the hyper sexualization of women by men is a prevalent topic, yet the women of the novel are demonized by both themselves and society. The female inclination to gravitate towards patriarchal ideology is inherent, and as Simone de Beauvoir explains in her novel The Second Sex, a taught ideology. In her section titled "The Girl," de Beauvoir says, "She has always been convinced of male superiority; this male prestige is not a childish mirage; it has economic and social foundations; men are, without any questions, the masters of the world" (de Beauvoir 341). While on the run, Abhor encounters a man in a gym that wants her to film a sexual encounter with him. Despite her reasoning that they two should not engage with one another, she ultimately submits to the man saying, "I quickly chose a raped body over a mutilated or dead one. I didn't know what to do about the useless and, more than useless, virulent and destructive disease named heterosexual sexual love. I've never known" (Acker 64). The sexual act in itself is violent. The image of rape in comparison to death generates a complex situation in which either choice leads to destruction. Abhor's reasoning cannot sway the man's sexual desire for her, and because he is a man, he is superior to her, more powerful than her. Abhor's submission to the man does not only give him her body, but it gives him control over her sexuality and identity. Tying this encounter to heterosexual desire illustrates the destructive power of heteronormativity. Within a sexual act, it clarifies that a woman must give herself to a man, destroying her agency, and removing her sexual desires and needs from the situation. This "disease" is lethal and leads to the demise of the female identity within male-female relationships.

Building on the concept of this "disease," Thivai, speaking about Abhor, says, "The male half of me'll rape the female half of me, which, I know, isn't very nice, but what can you do in a society that doesn't care about human need" (Acker 176). Thivai is aware that a nature of destruction has been instilled within him, and despite everything that makes him who he is, this "male" version of himself will continue to inflict violence upon Abhor. This behavior can be attributed to the taught behaviors of patriarchal society that allow men to violate women without repercussions. As Thivai recognizes, men much like himself were raised to take things from women; raping and violating their bodies because society says they can. While on a mission in Algeria with Thivai, Abhor remarks, "I don't think humans fuck therefore lovingly relate to each other in equality, whatever that is or means, but out of needs for power and control" (Acker 54). This revelation once again

speaks to the nature of society. Even within herself, Abhor knows that these sexual encounters will never truly be about her own desire or intimacy but rather a series of power plays between herself and a partner. There is an illusion within male-female sexual encounters that equality exists in that moment, but through Abhor, it becomes increasingly clear that it is not. This dynamic is rooted systemically within society and it cannot be changed unless society recognizes this issue and strives to abolish the system and rebuild another that values the bodies and voices of women.

Evaluating her sexual relationship with Thivai, Abhor fully begins to understand the sacrifices that come with being a part of a heterosexual relationship, "Since I gave, and he took, everything was about him. Since everything was about him, everything he thought about me was true of him. Since I remember I was nothing, my memory is nothing" (Acker 112). To be with a man is to lose herself in him. In the end, she feels as if she is left with nothing. This recurrent phenomenon is further interpreted in de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: "Oppressed and submerged, she becomes a stranger to the rest of the world" (342). She has become nothing because she has lost all the pieces of herself within him. As he is superior, she cannot simply take them back. Broken and lost, Abhor feels empty because the female part of her is now owned by Thivai.

Acker shows the violent relationship between Abhor and her father, and his toxic history, to reflect and acknowledge patriarchal violence in Empire. Abhor says, "Meanwhile daddy realized all he had done, all he had destroyed through lust" (Acker 19). Abhor's father leaves a path of destruction wherever he goes. Fueled by sex and rage, he engages in a sexual relationship and destroys what little strength and love are left in his marriage to her mother. Lost, alone, and driven to insanity, Abhor's mother becomes an alcoholic and a drug addict before she ultimately takes her life. Abhor's father has already fled to Greece where he is attacked. Bleeding and bruised, he watches as his yacht, his last possession is taken from him. At that moment, he has nothing and no one to go back to. As he cries, he finally begins to understand the violence he has inflicted on the women in his life, and that this life is now the ultimate punishment for the destruction he has caused. His actions only served to bolster the ideologies and violence of the patriarchy, and in his quest for sex and pleasure, he destroyed everything around him and killed everything he loved. His cowardice in this moment drives him away from those he has hurt, yet behind him lie the bodies of women

that will never recover from his reign of terror. Isolated and lonely, Abhor's views regarding sexuality, intimacy, and her own identity are warped and in ruin.

The identity of a woman is closely tied to her ability to engage with her sexuality. The destruction of sexual identity leads to the decay of female identity. To live missing a piece of oneself is to live without truly knowing oneself. Abhor discloses how her sexuality is a part of herself, saying, "That my sexuality was the crossroads not only of my mind but of my life and death. My sexuality was ecstasy. It was my desire which, endless, was limited neither by a solely material nor by a solely mental reality" (Acker 65). She uses crossroads specifically pointing to the choice to engage or not engage with her sexual desires; one is revered by society, and the other is frowned upon. These choices are what lead to either the blooming of her life or the death of her soul. Sexuality is freedom, and to be forced to repress it is to live a meaningless life, a life without ecstasy, to live a life without pleasure.

While hiding with the pirates, Abhor meets a fortune-teller that offers to use tarot cards to predict and explore her life. She says, "You've had to pit your will against all desire, your own and others" (Acker 117), and she continues, saying, "In order to survive haven't you thrown away the best part of yourself" (Acker 117). The fortune teller's assessment illustrates how Abhor has been forced to destroy and limit herself. In a quest for societal acceptance and positive acknowledgment, she has destroyed the part of herself that makes her human. Sexuality is a part of human nature and to destroy it or repress it is to destroy inherent human nature. It is a practice of molding oneself in the image of another, in an image accepted by society. This homogenous creation serves only to destroy individuality and develop meaningless recreations of conformity. To construct such an image of uniformity is a crucial tactic in achieving absolute power in a society. The ability to shape and mold the human mind and body, in a way, is the ability to both construct and control the masses.

In Foucault's Discipline and Punishment, he talks about the Western World's use of this tactic. To create a successful institution and, by proxy, a successful society, a government must break down the pieces of a person that makes them human, and then rebuild them in its image. He says, "The individual body becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on other, its bravery or its strength are no longer principal variables that define it; but the place it occupies, the interval it covers, the regularity, the good order according to which it operates its

movements" (Foucault, Discipline and Punishment 164). The potential of a body without will, fight, and agency is a struggle Acker examines throughout her novel. To have nothing but conditioning guiding one's life is to be powerless; to simply be a tool of the powerful is to be nothing. Abhor analyzes this turmoil remarking, "I could be no one because I had no sexuality" (Acker 128). In taking desire, pain, and passion from the people, mindlessness ensues; a nothingness is invented.

Acker pairs critiques of the political institution along with sexuality to represent how sexual liberation is achieved through political liberation. The ability to express and engage with one's sexuality is achieved through holding and controlling political power. Acker's use of political rebellion is a nod to this. One of the novel's settings is Algeria and the other is Paris, France. While the characters struggle in each country, Thivai ultimately refers to Paris as a place of freedom: "The true city of dreams. Paris, a city in which a person could do anything. Be a pirate. Have the tips of the ears tattooed. As long as he did it himself" (Acker 147). Paris is a place where people can do as they please; there is certain lawlessness to it. Here, Acker makes a statement about the way bodies have been classified and dictated by political oppression. The body in this case is not valued but rather it is fetishized and oppressed. As Thivai points out, in Paris there is power, and with that power comes a freedom that one cannot find in Algeria. This relationship once again ensures that those in the position of dominance enjoy life as they please, while those falling lower in the relationship must abide and play by a different set of rules.

The metaphor of the pirates is a crucial political theme throughout Empire of the Senseless. The pirates are a lawless group of individuals. They are feared by the people of the mainland due to their savagery and vulgar ways. Within the novel, the first encounter with the pirates is a graphic depiction of sex. The appearance of graphic sex is prevalent within the work; however, it is a staple of the pirates; these "crude" acts highlight the true nature of the pirates. They experience the full freedom of their sexual desire without infringement from society because they have abandoned society. As Abhor explains it, "Still in my men's clothes, I wondered whether any human sexuality remained. Certainly, there's human sexual desire, for its desire that sends a human off to sea" (Acker 121). To leave for the sea is synonymous with one alienating themselves from society. There is lawlessness associated with the sea; the sea cannot be policed in the way the mainlands are policed. On the seas, societal regulations do not apply, and Abhor realizes that in this

place, and this moment, sovereignty and autonomy are real and in her own hands; it is one of the first moments she has full agency over her body and her identity. Acker utilizes the "pirate" to symbolically fight against the reaches of colonialism. In an act of small rebellion, they refuse to conform to the projected and enforced by the oppressive institution. The pirates are feared because they represent a breach of societal borders and ideological boundaries. This group is one that is out of the reach of the hands of political and economic control and power, and therefore their lifestyle is dangerous to the systems that have been used to control and repress sexuality.

Sexuality and desire, the need for human affection and human touch, is rooted deeply within human instinct. It is instinctual for one to seek out a "mate" or "companion" in life. Acker's work suggests that the ability to do so has become conditional; it is dictated by a specific set of unspoken rules. The hierarchical nature of society is stacked to underrepresent the interest of those at the bottom with the intention of nurturing a society that benefits those at the top. Under capitalism, ethical consumption cannot occur because the economic system depends on the exploitation of the helpless. The economizing of sexual endeavors strips women of their ability to live freely. Acker's Empire of the Senseless follows the harsh consequences of this system on female development, unveiling the loss young women face as they must choose between acceptance and sexuality. Acker articulates the oppressive nature of these practices as she deconstructs and dismantles dominant societal narratives rooted in puritanism and conservatism. Acker's novel does not end in a revolution nor a "happy" ending in which Abhor is able to return to a society that allows her to revel in her sexual empowerment. Abhor rides into the sunset with her motorcycle, leaving behind society forever and strengthening the central idea of Acker's argument. To leave behind society and its oppressive nature is to find true sexual liberation.

KIERA GILBERT is a recent graduate of Michigan State University. She plans to attend Carnegie Mellon to pursue an M.A in Literary and Cultural Studies in the fall. She is most interested in understanding how social, political, and historical interactions affect identity, language, and borders globally. Kiera wrote this essay for her Senior Thesis. In her free time, Kiera enjoys hiking, crocheting, and spending time at her local library.

WORKS CITED

Acker, Kathy. *Empire of the Senseless*. Grove Press, 2018.

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017.

Borowska, Emilia. *The Politics of Kathy Acker: Revolution and the Avant-Garde*. Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

Burke, Tarana. "Get to Know Us: History & Inception." *Me Too. Movement*, 16 July 2020, metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Vintage House, 2011.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, 1978.

--- *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972–1977*. Vintage Books, 1980.

--- *The History of Sexuality. Volume I, An Introduction*. Vintage Books, 1990.

Ioanes, Anna. "Shock and Consent in a Feminist Avant-Garde: Kathleen Hanna Reads Kathy Acker." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2016, pp. 175–97. *University of Chicago Press*, doi:10.1086/686757.

Schloder, Amy, and Douglas A. Martin, editors. *Kathy Acker The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. Brooklyn, Melville House, 2018.

--- Acker, Kathy. "Kathy Acker: Gramercy Bar." Interview by Dean Kuipers. 2 July 2016, pp. 35–66.

Warhol, Robyn. "Second-Wave Feminism and After." *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, 2016, pp. 230–46. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*, doi:10.1017/cho9781316492697.017.

The Myth of Queer Agony: Homoeroticism, The Media, and Censorship

Andrea Hansgen, University of Dayton

It is 2020, and queer characters are more prevalent in books, movies, television, music, and art than ever before. This is a win for the LGBTQ+ community, yet when watching popular television shows such as *Atypical* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, audiences are met with nearly identical storylines. In both stories, a young gay girl finds a girlfriend only to be publicly rejected and ridiculed by her closeted girlfriend trying to save face. While it is nice that there are young characters experiencing queerness, time and again, this is equated with experiencing suffering. Gay characters are not new; they can be found in novels from 1928 and 1945, *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, and *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh, respectively. Both these stories show doomed queer relationships, and both are censored—either through an explicit ban or omissions in the text itself. Looking at *The Well of Loneliness* and *Brideshead Revisited* as well as other examples in a variety of mediums spanning across decades, patterns of unhappy queer folks and the censorship of homoeroticism appear. These are not, however, separate phenomena. Rather, the censorship of homoeroticism in *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Well of Loneliness* targets depictions of happy queer characters, so the myth of universal unhappiness amongst queer folks can remain. Moving forward, it is not enough to have queer representation in media; we must demand depictions of queer folks living happy, fulfilled, and successful lives.

Scholarship on queerness, the unhappiness associated with it, and the censorship surrounding it is not new, but what is novel about this paper's argument is that it frames *Brideshead Revisited* as a censored

text and situates "the unhappy queer" as the cause for censorship. Sara Ahmed has addressed the phenomena that most stories about queer people depict unhappiness in her work "Unhappy Queers." However, she sees this unhappiness as an act of rebellion. For queer individuals to be happy would be for them to fit into an acceptable mold for what life should be created by straight society. Rather than conforming in this way, queer people's mutual suffering—their mutual unhappiness—is a unifying force essential to the queer experience, which allows a space for queerness separate and distinct from the duty of happiness enforced by straight folks. Ahmed's observations of queer representation in books and film are crucial in the understanding of the "unhappy queer"; however, while she empirically is correct, this argument will differ in normative suggestions. The oppression and hardship experienced by the LGBTQ+ community will always be a part of the queer identity, and it can, indeed, be a very unitive thing. But for the sake of those wrestling with their sexuality, messages of hope are equally important. It is necessary for queer folks to have characters they can see themselves in, but if those characters are always miserable, it will be hard for those identifying with the characters to see a future for themselves that is successful, fulfilling, and happy.

To show the presence of both unhappy queers and the censorship of happy queers for the sake of perpetuating an unhappy myth, this analysis turns to *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Well of Loneliness*. *Brideshead Revisited* was never formally censored, but the omission of an explicit homoerotic romance between Sebastian and Charles is a form of censorship. Rather than running off into the sunset, Sebastian falls into alcoholism and Charles falls into the arms of women. Any same-sex love between them was doomed from the start. The informal censorship in *Brideshead Revisited* most closely mirrors the censorship that is still common today, which exists in narrative selection rather than explicit censorship. *The Well of Loneliness*, however, was explicitly censored, but the lessons it teaches us are the same. While *The Well of Loneliness* is by and large a very unhappy book, it is its hopeful moments and positive depictions of queer characters that landed it on a banned book list. Both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Well of Loneliness* perpetuate the unhappy queer myth while censoring happy alternatives, either in their writing or through a trial. However, this trend was not left behind in the first half of the twentieth century. Stories of happy queer people today are still being censored in the same fashion. Perceptions based on the media we consume daily would lead one to believe that being queer is a

dreary existence. However, this is not the case in the real world. Media ought to perpetuate a more realistic and hopeful look at queer triumph as well as struggle. The problem is not that stories of happy queer people do not exist; the problem is that such stories are being suppressed.

Happiness and unhappiness are words that will be thrown around a lot in this essay, so it is crucial to define what this argument means by happiness, and in contrast, how Sara Ahmed conceptualizes the term. Ahmed sees happiness as a duty. We want those we love to be happy, but this appears as a pressure rather than a well-wish. Ahmed explains that, "Happiness involves reciprocal forms of aspiration . . . and also forms of coercion that are exercised and concealed by the very language of reciprocity, such that one person's happiness is made conditional not only on another person's happiness but on that person's willingness to be made happy by the same things" (91). In *Brideshead Revisited* Lady Marchmain wants Sebastian to be happy, and it suffocates him. In *The Well of Loneliness* Philip wants Stephen to be happy, so he hides things from her. The pressure to be happy that parents put on their children in these two novels is a disordered, warped happiness. This is the happiness Ahmed is working with in her essay. Her conclusion that queer people should embrace unhappiness and rebel against the happiness demanded by straight-culture follows from this definition of happiness as duty. This paper proposes a new definition of happiness, a definition which is independent of the demands of others because it is a more fundamental happiness that is stable over time; it is not the kind of happiness one talks about because it is one's baseline. Happiness, for the purpose of this argument, is a sense of fulfilment, prosperity, and hope.

Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh has not thus far been considered a censored text, but this paper seeks to be the first to show how it is indeed censored, just in a more covert way than your typical banned book. This scholarly move is important to make because the flavor of homoerotic censorship that has remained ubiquitous today is more closely related to *Brideshead Revisited* than it is to officially banned books. Waugh has crafted a compelling story that is well regarded for a reason. However, readers may find themselves rooting for Charles and Sebastian from chapter one only to see their relationship crumble, leading both young men not only away from each other but also down dismal paths towards an unsatisfied life. The vague depictions of Charles and Sebastian's relationship may leave readers asking *what even was that?* There are two ways to look at their situation: they were sexually and romantically involved, and it was that involvement

that doomed them from the start, *or* they were just two college chums. No matter which reading you lean towards, there is censorship at work here. Sexual encounters between Charles and Sebastian are never spelled out. Whether or not you believe the relationship was sexual, it certainly had *the potential* to be, yet Waugh never answers the question with an explicit sex scene between the two men, despite his willingness to include sex between a man and woman later in the novel. It is omitted (censored) for a reason. Regardless of if sex occurred or not, Charles and Sebastian do not end up together and they are both unhappy as adults. Charles and Sebastian's relationship was not permitted to be out in the open in the text and it certainly was not permitted to be successful.

Brideshead Revisited has been widely read since its publication in 1945, yet it was not until 1994 when David Leon Higgin took on Waugh's novel that a major scholar pointed out that Sebastian and Charles had a queer relationship. Higgin refutes the claims of many past scholars, most notably David Bittner, who, for one reason or another, read Sebastian and Charles as platonic friends. Higgin's claim is clear: Sebastian *is* a homosexual character, and Charles is at the very least bisexual. Higgin confidently states, "about Sebastian's sexual preferences there can be little doubt" (86), and his evidence of the way Sebastian courts both Charles and later Kurt is convincing. The question becomes why it took nearly 50 years for someone to realize Sebastian and Charles may be more than friends. For starters, people see what they want to see. Readers were used to a flamboyant and effeminate gay caricature, "traits Sebastian never demonstrates" (Higgin 82). Since neither Sebastian nor Charles were a stereotypical gay character, they must not be gay at all, despite evidence otherwise. Others will frame Charles and Sebastian as a "romantic friendship," a term that is often attributed to close relations between a same-sex pair that society cannot or will not imagine as sexual (whether or not it was in practice). Joel Hencken describes this reading of *Brideshead Revisited,* "where it is claimed the characters were in love but not homosexual, and the relationship is constructed as 'just' the English process of growing up" (56). Another explanation is that Waugh buried evidence of a homoerotic relationship between Charles and Sebastian deeply enough that it could be easily ignored. The romance between the two characters is hinted at but we never get strong confirmation. There is no mention of a kiss between the two young men, let alone something more.

However, this cannot simply be explained away as Waugh preferring a more subtle approach when it comes to sexual explicitness, since the sexual nature of Charles's relationship with Julia later in the novel is spelled out in great detail. When Julia and Charles both find themselves on a cruise ship experiencing rough waters, steaminess ensues. While standing on deck of the shaky boat, Charles recounts,

> We were alternatively jostled together, then strained, nearly sundered, arms and fingers interlocked as I held the rail and Julia clung to me, thrust together again, drawn apart; then, in a plunge deeper than the rest, I found myself flung across her, pressing her against the rail, warding myself off her with the arms that held her prisoner on either side-and as the ship paused at the end of its drop as though gathering strength for an ascent, we stood thus embraced, in the open, cheek against cheek, her hair blowing across my eyes. (Waugh 298)

This moment on the deck acts as a sort of sexual simulation, setting the scene for what is to come. The movements of the boat cause an in-out, together-apart relationship between Julia and Charles's body, unmistakably similar to a particular sex act: heterosexual intercourse. It must be noted that such an act is the only thing that would be considered sex for many if not most in the time where the story takes place. The mechanics of how Julia and Charles are "jostled together" mirrors this gold-standard act perfectly. Not only does this passage reflect heteronormative sex acts, it also reflects a typical power dynamic found in heterosexual relationships. Charles describes his stance saying his arms "held her prisoner on either side." This metaphor puts Charles in a dominant role, holding power over Julia while she is submissive, a prisoner trapped with no way to escape. This sexually charged moment on the deck reinforces heteronormative views of sex both in the sex acts and power dynamics that the scene mirrors.

