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## Literary Undergraduate Research


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# Japanese Tanka Poetry and the Sublimity of the Mundane

Eleanor Brown, Ohio State University

As humans we desire contact with the overwhelming, the overpowering, and the transcendent. Perennial attempts to dissect sublime experiences in literature approach from different angles, yet converge on certain surprisingly similar principles. In his first century treatise *On the Sublime,* Longinus portrays sublime literature as best language applied to best thoughts, which together produce a transformative illumination of sudden insight in the reader—an experience akin to ego transcendence. He believes writers may intentionally craft such an effect, and explains both stylistic strategies for success and mistakes to beware of, including specific examples from ancient Greek and Latin texts. The principles Longinus draws from his own culture's literature manifest in the genres and styles of other times and places.

Though Longinus's conception of the sublime is not connected historically or geographically to Japanese tanka poetry, they reflect similar priorities, suggesting that these ideas apply to more than the writing of a single culture. Several tanka techniques are especially well suited to produce sublimity, though perhaps not in a way Longinus could have imagined. Tanka uses a heavily ritualized form containing 31 syllables spread over five lines. This seemingly stifling form is instead liberating, guiding the poet towards simultaneous goals of authentic self-expression and readerly insight. Such guiding structure can be conceived positively as scaffolding or negatively as guardrails, depending on whether the tanka writer is focused primarily on what to put into her work or what to cut out. As scaffolding, she must consider—through specif-

ic, tactile imagery—season, occasion, and historical/cultural context. Such considerations draw out universal experience, promote communal meaning-making, and focus on grand themes. With the form of the poem as guardrails, she must keep her images tight and her language brief. Well-chosen words with many meanings make the most of syllabic constraint; uncluttered silence allows images to resonate.

This paper will explore several of Longinus's conditions for sublime literature in the context of Japanese tanka poetry, and demonstrate how both pursue flashes of emotive insight. Towards this goal, it offers examples of poetic craft from the *Sarashina Diary,* a first-person memoir blending imagistic narrative with tanka poetry as only a court lady in Heian Japan can. Throughout, we will also seek clarity about poetry and the sublime more generally: does poetry create access to the sublime by shifting our focus away from the mundane, or does poetry pay such close attention to the mundane that we recognize it (the mundane) as sublime?

Longinus's examples of the literary sublime incline away from ordinary moments, to celebrate epic action in war, politics, and philosophy. Tanka poetry instead embraces tiny breaths of stillness between actions, intentionally attending to the ordinary in order to locate the sublime in every instant. In the universal human pursuit of ecstatic self-transcendence, the formal constraints of tanka poetry act as both scaffolding and guardrails for the tanka artist to provide new rhetorical tools for others, including traditionally Western descendants of Longinus.

## I. Introduction to Longinus's Theory of the Sublime

Longinus is possibly the first Western writer to substantively discuss the sublime. He argues that the sublime, or at least our experience of it, is brilliant language applied to grand thoughts. In his view, we cannot be convinced to sublimity as we can to rationality, and instead we must experience it as a sudden emotional response: "A lofty passage does not convince the reason of the reader, but takes him out of himself . . . a sublime thought, if happily timed, illumines an entire subject with the vividness of a lightning-flash" (I. 3–4). The "lightning-flash" of illumination does not appear as a careful building up of context or organizing principles spread skillfully through a body of work, but as an instant, vivid epiphany. Without the reader's will or intention, it reorients their perspective beyond the self and transforms their understanding at an emotional level. In their introduction to *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus' Peri Hupsous in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre*, Van Eck, et al.,

explain Longinus's experiences with the sublime as "one which sweeps readers or viewers along, robs them of rational control over their feelings, and opens hitherto unknown vistas of the infinite, the horrendous, or the incomprehensible . . . experiences [that have been labeled as] wonder and amazement, as mystical experiences of rapture, as horror or fear" (2–3). This illuminating effect stands in contrast to the slow road of reasoning, in which examples and conclusions are painstakingly connected into causal thought-chains. The longer way of rationality may be essential in reaching deeper understanding once illumination has inspired the mind. But it cannot be called sublime.

This is not to say that content plays no role in crafting sublime literature. In fact, Longinus insists sublime content "dispose [the reader's] mind to lofty ideas" and be "pregnant in suggestion" (VII. 3–4). If a sudden flash of insight does not lead to continuing contemplation or yield further and richer insights as time goes on, such emotional response is "merely a specious sublimity" (VII. 1) and most emphatically *not* the real deal. Content must generate new thoughts and lasting productivity to be considered truly sublime. This litmus test is helpful, since Longinus admits that the true and false sublime can be tricky to distinguish, requiring a lifetime of taste cultivation (VI.).

Another test of authentic sublimity is a work's involvement with universal experience. Longinus tells us that the sublime gives pleasure consistently to every reader, whatever their background: "For when the same book always produces the same impression on all who read it, whatever be the difference in their pursuits, their manner of life, their aspirations, their ages, or their language, such a harmony of opposites gives irresistible authority to their favourable verdict" (VII. 4). When we notice many people of varying types and tastes drawn in the same way to a piece of literature, we can be confident that we are tracking the sublime. This principle plays out in our own time through ideas of "the canon," "the classics," or "the great books." These are fraught, changing, and politically complicated lists, often telling us more about the people who compile them than about the books themselves. But the core concept holds: these are works in which many people from diverse times and places find the same special something. They are a good place to start the hunt for the sublime.

In sublime literature, best language is as essential as best thought. Style must be equal to thought, and only the best of both will do. To help writers avoid especially common mistakes in crafting their effect, Longinus identifies four stylistic corruptions: bombast, puerility,

false-sentiment, and absurdity. Bombast he describes as "grandiloquence" and "conceits which are high-flown," noting that it is "one of the hardest things to avoid in writing" (III. 2–3). Bombast's opposite, puerility, he explains as a sort of paltry longwindedness, calling it "a pedantic habit of mind, which by over-elaboration ends in frigidity" (III. 5). He insists sublime literature walk a path between the two: frothy on one side, frigid on the other. The next mistake, false sentiment, shows as "an ill-timed and empty display of emotion . . . or of tedious displays of mere personal feeling which have no connection with the subject" (III. 5). Finally, the mistake of absurdity is caused by a continual pursuit of novelty. Longinus complains of such a writer, "in his eagerness to be always striking out new thoughts he frequently falls into the most childish absurdities" (IV. 2). Such faults make work unfit to reveal or nurture the sublime.

In short, Longinus teaches that sublime writing highlights universal experience through specificity, transforms its reader in a flash of transcendent insight, and is rich with grand ideas. Its language must be neither overwrought nor pedantic, avoiding absurdities of novelty, affectation, and shallow emotionality. It treats passion vigorously. It balances artful figures of speech. Its expressions are dignified and its word structures majestic.

## II. Introduction to Tanka and its Capacity for Vivid Illumination

From its inception, Japanese lyric poetry is rooted in spontaneous outbursts celebrating natural beauty, love, longing, and loyalty. According to Yoel Hoffman in an introduction to his translated collection, *Japanese Death Poems, Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death*, Japanese poetry began as a largely democratic art. Its lyricism was simple and direct. During the Heian period (794–1185 CE), when the *Sarashina Diary* was written (1009–59), poetry became more popular at court, and competing schools formed: "Artifice, wit, and subtle plays on words often overshadow strong emotions . . . The poems here are more sophisticated, trenchant, and wittier . . . poetic ability often being a means of advancement to positions of power and prestige . . . it thus became the pastime only of those with the leisure to pursue it, the nobles" (Hoffman 13–14). This artistic space nurtured formal agreement through its organization, and tanka poetry emerged as a form uniquely well suited for creating those flashes of illumination that Longinus values as sublime.

Deceptively simple, tanka consists of five syllabically measured lines: the first is five syllables, the second seven, the third five again, and the last two are a couplet of seven each. As Earl Roy Miner explains in his article, "The Technique of Japanese Poetry," Japanese is much less stressed than English, so there are few metrical conventions. However, it can include more complex assonance and alliteration than would work in English, and ancient techniques of Japanese brush writing allowed poets to double or triple meanings in a very short space, as well as to overlap various sonics, images, and ideas that are simply impossible within the clear delineation of English writing systems (Miner 352–53, 357). While these linguistic differences make adequate translation difficult, the form succeeds brilliantly as poetry in its native language, conveying distilled points of sensation with vibrant intimacy.

One such example can be found in the *Sarashina Diary*, a prose journal interspersed with poetry that describes the first-person memoir of a court lady in Heian Japan. An image-rich unity of both prose and poetry emerges, weaving descriptions of the rich outer landscape of Japan with the inner, emotional landscape until the reader is unsure of which most informs the other. It is the nature of tanka poetry to create such a weaving, and it is unsurprising that a continual practice of this literary form in the court culture of ancient Japan habituates the writer's mind as much as their writing. Although the author intends a prose journal, her experiences within tanka poetry have so shaped her writing, thinking, and conversing that the boundaries between prose and poetry blur.

The writer's personal and cultural formation within tanka conventions explains *Sarashina's* emotive intimacy with its reader. Nearly any passage from the *Diary* illustrates how the form of tanka poetry channels its content into brief epiphanies. For example (and please note that translation often breaks the syllabic line form), she writes in her second poem: "For this night only/The autumn moon at Kurodo beach shall shine for me,/For this night only!—I cannot sleep" (6). From the context of her journal we know this is a very young woman (perhaps even a girl) on a journey at the outset of life. We see her still body lit in moonlight on a beach worn by lapping water. Since the moon frequently represents autumnal themes in tanka, the translator likely added "autumn" to cue English readers to its dissonance with youth. It is a wistful nod to mortality, an admission that all things, especially youth and beauty, disappear. Moonlight wakes the girl all at once to an alertness of interbeing with moon, beach, water—and the heartbreaking ephemerality of this aware-

ness. The reader is likewise startled to inner wakefulness and brought out of themselves by the girl in moonlight, their ego transcended by her intimate, sensual perceptions beyond rational expression. The repeated lines “for this night only” fracture this moment from the typical flow of time and make it a nearly physical object to be held. The girl’s longing to hold onto this moment extends to the reader, overwhelming them with the impossibility of keeping anything at all.

This poem demonstrates the power of extreme brevity for transmitting the sublime. Lengthy descriptions can hinder the sudden rushes of insight that characterize the sublime. Here, the emotional immanence of tanka imagery and its use of standard motifs (for example, the moon as a signifier for autumn) bypass the reader’s cognitive processes to deliver a sense of sublime helplessness in the face of impermanence, and introduces us to the most important of Longinus’ principles: the brief, lightning-flash of sublime illumination.

## III. Tanka’s Scaffolding: Crafting the Sublime

*A. Universal Experience*

Tanka poetic form and its traditional nature imagery produce effects of instantaneous revelation, epiphany, or emotional understanding. Its intimacy, often to the point of confession, is particularly startling in light of its traditionally restrictive themes and categories. English-language poetry may (and is often encouraged to) develop subjects personal to the writer’s individual experience, but Japanese poetry is considered *occasional* (Miner 361–64); that is, written for or on specific culturally recognized occasions or in conventional situations. An occasion could include a New Year’s Day event, pilgrimage to famous or beautiful places, a broken tryst, reflection on loneliness and longing, or grief at the loss of youth, activity, or beauty. These occasions mainly require that the poet communicate personal emotions in traditional expressions for public interpretation (364).

The unusual constraint of Japanese poetry makes tanka especially helpful at universalising individual experiences, an important feature of Longinus’s definition of sublime writing. Tanka’s traditional focus on natural and seasonal imagery is important because such imagery generalizes individual experiences, which can then be *applied* to the individual case (Miner 362, 366). The assumption that the speaker and the poet are the same person makes room for confessionality as another recurring theme.

It might seem to a Westerner that the occasional nature of tanka would stifle a poet's personal expression, but what actually happens is far more interesting. An English poet must establish their context anew for each poem to situate their reader, but a Japanese audience understands a poem's context immediately through a single word or phrase (e.g., "the first wild goose," "the middle of this world," etc.) and the poet can spend the rest of their words commenting on that context. According to Earl Miner in his article, *The Technique of Japanese Poetry*, tanka achieves freedom "by its very limitation" (362). Certain forms and conventions connect a poem to dozens of other poems. The poet builds off such reader associations to communicate new ideas by merely tweaking an expression or suggesting a surprising juxtaposition of established images. Within such a tradition of association, poets converse across time and space, building and commenting on each other's work through a kind of code which is invisible to Western sensibility. It becomes a literature that "always produces the same [pleasurable] impression on all who [can] read it" (Longinus VII. 4), maintaining connection to universal experience among writers and readers alike.

*B. Communal Meaning-Making*

The conversational aspect of tanka is illustrated by a game that developed during the 14th century from a variation of poetic form called *renga*, or "linked poem." For some time, tanka poets frequently divided the final 7-7 couplets from the earlier 5-7-5 portions of their pieces, giving each a different poetic image. Two or more poets would build renga by linking with each other's 5-7-5 images through the 7-7 couplets to create long, complicated poetry chains, changing poetry "from an art with social functions to a genuinely social pastime" (Hoffman 16). Renga is historically important because it facilitated the development of haiku as a dominant poetry form in Japan, but for our purposes it is important in making the formerly implicit cultural poetry conversation explicit.

Human beings engage in individual conversations, whether spoken or written, to create shared meaning. Wide conversation, often through art and writing, can be conducted across history and through generations, forming a whole culture through massively scaled communal meaning-making. This is the role tanka poetry played in Heian Japan, steeping each participant in conversational metaphor so that universal experience within its culture formed around the conflation of natural imagery and human emotion. Such continually practiced poetic conventions habituate the speech and thinking of each conversant to mold even the sounds and shapes of the language itself.

The *Sarashina Diary* is full of actual conversations in poetry, which mimic the larger national conversation on a smaller, personal scale. The author writes thank-you notes and reminder letters through it, receives cheeky answers from friends, and even flirts through it. Poetry becomes the perfect medium for communicating indirect emotions and desires without commitment. For example, in one section Sarashina is awaiting her stepmother's return. The stepmother had given hope that she would return within the year, but never did, breaking Sarashina's heart. Even after Sarashina confronts her with the sorrow she has inflicted, the stepmother evades responsibility, continuing to circle vague possibilities without promise. In this way, the stepmother keeps the relationship feeling positive:

> I became very anxious [and at last] broke a branch and sent it to her [of course with a poem]:
> *You gave me words of hope, are they not long delayed?*
> *The plum tree is remembered by the Spring,*
> *Though it seemed dead with frost*.
> She wrote back affectionate words with a poem:
> *Wait on, never forsake your hope,*
> *For when the plum-tree is in flower*
> *Even the unpromised, the unexpected, will come to you.* (17)

Here is a young woman who believed her hope dead, yet discovers that it and all the accompanying hurt, fear, and sense of betrayal live in her again. Spring brings new life; hope remembers the young woman and overpowers her by waking up everything she had pushed away, but it isn't hope she wants to be remembered by. This poem is about the bitterness of resurrection. Even knowing this bitterness, the writer cannot help hoping enough to send one last letter begging for her stepmother's return. Of course the mother's answer is a mere manipulation, a way to say *sorry-not-sorry* without ever committing herself to action. Readers are taken out of themselves to hate the stepmother on the writer's behalf, in all the ways the writer cannot allow herself to put on paper. Such overlapping pathos in the hope and bitterness of half-hidden agendas, delivered in the brevity of two heartbeats through a single image of new-blossoming plums, is a swift transcendent encounter with the sublime complexity known only by mothers and daughters.

This conversational mode isn't unique to the *Sarashina Diary*. In the *Diary of Murasaki Shikibu* (1007–10), we again see tanka's power to evade direct emotions. Shikibu describes a surprise encounter with the

Prime Minister that turns into a mashup of conversation, competition, skill test, and undetermined trespass or flirtation. These contexts teeter politely in balance through a poetry exchange, so that neither party requires confrontation or clarity:

> The air is misty, the dew is still on the leaves. The Lord Prime Minister is walking there; he orders his men to clear the brook. He breaks off a stalk of omenaishi [flower maiden] which is in full bloom . . . He peeps in over my screen! His noble appearance embarrasses us, and I am ashamed of my morning [not yet painted and powdered] face. He says, "Your poem on this! If you delay so much the fun is gone!" and I seize the chance to run away to the writing-box, hiding my face—
>
> *Flower-maiden in bloom—*
> *Even more beautiful for the bright dew,*
> *Which is partial, and never favors me.*
>
> "So prompt!" said he, smiling, and ordered a writing-box be brought [for himself].
> His answer:
>
> *The silver dew is never partial.*
> *From her heart*
> *The flower-maiden's beauty*. (Shikibu 73)

These poems are only pretty flirts: *I'm embarrassed by looking ugly in the morning without my makeup.—No, you look great because your beauty comes from inside, not from makeup.* Neither character means what they say: their words merely diffuse a difficult situation. But it works gracefully because of the way natural imagery universalizes their experience, infusing an awkward moment with precognitive clarity: morning dew and morning makeup; flowers and women. It also hints at the uncertain dance of tenderness and aggression in sexual encounters, playing with a sublime tension between the beautiful and the overpowering.

It is clear in these journal entries that conversations through poetry were an expected part of daily relationships among court people. The journals are written by extremely different women. Sarashina is seriously devout, prone to weeping, earnest, and given to self-reflection. Even her fantasies are deeply sincere. Shikibu, on the other hand, is much more playful and narratively bent. Poetry conversations in her hands turn into games. However, both use the convention

to come at the heart of an overwhelming matter without using direct language that could be construed as offensive for a noble Japanese woman. In doing so, they highlight and cultivate the sublime within their most mundane moments.

Such unified conversational practice engages the entire Japanese culture, whatever the difference in people's "pursuits, their manner of life, their aspirations, [or] their ages" (Longinus VII. 4), in experiencing the sublime as a form of communal meaning-making. Through this process, tanka poems become "pregnant in suggestion . . . impossible to distract the attention from . . . and . . . take strong and lasting hold on the memory" (Longinus VII. 4), swiftly passing Longinus's litmus test for the authentic sublime.

*C. Grand Themes*

As Longinus himself mainly quotes heroic epics, politically momentous speeches, and sweeping philosophical enquiries, it is uncertain whether he would consider as sublime the small sensory instants which tanka specializes in. Yet these are the stuff of human life. The reflection we find in these poems of our own vanity, longing, faithlessness, or nobility are fruitful glimpses into the I/Thou, through which human beings find meaning and connection. Tanka is good at this particular type of "grandeur" precisely because it has no pretense to grandeur, avoiding Longinus's dreaded "airs" without even trying—by being simply itself and nothing else. Death, impermanence, loneliness, and longing are themes which continually overlap and separate throughout tanka poetry, pointing to the sublime in everyday experience.

1. Death and Impermanence

Death is among the grandest, most mysterious concepts that humans must cope with. It is the universal sticking point where we must face the absolute unknown. Longinus mentions poetry about Spartan warriors facing death in hopeless, glorious last stands, and these are indeed grand. But other examples of death are no less grand because they are quiet. In fact, tanka's predilection for stillness is part of how it avoids what Longinus reviles as "bombast," an overblown frothiness of language which undercuts our access to the sublime.

As Buddhism strengthened in Japan during the ninth century, poets filled their work with new ideas about impermanence and death. Yoel Hoffman tells us that at this time in Japanese thought, "Fleetingness characterized not only the outward forms of nature, but also inward

nature; nothing is fixed, nothing stable" (37). These preoccupations in poetry could easily devolve into maddening abstraction, but Japanese poets found expression through tangible touch, sight, smell, and sound instead. "Transience . . . is conveyed through images of the changing seasons . . . Buddha's nature dwell[s] everywhere—in mountains, rivers, grass, and trees" (37–38). Such sensory rootedness fills their poetry with a sense of transcendence discovered in tiny or mundane details.

Life's impermanence and death's inevitability are twin sides of the most sublime terror humans face. Whether met in battle or looked for in sleep, death renders us helpless, and artists write about it in every age and circumstance. The tanka tradition of expressing impermanence through natural imagery does not blunt the terror of death, instead providing the writer with a vehicle for sudden, precognitive terror. Her audience is moved by the same flash of desperate clarity that Longinus finds in Western death epics.

## 2. Death and Loneliness

Death is one of the most important occasions in a person's life, and it was expected of tanka artists that as they felt death's onset, they should compose a meditation on mortality and briefly sum up their whole life. These death poems include some of the most sublime art of this genre. It is surprising that *Sarashina* does not conclude with one. Instead, *Sarashina* ends with a message from a friend in the form of a poem-letter that suggests Sarashina should detach from the world as a nun like herself:

> I was tired of meditation and sent a poem to one who had not called on me for a long time.
> *Weeds grow before my gate*
> *And my sleeves are wet with dew,*
> *No one calls on me,*
> *My tears are solitary—alas!*
> She was a nun and she sent an answer:
> *The weeds before a dwelling house*
> *May remind you of me!*
> *Bushes bury the hut*
> *Where lives the world-deserted one.* (68)

It is impossible to know whether Sarashina intended this to be her conclusion, but it does provide a fitting, if tragic, substitute for her death poem. Judging from her diary, Sarashina's life was full of loneliness, of longing for fulfillment in another, and of grief in

abandonment. She continually felt the pull of monasticism but never fully embraced its vocation. This pair of letters—one reaching out and one rebuffing, correcting—is a thoughtful summation of her life's themes.

Similar to death, loneliness consumes us as we order our lives against it. Sarashina presents the reality of such loneliness through brief images of weeds vs bushes: weeds only grow before gates if there are no visitors to trample them. As morning and evening are the times for both dew and visitors, wet sleeves reveal that Sarashina is waiting daily among tall weeds at her gate, hoping for a friend in vain. The nun replies that weeds may indeed remind Sarashina of her, as she has no intention of visiting at all. The friend has no weeds, because she has no visitor's gate. Instead she grows bushes over her house to insulate her from the world. Dew-wet sleeves come to represent Sarashina's sense of loneliness and rejection. A disciple of Longinus might communicate overwhelming loneliness through a description of one warrior left standing in a field among dead armies. The tanka verses instead reveal how this sublime experience is present in the quiet heartbeats of our day. We need only attend.

### 3. Longing and Seasonality

Tanka is not always about death or loneliness. Other themes celebrated by tanka poets, such as unfulfilled longing or life's seasonality, may be a world away from Longinus's heroic epics, but they do not lack grandeur. The *Sarashina* writer copies an apt example from an older friend into her diary:

> *Scarce had my mind received with wonder,*
> *The thought of newly fallen snow—*
> *Seeing the ground lie white—*
> *When the scent of Tachibana flowers*
> *Arose from fallen blossoms.* (21)

Tachibana is a wild mandarin plant with tiny white citrus-scented blossoms that bloom in late spring or early summer. The fruit comes in late autumn or early winter, but is too sour to eat. The tension of this poem emerges in these facts. In early summer, a woman is startled with wonder to step outside into new snow—the impression is precognitive. She smells sweet citrus and realizes these are fallen blossoms instead of snow, but her confusion is tied up in more than

white fluff on the garden path. Blossoms predict the coming fruit; the citrus blossom-scent of spring mixes up with the citrus fruit of early winter when the snow really does first fall. However, this sweet smell promises more than delivers, since the winter fruit, anticipated since summer, is sour when it finally arrives.

Complications of seasonal intersectionality, deferred dreams, dashed or sudden hopes, and a blurring between reality and illusion–all inherent in our everyday sense perceptions as they map onto our belief structures—are illuminated in one brief lightning-flash of language in this poem. The sublime emerges in the sheer volume of ideas that bypass rational processes to overwhelm the reader through a transformed, self-distanced perspective.

## IV. Tanka's Guardrails: Avoiding Corruptions of the Sublime

*A. Bombast and Puerility*

Tanka's form guards against two of Longinus's pet horrors: bombast and puerility. On one hand, it prevents overblown eloquence by its extreme brevity and commitment to syllabic constraint, and on the other, its imagistic emphasis maintains an imminent emotional resonance, so that its lack of "froth" does not slide sideways into "frigidity." Even at its most flowery or obvious, tanka is still saved from either fault. It must always say less than it means, relying mainly on the negative space left by its silences to move its audience. It can get neither carried away nor silly. Even in her least interesting poems, the Sarashina writer simply does not have room to take it too far due to the constraints inherent to the form of tanka poetry:

> *Flowers are falling, yet I may see them again*
> *when Spring returns.*
> *But, oh, my longing for the dear person*
> *who has departed from us forever!* (18)

The theme here is mourning, but only in the vaguest and most general way. There's little point of engagement given to its reader, and its natural image is unsurprising. But neither is it given room to become egregiously sentimental, frothy, or frigid, which it might have in another form. A tanka may not grip its reader, but neither will it assault them with bombast or puerility.