Things escalate as Julia takes Charles to her cabin below deck. Charles describes having sex with Julia by saying, "It was as though a deed of conveyance of her narrow loins had been drawn and sealed. I was making my first entry as the freeholder of a property" (Waugh 299). It is not hard to see what is literally going on here. Waugh chooses to include this spelled-out sex scene in his novel, whereas any outright descriptions of sex between Sebastian and Charles were omitted. Going beyond the mere presence of this scene, the metaphor surrounding

it tells us something else about the novel's take on sex. Julia's body is described as property that Charles has just become the owner of. This use of language perpetuates the idea that men are men and women are property to be owned by men. In addition to being problematic, this is a view on sex and relationships that is only compatible with a heterosexual model. This passage shows a clear model of what sex is and what sex is not in *Brideshead Revisited.* Sex is intercourse between a powerful man and a powerless woman that he owns all rights to. Sex between two men cannot even exist: it is imaginary.

While the emphasis on straight sex between Julia and Charles at the cost of omitting homoerotic sex between Sebastian and Charles is apparent in the novel, it is emphasized even more strongly in the 2008 film adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*. The film opens with the boat scene described above, despite it occurring in the chronological last third of the original novel. Anne Verhoef discusses the implications of the filmmaker's choice, "The crucial effect of repositioning this scene as the semi-primary narrative is that Julia, in contrast to the novel and the series, is introduced to the audience before Sebastian, . . . she becomes the eroticized object of Charles's gaze" from the get-go (3). This recommitment to highlighting the heterosexual relationship over sixty years after the original publication shows that the censorship of homoeroticism is a persistent issue that is still just as much a problem now as it was decades ago. Charles and Julia are romanticized while Charles and Sebastian could never be together without leading to destruction and unhappiness. A happy straight story usurps the potential for queer happiness.

Sebastian, once a well-liked son of a wealthy family, falls from greatness as a result of his queerness. Sebastian descends into alcoholism and abandons his family. He is queer and he is unhappy and unsuccessful despite a top tier education and prominent family name. When Charles visits Sebastian in a Moroccan monastery, long after their relationship ended, he notes, "He was more than ever emaciated; drink which made others fat and red seemed to wither Sebastian" (Waugh 247). Not only is Sebastian subject to an addictive vice, his vice makes him weaker where it gives others vigor and color. Perhaps if Sebastian had walked the straight and narrow, he would be handling his alcohol more gracefully. Even more telling of the plight of the unhappy queer in *Brideshead Revisited* is Charles's encounter with Sebastian's new companion, Kurt. What Charles first notices about Kurt is that he had "a face that was unnaturally lined for a man of his obvious youth; one

of his front teeth was missing, so that his sibilants came out sometimes with a lisp, sometimes with a disconcerting whisper" (Waugh 243). Physically, Kurt is worn beyond his years and has a speech impediment due to poor dentistry. He is not the picture of health, and the implication that he is younger than Sebastian, the man he is sharing a home with, suggests Kurt is a bottom-feeder, an unsavory type. Not only is Kurt himself an unhappy queer, due to Sebastian's queerness, Kurt is the best life partner he can find. Perhaps if Sebastian had a nice wife he would be living happily near family with wealth and success. But because he is queer, he is left with an unlucky lot in life.

Brideshead Revisited is full of unhappy queer character and lacks depictions of queer happiness; however, imagine a new story, *Brideshead Rewritten*. Charles and Sebastian, in their early years, make each other very happy. The Flytes love Charles, and Charles's father loves Sebastian too. Sebastian and the Flytes are very supportive of Charles's art, which is his ultimate vocation. It is not difficult to picture a world where Sebastian and Charles remain in each other's lives, living at or near Brideshead. Neither marry and they continue their boyhood romance into old age. This story is undoubtedly less exciting and far less conflict-driven than Waugh's 1945 classic, but it seems to be the most *realistic* outcome given the happiness of their relationship that seems to be doomed only because of its queerness. Their demise makes for an interesting narrative, but it also reminds readers that no matter how good a relationship is, if it is between two men, it will blow up, leaving behind only misery in the ruble. Not every story needs to have a happy ending, but it seems there are millions of happy endings for straight couples and nearly none for queer couples.

The Well of Loneliness by Radclyffe Hall is a book about an unhappy queer character, but it was not unhappy enough to escape censorship. This novel is a double-edged sword. It depicts Stephen's queer life as well as the lives of the queer people around her as dismal, unhappy, and as the title would suggest, lonely. Like *Brideshead Revisited* it tells readers that being happy and being queer are mutually exclusive terms. However, Stephen is a good person, and this scared 1928 straight society to the point that there was a successful trial to censor the book. If one is willing to admit that lesbians exist, they cannot go as far as to say they are virtuous. If lesbians walk among us, they must be some nefarious sub-human beast, not some pleasant girl with nice parents. This was central to the trial. Adam Parkes explains that "[i]n order to advocate sympathy and tolerance for lesbians, Hall made sure

her lesbian heroine, Stephen Gordon, appeared above reproach. Ironically . . . it was by making Stephen virtuous that Hall provoked moral censure" (435). This serves as a literal censorship of positive depictions of queerness.

While the positive moments may have led to its censure, Stephen's inability to have fulfilling relationships as a result of her queerness leaves a bad taste in the mouth of modern readers now that the book is back in print. An anonymous reader shared, "When I was nineteen, I wasn't able to finish it . . . Had I finished the novel then I think it would have been very harmful" (qtd. in O'Rourke qtd. in Green 281). This reader is living proof that narratives of unhappy queers are destructive to the wellbeing of young people wrestling with their own queerness. It is a pointedly negative experience of reading stories of queer tragedy such as *The Well of Loneliness* that makes the availability of happy queer alternatives so necessary. *The Well of Loneliness* may have been too happy for 1928 but it is not happy enough for what young people need in 2020.

The ending of Waugh's controversial novel shows us how it is simultaneously too tragic to be the story of a happy queer yet too hopeful to avoid censure. *The Well of Loneliness* ends with a powerful and disturbing vision that Stephen experiences after intentionally sabotaging her relationship with Mary in an attempt to give her a better life. She sees a "thronging of people," some of whom she knows and some who are "strangers with the miserable eyes" (Hall 436). The crowd is described quite grimly as having "marred and reproachful faces with haunted, melancholy eyes of the invert – eyes that had looked too long on the world that lacked all pity and all understanding" (Hall 436). The almost corpse-like description of these inverts reflects a group who has suffered at the hands of an unaccepting society. These are very unhappy queer people. They have a plea for Stephen: they call her by name twice and demand she "speak with [her] God and ask Him why He has left us forsaken" (Hall 436). The inverts feel rejected and even "forsaken" by a God, *Stephen's* God, who is loving to all except the inverts. The crowd then warns Stephen twice as they come towards her in a sort of attack threatening, "you dare not disown us" (Hall 437). The inverts are miserable, but this is part of their group-identity that they will not let Stephen opt-out of. One must remember this is a vision within Stephen's own mind, so the words of the crowd are Stephen's own thoughts. This vision is a strong depiction of the unhappy queer that has pervaded in stories ever since.

However, rather than remaining in this wretchedness, the novel ends with a moment of hope. After the ominous crowd taunts her, Stephen implores her God saying, "we believe; we have told You we believe . . . We have not denied You, then rise up and defend us. Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!" (Hall 437). Stephen's plea conjures an image of a world where the inverts can enjoy the same happiness as everyone else. It is a world without prejudice and rejection from society nor God. Stephen notes that she and the other inverts have been just as faithful as others, so their difference in treatment is illogical. The novel ends there, but if Stephen lived in the present day, she would perhaps see that prayer answered. Life is still not easy for queer people, but happiness has become a much more real possibility. This hopeful final line could have contributed to *The Well of Loneliness* becoming a banned book. This picture of a world where inverts could be happy and unbothered goes against the idea of the unhappy queer that society was committed to perpetuating. This final line paints a future that is too happy to stomach for those who think joy is straight-exclusive. While *The Well of Loneliness* has many melancholy moments, it is the moments of hope that led to its censorship.

Just as *Brideshead Revisited* was rewritten, *Brideshead Rewritten*, Hall's novel was rewritten as well. However, this time, the reimagination comes directly from a real anonymous reader. She said, "I identified with Stephen and admired her. The ending of the novel dismayed me, so I rewrote it" (qtd. in O'Rourke qtd. in Green 281). Stephen's likeability only made her forfeiture of Mary more painful to this reader who identified with her. This goes to show why representation is not enough. This reader felt *represented* but the character she saw herself in was tortured in the end, so she as a reader was tortured herself. She ached for a happy ending for Stephen, so she made one up on her own. Less creative readers may be less fortunate and be forced to sit with Stephen's agony, feeling it as their own.

Problems with censoring happy queer narratives are not a thing of the past and they are not just a problem in novels. *Steven Universe*, created by Rebecca Sugar, is a popular American children's cartoon which aired from 2013 to 2019. The story features characters who are each human-like embodiments of "crystal gems." In season one, episode fifty-three of the series it is revealed that Garnet is a fusion of two other feminine gems, Ruby and Sapphire. In the original narrative the fusion happens because Ruby and Sapphire's romantic love is so strong

that it creates a whole new crystal gem, which is Garnet. This is a very happy queer story, as the love of these two feminine gems is so strong it creates new life. This is a beautiful message for young children to see on TV. However, French children were not lucky enough to experience this same positive representation of queer love. *Steven Universe* airs internationally, but is translated so that children all around the world can hear the story in their native tongue. However, sometimes meaning gets lost in translation. In the French translation of the fusion episode, words are changed to make it so the fusion that resulted in Garnet's creation happened because Ruby and Sapphire were such good friends, not because they were in love. A statement from the translator who made the changes reveals this switch was intentional. Emeline Perego shares that in her time working as a translator with Cartoon Network, "the translators have repeatedly been confronted with examples of censorship and have automatically learned to self-censor out of fear of having their work sent back and rewritten" (Bakker 45). Perego was working in a company culture that encouraged censorship, but ultimately it was "her choice to translate it with this in mind" (Bakker 45). Due to attitudes at the French brand of Cartoon Network, the homosexual themes were deemed unsuitable for children. The translation was met with anger from many fans and was ultimately corrected, but if it had not been for the loyal fanbase, French children may have missed out on a positive message about love being for everyone. Even when happy queer stories are put out into the world, they are suppressed.

Brideshead Revisited and *The Well of Loneliness* are reminders from the past that queer people do not get happy endings in literature. While these books were written many decades ago, the lack of happy queers in the media we consume persists. Young gay kids may be eager to see new titles under the "LGBTQ+" section on Netflix only to watch as the character that loves like them gets rejected, bullied, never finds love, develops an addiction, never succeeds, dies, or maybe all of the above before the credits roll. Not every story needs a happy ending, but many stories that focus on straight characters do have happy endings, especially when compared to queer media. It's great that there even is a "LGBTQ+" section on Netflix, but while countless stories depict straight characters falling in love, getting into their dream school, making partner at that law firm, opening that bakery, or having a baby – similar stories with queer protagonists are notably absent from the menu of selections. It is crucial that queer folks not only see themselves on the page and on the screen, but also see themselves

thriving. All characters in all stories experience struggles, but queer folks should not always be struggling *because* of their queerness. Being gay is part of a person's experience, not an albatross they must drag through life. It is imperative that writers get creative and stop falling ploy to myths they have heard about the queer experience by writing believable characters who queer and straight audiences alike will be eager to empathize with and root for. This will begin dismantling the myth of the unhappy queer and show queer folks living happy lives.

ANDREA HANSGEN earned her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Dayton. She also achieved a minor in Women's and Gender Studies and Certificate in Human Sexuality Studies. She would like to thank Dr. David Fine and her classmates in her Senior Research Seminar where this paper was workshopped. Andrea has gone on to work in Development at a non-profit dedicated to providing resources and support to survivors of domestic violence.

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. "Unhappy Queers." *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 88–120.

Bakker, Sarah. *I'm made of love: An analysis of the censorship of homosexual themes and online response to the French translation of Steven Universe.* BA Thesis. University of South Australia, 2015, doi.org/10.6092/issn.2421-454X/8401. Accessed 19 Feb. 2020.

Green, Laura. "Hall of Mirrors: Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Modernist Fiction of Identity" *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2003, pp. 277–97.

Hall, Radclyffe. *The Well of Loneliness*. New York, Doubleday, 1928.

Hencken, Joel. "Conceptualizations of Homosexual Behavior Which Preclude Homosexual Self-Labeling" *Journal of Homosexuality,* vol. 9, no. 4, 1984, pp. 53–66.

Higgin, David Leon. "Gay Sebastian and Cheerful Charles: Homoeroticism in Waugh's 'Brideshead Revisited" *A Review of International English Literature,* 1994, pp. 78–89

Parkes, Adam. "Lesbianism, History, and Censorship: *The Well of Loneliness* and the Suppressed Randiness of Virginia Woolf's

Orlando." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1994, pp. 434–60.

Verhoef, Anne. "*Brideshead Revisited* Through the Years: Between Religion and Relationships from Novel to Screen." *Student Undergraduate Research E-journal*, vol. 2, 2016.

Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited*. New York, Hachette, 1945.

Shake Down: How Western Politics Fails to Define Sovereignty in Shell Shaker

Noah Hill Isherwood, Berry College

LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* presents a picture of a tribal life preoccupied with politics and legal proceedings, concurrently plotted with a historical storyline whose mythic truths influence the modern narrative. Notably, the makeup of this tribal reality is shaped in large part by Euro-American ideals and methodologies that stem from continued conflict between traditional ways and American culture. *Shell Shaker* exemplifies the modern Native American politico-social reality as one still forced to exist under Eurocentric customs and legalese, and this reality is most notably personified in the character of Redford McAlester. The death of McAlester at the hands of Auda Billy/Shakbatina exists as a symbolic political ritual within the narrative, allegorically representing a reclamation of Choctaw sovereignty. This reclamation of sovereignty plays out twice in the novel's dual timelines, the killing of Redford McAlester in 1991 by Auda Billy mirroring the killing of Red Shoes by Auda's ancestor Anoleta in 1747. The novel explores how these brutal acts of reclamation impact the Choctaws as a whole, but more specifically how the powerful women who perpetrated them profoundly impact the tribal dynamics of the Choctaw nation.

The first introduction we get to the character that represents Choctaw tribal authority is of a political bent: "Redford McAlester was campaigning for chief when [Auda Billy] met him in 1983" (Howe 20). This first glimpse tells much about the modern tribal structure, that it has become inherently Euro-American by virtue of its federally defined power structure and existence. McAlester purported himself to be the type of person who would make the perfect modern chief,

promising to "fight the federal government for Choctaw sovereignty" through politics (20). The McAlester campaign was a massive success: "he won easily" (21). However, politics takes on a different and more insidious tone in a cultural echo chamber such as a tribal community. After his victory, McAlester soon becomes the favorite of the elder women in the tribe, who give in to his every demand, leading Howe to proclaim the following: "[They] fed his hunger for power with their support. Whites call these 'political victories,' but it is so much more in Indian politics" (21). The tribal reality soon becomes one based on politics, creating something that seems more like a corporation than a community. The "dirty tricks of his administration . . . consumed" all of those close to the chief, leading to the practice of "de-tribing," in which members who did not toe the line were systematically disenfranchised (22). Rather than acting as a servant to his people as they had originally hoped, McAlester ran the tribe like any American businessman or politician would. McAlester becomes an antithetical example of the ultimate conclusion of the "noble savage" philosophy. The noble savage is "an idealized concept of uncivilized man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization" (Noble Savage), and McAlester is precisely the opposite of this, a native man who has co-opted the systems of Western civilization to an ultimately foul end.

The politicking of McAlester goes much farther than personal hubris, bordering upon cultural commodification, with Choctaw culture being used as an economic pawn. McAlester mentions the Irish connection to the Choctaw tribe, and how it can be exploited: "Carl, put a wet towel on your head. The more tribal we appear, the more the Irish love us. The more the Irish love us, the more we're able to move money in and out of their banks. Besides, Auda is one beautiful woman in traditional Choctaw dress. She'll turn heads" (24). Here, McAlester demeans his own culture, appropriating his own traditions, to ensure that he can benefit personally. It is later revealed that he is involved in the Mafia and donates to the Irish Republican Army, a terror organization, using profits gained from the casino deals and donations solicited through methods mentioned in the above quote. Rather than becoming the tribal savior that his tribe intended, and indeed needed, Redford McAlester has become a tool of colonialism, perpetuating a culture of hate and oppression.

Unfortunately, it seems as if this aspect of colonialism is the greatest threat facing tribal communities such as the Choctaws: a fellow

tribesman taking the side of oppressive government, implementing Euro-American politics and ideals to better his accounts rather than those of the tribe. In their article "Chaotic soup of politics: a Native American Indian mental health perspective," Eleanor Yurkovich, Zelta Hopkins-Lattergrass, and Stuart Rieke explore the dangerous pitfalls of politics in Native contexts. The political schema of tribal leaders such as McAlester ignores and corrupts a holistic tradition of tribal welfare, erroneously focusing on politics as an end-all-be-all. According to Yurkovich et al, "in this tradition, the physical, emotional (mental health), cognitive, social (political processes), and spiritual (religious) dimensions of a person within their community are always perceived as one, and considered inseparable" (1016). Using their contention, it can be argued that where McAlester ultimately goes wrong is in ignoring this fundamental intersection of identities. The result is a betrayal particularly poignant to tribe members who have placed their trust in McAlester. Rather than helping create a new reality of sovereignty for the tribe, McAlester's actions represent tangible evidence of Yurkovich et al's findings: creating "distrust, insecurity, jealousy, and fear among members; disrupting the inter- and extra-personal harmony, which includes the spiritual base of the community" (1023). The afore-mentioned "dirty tricks" of the chief's administration are seen to have consumed the tribe, and rather than moving forward, McAlester's sins effectively reverse political sovereignty efforts and lead to his ultimate demise; the chief is hoisted by his own political petard.

It is within the circumstances of this ultimate demise that we see redemption from the curse of politics. Auda Billy, in an action supposedly co-opted by Auda's ancestor Shakbatina, eradicates the chief by shooting him in his office. According to Monika Siebert in her essay "Repugnant Aboriginality," by killing McAlester, Auda "removes a compromised tribal chief from power, a task traditionally undertaken by clan mothers in matrilineal indigenous societies'' such as the Choctaws (104). If Auda's actions are interpreted as truly relating to, and being predicated by, the mythic and historical Shakbatina, they have the spiritual power to redeem the tribe on their traditional terms. Shakbatina was the mother of Anoleta, the killer of Red Shoes and also McAlester's historical analog, and it is through Anoleta that Auda is descended from Shakbatina, thus her actions reinforce this connection on a symbolic level. Auda's actions make her a "responsible clan mother, one more in a long tradition of Billy peacemakers" (Siebert 104). She has become like Anoleta and Haya, killing McAlester as they killed

Red Shoes, another agent of justice by ritual violence. Shakbatina's confession confirms the aid she gave to Auda, which both "implicates and exculpates Auda" in a unique way that gives her agency and a spiritual responsibility that the court's findings directly contradict (Siebert 104). In this manner, the killing, done by hand and spirit, supersedes the rule of law, because the law would not bring true, justice, or change the tribe so desperately needed. Thus sovereignty—or at least the sovereignty of ultimate justice—is placed back into tribal hands.

The war between old and new, Native American and Euro-American, sovereignty and oppression, is not fought simply in systems and laws. The politics of Redford McAlester, though not what literally killed him, brought his untimely ending to pass. However, the means of achieving such justice were inherently spiritual, transcending time and space to bring about a ritual reflective of one that occurred in another life. The actions of Auda Billy killing Redford McAlester for the betterment of the tribe made her a kindred spirit with her preceding clan mothers and present for the reader an evident object lesson. When it comes down to it, whether the culprit uses old or new tools of evil to enact injustice, the older system of justice will be brought to bear when his time has run out. Auda and Shakbatina attacked McAlester with swift fury in order to prove this point and to send the message that those who chance to tamper with the sovereignty of their people will feel the full weight of their actions in the end. European politics and laws do not apply to ultimate justice, and in the end, "Indians [have] all the luck" (Howe 222).

NOAH ISHERWOOD is a senior English major with a Digital Storytelling minor studying at Berry College, in Rome, GA. His literary interests include the Native American and environmental literature canons, as well as early to mid-20th Century British genre fantasy. After completing his B.A. at Berry, he plans to pursue a career in higher education, with an emphasis on peer mentorship and vocation.

WORKS CITED

"Noble Savage." *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* www.britannica.com/art/noble-savage, 2019.

Howe, LeAnne. *Shell Shaker,* Aunt Lute Books, 2001.

Siebert, Monika Barbara. "Repugnant Aboriginality: LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* and Indigenous Representation in the Age of Multiculturalism." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography,* vol. 83, no. 1, 2011 pp. 93–119. *ProQuest,* www.proquest.com/docview/2152624233.

Yurkovich, Eleanor, Zelta Hopkins-Lattergrass, and Stuart Rieke. "'Chaotic soup of politics:' a Native American Indian mental health perspective." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, vol. 14, no. 10, 2011, pp. 1013–29. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com docview/1081869741.

Recognizing the Nefarious as Normal

Marah Hoffman, Lebanon Valley College

Evil is pervasive in contemporary life. In the Bible, the recognition of evil is depicted as the catalyst of the human reality—flawed and mortal. Following the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush proclaimed Iraq, Iran, and North Korea to be the "'axis of evil'" (Norden xi). Villains run rampant in the realm of popular culture. In part because of this prevalence, many remain misguided about their relationship to evil and miss its secular origins in "otherness."

"Othering" refers to the often unconscious formation of "in groups" and "out groups." In "Roots of Brutality," Laura Spinney explains, "We feel less empathy towards people outside our group, and we can literally dehumanize them" (43). It is this othering of an individual or group that likely leads to the symptoms and conditions that we commonly recognize as "evil": the actions and beliefs of the bully, the misogynist, the racist, the mass shooter, etc. To end this cycle, we must see our role in it. We must recognize the ways in which social structures for which we are all responsible help constitute the conditions from which "evil" emerges. This proposed shift in how we popularly think about evil matters because without it evil as a supernatural force remains capable of shielding us from our own responsibilities and our ability to effect meaningful and lasting social change.

MISUNDERSTANDING EVIL

Phillip Cole highlights the dangers of society's misconception of evil. He laments, "Evil is always something asserted with confidence . . . never with philosophical doubt" (4). People are certain in their perceptions of evil as a ribbon-tied explanation for otherwise incomprehensible events, but they should not be. Cole explains that society's

castigating of those deemed villainous as purely evil is inaccurate because pure evil is "the pursuit of the suffering and destruction of others for its own sake, and this verges on the incomprehensible, to such an extent that many thinkers have argued that mere human beings are incapable of it" (3). According to Cole, "The human figure who pursues the destruction of others for its own sake is a fictional or mythological figure but does not exist in reality" (6). Human evil always has human motivation such as jealousy, rage, revenge, hunger, a need to follow orders, and othering; many times, it is an amalgamation of multiple forces (Cole 6). The reason some believe others to be capable of pure, supernatural evil is they want to separate evil from their idea of what it means to be human. This fear that evil "may be within as well as in the world outside" is ancient, as evinced, for example, in the Bible: "the Devil . . . is at his most dangerous when he appears not as a serpent or a demon, but as an ordinary person" (Cole 2).

Cole uses a horrific event from the 1990s to exemplify humanity's inability to accept human evil. In 1993, two ten-year-olds murdered a two-year-old boy by beating him with bricks and iron bars, then left his body on railroad tracks (Cole 8). Following the murder, the ten-year-olds "'lost the right to be seen as children, or even as human,' and, 'The word used about them stopped all arguments. They were evil'" (qtd. in Morrison 9). The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, John Major, spoke of the tragedy, proclaiming, "We must condemn a little more, and understand a little less" (9). The Prime Minister's assertion suggests that the civilized world did not want to reconcile the boys' gruesome act with human nature. So, they built a border between the boys and humanity. But, in doing so, they lost the truth of the boys' humanity. People failed to see the boys' abusive upbringings, which pushed them toward brutality (Cole 9). The two-year-old's murder was a tragedy, but it was not a display of "pure evil" because it had human motivation—a desperate plea for attention. In using this example, Cole illustrates how ignorance of human evil can lead to a draught of empathy and even dehumanization. Instead of attempting to rehabilitate the boys by providing them with the nurturing they so craved, society locked them behind bars for eight years—defining their lives by their misdeed and perpetuating a cycle of hurt.

George Salis echoes Cole's analysis when he explains that the notion of pure evil has decisively increased retribution and hostility, whereas the recognition of natural or human evil "has demonstrated the opposite effect, leaning more toward restorative or rehabilitative

justice" (40). Salis elaborates, saying, "The mechanics of natural evil will allow us to decrease the tendency of criminals to reoffend through rehabilitation" (40). In other words, if society recognizes evil as a human reality—choosing to understand rather than condemn—crime has a better chance of decreasing. By facing our fear head on, we could potentially eliminate its source.

OTHERING *AS* EVIL? THE CASE STUDY OF LORD VOLDEMORT

A key component of facing our fears is understanding our tendency towards othering—one of the most powerful determiners of evil (Spinney). Othering is a phenomenon often mirrored in popular culture. One way to make sense of it (broadly) is to consider it within the context of creative expressions with which many are familiar. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling provides a useful example of the dangers of othering and its intersection with evil. According to the series, Lord Voldemort was a victim of othering before becoming a perpetrator. His pursuit of destruction is the result of a tormented upbringing and othering. Like Harry Potter, Voldemort is an orphan. However, unlike Harry, Voldemort despises his parents and their "impure" blood, motivating him to punish those like them. The cause for Voldemort's hatred of his mother and father is explained by him in *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*: "I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out his wife was a witch? No, Harry—I fashioned myself a new name" (Rowling 314). Voldemort's magic earns him misery from the race he was born to, so in a quest for revenge, Voldemort chooses to exterminate the muggles (non-wizards) and muggle-borns (wizards born to non-wizard parents). He pushes the belief that these groups threaten the purity of the wizarding world. This evolution of victim to oppressor as a result of abuse is familiar despite its placement in a fantasy world.

The conflicting ideologies between those who strive for equality and those trying to enforce a hierarchy create much of the tension in the *Harry Potter* series. This is reflected in the first book, *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, when a young Draco Malfoy says, "I really don't think they should let the other sort in [Hogwarts], do you? They're just not the same" (Rowling 78). Eventually, Voldemort's plan to purge the world of "muddy" blood amasses so much carnage that a war breaks out between good (Harry Potter and his fellow virtuous wizards) and evil (Voldemort and the Death Eaters). As in most cases in popular

culture, good prevails. Voldemort's story ends as it begins—in loss. The lesson one may discern from Voldemort's cruelty is that othering can produce new othering of a different, more cold-blooded nature—a desire for extermination. Boiling the series down in this way can provide a valuable lesson drawn from an especially familiar set of stories, which might help us take broader steps toward framing evil as secular and thus more manageable.

Of Harry Potter's conflict, Martin F. Norden writes, "Here we see evil, not as a demonic other, but, in the Augustinian terms deployed by Delbanco, as 'a pocket of nothingness in a good world'" (94). Within this observation, Norden is commenting on Voldemort's well-roundedness; we can see the roots of his villainy. The *Harry Potter* series triumphs because it refuses to endorse the flimsy representations of good and evil so popular in culture; even Harry Potter sometimes finds himself teetering on the line between good and evil (Norden 94). Many people are compelled by *Harry Potter,* likely in part because they see themselves in it—their potential for both good and evil. The series demonstrates that no one is purely good or purely bad, even The Dark Lord himself. The realization of this can be healing, but it takes work, especially considering how long we have been ignoring our fundamental role in the construction and perpetuation of evil.

The appearance of evil within expressions of popular culture—with heroes vanquishing villains—may not, however, be as innocent as it appears (no matter how round its characterization). Accompanying more responsible representations of evil, such as those found in *Harry Potter*, are plenty of rotten archetypes. Because media practitioners often use evil to suit the needs of eras, they have made evil into, as Norden explains, "a ubiquitous commodity for consumption" (xiii). Norden notes evil's importance to popular culture, saying, "concerns about mediated evil may ebb and flow, but they are always present" (xiii). This frequent use of evil in popular culture, according to Norden, is problematic. The first reason stems from its effects: the short-term stimulation provided by depictions of evil "in the long run, can only desensitize us to evil" (Norden xv). The second reason derives from motivation. Historically, entertainment has often served as a conduit for the transference of discriminatory messaging (Norden xviii). Norden delves into the specifics, explaining the media's two main agendas for using mythologized evil: "to reinforce 'gender, racial, moral, and ethnic hierarchies by punishing those who transgress socially prescribed boundaries'. . . and to further maintain the mainstream's cohesion by

inscribing extremely untoward qualities and behaviors onto 'Others'" (xvii–xviii). A well-known example of popular culture's "othering" is "The Siamese Cat Song" from Disney's *Lady and The Tramp* in which the two Siamese cats serve as mocking caricatures of Asian people; they have thin eyes, buck teeth, and speak in broken, accented English. *Lady and The Tramp* insidiously taught countless people, especially children, to regard the Asian culture with disgust and annoyance; generations are likely still suffering from the repercussions of such a depiction. Because evil has been mythologized by entities such as popular culture, it seldom reflects its true function as an inherently human creation and pitfall. Expressions of evil as fantastic or otherworldly—while entertaining—likely make it more difficult for everyday people to recognize the very real ways in which they mirror the evil on their screens (by "othering," among other things).

THE EVOLUTION OF EVIL

Humanity's history of othering is deep, likely reaching as far back as our ape ancestry. "Let's Get Metaphysical" by Ananthaswamy et al., for example, explains that human behavior, including acts deemed evil, can be predetermined by our genetic composition, which is the product of thousands of years of evolution. The article argues that evil "is the neutral hand of natural selection" (Ananthaswamy et al.). To demonstrate this, Ananthaswamy et al. cite a case of infanticidal chimpanzees: "such acts occur at times when competition for food and other resources is higher—so killing the competition means more bounty for your own genes." Essentially, the murders committed by the chimps, an act many would consider malevolent if perpetrated by humans, is self-preservation.

An example perhaps more relevant to human society is when poverty drives people to crime. In an analysis of chimpanzee violence instigated by pure competitive drive as opposed to hunger, Ananthaswamy et al. illuminate the shared tendency of chimpanzees and humans to define an other, saying, "the strong us and them mentality we attach to everything, can be traced back to this adaptive behavior in apes." Laura Spinney expands on this in "Roots of Brutality." Spinney declares, "Humans evolved as ultra-social animals, relying on group membership for survival. Our tendency to group together is so intense that just glimpsing a flash of color is enough for us to affiliate with a stranger sporting the same color" (43). Such research asserts humanity's deep-seated tendency to vilify the other and revere the in group.

THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGY OF EVIL

People's perception of evil as foreign from themselves hints at psychological and social-psychological blind spots. Everyone is capable of malice, especially in the form of "othering," at least under certain conditions. The field of psychology has stressed that too often people overestimate personality as a determiner of behavior, specifically poor behavior, instead of situational forces (Levine 2). Corroborating such misinterpretation, for example, is the sexual abuse of parishioners by Catholic priests: "those in power invariably drew the mistaken conclusion that the pathologies were the result of a few bad apples—when in fact the bigger problem was the nature of the barrel they were placed in" (Levine 2). This blindness to situational impact is so widespread that psychologists call it "the fundamental attribution error" (Levine 2). Robert Levine elaborates, saying, "a half-century of research in social psychology has conclusively demonstrated that even subtle features of a situation often bring out the worst in people" (3). Salis has similar findings: "psychological phenomena, working individually or simultaneously, can cause people who are overall mentally healthy to engage in evil acts" (41). According to psychological evidence, our perception of normal should not exclude nefarious acts because these acts are normal.

The famous Stanford Prison Experiment demonstrates Levine and Salis's point. In the experiment, twenty-four young men who were by all accounts average got randomly assigned the role of either guard or prisoner (Levine 1). The guards quickly became malicious: "They made the prisoners obey trivial, often inconsistent rules and forced them to perform tedious, pointless work" (Levine 1). Such tasks included transferring heavy objects from closet to closet and removing the thorns from blankets that the guards had dragged through thorny bushes (Levine 1). Because, in the guards' minds, the prisoners were the other, they had no qualms about brutalizing them. As a result of the extreme behavior, the experiment was concluded after six days and nights; it was meant to last for two weeks (Levine 2). Levine explains, "What happened at Stanford makes it clear that insane situations can create insane behavior even in normal people" (2). The social sciences agree: the problem of evil cannot be pinned on a mere individual or group; we must all shoulder its weight.

WHAT NEXT?

> The danger . . . with the notion that evil can be a complete explanation is that it closes off all possibility of understanding. If we seek to understand the social, psychological, historical conditions that act as the background for horrific acts, the notion of pure evil may disappear – indeed the idea of evil may disappear in its entirety. (Cole 9)

Unfortunately, popular notions of evil as otherworldly or inherently spiritual likely will not abate any time soon. Uprooting a society's deep-seated perception of evil as an external and eternal force is no easy task. Viewing evil fundamentally through the simplistic lens of external villainy not only allows for evil's often appealing romanticization (in stories, films, etc.), it frees us from having to face our own involvement in its real-world, complex, production and perpetuation. By acknowledging that we ourselves know what it's like to other and be othered and that evil has its genesis in these experiences, we can, however, take steps toward a more productive framing of evil as something that we can combat (without the help of wizards).

Evil is not what culture commonly depicts it as—the defining feature of our enemies—or what we often perceive it as—something to fear and lock behind bars. Evil is a part of us. By accepting this, we can lessen evil's power—perhaps ending cycles of abuse and tragedies, such as genocides, insane asylums, and everyday bullying. We also could, in the long run, more directly save ourselves. Frequently, we are both the perpetrators of harmful biases and victims of othering. By hurting others, we hurt ourselves. Therefore, if only out of self-interest, it seems imperative that we figure out ways to cease casting stones. As we do, our world may gain a clearer surface in which to better see ourselves and the inextricable ties between us.

MARAH HOFFMAN is from Exeter, Pennsylvania. She is a junior English, Creative Writing, and Secondary Education major at Lebanon Valley College. Besides being a student, Marah is a cross country and track athlete, a cross country representative for the Student-Athlete Advising Committee, a tour guide, a co-poetry editor for *Green Blotter Literary Magazine*, and a writing mentor. After college, she hopes to secure a job in the field of education or publishing.

But no matter where she ends up, she is determined to continue pursuing her passion for creative writing through reading and writing. Her favorite genre to both read and write is creative nonfiction.

WORKS CITED

Ananthaswamy, Anil, et al. "Let's Get Metaphysical." *New Scientist*, vol. 231, no. 3089, Sept. 2016. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=gft&AN=117806455&site=ehost-live.

Cole, Phillip. *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy.* Edinburgh University Press, 2006, doi:10.3366/edinburgh/9780748622009.001.0001.

Levine, Robert. "The Evil that Men Do." *American Scientist*, pp. 1–4, doi:10.1511/2007.67.440.

Norden, Martin F. *The Changing Face of Evil in Film and Television*. Rodopi, 2007, doi:10.1163/9789401205276.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York, Scholastic Press, 1997.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.* New York, Scholastic Press, 1998.

Salis, George. "Whence Cometh Evil? The Concept and Mechanics of Natural Evil." *Skeptic*, vol. 23, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 40–43. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=gft&AN=128782770&site=ehost-live.

Spinney, Laura. "Roots of Brutality." *New Scientist*, vol. 228, no. 3047, Nov. 2015, pp. 40–43. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1016/S0262-4079(15)31615-8.

The Influence of Edward Said and Orientalism in the Twenty-First Century

Catherine O'Reilly, University of Illinois at Chicago

The literary theory of postcolonialism gained traction in the 1980s as an emergent method of critical analysis, bringing the effects of imperialism and colonialism on literature into focus. Edward Said is widely considered to be one of the founders of this theory as his book *Orientalism*, published in 1978, deconstructed the binary between the Western world and what Said terms "the Orient," referring broadly to a region starting in the Middle East and extending eastward until China, including India and all of Southeast Asia as well. Said argues that the very concept of the Orient is a Western creation; Europe, and later America, used their geographic distance from the diverse regions and cultures which comprise the Orient as a tool with that to "other" this region. Positioning themselves as the center of culture and intellectualism, the Western world effectively pushes non-Western ideologies and cultures to the margins.

This process of marginalization is a form of epistemic violence that effectively creates a binary between the West and the Orient without leaving space for nuance and complexity to exist when participating in discourse about the regions loosely grouped as the Orient. This "us versus them" mentality is utilized as a justification to subjugate and imperialize the nations in the Orient, elaborating, "not only [on] a basic geographical distinction but also of a whole series of 'interests' which, by such means as scholarly discovery . . . not only creates but also maintains . . . control[s], manipulate[s], even incorporate[s], what is a manifestly different world" (Said 1875). In describing the fluidity of Orientalism as the ability of the West to continually maintain superiority in any relationship it has with the Orient, Said argues that

Orientalism is an adaptable tool of subjugation and violence used to project Western conceptions of the Orient and allow them to dominate the discourse surrounding the Orient without allowing for voices from the Orient to speak. Furthermore, because the hegemony created by this encompasses culture and intellectualism, as well as politics and the economy, literary knowledge and those who produce it are invariably influenced by colonialism and imperialism, and the legacies both leave behind, which make it impossible to study and analyze literature without considering the position the author has to imperialism or the countries who perpetrated it.

The subjugation inherent in Orientalism operates both on an aggregate and individual level; in the larger context, the regions of the Orient were Orientalized because they could be forced into this mold and made to fit Western conceptions of the East without their consent. On the level of the individual, the historic representation of people from the East has been subject to Western conception of what the non-Western world should look and be like, and as a consequence, Orientalism has deprived these represented people of their own identity and voice outside of how they are represented in a Western-Orientalist framework. One prominent example can be found in the relationship between Kuchuk Hanem, an Egyptian courtesan, and Gustave Flaubert, who encountered her on his travels in Egypt. Flaubert's description of Hanem, "produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman," but Flaubert was the architect of this narrative; Hanem "never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history" (Said 1870). Flaubert as a white, Western, wealthy man was firmly in a position of superiority over Hanem, and these privileges and the systems which support them allowed Flaubert to represent Hanem as "typically Oriental" to his audience and to craft his definition of what that means (Said 1870).

According to Gayatri Spivak, another influential postcolonial scholar, Hanem's position as a member of the subaltern, loosely defined as those who exist outside of the margins in decolonized space, subjects her to the epistemic violence created by the fact that no discourse exists that can support and convey the message of her viewpoint as a woman of the subaltern (Spivak 2125). Where Flaubert's position as a wealthy white male is well-suited towards participating and being represented in discourse regarding the binary created between the East and the West, there is comparatively little to no space for the perspective of Hanem, and this "stands for the pattern of relative strength between

the East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (Said 1870). The strength and domination of the West allowed Western intellectuals to create the discourse surrounding the East, and the ensuing violence created by this discourse allows for continued Western subjugation of the East.

As a strategy of domination and subjugation, Orientalism encompasses all aspects of society, including academia and the various fields within it, such as literary studies. Said argues that there is no distinction between literary knowledge and political knowledge, because all works of literature and the subsequent analyses of them are inevitably shaped by the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Historically, while literary critics have acknowledged that texts exist within contexts, "there [was] a reluctance to allow that political, institutional, and ideological constraints act in the same manner on the individual author," and as a result, "contemporary scholarship keeps itself pure," meaning it fails to acknowledge the influence of larger societal influences (like Orientalism) on authors (Said 1875).