*B. False Sentiment and Absurdity*

The occasional nature of tanka poetry creates context for communal meaning-making and highlights universal experience, and also addresses Longinus's concerns with false sentiment and absurdity. False-sentiment has little place in the brief, public conversations of tanka verse. Since each of a tanka's sections may contain an image, only two images are available to evoke an emotion, which must also be connected to a culturally recognized event. These restrictions do not give poets space to wax on about disconnected idiosyncrasies or embellish with extraneous feelings. Absurdity, on the other hand, follows from a continual pursuit of novelty. Tanka addresses this concern at its root. Novelty, while secondarily valuable in keeping occasional poetry fresh, is not a core value. Communal conversation and universally interesting perspectives on traditional themes are the goal.

## V. Conclusion

Longinus and the architects of tanka share a vision of sublimity. What Longinus explains in direct language, tanka poets illustrate in their art. While we find that form and tradition alone do not create a sublime piece of literature, they function as guardrails and as scaffolding to direct them in the pursuit of artistic perfection. For the tanka poet, sublimity is not merely serendipitous, but guided by the form of the poetry itself (and a touch of genius).

Even through the difficulties involved in faithfully translating tanka, people of all languages and cultures can appreciate its distinctive success with the sublime. Many works among these poems easily satisfy Longinus's criteria. When we read one, our attention and memory is captured. Its depth of subject and turn of perspective inspire a flash of sudden insight, even if we cannot read Japanese and so must miss out on some of the unique aspects of its composition.

Longinus's examples of the sublime do tend away from the mundane. Turning our mind from the daily grind of weed pulling, laundry folding, and diaper changing to the grandness of heroic battle-sacrifice is often a welcome relief. Examining our philosophical assumptions underlying why we bake bread for our family is important if we don't want to burn out. Listening to moving political speeches really matters as we weigh big-picture questions of civic responsibility. But all these excitements are mediated by un-fanfared, average moments: encrypted wartime texts about silly shenanigans from a son on Ukraine's border; the smell of yeast on doughy fingers

while considering bread's virtue as a mean between extremes; a child munching popcorn in her father's lap while he parses the presidential debates of two broken parties.

In the West, our attitude toward the usual, the routine, and the small is often a learned disdain or a desire of escape. Aesthetic balance requires we attend to the whole experience of life: the loud as well as the quiet; action as well as stillness. In their *Short Guide to the Theory of the Sublime*, Holmquist and Pluciennik tell us to be unastounded by the number of different terms and categories applied to the sublime because "it must be, as the beautiful is, ubiquitous" (Holmquist and Pluciennik 721). The sublime is available at every level of human experience—it is ours to find. By paying close attention to the grounding of life's "big" events in small sensory details, then universalizing them through natural imagery and contextualizing them within traditional occasions, tanka poetry teaches us to savor the sublime in the mundane.

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# The Metamorphic Horror of Protoplasmic Evolution in Weird Fiction

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Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and scientific scholarship on pre-DNA genetics inspired the unsettling portrayals of transformative body horror in weird fiction. As these persistent scientific discoveries impacted social perspectives regarding stages of human development, they provoked psychological fears about the interconnectedness between prehistoric bestial organisms and modern human beings. In his horror tale, "The Great God Pan," Arthur Machen evokes a disturbing reaction in readers by drawing on these socially influenced fears of evolution when depicting a visceral episode of metamorphic body horror. Machen's fiction illuminates degenerative bodily transformations to produce physiological terror toward the protoplasmic origins of life. Similarly, Clark Ashton Smith's "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros" heightens fears toward the chemical elements of protoplasmic transformation, where monstrous physical changes mimic the obscure cellular processes of pre-human evolution. H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shadows Over Innsmouth" materializes the social anxieties of racial mixing and genealogical identity by exposing the repulsive weirdness of interior psychological transformations. Within these weird tales, the descriptive reveals of rapid transformations and genetic transmutations produce an embodied, unsettling reaction for readers related to body horror as it connects to historically fluctuating fears towards evolutionary theory; in these stories, it is specifically protoplasmic material or slime which generates a fearful and repulsive response toward the unknown, whether it is a mutated monster or a racially impure species.

In his tale, "The Great God Pan," Machen's detailed reveal of bodily metamorphosis evokes an unsettling and fearful reaction through its manipulation of the gradual process of evolutionary change into a series of rapid, unnatural protoplasmic reversions. As Machen's transformative body horror illustrates the tangibility of degeneration, the materiality of protoplasm further enhances the repulsive quality behind these metamorphic mutations as they illuminate a raw degradation of the modern human form. While the built-up suspense of the story primarily surrounds the mystery of Helen Vaughan's true hybrid identity, her turbulent death serves as a dramatic reveal of horror that consequently dissolves the fragile boundaries between the urban and supernatural realms. Machen releases the built-up tension by revealing the horrifying truths of Helen's inherited demonic identity through the scene of her aberrant, bestial death:

> Changing and melting before your eyes from woman to man, from man to beast, and from beast to worse than beast . . . dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited . . . the principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed. (66)

In this dramatic reveal of Helen's metamorphosis, Machen develops the body horror of her rapid protoplasmic degeneration by drawing inspiration from the historically influenced fears towards Darwin's theory of evolution. With the rapidity of Helen's transitions from "woman to man, from man to beast," Machen emphasizes the chaotic instability of her protoplasmic reversions to create a disconcerting, fearful reaction toward the ceaseless nature of evolutionary change. Although it was theorized that evolution is a slow, developmental process that spans generations, Machen builds the horror of Helen's degenerative reversal back to the prehistoric origins of life by portraying the terse rapidity of her bestial changes. In the scheme of these existential transformations, Machen's stylistic mechanism of concretely describing the off-putting tactile reversions and the blurring of sexes contributes to an effective reveal of dread as readers are aggressively rushed through the evolutionary stages of human life. Not only does the accelerated pace of Helen's transformation evoke an alarming effect, but it also forces readers to contemplate the violating repercussions of the evolutionary interconnectedness between modern humans and prehistoric animalistic organisms. In his article, "A Theme in the Early Work of Arthur Machen: 'Degenera-

tion,'" Adrian Eckersley similarly expresses how Machen's transformative body horror in Helen's chaotic reversions produces a fear towards evolution for readers as they engage with the grotesque "backward-run down the evolutionary tree towards protoplasm" (283). As Eckersley's analysis relates to how Machen builds the atrocious reveal of Helen's savage transformation by quickly guiding readers through the stages of evolution, it consequently activates readers to become repulsed by their evolutionary relationship to protoplasmic organisms.

Within the tangible qualities of Helen's bestial metamorphosis into the primal matter of life, Machen's depiction of protoplasmic reversion furthermore produces a repulsive effect for readers as they experience the chemical dissolution of the modern human body. As he was influenced by historically shaped fears of evolution, Machen's metamorphic body horror draws inspiration from Thomas Henry Huxley's scientific theories on how protoplasm is the fundamental, universal matter of life. In his essay, "On the Physical Basis of Life," Huxley's conceptualization of protoplasm as the primordial matter of all life that is "always dying, and, strange as the paradox may sound, could not live unless it died" heavily parallels how Machen portrays Helen's protoplasmic reversions as a perpetual, rapid progression of imbalanced growth and decay (19). As Huxley emphasizes how the chemical dissolution of the protoplasm constantly endures a transformative death, Machen's depiction of Helen's slimy decomposition produces a repulsive, anxiety-driven reaction because Machen draws inspiration from the cellular mechanisms of the protoplasm's repetitive death and resurrection. The physicality of Helen's mechanical process of "changing" furthermore mimics an abnormal chemical reaction because the "melting" process scientifically concerns a physical change in matter. Additionally, Machen emphasizes that Helen's embodied deterioration surpasses physical change as her gender identity is chemically modified too. This stylistic choice consequently heightens the horrifying evolutionary aspects of Helen's protoplasmic breakdown. With these shifts in the states of matter, Machen demonstrates how the protoplasmic aspects of Helen's metamorphosis are permanently chemically intact regardless of the physical changes in her appearance. Through the complexity of Helen's protoplasmic metamorphosis, Machen's body horror illuminates the fear of evolution, specifically the fear that the prehistoric stages of human development are chemically encoded in all modern human existence.

Building on Machen's fascination with the chemistry behind corporeal degradation, Smith's "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros" progressively ignites a fear of the chemically revolting aspects of the proto-

plasmic evolution of a grotesque tentacled monster. In the body horror of the monster's transformative protoplasmic growth, Smith's disturbing reveal of the formless ooze rapidly converting into a tentacled monster evokes an embodied, unsettling reaction towards the chemical changes that arise with evolutionary change. In Satampra Zeiros's description of the protoplasmic beast, he emphasizes how "it was indescribably viscid and slimy and cold, it was loathsomely soft like the foul mire of a bog and mordantly sharp as an edged metal" (Smith 15). The visceral description of the tangible features of the tentacled monster creates a disconcerting effect on the reader because the "slimy" and "viscid" chemical qualities mimic the protoplasmic components of prehistoric species. In his essay, "The Physiology of the Carbohydrates: Their Application as Food and Relation to Diabetes," Frederick William Pavy's description of the chemical malleability of protoplasm informs Smith's portrayal of the gross monster as this in-between creature that can simultaneously change from liquid to solid form. With its inherently flexible chemical properties, Pavy mentions how living protoplasm "in a previously liquid or amorphous condition . . . undergoes changes of a chemical nature" (24). With this duality of feeling both "soft like the foul mire of a bog" while also "sharp as an edged metal," Smith generates the uncanniness of this ambiguous monster's chemical composition by drawing inspiration from the organic materiality of protoplasm. The language used in describing the moist tentacled monster as a mushy yet solidly composed product of protoplasmic nature further enhances the creature's ambiguity, causing readers to be repulsed by its contradictory chemical qualities. As his weird fiction generates a terrorizing fear towards the chemical components of evolutionary development, Smith's transformative reveal of horror is similar to how Machen employs breathless terseness to enhance the unsettling effect of protoplasmic reversions.

These unsettling effects are even embodied within the forms of the creatures themselves. As Smith's tale concludes with a rapid reveal of the stagnant puddle transforming into a solid tentacled monster, Satampra Zeiros terrifyingly emphasizes how tense the accelerating movement of the monster was as "it slithered toward [them] with an unbelievable speed and celerity of motion" (Smith 11). With this reference to physics, the rapidity of the beast dangerously "slithering" essentially creates the horror of the scene. This rapidity matches how Machen illustrates the gruesome protoplasmic reversal of Helen to heighten the reader's anxiety toward the unnatural mechanisms of her metamorphic

death. With this emphasis on speed within the final transformative reveals of the slimy monstrous creatures, both Machen and Smith effectively create a sense of impending doom that alarms readers while forcing them to confront the disturbing repercussions within the inevitable aftermath of evolutionary change, which occurs at a faster pace than one may have initially anticipated.

While Machen and Smith's body horror engages a fear of the degenerative characteristics of protoplasmic evolution, Lovecraft's weird tale "The Shadows Over Innsmouth" illuminates a fear of genetic transmutations that occur psychologically instead of physically. As Lovecraft provides subtle glimpses of Robert Olmstead's transformation throughout the story, the shocking nature of his acceptance of his genealogical identity generates a repulsive, fearful reaction in readers as they contemplate the interior depths of their unknown inherited genetic lineage. As Machen and Smith emphasize the contemporary fears of protoplasmic evolution in their fiction, Lovecraft similarly crafts the repulsive aspects of his transformative horror by drawing inspiration from historically influenced anxieties towards pre-DNA genetics. Within the first glimpse of his interior psychic transformation, the duality of Olmstead's simultaneous curiosity and repulsion is depicted when he feels "a subtle, curious sense of beckoning seemed superadded to the grim repulsion; and oddly enough, [he] found this overtone more disturbing than the primary impression" (Lovecraft 282). In his growing "sense of beckoning" towards the antiquarian cultural landscape of Innsmouth, the subtle nature of Olmstead's psychological transformation strengthens the repulsive aspects of his gradual shift into a hybrid creature because readers experience the eeriness of his intangible genetic transmutations. As Lovecraft was influenced by the historical scientific contributions regarding the human genome, the lack of extensive knowledge about DNA or mutations contributes to the weirdness of Olmstead's invisible transformation into a racially or genetically ambiguous life form.

Due to the deficiency of scholarship on genetics, Lovecraft utilized ambiguity to describe these unorthodox transformations. In his scholarly article, "The Refinement of 'Crude Allegory': Eugenic Themes and Genotypic Horror in the Weird Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft," Mitch Frye emphasizes how "the gene was certainly more of a mystery to Lovecraft and his contemporaries," which demonstrates how the limitations in knowledge about the gene significantly impacted how Lovecraft crafted the ambiguous weirdness of genetic transmis-

sion within his weird tale (238). As Machen and Smith concretely describe the tangibility of the stickiness behind protoplasmic reversions, Lovecraft's approach is different because he cannot draw inspiration from the processes of genetic hybridization or allelic mutations because they have not been historically at his disposal. Although Lovecraft discusses genetic hybridity in his weird fiction, Frye asserts how "the double helix model of DNA demystifies genetic information by allowing it to be visualized" (238). With modern scientific knowledge about DNA and genetic transmission, there is much more clarity and transparency regarding how these generational processes work, which makes it easier to conceptualize. Since Lovecraft did not have access to this scientific knowledge, his fiction refrains from concretely depicting the vivid imagery of tangible genetic change. Although Lovecraft avoids portraying the materiality of protoplasm within his repulsive genetic transformations, the slimy quality of the unknown parameters of genetic ancestry can also manifest as an effective mechanism for weirdness when describing transformative body horror. Therefore, it is likely that Lovecraft's repulsive portrayal of Olmstead's genetic transformation into a fishy humanoid stems from the historically fluctuating perspectives towards the unknown, whether it is about the racial other or the uncertain process of genetic change.

While Lovecraft's weird tale generates a fear of genetic inheritance and racial mixing, the ultimate reveal of Olmstead's genealogical metamorphosis from human to antiquarian is arguably the most repulsive because he suddenly accepts the acquisition of the "Innsmouth look" and then consequently embraces the fate of his bestial genetic heritage. In the terrifying aftermath of Olmstead's lengthy episodic metamorphosis, the epiphanic moment of his realization about his genetic identity arrives when he states how "[he] had acquired *the Innsmouth look*" while also planning to leave in solidarity with his cousin into the "lair of the Deep Ones" (Lovecraft 334). As readers are a step ahead of Olmstead throughout his psychological transformations, Lovecraft concludes the story with the shocking reveal of Olmstead's acceptance of his family's alien ancestry. Although Olmstead initially mentions how "the 'Innsmouth look' [is] a disease rather than a blood strain," the twisted reveal of his transformation and acceptance of his heritage is repulsively shocking to readers (Lovecraft 290). With his shift from feeling disgusted by the people of Innsmouth, Olmstead's shocking appreciation of his authentic genetic identity augments the unsettling, fearful effect for readers because they are still left with

a lingering repulsion towards his genetic transmutation. While his chilling interior changes have transformed his bodily appearance, they have also altered his perspective toward his previously unknown non-human ancestral heritage. As Olmstead initially labels the physical appearance of the Innsmouth people in a derogatory way, the negative connotation of "disease" reveals the repulsive treatment of racial otherness, which correlates to Lovecraft's fears of racial hybridity. As Lovecraft "believed that [immigrants] sought to pollute [cities] with their own contributions," the ideas of racial impurity within Olmstead's initial repulsion draw from Lovecraft's own eugenic and racist ideologies (Frye 250). With this historical context of prejudice against genetic transmission and racial mixing, Lovecraft manifests these social anxieties to produce the foreboding sensation of repulsiveness for readers as they individually grapple with their endless fears of unknowingly inheriting the ancestry of the racial other.

Within the genre of the weird tale, one of the most fundamental aspects of a reveal of horror stems from how it makes the reader feel an unexplainable sense of dread towards a rapidly changing monster or simply the eeriness of an unknown identity. In these tales, the transformative body horror behind these powerful reveals illuminates the reader's agitated response because it makes them question their relationship to these evolutionary and genetic components that are uncontrollably within them. As Machen and Smith allude to the disastrous aftermaths of metamorphosis, their respective reveals of horror highlight the swiftness of evolutionary change and the uncanny tangibility of the protoplasm that is universal to all life. While Lovecraft's fiction exposes the hidden horrors of psychological transformation, he mediates a fear of genetic heritage that may be unknowingly racially ambiguous, making readers contemplate their own ancestral unknown. While these authors may depict their metamorphic reveals differently, they produce weirdness in their fictional worlds by drawing inspiration from the historically shaped social anxieties towards pivotal scientific discoveries about the protoplasmic origins of life and genetic inheritance. In other words, strange transformations in weird tales surpass the mere category of entertaining horror because these weird tales stem from consistent historical engagement with Darwinian and protoplasmic theories. The understanding of chemical or genetic transformation as a widespread historical trend augment how historical scientific advancements informed the horror behind these memorable tales.

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# “Don’t You Know It’s Hot Out Here In The Sun?”: The (Down)Fall of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man as It Relates to Adam’s Fall from Grace

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## I. Prologue

*“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you”* (*King James Version*, Exodus 3.14).

Since the novel’s publication in 1952, scholars have situated and criticized Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* through various literary lenses. Through scrutinizing elements from Ellison’s existence as an African American writer to the simplest nuances of his works, one similarity remains true: scholars cannot debate the *Invisible Man’s* significance to the literary world. By following an African American narrator who begins the novel with the line “I am an invisible man,” Ellison makes clear that his character exists as an empowered man who steals figurative power from the dehumanizing “I” slave narrative and literal power from an electric company to enlighten himself (3). As a result, the narrator begins the novel in a dark place, but the question remains: how did the Invisible Man get here? Starting at the end, the narrator inhabits an underground manhole where he moves through his new world as an “ectoplasm” never to be seen by his peers; however, the narrator’s invisibility is not solely represented by the perception of his peers. Rather, the Invisible Man himself encounters a series of situations in which he is blind to the white patriarchy who rule his life and actions (Ellison 3).

On many occasions, the Invisible Man's narrative presents a metacognitive circumstance in that while the Invisible Man is, in fact, invisible, the narrator's blindness eventually creates his own invisibility. In the novel, the Invisible Man's vision blurs during his frequent walks, in turn blurring his future as he traverses his new surroundings. With an impending sense of doom and wonder as to how the Invisible Man ends up underground, the reader slowly observes the narrator's fall into an abyss of lies, sins, and betrayal against the white patriarchy that he worships as he walks with a veil over his eyes, unaware of his own downfall. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of "downfall" almost always relates to the origin story of the first man and woman. Adam's fall from grace begins after the devil, disguised as a serpent, deceives the first woman and tempts her to sin by consuming fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Once realizing her nakedness, Eve tempts Adam to eat from the tree, completing their fall from God's Grace. The Invisible Man's transition from visible to invisible follows a similar pattern as the downfall of Adam; however, the Invisible Man's God exists not as a deity but as the white patriarchal society that he inherently wishes to please for power. Although scholars such as Claudia May and Joanna Piciotto have created connections between the Biblical Eden and other influential novels by delving into literary aspects that relate to the Bible, no one has connected the Invisible Man's underground evolution and Adam's fall from grace. I utilize James Weldon Johnson's writings and the epic poetry of John Milton to view *Invisible Man* as a metaphorical retelling of the Garden of Eden. Comparing the Invisible Man's evolution to aspects of the Biblical Fall of Man creates theoretical implications to analyze previously unexamined connections between Biblical contexts and modern-day literature, thus retooling the Invisible Man as Adam and the white patriarchy as God.

## II. A State of Innocent Obedience

*"For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil"* (Romans 16.19).

After the Invisible Man's brutal beating at the battle royal, a night of entertainment for the white members of society, this society awards him a scholarship to a prestigious university founded by an African American man. He receives an education that has yet to be made available to his family members and spends the next three years in academia.

During this time, the Invisible Man begins to view his surroundings as a heavenly arena, wherein the college fulfills his dreams of becoming an educated Black man. In his narration, he begins incorporating diction with seraphic and pure connotations, such as, “roads gracefully winding” and “white magnolias” “in the bee-humming air,” establishing the Invisible Man’s perspective of the college as an Edenic location (Ellison 34). Despite this, Claudia May argues that while the college may be a place of respite, she ultimately cannot connect the college to the Garden of Eden, as “the promise of Eden as a region untouched by disharmony is never fully ‘gained’” (422). Because the college that the Invisible Man attends still contains many instances of racism and racial segregation, it cannot be related to the biblical Garden of Eden, in which the inhabitants are “devoid of conflict” (May 422). However, the college as an Edenesque space still exists, though only from the Invisible Man’s viewpoint. Like his perception of white patriarchal society, his Eden exists outside of true reality as an idealized and intangible mindset. For instance, though the Invisible Man lives in a time of racial animosity, his perception of his experience at college is not impacted by it. He believes that the college’s surroundings sustain his education and will establish his future endeavors, and in this innocent and somewhat naive perception, the Invisible Man creates a mindset in which he has found a perfect heaven on Earth.

In this space which the narrator views as heaven, Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the college, acts as a God-like figure whom the Invisible Man devotes himself to worshiping. Joanna Picciotto, in her analysis of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, surmises an idea which can be applied to the Invisible Man’s devotion to Dr. Bledsoe: “For created humanity, divine worship was indistinguishable from satisfying the cognitive appetite” (25). The narrator believes that Dr. Bledsoe, as the college’s president, has his best interests in mind, and thus innocently obeys the commands given to him and devours the education that fulfills his “cognitive appetite” (Picciotto 225). For example, after Dr. Bledsoe admonishes the narrator for taking Norton to the college’s more shameful sights, the narrator intrinsically feels as if Dr. Bledsoe’s allegiance to the white patriarchy is unsettling; however, the narrator still pledges allegiance to said patriarchy and Bledsoe as he convinces himself to “submit to punishment” due to having “violated the code” (Ellison 147). This mindset continues throughout the novel even as the narrator moves from one landscape to another, infallibly worshiping the white patriarchs of society whom he should despise.

Unfortunately for the Invisible Man, he mimics the college's Founder by placing a veil over his mind's eye in the same way the bronze statue of the Founder places a veil over his literal eyes. The statue placed in the middle of the college campus reminds the students of what their ancestors endured to place them here. As the Invisible Man thinks back on the statue, he remembers "his [the Founder's] hands stretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil," and he is "puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place" (Ellison 29). Just like the Founder, the Invisible Man has a veil that covers his mind's eye. The veil skews his perception, and he believes that the college balks against powerful white men in society who ultimately aim to hurt educated Black men, instead of the reality that the college enables this cycle. This belief allows him to believe in the power that Bledsoe bestows upon students and the hope he gives them that they could be like him one day. Most importantly, he continues to believe that he is safe in the Eden that he calls home, innocently oblivious to the obscurity of sin that the college promotes to its students; furthermore, a biblical veil symbolizes the power of submission as the veil visually proclaims an outside force's power over one's body. In the Invisible Man's case, since his veil does not extrinsically present itself to viewers or the Invisible Man himself, the power of this veil stays hidden over his mind's eye, portraying an invisible submission to the white men of his society.

## III. Exodus

*"I* am *the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"* (Exodus 20.2).

Exodus, deriving from the second book of the Bible, refers to the departure of Israelites from Egypt and deliverance from slavery; however, the word "exodus," in a new construction of the word, means "a mass departure of people" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). American writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson presents an argument for a remedy to African Americans' state of chaos after the Great Depression. In his book *Negro Americans, What Now?*, Johnson argues that a mass exodus of African Americans is one solution to solving the problem of prejudice in the United States, but in order for this solution to be complete, they must have a state or territory for themselves. Throughout the novel, the Invisible Man embodies several identities to fit the situation that arises. For example, he begins his journey at

college as a naive Black boy, unaware of the pressures of society. He then embraces the identity of the Brotherhood after Bledsoe's betrayal. In each facet of identity, the Invisible Man feels as if he has moved from one idyllic "Eden" into another. The Invisible Man's various facets of identity present themselves as "a mass departure of people" as he leaves one Eden and enters another. The narrator fulfills Johnson's argument by claiming his new surroundings as territory through every identity, even as he attempts to ignore the influence of prejudice by holding the metaphorical veil firmly over his face (Johnson 213).