However, the notion of "pure scholarship" and of a distinction between knowledge in a literary context and political knowledge are false because Orientalism creates a framework that filters all knowledge produced about the East by Western scholars. The long history of Western investment and domination in the East means that there is an inherent bias, even if subconscious, in Western scholars because of the recognition that they belong to a group who has vested interests and involvement in the subjugation of the East. This violence created by Orientalism and the subsequent limitation and inaccuracies of the scholarship produced about the East necessitates the need for scholars and authors of the countries in the East to produce scholarship on their histories and cultures. For example, the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini follows the contemporary history of Afghanistan from the 1960s through the 2000s as experienced by two main characters. Because Hosseini is Afghani and the focus of the novel is not on Western, and more specifically American, relations with Afghanistan, the novel works to diverge from the Orientalist conception of Afghanistan, which defines the nation solely in its relationship to the United States and its military action. Hosseini is representing himself rather than being represented by a Western projection of Afghanistan's history and rejects the violent and discriminatory generalization of historically labelling the Middle East to China as "the Orient" (Hosseini).

Said's definition of Orientalism as a flexible ideology that continually allows the West to position itself in dominating positions over the East and project Western ideals of what constitutes the Orient is particularly relevant when considering the relationship America has maintained with the Middle East after September 11th. Said's notion of the general "othering" of the East is plain to see when considering President George W. Bush's declaration of war on terror and subsequent invasion of Iraq based on falsified evidence of weapons of mass destruction being held by Saddam Hussein. Bush used Orientalism as an excuse to "other" the entire region of the Middle East and in doing so continued to assert Western, specifically American, superiority on a global scale. The war on terror created by President Bush is a prime example of how the colonial and imperialist framework has morphed into a more modern and covert system of oppression and superiority. This neocolonialism highlights the fluidity of Orientalism—while the methods of imposing Western domination and violence have changed, the basic principles of "othering," diminishing, and silencing the East have continued to perpetuate violence towards the non-Western world in new and more sophisticated ways.

CATHERINE O'REILLY is a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago, majoring in Biology and minoring in Earth and Environmental Sciences and English. She wrote this paper for An Introduction to Literary Studies and Critical Methods (shout out to Professor Sunil Agani for encouraging her to submit this paper!). At the moment, her favorite book is *An Anthropologist on Mars* by Oliver Sacks—he uses the emotional storytelling typically only associated with fiction to bring warmth and life to science, and that's something she wishes to strive for in her future as a scientist.

WORKS CITED

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. ATSS Publications Ltd, 2007.

Said, Edward. "Orientalism." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* edited by Vincent B. Leitch, W. W. Norton & Co., 2010, pp. 1866–980.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* edited by Vincent B. Leitch, W. W. Norton & Co., 2010, pp. 2114–26.

Foucault in a Spacesuit: Modern Panopticism, Discipline, and Among Us

Tegan Pedersen, University of West Georgia

With the development of technology comes the displacement of human socialization into increasingly digital platforms. One platform that lends itself well to interaction is video games, especially those with chat, voice, and video functions, or those with communication as a critical element of their gameplay. The newly-trending title Among Us is a categorical example of both the socialization of video games and increased interpersonality relating to the development of technology. Among Us (and the larger theme of technology-driven player interactions it embodies), when analyzed in tandem with the prison-related theory of Michel Foucault, demonstrates the degree to which punishment and penal systems constitute basic societal functions, and video games' responsibility as a mechanism in both extending and dismantling that disciplinary framework.

First, it's important to define video games and how we as players fit into their vast digital worlds. While it's nearly impossible (and, considering how rapidly the concepts of games, gaming, and game studies evolve, quite futile) to pin down one singular definition, there are a few key elements that are both characteristic and integral to what this essay will discuss about games. American game designer Jane McGonigal outlines those elements as follows: "When you strip away the genre differences and the technological complexities, all games share four defining traits: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation" (21). While those create a solid guideline, I'll complicate the definition further by adding one more element: the player. The difference between games and traditional forms of literature—texts such as song, film, poetry, and novels—is that games involve a player, and so

the audience of the text, the player, and the player's agency become a factor of analysis. In other words, games require that we study not only their unique features—their mechanics, art, context, and so forth—but that we also study their interactivity, or the player's reaction, responsibility, and consciousness that are reflected back onto those features. In his exploration of human relations to video games, how a physical player occupies a game's non-physical spaces, Brendan Keough writes: "To consider videogame experience as it is perceived is to account for the particular material engagements that videogames not only demand with both physical interfaces and audiovisuals but also to which they respond" (10). With a similar perspective in a study about agency in video games, researchers found that a player's ability to control a character within a virtually rendered environment affects our "spatial presence," or the neurological perception of sensory input and output and how that perception alters our sense of physical self. Considering these two standpoints side-by-side, it's evident that, as Keough states: "The video game is played, and the videogame plays" (10). To move forward, we need to better understand 'play.' Miguel Sicart, in his work Play Matters, explains that "[play], like any other human activity, is highly resistant to formalized understanding" and maybe more easily defined through its components rather than grappling with the whole (Play Matters 6). Play is situated in context, designed around rules or the mindful absence of rules, exists as a tension between order and chaos, and involves a full palette of emotions; for example, play encompasses the breathless fear that accompanies a round of hide-and-seek, the explicit pain of a paintball striking an unpadded arm, the mourning of a child in a dramatic game of 'playing house.' Sicart writes,

> We play because we are human, and we need to understand what makes us human, not in an evolutionary or cognitive way but in a humanistic way. Play is the force that pulls us together. It is a way of explaining the world, others, and ourselves. Play is expressing ourselves—who we want to be, or who we don't want to be. Play is what we do when we're human. (Play Matters 6)

By applying a theoretical context—in this case, discipline—to video games and play, we can begin to parse the significance of the depth of player involvement.

Moving not-so-briefly away from video games and the digital realm, we'll look now to Michel Foucault and his concept of discipline and punishment. Historically, the body is the object or target of punishment. At first, the link between body and discipline was clear; torture was rooted in spectacle, or "the legal ceremonial that must produce, open for all to see, the truth of the crime" and took the shape of disciplinary action like hangings, guillotines, and burnings (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 35). Spectacle also involved the public, and so discipline, its involvement with the body, was communal, social. However, "[by] the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, the gloomy festival of punishment was dying out" and evolved into modern, more 'humane' penal practices (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 8). Still, Foucault states "a trace of 'torture' in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice . . . [is] enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporal nature of the penal system" (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 16). The 'trace' refers to the relationship of punishment and the inseparable connection between the soul, on which modern discipline is exacted, and the body.

As discipline developed past crude corporal punishment (though still maintained an element of spectacle in new, changed forms), so did the systems through which discipline is imposed—the systematic withholding of rights and liberty, punishment of the 'soul,' or a shift toward forced revelation and moral elevation through disciplinary mechanics. Because of the nature of the discipline-mechanic, the methods by which morality and ethics are excavated from imprisoned people, the body is still the object of punishment. Foucault elaborates: "a punishment like forced labour or even imprisonment—mere loss of liberty—has never functioned without a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself: rationing of food, sexual deprivations, corporeal punishment, solitary confinement" (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 15–16). Biopolitics deal with the merging of the two targets of discipline, the control over body and soul, "the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being . . . State control of the biological" (Foucault, Society Must be Defended 241). The body and living essence of a person were, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, caught up in the development of "new [technologies] of power," which are not the same as technologies of punishment, but still "[dovetailed and embedded] in existing disciplinary techniques" (Foucault, Society Must be Defended 242).

The body was once again public, part of a complex network of power structures.

These systems designed to enforce discipline are so far-reaching and foundational that, "[as] a consequence, [we must] regard punishment as a complex social function" (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 23). This social function is crystallized, observable in the seventeenth-century protocol for plague epidemics. An infected town was shut down and divided into districts, each district supervised by a syndic. The syndic's duty was to make rounds within their assigned district, account for each person and their condition, then report this information back to a higher authority, an intendant. The intendants were responsible to magistrates or mayors, and so this social hierarchy—which extended downwards to "crows" or "people of little substance who carry the sick, bury the dead, clean and do many vile and abject offices" – was born out of a need for surveillance and control (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 195). And while social hierarchies are not exclusive to plague protocol, the systems of maintaining permanent control over a population were streamlined and popularized. Panopticism is simply that: a standardized, efficient system through which a large group of people—whether they've committed some kind of crime, ethical wrongdoing or not—can be surveilled and disciplined. The modern representation of this compartmentalized hierarchy of law enforcement, the syndics and the intendants that ran the panopticon plague state, is present in contemporary police forces, which Foucault describes as "a single, strict administrative machine" with the task of streamlining and unifying an extensive list of disciplinary duties, such as tracking criminals, administering punishment, and, most importantly surveilling (Discipline and Punish 213). Foucault expands upon this by stating, "[The police are] an apparatus that must be coexistive with the entire social body and not only by the extreme limits that it embraces, but by the minuteness of the details it is concerned with" (Discipline and Punish 213). Police are not only concerned with 'extremes'—societal outliers deemed criminal for any number of reasons—but also have a duty to blend with society, act as an embedded central pillar through which information was transferred inward from the general population. By integrating police, individual parts working in congruence with the larger surveillance and disciplinary structure, the panopticon could be further extended. Within the architecture of a panopticon, "all that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy . . . Is it surprising

that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (Discipline and Punish 200, 228). This model of discipline, this machine in which masses of people can be partitioned, surveilled, and stripped of liberty and rights, is the model on which the most fundamental principles of what we consider a 'developed society' are built—education, labor, and healthcare are all framed within the scope of the unblinking eye of panopticism.

None of this—the invasive role that discipline plays in day-to-day life, the neatly-portioned cell-like structures that social interactions and functions are allowed to take place within, social classification of prisoner and warden, student and teacher, worker and supervisor, patient and doctor—is new. What is new, however, are the innovative and progressively more covert ways of implementing the methods of panopticism. In a study on Dutch prisons (a country regarded as one with the most relaxed, humane penal systems in the world), researchers observed prison architecture and its effect on the relationships between inmates and law enforcement. The study's hypothesis, which sought to prove the negative psychological effect that panopticon and radial prisons had on inmates, hinged on the idea that "Prison safety . . . requires 'dynamic security,' which is based on positive interactions and constructive relationships between correctional officers and prisoners, with mutual respect and trust" (Beijersbergen 61). The prison architecture which paired favorably with this hypothesis was the Dutch campus prison, characterized by small living units, but larger facilities dedicated to social interactions, and a decrease in architecture-based surveillance (such as the tower in the center of a panopticon). Simultaneously, they found that "With reference to sight lines, prisons with good visual access have been linked to fewer suicide attempts and less vandalism . . . but also to more (discovered) prisoner misconduct" (Beijersbergen 68). Newer prisons such as the campus layout, built with a more 'humane' form of incarceration in mind, have less visual access and therefore more cases of suicide and vandalism, but less discovered misconduct (it's important to specify 'discovered' here, as misconduct still takes place but is not as easily monitored.). Older prisons such as the panopticon and radial layouts, which have substantial area dedicated to living spaces but little to anything else, and are therefore smaller overall, have better visual access and thus less suicide and vandalism, but more discovered misconduct. Karin A. Beijersbergen states, "As a possible explanation, it was suggested that offenses were more likely to be observed and recorded in smaller prisons" (68). With a higher rate

of suicide and similar rate of misconduct (the panopticon's deterrent of both being the fear of being perceived and punished), the campus prison is simply an individualized, scaled model of the panopticon structured around the illusion of 'mutual trust and respect,' the illusion of privacy through bad visual access. Referring back to plague measures, visual confirmation was paired with a centralized, constant stream of "writing [which] links the centre and the periphery" (Foucault Discipline and Punish 197). So, even if Dutch campus prisons don't rely on literal visibility to monitor, permanent visibility and surveillance are still maintained through measures like schedules, registers, and checkpoints an inmate must adhere to. The panopticon, the base for all critical roles we may play in a functioning society, cannot be reformed in a way that optimizes humanity, only retrofitted with newer, more modern elements.

Returning now to technology, we'll evaluate those modern adaptations. If "the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy," then the smartphone is the prison of the body (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 30). Not just a phone, either—tablets, laptops, smartwatches, in-home assistants like Alexa, are all-new, modernized elements of panopticism. Before continuing, I want to clarify two things: we as humans, subject to inescapable responsibility imposed upon us to exist in whichever social role we must, are not to blame for the conditions and conditioning we experience. Without breaking out into an entirely separate psychoanalytical profile of labor power structures, even the warden, the syndic, is simply doing a job, driven by whatever motive—necessity and survival, greed and power (which return to survival, if scrutinized closely enough)—they've learned, adopted, and internalized. Second, the expanse of technology, while it's manipulated as an arm of discipline and punishment, is not inherently a bad thing and should not be regarded as such. Video games especially, the broad category of creative text with which this essay is primarily concerned, are dismissed as time-wasting, brain-melting mediums that have only recently, within the last two decades or so, started to gain traction as a legitimate form of media worth critical analysis. It is also impossible, in most cases, to avoid technology. Even basic retail or food service jobs require applications on phones and computers (often on personal devices, blurring the distinction between work and personal life, drawing an even tighter radius around the time which we are allowed to be non-productive), virtual literacy on a variety of machines, troubleshooting skills, and the ability to cope with the rapid development and shift of labor toward digital platforms. Technology is central to nearly

all aspects of modern life, especially social interactions. While I will not veer into the field of security breaches and privacy violations that surround technology, which often over-shoots into conspiracy, there is merit to the notion that technology makes us, as users, extremely vulnerable and visible. Social media alone encourages the user to plug into a constantly refreshing stream of both their life and others' lives. While we can somewhat monitor the degree to which we are visible—what information we share, with whom we share it—we are still, at any given time, visible in some sense and therefore vulnerable. The Dutch campus prison has small living quarters and falsely perceived freedom, a scaled-down panopticon; with technology, we are simultaneously the warden and the inmate in our small (in the sense of being individual), virtual, customizable cells, able to imperceptibly surveil and be surveilled within a social system that demands our participation or, at the very least, compliance.

Another facet of discipline adapting to the digital realm is the concept of gamification, or the addition of (often digitized) gaming elements—more specific than McGonigal's list, elements such as scoring points, competition, levels, and rules—to non-game activities like manufacturing, marketing, and education. An example of gamification might be a company-implemented system in which an employee can redeem and exchange points for rewards, or a classroom minigame that a teacher devises to help students connect with a subject they may otherwise refute. Gamification is not malicious by nature. McGonigal calls it a method of turning "a real problem into a voluntary obstacle," or a way for players to engage more willingly with a task (311). Games are a method of coping, of transforming tedium into appealing, exciting tasks that the player wants to, not simply needs to complete. Other critics disagree; game designer Ian Bogost calls gamification "bullshit . . . used to conceal, impress, or coerce" (Jagoda 116). Positioning ourselves in the middle, we can see both sides simultaneously: gamification is a way to lighten the heavy burden of labor that we must carry, to make tasks more pleasing and affable. It's also a method of concealing the burden of labor, costuming it in 'fun,' and prioritizing productivity over the user's enjoyment and wellbeing, which is only a side-effect. These concepts together, that gamification is both a delightful reimagining and 'bullshit' coercion tactic, paired with the visibility that technology allows, is the modernized panopticon: extremely partitioned, individualized modes of surveillance with the goal of promoting and optimizing productivity and compliance.

Refocusing now on a specific game, Among Us, we'll return to the body. In this case, a small, customizable body in the shape of a spacesuit. The game, originally released in 2018 by developer team InnerSloth, gained immense popularity beginning in late August 2020. The mechanics are simple—the player controls a small character and is randomly assigned one of two roles: crewmate or imposter. As a crewmate, the player must navigate a selection of three different maps to complete tasks, report bodies, and suss out the imposter(s) through a system of meetings and voting. As an imposter, the player must sabotage parts of the map, kill crewmates, navigate a system of vents (colloquially called 'venting'), and avoid detection by crewmates. The tutorial allows the player to practice each role by toggling which they have selected at the "emergency meeting" table. In the tutorial, neither the imposter nor the crewmate is branded as good or evil, and there are no outstanding indicators that either role is ethically superior to the other; the outcome (that is, whether or not the imposter role is favorable) is decided entirely by the group of players constituting a lobby, usually without a written general consensus. During a round, a crewmate is supposed to report any halved body of another crewmate they find by hitting a button that summons all players into a chat menu. The players then discuss who they think committed the murder. The most prevalent method of discovering the imposter is through a series of cross-checks on location and perceptions of another player's body (or rather, the character they control). Players determine innocence by evaluating how one another acts, stands, appears—whether a player stood at a spot on the map where there is no task, how they were walking or running, which direction they came from in relation to a discovered body, proximity to a vent, and through surveillance measures built into the game. On the map Polus, for example, a player can watch live footage from individual cameras placed around the map. If a player is in the security room watching the footage, all of the cameras light up with a small, red indicator—another player can see the red light on the camera, signaling another player watching the footage, but cannot tell which frame the other player is viewing, which part of the map they can see, or which player is watching. There's also a feature on the map Mira that logs players' movements through thresholds, door logs. Each time a player crosses any of several indiscriminate tripwires on the map, an entry is added to the logs with the time, location, and player name and color. Players can go back and review these logs to deduce where a player was at the time of a murder or to catch an imposter venting. At

all times there is the assumption of being monitored without knowing exactly who is monitoring or their intention. The entire game, all its mechanics and the interactions it facilitates between players, is built on the premise of surveillance and its relation to the character's body that players inhabit—getting away with killing another player, getting caught emerging from a vent, proving your innocence through the visual confirmation of completing tasks, positioning your character in a way that raises or squashes suspicion.

Punishment in Among Us is decided and implemented through the collective determination of guilt or innocence (which is a mold we fill with our own biases, principles, and predispositions), the piecing-together of visual and intuitive information with a presumed collective goal. At the end of a meeting, the player who received the most votes, imposter or not, gets ejected—launched into space or thrown into a pool of lava. Game studies expert Patrick Jagoda, in an article on gamification, writes that "the gamified world of the early twenty-first century departs dramatically from an earlier society oriented around the production of spectacles" (117). I'll counter, however, that gamification is not the departing from the spectacle, but rather (not unlike what we've explored concerning the compacting of the panopticon) the re-commodification and normalization of spectacle on a smaller scale. A player can make fifty kills playing Call of Duty from their desk, can survive a spacecraft crash-landing into a radioactive ocean in Subnautica, can toss another player into a pit of lava or out into cold space in Among Us. The grandeur of digital death is thrilling to players. That thrill is honed and marketed in ways that coerce players further into engagement and complicity. Similarly, Among Us raises an interesting tension between player and punishment. The character is customizable, a player can personalize the representation of themselves in the game: options include colors, hats, 'skins' or outfits, and pets that can accompany your character during a game. The tension lies in how easily the body can be discarded, punished, or disciplined, either by imposter or by group ruling. In short, we have not distanced ourselves from a spectacle, we have simply redefined it as technology evolves.

As with any game, fan theories about Among Us emerged from a range of evidence (some of which can be considered 'easter eggs', or "a secret feature designed into a game awaiting player discovery") present in each map (Dyer-Witheford 11). The most pervasive theory is that imposters, contrary to commonly accepted methods of gameplay, aren't the 'bad guys.' There is enough evidence to support the claim

that the imposters are a group of colonized people resisting occupation. In a brief exposé of these theories, popular gaming YouTube channel ArcadeCloud News reviews in-game clues to analyze the possibility of colonization as a central theme. Evidence includes a task on the map called Mira which requires crewmates to upload data collected from the other two maps, Skeld and Polus (ArcadeCloud News 00:00:50–00:00:58). There is also evidence on Polus—a map designed to look like a haphazard research station erected on a foreign planet—that the name Mira (which is branded on some of the equipment strewn around the map) refers to the home of the crewmates (ArcadeCloud News 00:01:07–00:01:30). We can then assume that the imposters are infiltrating the colonizing crew to protect their territory and people. This assumption is backed up by information from InnerSloth, which states that the game—Polus, especially—is based on the John Carpenter film The Thing, in which an alien lifeform infiltrates an invasive research crew by imitating the humans' appearance and killing them off one-by-one (00:02:57–00:03:27). Additional evidence of this is also built into the abilities and responsibilities of each role: crewmates' tasks include fixing wires that appear to be slashed, sorting artifacts such as bones and gems, and maintaining equipment like engines and reactors. Imposters can navigate the elaborate vent systems built into each map—implying some advanced knowledge of the setting that crewmates do not possess—and sabotage functions such as oxygen supply and communications. Why then, if the imposters are indeed revolting against colonization, is the default method of play, which evolved without rules stating whether or not the imposters are the antagonists, based around discovering and ejecting the imposters and saving the crew? The answer is rooted in the colonization operations taking place in our world, or our proximity to and trust in colonial systems of discipline.

The practice of colonialism is as old as human interaction—groups conquering one another for any combination of land, money, status, and religion. Humans, as time progresses, have just found more and more complex, advanced ways to do it. It is not, however, part of the human condition to conquer one another, but rather the goal of few prominent figures—people who managed to obtain money, status, and power, and have since dictated the systems of law and order that most people are born into—that has been baked into how we are trained to interact on both a large and small scale. The need for militaries and weaponry developed alongside colonization. The same goes for gaming, which emerged from the belly of the United States military-indus-

trial complex. Discussing the history of video games and immaterial labor, Nick Dyer-Witheford writes: "All contenders for the title 'inventor of the video game'—[William Higginbotham, Steve Russell, and Ralph Baer]— . . . were among the first mass draft of immaterial labor, the highly educated techno-scientific personnel recruited to prepare, directly or indirectly, for nuclear war with the Soviet Union" (7). We can succinctly describe the military, especially a body as overpowered as the United States military, as a reinforced, globally-stationed hyper-police force; so, just another arm of discipline, millions of contracted eyes in the U.S. panopticon. Video games, born from one of the largest colonial operations to ever exist, will always maintain a thread of colonialism and, in many cases, capitalize on it, especially in displays of military sensationalism. As Fortune Magazine reports, pulling data directly from game sellers that span different consoles and modes of gameplay, the Call of Duty franchise, a first-person-shooter simulating combat in World War II, was rated the best seller all but three years between 2009 and 2019 (the three exceptions being 2010 with Halo—another military-themed first person-shooter, 2013 with Grand Theft Auto V, and 2018 with Red Dead Redemption) (Morris). Another example involves a recent scandal between the U.S. military, specifically the Army and Navy, and a video game streaming platform, Twitch. Their presence on Twitch began as a display of "[the] human side of being a soldier," according to a report released in 2018 by the Official Army Recruiting Command (Villaume). During the summer of 2020, though, the military pages received negative attention over their mass-ban of viewers who crowded Army and Navy-affiliated streamers' chats with questions like 'What's your favorite war crime?' (Laio). Because the streamers were directly connected with a division of the U.S. government, banning viewers who asked about war crimes raised the issue of first amendment rights and the suppression of free speech. The scandal grew when Twitch had to intervene and stop the U.S. Army from promoting fake giveaways, which promised prizes such as an Xbox Elite Series 2 Controller through disguised URLs that redirected users to recruitment sign-up pages, none of which contained any additional details regarding a giveaway (Sands). Through all of this, the military has projected mixed signals about their intentions. To some reporting outlets, they "maintain that they are not recruiting on Twitch" (Laio). To others, they're direct, stating explicitly that "the military has turned towards gaming as a way to connect with potential recruits" (Sands). With this in mind, I want to recall the earlier discussion of police and

their role in discipline, their duty of merging with the public to maintain the panoptic field of view. As I've already stated, the U.S. military is a globalized police force and carries out their same functions on a larger scale. Video games, too, are inextricably linked with the military and, as a consequence, discipline—though in more ways than simply compliance.

Military development led to the technology necessary for the creation of digital games. Dyer-Witheford writes about their conception, stating: "All the first virtual games were unofficial, semi-clandestine, or off-the-cuff projects" in which people employed by the U.S. military (who were dubbed "freaks" for their interest in computer science) established their niche in seventies anti-war counterculture. A majority of early game developers were involved in the Tech Model Railroad Club (TMRC) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the TMRC is credited as the oldest hacking group in North America and is directly responsible for the distribution of resources and knowledge that made gaming possible. Dyer-Witheford elaborates: "No political-activist collective, TMRC members nonetheless 'believed in a cooperative society and . . . a utopian world in which people shared information, sometimes without regard for property rights' . . . this digital experimentation tied into a counterculture of psychedelic drugs and of political dissent" (8–9). So, while video games were created through technology meant for the expansion of the U.S. military, the fundamental elements of games are inherently revolutionary, resistive, and counterculture. Even the 'easter egg' evolved from a meta-protest:

> [One programmer] had worked exhausting hours transforming a text-based adventure game into virtual form . . . a task his supervisor had said was impossible . . . Now the game was completed. But success would bring little recognition or reward. His employer, the most famous and profitable company in the newly booming video game business . . . a huge media conglomerate . . . refused to give designers royalties for games or even name credits on the game boxes, a clear move to reduce the bargaining power of a workforce whose strange technical powers its managers could barely comprehend. The programmer reflected and made one finishing touch. In the depths of a gray catacomb, he coded a single pixel dot, the same color as the game's background [which] would allow access to a secret room. On the wall of the secret room . . .

> the programmer wrote 'Created by Warren Robinett.' Then he quit. (Dyer-Witheford 10–11)

Video games are at once both the protest and embodiment of 'physical misery,' of new, evolved miseries; they are simultaneously the cause and effect of infiltration of panopticism into each corner of societal function; they are both the method of discipline and of coping; they are, as McGonigal writes "an art form that helps us process and engage a world increasingly informed by new media technologies" (117).

Through games—a vessel for human interaction created in compliance with and defiance of a model-panoptical machine—we can subvert indoctrination of discipline, distance ourselves from the understood, overlaid concept of punishment by destabilizing the methods by which the doctrine is delivered to us, reconstituting the terms by which we play. 'Play'—the indefinable, abstract pleasure we derive from any range of activities and combination of emotions—is as central to humans as discipline. And just as William Higginbotham devised Tennis for Two; just as Steve Russel crafted Space Wars; just as Ralph Baer designed the first TV-connected console with technology afforded to them through the U.S. military, one of the biggest extension of Foucauldian discipline to exist; just as the "freaks" in the 70s MIT cybernetics department gathered around a communal system of information-sharing for the development of projects that directly hindered the progress of military development; we, as players, can take small measures toward dismantling the framework of panopticism that we exist within. We can disrupt the passing-down and passing-on of punishment-driven practices by recognizing disciplinary themes in media we engage with, carry criticism outside of the literary realm and evaluate how we interact with our surroundings, what judgments we pass and what elements of the panopticon we are complicit in, which ones we actively reinforce. We can be mindful of our role as imposter or as crewmate, and wherein the panopticon each role places us. Technology will continue to develop, we will become synchronically more gamified, more visible, more vulnerable, and with the exposition of games as an integral part and counterpart of discipline, we can use them to begin reclaiming the body (or spacesuit) of the condemned.

TEGAN PEDERSEN is a fifth-year student at the University of West Georgia. She studies German, English, and Creative Writing. When she's not writing an essay or making flashcards, Tegan enjoys painting and studying bugs. In another life, she'd like to be an entomologist. After graduating, she hopes to move abroad, continue studying languages, and teach.

WORKS CITED

ArcadeCloud News. "AMONG US STORY EXPLAINED (5 BIG THEORIES) | The Countdown" YouTube, uploaded by ArcadeCloud News, 29 October 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuB JNsQ0L-5c&list=PLAS-ZOY_wd7AOUojZea3fCoDq6kORQu6g&index=7.

Beijersbergen, Karin A., et al. "A Social Building? Prison Architecture and Staff-Prisoner Relationships." Crime and Delinquency, vol. 62, no. 7, 2016, pp. 843–74.

Bogost, Ian. How to Do Things with Videogames (Electronic Mediations). 1st ed., Univ of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick, and Greig De Peuter. Games of Empire (Electronic Mediations). 1st ed., Univ of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 1–30.

Fikfak, Alenka, et al. "The Contemporary Model of Prison Architecture: Spatial Response to the Re-Socialization Programme." Spatium, vol. 2015, no. 4, 2015, pp. 27–34. EBSCO, doi:10.2298/SPAT1534027F.

Foucault, Michel. "17 March 1976." Society Must Be Defended. Picador, 2003, pp. 239–64, sites.psu.edu/vicarocas426s16/wp-content/uploads/sites/37602/2016/01/Foucault-Society-must-be-defended14032016.pdf.

---. Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Vintage Books, 1995, pp. 1–332.

Jagoda, Patrick. "Gamification and Other Forms of Play." Boundary 2, vol. 40, no. 2, 2013, pp. 113–44. Duke University, doi:10.1215/01903659-2151821.

Keogh, Brendan. A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames. MIT Press, 2018.

Liao, Shannon. "Why the U.S. Military's Video Game Livestreams on Amazon's Twitch Have Been Controversial." CNN [Atlanta, GA], 16 Aug. 2020, edition.cnn.com/2020/08/16/tech/twitch-military-recruitment-aoc/index.html.

McGonigal, Jane. Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World. Illustrated, Google Books ed., Penguin Books, 2011.

Morris, Chris. "Here Are the Best Selling Video Games of the Past 25 Years." Fortune, 17 Jan. 2020, fortune.com/2020/01/17/best-selling-video-games-past-25-years.

Sicart, Miguel. The Ethics of Computer Games. 1st ed., The MIT Press, 2009.

----l. Play Matters (Playful Thinking). Reprint, The MIT Press, 2017.

Sands, Mason. "U.S. Military Recruitment On Twitch May Be Controversial But Isn't Likely To Stop Anytime Soon." Forbes, 20 July 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/masonsands/2020/07/20/military-recruitment-on-twitch/?sh=6d4942b47490.

Villaume, Jennifer. "Recruiter Live Recruits as Shoutcaster on Twitch." U.S. Army Recruiting Command, United States Army, 14 Aug. 2018, recruiting.army.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1602151/recruiter-live-recruits-as-shoutcaster-on-twitch.

The Potential of Forbidden Stories: Using Fictional Narratives to Challenge Ontological Boundaries and Encounter the Elusive

Michael A. Thomas, Webster University

Marian Engel's novel *Bear*, a recipient of the Governor General's Literary Award—one of the highest honors in Canadian literature—portrays the vivid spiritual, emotional, and sexual relationship between historian Lou and the sole resident of the isolated island estate she is assigned to catalogue: a bear. Throughout her tenure, their relationship progresses into the transgressive—they shit together, the bear licks her until she climaxes, and she is fundamentally changed by the bear. Yet the text is more than sexually transgressive; it is also laden with an emotional and spiritual intensity that signals that whatever occurs between Lou and the bear is not simply erotica, but something altogether more meaningful—something hard to describe.

This indescribable *something* is the reason for this paper. *Bear* is a literary orchestration of realizations, births, and awakenings that swirl around Lou, the bear, and the environment, each equally inseparable as they are separate, and all holding the potential to include the reader, whoever they might be, in that complex swirl. This mixing of human and non-human threatens Western culture's narcissistic centering of the human experience, a position that has created an anthropocentric worldview which devalues non-human Others and elevates humanity on the basis of an ontological, moral, and ethical superiority—a problem widely noted in the interdisciplinary work of animal studies and posthuman scholars like Kathy Rudy, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti. Our self-erected human/non-human binary harms non-human Others by justifying their unethical treatment and harms humans by constrain-

ing us within a rigid definition, and limited perception, of what it means to *be* human. *Bear* questions this binary paradigm and suggests one way humans might become something else, or grow into someone new, through a deeper connection with our non-human Others; like Lou, who did not know "what passed to her from [the bear]," but did know that "for one strange, sharp moment she could feel in her pores and the taste of her mouth that she knew what the world was for," we might also learn to feel and taste and know in ways that decenter humanity and bring us closer to our collective world (Engel 137).

I see *Bear* as one example of the potential that fictional narratives of cross-species intimacies possess: the catalyzation of an ontological border-crossing journey. Beyond simple allegory, stories like Engel's challenge the reader familiar with the "possessed" Other, the creatures we claim ownership of, to confront the "unknown" Other, those capable of challenging our notions of what it means to be human, perhaps even blurring the ontological barriers that maintain our anthropocentricity—beings who can change us. We are challenged to imagine, with Engel and alongside Lou, such a situation. *Bear* is an effective challenge because the very notion of a relationship like Lou and the bear's, in all its facets, is both culturally taboo and requires, regardless of the reader's final conclusion, a degree of transformative empathy. We ask "Why, Lou?", and attempt to understand her choices, thus beginning a journey alongside her. In this way, *Bear* and works like it generate the necessary cognitive and poetic environment to catalyze an ontologically transformative encounter between humans and elusive non-human Others; the act of reading such forbidden narratives thus holds the potential to alter the way we understand and experience relationships with the beings who share the world with us, perhaps charting one path toward a more collective and connected life together.

BEAR AND LOU: FORBIDDEN EXPERIENCES

The crux of my argument rests upon the concept of the "forbidden," a concept demonstrated in both Lou and the bear's relationship and in the culturally forbidden transformations they go through together. This concept of the forbidden fits both the events and effects of the text. Something forbidden is not necessarily a moral wrong or ethical villainy—it simply is what isn't done. A forbidden place is where we do not go, a forbidden action is what we do not do, and a forbidden topic is what we do not speak. The forbidden is that which should not be questioned. It is forbidden that Homer, Lou's quasi-guide and al-

most sole human connection while on the island, warns against. "Don't get too soft with it," he cautions, leaving the most significant warning unspoken: the bear is not human and Lou is (Engel 40). They are separate on an ontological level: one human, one not human, thus they are incompatible according to the outdoorsman Homer and the nature/culture binary. The forbidden evokes the cultural anxiety summoned by a violation, or questioning, of human ontological stability and separateness—much like the way Lou's progressive relations with the bear transgressively explore space and touch. The forbidden conjures the puritanical moral condemnation associated with deviance from tradition and expectation—Lou, an unmarried twenty-seven-year-old woman alone in the woods with books for company, finds desire's satisfaction, personal and complex fulfilment, and revelation in intimacy with an animal. The forbidden nature of the novel's events saturates its pages. It is aware of, experiments with, and explores the forbidden through the vehicles of space, sense, and feeling. The forbidden also encircles something altogether more elusive: something at the edge of our minds that is as unknown and prohibited as it is desired. Such forbidden-ness between Lou and the bear allows for an encounter with that same prohibited unknown: the source of her pleasure, revelation, and transformation.

Spaces—like doorways and restrooms—serve as vehicles through which the forbidden is encountered. These spaces become altered by, and serve to alter, Lou and her relationship with the bear; they, and all the associations that accompany them, become sites of ontological transgression. When Lou first arrives, she sits near the bear's shed to eat food and feel sunlight. Here, she realizes that "the bear was standing in his doorway staring at her. Bear. There. Standing" (Engel 34). The bear stands in the doorway. He possesses the doorway. He stares at the human. While not transgressive yet, this interaction preempts and plays with the metaphorical barrier-crossing that the whole text explores. Such transgression occurs when Lucy Leroy, the "eternal" native Canadian woman, speaks with Lou about the bear and says, "Shit with the bear . . . He like you, then. Morning, you shit, he shit" (49). The next morning, Lou shits by "the bear's cabin"[1] and finishes "the humiliating act" (50). Why humiliating? Because Lou does as animals do, as the bear does, with the bear. She thinks, perhaps not wrongly, that she blurs the line of her humanity by the act. Yet, Lucy Leroy is right: Lou shits and the bear shits; we all shit. The text gives no indication that she stops, and so we are left to infer that this transgressive act

continues. Thus, the bear's cabin becomes a site of Lou's disconnection from the traditional human, but it also becomes transformed itself. It is no longer just the place where the *animal* shits, it is where *they* shit. This act is not simply the deconstruction of a nature/culture binary, but a transformation of space and beings in a way that is both forbidden—it is that which just isn't done—and perhaps even impossible without each other. It is important to note that this is not a one-way colonization of the animal by the human; the bear enters the house one night of his own accord and similarly alters the space. Alone, Lou relaxes when she hears "claws clacking on the kitchen linoleum" and the sound of the bear drinking from the house's "enamel water pail"[2]: the space becomes mutant, neither human nor animal exclusively (55). He climbs the stairs and stands once more in a doorway, seeming to her "a cross between a king and a woodchuck" and lies before the fire, sitting there frequently from then on (55). Home and den amalgamate, becoming something else through Lou and the bear's relationship.

The physical interactions between Lou and the bear, both sensual and sexual, are perhaps the most obviously forbidden and disruptive elements of the novel. When the literal and metaphorical boundaries of human/animal spaces are crossed and the bear lies on the floor in front of the fireplace with Lou, she finds "herself running her bare foot over his thick, soft coat, exploring it with her toes," finding it had "depths and depths, layers and layers" (Engel 57). While perhaps suggestive, the scene is not immediately alarming. Still, both are gently prodding the ontological line—the bear is lying where a bear-rug might be, or a romantic lover, and Lou is probing the depths of his coat with her bare toes, evoking the erotics of firelight and touch, moving deeper and deeper through each layer, closer to his body, conjuring a sense of exploration. As their relationship progresses, Lou lies near him to masturbate. He stirs and turns to her on his own, beginning to lick her body, and she allows him to, directing him with "little nickerings" (93). Lou's experience of this physical connection departs from her experience with humanity and is more than sexual: "And like *no human being* she had ever known it persevered in her pleasure. When she came, she whimpered, and the bear licked away her tears" (93, emphasis mine). Their physical relationship thus drastically disrupts binary animal/human categorizations and draws new boundaries. She finds with the bear a physical pleasure that "no human being she had ever known" could provide, and through this physicality she finds a more emotional and elusive connection—whimpering as the bear finds "her secret places"

and then licks "away her tears" (93). On the verge of departing, while Lou and the bear lay "in their pelts" before the fire, she notices the bear's erection and, knowing they had yet to have penetrative vaginal sex, assumes "the animal posture" (131). The bear then rips the skin on her back in one great swipe. Though frightened and injured, the next day Lou still remains intimate with the bear, though she is now more aware of the ways they have, and have not, changed each other. When viewing her injury, she thinks, "I shall keep that . . . And it shall not be the mark of Cain," suggesting that she does not feel her act was one of moral sin, but one that represents the deep meaning of their physical connection, a change that she embraces (134).

The text's use of spaces and physicality to portray the forbidden (and thus challenging) nature of Lou and the bear's relationship underscores Lou's gradual journey from a seemingly meaningless, static life to one of loose yet vibrant self-discovery. Lou, before going to the island, was ashamed that the "image of the Good Life long ago stamped on her soul" was so different from her current life (Engel 12). Her internal conflict, one that is past and sometimes present, threads throughout the text and suggests that she is a searching, lost soul. A person given to "crises of faith," halfway through the novel she finds herself unable to justify the rigid staleness of her life when compared to the realness of her experiences on the island (82). The list of questions that prompt her crises, ones that asked her "who she was," bespeak a person moored in a place that does not feel right, or one who is questioning their place in reality: "What am I doing here?"; "Who the hell do you think you are, having the nerve to be here?"; "Who the hell do you think you are, attempting to be alive?" (82, 83). This sentiment is again repeated by the Devil, representing the universal and personal internal critic, who criticizes Lou by saying she has "no sense of self" (123). The context of Lou's internal crises—the lack of a sense of self and position in the world—might also enable her transformation; she is not necessarily restricted by the illusion of an immutable ontological stability. Lonely, depressed, and lacking a sense of meaning in life, Lou finds revitalizing and meaningful change on the island and with the bear.