The Invisible Man mimics the book of Exodus after his exile from the college by traveling, as he travels north in search of a job with Bledsoe's colleagues. Instead of Eden, he finds new authority figures to devote himself to: the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood represents the same white patriarchy seen in the battle royal. The Brotherhood, as described in the novel, exists as an authoritarian group that focuses heavily on the survival of the group as a whole instead of the individuals that create the group: "they usually think in terms of 'we'" (Ellison 316). These white men do not have a clear vision of their true motives, as embodied by Brother Jack, who both runs the Brotherhood and embodies their lack of vision for their motives. Like the white men at the battle royal, the Invisible Man devoutly worships both groups as his only escape from the patriarchy. Once again, a group of powerful men blind the Invisible Man as he learns to adhere to a collective thought and purpose instead of his individual identity.

Before meeting the Brotherhood, however, the Invisible Man traverses the North alone and attempts to establish his foundation as a Black man in a white man's world. For instance, the Invisible Man leaves the college with seven letters of recommendation from Bledsoe to deliver to his colleagues to ostensibly help the Invisible Man find work in the North. The Invisible Man puts devout trust in Bledsoe to deliver him to a newer and life-changing beginning, so he does not open the letters of recommendation; however, the Invisible Man discovers that Bledsoe's letters only mock him for failing to entertain the "delicate relationships" with wealthy white men on which the college depends (Ellison 191). The narrator's blind devotion to Bledsoe showcases the fallibility of the narrator's thoughts. What he believes becomes his reality, rendering his surroundings an Edenesque landscape (though they are anything but). The metaphorical veil blinds both the Invisible Man's literal eyes and his mind's eye to the possibility of escape from the white patriarchy, and ultimately leads to his downfall through misplaced trust in the same white patriarchy that enslaved his ancestors.

## IV. Meeting with the Snake

*"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil"* (Isaiah 5.20).

The Invisible Man's new mental Eden exists within his presence in the Brotherhood. Within the group, the Invisible Man accrues a false sense of respect and power as delegated by Brother Jack, who leads the Brotherhood. Specific parts of the Brotherhood appeal to his sense of self-assurance, from orating paramount speeches to rile support for the Brotherhood to meeting new peers who support him. After delivering his first speech for the association, the Invisible Man once again becomes blinded: "Blurred figures bumped about me. I stumbled as in a game of blindman's bluff" (Ellison 347). In this sense, the Brotherhood relates to the same white patriarchal society controlling the battle royal who aims to blind the Invisible Man, and the Invisible Man's new Eden is the same as his previous Eden at college, just in a different physical landscape. Neither of these Edens allow the Invisible Man to hold power and autonomy as a Black man, but both provide him a false sense of self-confidence. Although the Brotherhood portrays a sense of unity, the Invisible Man becomes a figurative synecdoche in the novel as he believes that *his* motivations are the same motivations that drive the group, and by orating for the Brotherhood, he is one in the same as the group; however, he remains solely a mouthpiece for the Brotherhood and creates an idyllic version of his involvement.

Importantly, though the narrator believes he is acting toward a greater purpose, his blind trust in the Brotherhood leads him downwards in his fall. His fall is foreshadowed in his first meeting with the organization, as the Invisible Man notes that he "could see the word Chthonian on the storm awning stretched above the walk" (299); the word "Chthonian" embodies an unholy connotation as it means "concerning, belonging to, or inhabiting the underworld" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). The hellish implications of this word create the sense that the Invisible Man has entered the depths of Hell with the Brotherhood, whom he mistakenly believes imparts good upon the world; furthermore, Brother Jack's deceitful nature presents itself as similar to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Ellison introduces Brother Jack in the novel as the one who recruits the Invisible Man into the Brotherhood. Brother Jack tempts the narrator with money and opportunities to speak for the Black injustice as he "sweeps" the Invisible Man away and "introduces [him] by a new name" (Ellison 311). As the novel progresses, however, Brother Jack's deceit becomes visible when he abandons the

local problems in Harlem to instead focus on national and international issues, further proving that Jack does *not* share the same values as the Invisible Man and instead works for his own profit.

In Book IV of *Paradise Lost* (1667) by John Milton, Milton describes Satan's pain and envy as he looks down upon Adam and Eve, which connects to Brother Jack's deceitful nature through his inability to view the Invisible Man as an individual; instead, Jack asks the Invisible Man to renounce his past as Satan asks Adam and Eve to renounce the wishes of God. Once an angel in heaven, Satan is envious of the happiness and joy the couple feels in Eden, and he wishes to wreak havoc upon their joy in order to spite God: "Your change approaches, when all these delights / will vanish, and deliver ye to woe — / More woe, the more your taste is now of joy" (Milton 367–69). In the same way that Satan looks down upon Adam and Eve, Brother Jack looks down upon the Invisible Man as they descend into the Chthonian. Unaware of the evilness that lies beneath the organization, the Invisible Man confuses whom he views as *his* God with a figure of deceit and evil; in this moment, he exhibits the same blindness he shares at the battle royal while descending in the elevator to the boxing arena. During his first meeting with the Brotherhood, the narrator unknowingly begins his final Fall from his God's Grace through his ambition to better society for himself.

## V. The Consumption of the Apple

*"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3.5).

After many more meetings with the Brotherhood and several speeches made on behalf of the Brotherhood, the Invisible Man's identity within the Brotherhood and the power it confers blind him to the organization's true motives; furthermore, he has not yet lifted the veil from his mind's eye. Tod Clifton, a member of the Brotherhood, serves as Harlem's Youth Leader. After leaving his position, the Invisible Man witnesses Clifton's murder. Clifton and the Invisible Man share the same hope for Black liberation from a white patriarchy. While the Invisible Man is still somewhat under the impression that the Brotherhood lives up to their ideals, Brother Clifton's death reveals the Brotherhood's real motives, and it is Brother Clifton's death that drives the Invisible Man to give a speech he knows that Brother Jack—his metaphorical God in the Brotherhood—will not approve of.

At Brother Clifton's funeral, the Invisible Man stands before an audience who feels the same betrayal and anger against the white patriarchal police officers that the Invisible Man is beginning to feel against the Brotherhood for its failure to protect Clifton or prevent his murder. As a result, the Invisible Man now must declare a eulogy describing Clifton's life. However, instead of promoting the organization during Clifton's eulogy, the Invisible Man describes Clifton's life as it relates to the other Black members of the community, beginning with the anaphoric clause "His name was Clifton . . . " (Ellison 352). The Invisible Man humanizes his murdered friend to the audience, a friend that has been dehumanized in society due to his race, and through his oration, comes to understand that the Brotherhood does not care about the Black youth as they claim, showcasing Clifton's death as an example of this betrayal. The Brotherhood diminishes the real issues in the community (issues that Clifton's death at the hands of the police have only inflamed) by focusing more on their reputation than their actions, and the Invisible Man's resentment over the death of his friend presents itself through his speech.

During the Invisible Man's eulogy for Clifton, as the tension and anger grows in the sweltering heat, he questions the audience, "Don't you know it's hot out here in the sun?" (Ellison 352). The sun at Clifton's funeral directly correlates to a description of Eden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Satan, similar to the Invisible Man's proclamation that he is hot in the heat, speaks to the sun: "O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams, / That brings to my remembrance from what state / I fell . . . " (Milton 37, 38). In this case, however, Satan admonishes the sun for reminding him of heaven as it shines upon Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, the sun shines upon the Invisible Man as his Edenesque view of his surroundings slowly fades. He consumes an apple from the Tree of Knowledge, and he finally lifts his veil. The Invisible Man, post-consumption, describes the Brotherhood as a "mere glimmer of light, but behind the polished and humane facade of Jack's eye, I'd found an amorphous form and a harsh red rawness" (Ellison 392–93). Once he lifts this veil, the Invisible Man sees Jack in his "raw" nakedness and, consequently, realizes the true motives of the corrupt organization (Ellison 393). While the Invisible Man had viewed Jack through an idealistic veil, the action of oration becomes the consumption of the apple that unobscures his vision and deconstructs his Edenesque fallacy.

## VI. The Invisible Man's (Down)Fall

*"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me"* (Micah 7.8).

The *Invisible Man* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* embody the metaphorical definition of "falling" as it relates to Adam's Fall from Grace. The *OED* traces the word "fall" starting from 1175 AD as "To descend from a state of moral rectitude, virtue, or grace" (*OED* "fall"). The many references to the word come from sources such as the 1879 *Life and Work of St. Paul* by F.W. Farrar: "The sense of sin oppressed him . . . He was ever falling and falling, and no hand was held out to help him," and the 1992 *Black Women Abolitionists* by S.J. Yee: "If they lost their virginity before marriage, they would fall from virtue." In the context of biblical connotations, *Falling* is therefore followed by *From Grace*. In said context, to thoroughly understand the transitional state from pre-fall to post-fall, an action must occur for someone to fall from God's virtue. The reader can trace the Invisible Man's Fall from Grace as he transitions from a state of innocent obedience to guilty disobedience of the Brotherhood by tracing the usage of the word *fall* as it appears in the novel. Using this method, the reader can pinpoint six instances that contributed to the Invisible Man's fall; furthermore, each instance of the word "fall" in the novel accompanies a new transition for the narrator in his search for identity, which suggests that each "fall" alters the Invisible Man's identity.

The first use of *fall* appears in the novel during the battle royal: "The room went near red as I fell. It was a dream fall, my body languid and fastidious as to where to land, until the floor became impatient and smashed up to meet me" (Ellison 21). Despite coming to the battle royal to deliver a speech, the prominent white members of society force the Invisible Man to fight other Black children for their pure entertainment. The battle royal remains key in understanding the Invisible Man's mindset as he enters the collegiate world. By both *falling* to the ground and *falling* into the wishes of the white men, the narrator creates a cyclical process in which he continuously places white men in a position of power over him as his God.

The second use of *fall* appears as Dr. Bledsoe summons the Invisible Man to entertain one of the university's wealthy white donors, Mr. Norton, by driving him around the campus to places he pleases. Unfortunately for the narrator, Mr. Norton requests to visit one of the town's patrons, a man named Trueblood, who is infamous for raping

his daughter and his wife in his sleep. Though the Invisible Man does not realize, the reader understands that Mr. Norton had sexual fantasies as well about his late daughter. Upon realizing that Trueblood raped his daughter and received no repercussions from his community, Mr. Norton becomes ill and requests that the narrator drive him to get a "stimulant" or "a little whiskey" (Ellison 69). This series of unfortunate events for the narrator only seem to worsen as the only bar available for Mr. Norton is a rowdy Black veteran's bar, which shocks Mr. Norton and shakes the hope he held for the civilization of Black people. After returning to campus with the thoroughly shocked man, the Invisible Man visits Mr. Norton's room to try to explain to Dr. Bledsoe what happened; as he explains, he notes that above the fireplace is a portrait of the Founder that "looked down at me remotely, benign, sad, and in that hot instant, profoundly disillusioned. Then a veil seemed to fall" (Ellison 81). Once again, the Invisible Man innocently obeys the white members of society, just as the narrator obeyed Mr. Norton's requests to see different places in town. The Invisible Man's blind obedience in this instance relates back to the veil over the Founder's eyes. By obeying Mr. Norton's request to visit Jim Trueblood, however, the Invisible Man *falls* from Dr. Bledsoe's Grace in the same way the veil falls from the portrait of the Founder. Even through the Invisible Man's own banishment and move to the North, the veil remains over his mind's eye.

The third use of the word "fall" occurs in Dr. Bledsoe's letter to his colleagues in the North. After meeting with Bledsoe, the Invisible Man is expelled from the college until autumn (or so he thinks). Dr. Bledsoe writes seven letters of recommendation for the Invisible Man to deliver to some of his colleagues in the North, all of which are securely sealed and which the narrator does not view beforehand. After several letter deliveries and no calls for work, the Invisible Man visits the last colleague in the hopes of finding a job. However, instead of meeting with Mr. Emerson, the Invisible Man is met by Mr. Emerson's son, who flirts with and takes pity on the Invisible Man's current predicament with the college. As a result of this pity, Mr. Emerson's son, Emerson Jr., reveals the actual contents of the letter from Dr. Bledsoe, which the Invisible Man believed was for the benefit of his education: "This represents, my dear Emerson, one of the rare, delicate instances in which one for whom we held great expectations has gone grievously astray, and who in his fall threatens to upset certain delicate relationships between certain interested individuals and the school" (Ellison 148). By using the word "fall," Dr. Bledsoe directly

relates the Invisible Man's fall from Grace to his position as a student at the college. Since the Invisible Man worships the college and its patrons, president, and Founder (all either powerful white men or run by powerful white men), Bledsoe describes the narrator as no longer succumbing to the Grace of the college or its patrons since he threatens their interpersonal relationships. The Invisible Man transitions from one Eden to another through every fall as he leaves behind his worship of the white patriarchy, as well as his idolization of Dr. Bledsoe, Brother Jack, and the Brotherhood as a whole.

The fourth usage of the word "fall" is during the Invisible Man's stint at the Optic White paint factory and represents both the impossibility of concealing the sins of the white patriarchy and the necessity of Black populations to make white society shine. The Invisible Man seeks out this job at the behest of Emerson Jr., where he meets his supervisor, a man named Kimbro. Kimbro gives the Invisible Man strict orders while mixing paint: "There's got to be dope in every single sonofabitching bucket" (Ellison 154). Kimbro's poor instructions cause the Invisible Man to mess up the white paint, and he is consequently moved to the basement to work with Brockway. Brockway is a veteran at the paint factory and the only other Black man who works there because his experience with the factory has made him irreplaceable. After the Invisible Man has a run-in with some union members at the factory, Brockway's paranoia of losing his job leads him to give the Invisible Man incorrect directions that ultimately cause a deadly explosion: "It was a fall into space that seemed not a fall but a suspension. Then a great weight landed upon me and I seemed to sprawl in an interval beneath a pile of broken machinery . . . " (78). The Invisible Man's *fall* while working in the Optic White paint factory proves his inability to ignore the sins of the white patriarchy and the legal system that enables its abuses. The white paint represents the white society, while the drop of black represents the Black population. The black dope is vital for creating the perfect shade of white, just as the Black population is vital for the white society to shine, similar to how Brockway is a Black man running the machines that create white paint. The Invisible Man's fall is a pyrrhic fall in that, while he remains the victor from leaving one state of submission, he transitions from the existing workforce into the Brotherhood, where, like Brockway, he conceals the sins of white society.

The fifth use of the word *fall* occurs when the Invisible Man leaves the hospital after the incident with Brockway at Optic White. The Invisible Man loses his identity following a series of electric shock treatments, which leads the narrator to leave the hospital feeling more confused about who he is than when he first started his journey in the North. The Invisible Man, while walking, has several semi-conscious experiences in which he realizes that he is “no longer afraid” of the influential white men to whom he previously was subordinate; however, even though he may state that his fear is gone, he continues to remain subordinate to the same type of people (Ellison 194). The Invisible Man feels light-headed and thinks, “It was day’s end now and on top of every building the flags were fluttering and diving down, collapsing. And I felt that I would fall, had fallen, moved now as against a current sweeping swiftly against me” (Ellison 194). As the narrator stumbles along the subway platform, he connects himself and his mental state of confusion to the “fluttering flags” on the tops of the buildings (Ellison 249). By connecting himself to the flags, the Invisible Man positions himself as falling from the top of the world. The question left to the readers, however, is from what is he falling? To the Invisible Man, this train of thought is significant in his transition from a worshiper of whiteness to someone working against the white patriarchy. Again, the reader would benefit from remembering that while the Invisible Man believes he has completed his transition, he is still falling.

The last use of *fall* occurs just as the Invisible Man plunges underground to what becomes his new territory. Chased underground by a mob of white men after helping to burn part of the city, the narrator staggers through the street and finds refuge inside of an uncovered manhole. The Invisible Man’s fall into the uncovered manhole results in him “lay[ing] in the black dark upon the black coal no longer running . . . ” (Ellison 438). Soon after lighting a match to see his new surroundings, “the match went out and I heard something fall softly upon the coal nearby. They were talking above” (Ellison 434). The situating of white men above him puts them in a literal position of power over him. By falling into an underground manhole, the Invisible Man has finally reached physically and mentally the lowest point possible, and to complete his Fall from the Grace of white men, he has left the Brotherhood and created a landscape of his own–one that, importantly, he does not view as an Eden. The Invisible Man has abandoned all hope of his God and expelled himself from Eden, and seeks the redemption only he can give himself.

## VII. Epilogue: Falling into the Abyss of Nietzsche

*"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3.5).

The final chapter places the Invisible Man underground in his manhole, which mirrors the reader's introduction to the Invisible Man in the prologue. The manhole is void of light and the truth the Invisible Man thought he knew; instead, immense darkness surrounds him. The Invisible Man must therefore create his own light figuratively and literally by repossessing his faith in his previous God and becoming his own faith. To begin his transformation into a state of guilty disobedience from God (guilty meaning that he feels guilt for his previous devotion), the Invisible Man burns past relics that held significance to him: "I started with my high school diploma, applying one precious match with a feeling of remote irony, even smiling as I saw the swift but feeble light push back the gloom" (Ellison 440). He then moves on to burn Clifton's Sambo doll, the "anonymous letter" that Jack wrote, and a piece of paper with his Brotherhood name. In this sense, the Invisible Man has unobscured the thin line between what he views as good and evil, distinguishing between his past experiences with white patriarchy and his future as an African American man beneath the world.

In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche, a widely known German philosopher, wrote of similar experiences in his book *Beyond Good and Evil*. He states that by looking into all possible modes of thought beyond good and evil, a person, without realizing it, has opened his eyes to the opposite idea of religion. A man who has learned not only to compromise and realize what was but "wishes to have it again *as it was and is*, for all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo* . . . to the whole piece and play" requires to make himself anew and necessary to the world (Nietzsche 45). In this sense, the Invisible Man's descent into the underground world to reflect on his previous experiences *falls* into Nietzsche's argument that reflecting upon what has created his current state, then reflecting again from the beginning, will ultimately renew him from the identity he has become. Overall, the Invisible Man's Fall from Grace was necessary for his evolution into a Black man who can effectively "Live with [his] head in the lion's mouth" and "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" because, without his fall, the Invisible Man would not be able to rise from the ashes of his past (Ellison 16). The Invisible Man's opposite

idea of religion focuses instead on relinquishing worship to Bledsoe, Mr. Norton, Brother Jack, and the likeness of patriarchal white men to thoroughly establish a religion based upon himself and his experiences to finalize unapologetic disobedience against these men.

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# Nature versus Norms: Eugenics and Social Constructs in "The Shadow over Innsmouth"

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## I. Introduction

H.P. Lovecraft's reputation as one of the most well-known and influential writers of American horror fiction only somewhat precedes his infamy for racism and xenophobia. His novella "The Shadow over Innsmouth," written in 1931, undoubtedly reflects the prevalent beliefs of his historical moment, in which the American eugenics movement rose to prominence (Joshi 2: 791). This story follows narrator Robert Olmstead on a genealogy-tracing trip to New England in 1927 (Joshi 2: 791). Intrigued by the rumors he hears from New Englanders, he detours to the isolated port town of Innsmouth. The Innsmouthians' strange appearances disturb him, and his disgust intensifies when he learns from Innsmouth resident Zadok Allen that the Innsmouthians' physical features are the product of crossbreeding with fishlike creatures known as the Deep Ones. After fleeing Innsmouth, Olmstead continues his genealogical quest and eventually discovers that he too has Deep One ancestry. This revelation causes him to contemplate suicide, but he ultimately decides to live out the transformation into a Deep One and join his ancestors in the sea.

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" has traditionally been read as supporting the racist, xenophobic, and eugenicist beliefs of its historical moment. However, I argue that this story instead exposes the unnecessary, harmful consequences and irrationality of these beliefs. More specifically, this story condemns racial prejudice, the association of mental illness with non-

white, non-Anglo-Saxon ancestry, and the concept of genetic determinism. The novella presents all of these ideas as social constructs, a contrast to the eugenics movement's attempts to present them as objective and scientific. Consequently, this text illustrates, through its protagonist Robert Olmstead, how individuals can free themselves from these constructs in order to live a life of acceptance, individual agency, and pride in their ancestry, even amid rampant xenophobia and the popularity of eugenics.[1]

## II. The Context of Eugenics

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" emerged in an era when eugenics was "as roaring a part of American culture as flappers and the Model T" (Miller 131). The eugenics movement gained prominence in the United States from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, by which time about "two-thirds of the . . . states" had passed eugenic sterilization laws (Dowbiggin x, Luty 52). Several of these sterilization laws listed "the mentally ill" as "a specific target group" for sterilization (Dowbiggin 77–78). The eugenics movement also supported genetic determinism through the beliefs that genes control "all or at least most human characteristics" and that, as the gene itself is "a unit that w[ill] not change," people cannot escape their genetic fate (Garver and Garver 1110). Consequently, mental illnesses were seen as genetic and therefore incurable, so psychiatrists used eugenics to explain their own "pronounced difficulties trying to cure their institutional patients" (Dowbiggin x). Thus, the American eugenics movement presented genetic traits like mental illness as destiny: once inherited, those traits decided a person's inevitable fate.

Additionally, concerns about immigration contributed to the eugenics movement's rise to prominence in the United States. Increases in immigration prompted the spread of racist fears about the supposedly genetically superior Anglo-Saxon population declining in the United States (Garver and Garver 1110). "[R]estrictionist" opinions towards immigration increased (Dowbiggin 192). The eugenics movement, with its inaccurate claims about immigrants being "biologically inferior," provided justification for these opinions, as well as for "xenophobic" laws that severely limited immigration (Garver and Garver 1110–11, Dowbiggin 192). One such belief of some American psychiatrists was that immigrant populations exhibited a higher concentration of mental illness (Dowbiggin 191). Another belief associated alcoholism with immigrants (Dowbiggin 224). Thus, the eugenics movement characterized immigrants as threats to the Anglo-Saxon population who would

bring unfavorable genes into the United States (Garver and Garver 1110). The Deep Ones in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" display these supposedly genetic traits that the eugenics movement associated with immigrant populations, which illustrates them as the embodiment of the eugenics era's racist fears.

First, the novella directly relates Deep One ancestry to foreign descent, which illustrates the story as an allegory for the xenophobic climate in the United States. A ticket agent from New England who warns Olmstead about Innsmouth claims that many New Englanders dislike the Innsmouth residents because of "race prejudice" (Lovecraft 360). This racism stems from the Innsmouthians' strange appearances and their potential relation to the "queer kinds of people" brought to Innsmouth by trading ships that traveled to "queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else" (Lovecraft 360). This suggests that the New Englanders believe that the Innsmouthians' ancestry derives from immigrants, and, furthermore, their description of foreign people and places as "queer" demonstrates their intolerance toward the potential cultural differences of other peoples. However, because the Innsmouthians' ancestry instead derives from the Deep Ones—who originate from the waters around the South Pacific islands—this prejudice illustrates how white New Englanders hold similar contempt for both immigrants and the Deep Ones. Thus, the story re-creates the prejudiced cultural climate of the United States, with the Deep Ones representing immigrants and the New Englanders representing individuals who hold xenophobic beliefs. This is further proven through the characterization of the Deep Ones, which reflects xenophobic fears about immigrants. When guessing how the Innsmouthians spend their time, another New Englander suggests that "[p]erhaps—judging from the quantities of bootleg liquor they consum[e]—they lay for most of the daylight hours in an alcoholic stupor," which echoes the xenophobic fear of immigrants being alcoholics (Lovecraft 372). Additionally, the Innsmouthians' "quasi-pagan" religion, the Esoteric Order of the Dagon, was "imported from the East" and replaced Christianity in Innsmouth, which poses another derogatory comparison between the Deep Ones and Pacific Islanders (Lovecraft 365). The fear of another religion replacing Christianity represents the fear of other cultures replacing or interfering with Western culture in the United States. These elements present the Deep Ones as fictional surrogates for immigrants who enact the xenophobic fears of the early twentieth century.

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" draws on another xenophobic fear by associating non-English languages—and by extension, non-Anglo-Saxon heritage—with mental illness. Characters slip into an unfamiliar language to demonstrate madness. The novella establishes this technique when Zadok Allen begins speaking in a strange language—"*Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah-nagl fhtagn*"—immediately before Olmstead describes him as "fast lapsing into stark raving" (Lovecraft 386). Olmstead himself later speaks this same language when he decides to embrace his ancestry and join the Deep Ones: "*Iä-R'lyeh! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä!* No, I shall not shoot myself—I cannot be made to shoot myself!" (Lovecraft 412). Olmstead embracing this new language represents his acceptance of his ancestry. The fact that he begins speaking it immediately before declaring that he will not commit suicide—his only option to avoid transforming into a Deep One—emphasizes this acceptance. However, Olmstead slipping into this language also indicates that he too, in the perspective of others and society, may be "fast lapsing into stark raving." His language change presents his newfound wonder at the acceptance of his ancestry as the product of madness. The association of madness specifically with non-English languages in the story represents the eugenics movement's belief that immigrant populations were more prone to mental illness.