Lou's experiences on the islands are not only physically and emotionally fulfilling, but also cause a positive shift in Lou's spiritual and ontological perspective. The text hints at this fundamental change in its first pages, saying that Lou, stuck in the shame of a life that did not please her, was due an "escape" from it (Engel 12). Later, heading through the mountains toward the island, she crosses a "Rubicon," a

boundary of change, and has an odd feeling that she is "being reborn" (17, 19). This sense of rebirth is the process that takes place over the course of the novel, one that moves her from a life of meaningless tedium, of unsatisfactory existence, to a more meaningful, present-minded state of being alive. On Lou's rebirth, Engel's narrator explains:

> What had passed to her from him she did not know. Certainly it was not the seed of heroes, or magic, or any astounding virtue, for she continued to be herself. But for one strange, sharp moment she could feel in her pores and the taste of her mouth that she knew what the world was for. She felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last clean. Clean and simple and proud. (136–37)

The vagueness of "what passed to her" from the bear, combined with the clean and revelatory imagery of the passage, evokes a spirituality reminiscent of baptism, of newness, of new life (136). She finds that she is still herself, yet fundamentally different. She is no longer the historian who needed to remind herself that "long ago the outside world had existed," nor is she necessarily more in touch with her own humanity (12). She is simple, proud, and clean. Simple—in contrast to the orderly and efficacious catalogue of "thoughts and feelings" (83). Proud—no longer ashamed of her lack of self because she has found it. Clean—not in the moral sense, but in the way that all the nature around her is clean, in the way that her passionate love for the bear is "clean," as a purifying force of perspective-shifting clarity (118). To define the exact nature of this change would betray its elusiveness, yet we know it is not only unconcerned with humanity, but also definitely not human; it is a matter of *being*.

The subtext of the above passage, and the novel itself, is that Lou's attempts to realize any kind of ontological change or understanding—to see herself move from a place of non-self to self, from past to present, to achieve a degree of self-actualization—result in a profoundly non-human experience sourced from forbidden interactions with an elusive Other. The knowledge she gains but cannot fully describe in the text is not the empirical humanity of the historical books around her, nor the organized thoughts and feelings she once thought provided safety, but the kind of knowledge conveyed through electrically esoteric experiences with the forbidden—the transmuted spaces of the island and her complex relationship with the bear, and what Lou's actions

concerning both represent. Through an engagement with forbidden spaces and feelings, Lou encounters that ever-elusive-*something*. Lou is transformed. Once the present was "as ungraspable as a mirage," and Lou existed as an unreal being, adrift and ethereal (Engel 20). Now she is "strong and pure," invariably present and alive (140). Lou's world, like the island estate, is "no longer a symbol, but an entity" (137). She, through the forbidden, encounters the elusive and senses it, blurring the ontological bounds of her humanity, becoming more fulfilled in the process.

THE LITERALITY AND ELUSIVENESS OF *BEAR*

The ontological impact of a forbidden narrative, one that is conducive to an encounter with the elusive *something*, depends in part on a willingness to accept its literality. A symbol, by virtue of its representative nature, is incapable of embodying the fullness of a thing, much less an elusive forbidden thing. Lou says as much when she first sees the bear: "Everyone has once in his life to decide whether he is a Platonist or not . . . I am a woman sitting on a stoop eating bread and bacon. That is a bear. Not a toy bear, not a Pooh bear, not an airlines Koala bear. A *real* bear" (Engel 34, emphasis mine). The bear, to Lou, is not merely a form of an idea, but an actual bear. A *real* bear. This emphasis on realness—legitimacy of existence in contrast with abstract Platonic forms—specifically affirms the literality of the bear himself. Such an emphasis places the reader in a difficult position. They must discern and accept the literality of the bear in the narrative, in that the bear is a real bear with whom Lou has a real relationship, and also the literality of the bear as the reader interprets him, in that the bear is not merely read as an allegory but recognized as a real bear. The latter, specifically in light of the novel's forbidden sexuality and cultural taboo, might be most difficult for *Bear*'s readers.

To the reader, *Bear* is a challenging maze of allegory, meta-textual ethical examinations, and human-animal relationships, all notably impacted, from within the text and without, by the shadow of sexual taboo. The taboo nature of *Bear*, at least in popular discourse, seems dominant. One edition of the novel[3] headlines it in bold as "THE SHOCKING, EROTIC NOVEL OF A WOMAN IN LOVE" with the attached *Washington Post* review, "A STARTLINGLY ALIVE NARRATIVE OF THE FORBIDDEN, THE UNTHINKABLE, THE HARDLY IMAGINABLE."[4] Forbidden, yes, but sensationalist advertising like this belies the complexity of the text, portraying it as an exercise in

carnality, if not sin—a riveting beach read. This shocking evocation of cultural taboo is not lost on the reader, and the text's third-person narrative invites complication. The reader is caught between the narrator's quasi-godlike perspective on Lou and the ethical quandaries of the text's events which, by traditional human standards, do not validate or concern Lou's perspective. The third person narrative ensures that the reader cannot find reprieve within Lou's mind, where personal subjectivity would be more palpable and presumably immoral actions more easily excused. They are exposed to her feelings and needs, her past and present, her emotions and spirit. Because this is not a Nabokovian story with an eccentric, unreliable, and morally degenerate narrator, the reader is less justified in the dismissal of the forbidden as a mere abnormality or crime. Thus, *Bear*'s readers are challenged to reconcile the ethics of an act of sexual intimacy between human and animal for themselves, as the text is hardly concerned with judging it.

Critics' attempts to interpret, even justify, the intimate and transgressive relationship between Lou and the bear have relied heavily on allegorical readings that do injustice to animals themselves. Kenneth Shapiro and Marion W. Copeland, in their article "Toward a Critical Theory of Animal Issues in Fiction," argue that appropriation of animal figures and exploitation of the 'animal' idea are reductive and disrespectful (344). This is because in purely allegorical readings, animals become more symbolic than sentient, effectively de-naturalized. The challenge, they argue, is to understand which literary works show animals as mere human resources through their use of animals as only symbols, and which show them as a "more or less equal partner in a relationship—the fruit of which is a common project, a shared word" (345). Greg Garrard, speaking specifically on symbolization in *Bear*, notes that critics usually frame *Bear*'s narrative as an "allegory of some kind" (223). This tendency to allegorize completely also conveniently minimizes the taboo of the bear and Lou's relationship. This is convenient because while only an allegorical symbol, the bear cannot be animal, and so the taboo which first enabled such symbolism is erased while maintaining the position of, and benefit to, the human, circumventing the text's difficult discourse on the ontological boundary between the human and non-human. Yet in *Bear*'s case, Garrard argues that the text's attempts to symbolize the bear are not symptoms of complete allegorization, but of a language barrier—Lou and Engel's vital inability to fully represent the "elusiveness of the animal Other" (277).

The elusiveness that Garrard mentions, and which I have hinted at, is a concept that defies definition itself and also exists as the central conflict in Lou and the bear's relationship. Catriona Sandilands, in *The Good-Natured Feminist*, writes on nature and its elusiveness, saying that humanity's attempts to describe non-humanity "can never be complete" and will always be lacking (185). Regardless of the creative metaphors, carefully woven allegories, and inventive figures that decorate humanity's most poetic language, they all fail to fully represent the non-human Other. *Bear* accepts this. Lou, despite her experiences with the forbidden, cannot fully grasp the elusiveness of the bear's being. The bear is always, to Lou, a being of "secrets" with no "no need to reveal them," a creature "larger and older and wiser than time" (Engel 70, 119). He is sometimes "God," eternal and "infinitely heavy and soft" (119, 124). His nature is secret to her, becoming infinite in its capacity because of its unknowability. Lou's discovery of the bear's "depths and depths, layers and layers" conjures a sense of progression, but also a sense that she might never completely discover the bear—just the layers that are within her reach, not any definite conclusion (57). In fact, Lou's insistence on rendering the bear knowable precedes the only explicit harms caused to either of them in the text. After Lou says that she wants the bear to take her to the "bottom of the ocean," to give her his "skin" and tell her his "thoughts," she insists that they dance (112). This dance, set to the backdrop of "garbled languages" and songs emanating from an old radio, requires a bipedal position which seems to "hurt or confuse" the bear, yet she continues, comparing him to "a baby" (113). He is harmed by her insistence and never dances willingly. Similarly, the bear claws Lou's back after her continued efforts to have penetrative vaginal sex, a pointedly human desire to consummate and thus anthropocentrically legitimize their relationship, a desire founded in "something aggressive" that always made her go "too far" (122). The scar left by this intentional anthropocentric attempt to somehow conceptually capture the bear is not a punishment, but a symbol of "the impossibility of the[ir] encounter" (Sandilands 183). Lou decides to "keep" the scar, not as a mark of sin, but as a reminder that the forbidden encounters between her and the bear are defined as much by their elusiveness as they are by the effect of that elusiveness itself—an indescribable but till transforming experience (Engel 134).

Lou's forbidden experiences are what facilitate her encounters with the elusive unknown, and thus allow the spatial, physical, and emotional transformations she undergoes throughout the text. The elusive un-

known is alien, its representation is the ever-unachievable poetic goal, and its exact nature is only describable by its inability to be fully described. The elusive is "the unsymbolizable kernel of both human and nonhuman life," a kind of unfiltered reality (Sandilands 185). It is not unlike negative space: its presence is perceptible only through the structure that surrounds it. Though Lou and the reader cannot understand or describe this elusive- something, its impact is visible through Lou's experiences in that her transformations, as facilitated by the forbidden, are the result of an encounter with the elusive. Sandilands writes on the strangeness of such encounters, saying that "this strangeness, this moment of human linguistic unknowability, must be preserved and fostered" because it is "a place where the so-called rational mind has not completely colonized the impulse, the spirit, or the body" (185). Thus, the forbidden, that which is just not done, just not viewed, and just not felt, is also the site least dominated by the exclusively human because of its prohibited nature; the forbidden is the furthest reach of the symbolizable, the bleeding edge that encircles the unknown, the recognizable elusive-something. In this way, the forbidden might offer the opportunity to brush up against the amorphous, ineffable kernel of life that holds the potential to transform us, to change us.

SEXUALITY AS FORBIDDEN & ELUSIVE ENERGY

Sexuality, as a human topic, is often taboo, often forbidden, yet also contains a seed of something much harder to describe. It is, at once, both holy and sacrilegious, flaunted and shunned, the target of censorship and also of artistic liberation. While human sexuality is a constant subject of conflict and discourse, a sexuality that crosses ontological boundaries is almost universally decried, despite its complex nature. For example, an understanding of sexuality not as an amorphous, affective energy but as only a "performed action" between the same species, or something carnal that is "done" to another, renders complex readings of *Bear* partially inert, potentially framing Lou as a sexually perverse animal abuser. Similarly, a humanistic understanding of human/non-human relationships might hinder the novel's intermixing dialogues on humanity and nature. Thus, a more complex understanding of our relationships to both non-human Others and to our conceptions of sexuality is required to unlock the potential in *Bear* and texts like it, the same potential that Lou finds in the forbidden: the possibility of brushing against the transformative unknown.

The affective bonds humans and non-human Others forge hold great meaning; we share our lives with these Others, are vulnerable with them, even rely on them; the romanticized "animal companion" is lauded on bumper stickers and "getting out in nature" is an often-peddled mental health suggestion. Yet the relationship central to *Bear* is still perceived as deviant, even criminal, not because of emotion or spiritual intimacy, but because of Lou's sexual connection with him. This is interesting, as Kathy Rudy claims in her essay "LGBTQ . . . Z?", because a person who eats animals, kills animals, trains them, breeds them, or cuts them open for science can generally be considered a normal member of society, but having sex with them remains abhorrent (258). Accordingly, Rudy questions the interdiction on human-animal sexuality by questioning preconceived notions of sexuality itself (261). While not at all advocating for the ability or legal right to have sex with animals, Rudy draws from queer theorists like Eve Sedgwick to ask how clearly we can draw the line between animal and human through a taboo on sexuality if sexuality itself is undefined. This position coincides with queer theory's reimagining of sex itself, not as specific set of actions where one party is acted upon by another, nor as merely a reproductive act, but as "an energy that can be tapped into but never nailed down" (259). Perspectives on sexuality that conceive of it as an energy—amorphous, affective, and evocative; having an effect; experiential; influencing and transforming—complicate our human perspective on loving non-human Others.

A queer redefinition of sexuality allows for a more complex relationship with the world and the beings who share it with us. Rudy, alongside Midas Dekker in his book *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality*, claims we may already be engaging sexually with our animal companions:

> If you drop the requirement that for sexual contact something has to be inserted somewhere and that something has to be fiddled with, and it is sufficient simply to cuddle, to derive a warm feeling from each other, to kiss perhaps at times, in brief to love, then bestiality is not a deviation but a general rule, not even something shameful but the done thing. (qtd. in Rudy 267)

If sexuality is an energy, one of many tools with which we can make sense of the world just as our emotions and spirituality are, then perhaps, in some ways, sexuality and our non-human others are less an

incompatible immorality than we have been taught. Sexuality, as a non-prescriptive amorphous energy, can help us interpret our world and form more substantial connections with one another; sex, then, is an exchange of relationally constructive energy. To this effect, Rudy claims that the interdict on human-animal sexuality is less a question of sexual morality and more a method of maintaining a distinct human/animal binary, a symptom of "a cultural anxiety about our own animality" (Rudy 267). Though the possibilities of harm and abuse are real, the majority of discourses on human-animal sexuality rest on judgements of ontological value and not an ethics of care or harm. This (often moral) discourse on the difference between animal and human beings is based on the belief that one is fundamentally superior or inferior to the other, positing that this value-based ontological rift is enough to justify sexual prohibition (Rudy 266). While we understand that our human sexuality requires complex ethical navigations, the inclusion of the non-human in our sexual dialogue evokes the simple reaction of "it just ain't right." Perhaps this apprehension is rooted in the worry that we might be changed, that our own status as 'definitively human' might be destabilized.

I'm reminded of Ellen Meloy's first line in her essay "A Field Guide to Brazen Harlotry," a beautiful meditation on sexuality, sensuality, and nature: "For reasons that are not entirely clear I have always believed that love and restlessness are inextricably bound to a desert plant called cliffrose" (221). In her essay, she describes becoming lost in the Colorado desert and seasonally changing alongside the flora of that arid place (222). The energy of the desert transcends an academically sterile botanical view, or a simply spiritual connection, and is deeply intimate and physically felt, an absolutely foundational aspect of her physical being. Beyond the cognitive connection to the earth around us, past the simple flatness of words like "plant" or "desert," and distant from concerns of the isolated *anthropos* species, she finds something simultaneously recognizable and elusive, yet nonetheless desired:

> There was little doubt in my mind what all these plants were up to, their wild, palpable surge of seduction best absorbed by the undermind—no categories, no labels, no conscious grasping but a kind of sideways knowing. Spring in the desert grew beyond the reach of intellect and became a blinding ache for intimacy, not unlike beauty, nor unlike physical love . . . It is

> spring again. I have decided to live inside the sex organs of plants. (Meloy 223)

Meloy experiences a disconnect from pure cognition, the site of dualistic constructs and humanistic symbols, growing with Spring and encountering an elusive-something. This process is sensual, aching with a need for closeness and an acknowledgment of lack. It cannot be fully described, only known as something that is "not unlike"—it is an encounter the nature of which is only ever at the tip of the tongue, a sideways knowing, beyond cognitive explanation because it is beyond the symbolic structure of our own understandings (223). To describe it is an impossible task, but the effect is evident: she decides to live inside the sex organ of plants. She recognizes that her willingness to touch and move with the forbidden is a transformative act that makes the distinctions between her and the desert much less clear. She finds value in this ontological blending:

> There is the reassurance that this is not a place with too much rain, that the thirst of its sandstone, of juniper and pinyon, cliffrose and scarlet paintbrush, is as true an edge as human longing. Look at these faces, sandstone and woman; both hold the history of the wind. Read the heart as geological terrain, as slip faults and slow persuasions, states of ecstatic disintegration and tectonic fate, angular unconformity, angle of response. The fierce bond between body and this piece of earth tells what rapture feels like, how it consumes and transforms us. (Meloy 255)

She blurs the lines between human, plant, and location through a shameless physical connection. Her connection with the earth, like Lou's, grows beyond intellect, beyond symbolism, becoming something not unlike our own sexual feelings: to touch, to hold, to be near, or to lie beside. This physical connection is poetic, energetically sexual, and sensual; it is not unlike loving touch, human intimacy, or beauty. It is rapturous and transformative. In the synchronization of her own rapturous longing with the longing-thirst of sandstone and cliffrose, she crosses an ontological line, crying out alongside the stone and petals, "quench me." She says that she is transformed because of her desires, but also because of her willingness to desire alongside and with the

desert itself. She is not separate, nor is she the same, but fluctuates and flows like the water that once shaped the thirsting landscape.

Lou and Meloy change because they embrace experiences that challenge ontological restrictions on sexuality and the divide between humans and non-human Others; they are thus able to find a degree of self-realization through relational exploration of the forbidden, and therefore make contact with the elusive unknown. It is not necessarily a need for sexuality that allows Meloy to be changed by desert flora like cliffrose, nor is sexual energy the definitive and euphoric catalyst in Lou's transmutation, but rather a lack of concern for the restrictive interdiction on human/non-human sexuality; they both possess a willingness to engage with the forbidden, to defy the divide between them and their world. They lack the immutable presumptions of difference that would prevent their transformations. It is the belief that "one's species rests on physical markers that are immutable" and that the categorical divide between humans and non-human Others is "grounded in a biological essence untouched by culture" that renders us "unable to explore the heterogeneity and fragmentation within each category" (Rudy 266). This fragmentation, or what I see as an ontological openness that creates potential, is evoked in Rudy's relationship with her dog family: one that changes her and makes her not only, or simply, human. For Rudy, this willful openness might be seen in the way she shares the same "emotional, financial, and daily life" with her dogs as she has with previous partners, each having their own meaning, neither inferior to the other, neither defined by the presence or lack of any specific genital act (261). For Meloy, the openness occurs in the synchronicity between her own desires and the plants and landscape of the Colorado desert. And for Lou, it is found alongside the bear, through forbidden touch and communion with him and the world around them:

> That night, lying clothed and tenderly beside him [the bear] by the fire, she was a babe, a child, an innocent. The loons' cries outside were sharp, and for her. The reeds rubbed against each other and sang her a song. Lapped in his fur, she was wrapped in a basket and caressed by little waves. The breath of kind beasts was upon her. She felt pain, but it was dear, sweet pain that belonged not to mental suffering, but to the earth. She smelled moss and clean northern flowers. Her skin was silk and the air around her was velvet. The pebbles in the night water gleamed with a beauty that was their own, not a

> jeweler's. She lay with him until the morning birds began to sing. (Engel 136)

Lou is here made new, but not different: a child, lover, and part of nature. Lou's pain is the earth's pain, and it is good pain. Her body is covered in beastly, kind breath. The fur of the bear holds her, rocks her in little waves as her forbidden pleasures awaken her to not just the bear's presence, but also the world around her. She moves differently now; she is a silky body against a velvet world, smooth like water, and content to be fragmented amidst it all.

The forbidden experiences that Lou has with the Bear enable her interactions with an unknowable non-human Other and demonstrate how narratives of the forbidden might imagine—even conjure—a more complex and transformative understanding of human and non-human relationships than the stories we usually allow ourselves. For the reader, *Bear* presents a counter-narrative to the dominant social norms that inscribe and constrain real world relationships, specifically those with the non-human beings who live alongside us. The limitations of anthropocentrism bar us from a deeper, more complex realizations of ourselves and the beings with whom we share this world. The ontological prohibitions that forbid us from deviating from 'the human' do not only foster negative effects, but also prevent positive change. *Bear* does not ask that the forbidden be done but imagined, that its experiential potential be felt through fiction. And because the forbidden is a human concept, it can be described by human language. Thus, forbidden stories—understood as narratives which skirt the elusive—might allow the reader to interact with the transformative qualities inherent in them, reaching out as far as our language can allow us, brushing the borders of the unknown; like Lou, we might feel in our pores and taste in our mouths and glimpse of what the world is for. Yet this is not a colonial attempt at possessing the unpossessed. Though such knowledge might only be received by humans because of its fictional literary medium, it still stands to benefit human and non-human beings alike by facilitating a complex relational connection that can empathetically bridge the gap caused by anthropocentricity, providing a perspective outside of our traditionally human-centred one.

I do not think I am alone in my frustration over the walls, old and new, that stand between all of us on this planet. When Lou says that "she did not know" what "passed" between them, I am not angry at her lack of knowledge because knowing *what* passed does not matter as

much as knowing that *something* did pass, that they did connect (Engel 137). The intentional contradiction between her cognitive knowledge and felt knowledge reflects the esoteric nature of the "elusive" and of relationships themselves. Truthfully, how many of us know what passes between us in a smile? In sex? In shared laughter or tears? Is there always a describable knowledge to it, or is the fact that something happens, and we can feel it, the important part? Perhaps the value in such forbidden stories is not found in their utility—what they can do for us as humans—but in how they generate more collective, complex, and meaningful relationships in all of our lives, between humans and the elusive Others of the world. The potential of such relationships, though they be fiction, is that they combine empathy and the forbidden to foster a sense of knowing "what the world [is] for" without the need to fit it within our own restrictive structures of human language and ideas, charting a path towards a less harmful and more understanding, even fulfilling, shared life (137).

MICHAEL ARTHUR THOMAS JR. graduated from Webster University in Spring 2021 with a B.A. in English Literature and a B.A. in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Michael would like to thank Dr. Karla Armbruster and Dr. Kate Parsons—and many friends and mentors—for encouraging academic exploration and accepting that time is relative, especially to them. Above all, Michael believes in a future produced by care and by active resistance to hate and oppression.

NOTES

1 An already blurring phrase—the bear's *cabin* is an assertion of property possession, but more so a claim that the *animal* bear is in possession of the *human* cabin.

2 It is interesting that Lou relaxes not when she hears a noise, but when she knows that it is not another human *and also* that it is the bear.

3 The scar also represents the unknowability of the bear itself—the elusive Other's defiance of absolute human comprehension. I expand on this in a later section discussing literality and symbolism in the novel.

4 The 1977 Bantam Seal reprinting from publisher McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Ltd. This specific cover, re-popularized as a meme on

Imgur in 2014, ignited new interest in the book. The original posting, titled "WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK, CANADA," involves casual public reactions that make fun of, criticize, and condemn the novel (and by proxy, Canadian literature). One line from the post reads: "the most fucked up romance novel in existence."

5 The Globe and Mail published a piece, entitled "Why there'snew interest in the book 'Bear': Irony, sly humour (and the bear sex)" and written by John Semley, which discusses public reactions to the text amidst the internet-driven renewed interest following the aforementioned viral meme on *Imgur*.

WORKS CITED

Alexisdanaan. "WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK, CANADA?" *Imgur*, 8 July 2014, www.imgur.com/gallery/uf3YE. Accessed 8 Oct. 2020.

Engel, Marian. *Bear*. 1976. McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1993.

Garrard, Greg. "Bestial Humans and Sexual Animals: Zoophilia in Law and Literature." *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human*, edited by Michael Lundblad, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, pp. 211–35.

Meloy, Ellen. "A Field Guide to Brazen Harlotry." *The Anthropology of Turquoise: Meditations on Landscape, Art, and Spirit*, Vintage, 2002, pp. 221–55.

Rudy, Kathy. "LGBTQ . . . Z?" *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, edited by Raja Halwani et al., 7th ed., Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2017, pp. 257–72.

Sandilands, Catriona. *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Semley, John. "Why there's new interest in the book 'Bear': Irony, sly humour (and the bear sex)." *The Globe and Mail*. 8 Aug. 2014, www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/why-the-new-interest-in-bear-its-irony-and-sly-humour-and-the-bear-sex/article19973451/. Accessed 8 Oct. 2020.

Shapiro, Kenneth, and Marion W. Copeland. "Toward a Critical Theory of Animal Issues in Fiction." *Society and Animals*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2012, pp. 343–46. *ResearchGate*, doi:10.1163/156853005774653636.

Art, Labor, and Masculinity in the Poetry of B.H. Fairchild

Patrick J. Wohlscheid, College of Charleston

"Leonardo whistles a *canzone* and imagines / a lathe: bit, and treadle, the gleam of glass," B. H. Fairchild ends the last and titular poem of his third collection, *The Art of the Lathe* (ll. 67–68). The closing lines exemplify many of Fairchild's poetic obsessions: the dichotomy of mind and body, the poetry of labor, and the often-surprising places where beauty might be found. In fact, these themes are exactly what make the work of Fairchild a perfect illustration of a much larger discussion in American poetry. Fairchild's challenges to and reimaginings of masculinity, in a variety of contexts, have produced some of the most fertile areas of scholarly and artistic inquiry. For contemporary American poets, it seems that identifying and detangling the connections between masculinity, American identity, and artistic creation is not only an interpretive act, but an expression of aesthetic and political autonomy. As a poet writing from the last decades of the twentieth century on, B.H. Fairchild might be seen as an early explorer of the links between masculinity, class, and aesthetic value. Through a vivid combination of real and imagined narrative seen most clearly in the poems "Beauty," "The Machinist, Teaching His Daughter to Play Piano," and "The Art of the Lathe," Fairchild provides the reader with a consistently subverted picture of both "high" culture and regional working-class identity, interrogating the complex roles that masculinity, class, and sexuality play in the creation of different conceptions of art and beauty.

As a narrative poet, Fairchild's own life greatly informs the subjects of his poetry and its overarching themes. Several short pieces on Fairchild reveal the importance of biography on his work, and each emphasizes duality as key. Fairchild's early life was one of seeming

contradictions, most notably through growing up in a working-class household but constantly pursuing art and culture that might be considered "high-brow," including the classics of the fine arts, music, and literature. This central dichotomy clearly informs Fairchild's most celebrated collection, *The Art of the Lathe*, where "the world of the machinist repeatedly interfaces with experiences of music and art in the poems from this collection" (Frank 194). The machinist's world, drawn from his father's profession as a lathe machinist, can be generalized as the larger regional class-centric identity of the rural Midwest where Fairchild grew up. Sense of place, which is essential for Fairchild's connection between class-based masculinity and art, is primarily conveyed through narrative form, or what has been previously described as "memagination" (Mason 251). "Memagination" is an apt term for his poetic style, as it captures the combination of real and imagined narratives that are so influential in teasing out Fairchild's philosophical themes and emphasizing historical and contemporary parallels. More central to the discussion of masculinity, class, and art, though, is the breadth of Fairchild's education. It is easy to see the depths of his literary, philosophical, and artistic knowledge simply by reading *The Art of The Lathe.* From Plato and Aristotle to Rilke's *The Book of Hours* and the sketches of Théodore-Edmond Plumier, Fairchild forces us to consider these cultural traditions not as the antithesis of the masculine working-class culture of rural Kansas, but as a part of it. Fairchild himself is a synthesis of these supposed contradictions.

The false opposition between beauty defined as "highbrow" culture and beauty as the memory and familiarity of rural life is clearly presented in the first lines of one of the central poems in the collection, "Beauty":

> "We are at the Bargello in Florence, and she says,
> *what are you thinking*? and I say, *beauty*, thinking
> of how very far we are now from the machine shop
> and the dry fields of Kansas. . . " (ll. 1–4)

This raises many questions. Do these lines mean that beauty is *only* found at the Bargello, or is the real beauty back at the machine shop and the beautiful but harsh natural landscape of Kansas, or some combination of both? The matter is further complicated by the introduction of masculinity in the poem, and its vexed relationship to beauty.

Reflecting on the word "beauty," Fairchild realizes that he has never heard any male relative use "this word in my hearing or anyone else's except / in reference, perhaps, to a new pickup or dead deer" (ll. 12–13). This dramatic realization leads Fairchild to further reflect on his own relationship to beauty, both the word and concept. While in the eyes of Fairchild's peers there might be beauty in the world, it must be relegated to heavily coded cultural objects associated with working-class masculinity. And with this realization in mind, Fairchild's personal relationship to beauty throughout the poem—closer to the art museum than the corn fields—becomes all the more separated from the cultural environment of his childhood and presents a different picture of masculinity than that of his male relatives.

When discussing this rural working-class masculinity in relation to beauty, it seems that Fairchild is referring to what scholars have termed as "hegemonic masculinity": a particular manifestation of gendered attitudes and behaviors that suppresses and even oppresses other masculinities and femininities. Ava Baron chronicles the creation of this specific masculinity in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American and British workplaces, where increasing industrialization put a great deal of emphasis on the physical body in labor, as opposed to the skill and artisanship of the individual craftsman, and prioritizes "toughness, physical strength, aggressiveness, and risk" (146–47). The power of such masculinity is clear when thinking about rural American life in general, but several complications arise when considered in relation to the lathe machinists of Fairchild's poetry. The lathe machinists rightly view their work as requiring individual skill and artisanship, but they still subscribe to the idea that masculinity is affirmed in physicality and aggressive behavior and refuse to acknowledge "beauty" as a part of their lives.

This connection between working-class masculinity, the lathe machinists, and art is teased out in several poems, specifically "The Machinist, Teaching His Daughter to Play Piano" and "The Art of the Lathe." Both poems explicitly link fine art and classical music with the status of the lathe machinists, a connection that, as we have seen, the lathe machinists might resist themselves. It is another false contradiction that the lathe machinists, associated with a lower class, cannot possibly engage in what many consider highbrow culture. In the former poem, Fairchild leads with juxtapositions. He depicts images of a father's hands laboring over the piano, immediately shifting to his gritty work at the lathe and his daughter attempts to play the instrument by

copying each of his motions. These juxtaposed elements, father and piano, father and lathe, daughter and piano, all embody the interconnectivity of gender, art, and class. Physical labor and artistic labor—the act of making music—all converge in "The Machinist" as "the keyboard / moves like a lathe" (ll. 23–24). When father and daughter interact in the final stanzas, this fact is realized with "something created between them . . . a master of lathes, a student of music" (l. 30). Here, confronted with the similarity of art to labor and the unique connection that art creates between individuals, the machinist father's very identity as a male and as a laborer is challenged. Furthermore, the catalyst for this masculinity in crisis is a symbol very much antithetical to the archetype of the rugged male: a young girl. The daughter is shown to be on the precipice of a musical education more complex than what her father might be able to provide as she carefully tries to pronounce the names of Chopin, Mozart, and Scarlatti. I see this divide as not only the typical idea of the child surpassing the parent, or the student overtaking the master, but as a symbol for the cultural barriers to art that the father is unable to break. But the daughter's musical education, just like Fairchild's, associated with highbrow culture and traditional conceptions of beauty, is presumably more appropriate for a young girl. An embrace of this type of beauty by the father might be just as quickly frowned upon based on his class and gender identity.

The aforementioned "The Art of the Lathe" presents a similar picture of the relationship between aesthetic value and masculine labor but in a blended personal and historical context. The poem depicts Fairchild's father and fellow craftsmen as situated in a long line of lathe machinists, an artistic and historical lineage. From Leonardo da Vinci's invention of the lathe to Plumier's *L'art de tourner en perfection,* Fairchild makes it clear that the craft of the lathe has been intricately connected to the notion of beauty that is so alien to its contemporary practitioners. Fairchild focuses on the story of a young lathe apprentice depicted in Diderot's *Encyclopaedia,* a character who could be seen as a stand-in for the poet himself. The boy imagines Leonardo da Vinci as an apprentice himself, "staring through the window at Brunelleschi's dome" (l. Fairchild 49). This imagining, besides reinforcing the historical importance of the lathe itself, connects the fine arts of the Renaissance to the art of lathe work. In this way, the boy, and later Fairchild himself, are able to recognize things like classical art and music as beautiful, even when their material environments encourage them not to. The synthesis of these two ideas in Fairchild's

personal life is revealed only lines later as he connects thinking of Mozart to the sounds of Patsy Cline's song, "I Fall to Pieces," playing in the machinist's shop (ll. 42–43). By comparing and connecting the classical and modern, the high- and middle-brow, Fairchild reinforces again that traditional beauty and the figure of the masculine craftsman are not at all oppositional. In the final lines, this image is reversed, with an imagined Leonardo da Vinci "whistl[ing] a *canzone* and imagines / a lathe: bit, and treadle, the gleam of glass" (ll. 67–68). In this image, we now see that at some point, the labor of the lathe machinist might have been more explicitly linked to classical and modern ideals of beauty. But in time, from Leonardo to Fairchild, changing ideas of masculinity have severed the lathe machinist's connection to art.

Fairchild's exploration of aesthetics through working-class masculinity does not simply end with imagery of the rough and aggressive male laborer, but it also addresses male sexuality as an integral part of that identity. In "Beauty," the narrator recalls a time when two young drifters came into town and were hired by his father to work in the shop. One day, he walks into the shop and finds the men standing naked, caught in a voyeuristic act. He contrasts the paleness and fragility of their bodies to the hardness of the machinery, seemingly acknowledging a non-hegemonic masculinity working against the masculinity tied to the lathe. The retribution against this queer act is swift, as another worker walks in and is gripped with "a kind / of terror on his face, an animal wildness" (ll. 139–140). Besides the explicit and starkly erotic imagery of man and metal, the scene is tense with violence as the worker threatens to beat the two men with a tire iron. Though he is stopped by Fairchild's father, the men are cast out of the shop and presumably the town. Even Fairchild's father, who is not as violent as the other worker, can barely contain his utter disapproval towards homoeroticism. This disapproval is pervasive in the poem, as earlier the father leaves a dining room quickly after a relative uses the word "lovely" in relation to a centerpiece (l. 39). Even the word lovely, perfectly normal in everyday conversation, is a signifier of queerness, and by extension immorality, for Fairchild's father. Fairchild himself is not immune to this conditioning, assuming in his youth that it would be easy to assume that two intellectuals having a discussion on the nature of beauty must be gay. Because of his working-class environment and its ties to hegemonic masculinity, Fairchild thought it natural to associate "beauty" as a concept with homosexuality. While we can see that Fairchild as poet and narrator has gotten past these prejudices,

they still play a prominent role in the lives of his relatives and peers. If previous poems challenged working-class masculinity by acts of artistic beauty, these scenes force men like Fairchild's father and the aforementioned angry worker to confront sexuality as it is associated with work and maleness.

Ava Baron, taking the phrase from Michael Kimmel's groundbreaking *Manhood in America,* refers to this intersection of sexuality and masculinity in the workplace as the "homosociality" of labor, where men look to other men for validation in their gender identity, sometimes through coded or explicit homoerotic acts (151). In light of this theory, we have even more clarity on Fairchild's narrative of voyeurism in the gritty setting of the machine shop. The narrative of the naked workers is not only unsettling because it is strange or completely divorced from the idea of the working-class man, but also because the "normal" lathe machinists like Fairchild's father and his coworker must confront a deeply repressed aspect of the masculinity that they form much of their identity around. The poem, in its third section, returns to the present moment in Florence, with Fairchild's wife asking again about what he is thinking. Fairchild responds by recounting the moment he found out about the angry worker, Bobby Sudduth's, death by a self-inflicted gunshot. He thinks of it as similar to what the death of Hart Crane—a gay modernist poet—was described as, "*a terrible kind of beauty*" (l. 195). This line, associating beauty with masculinity, and queerness, and death is both profoundly poetic and key to understanding the connections that Fairchild references. It underscores the supposed contradictions in the poem's narrative and disrupts them. Fairchild realizes, in several moments of clarity, that his particular conception of beauty is shaped by his childhood environment with its physical masculinity and working-class roots. The discovery, as the life and death of Bobby Sudduth implies, is not one to be taken lightly, and it is certainly not a coincidence that Bobby was one of the only other male characters in the poem to refer to "beauty" at all.

As I mentioned earlier, the critical examination of art through the lens of class and gender difference is not unique to B.H. Fairchild, but is a thematic preoccupation with many contemporary American poets. Tony Hoagland, a poet somewhat similar to Fairchild in narrative style and inspiration, writes that the growth of masculinity as a topic of discussion is an entirely positive thing, as it allows poets to "coherently represent the emotional life of men . . . in all its ambivalence and complexity" (76). Many of the same themes that Fairchild and Hoagland

emphasize are utilized by poets of a similar generation, such as Terrance Hayes and Ocean Vuong, exploring the intersections of race and queerness with beauty and masculinity, respectively ("Hayes"). Class, though, should not be ignored as a part of such a narrative and poetic tradition that Fairchild exemplifies. We can look to other poets like Philip Levine for the treatment of art, narrative, and identity in working-class environments ("Levine").

This intersectionality, in essence, is the practical point of discussions on masculinity, class, and beauty prompted by Fairchild's poetry in *The Art of the Lathe.* Since its beginnings, poetry has been tied to certain cultural norms about gender identity and class. In the Renaissance and Reformation tradition that Fairchild references, poetry was a male-dominated and elite activity, with other literary forms like the closet drama and amatory fiction often produced by women. In twentieth-century American literary culture, of which Fairchild is a part, poetry seems to carry a feminine connotation, whereas the image of the masculine novelist gained cultural traction. From this, it is plain to see that not only aesthetic tastes around literature change through time and place, but also the way we think about gender and class in relation to art. In Fairchild's poetry, we are presented with a particularly influential idea of masculinity that is inextricably linked with working-class ideals and environments. Fairchild beautifully depicts this tradition, but also brings to the surface its contradictions, presenting an alternate version of aesthetic value that broadens the possibilities for art and preserves working-class roots without its oppressive masculinity.

PATRICK WOHLSCHEID is a rising Senior at the College of Charleston majoring in Philosophy and English. He is primarily interested in aesthetics and 19th century literature and is the Managing Editor for Miscellany literary and art magazine. His next projects will be focusing on the connections between Victorian Gothic literature and philosophy, and the aesthetics of style in the English Renaissance. After college, he hopes to attend graduate school in the humanities.

WORKS CITED

Baron, Ava. "Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 69, 2006, pp. 143–60.

Fairchild, B. H. *The Art of the Lathe*. Alice James Books, 2015.

Frank, Rebecca Morgan. "About B. H. Fairchild." *Ploughshares*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2008, pp. 192–97.

"Hayes, Terrance." *MacArthur Fellows Program*, MacArthur Foundation, 17 Sept. 2014, www.macfound.org/fellows/915/.

Hoagland, Tony, and Max Fierst. "Tony Hoagland on Masculinity and Being an American Poet." *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, vo. 32, 1999, pp. 74–80.

"Levine, Philip." *Poets*, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/philip-levine.

Mason, David. "Memory and Imagination in the Poetry of B. H. Fairchild." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 115, no. 2, 2007, pp. 251–63.

Maynard, Steven. "Queer Musings on Masculinity and History." *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 42, 1998, pp. 183–97.

The Awful Power to Punish: Reevaluating Audience Engagement in the Face of Interactive Cinema

Sabrina Zanello Jackson, Carnegie Mellon University

"For years I have searched for a unique way whereby a motion picture audience could actually decide the climax of a picture. I have found such a way," director William Castle boldly announced in the trailer for the 1961 horror film, *Mr. Sardonicus* (Castle). The picture follows Baron Sardonicus, who threatens to harm his wife if a prominent medical doctor fails to treat the baron's bizarre facial disfigurement. At the conclusion of the film, the director leaves the fate of Mr. Sardonicus in the hands of the audience through the "Punishment Poll" (Burgos). Quoth the movie poster, "In the spirit of foul play," each audience member held up a white card; on one side, a thumbs up to show mercy, and on the other, a thumbs down to doom the Baron. Although the director unequivocally stated that he shot a "mercy" ending, that alternative was never chosen in theaters and evidence suggests that it never existed (Burgos). Still, the fact that movie-goers at least possessed the illusion of choice was a revolutionary experience. *Mr. Sardonicus* marked the first film in the brief history of interactive cinema, a forthcoming field that has yet to burst into full bloom. The emergent genre of interactive cinema is salient and capable of entirely transforming conventional cinematic theory. By comparing the development of interactive cinema to traditional film theory and examining the potentialities of future technologies, the unprecedented assets of this new field can be revealed, garnering further insight into the question: how does the introduction of choice change the relationship between creators and spectators?