Clearly, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" responds to the prevalence of xenophobic and eugenicist ideas within its historical moment. The fact that the Deep Ones embody the fears and negative impressions that white, Anglo-Saxon Americans had about immigrants indicates that "The Shadow over Innsmouth" supports eugenics and xenophobia. However, one crucial moment in the story calls this interpretation into question: "Olmstead's spectacular conversion at the end," during which he accepts his Deep One heritage and resolves to rejoin his Deep One relatives undersea (Joshi 2: 797). Lovecraft scholar S. T. Joshi acknowledges that this moment could "transform the Deep Ones from objects of horror to objects of sympathy or identification," but he ultimately rejects this interpretation and instead argues that "Olmstead's change of heart [is] an augmentation of the horror" that the Deep Ones evoke (2: 797). Moreover, Joshi claims that this moment achieves its frightening effect through its illustration of both Olmstead's "physical body" and "mind" as "ineluctably corrupted" (2: 797). When Joshi's claim about Olmstead succumbing to madness is considered in conjunction with the allegory about eugenics in "The Shadow over Inns-

mouth," the story seems to support eugenicist and xenophobic beliefs and present the Deep Ones—and, by proxy, immigrants—in a deeply negative light. Olmstead's insanity not only reinforces the association between foreign ancestry and mental illness, but also implies that he needs to be mentally ill in order to be proud of his non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon heritage. Additionally, Joshi argues that the novella serves as a warning against interracial or intercultural relationships, suggesting that these bonds will induce the degeneration of the human species (2: 793–4). Degeneration was a eugenicist belief concerned with a genetically determined hierarchy of life forms, in which moral failings induce physical changes in an organism that demote it on the hierarchy (Miller 25–7, 49, 128). Joshi's argument suggests that "The Shadow over Innsmouth" presents interracial and intercultural relationships as a moral failing that will cause "the denigration of human importance" within this hierarchy (2: 794). However, I disagree with Joshi's interpretation of the ending of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" as an intensification of the fear surrounding the Deep Ones. Rather than exemplifying a descent into madness, Olmstead's decision to join the Deep Ones indicates his rationality. Consequently, the story presents an argument against eugenics, exposing the illogical thought processes that underlie its condonement of bigotry and genetic determinism.

## III. The Irrationality of Prejudice

Olmstead only appears to succumb to madness when he changes his opinion about the Deep Ones because, through this action, he defies the xenophobic social norms established throughout the story. "The Shadow over Innsmouth" illustrates prejudice against the Deep Ones as normal and prevalent in society, a parallel to the rampant racism and xenophobia of the eugenics-era United States. However, when the characters in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" express prejudice, the novella highlights the lack of logic and objective evidence behind their sentiments, which presents xenophobia as similarly illogical.

Olmstead's descriptions of the Deep Ones are filtered through his prejudiced perspective in a narrative style which focuses on Olmstead's own feelings and impressions rather than the actual stimuli that evoke them. This narration ultimately criticizes prejudice as a construct which has no rational basis in objective reality and is, instead, based on individual biases. For instance, Olmstead describes the Innsmouthians as having "certain peculiarities of face and motions which [he] instinctively disliked without being able to define or comprehend

them" (Lovecraft 369). However, he never details these specific traits, nor can he identify which ones produce his distaste. In fact, Olmstead's physical observations do not always inform these impressions: "even before [he] notice[s] any details" about the Innsmouthian bus driver's appearance, "there spread[s] over [him] a wave of spontaneous aversion which c[an] be neither checked nor explained" (Lovecraft 365–6). His reaction precedes his perception, indicating that his revulsion toward the Innsmouthians originates from his own visceral feelings rather than any specific details about the Innsmouthians themselves. Consequently, Olmstead's descriptions highlight the fundamentally illogical nature of prejudice, which is not grounded in the truths of objective reality and is instead reliant on subjective biases.

This truth, however, does not prevent other characters from sharing Olmstead's prejudice against the Deep Ones. Their bias saturates the information that they provide about Innsmouth. Taken at face value, their rumors support the interpretation that Olmstead's madness causes him to decide to join the Deep Ones. However, exposing their prejudices and considering alternate interpretations dilutes the derogatory impact of their statements and uncovers the ill-founded nature of the stigma against the Deep Ones and the xenophobia it represents.

For instance, a New England ticket agent supplies the first negative depiction of the Innsmouthians in the novella. He describes Innsmouth as a town of strange, isolated people, shrouded in sinister rumors and with a mysterious history involving riots and a disease epidemic. However, he also admits that "the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice" (Lovecraft 360). The ticket agent thus presents prejudice as a concept which discounts the reasons behind New Englanders' hatred of the Innsmouthians. Rather than rumors or history evoking their disgust, their revulsion originates "simply" from their illogical, emotional preconceptions about the Innsmouthians based on their appearance and ancestry. Furthermore, even after the ticket agent confesses that baseless prejudice underlies New Englanders' dislike for the Innsmouthians, he says, "I don't say I'm blaming those that hold [race prejudice]. I hate those Innsmouth folks myself" (Lovecraft 360). Even though he acknowledges the lack of rationality behind his own contempt, the ticket agent still resents the Innsmouthians, revealing the incongruity of his prejudice. His own admission undermines his negative characterization of the Innsmouthians, as it reveals that his bias influences his beliefs. Nonetheless, this first impression of the Innsmouthians

that Olmstead receives sticks in his mind, despite its questionable credibility. When Olmstead stays at the Gilman House hotel in Innsmouth, for example, he struggles "not [to] dwell on" the rumor he heard from "the Newburyport ticket-agent about the Gilman House" (Lovecraft 391). The emotional salience of the ticket agent's information overpowers its lack of credibility, demonstrating how prejudice endures despite its lack of a logical foundation.

Furthermore, much of Olmstead's information about the history of Innsmouth comes from Zadok Allen, whose intense bias against the Innsmouthians who breed with the Deep Ones creates doubt concerning the credibility of his story. Zadok openly expresses his disgust toward mating with the Deep Ones. First, he labels Obed Marsh, the sailor who brought the practice of reproducing with the Deep Ones to Innsmouth, as "[f]ar gone" mentally (Lovecraft 386). Additionally, Zadok later professes that "[he]'d a died ruther'n take" the third Oath of Dagon, a pledge to breed with the Deep Ones (Lovecraft 387). However, Zadok's disgust disregards the fact that the Innsmouthians cannot avoid breeding with the Deep Ones, as the Deep Ones threaten to "ris[e] an' wip[e] aout humankind" if the Innsmouthians do not comply (Lovecraft 386). This perspective, which neither Zadok nor Olmstead consider, illustrates the Innsmouthians breeding with the Deep Ones as a selfless act to save humanity. Zadok's bias against crossbreeding with the Deep Ones blinds him to the nobility of the Innsmouthians' compliance, demonstrating how prejudicial beliefs are maintained by ignoring contradictory evidence.

Clearly, Zadok's individual prejudices render his claims questionable, especially claims which reinforce xenophobic stereotypes and which are not substantiated by the truths of Olmstead's genealogical research. Olmstead's research provides him with evidence to support Zadok's statements that the Deep Ones mated with humans and that Obed's daughter—later revealed to be Olmstead's great-grandmother—"was eddicated in Europe" and married "an Arkham feller" (Lovecraft 387). However, no proof or even corroboration arises for one of Zadok's wildest claims: the Deep Ones' demand for human sacrifice. Zadok describes both the Pacific Islanders and their religious practices, including sacrifices to the Deep Ones, as "heathen," displaying his bias against the cultures of Pacific Islanders (Lovecraft 379, 380). His claim that they made human sacrifices to the Deep Ones—and that the Deep Ones then demanded these sacrifices from the Innsmouthians—is likely influenced by stereotypes about non-Christian religions. Thus, Zadok's

claims about human sacrifice may provide more information about Zadok's xenophobic beliefs than they do about the truth of what happened in Innsmouth, illustrating how prejudice can promote the acceptance of unfounded beliefs about reality, as long as they are consistent with one's preconceived biases.

Furthermore, Zadok's claim that human sacrifices occur in Innsmouth relies on his questionable memory. His belief originates from "see[ing] somethin' heavy heaved offen Obed's dory beyond the reef" from his house's cupola when he was a teenager, "an' then larn[ing] nex' day a young feller was missin' from home" (Lovecraft 384). A correlational, not causal, relationship links the strange, vague image Zadok sees to the missing person. Moreover, when Zadok discusses these events that occurred in Innsmouth during his teenage years, he mentions not only that people went "missin'," but also that some people "kilt theirselves" (Lovecraft 386). Therefore, suicide, rather than sacrifice, could explain the person's disappearance. Additionally, Zadok's memory is characterized as unreliable. A grocery store worker in Innsmouth describes Zadok as "ninety-six years old and somewhat touched in the head, besides being the town drunkard," and Zadok is, in fact, drunk when he tells Olmstead about Innsmouth's history (Lovecraft 373). Thus, alcohol and mental illness could potentially influence his story. Also, these memories occurred during Zadok's childhood and teenage years, so some of the details in his memory may have faded or changed with time. All of this combined causes Zadok's description of the Deep Ones and the Innsmouthians to lack credibility. However, Zadok's stories still contain enough negativity to enhance prejudice. Even though Olmstead initially finds Zadok's story "[p]uerile," it still "communicate[s] to [him] a mounting unrest which join[s] with [his] earlier sense of loathing for the town and its blight of intangible shadow" (Lovecraft 389). The fact that a story which Olmstead does not even believe intensifies his hatred of the Innsmouthians further demonstrates the irrationality of prejudice.

However, when Olmstead finally hears a different perspective that presents the Deep Ones in a positive light, his opinion of them changes, which illustrates how his previous prejudice relied on an incomplete and wholly negative view of the Deep Ones. He communicates with his Deep One grandmother and great-great-grandmother through dreams. They initially frighten him, but later these "certain dreams dete[r] [him]" from committing suicide (Lovecraft 412). Thus, they provide him with a comfort that makes him feel more accepting of his impend-

ing transformation into a Deep One. Through these dreams, Olmstead learns more about the Deep Ones. As he becomes more familiar with them and their world, "[t]he tense extremes of horror [lessen], and [he] feel[s] queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them" (Lovecraft 412). When he takes time to actually learn about the Deep Ones and their lives from the Deep Ones themselves, rather than just hearing negative rumors about them, his fear of them decreases. He begins to take an interest in them and feels "drawn" to learn more about their lives. Olmstead's dreams highlight the influence of perspective on prejudice: once he hears a positive perspective of the Deep Ones and thus escapes the echo chamber of negativity he encounters in human society, his fear and prejudice disappear, and he decides to accept his heritage and join his Deep One family.

Moreover, Olmstead's ultimate decision to join the Deep Ones is, unlike his initial prejudice, grounded in logic. This choice benefits him, as his recollection of one of his dreams reveals:

> One night I had a frightful dream in which I met my grandmother under the sea. She lived in a phosphorescent palace of many terraces, with gardens of strange leprous corals and grotesque brachiate efflorescences, and welcomed me with a warmth that may have been sardonic. She had changed—as those who take to the water change—and told me she had never died. Instead, she had gone to a spot her dead son had learned about, and had leaped to a realm whose wonders—destined for him as well—he had spurned with a smoking pistol. This was to be my realm, too—I could not escape it. I would never die, but would live with those who had lived since before man ever walked the earth. (Lovecraft 411)

Olmstead has not yet overcome all of his fear and prejudice—he describes the dream as "frightful," the flowers as "grotesque," and his grandmother's "warmth" as possibly "sardonic." Still, even with these reservations, this dream presents a positive image of becoming a Deep One. Olmstead also describes the undersea world in terms that imply royalty and beauty, like "palace," "terraces," "realm," and "wonders." His word choice indicates that, despite his fears, his fascination and awe about his heritage is growing. In addition to this beautiful new home, Olmstead's grandmother mentions another benefit of becoming a Deep One: immortality.

Both she and he will "never die," so not only will he live forever, but he will live forever surrounded by his family. The decision to join the Deep Ones, thus, has benefits for Olmstead, which provides him with rational reasons for overcoming the illogic of prejudice and making this choice.

## IV. Social Norms and Mental Illness

Despite the rationality of Olmstead's ultimate decision to embrace his Deep One heritage, the social expectations of prejudice towards the Deep Ones cause other characters in the story to view him—as well as his cousin Lawrence, who is also transforming into a Deep One—as mentally ill for his acceptance of the Deep Ones. This presents the label of madness as a social construct applied to those who deviate from social norms rather than an objective quality of psychosis or irrationality. "The Shadow over Innsmouth" initially hints at the social construction of madness through Olmstead's reactions to his dreams. Olmstead confesses that his dreams would "stamp [him] as a madman or a genius if ever [he] dare[s] write [them] down," illustrating madness as subjective and socially determined (Lovecraft 411). The word "stamp" presents this characterization as an externally applied label rather than an internal or innate quality; depending on how society reacts to the same, unchanging stimulus of Olmstead's dreams, it will either "stamp" him with the positive label of "genius" or the negative label of "madman." Thus, the novella criticizes the eugenics movement's presentation of mental illness as genetic, instead suggesting that it is merely a social construct.

The social construction of mental illness is ultimately used against Olmstead and Lawrence because their choice to embrace their Deep One heritage defies the socially accepted view of the majority. Unlike Olmstead and Lawrence's eventual acceptance of their ancestry, disgust towards the Deep Ones and the Innsmouthians with Deep One heritage persists for everyone else in the story. For instance, the ticket agent claims that "[n]obody around [Newburyport] or in Arkham or Ipswich will have anything to do with" the Innsmouthians, which presents prejudice against the Innsmouthians as a widespread attitude across several New England towns (Lovecraft 361). Members of Olmstead and Lawrence's family also express disgust towards their transforming family members, which further highlights how revulsion towards Deep One features is normative. For instance, Olmstead's uncle Douglas "shot himself after a trip to New England"—during which he learned about his Deep One heritage—in order to avoid the transformation (Lovecraft 409). Additional-

ly, Lawrence's father describes his transforming son's "state, both mental and physical" as "very bad," and Olmstead's father "look[s] at [Olmstead] curiously and almost affrightedly" when he begins to transform (Lovecraft 409, 411). Olmstead and Lawrence thus defy social norms by living out their transformations into Deep Ones, and consequently, they are viewed as mentally ill. Lawrence's father locks his son in a "madhouse," and Olmstead fears that his father will also "shut [him] up in a sanitarium as [his] poor little cousin [Lawrence] is shut up" (Lovecraft 412). Olmstead, extrapolating from Lawrence's experience, believes that his choice to deviate from social norms is grounds for his family to lock him up in a mental hospital. The fear of institutionalization looming over Olmstead illustrates how society can weaponize the social construction of mental illness against people who hold non-normative views.

In addition, Olmstead's acceptance of his heritage further deviates from social expectations because, given the connections between Deep One and foreign ancestry, Olmstead's actions represent an acceptance and celebration of non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon ancestry. Olmstead's decision deviates from the social norms of a place and time in which eugenics, racism, and xenophobia were widespread. In the early twentieth century, white supremacy and eugenicist ideas of degeneration and a biological racial hierarchy were "prevalent," especially in New England (Joshi 1: 112–13). Furthermore, after the United States entered World War I in 1917, xenophobia and racism increased throughout the country through "Americanization," a "mounting conformist pressure to prove patriotism and loyalty to the country's values, symbols, and institutions" (Dowbiggin 225–26). By accepting his foreign-coded heritage, Olmstead defies this "conformist pressure"; consequently, society labels him as mentally ill.

Olmstead's decision to join the Deep Ones initially seems like the product of madness because he contradicts the expectations and beliefs about the Deep Ones that arise throughout the story. However, the pervasive disgust towards the Deep Ones represents the popularity and normativity of prejudice in the early-twentieth-century United States. Olmstead's choice at the end of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" does not perpetuate the beliefs of eugenics. Rather, it condemns them. Not only does it expose the irrationality of prejudice and xenophobia, but it presents madness—which the eugenics movement considered to be an inherited trait more concentrated in immigrant populations—as a social construct rather than an innate, genetically transmissible quality. Thus, the novella reveals how eugenicist beliefs that sought to slander immigrants perpetuated xenophobia through baseless prejudice and a socially constructed, subjective conception of madness.

## V. Criticizing Genetic Determinism

In addition to attacking the racist and xenophobic prejudices of the eugenics movement, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" also condemns eugenicist beliefs about genetic determinism. The novella demonstrates how genetic determinism renders individuals powerless over their fates—but only as long as they believe in their genes' omnipotence. Once they comprehend the agency they retain over their destiny, this powerlessness fades, enabling them to take action to realize the future they desire. Thus, socially perpetuating the inescapable power of genes over human fate—as the eugenics movement did—creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that induces significant, unnecessary distress in individuals.

Olmstead's stress about his genes' absolute power over fate underlies his hatred toward the Innsmouthians. He especially despises one of the Innsmouthians' characteristics that reminds him of members of his own family: their eyes. He refers to the Innsmouthians' distinctive appearance as "the staring 'Innsmouth look,'" which references no other specific trait except for their eyes (Lovecraft 377–8). Furthermore, when recalling a conversation with the grocery store worker in Innsmouth, Olmstead's memory emphasizes the clerk's mention of "staring, unwinking eyes which one never saw shut" as "especially . . . shocking" (Lovecraft 372). Olmstead also highlights the eyes of his relatives with Deep One ancestry when he describes why he disliked them: "[s]omething about the staring, unwinking expression of both [his uncle and grandmother] had given [him] a vague, unaccountable uneasiness" (Lovecraft 409). The part of the Innsmouthians that bothers Olmstead most implies a connection between them and himself. Olmstead does not acknowledge this connection; doing so would also acknowledge its ramifications for his own future. The eugenics movement's belief in genetic determinism would imply that Olmstead would be unable to avoid his inherited fate: becoming a Deep One. Thus, the social prevalence of genetic determinism affects how Olmstead copes with the possibility of his relation to the Deep Ones. He denies rather than interrogates his recognition of his family's features in the Innsmouthians; he notes only that the Innsmouthians' appearance looks familiar, but that "this pseudo-recollection passed very quickly" (Lovecraft 369). He does not attempt to place this memory and even discounts the impression of déjà vu as false. His dismissal suggests that he knows, subconsciously, that he does not want to acknowledge his relation to the Innsmouthians and its consequent implications for his fate. Thus, he suppresses his recognition with denial, displacing his déjà vu with disgust.

However, as Olmstead researches his family history and his genetic fate catches up with him, his attempts to protect himself through denial fail. He admits that he makes "a horrible sort of *comparison*" between his uncle's and grandmother's faces and "something which would bring stark panic if too openly thought of" (Lovecraft 409; emphasis in original). Olmstead directly acknowledges his reasons for attempting denial: to relieve himself of the stress that accompanies acknowledging his fate. However, his attempts to suppress the Innsmouthians' similarities to his family ultimately fail. The mere suggestion induces in him "a kind of terror of [his] own ancestry" (Lovecraft 409). When Olmstead finally sees evidence of his family's connection to Innsmouth, a tiara made of the Deep Ones' gold in his family vault, he faints. He cannot consciously cope with the revelation. Afterward, he undergoes a mental health crisis: "[f]rom that day on [his] life [is] a nightmare of brooding and apprehension, nor do[es] [he] know how much is hideous truth and how much madness" (Lovecraft 410). Olmstead questions his sanity in a last-resort attempt at denial. The truth terrifies and disgusts Olmstead so much that he prefers psychosis over being related to the Deep Ones. However, his admission of "apprehension" demonstrates his fear for the future. Now that he acknowledges his genetic ties to the Deep Ones, he dreads its implications for his fate. His description of this "apprehension" as a "nightmare" that consumes his life illustrates how trapped he feels because of genetic determinism, and how this loss of control envelops him in immense stress. This anxiety is so intense, it causes Olmstead to contemplate suicide. He "b[uys] an automatic and almost t[akes] the step," but ultimately grows to accept and appreciate his destiny (Lovecraft 412). However, Olmstead's uncle Douglas, who does commit suicide to avoid his genetic fate, exemplifies how not everyone comes to terms with genetic determinism's attribution of omnipotence to genes. Olmstead and Douglas demonstrate the damaging power of society's widespread acceptance of genetic determinism; when people believe they lack control over their future, they experience immense distress that can, in some cases, culminate in suicide.

However, suicide also provides a method of regaining control over genetic determinism. Michel Foucault describes suicide as a "possibility of resistance" in an unbalanced power dynamic (292). Thus, no side in a power dynamic can assert "'total power' over the other," as "power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself" (Foucault 292). Through suicide, Douglas resists the absolute power that his genes assert over him, as he averts

the fate his genes determine. However, other options aside from suicide offer the opportunity to assert power over genetic fate. For instance, Olmstead reclaims power over his destiny by contemplating suicide and consciously deciding to live out the transformation he inherited. Although his powerlessness initially generates denial and stress, he exercises agency over his life through his choice to continue living. He further demonstrates his agency through his decisions to actively produce the future he wants, such as deciding to leave for the water early to avoid institutionalization and "plan[ning] [his] cousin's escape from [the] Canton madhouse" (Lovecraft 412). In making such active decisions, Olmstead enacts his belief that his own behavior influences the outcome of the future, rather than the central determining factor being his genes. While the eugenics movement viewed genes as deterministic, Douglas and Olmstead contradict the idea of genetic determinism to instead reveal that people are not completely powerless in the face of their genetic fate: they possess the power to act and affect their future.

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" highlights how genetic determinism derives its power from its status as a socially accepted belief rather than from the actual influence of genes. It falsely presents people as completely powerless over their fates, which produces stress and hopelessness. However, even in situations where genetics powerfully influence people's futures, people can still exert some level of control. They may even feel empowered to act in order to change pieces of their destiny that their genes do not affect. Douglas and Olmstead asserting agency over their lives condemns genetic determinism as an unnecessary stressor; both characters demonstrate how acting in defiance of genetic determinism allows them to reclaim power over their future. Thus, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" argues that genes can only assert absolute control over a person's life if that person believes in their genes' omnipotence and does not attempt to assert their personal agency.

## VI. Conclusion

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" is clearly a product of the American era of eugenics. However, rather than supporting eugenicist ideas and prejudices, this novella illuminates the irrationality and disastrous consequences of these beliefs. Although eugenics is no longer as widespread and socially accepted as it was in the early twentieth century, it remains a threat. According to Ian Robert Dowbiggin, "breakthroughs in genetic and reproductive technologies" have sparked fear of "a return of the eugenics movement" (vii). Dowbiggin also theorizes that, if

this eugenics revival occurs in the United States, its cause will be "the critical inability of the American public" to recognize the similarities between modern discussions about genetics amid technological advances and conversations from the eugenics era (239–40). Thus, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and its illumination of the irrationality of the eugenics movement's beliefs remain relevant today and can help prevent the United States from returning to this dangerous path. By examining one's beliefs for a logical basis in evidence, listening to a variety of perspectives—even those that deviate from social norms—and empowering human agency over the omnipotence of genes, one can be like Olmstead and escape the powerful hold of illogical eugenicist beliefs.

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## NOTES

1. I would like to clarify that I am making no argument regarding Lovecraft's intentions in writing "The Shadow over Innsmouth." Instead, I adopt the analytical framework promoted in Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" and allow the "language itself" of the novella to "spea[k]" and form the basis of my analysis rather than attempting to search for Lovecraft's intended meaning based on his personal beliefs (143, 146). Regardless of whether Lovecraft intended for "The Shadow over Innsmouth" to support or criticize the bigotry inherent to the eugenics era, the novella's portrayal of this era's beliefs, the thought processes that maintained them, and how Olmstead eventually overcomes them ultimately illuminates the logical fallacies of the eugenics movement.

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# A-Blair-OOOOOOOO!: Examining the Rhetorical Differences in American and British Soccer Commentary Through the Elocutionist Lens

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Soccer—football—is the world's game. The global TV audience of the 2018 FIFA World Cup was 3.5 billion people (Harris). The final between France and Croatia on July 15, 2018, was watched by 1.1 billion (Harris). Eighty broadcasters in 212 territories around the globe carry the English Premier League (Curley). However, the United States has always been an exception to this. When the United States Men's National Team played the England National Football Team in the 2022 FIFA World Cup on November 25, only around four percent of the United States population—15.3 million people—tuned in to watch (Harris). By comparison, twenty-two percent of Brits—15.1 million people—tuned in for the highly-anticipated group stage match (Harris).