Cinema, as it is familiarly conceptualized, is an experience typified by passivity for the collective audience and agency for the filmmakers.

A mass of movie-goers sits silently in the dark, lending all of their senses to the images on screen, which have been crafted with complete control by the film creators. Interactive cinema follows the conventions of traditional filmmaking, with the addition of "Choose Your Own Adventure" aspirations. The movie genre is singularized by non-linear storytelling in which the spectator has the ability to direct the course of the film through choices at specific intervals. While the genre has been dismissed in the past due to less-than-successful productions, recent advances in the technological landscape are proving that interactive cinema is a force to be reckoned with, capable of deconstructing elitist barriers between mass culture and autonomous artistic innovation. By giving the spectator the power to choose, interactive cinema has the unparalleled potential to build an equitable and autonomous dialogue between creators and spectators and to hold audiences accountable for their complicity as consumers.

NOTIONS OF INTERACTIVITY, AGENCY, AND IMMERSION IN TRADITIONAL FILM THEORY

The predominant theoretical frame of cinema praises a feudalist relationship between spectator and creator. Historically, cinema has evaded conventions that spark interaction, favoring a deep segregation between those who make movies and those who watch movies; it is a transaction with only one party providing a service. Many film critics have attributed this relationship to the effects of "mass culture," which is a set of ideas and values that develop from a common exposure. This concept stems from the origins of cinema, when film was considered a working-class medium controlled by populism. In "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," German sociologists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer scorned popular culture for reducing the audience to a "sphere of 'amateurs'"— passive, consuming populace, not unlike sheep going to fodder (96). Similar to the brainless-sheep metaphor, German film theorist Siegfried Kracauer paints movie-goers as "dope addicts" in his essay entitled "The Spectator," warning his readers that the movies employ "stupefying effects" to induce "lowered consciousness" on the viewer (3). Because the movie-goer relinquishes control and takes on "the position of a hypnotized person" (Kracauer 4), they open themselves up to accept information blindly.

"Mass culture" is the cause of an unfortunate cycle in cinema, where what is consumed by the most people is deemed the most popu-

lar and thus increases the production of material regardless of its quality. When this next round of film is produced, this becomes the baseline of film knowledge for the public (meaning the population that lacks scholarly backgrounds in film and its theory) and results in the pool of what could be deemed "popular" narrowing even more, perpetuating a horrid circuit. Film critic Pauline Kael posits that cinematic "trash" desensitizes audiences to what other possibilities exist and "limits our range of aesthetic response" (11). Kael recognizes that the establishment of this "terrible conformist culture" is bipartisan, as it depends on the naivety of the general public and the commercial film industry's lust to prey upon it for the sake of "slick, stale, rotting pictures [making] money" (11).

Despite the majority of conventional film theory supporting the notion that film is a middle-class medium, some film scholars are chipping away at this notion, providing a more optimistic outlook on audience engagement in film. While mass culture "may poison us collectively" (Kael 11), Kael firmly believes that the individual can still maintain personal beliefs. Because interactive film allows audience members to guide the path of a film, it supports this personal autonomy and could help ensure that minority responses to cinema are heard. The personal autonomy in interactive film could prevent mass culture from "cramp[ing] and limit[ing] opportunities for artists" (11), as even one film could involve various genres, multiple plot lines, and could convey numerous messages simultaneously.

Director Martin Scorsese and critic Susan Sontag argue that the audience is in fact not passive, but rather has some agency and participatory sensibility through the going-to-the-movies experience. Scorsese recalls personal anecdotes of "experiencing something fundamental together" with his family at the movies, while Sontag comments on how "people took movies into themselves." By translating the abstract togetherness of a trip to the movies, the authors highlight cinema's magical ability to be a cultural nexus. They recognize not only how cinema builds a sense of community among audience members, but how it can build a relationship between creators and spectators. Sontag reminisces about the golden days of 1950s cinema, where movie-goers used a weekly visit to the theater to learn "how to walk, to smoke, to kiss, to fight, to grieve" (Sontag). It is a channel of absorption, and one that in fact works both ways, as Scorsese notes how the images flickering on a screen maintain an "ongoing dialogue" with life (Scorsese).

Interactive film could take autonomous artistic dialogue to the next level by placing the spectator and creator on more equal footing. In traditional film theory, the synthesis of aesthetics, actions, and themes is mostly accomplished through the editorial decisions of the filmmakers. Adorno and Horkheimer analogize the dialogue between artist and spectator to the emerging technologies of their time. While the telephone represents an equitable two-way exchange, the radio "democratically makes everyone equally into listeners, in order to expose them in authoritarian fashion to the same programs put out by different stations," (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). This dynamic robs the audience of their voice and their critical thinking, or, as Martin Scorsese would put it, their inference. Inference is the audience's ability to make connections and generate a third "image in the mind's eye" from various images presented in a film (Scorsese). The most common form of this element is the cut, where two or more separate shots are displayed in direct succession, creating a larger cinematic world for the audience to deduce. Inference is cinema's most direct display of synthesis. Interactive film brings inference to a whole new level because the spectator acts as the editor. The viewer has the opportunity to actively evaluate possible decisions and their outcomes, mapping out character and plot arcs as the movie unfolds. By placing the responsibility of choosing in the viewer's hand, interactive film gives audiences a "mechanism of reply" (Horkheimer and Adorno 96). Since both the filmmakers and spectators have a stake in the production of a story, interactive cinema can potentially spin more complex, sophisticated, and mind-bending storylines.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIVE CINEMA

The history of interactive cinema is brief yet burgeoning. A substantial portion of past evaluations of interactive cinema have been highly cynical, positing that the field died out in its infancy. This is supported by its history, as available technology limited production costs, artistic goals, and public accessibility. However, this does not prognosticate the genre's future, and regarding the failures of its past is an important step towards identifying its strengths. By outlining the historical and technological aspects of the following key interactive films, it will become clear that these films point to a new paradigm for spectator engagement.

Six years after *Mr. Sardonicus*, the Czechoslovakian dark comedy *Kinoautomat* premiered at Expo 67 in Montreal, marking the first interactive movie where the audience made choices via technology (Gagnon and Marchessault 3). The production took place in a custom-built cinema, with buttons installed on each of the 127 seats, one green and one red (Burgos). The interactive element was achieved by switching a lens cap between two synchronized projectors, each with a different cut of the film (Gagnon and Marchessault 3). The plot of *Kinoautomat* was designed so that the dual paths ultimately converged at the same juncture, rather than exponentially growing paths at each of the nine decision points (Burgos). While it may seem disappointing that all the choices ultimately funneled into the same conclusion, in which a man's apartment catches fire, the audience's joy stemmed more from observing the various scenarios come to life. Similar to Mr. Sardonicus, the simple presence of choice meant more to the audience than its effects.

Despite the revolutionary achievement of *Kinoautomat* at Expo 67, the module did not immediately take off in Czechoslovakia nor Hollywood. Rather, the 70s and 80s featured a shift away from interactive footage for cinema to interactive footage for video games. The cinematic endeavor resurfaced in 1992 with the premier of *I'm Your Man*. This twenty-minute film holds the title (a slight misnomer) of the world's first interactive film (Zonana). The $370,000 production is a crime-comedy where the audience picks one of three choices that flash on-screen by hitting a color-coordinated button (Burgos). The short length of the film and the focus on the new production process needed to manifest multiple story paths led to less focus on aesthetic outputs and character development. *Mr. Payback*, a movie where audience members choose how a cyborg should punish bullies and thugs (Burgos), followed three years later and continued to ignore aesthetic goals for interactive cinema. Film critic Roger Ebert gave the film a pitiful half star, claiming that:

> Nothing on Earth could induce me to sit through every permutation of Mr. Payback. . . It is just that this is not a movie. It is mass psychology run wild, with the mob zealously pummeling their buttons, careening downhill toward the sleaziest common denominator. (Ebert)

Despite the shallow, commercial intentions of the film, *Mr. Payback*

did offer a new interpretation of the expected behavior of a collective audience. As the film reel began to roll, an announcer encouraged the audience to "feel free to generally behave as if you were raised in a barn" (Ebert). While conventional film theory posits that to truly understand a film the audience must be a silent observer, "absorbing" film in the dark (Sontag), the makers of *Mr. Payback* seem to argue that to truly understand a film is to engage and respond to it actively. As such, interactive film has the power to advance the movie-going experience so that it involves animated audience members on the edge of their seats, rather than submissive "dope addicts" (Kracauer 3).

I'm Your Man and *Mr. Payback* both required specialty screening equipment and joysticks to be played, which cost each enterprising movie theater $70,000 to install—an investment that they did not get a return on, as the enormous costs of the projects and lack of appeal from film critics failed to see the genre catch on (Burgos). A few attempts were made at interactive cinema over the years, but it was not until 2016 that modern technology announced its aptitude for interactivity. *Late Shift* was an action interactive film surrounding a simple plot of mob entanglement, which was originally presented in European cinemas and was later produced on gaming systems such as PS4 and Nintendo Switch, indicating, how the element of choice was still being depicted with an absence of artistry, making it more suitable as a cinematic game than a game-like film (Burgos). Still, the film introduced another meta-cinematic feat of the interactive module by tying the act of choice into the genre of the film. The audience could feel more immersed in the adrenaline-packed action movie as the movie did not pause for the audience to debate their options, raising the stakes under the philosophy that no decision is also a decision (Burgos). Therefore, it is arguable that the introduction of interactivity into action films could help counteract the process of desensitization that has taken hold of audiences in the twenty-first century, where action seems ubiquitous.

CINEMA'S UPCOMING TECHNOLOGIES AND NEW THEORETICAL PARADIGM

2019 featured a game changer. When Netflix approached the *Black Mirror* team about producing an interactive story, they were originally apprehensive. Producer Annabel Jones expressed that they were only interested "if it was adding an extra layer thematically" and "didn't want it to feel like a gimmick" (Netflix). So, when creator Charlie Brooker came upon an inspiring subject and reevaluated the oppor-

tunity, the world's first artfully-motivated interactive film was born. Brooker wrote *Bandersnatch,* a stand-alone film for the anthology series where young game designer Stefan attempts to code a choose-your-own-adventure game, while viewers meta-cinematically choose Stefan's adventure. Although the film is not revolutionary in that the genre of interactive film was already established, the film stood out for its aesthetics and better accessibility. Netflix's new technology means that cinema's definition no longer depends upon the spectator's collective experience, as these films can be played on any screen with any number of audience members. Modern filmmaking technology and standards, and the budget security of the *Black Mirror* franchise gave the creators the security to focus on creating the film with ingenious cinematography, artistic storytelling, and intense character development. While Brooker "went into the project assuming it would require twice the amount of effort for a typical *Black Mirror* episode," he came out likening it "to doing four episodes at the same time," and this speaks volumes to the incredible opportunity Netflix's new interactive technology provided (McHenry). Brooker's *Bandersnatch* represents not only a bright future for the genre, but a new theoretical paradigm by which to navigate contemporary media terrains.

Interactive cinema has the capacity to make spectators more aware of themselves and their decision-making skills. Traditional film theory posits, as Siegfried Kracauer explains, that cinema contains "the pulse of life itself"; a pulse that the masses cannot help but give themselves "up to its overwhelming abundance so immeasurably superior to our imagination" (12). In other words, audiences use movies to live through characters and see themselves on screen. Interactive cinema takes this vicarious relationship one step further because the spectator is able to make decisions for the protagonist rather than just judge their decision-making. Thus, the spectator transforms from a passive observer to an active participant, more immersed and engaged in the storyline.

Interactive cinema also has the power to highlight the role of the spectator on a darker level. In traditional film theory, Pauline Kael posits that "perhaps the single most intense pleasure of movie-going is this non-aesthetic one of escaping from the responsibilities of having the proper responses required of us" (7). While movies may be pleasurable because they permit "unsupervised enjoyment," that very escapism is highly problematic (Kael 7). Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey discusses how the detached communication between filmmakers and audiences permits audiences to engage in voyeurism, the practice of

gaining pleasure (often power-based) from watching others on screen. The "mass of mainstream film" seems to unfold "indifferent to the presence of the audience" and suggests plausible deniability (Mulvey 2). This perpetuates the idea that voyeurism is appropriate in real life. Because interactive cinema calls upon audience members to actively respond to images, they are more likely to notice whether their own behavior is immoral. Mulvey also blames the "extreme darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another)" for the promotion of voyeuristic separation, but interactive cinema presents a solution for this as well (2). No longer will the dark theater be a place "where nothing is asked of us and we are left alone" (Kael 7). If an interactive film were to be shown at a public venue, the act of everyone choosing film paths and sitting in anticipation as the votes tally up would foster a sense of community and counteract the spectator-separation that the darkness of the theater promotes, thus eliminating the idea in the viewer's mind that the theater lies outside of societal regulations.

Interactive cinema can make spectators take responsibility and be complicit in their viewing experience. *Mr. Sardonicus*, *Bandersnatch*, and *You vs. Wild* dangle the awful power to punish above the audience, beckoning the darkness of the human psyche to reveal itself. In the trailer for *Mr. Sardonicus*, William Castle references historical instances of mob mentality to illustrate how collectively-determined punitive justice is not new. Each spectating mass had its own gruesome weapon by which to wield fate: Western cowboys had the noose, French revolutionaries had the guillotine, and Ancient Romans had the "thumbs down" sign, not unlike the Punishment Poll cards that ushers handed out at the screenings of *Mr. Sardonicus* (Castle). These real-life instances warn the audience that their input on a film has actual consequences and should not be taken lightly, yet the accompanying smile on the director's face mirrors the undeniable curiosity of the audience: *how far can we go?*

Bandersnatch deliberately toys with this perverse curiosity, forcing the viewer down pathways of more psychological torture for the protagonist; "the more Stefan suffers, the longer you keep playing" (McHenry). The five major *Bandersnatch* endings are quantified by the rating that Stefan's choose-your-own-adventure video game ultimately receives. Unfortunately for Stefan, the ratings and Stefan's wellbeing have an inverse relationship, which subtly communicates to the viewer that there is a way to 'win' the movie. When Stefan works with a dependable software team, the game flops with no stars; when he murders

and chops up his father, the game receives a raving five out of five. Spectators are forced to pit human decency against ambition with nasty results that leave viewers feeling grossly complicit. The *Black Mirror* stand-alone comments on the human competitive spirit and how its hunger can surpass all other values. What starts out as harmless toying (even teasing Stefan with the knowledge that he is being controlled by "someone on Netflix") turns into the gruesome sacrifice of mental health for creativity—and the blood is on the remote (*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*).

Netflix set a metacinematic precedent with *Bandersnatch* for testing the human capacity to harm others. In *You vs. Wild*, viewers join Bear Grylls in world-wide survival adventures and have the chance to make decisions for the famed adventurer. While the premise of the show suggests the same "mass psychology run wild" effect of *Mr. Payback*, its interactive modality highlights more pressing sociological implications: many viewers enter *You vs. Wild* with the strong intent of killing Bear Grylls (Ebert). One journalist described the series as "a tempting beast" with a ridiculous sense of humor; the seat of divine power being "you, the twisted person controlling his actions from your couch" (Surrey). While the actual content is a survivalist play-by-play, this meta-commentary speaks existentially to the human obsession with drama and its apparent sibling, death. The introduction of choice transforms the spectator's omniscient perspective from invisible to divine, provoking philosophical boundaries about manipulation, control, and what it means to play God.

CONCLUSION

Overall, introducing choice threatens to completely upset conventional cinematic theory and establish a new relationship between spectators and creators, unconcerned with hierarchy and ecstatic about egalitarian dialogue. Interactive cinema represents the newest "what if" in the film industry, capable of tackling philosophical queries through the ongoing conversation between filmmakers and consumers. Although the genre has a young and scruffy reputation, the failures of past interactive filmmakers have only enticed more creatives to take up the challenge, and new technology is making the film mode easier to make and easier to access. Although the concept is new, it has fascinating implications for the film studies field at large, especially given emergent technologies. The future of interactive cinema is as open and unpredictable as the multiple plot paths that it presents. Whatever it may bring,

what matters is not what one is given, but rather what one chooses to do with the gift.

SABRINA ZANELLO JACKSON is a senior at Carnegie Mellon University pursuing a B.F.A. in Dramaturgy and a minor in Literature and Culture. She is most drawn to stories of liberation and joy that are unafraid to break literary "rules." After graduation, she hopes to work as a dramaturg and community organizer in the non-profit arts sector. In her "free time," Sabrina enjoys painting with her mom, nature walks, and research rabbit-holes.

WORKS CITED

Burgos, Danielle. "A Brief History of Interactive Film." *The End Run*, Endcrawl, 25 June 2019.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch. Directed by David Spade, screenplay by Charlie Brooker, House of Tomorrow and Netflix, 2018. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/title/80988062. Accessed 2 June 2019.

Castle, William. "Mr. Sardonicus - Movie Trailer (1961)." *YouTube*, uploaded by Terror Movie Trailers, 5 Nov. 2011, youtu.be/LVZpgMdQShc.

Ebert, Roger. "Mr. Payback Movie Review & Film Summary." *RogerEbert.com*, 17 Feb. 1995, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mr-payback-1995. Accessed 11 June 2019.

Gagnon, Monika, and Janine Marchessault. *Reimagining Cinema: Film at Expo 67*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014..

Grylls, Bear, Robert Buchta, and Delbert Shoopman, creators. *You vs. Wild.* Bear Grylls Ventures and Electus, 2019. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/title/80227574. Accessed 15 June 2019.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, 2020, pp. 94–136, doi:10.1515/9780804788090-007.

I'm Your Man. Directed by Bob Bejan, Loew's Theaters, 1992.

Kael, Pauline. "Trash, Art, and the Movies." *Harper's Magazine*, 1 Feb. 1969, pp. 65–83.

Kinoautomat. Directed by Radúz Cincera, Ján Roháč, and Vladimír

Svitácek, produced by Ladislav Kalas, 1967.
Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Spectator." *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton UP, 1998, pp. 157–72.
Late Shift. Directed by Tobias Weber, CtrlMovie and Wales Interactive, 2016.
McHenry, Jackson. "Black Mirror: Bandersnatch Is Hard to Watch, But It Was Almost Impossible to Make." *Vulture*, 17 Jan. 2019, www.vulture.com/2019/01/how-black-mirror-bandersnatch-was-made.html#_ga=2.242385602.1505367436.1623870292-1597691984.1623870292. Accessed 16 June 2019.
Mitchell, Alex, et al. *Interactive Storytelling 7th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling, ICIDS 2014, Singapore, Singapore, November 3-6, 2014, Proceedings*. Springer International Publishing, 2014, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-12337-0.
Mr. Payback: An Interactive Movie. Directed by Bob Gale, Interfilm Technologies, 1995.
Mr. Sardonicus. Directed by William Castle, William Castle Productions, 1961.
Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 833–44.
Netflix. "Black Mirror: Bandersnatch | Featurette: Tech [HD] | Netflix." *YouTube*, 3 Jan. 2019, youtu.be/zBsh7Byu044.
Scorsese, Martin. "The Persisting Vision: Reading the Language of Cinema." *New York Review of Books*, vol. 60, no. 13, NEW YORK REVIEW, 15 Aug. 2013, www-nybooks-com.cmu.idm.oclc.org/articles/2013/08/15/persisting-vision-reading-language-cinema/. Accessed 2 June 2019.
Sontag, Susan. "The Decay of Cinema." *The New York Times Magazine*, The New York Times Company, 25 Feb. 1996, www.nytimes.com/1996/02/25/magazine/the-decay-of-cinema.html. Accessed 28 May 2019.
Surrey, Miles. "I Tried to Kill Bear Grylls." *The Ringer*, The Ringer, 11 Apr. 2019, www.theringer.com/tv/2019/4/11/18305706/. Accessed 15 June 2019.
Zonana, Victor F. "COLUMN ONE: This Movie Requires a Pistol Grip: 'I'm Your Man,' Billed as the First Truly Interactive Motion Picture, Debuts. Technologists See the Future. Kids

Go Wild. Our Man Has His Own Ideas: Home Edition." *The Los Angeles Times*, Tribune Interactive, LLC, 1992.