The question as to why soccer has yet to firmly take hold of the American zeitgeist has been posited from numerous sources over the past several decades. A plethora of answers have been given. The US is too busy watching football and basketball. The US doesn't understand soccer. The US sucks at soccer and therefore hates it. The list goes on. This paper does not stake a particular claim on this question; rather, this research contends that the 15.3 million Americans who watched the U.S.-England match on November 25, 2022, consumed a drastically different product than their 15.1 million British counterparts, revealing a potential cause for the disconnect between American viewers and soccer. The main difference between these products is that a majority

of American viewers watched the Fox Sports coverage of the match, while a majority of British viewers watched the BBC coverage. Aaron Timms, writing for *The Guardian*, has memorably described Fox Sports' coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup as an "unmissable abomination" (Timms). No such main-stream complaints have been lobbed at the BBC coverage. There is a general sense in the international soccer community that American announcers are far inferior to their British counterparts; however, this claim has yet to be exhaustively, or even adequately, examined. This paper provides a rhetorical comparison between American and British soccer commentators through the lens of the Elocutionist Movement in the hopes of distinguishing some of their core differences. In so doing, this paper argues that American announcers produce a tonally inconsistent product—they use improper intonation, say too much at the wrong times, and employ far too literal language to effectively encapsulate the beautiful game of soccer.

As a brief digression, it's important to discuss one particularly contentious term: because this paper is written by an American student at an American university largely for American audiences, the term "soccer" will be used to refer to the game played by two teams of eleven players with a round ball. It may seem an odd choice to use "soccer," given the cross-cultural level of analysis this paper seeks to incorporate and the fact "football" and its various spellings is the widely accepted term for this sport anywhere outside the United States, Canada, and Australia (Cunningham), but due to the author's own cultural background, use of the term "football" would be disingenuous. Therefore, "soccer" will be the term herein employed.

The fashion-versus-function, delivery-versus-substance discussion has raged for centuries within the study of rhetoric. Classically, the five canons of rhetoric are as follows: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Generally, rhetoricians saw delivery as a less important virtue of speech; theorists as far back as Plato argued that the content of what one says is more important than how one says it. However, delivery is impossible to erase from a complete understanding of rhetorical theory. As early as the first century, Quintillian argued rhetoric is defined as a "good man [*sic*] speaking well" (360). Over time, the group of rhetorical theorists who advocated for delivery became known as the Elocutionists. The British Elocution movement was particularly prominent in this regard and varied somewhat from its American counterparts. British elocutionists "made rhetoric appear to be the art of declaiming a speech by rote, without

regard to whether the thought [*sic*] uttered were trivial or false or dangerous" (Spoel 49). Elocutionists claimed the components of delivery—including but not limited to the aspects of cadence, intonation, body language, and pronunciation—were as, if not more, important as the content of a speech. A prominent member of the Elocutionist Movement was eighteenth-century Irish stage actor Thomas Sheridan. Sheridan, as Philippa Spoel puts it, repeatedly advocated for the "scholarly and educational credibility of elocution as a new field of study within the context of late eighteenth-century British culture" (49). While Sheridan and his elocutionist disciples knew nothing of the futures of television broadcasting and sports commentary, his lessons of appealing to audience emotion through delivery still resonate in contemporary rhetorical discourse. Applying the cornerstones of the elocutionist teachings of Sheridan and others provides an insightful and necessary understanding of the technical differences in cross-cultural soccer commentary.

To be clear, this paper deals more with the delivery of the language of play-by-play commentary than purely the content of the speech. Certainly, an issue with American commentators at lower levels is a lack of understanding of soccer's rules and intricacies and an untrained viewing eye. However, in most instances American commentators get the factual information correct, particularly at the higher-budget end of the spectrum. Even when their content is factually accurate, they are faced with scorn for producing an inferior product. John Strong, the lead play-by-play commentator for Major League Soccer—America's primary soccer league—on Fox Sports, is an archetypal example of this phenomenon. In an MLS match between the Seattle Sounders and Minnesota United in 2021, Strong provided a piece of commentary that embodies his rhetorical limitations: "There's contact there. Ruidiaz gets ahead of Boxall. It's not a foul! And Ruidiaz scores! Quick ball over the top, contact in front of it, Ismail Elfath says nothing, Raul Ruidiaz scores again, and all of a sudden the game is tied!" (ESPN FC 00:34–00:47). Strong gives the viewer a perfectly adequate account of the facts of the play–a Seattle Sounders player pushed over a Minnesota United defender in order to reach an overly ambitious pass before dispatching a finish past the befuddled goalkeeper—but his delivery is far from ideal. For one thing, Strong places an inordinate amount of emphasis on unimportant phrases; had the previous quote been capitalized to match Strong's intonation, part of it might look something like, "QUICK ball over the TOP, contact in FRONT of it, ISMAIL ELFATH

says NOTHING, and all of a SUDDEN the game is TIED!" He also incorporates far too many details far too quickly and provides little other than a literal account of events. Due to this, as the comments of the YouTube video of this moment suggested, Strong's call is hardly memorable; clearly soccer fans want more from their commentary than sheer factual accuracy. In his academic appraisal of what makes for excellent commentary, Armani Syed highlights "the joys of Arab and Latin American soccer commentary" apparent during the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Syed characterizes Arab and Latin American announcers as exhibiting an impassioned "narration style," while claiming "some on social media said it made English-language commentary feel a little lackluster by comparison" (Syed). It's important to note the "English-language" commentary Syed refers to is that of Fox Sports, not the BBC. Strong's speech misses the "impassioned" and properly-intoned style Syed and others claim is so important to reputable soccer commentary. It also typifies the American broadcast aesthetic of filling the airtime, and thus showcases the quirks and pitfalls of soccer commentary in the United States.

The contrast between Strong's inconsistent and literal rhetorical style and that of one of the most popular and well-known British announcers in the world, Peter Drury, is stark, and it is the perfect example of the differences between the highest levels of American and British soccer commentary. Drury is currently NBC Sports' lead main commentator for Premier League Productions. He's known for a series of highly romanticized and alliterative calls, including, "Roma have risen from their ruins! . . . Manolas: the Greek god in Rome! . . . The unthinkable unfolds before our eyes!" (TD 07:50–08:15). In this call, one of Drury's most well-known and most recited commentaries, he describes a late, game-winning goal from Kostas Manolas, a Greek player on the Italian club AS Roma FC. To capture the moment, Drury leaves long spaces between his minimal words, thus allowing the action to partially speak for itself. It is commentary laced with intentional delivery—note the pauses and ellipses before each clause that add force to Drury's words—and it is one befitting of the occasion. Below a video featuring the commentary, one viewer comments, "My eyes tear up every time!" (TD). The emotional impact of this call makes the importance of delivery clear. In a journal article exploring the popularity of English soccer, James Curley and Oliver Roeder suggest the importance of aesthetic delivery in broadcast commentary: "In the end, perhaps the answer to English soccer's popularity lies beyond the database. Perhaps the key

is in the aesthetics" (81). It's easy to trace a line between the "aesthetics" of English soccer and its accompanying commentary. The most memorable, engaging, mystifying moments of English soccer—Wayne Rooney's bicycle kick in 2011, Sergio Aguero's 2012 goal to win the league, and the list goes on—are all accompanied by buoyant broadcast commentary. Filled with its well-delivered and lyrical comments, British commentary helps shape the game's iconic moments, which in turn create the mystique behind the world's most-watched soccer league. While factual and literal commentary is passable, only well-delivered and literary commentary is memorable.

Since sports commentary is inherently an aural accompaniment to an already visual product, any comparison of Strong's and Drury's words must contend with their respective auditory qualities. Chief among these qualities is intonation, the rises and falls of the voice while speaking. Intonation provides a window into the emotions of the orator; while a well-delivered line meets an audience with a pleasing preferred timing and pace, a well-intoned one connects the viewer to the commentator's emotional range, thus rendering the product more engaging. Sheridan was critical of speeches delivered with unintentional intonation. As he argued in his *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, "he [in this case, the announcer] makes use of words only, and the signs of emotions, which it is impossible they can represent; and omits the use of the true signs of the passions, which are, tones, looks, and gestures" (Bizzell 884). Because soccer commentators cannot convey information through looks or gestures, their tones become hugely important in conveying the emotion of the game, as spoken words, arbitrary signs in and of themselves, fail to completely convey the nuances of a human's emotional vocabulary. There are several iconic examples of effective intonation in British soccer commentary, two of the most notable being from Martin Tyler and Gary Neville. Martin Tyler's often-referenced 2012 "Agüeroooo!" call stands as one of the most vivid uses of intentional intonation. It is pointless to describe with words the intense emotion Tyler conveys through the elongation of the "o" sound and the crackling of his voice, which are doubtlessly among the reasons that Bleacher Report included this call in their Top 10 Most Iconic Commentator Calls in Football History list (FenasiKerim 00:05–00:15; Bailey). Another example of a British commentator who employs effective intonation is Gary Neville, whose most well-known call is an elongated "Oooohhhhh! Unbelievable!" from 2012 that has been colloquially referred to as a "goalgasm" (Chelsea 00:05–00:15). What's clear

from both of these examples is that the words are subservient to the tone: Neville conveys meaning not through his cryptic "Oooohhhhh" but through the simultaneous relief and ecstasy ricocheting across his vocal chords; Tyler conveys meaning not from simply pronouncing the player's last name but through the way that name morphs into rapturous excitement over the span of a few seconds. Sheridan, most likely, would see the virtue in this form of tonally-centered commentary. As he further comments:

> And tho' these tones, are usually accompanied with words, in order that the understanding may at the same time perceive the cause of these emotions, by communication of the particular ideas which excite them; yet that the whole energy, or power of exciting analogous emotions in others, lies in the tones themselves, may be known from this. (884)

The superiority of British commentary, then, lies in its understanding, most likely unintentionally, of Sheridian tonal control. This is why YouTube commenters regularly maintain that Neville's commentary "gives them tingles" (FenasiKerim), while very few, if any at all, say the same of Strong's. If Strong continues to randomly spike his voice during the recounting of insignificant or unrelated details—like in the aforementioned "Ismail Elfath" example—his commentary will remain inferior.

In all of the aforementioned iconic British calls, fewer words are used to express action and the resulting emotional response, suggesting that ideal soccer commentary lets the action speak for itself, supplementing it with insight or emotion. American announcers, obsessed with "filling the airtime," often resort to an overabundance of words (Szymanski). This tendency, as Sheridan warns, is rhetorically misguided. Sheridan argues that "words are in their own nature, no essential part of language, and are only considered so thro' custom" (Bizzell 883). Sheridan's point, while extreme, indicates how speaking too much can actually detract from or confuse what is being said. Taylor Twellman, a prominent American commentator and former player, is guilty of this rhetorical blunder. An example of Twellman's rhetorical overindulgence comes from the 2019 MLS Cup Western Conference Final match between the Seattle Sounders and Los Angeles Football Club. After Seattle forward Raul Ruidiaz nearly misses a shot, Twellman goes on a long, cascading description of the player's wardrobe: "From the moment he got off the plane in Seattle, every-

one told me he looked like a stone-cold killer. He had black shades on, black tea shirt, studded earrings, a huge watch!" (Seattle 02:07–02:15). Twellman makes a choice to accompany replays of Ruidiaz's dramatic, long-range effort with an elaborate description of first-day training outfit, and the result is somewhat jarring. Twellman's words, rather than complimenting the moment within the game, actively divides the viewer's attention. Twellman is by no means the only American commentator to commit this error, and it points to a grander error in American sports commentary: too many words, regardless of what they are, often detract instead of add.

Beyond better tonal control and an appreciation for concision, British commentators also exhibit more poetic language and thereby make their commentary more engaging for viewers. Whereas substituting tones for words is a more traditionally Elocutionist line of rhetorical understanding, there are also Elocutionists who concentrated on stylistic language, such as prominent Elocutionist Hugh Blair, who discussed the effect of this kind of language in his lecture *Origin and Nature of Figurative Language*:

> [Figures of speech] always imply some departure from simplicity of expression; the idea which we intend to convey, not only enunciated to others, but enunciated in a particular manner, and with some circumstance added, which is designed to render the impression more strong and vivid. (962)

Blair's insight illustrates the blurred lines between the canons of invention, style, and delivery. The orator creates a concept in their mind, designs it to be properly expressed, and thus enunciates it. This process takes place more intentionally in British soccer commentary than in its American counterpart. Returning to Drury's call of Manolas as a "Greek god," the British pundit employs a complex blend of hyperbole, metaphor, and proverbial diction to describe the scene more as a mythological tapestry than a soccer game. Meanwhile, J.P. Dellacamera, an American play-by-play commentator with over four decades of experience in broadcasting and a member of the Fox Sports team at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, is famous for steering clear of flowery language. Dellacamera was part of FOX Sports' coverage of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, during which he commentated the final between the United States and Japan. As American central midfielder Carli Lloyd marauded forward with the ball into a vulnerable Japanese defense, Del-

lacamera provided the call, “Lloyd with Morgan streaking [forward], she’s chipping the goalkeeper! Off the post and in! Hatrick for Lloyd!” (Matt 03:30–03:40). Lloyd’s third goal that day was one of the greatest strikes in World Cup final history, yet nothing about Dellacamera’s dry, professional description would suggest this. Dellacamera’s lack of figurative language, coupled with his reserved intonation, creates a subdued product. Dellacemera’s rhetoric does nothing to render his image “more strong and vivid” like Blair suggests. This does not mean he has failed as a broadcaster, but it does create a noticeable contrast to British commentators. For instance, when Manchester City’s captain and central defender Vincent Kompany scored a beautiful, thirty-yard screamer against Leicester City on May 6, 2019, Drury was there to provide memorable commentary, “Had a look; had a hit. OOH! Captain Fantastic! A wild celebration for a goal from his wildest dreams! A fantasy goal for City’s fantasy footballer!” (TD 02:42–03:03). Drury heeps layers of literary devices onto this commentary: antonomasia, repetition, alliteration. In so doing, he differentiates his commentary from the products of others and renders the image vivid. Dellacamera’s image is dull by comparison, causing viewers to lack any sense of engagement with the commentary—and possibly mute the broadcast.

Although content will always be important, the Elocutionist Movement—particularly the works of Thomas Sheridan and Hugh Blair—indicate that style and delivery are vital canons of rhetoric. Sheridan’s and Blair’s theories shed light on why American and British announcers are so respectively maligned and revered. Putting aside the issue of insightfulness and factual accuracy, American announcers struggle with the packaging of their content. Their off-putting delivery draws unflattering attention to American broadcasting, as in this critique from *The Guardian*: “Whereas the USMT is now a cosmopolitan ensemble of feather-fine talents, the Fox team is the equivalent of a farmer’s league XI that hoofs it long and hopes for the best” (Timms). Due to a lack of tonal intentionality, a dependency on an overabundance of words to fill airtime, and a reliance on the literal more than the figurative, American soccer commentary falls flat in comparison to the products of their British colleagues. Drury, Tyler, Neville, and others lace their well-delivered, passionately-intoned commentary with lyrical language that attracts the audience instead of annoying them. Soccer, known around the world as “the beautiful game,” deserves to be packaged and delivered in a manner that befits its beauty. As the conditions of soccer in the United States continuously improve, it is time viewers expected the same from their commentators.

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# Muslim Punk Feminism in *We Are Lady Parts*: A Radical Engagement with Difference

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## Introduction

Contemporary media discourse has cast countless perspectives aside to a space that academia has come to know as "the margins." One compelling quality ever-present in such a space is that of "difference"—a key term in feminist thought that has intrigued prominent theorists, including Audre Lorde and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Difference demands the critical exploration of various marginalized perspectives, which is where the genre of punk holds great relevance with its empowering of the politics and voice of the subaltern. Considering these observations, I want to first examine "punk" implications in feminist theory. Secondly, I want to draw attention to Nida Manzoor's television sitcom, *We Are Lady Parts,* as a significant "punk" media text, spotlighting five diasporic Muslim women in the UK who form a punk band in response to their individual and shared frustrations with society. Through a close reading of punk ideology and representation within the music, cinematography, and characterization in *We Are Lady Parts*, I argue that a distinct "Muslim punk feminist" movement emerges: one that offers complex expressions of difference informed by both punk anger—a driving sentiment within the movement—and punk reframings of "success," aligning with notions of resistance from the margins.

This proposed movement is valuable for three key reasons. Firstly, it draws attention to certain marginalized voices—namely, diasporic Muslim women—as well as to creators from such communities that

are often excluded from mainstream literary and filmic discourses. Secondly, the movement recognizes an alternative praxis within media and literary representation that resists the common academic urge to identify, label, and homogenize. Within "Muslim punk feminism," stereotypical oppositions—such as Islam and feminism, Muslim and queer, woman and punk, among various others—coexist in different complex forms, acting subversively against binary, oversimplified understandings of Muslim women, which are rooted in patriarchal and colonial values as well as in reductive postfeminist discourses. Thirdly, this movement, while acknowledging the damage and influence of oppressive dominant ideologies, highlights mobilized resistance at the margins. It emphasizes shared anger as well as catharsis amongst Muslim women and other marginalized communities who come together to celebrate their differences, rather than portraying the Muslim woman subaltern as "always oppressed" or unliberated without a white savior. Overall, "Muslim punk feminism" advocates for practices of nuanced representational plurality at the margins, within which I locate revolutionary possibility.

## Tracing the roots of punk feminism

There is already an electrifying line of academic discourse on the intersections of punk and feminism with numerous points of interest for my argument. The notion of punk performance holds immense significance in feminist praxis and media. As a pioneering writer on performance theory, Judith Butler claims, "From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic" (523). Punk feminism works beyond categories of gender and genre as a movement based in acts—an *active resistance.* The term "resistance" here requires characterization, particularly through its connection with "difference"—a key presence across punk feminist movements. Audre Lorde's discussion on the need to acknowledge difference in feminist resistance is pertinent to punk feminism: "Only within that interdependency of difference strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate" (25). The role of difference is crucial in defining punk performance, as a lead singer in the punk band, Bags, as well as a Chicana, Alice Bag describes her experience as an "outcast": "We were different, proudly different, and wanted to express our creativity through our art, our music, our fashion, our way of life" (236).

Here, the celebration of difference as well as the active rejection of patriarchal and colonial narratives of homogenization are key defining features of punk resistance. Mohanty further critiques such narratives, targeting the tendency in West-centric feminist scholarship to collectivize the category of "women" or "we" as a powerless group: "The discursively consensual homogeneity of 'women' as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women" (338). Within the context of punk movements, Katherina Wiedlack also targets this homogeneity, beginning with the following argument concerning the Russian punk band, Pussy Riot: "Most public media as well as cultural representations and analysis within the global West impose the values of queer feminist punk on the group without consideration of their specific cultural location" (411). She then proposes that the band "took up these discourses and products of the Western gaze and used them for their own purposes" by taking inspiration from Western punk movements and pursuing their own political goals, such as critiquing the Russian regime and battling homophobia (411).

Here, punk women occupy autonomous narratives of empowerment outside of the Western gaze that challenge homogeneity as well as assumptions of powerlessness within the broad categories of "women" and, more specifically, non-Western women.

## Ugliness, disruption, and "angered resistance"

After setting the stage for punk intersections with feminist theory, Manzoor's *We Are Lady Parts* becomes an apt media text to explore the subject matter, offering ample material on feminism and "punk performance" while enriching such perspectives through its alternative portrayal of the often-misrepresented context of diasporic Muslim women. Rosalind Gill discusses postfeminist media representations of feminist concerns, outlining the image of the "hot feminist": "It is a feminism that is actually encumbered by its desire not to be angry, not to be 'difficult', not to be 'humorless': it is positioned against the figure of the 'feminist killjoy'" (618). Alternatively, in its approach towards feminist concerns, punk feminism does not shy away from anger, "ugliness," and disruption, as displayed in *We Are Lady Parts*. The Muslim women in Manzoor's sitcom are vastly different not only from West-centric punk portrayals but also amongst themselves. However, they are all wronged by oversimplification and stereotyping practices within dominant patriarchal and colonial ideologies—and they are angry.

The injustice they face warrants a retaliation, expressed through their punk performance of angry feminist musical anthems, combined with general aggression and frustration towards the patriarchy. Bag writes, “Early punk participants, disenfranchised by the status quo, grew tired of knocking politely at the doors of the establishment and decided to simply kick them down” (238). While interacting with elements of hopefulness and celebration, punk performance appears to be heavily characterized by the anger of the “other.” Saira, the lead singer and leader of Lady Parts in the show, exhibits typical punk aggression by expressing her frustration openly, often yelling and kicking and punching things with aggression but never abuse. We learn soon that she left her family’s home and works at a butcher’s shop to support herself, confronted regularly by the condition of being an outcast both to her family and as a Muslim woman in Britain.

The band’s drummer, Ayesha, is confronted with a similar feat in different ways. As an Uber driver, we see her deal with racist microaggressions from the first episode, and later we know her to be a queer Muslim woman—an identity often coded as a contradiction in itself, with layered forms of marginalization. Such varying dissonances in both characters’ lives set the stage for their association with “Otherness” on multiple fronts, and their consequent frustration. Ayesha is also openly aggressive in her behavior, such as when her band members hold her back as she attempts to physically fight Amina after she suggests an amendment in the lyrics for the song, “Voldemort Under My Headscarf” (“Potential Future Spouse” 04:25–04:27). It should be noted that this particular aggressive reaction is in response to the suggestion of removing the reference to “Voldemort”—a supervillain—from the song, which in turn, would remove the aggressive, antinormative stance upheld by punk art.

Bisma’s character is another whose punk performance is relevant to the punk concept of “angered resistance.” Unlike others, she is a married woman and mother to a young daughter. Within the category of “Third World Women,” Mohanty comments on how married women are “victims of the colonial process” and how Muslim women in families are “oppressed” by patriarchal power structures (341; 342). Despite the tendency of Western media to represent Muslim wives and mothers through the oversimplified lens of victimhood, Bisma’s character does not abide by these definitions. Her home is depicted as a feminist space where the band members often meet for discussions and where even passing comments that stem from patriarchal values are immediately

unwelcome. When her husband mentions that Saira will always prioritize the band above men in her life, Bisma retorts, unamused, "Daughter, I think we should depart from this place before we choke on the fumes of this toxic masculinity" ("Godzilla" 06:13–06:20). Additionally, Bisma designs her own comic titled "The Killing Period" about women who become murderous when they menstruate, displaying her punk aggression while also engaging with female bodily processes that are typically associated with "shame, embarrassment and disgust" (Duby et al. 72). Bisma's status as a wife and mother does not suppress her voice, and instead, uniquely informs her punk performance. Her dedication to loud Muslim feminist expression underscores that women who lead a resistance do not abide by a single archetype, and that such movements only thrive on the ideas and actions of *different* women.

This sentiment of angered resistance also manifests in punk music through its shouted vocals, distorted guitar, and overall loud, disruptive sound. Jack Halberstam quotes Jayna Brown's description of punk singers: "Their shrill, shrieking, synthesized voices—enact a kind of anger that challenges the masculinized form of that emotion, as well as responding to gendered forms of oppression" (129). The music and instrumentation of Lady Parts comprises Saira's raging "yell-singing" style and power chords, Bisma's punchy basslines and vigorous backing vocals, Ayesha's emphatic drumming, and Amina's simple but gripping guitar solos. Together, they offer a powerful punk performance that demands attention and visibility while furiously reclaiming an anger that has often been associated with masculinity and forbidden from femininity. The first song that the band performs, "Ain't No One Gonna Honor Kill My Sister But Me," is the band's mockingly vengeful anthem, engaging with the concerns of specifically Muslim feminism. In adopting an approach reminiscent of—but arguably more sensitive than—Nirvana's grunge anti-rape song, "Rape Me," this song entices listeners to engage firsthand with the ridiculousness and injustice of violence against women. The song ragefully calls attention to the justifications for such violence, suggesting that the current social context warrants a woman to be killed for no real crime at all through lyrics such as "I'm gonna kill my sister . . . She stole my eyeliner!" ("Play Something" 02:23–02:38). Furthermore, even in its mocking tone, the song continues to serve as a warning for men to steer clear of femme spaces and sisterhood, as in the line, "She's mine, motherfucker!" ("Play Something" 03:05–03:07). Here, Muslim punk feminism does not present a pretty, palatable, packaged "hot feminism," but instead di-

rectly addresses disgust, violence, and murder, revealing the "ugliness" of patriarchal, colonial and capitalist ideologies that perpetuate performed ignorance towards such injustice. Furthermore, the movement challenges dominant masculinist and "white-privileged" discourses around the genre of punk, carving a space for Muslim women-led subversive discourses and modes of resistance.

## "Success" as a scream-sung punk song

As a feminist text following five Muslim women in a punk band, "Lady Parts," the show's depictions of success are important in revealing its political alignment with the margins. Angela McRobbie critiques postfeminist media depictions of "feminist success," arguing that West-centric, capitalist images of the "successful young woman" have become a "metaphor for social change," giving the example of the "ambitious TV blonde" represented through "glamorous high achievers destined for Oxford or Cambridge" (257). Alternatively, *We Are Lady Parts* presents difference as well as resistance in its representations of feminist success through its radical embodiment of "Otherness." The fifth episode of the sitcom, "Represent," shows a montage of the five band members' different future aspirations, featuring the song "Success" by Slotface and distinguished additionally through diverse cinematography. Saira, the band's lead singer, appears first in the montage, standing in the butcher's shop she currently works at, which soon transforms into a stage with several shots in bold statement punk colors of Saira performing center-stage for a crowd of thousands. Here, the voice of the subaltern is both literally and metaphorically centered, and she is finally able to be heard by a large majority. Bisma appears next, sitting at her comic stand next to her daughter. Her dream is depicted through psychedelic cartoons which show pieces of her comic and culminate in an animation of her playing bass onstage, showcasing both her dreams as a cartoonist and as a musician instead of a single goal. Ayesha appears after Bisma, shown in her bedroom with her then girlfriend Zarina. Ayesha's dream is shown through dark, metallic cinematography, sensualized by rain, displaying shots of her in grunge eye makeup bashing the drumkit passionately while Zarina watches, enjoying the music and rain. This dream resists normativity in its dark, grunge aesthetic and queer possibility, reflecting Elizabeth Stinson's claim that "Punk sound, as a radical force, has the potential to open a vital and alternative space of sexuality and performance" (279). Mom-

taz, the band's manager, follows, first pictured in the undergarments shop she works at and later, in her dream, inside her office at her own record label. Here, the niqabi woman occupies a position of power, fame and visibility, critiquing the "repugnance" (Bakht 70) and ostracism in attitudes surrounding niqabi women. Finally, Amina's dream in the montage shows her walking through a museum—as she typically loves doing—and seeing a portrait of herself with her guitar alongside the faces of old white men, depicting a desire for recognition and belonging in a world that privileges and prioritizes the white cishet male. These series of dreams as manifestations of feminist success speak of recognition and representation for different Muslim women, rather than pedestalling the single, myopic trope of the "ambitious TV blonde" at prestigious institutions as the standard for feminist success. Moreover, while demonstrating punk resistance on varying scales, this montage also pays homage to the differences that highlight and color these women.

Amina's journey throughout the show demonstrates alternative notions of success for punk Muslim women. On a personal level, she sets a goal to overcome her performance anxiety in order to be able to play with the band. When confronted with stage performances, her immediate reaction is often to throw up or to freeze. In the fourth episode, with Saira's help, Amina first shakily performs improvised spoken word poetry onstage and, towards the end, is finally able to play guitar onstage with the rest of the band and make progress in dealing with her anxiety. Although the band plays for an audience that boos and heckles them throughout their set, the women deliver a flawless performance and celebrate at the end, cheering while Amina narrates, "I had done it! I had performed! We were a real band—a proper live band. True, the crowd weren't going wild but this was a victory and the only way was up!" ("Godzilla" 23:40–23:51) The labeling of this moment as a "victory," along with the celebratory reactions of the band, associate this performance with success. While the audience in the show does not respect their performance, the TV show's audience, being familiar with the characters and their journeys, is encouraged to appreciate the joy accompanying Amina's and the band's achievement. This "small," unusual victory, heightened by its placement at the end of the episode, performs a larger foregrounding of alternative modes of feminist success that reject the narrow-minded portrait of the "ambitious TV blonde," honoring instead the versatility of punk resistance—particularly through collective mobilization.

Furthermore, the content of the punk song performed in the ending scene of the fourth episode is itself a critique of capitalist ideology—an oppressive force that punk performance aims to defy, with its forefronting of those at the margins of class, race and gender. The first chorus lines are as follows: *"Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living. Barely gettin' by, it's all taking and no giving. They just use your mind and they never give you credit. It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it"* ("Godzilla" 22:08–22:27). Here, Lady Parts' punk cover of Dolly Parton's anthem aligns with punk ideals of rejecting the system and identifying the dull, repetitive, and unrecognized strife faced by members of the working class as a result of capitalist power dynamics. However, punk performance is not simply an identification of subalternity. It exhibits a "hopeful, resistant subjectivity" (Barriere 5), which is shown through other lyrics in the song, such as, "But you got dreams he'll never take away" ("Godzilla" 22:57–23:00) and "The tide's gonna turn and it's all gonna roll your way" (23:07–23:10). Here, it is the subaltern who sings and dictates the "metaphor for social change," empowering bold, unapologetic punk performance over capitalist ideals of success.

## Happy, angry endings in a "Muslim punk feminist" world

The ending in the sixth and final episode of *We Are Lady Parts* displays the band successfully performing a gig they have set up themselves with an audience they have gathered themselves. The last song they perform together is a punk cover of Queen's "We Are The Champions," which is itself a pop culture anthem of success. For Amina, this success is found in the process of overcoming her anxiety as well as in the loud expression of her true desires and aspirations, despite the social taboo-ness of punk within religious and cultural contexts. For all band members, this success is meaningful in its nod towards their collective dreams of recognition and in allowing the voices of punk Muslim women to be heard, while also providing hope in paving a way for the band's future. It also must be noted that images of success are not associated with a shedding or detachment from their Muslim identity. Although Western ideologies propose that acts such as removing one's headscarf constitute "liberation" for the "oppressed" (Jamal 204), these women share and celebrate their success whilst continuing their varied practices and performances as Muslims.

Overall, the Muslim punk feminism in *We Are Lady Parts* is angry, unsettling, and empowering in its representation. It both demands and delivers, offering complex, holistic portrayals of its characters

that place its audience in an uncomfortable position, restricting them from the tendency to categorize. However, within this discomfort, Manzoor's sitcom also provides catharsis through its critical exploration of feminist joy as well as anger. It captures the larger-than-life contentment in friendship amongst those who acknowledge, celebrate, and fight for difference.

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# Milton's Making of a Monster: Viewing *Stranger Things* Through the Lens of *Paradise Lost*

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As the young characters of Netflix's hit science fiction-horror series, *Stranger Things*, have matured, the show's tone and themes have done so as well. Picking up months after the events of July 1985, the characters are still handling the resulting trauma at the beginning of season four. Eleven, the protagonist, is struggling with the presumed death of her adoptive father, the loss of her psychic abilities, and the bullying from her new classmates. Max Mayfield is no longer speaking with her friends in her grief over the death of her brother Billy at the hands of the Mind Flayer, a 700-foot tall monster from an alternate dimension known as the "Upside Down." These themes of trauma and depression are exemplified by season four's new villain, Vecna, a monstrous creature from the Upside Down who telepathically murders teenagers after forcing them to relive their most traumatic moments. Over the course of the season, the characters learn that Vecna was originally a human named Henry Creel, who, prior to the beginning of the series, was banished to the Upside Down by Eleven. There, his body became mutilated into a monstrous form, and in the season finale the ultimate twist is revealed: Vecna controls the previous antagonist, the Mind Flayer, and its hive mind, meaning that he is the true main antagonist of *Stranger Things*. Moreover, Vecna's backstory and motivations call to mind another famed literary villain: Satan in John Milton's 1667 epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Because of the two character's similarities, I argue that Vecna closely follows the Satanic archetype set forward

by Milton in a fresh and original manner by explicitly tying *Stranger Things*' version of the fallen devil's actions and motivations into this season's themes of depression and trauma.

## The Method: Establishing Genres and Archetypes

Before making any direct comparisons between the two figures, it is essential to consider the genres of *Paradise Lost* and *Stranger Things* and any possible intersection between them, in order to see the manner in which genre tropes may influence each character and their similarities. Unlike *Stranger Things*, *Paradise Lost* is not explicitly a tale of horror, although the vivid imagery associated with the personifications of Sin and Death can be associated with the, at times, visceral elements of the genre. Instead, scholars note that *Paradise Lost* interacts with and even influences other genres that *Stranger Things* engages with. In her article "Milton in Science Fiction and Fantasy," Katherine Calloway Sueda discusses prominent examples of Miltonic imagery and ideas that are used both consciously and unconsciously within works of science fiction and fantasy. Sueda defines two major elements drawn from Milton's work that can often be found within these two genres: the narrative process of worldbuilding, and the notion of good versus evil. She writes that Milton engages in worldbuilding by thoroughly describing the physical makeup and behaviors of angels and demons. This set a precedent for science fiction authors to substantively describe the creatures of their own works (Sueda 144–5). Worldbuilding has been a large part of *Stranger Things* since its inception, with its detailed crafting of the alternate dimension of the Upside Down and its inhabitants. Notably, the show's first two seasons vividly depict the life cycle, hunting patterns, and reproductive process of one of its creatures, the Demogorgon.

The notion of good versus evil is imperative to comparing Satan and Vecna, and it foremost plays a role in how the genres intersect between the two stories. Sueda writes that authors of science fiction and fantasy must view the genres " . . . as doing serious intellectual and ethical work rather than serving as mere escape or distraction" (147). She argues that *Paradise Lost* is Milton's magnum opus because of the unique decision to depict Satan as the protagonist of the story, and portray him in a more sympathetic, nuanced manner. Milton uses language from his earlier works to highlight Satan's imperfect state: "his own pride, malice, folly, misery, and lust . . . The Satan in Milton enables him to draw the character just as the Satan in us enables

us to receive it" (Lewis 205). The inner flaws and emotional turmoil Satan experiences in *Paradise Lost* is familiar territory to the reader, as he is not irredeemably evil by nature but is simply too prideful to deviate from the path he has chosen. As such, this more human depiction forces the reader to see negative feelings, such as pride, they share with Satan and judge him therewith. In tandem with this point, *Stranger Things* uses the character of Vecna as a physical manifestation of depression. Consequently, viewers are forced to consider how they have been affected by the dark feelings Vecna symbolizes—and in fact have taken further inspiration from the show by choosing 'savior songs,' or songs with great emotional meaning, that would allow them to escape Vecna (@Stranger_Things). That attached symbolism to Vecna is reminiscent of Sueda's description of Satan within the science fiction model, in which she writes: "Satan is Earth's first alien invader, an intelligent creature from outer space with a sinister agenda" (145). Vecna fits this description as well, with his intention to open gateways into the 'alien' dimension of the Upside Down and summon an army that will help him take over the real world, truly earning him Satan's title of "the enemy of mankind" (Milton IX. 494).

Elements which expand on the notions of good versus evil within *Stranger Things* and *Paradise Lost* are the show's frequent and overt references to Satan and Hell, which cast Vecna within the general Satanic archetype. Before Henry morphed into the monstrous figure known as Vecna, he was characterized as a skilled, handsome youth and adult, much in the same way that Satan was described as the most beautiful angel in all of Heaven. However, both figures' respective appearances became disfigured after they committed their atrocities to rebel against their corresponding authorities, and as punishment they are expelled from a brilliant white space (for Vecna, the Hawkins Lab; for Satan, Heaven) to a fiery, deadly realm (the Upside Down; Hell). There, they are each able to seize control and command an army of demons (the monsters endemic to the Upside Down are referred to with the prefix "demo-": demogorgons, demodogs, and demobats, suggesting a connection to the biblical versions of demons) with the ultimate goal to return and take revenge upon the world from which they were banished. Both have a tendency to whisper into the minds of humans, reminding them of their previous sins and their dark, negative feelings towards others. The Devil and Vecna even go by many names (the former by Satan and Lucifer, among others; the latter by Henry Creel, 001, and Vecna).

Yet *Stranger Things* goes a step beyond other Satanic archetypes by moving past general similarities and expressly rendering Vecna's story in Biblical terms. Reflecting on the reactions of his family when he began haunting them with twisted visions in 1959, Vecna sneers, "My naive father believed it was a demon, cursing [the family] for their sins" ("Chapter Seven: The Massacre at Hawkins Lab" 1:26:40). Additionally, when Vecna speaks of his fall from Earth to the Upside Down, he admits to Eleven, "At first, I believed you had sent me to my death. To purgatory" ("Chapter Nine: The Piggyback" 1:24:38). The vast majority of the residents in Hawkins, Indiana, who are unaware of the otherworldly beings which frequently seep into their town, attribute the murders that Vecna commits to Satan himself, and seek the scripture for answers. Their belief shows a seeming understanding of the principles of the Satanic archetype, which Patricia Kubis defines as Satan having "remove[d] his monster mask with the result that he walks incognito, unnoticed in his favorite form: man" (xvii). Unfortunately, caught up in the Satanic Panic of the era, the townspeople vilify the main group of protagonists as Satanic worshippers and choose to hunt them down instead. Within the narrative itself, the labels of good and evil are not given out delicately or rationally, but violently. Hence, while there are many commonalities between Vecna and the Satanic archetype, it is more fruitful to compare Vecna directly to the version from *Paradise Lost,* as that is how Vecna can truly be understood better as a man.

To that end, there are several elements within the show that can be more directly connected to Miltonic imagery concerning Satan, where the shared characteristics become more complex. After attacking the Hawkin Lab in 1979, Vecna shares his worldview with Eleven and seeks to sway her into joining his side and conquer the world. The scene's focus on Vecna tempting a young girl is reminiscent of the plot of Milton's *Comus*, a 1634 masque in which a devilish figure attempts to corrupt a young Lady with a drink from his magic cup. Additionally, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan and his fellow fallen angels are cast out of Heaven due to a burst of power from the Son of God. Just as the Son and Satan are both of God, Vecna and Eleven are "siblings," as both were test subjects of Dr. Brenner, the head of Hawkins Lab. Just like the Son of God in *Paradise Lost*, Eleven is able to transport her "sibling" to another realm. *Paradise Regained*, the 1671 sequel to *Paradise Lost*, further emphasizes that, unlike Satan, Jesus does not remember condemning him to Hell; Eleven similarly cannot remember banishing Vecna, having repressed the trauma, until Brenner coaxes it out of her. In addition, Vecna is not immedi-

ately sent to the Upside Down: he is depicted as physically falling for a long period of time, caught between two planes of brimming lightning, which is suggestive of the voids of Chaos that Satan must pass through during his journey from Hell to Eden. (The unending lightning storms and snowlike particles within the Upside Down itself are reminiscent of Milton's depiction of Hell's unnatural weather). During his fall, Vecna is struck by lightning an innumerable amount of times, scarring his entire body and burning his skin and hair away—notably causing him to develop cataracts in his eyes and become blind (Sprabary), a trait shared with Milton at the twilight of his career. In *Paradise Lost*, a similar scene is shown where Satan, upon his decision to fully commit to evil, develops ugly scars on his once-beautiful face to reflect his seething hatred: "Thrice changed with pale, ire, envie, and despair, / Which marred his borrowed visage . . . " (Milton IV.115–6). Upon renewing his murder spree in 1986, Vecna appears to his victims in visions, where he deceives them by taking the form of family members and friends, just as Satan does to Eve in Book IV.

## The Man: Establishing Self-Delusion

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan's professed beliefs and actions suffer from a sense of internal delusion brought about by his own nature, which Vecna also demonstrates. In his critical work *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis writes that while Satan is an impressive literary creation, Milton crafts him as a character not to be admired. Lewis acknowledges that Satan brings forth some sympathy, but also points out that "No one had in fact done anything to Satan; he was not hungry, nor over-tasked, nor removed from his place, nor shunned, nor hated" (203). Thus Satan's demeanor towards God can only be described as impetuous, as he seeks to strike at what he views as God's new favorites, the innocent Adam and Eve, and drag them down to his level. In the same way, Vecna chooses to target those who are weak and vulnerable, namely traumatized youth, and before killing them explicitly voices that he is making them *join* him—like Satan, Vecna is dragging his victims down to his level, quite literally in the form of bringing them to the Upside Down with him. Furthermore, Lewis deems a number of Satan's arguments and actions in *Paradise Lost* to be flawed logically, and a result of a narrative that contradicts the truth of reality. Satan is shown denying God as his creator in an outright lie, (Milton V. 853–7) as well as claiming that he fought directly against God in war, rather than against the archangel Michael (Milton I. 111–4). Satan is so in-

wardly deluded that there is something wrong with his existence that he naturally starts to believe his own lies. It is an indication of such when he feels some remorse, but still cannot find it within himself to fully accept his faults and turn back to God. Satan, writes Lewis,"now believes his own propaganda . . . he has become more a Lie than a Liar, a personified self-contradiction" (203). Similarly, Vecna is deluded about his own nature in *Stranger Things*, believing even in childhood that he is something more than a human being. Previously, the show consistently classified antagonists as being of either the real world or of the fantastical dimension of the Upside Down. In reality, Vecna blurs this distinction, but as a consequence of his delusions over his own nature, he rejects the humanity that connects him to the real world to instead seize control of the Upside Down.

Another sign of Vecna's and Satan's hypocrisies and contradictions is how they are caught up in deliberately and fiercely striking back against the fathers and creators they believed wronged them, despite the fact that, in so doing, both Satan and Vecna remain reliant on the influences of these father figures to inform their actions and motivations. This is a trait that Lewis notes about Milton's Satan, who is forever tied to Heaven and, thus, to his father figure, God, no matter how much he may revolt against that father figure:

> Throughout the poem [Satan] is engaged in sawing off the branch he is sitting on . . . since a creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers—including even his power to revolt. Hence the strife is most accurately described as "Heav'n ruining from Heav'n" (VI, 868), for only in so far as he also is "Heaven"—diseased, perverted, twisted, but still a native of Heaven–does Satan exist at all. It is like the scent of a flower trying to destroy the flower. (203)

While Satan may deny that he is of Heaven, he struggles at several points when he thinks back on his relationship with God. While it is true that God's power is greater than Satan's ever could be, Satan is also emotionally focused on God in a way that hinders his plans as well. When he first arrives at the Garden and spies upon Adam and Eve, invisible, Satan momentarily feels guilt at trying to hurt his creator: "[H]e deserved no such return / From me, whom he created what I was / In that bright eminence, and with his good / Upbraided none" (Milton IV. 42–45). Thus, Satan's fight against his creator and father figure is doomed from

the start: though Satan is motivated to prove he is beyond the physical control of God, God's past influence means that Satan can never truly succeed against Him. Vecna is placed in a similar situation with his father figure, Dr. Martin Brenner, a scientist at the Hawkins Lab who compels all of the psychic children being raised in the lab, including Vecna before his defeat, to address him as "Papa." Vecna and Brenner's relationship is interesting in that, unlike God, the latter is an ordinary man without any supernatural abilities, giving Vecna ample opportunity to kill his father figure to eliminate any further paternal or authoritarian influence as he enacts his plans. However, Vecna never kills Brenner, despite his newfound ability to telekinetically murder from the Upside Down. In fact, when Vecna is later told by Eleven that Brenner has been killed, his displeasure is visible. Although he describes Brenner as a powerless weakling who took control of psychic children in order to become special himself ("Chapter Nine: The Piggyback" 1:23:37), it is clear that Vecna deliberately left him alive, if only to make sure that Brenner bore witness to the ultimate failure of his life's work. It is exceedingly odd to see the horrifically burnt, tentacle-covered Vecna speak of his "Papa," but that fits with the unnaturalness of how both Vecna and Satan cannot let their respective "fathers" go. Ultimately, Satan and Vecna are committed to gain acknowledgement from their father figures, despite the fact that they believe they are acting for their own reasons—an idea which is, in itself, illogical.

Even in these moments of weakness, neither Vecna or Satan see fit to do reflection and seriously consider changing their ways; rather, they eventually scorn at any idea of redemption and continue down their chosen path. On a whole, Lewis writes, Satan is a very selfish character who largely lacks self-awareness: "He has chosen to have no choice. He has wished to 'be himself' . . . and for himself, and his wish has been granted" (205). While Satan does feel a great sense of remorse and regret in the Garden of Eden, he does not stay with these emotions for long. Instead he repeatedly rages against God as 'the Victor,' and monologues how he is going to fully commit himself to evil and turn away from feelings of regret: "So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear, / Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good" (Milton IV. 108–10). For all of the sympathy Satan evokes, it is with his personal refusal to work to repent that seals his perpetual failure against God, and renders him firmly unlike Adam and Eve once they sin but feel regret. Likewise, it is with Vecna's lifelong desire to shed himself of his humanity—and to choose to have no choice—that his role within the season's themes of trauma comes

to light. Although Vecna is human, contradictorily he expresses scorn at human connection and empathy, having told Eleven that he relies only on memories of anger and sadness to fuel his powers ("Chapter Seven: The Massacre at Hawkins Lab" 1:31:27). Yet over and over, other's choices to see the good beyond their trauma results in Vecna's defeat. It is Max's emotional connections with her friends that allow her to escape Vecna's clutches, and Eleven's choice to tap into her one happy memory of her mother that allowed her to recover from Henry's hold and overpower him back in 1979. In both cases, relying on humanity and emotion allowed these characters to come back from the brink and save themselves. The fallen, traumatized Vecna, however, willingly chooses to keep himself as such. The third episode, "Chapter Three: The Monster and the Superhero" illustrates this well: Eleven has traumatic flashbacks of the lab massacre, an event she cannot fully remember but fears she may have been responsible for. In an argument with her boyfriend Mike, who calls her a "superhero," Eleven says that she feels that she is instead a "monster." As Eleven experiences more painful flashbacks of the massacre, the camera then cuts to Vecna in the Upside Down: the true perpetrator of the massacre, and someone who has never felt traumatic flashbacks or questioned whether he was a monster over the massacre. Visually, the show demonstrates that it is the self-obsessed, uncaring Vecna who is the "monster," and that is precisely another reason why he and Eleven are destined to stand against each other as bitter enemies. Satan and Vecna remain fallen, but as a result of their own decisions and lack of true remorse.

This single-minded, narrow focus that Vecna and Satan share sustains their villainy and contributes to their continued fall even after their physical descent is long complete. Lewis writes that "Satan *wants* to go on being Satan. That is the real meaning of his choice. 'Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.'" (Lewis 205). Indeed, this robustness is shown with Satan and Vecna, when the two are shown to immediately reconcile their new location with their previously held ideals, and to move forward in their declared aims of 'bringing Hell to Heaven.' In the first book of *Paradise Lost*, the fallen angels are shown sprawled out on the floor of Hell, dazed and defeated, but Satan's anger is still vivid and he urges his followers to pick themselves up and not sink into sorrow:

> Though changed in outward lustre; that fixed mind
> And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,
> That with the mightiest raised me to contend,

> And to the fierce contention brought along
> Innumerable force of spirits armed
> That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,
> His utmost power with adverse power opposed
> In dubious battle on the plains of heaven,
> And shook his throne . . . (Milton I. 97–105)

Satan may have been externally changed, his body forcefully thrust from his home and into the void of Chaos, but inwardly, his resolution and commitment to doing evil stand firm. Neither does Vecna fall into despair over his horrifically burned body or his arrival into a new dimension full of monsters that offers no return to Earth. Instead, he glowingly marvels at his fortune being deposited into "a realm unspoiled by mankind" ("Chapter Nine: The Piggyback" 1:25:15). Vecna is then shown wandering for days, searching for a means to continue his villainous trajectory, until he finds something: the swirling cloud of particles that will come to be known as the Mind Flayer. Without hesitation, he raises his hand and uses his mental abilities to take control and alter the cloud's form into that of an enormous spider: "I found the most extraordinary thing of all. Something that would change everything. I saw a means to realize my potential. To transcend my human form. To become the predator I was always born to be" ("Chapter Nine: The Piggyback" 1:25:27–1:26:00).

The hypocrisy of Satan and Vecna are reinforced in these new realms, where their efforts to allegedly continue their revenge instead violate their stated beliefs. It is in this act of asserting control over the otherworldly Mind Flayer and forcing it to permanently take a form he desires that Vecna and Satan share a hypocritical nature. As Lewis writes of Satan, "He wants hierarchy and does not want hierarchy" (203), an idea which also applies to Vecna. Vecna professes to disdain any form of control and authority and to love the Upside Down's untouched quality, but by the time Eleven activates a new portal in 1983, the Upside Down has been transformed from a bright orange dimension with rocky terrain to a dark blue, shadowy replica of Hawkins. On top of that, by assuming control over the Mind Flayer's hive mind, Vecna corrupts the previously docile creatures of the Upside Down (compelling them to become vicious predators), much in the same way that Satan in *Paradise Lost* possesses an innocent serpent to tempt Eve. Vecna has become exactly what he claims to hate and fight against: a human who imposes his will upon a world and perverts it. In much the

same way, Satan vehemently despises God's throne, and he wages war to topple his father's hierarchy, but by the time the fallen angels have begun conspiring to strike back at God, Satan has already placed himself upon a throne and crowned himself the ruler of Hell.

Both Vecna and Satan have turned their new realms into near replicas of the domains they proclaim to despise, and both attempt to give the pretense of involving others. Satan, for instance, calls together a council of demons to plan how to move forward in their war on Heaven, yet he has already decided to desecrate God's sinless creations, Adam and Eve, and gives the idea to Beezlebub to act out a charade of teamwork. Similarly, Vecna creates the illusion of being merely another piece of the Upside Down by tethering himself to its hive mind–when Chief Hopper burns and beheads demogorgons in the real world, Vecna howls with pain, demonstrating this connection–but by controlling the Mind Flayer, he actually has full control over the whole dimension. Before Vecna's true power is revealed, the main cast theorizes that the Mind Flayer is the military commander of the Upside Down, and that Vecna is his "five-star general" ("Chapter Seven: The Massacre at Hawkins Lab" 33:08). Vecna and Satan's simultaneous instinct is to declare that they are the "foot soldiers," the lowliest members of the unjust military hierarchy. In truth, however, they are both the commanders, and their protests to the contrary are mere deception–to everyone, including themselves.

## The Fall: Establishing Self-Destruction

To fully evaluate the importance of the fall to both characters, it is insightful to consider the perspective that Vecna acts as an antihero, rather than simply as the antagonist, within his narrative, which is similar to Milton's portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. In her essay, "The Antihero's Journey: The Influence of Milton's Satan on the Evolution of the Dark Hero," Alice Capstick describes the antihero in terms of how they straddle the boundary between good and evil physically, psychologically, and morally (3), and how their relationship with power factors into their subsequent descent. Capstick conceives a 3-part model to describe the journey of the antihero, an inverse of Joseph Campbell's model of the hero's journey. The three stages she presents are a character's "rise," "reign," and "ruin," and she writes how Satan in *Paradise Lost* falls seamlessly into the three stages and, as such, is a clear precedent for the modern antihero, which can be represented through Vecna's journey.

Capstick does not depict the acts of rebellion performed by the antihero as being borne from a purely evil nature, but out of a distaste and aversion to rigid authority; in terms of Satan and Vecna, the targets of their grievances are God's cosmic hierarchy and the nature of the human race, respectively. In the "Rise" stage, Capstick notes that the antihero is "distinguishable from traditional heroic figures because they are motivated by their ideological rejection of the system of power they are subject to, on the grounds that it is tyrannical and oppressive," and furthermore that their "dissatisfaction [is] not just with a simple system of government or hierarchy, but with the order and governance of the universe on a cosmic scale" (7). Both characters also feel an overwhelming sense of superiority over others. Such language is evident in a flashback to 1979, when Vecna, still in human form before his exile to the Upside Down, speaks of his childhood to Eleven and explains his dissatisfaction with what sees as the repressive structure of society.

> But the human world was disrupting [nature's] harmony . . . enforcing a structure of their own. A deeply unnatural structure. Where others saw order, I saw a straitjacket. A cruel, oppressive world dictated by made-up rules . . . [everybody] performing in a silly, terrible play, day after day. *I could not do that.* I could not close off my mind and join in the madness. I could not pretend. And I realized I didn't have to. I could make my own rules. I could restore balance to a broken world. A predator . . . but for good. ("Chapter Seven: The Massacre at Hawkins Lab" 1:23:45–1:25:30)

Like Vecna, Satan questions the authority within his narrative, God's cosmic hierarchy, and whether that authority is truly a fair one. In a flashback to the time before the War on Heaven, Satan gathers many angels and shares his thoughts with them, questioning the laws of Heaven set up by God. Notably, Satan also refers to a physical object to symbolize the captivity he views following authority to be:

> But what if better counsels might erect
> Our minds and teach us to cast off this yoke?
> Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend
> The supple knee? Ye will not, if I trust
> To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
> . . .

> Who can in reason then or right assume
> Monarchy over such as live by right
> His equals, if in power and splendour less,
> In freedom equal? or can introduce
> Law and edict on us, who without law
> Err not . . . (Milton V.785–789, 794–799)

In these quotations, Vecna and Satan disparagingly refer to those who would not agree with their point of view as inferiors. Vecna refers to all other humans as actors who unquestioningly put on a performance and go through the same motions their entire lives, while Satan refers to those who would disagree with them as mindlessly committing to a similar ritual, slavishly placing their faces fully onto the ground before God. In their minds, they do not consider themselves part of their respective species—this is in line with Capstick's work; she notes that the stage of "Rise" leads to the antiheroes "degrad[ing] their humanity" (11). She cites Satan's degradation as someone who initially proclaims themselves to fight tyrants, yet increasingly uses the language of a dictator himself (11). Even before his transformation into an otherworldly being, Vecna states that he identifies much more with spiders, as they are predatory animals, than with human beings. When Vecna finally surrenders his body to the Upside Down, allowing the tendrils and tentacles that cover the entire dimension to fully embrace him, he is able to physically divorce himself from his humanity.

Capstick defines the second stage, "Reign," as the antihero's successful second attempt at rebellion, and the subsequent achievement of power to maintain their rebellion; however, "the antihero continues to rely on the problematic methods they used in the process of gaining power despite being aware they are immoral" (12). Satan and Vecna's "problematic methods" are evident—Satan's decision to grant himself a throne and Vecna's decision to transform the Upside Down in order to represent his old home are clear hypocrisies. Capstick writes that Satan's throne "undermin[es] the belief in the importance of democracy which he expressed in his earlier speeches" (8) and that it instead symbolizes tyranny (10). Similarly, Vecna's action makes him the human who spoils a world in his own image, specifically in the image that he claims to hate. Capstick is able to emphasize both the presence of self-awareness in the nature of the antihero, as well as their hypocrisies and flaws: in the best written antiheroes, their inclination to darkness is visible from the beginning, and their flaws, and especially their flawed heroism, should

be clearly articulated so as to show its gradual rather than sudden nature. Both *Paradise Lost* and *Stranger Things* present flashbacks of their two characters where it is evident that there is a crack in the way they present themselves, even though Satan is a prominent angel and Vecna, in his original form of Henry Creel, is a child. Capstick cites the increasingly warped forms Satan takes as he changes form as subtle evidence of this notion (14). Moreover, during the scene where young Henry stands in front of a clock in his home and uses his abilities to turn the clock hands backwards, it is a moment of victory for the character, as he views it as the first step in being able to repel the natural order. But the audience views the scene with dread, as any good intentions on Henry's part are rendered moot with the knowledge that Henry, as Vecna, plants the image of the clock as the beginning of the end for his young, traumatized victims. In these examples, the methods of the two characters come across as unnatural due to knowledge of their later actions, no matter the good intentions of the characters at that time.

Lastly, Capstick writes of her third stage, "Ruin," saying: "When their façade eventually fails them, the antihero has no choice left to them, and in this helpless state they usually lose their power and fall with no hope of redemption or absolution" (15). Having fully abandoned pretenses of good and fully turned to evil, upon his return to Hell, Satan is punished with being transformed into a snake once again. On this fate, Capstick writes, "[i]nstead of heroically overthrowing tyranny, Satan's moral weakness means that he has become a worse example of tyrannical oppression and despotism than God ever was" (16). Satan is thereby unwillingly reduced to the form he chose to act against God in. Similarly, Vecna is forced to burn after his gruesome murders in 1979, and the season finale ends with the teenagers entering the Upside Down in 1986 and bombing him with Molotov cocktails, burning him once again. This time, as Vecna's attachment to the Upside Down has rendered him extremely vulnerable to fire and water, he is burned to the point where he no longer appears humanoid. Again, in his defeat Vecna is cursed with that which he sought with his campaign: complete separation from his human appearance and life. Reflecting on Vecna's fall, Autumn Sprabury draws a definitive line between Henry and Vecna: "After Eleven bans Henry to the Upside Down, we are able to watch his metaphorical (and physical) fall from grace . . . we see a badly burned Henry, then a flash of lightning that reveals him as the King of the Upside Down" (Sprabury). Vecna may have described his goals with the language of noble intentions, yet this outlook portrays him as better off if he had been fully disintegrated

by Eleven, as opposed to morphing into the vengeful being he resembles now. Even in the finale, when Eleven pleads for him to seek redemption after Brenner's death, Vecna sneeringly refuses to turn back from his current state. Perhaps Vecna entered the Upside Down intending to continue his remaking of the world for the better, but now, he will forsake redemption to purely seek revenge.

In an article published shortly after the release of the final two episodes in July 2022, Dani Di Placido writes glowingly of the Duffer brothers' decision to retcon the series' main antagonist, the Mind Flayer, and introduce a new one in Vecna. Di Placido doesn't argue that the Mind Flayer as an antagonist had lost its menace after being defeated at the end of two seasons in a row; rather, that Vecna's human nature makes him a much more engaging and visceral threat than the faceless, unknowable, alien Mind Flayer. Di Placido writes that Vecna's story mirrors Satan's, being " . . . a fallen angel who finds new power and purpose in Hell; hence, the twist morphs *Stranger Things* into an explicit story of good versus evil, rather than humanity versus the unknown" (Di Placido). It is rather fitting that the series is able to depict Sueda's theme on the struggle between good and evil in such a cinematic fashion, given her argument that *Paradise Lost* is "the greatest movie never made" (142). Truly, the fact that *Stranger Things* was able to use the text's foundational Satanic archetype, successfully create a new antagonist from it, and tie him into more mature, darker themes of trauma and regret, is worthy of considerable praise. Doing so excellently services the continued development of the show's beloved characters, even four seasons into the show. It goes to show that John Milton knew that to create a timeless epic, it was essential to create an antagonist who serves as a direct threat and, moreso, as a dark foil to the other characters in the story. Nearly four hundred years later, the Duffer Brothers took note of that.

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# Black ~~Monsters~~ Heroes as Victims to the Revenge of the Normative in *The Night of the Living Dead* & *The Shining*

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The impact of George Romero's *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) is undeniable; both films occupy a complex space in horror film and racial history due to the representations of Black male saviors. In *The Shining* and *The Night of the Living Dead*, Black male characters Dick and Ben, respectively, serve as mentors and eventually heroes to White protagonists who are made out to be the primary victims of dangerous environments. These Black men not only fall victim to untimely, and what seem to be narratively unnecessary, deaths but are also depicted as extremely brave and compulsorily protective over strangers. These deaths highlight trends of Black male subjugation in the horror film genre. Blaxploitation, the power dynamic of the White victim and the masculine (borderline monstrous and aggressive) Black hero, and the significance of Black death in horror films contribute to the creation of relatively undeveloped Black male characters. Thus, both race and gender identities factor into the narrative curation of the Black man as the threatening "Other"—or monster—as opposed to othering the life-threatening true threats that the Black characters seem to parallel. I argue that in both *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining*, despite the supernatural and catastrophic events that transpire, Black men remain the "Other" as they are depicted as two-dimensional characters that exist to be used by White normative characters and narratives. What I have coined as the "monsterizing" of Black male

characters is especially present in the horror genre and is a result of the narrational attribution of material and psychological powers to Black male characters which is reminiscent of cultural systemic subjugation in the world beyond the screen.

## Blaxploitation & Context

The trends of fears in film, as well as what or who is considered "the repressed," are constantly evolving due to the cultural context of films as a media. Consequently, it is important to note that there were both breakthroughs and strife concerning civil and human rights during the release of both *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining*. In fact, Duane Jones, the actor who played Ben in Romero's film, was the first Black actor to be cast in a lead role for a Hollywood horror movie. These types of monumental racial milestones were undoubtedly triumphs for the Black community due to their cultural and canonical importance but elicited mixed emotions due to the depictions of Black characters and the Hollywood ideal of Black manhood. As a result of this, Blaxploitation became a normative occurrence in Hollywood which led to more films comparable to *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining* that served as outlets for the hegemony of America, and consequently, neocolonialism.[1]

Blaxploitation, in simple terms, is the exploitation of Black people, but considering the context of the term within the scope of this paper, Blaxploitation can also be defined more specifically as "an era of Black film offering which often drew their inspiration from Black power ideologies while presenting themes of empowerment, self-sufficiency, and conscious-raising" (Coleman 120). These ideals of Black identity, while pillars of progress in civil rights movements that occurred during the inception of the Blaxploitation film, depend on the stereotype of the Black macho man, which obviously excludes various other identity expressions. This stereotype served as the prominent representation of an entire people and was produced by White male Hollywood powers that were not cautious to curate enduring and non-racist depictions. These Blaxploitative films provide an opportunity to critique society as racist, given that the fears and biases of reality are reflected in the depiction of the "Other" in media—in this case, films like *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining*, in which Black male characters are portrayed as inherently monstrous due to a lack of Whiteness and, resultantly, normality. This ideal of monstrosity is emphasized as, "Black macho became dominant social expressions of racial identity for many African

American men . . . In general, blaxploitation films depicted a stronger, more militant image of African Americans who triumphed over White antagonists" (Benshoff 33). This strong and dominant expression of Black male characters reflects the commodification of Black bodies, stemming from the extensive and dark history of America. As a result, Blaxploitation film is a nuanced subgenre that should credit its origins to the legacy of racism (and generally, the lack of resistance to this legacy). Due to the masculinization of the African American man and the unequal power structures of society, the revenge plot is an unattainable film fantasy heavily sought after in this era. The (racial) revenge plot in which the Black man has the power to punish his ancestor's former (White) "massa" is a dominant narrative in Blaxploitation films. But this depiction is only one side of the racialized coin and parallels that of subjugation. In both *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining*, these racial dynamics are taken a step further and transmute into the subjugation of the Black laborer and protector, which I offer as the primary tool of neocolonialism in Blaxploitation film.

Black male subjugation, as I refer to it, is a product of neocolonial hegemony that makes its way into film narrative. Subjugation compels the "Other" to be under control and become submissive. This, for Black Americans, was nothing new, but it was acted out in the new medium of film for their viewing pleasure. In this same vein, Coleman affirms, "Horror, for Blacks, continues to be a study in racism, exoticism, and neocolonialism in which Black Americans are portrayed as outsiders of Western images of enlightenment, while being subordinated to a system of primitive images" (213). Depictions of Black Americans in horror films therefore were dualistic due to exoticism which was represented in the films as the consumption of Black labor or enlistment of Black characters as the exception to the White gaze and primitive stereotypes, although they were never allowed to reach narrational enlightenment. The Black man is the "privileged Other" in horror films due to their proximity to Western images of normality based on gender identity while also being excluded as minorities of racial identity. In other words, while Black male characters were subordinated in horror film narratives, due to their gender identity, they were deemed acceptable sidekicks to White men. This hinders narratives to "remain(s) unapologetically exclusionary, propagating the Western hierarchal framework of privileging the experiences of the White male" (Brooks 461). Centering the White male gaze narratively fuels a racist and often hyper-masculine spirit that translates from the cultural ideals of the audience, to the curators of the film, and finally

to the characters seen on the screen. This translation of the white gaze, resultantly, paralyzes the Black male character by only acknowledging their masculinity rather than permitting them to be dynamic beings. In some narratives, like in *The Night of the Living Dead*, this emphasis on masculinity is the reason the Black man is challenged by other (usually White) male survivors. Black American characters (particularly Black men) occupied a complex space in the early horror film as their masculinity was dramatized but their Blackness was seemingly overlooked. *The Shining* notably doesn't employ this dynamic to establish the non-threatening nature of Dick Hallorann.

Two-dimensionality is an aspect of Dick Hallorann's nature. Unlike Ben in *The Night of the Living Dead*, whose character is fraught with normative ideals of masculinity, Dick is written with a different kind of two-dimensional identity. He is instead personable and kind, which is evident in one of his first orientational conversations with the family:

> DICK HALLORANN. Mrs. Torrance, your husband introduced you as Winifred. Now, are you a Winnie or Freddy?
> WENDY TORRANCE. I'm a Wendy.
> DICK HALLORANN. Oh. That's nice. That's the prettiest. (Kubrick 15:35)

This cordial relationship dynamic is maintained until later in the film when Jack's hateful and violent behavior gets out of hand. Ben, in contrast, is not permitted to be likable. I believe this is because the men occupy two vastly different roles, as Dick slides under the (threat) radar at the beginning of the narrative because of his older age. Ben's character, as a strapping young man, is not afforded that same kindness and accommodation because he possesses physical power while Dick possesses mental power.

The (almost super-humanly) empowered and subjugated Black male character, exemplified here by Dick and Ben, are two extremes of monsterizing. Both characters are empowered and subjugated in different ways. In the case of Dick, he has super-human powers of telepathy and clairvoyance. This ability connects him to young Danny, who doesn't understand his budding super-human abilities, so Dick serves as his mentor. However, despite his wisdom and powers, Dick doesn't foresee the danger that the family will be in, so he occupies a kind of liminal powerless position. Although he is suggested to possess more advanced power than anyone in the narrative, Dick is generally made to be non-threatening and accommodating. Ben, on the other hand, veers

on the side of hyper-masculine with his apparent need to supersede the other male survivors and to control the bodies and behavior of the women of the group. The hyper masculine and over-bearing portrayal of Ben makes him an active threat throughout the film, which nearly juxtaposes the non-threatening and pleasant portrayal of Dick. The power struggles between the White and Black male characters show that the White male survivors don't see them as valid leadership figures, whether the Black man tries to take leadership by force in apocalyptic situations or for the protection of the White family unit. Both Ben and Dick are made to be the monsters in their narratives, despite their good intentions. The "monster" I label them as deviates from the zombies and ghosts that belong in their horror narratives. Instead, these characters are given this label because they are, "the monster, a specifically Black *avenger* who justifiably fights against the dominant order—which is often explicitly coded as racist" (Benshoff 37). The character that is considered the "monster" is the one who deviates from normative behavior, which is commonly the Black hero who is not supposed to overcome his circumstances yet fights against those circumstances nonetheless. This racial coding is visible in different ways for Dick and Ben, but regardless of their situations, it is clear that they fulfill this role. While this labeling brings these men (the "Other") under the control of the dominant culture of White normality, the racialized dynamics of these narratives makes it clear that, regardless of their behavior, Black men are still considered a threat.

## The White Victim & Black Hero:

Another threat to White normative standards is how the Black man protects the White woman in these narratives. The dependent relationship between the defenseless White woman and protective Black man is supported by the apathy of the White male. Subsequently, the normative standards established by these films depend on the dynamic of the White damsel and Black hero. This relationship is marked by a White damsel that lacks senses in some manner. This kind of racial and gender standard highlights how:

> the film . . . offers a variety of representations of (White) womanhood ranging from competent to incompetent . . . critics are guilty of creating a framework that, as bell hooks expresses, "privileges sexual difference [and] actively suppresses recognition of race." (Brooks 463)

By indulging in the White male fantasy of the White woman unarmed and needy, these films abide by Western hegemony, only to place the Black man between the White male and female as a blockade. This framework that privileges sexual difference is apparent due to the disparities of the men and women in the film narratives. In *The Night of the Living Dead,* Barbara becomes physically incompetent as she goes into a type of catatonia. The other women, Helen and Judy, who previously showcased some semblance of competence, are not shown nearly as much as Barbara, who is inactive for the majority of the movie. When she is left alone after her brother is attacked by a zombie, Barbara suddenly does not have the wits to make wise survival decisions. This psychological regression juxtaposes the immediate intelligence and leadership of Ben, which situates the social dynamic so that Barbara must be taken care of to survive. This White female victim/Black male hero dynamic is also present in *The Shining* between Wendy Torrance and Dick Hallorann. In the absence of a good father and husband figure, with Jack Torrance preoccupied with his writing at the beginning of the narrative, Wendy is left to her own devices with her son, Danny, in the Overlook hotel. With Dick being a veteran of the hotel staff, he assists in areas that Jack cannot in order to make Wendy comfortable in her surroundings. As the head chef, he shows them around the kitchen, which is traditionally a domesticated (and feminine) space and showcases his connection and appeal to Wendy. This interaction also serves to exemplify how capable Wendy is of taking care of herself and her family as she plans to take over the domestic spaces of the hotel in the absence of Dick. Eventually, Wendy mimics Barbara's catatonic behavior from *Night* after Jack has started to exhibit threatening behavior, at which point Dick comes to the mother and child's rescue. By "dumbing down" or diluting the women's chances of leadership in dire situations, the narratives reiterate that the Black man's place is below theirs and that a rearrangement of the social order is necessary to imagine a story where the Black male is in power in any way. This rearrangement triggers the White male, who assumes dominance in the power structure, to seek out extreme means of recalibrating the social order, including the sudden death of his narrational competition, the Black man.

## Black Death: The Imposition of Black Life

The deaths of the Black protagonists in both *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining* are notably violent and are seemingly unnecessary. It is evident that as the "Other," the men are disposable in the

narrative. In fact, their untimely deaths both occur near or seemingly because of White victims that they valiantly attempted to save. This signifies that no matter their intentions of heroism, their lives are defined by their proximity and assimilation to Whiteness. Walter Metz asserts this in his analysis of the violent rejection of Dick in *The Shining:*

> [The film's] narrative concerns only one murder, that of Dick Hallorann . . . we see Jack strike one blow to Hallorann's chest in a long shot. Hallorann offers an external resistance to the patriarchal structure . . . The film locates Hallorann's murder within a larger critique of colonialism . . . Thus, the hotel as a symbol of American success literally covers over the violence and corruption it took to build it. (53, 56)

The swift killing of Dick, when considered symbolism within the larger critique of colonialism, represents the disenfranchised being swept under the rug for the benefit of those at the top. Historically and systemically, those at the top are typically White, cisgender, and heteronormative, and they contribute to the downfall (whether knowledgeably or not) of those that are marginalized. In *The Night of the Living Dead*, this critique is evident as well through the protagonist dying in a situation which is reminiscent of a lynch mob. Ben suffers an almost uncharacteristic death because "[he] who was calm under fire, competently took charge . . . and . . . kicked some (White) butt . . . is symbolically lynched by a mob of shotgun toting White men" (Coleman xvii). Seemingly after the brunt of the zombie apocalypse, the home Ben and the other survivor's occupied is surrounded by a large group of White men carrying guns. As though they don't see Ben looking out the window assessing the group of White men (notably, without any zombie mannerisms), they shoot him upon sight. This sudden change in Ben's ability to survive is almost jarring as his sudden death occurs in the conclusion of the film and his body is discarded within minutes along with zombie corpses, but it also signifies the revenge of the normative in response to Ben's ascension in the social order.

Furthermore, the relationships of these characters are defined by an underlying jealousy informed by a lack of the White man's humanity towards and relation with the non-normative. In Dick and Jack's narrative, this jealousy establishes itself as the resentment Jack has towards Dick for extending empathy. Daniel O'Brien, in his chapter on Black heroism, notes:

> Kubrick's *The Shining* does illustrate the violent, destructive irrationality of racial discrimination . . . It is, however, worth noting that the film's prime embodiment of Black masculinity remains superior to his White counterpart on numerous levels . . . (Jack) forsakes his roles of husband and father . . . attributes taken up by Hallorann, out of both professional duty (head chef) and personal choice (fellow shiner). (173)

Because of racial discrimination, which Jack starts to verbally express once he spirals into delusion with another White male patriarch (Mr. Grady), Black death serves as a release from the pressure Jack feels. It is also important to note that in the novel and original script, Dick survives and is the hero who saves Danny and Mrs. Torrance. Scatman Crothers (the actor who plays Dick Hallorann) even claims that "The strange thing is that even Stanley's screenplay has Hallorann saving them. I just don't understand what happened. I still don't know why Stanley changed the story. I never asked him why he did it" (Beebe). The decision to have Dick die was somewhat last minute and significantly altered the tone of the movie. We can infer that the increasing tension between Jack and Dick impacted the producers enough that they decided that Dick must die. This decision was likely made because Dick's character displayed the attributes that Jack's wishes he could possess, such as financial stability, kindness, and an effortless connection to Danny. These attributes are not present to establish that there is a possibility of Dick replacing Jack as a husband and father figure, but to instead establish Dick as a threat who must be killed off because of the potential to escape his predetermined role as a servant (and to undermine White normativity). In *The Night of the Living Dead,* Black death is swift, sudden, and hastily discarded which recenters the narrative on the White male hero that could not be bothered to consider the Black male as an ally even after nearly surviving the apocalypse singlehandedly.

## Genre & The Big Bad Presiding White Man

In my analysis of the social implications of these two films and their characters, it is imperative to engage with the trends of the horror genre. Horror that incorporates elements of melodrama, as in the case of these examples, is a landscape that is very experimental. This is perhaps why horror has so seamlessly reflected the anxieties of race. Horror, in all its complexities and subgenres, can expose the true desires and fears of a society. Melodrama, on the other hand, offers the viewer sensational and exaggerated events and characters. *The Night of the Living Dead* and

*The Shining* possess elements of both genres but, "[i]n a poststructural sense, *The Shining* offers a liminal narrational system caught between the horror film and the family melodrama which offers the possibility of critique unavailable to either of the genres in their 'pure' state" (Metz 40). The complicated social structures from the melodrama genre that exist in the films are benchmarked by exaggerated displays of emotions and abrupt plot twists. In *The Shining*, these displays are acted out by Jack and Wendy, while Dick never truly displays any intense emotion. This further asserts his innocent nature as he is simplified and the White characters are situated to be more complex. In *The Night of the Living Dead,* a similar phenomenon occurs with Ben's character. Although Ben is attributed with intense emotions, he seemingly can only express a limited amount of them, rage and violence, unlike his narrative counterparts. This realm of limited possibility only confirms the influence of Western hegemony, which simplifies "Others" for the sake of presiding over them as superior. Considering the lack of racial representation in film in the 1960s and 1980s, this genre mix also makes for the perfect backdrop to take narratives a step farther as:

> queers (broadly defined as anyone who rejects the essential superiority of a straight White male identity) are drawn to the genre because of its many intriguing "not normal" representations. This would suggest that the horror film functions hegemonically, in effect enabling socially oppressed people to contribute to their own oppression by consenting to the manufacture of their own identities as monstrous Others. (Benshoff 32)

As I stated in my analysis of Blaxploitation, subjugation is present in the narratives of the horror films *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining*, but as a system these films that monsterize the Black male characters also rely on the production and consumption of media to perpetuate it. Certainly, with those things considered, the racial anxieties of the times could be blamed for the representations of Black men in film, but when time and time again White normative standards are used to size up "Others," our culture enters dangerous territory.

## Conclusion

The artificial Black masculine enemy that tries so hard to be an ally in film narratives is never reconciled because they can't be the true hero while under the guise of Blaxploitation exhibited as muted

or sensationalized emotions, sudden Black death, and performative or dampened masculinity. This is particularly true when normative characters and social power structures continue to see them (and won't accept them) as queer for simply existing in a space not made for them. Blaxploitation, White victimhood, Black death, and the implications of gender and social norms all create the ideal environment within horror films for the legacy of Western hegemony to live on. Systemic subjugation, while not new, is explored in *The Night of the Living Dead* and *The Shining* in complex ways that reveal the racialized attitudes of society and the "monsterization" of Black characters that audiences have become so horrified and entertained by.

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## NOTES

1. The economic and political policies by which a great power indirectly maintains or extends its influence over other people. Neo- : new and different period or form of.

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# Women After the World: Analyzing the Representation of Female Characters in Modern, Mainstream, Post-Apocalyptic Films

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Female representation in film, across different genres and countries, is a topic that has been examined and researched in numerous research papers. Perhaps the most famous paper on female representation in film is Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which defines the term "male gaze" as the objectification of women through the male perspective, and especially the male camera in film. Other researchers have studied the representation of women in film across different cinemas and genres. These studies have explored questions related to gender roles and stereotypes in film, as well as the impact of representation on societal perceptions. The continued interest in representation of women in film emphasizes that there is still a pressing need to delve deeper into the topic, particularly across genres that have been less comprehensively studied, such as the post-apocalyptic genre. This essay aims to expand on the existing literature on female representation, by examining the topic within post-apocalyptic films.

Post-apocalyptic fiction narratives, including films, are set in futuristically dystopian environments and revolve around the status of humans and the world following an apocalyptic event. These narratives increased in popularity after the Second World War and during the Cold War, reflecting humanity's collective realization of the destructive potential of nuclear weapons. Isaac Asimov, one of America's most renowned science fiction authors, argued that the increasing popularity of

the genre can be attributed to the fact that the atomic bomb "made science fiction respectable" (168). During the Cold War, post-apocalyptic fiction became a vessel for social commentary (Seed). Interestingly, the genre did not necessarily take a side in the conservative-liberal discourse. In the book *Atomic Bomb Cinema: The Apocalyptic Imagination on Film*, Jerome Franklin Shapiro argues that while some of the genre's Cold War era films critiqued American conservativeness and advocated for progressiveness, others were critical of liberalism and promoted a return to the social norms. It is important to note that World War II and the Cold War being the main triggers for the rise of the post-apocalyptic film genre is a dominantly American or Western notion. For example, Barbara Gurr argues that other communities who have experienced collective generational traumatic events, such as indigenous communities in North America who had been subjected to mass murders by colonizers or African communities who had been enslaved and later colonized for centuries, have a different perception of post-apocalyptic narratives and attribute its rise to different historical events. Nonetheless, because this paper is primarily concerned with *mainstream* post-apocalyptic films, its main focus will be on films produced in Hollywood. That is not to discredit other understandings of the genre and its history; however, the influence of American cinema on the world is massive enough to warrant analyzing the films within the context of how the genre grew specifically within the United States.

The urge to study this genre today is due to the current status of the planet, in terms of the environmental problems that the world currently faces and the sense of impending climate doom that dominates media and social discourse. Similar to how the threat of nuclear destruction helped shape post-apocalyptic films, the imminent dangers of climate change and global warming also contribute to the rise and the shaping of the post-apocalyptic genre. In particular, it is worth studying female representation in the genre's modern films because it can provide us with better insight as to how the modern-day patriarchal society views women, especially in times of distress or turmoil. The post-apocalyptic genre should be subjected to the same scrutiny in its representation of women as other genres have been, because the films of the genre conceptualize new worlds and environments. The gender expectations perpetuated by these new conditions carry within them gender expectations for the modern world. It is therefore necessary to study the representation of women in post-apocalyptic films, particularly who these representations seem to serve and to what end. Exist-

ing gender power structures rely heavily on the longevity of traditional gender stereotypes and would benefit from their continued presence in media, whereas any attempts to dismantle the aforementioned power structures would require the support of progressive representation in media. The analysis of different modern (post-2005 for the purposes of this paper) post-apocalyptic films allows a deeper understanding of how the portrayal of women in futuristic, end-of-the-world societies reflect their contemporary status.

## The Feminine Hero: *The Hunger Games* (2012–2015)

The four installments of *The Hunger Games* are the top four highest grossing post-apocalyptic films of all-time, making the franchise an essential starting point when it comes to studying modern, mainstream post-apocalyptic films. Based on and sharing the same name as a series of books by Suzanne Collins, the films' protagonist is Katniss Everdeen, who is played by Jennifer Lawrence in the films. Within the films, the Hunger Games are an annual event, in which one female and one male from each of twelve Districts fight to the death for the entertainment of the extravagantly wealthy citizens of the Capitol. Over the course of the four films, Katniss Everdeen transforms from one of the Games' participants into one of the *de facto* leaders of the revolution that takes down the oppressive Capitol.

The popularity of the franchise has driven debate about its female representation, particularly through Katniss, the main female lead of the series. In their paper "The Hunger Games: Transmedia, Gender and Possibility," Baker and Schak argue that the protagonist being female is, in and of itself, a positive representation for women. This is because it had been found that across the most popular fiction Hollywood films released between 2007–2016, only 21% of action films had a female protagonist (Smith, Choueiti and Pieper). *The Hunger Games* challenged the male-dominated landscape of action films, offering a significant alternative to the male heroism that oversaturates the genre. On the other hand, Firestone contests that Katniss Everdeen lacks autonomy as a character, claiming that she is a reactive figure throughout the events of the four films, taking initiative only once to destroy some of her rivals' food source during one of the tournaments. However, this argument fails to recognize much of Katniss's autonomy throughout the events of the films, such as when she decides to shoot the apple inside the mouth of the roast pig to assert her presence in front of the disinterested game makers. As Baker and Schak also point out,

Firestone's argument about Katniss's lack of autonomy conveniently forgets that Katniss took what was perhaps the single-most important decision in the franchise: the decision to kill the newly inaugurated President Coin in the last film, consciously choosing not to enable the ascension of another dictator. It is important to note that while Firestone's argument is based on the books, the events in question occur in both books and films. Throughout the films, Katniss's character is given depth and development. She is portrayed as heroic, all the while being flawed; she is brave and intelligent, yet arrogant and often impulsive. These layers to her personality make her feel like a real person, with autonomy and decisions over her life and the lives of the people in her life. The complexity of Katniss's character particularly stands out when she is contrasted with the large majority of female characters in action films, such as "Bond girls," who have historically been portrayed as secondary, one-dimensional characters driven by the interests and goals of their male counterparts.

The most important aspect as to why Katniss is a well-represented post-apocalyptic action hero is that she looks feminine. The femininity of Katniss Everdeen challenges the notion that the female hero needs to me masculine-looking or androgynous, compared to Imperator Furiosa in *Mad Max: Fury Road,* for example (who will be discussed in the next section). For instance, during the galas, Katniss wears stereotypically feminine dresses and puts on feminine make-up; even as a huntress in District 12 and as a participant during the Games (two environments where most outfits are gender-neutral), she is clearly feminine-looking. Herein lies the significance of Katniss Everdeen's femininity: it is never an obstacle in her journey. Never throughout the franchise do the characters or the film language imply that Katniss embodies courage *despite* her femininity, or that she needs to compromise that femininity in order to be stronger. Katniss is both strong and feminine, and the films never imply that the two attributes are in conflict. In fact, Katniss even sometimes weaponizes her femininity and uses it as a tool to her advantage, for example, to gain audience sympathy in the parades before the games. Philip Kirby raises another important point about Katniss's appearance: she is never oversexualized during the films, unlike other female action heroes such as Lara Croft in the *Tomb Raider* film franchise. While one could definitely argue that the sexualization of Katniss would not have made sense within the world and events of the franchise, Hollywood is notorious for oversexualizing its female characters in any film genre and environment; therefore, compared to

Hollywood standards, the non-sexualization of Katniss is an important step towards a better representation for female heroes. The insistence on the non-sexualization of Katniss puts Katniss in a position where she is not objectified by the male gaze, allowing the audience to engage with her heroic personality and actions as a complex character. Additionally, the character's non-sexualization is especially significant since the films were released during the peak of Jennifer Lawrence's popularity; she topped the For Him Magazine's "Top 100 Sexiest Women in the World" list in 2014. The films, however, refused to oversexualize Katniss Everdeen, which adds to the significance of her representation as a *feminine* female hero.

## The Conflicted Liberator: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)

*Mad Max: Fury Road* is technically the fourth installment of the Mad Max franchise. However, since the first three films were released between 1979 and 1985 and star Mel Gibson as Max, while *Fury Road* was released in 2015 and stars Tom Hardy as Max, most audiences view the film as a soft reboot of the franchise as opposed to a sequel. The film is very conflicting—and conflicted—when it comes to its representations of women. This is visible through some of the secondary female characters, such as the slave-wives, whose representations swing between reductive and empowering throughout the film. For example, the scene of the wives showering has been criticized for oversexualizing the wives and, by extension, their enslaved positions, while others contest that the same scene signifies the wives cleansing themselves of the tyranny and injustice they were subjected to by Immortan Joe (Du Plooy). The focus of this section, however, is on Imperator Furiosa, one of the film's two protagonists and the most essential character to an analysis of the conflict that exists within the film's representation of women. Furiosa is a warrior-turned-liberator who aims to free the group of slave-wives and lead them to the home that she was forcibly taken from as a child. She has more lines than the titular Max, and director George Miller revealed that one of the film's proposed names was "Mad Max: Furiosa," which implies that her character has the same importance as Max.

One of the biggest feminist concerns regarding a lot of modern female-led action films is that the attempt to create powerful female heroes is often too forced and unnatural, resulting in the creation of sexy, shallow, one-dimensional characters who lack the necessary character depth to be taken seriously. *Mad Max: Fury Road* subverts this con-

cern through Furiosa, a powerful, emotionally complex warrior with a strong moral compass, and a rebel who sets out to free the oppressed. She is an enslaved, orphaned warrior, forced to fight for the evil ruler responsible for her enslavement and her mother's death. The nuances of her background add layers to Furiosa's character, as the rebellion against Immortan Joe becomes a rebellion against the patriarchal system that has oppressed her. However, one critique of the film is that the decision to revolt against Immortan Joe—arguably the single-most important decision in the film—is taken not by Furiosa, but by Max. In "Female Action Hero vs Male Dominance: The Female Representation in Mad Max: Fury Road," Bampatzimopoulos argues that some aspects of Furiosa's character carry enough profoundness to be considered feminist representations, such as her autonomy throughout the majority of the film and her superior combat skills, while other aspects of her character cannot be labeled feminist, specifically her reliance on Max to make the decision to rebel against Immortan Joe.

Moreover, physically, Furiosa has a shaved-head and does not conform to a traditional feminine physique, compared to the slave-wives who have long, flowy hair (with the exception of Zoë Kravitz's character) and are non-muscular. Her physical appearance is logical within the narrative of the story, as Furiosa was kidnapped as a child and forced to become a warrior alongside shaved-headed males. However, this does not change the fact that this representation emphasizes the idea that femininity and heroism cannot coexist. Heroes embody strength and courage, and limiting heroes to masculine-looking figures limits those traits as well. While it is important to portray women as heroes and figures of power, the decision to make them unfeminine-looking sends the message that femininity is not a desirable trait in conjunction with heroism.

Another point worth analyzing is that Furiosa has a bionic arm, which is not unusual for the world of *Mad Max*. As someone who has been forced to conform for the majority of her life, her arm takes away her uniqueness by physically connecting her to the post-apocalyptic society that oppressed her. However, her uniqueness is highlighted in the scenes in which she does not wear the bionic arm, such as during the first fight against Max when the audience first realizes her intentions as a liberator, then at the moment of her greatest despair when she finds out that her home no longer exists, and finally at the moment of her triumph as she ascends the citadel. In these scenes, Furiosa shows her truest self, both to the other characters in the film and to the audience by physically existing as an entity separate from the oppressive

society which her arm represents. Additionally, the decision to portray Furiosa as a woman who has lost an arm serves as a powerful symbol of empowerment for women with disabilities. When she is wearing her bionic arm, she is one of the most powerful fighters in the Wasteland, and when she is without it, the audience gets to see her truest emotions. Thus, the film's representation of women with disabilities is respectable because Furiosa's disability is not showcased in a patronizing manner, but rather as an integral, but not limiting, aspect of her identity.

## The 'Ideal' Woman and the Problem with *Wall-E* (2008)

*Wall-E* is an animated film, produced by Disney/Pixar, which differs from the other films mentioned in this paper in that it is primarily marketed towards children, despite also being well-received by adult audiences. It is important to analyze the gender stereotypes (or lack thereof) in *Wall-E* to understand how it impacts children in their formative years because of its child-aimed marketing and intended audience. Gender representations in children's media influence the young audiences's perception of gender roles and contribute to their beliefs surrounding masculinity and femininity; for example, Coyne et al. found that children who watched more Disney Princess movies were more likely to conform to gender-stereotypical behavior.

Even though the two main characters in *Wall-E* are robots (and therefore technically genderless), Wall-E is depicted as masculine and Eve is depicted as feminine through their colors, geometry, and names (Centenero). Wall-E and Eve are representations of masculinity and femininity, respectively, and both are figures that children look up to. The gender stereotypes that each of the robots assumes and the expectations they live up to influence how children perceive gender roles. In "Creating Gender in Disney/Pixar's WALL-E," Brittany Long argues that the physical appearances of Wall-E and Eve promote stereotypical gender roles. Throughout the film, Wall-E is dirty and rusty and makes no effort to tidy itself/*himself*, whereas Eve is a glistening white robot who receives regular maintenance to keep a pristine form. The film therefore enforces expectations on women to be well-groomed and to take better care of themselves than men. The characters' jobs and mannerisms also perpetuate gender stereotypes. Wall-E is childlike, clumsy, and curious, always gathering earthly objects and showcasing his collection to Eve, whereas Eve is a nurturing figure, who scolds and guides Wall-E throughout the course of the film. Additionally, the characters' jobs continue to perpetrate the same gender stereotypes: men are expected to perform physically laborious jobs, as seen by Wall-E's

job as a cleaner, while women act as nurturers even in professional settings (teachers, caregivers, etc.), as evidenced by Eve's job, which is to search for life on Earth and nurture it within herself. Traditional representations of romance and the associated gender stereotypes are also present in *Wall-E* as 1890s American stereotypes, à la *Hello, Dolly!* (Howey): Wall-E is the heterosexual male who wants to win over the female he likes, and Eve is the female who sees the male when he finally gives her what she needs, and together, they dance in space. However, during action scenes, both Wall-E and Eve support each other without conforming to the gendered stereotypes they represent in other parts of the film. And yet, with the emphasis that the film places on Wall-E's crush on Eve, she is still ultimately an object to be won by a man and perpetuates gender stereotypes about how women should look and act.

In a film where Earth has become a desolate planet and robots advocate for the restoration of Earth and humanity, it is important to analyze what the film believes humanity should return to: the status quo. The problem with *Wall-E* is not just that its characters conform to traditional gender stereotypes; the vast majority of films, post-apocalyptic or not, predominantly have characters who conform to these stereotypes. The problem with *Wall-E* is that its characters conform to traditional gender stereotypes while the film's narrative calls for the restoration of humanity and Earth. By combining these ideas, the film advocates for the restoration of the gendered status quo in tandem with the restoration of the planet. Not only does the film miss an opportunity to challenge and redefine gender roles, but it also actively abandons neutrality (the film could have simply not made any clear statements about gender roles), and instead deliberately chooses to promote existing stereotypes and present them as the only option for humanity to return to. *Wall-E* therefore contributes to the normalization of traditional gender stereotypes and perpetuates the same traits associated with the "ideal" woman: clean, pretty, nurturing, and keen on taking care of herself and those around her. Since its primary audience is children, the film's reinforcement of these ideals and expectations can largely shape their understanding of gender.

## *Children of Men* (2006) and the Marginalized Woman

*Children of Men* stands out among the other films addressed in this paper because it is less commercial and was created by an auteur, Alfonso Cuarón. Its representations of women are interesting because of the direct relation between its plot on one hand, and sex, reproductivity, and

infertility on the other. In a world where humans have not conceived children for nearly two decades, pregnancy is an incredibly rare occurrence. *Children of Men* realizes that the identity of the pregnant woman is important to the film's message and purposefully chooses to make the only pregnant character a marginalized woman. Cuarón consciously decided that the pregnant woman should be a black, African, illegal immigrant named Kee, as opposed to a British citizen, as in the book (Sparling). According to Sparling, this decision is a response to post-9/11 border and immigrant policies to portray the underrepresented struggles of immigrants, particularly women immigrants. In that sense, *Children of Men* realizes the significance of giving a voice to the unheard.

Kee is not the protagonist of the film, and the question of whether the film represents her as a subject rather than as an object is worth exploring because Kee herself also struggles with her agency within the world of the film. The growth of her as a person inside of the film (*text*) occurs in tandem with the development of her representation (*meta-text*). Some might argue that the representation of Kee is reductive as she is sidelined during earlier parts of the film; however, this is a deliberate choice that highlights Kee's own struggles with autonomy. Kee is initially a passive character, seen by other characters only as a means to an end instead of as a person; concurrently, the film deliberately excludes her from the narrative and keeps her involvement to a minimum. When she begins to make her own decisions, such as trusting Theo enough to reveal her pregnancy to him, she receives more screen time and delivers more lines. Her screen time increases with her autonomy to reflect the relation between the *text* and *meta-text*. Admittedly, this is done subtly, and in the first half hour of the film, it is easy to dismiss the film as another white-savior film wherein the white man saves the woman of color. However, the deliberate sidelining of her character in the first act of the film intentionally emphasizes the marginalization of women, people of color, and immigrants, and Kee, as a pregnant illegal female African immigrant, represents the struggles that come with marginalization.

## Findings and Conclusion

There is no single label that can represent female characters in modern, mainstream, post-apocalyptic films. The films used as examples through this paper challenge and reinforce various gender stereotypes to various degrees, and offer different perspectives on femininity in film. For example, *Children of Men* deliberately represents the intersection of marginalization and femininity, while *The Hunger Games* franchise is less complex

but still brings positive, strong female representation to the mainstream film world. *Mad Max: Fury Road*, on the other hand, represents the intersection of femininity with heroism and disability, but ultimately compromises Furiosa's autonomy at a crucial moment in the narrative and implies that masculinity is necessary to be a hero. Similarly, *Wall-E* weakens its potentially strong female representation with its insistence on traditional gender roles and the centrality of those roles to the status quo.

Amongst the four films, three of them take clear stances on gender stereotypes, while *Mad Max: Fury Road* does not. Ironically, it is the only film among the four that hired a "Feminist Consultant," Eve Ensler. The film, however, is conflicted in what it says about women in heroic roles. For example, the female characters in the film (lead by Imperator Furiosa) overthrow the system headed by Immortan Joe, which could be understood as dismantling the patriarchy. However, Immortan Joe is an almost cartoonish villain throughout the entirety of the film, which takes away from the weight of the revolution against his patriarchy. The closest films to *Fury Road* in terms of narrative and character profile are *The Hunger Games* films, which comparatively are more deliberate in progressive female representation. In an interview in December 2022, Jennifer Lawrence stated that even before production started on the first film, she was aware of the importance of *The Hunger Games* films from a feminist perspective. She stated that she knew that there are disproportionately fewer female action heroes compared to male action heroes, citing that she was always told (she did not specify by whom) that female action heroes are not marketable to young male audiences, whereas male action heroes appeal to both boys and girls ("Jennifer Lawrence" 05:00–05:15). This emphasizes the idea that *The Hunger Games* actively set out to create a feminine-looking hero who exercises her autonomy in the film's key moments, which in turn underscores the conflicted representation of *Fury Road*.

In comparison to the other two films, *Children of Men* and *Wall-E* are both more direct in their communication (though the messages they convey are not similar). The former is clearly and extremely critical of national systems that stigmatize and discriminate against immigrants, and the decision to represent the world's first pregnant woman in around two decades–in the context of the film, a very important role–as a marginalized woman emphasizes the film's critique of immigration policies and the systemic oppression of marginalized groups. Kee's growth as a person with increasing agency coincides with the growth of her on-screen role, which emphasizes the film's purpose:

to give underrepresented communities an opportunity to tell their own stories within larger narratives. In contrast, *Wall-E* represents reductive characters that proliferate and reinforce stereotypical gender norms. If *Wall-E* is an urgent message about the importance of protecting our planet by restoring humanity to its norms, then the film also implies that traditional gender roles and perceptions of romance are the "normal" benchmark humanity should hope to return to.

It is therefore important to ask, what goals do these portrayals and representations serve? What, or rather who, stands to gain from either the reinforcement or challenging of social norms? In order to answer this question, one should look at the social norms in question. The clearest reference point to start from is *Hello, Dolly!*, which was established as Wall-E's own reference point within the film. *Hello, Dolly!* promotes the stereotypes of an American romance: a white man seeks a white woman as reward, and the story ends happily. The stereotypes and norms advocated for by *Wall-E* benefit those who are already privileged: people who already ascribe to traditional gender roles and benefit from the status quo. For example, a clear benefitting party would be fathers who expect their wives to contribute to the finances of the household and to be the sole person responsible for domestic work and caring for their children. *The Hunger Games* franchise, on the other hand, benefits women and girls in the workplace who have long been told to "look professional" and compromise their femininity for better chances at a promotion or a raise. *Mad Max: Fury Road* attempts to bring about the same influence as *The Hunger Games*, but ultimately fails to do so. *Children of Men* advocates for the underprivileged–people of color, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, refugees, and historically marginalized people who have been systematically oppressed by existing social and gender power structures.

These are but simplified, direct examples as to who stands to gain from these representations. The nuances and complexities of existing socioeconomic structures tell us that there is a plethora of different groups who can stand to benefit from any of the representations analyzed in this paper, and from the other films of the genre. Whether it is dismantling systemically unjust national and international institutions which obstruct marginalized women, or advocating for increased women representation within the film industry, post-apocalyptic films are vessels for filmmakers to challenge the status quo by portraying a world where that status quo is exaggerated or completely dismantled. However, the same genre and the same worlds can also be used to say

nothing or uphold existing gender norms. It is therefore essential to watch these films through a critical lens to truly understand what they are communicating and who stands to gain from them.

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