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

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Preface

Joshua Black

I was a freshman at the University of West Georgia when I first purchased and then gorged myself on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, and though I now consider it outmoded, it has remained with me ever since, offering an optimistic counterpoint to the fatalistic post-structuralisms that can obtain in modern academia. Even so, it has been Foucault and Derrida, not Frye, whom I have cited the most, for their critical models—however fatalistic—have done the most for the marginalized. Sedgwick could not, after all, have written her *Epistemology of the Closet* without Foucault, whose work she accepts “as axiomatic,” nor Said his *Orientalism*. Indeed, in explicating the slipperiness of language, post-structuralism and cultural studies more generally have opened up spaces from which critics can question those discourses that valorize some and marginalize others. Thus, I was troubled—I euphemize here—when I read Harold Bloom's foreword to the most recent edition of the *Anatomy*, an article in which he elides cultural critics as individuals who “concern themselves with the intricate secrets of Victorian women's underwear and the narrative histories of the female bosom” at the expense of what he considers substantial analysis. On a certain view, I can empathize with the Sterling Memorial Professor, for to someone educated in a canon of dead white men, current criticisms must seem otiose and meaningless. Why write a dissertation on Nadine Gordimer when Shakespeare, as Bloom titled one of his bestsellers, “invented the human?” Yet, I would suggest to Mr. Bloom that one of his favorites, William Blake, was once considered trash, so much so that his contemporaries claimed that the poet and engraver could not, as Bloom claims of modern critical subjects, “write [his] way out of a paper bag.” Aesthetic categories change and, with them, canons.

But, of course, the same applies with the canons of criticism. Bloom's critical episteme will pass, and we as a discipline will inaugurate another; and, I do mean here to use the word “inaugurate” in its literal sense. On a morphemic level, after all, the word presents an interesting meaning: an action the future of which one, in the very doing, has begun to augur or predict. Such a meaning, I

want to believe, has relevance in the inaugural issue of *Literary Undergraduate Research*. That said, I am not speaking of *LURe* specifically, but of literary criticism in general, for the writers whose papers made this journal possible are also the individuals who will critically continue that which Frye termed “a Myth of Concern,” his version of Shelley’s notion that imaginative literature was one vast poem with many authors. From their interests, regional, periodic, theoretical, and otherwise, it follows that we cannot know what will become of the discipline. Might formalism again become the standard, or will cultural studies remain, as Bloom phrases it, “a triumphant beast” in academia? I’m not Tiresias; I can’t answer such questions. I can, however, suggest that with *LURe* we as a group have begun to answer them. Eliot observes in his *Four Quartets*: “In my beginning is my end.” So too with *LURe*. In our inaugural issue, in our beginning, I don’t doubt that a perceptive person might well see the next generation of literary critics. And, I for one look forward to whatever modes of literary criticisms that they might in time author.

The “Un-Fortunate Fall”: Matrimony and Mastery in Abigail Adams’ Correspondence and Foster’s *The Coquette*

Anna Davison

I related to her the conversation, and the encouragement which I had given to Mr. Boyer. She was pleased but insisted that I should own myself somewhat engaged to him. This, I told her I should never do to any man, before the indissoluble knot was tied. That, said I, will be time enough to resign my freedom. She replied that I had wrong ideas of freedom and matrimony; but she hoped that Mr. Boyer would happily rectify them.

—Eliza to Lucy in Foster’s *The Coquette*

*No more, America, in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredressed complain,
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Had made, and with it mean t’enslave the land.*

—Phillis Wheatley, “To the Right Honorable William...”

Though an African slave, Phillis Wheatley is recognized today as one of America’s finest early American poets. However, her works were not significantly recognized until much later in time. During her career, “doubts had been raised [. . .] in London about the authenticity of her writings,” and there was a need for publishers to establish credentials for her work through her presence and the authenticating statements of her owner, a wealthy tailor named John Wheatley (Shuffelton 175) and other “respectable Characters in *Boston*, that none might have the least Ground for Disputing their *Original*” (Gates 168). Despite her state, Wheatley continued to address the most poignant issue of her time: slavery. In “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” Phillis Wheatley immerses her audience in the early American political, social and racial situation of the time—while also retaining a haunting religiosity in the short poem as well.

In the first lines of the poem, she begins with her own daunting past in connection to America's early social system by describing her capture from her parents in Africa: "Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land / Taught my benighted soul to understand" (Wheatley 752). The religious terminology insinuates that her native land, Africa, is one of pagan cultures, gods, and false idols; she was ignorant of her destitution, or better yet, her damnation. However, the text goes on to state, "That there's a God, that there's a Savior too: / Once I redemption neither sought nor knew. / Some view our sable race with scornful eye. / 'Their color is a diabolic dye.' / Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain, / May be refined, and join the angelic train" (753). Redemption comes to Africa in the form of white slave traders, as described by Wheatley, and ironically becomes an instrument of salvation. Thus, this image creates an interesting double consciousness regarding the view of slavery—the capture and enslavement of innocent people cannot be all that bad if they are being "saved" from their pagan ways. The fall or "capture" into slavery as a means to attain salvation, therefore, constitutes the "fortunate fall." Likewise, the concept of the "fortunate fall" also speaks toward another aspect of the human condition, particularly that of women in the early American culture.

The primary texts that exemplify the connection to Wheatley's poem are Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) and the correspondence of John and Abigail Adams. For instance, Eliza in Foster's text is forced to select a husband; unfortunately, Eliza would rather stay single and free from any marital obligation, especially that of the domestic sphere. Eliza views the marital state as a form of enslavement and an unfortunate end for any woman, especially herself. To her, death seems more desirable than the confines of marriage. While her death serves as the unfortunate result of unfair social institutions and differentials in gender hierarchies, society requires women to be married in order to find an identity and "salvation" through their husband; if women remain unmarried, they are subject to social stigmatization and a life "lost" to hopes of security. However, one woman appears to complicate this particular view: Abigail Adams. Abigail Adams is known as one of the most prolific first ladies in American history. Yet, her intelligence, and passion for her own sex to be liberated along with the slaves, is of little value apart from her husband, John Adams. Therefore, as she begins to challenge the established gender hierarchies, prevailing

American and world thought at the time, she remains underneath the “cover” of her husband. Therefore, the differentials in gender hierarchies are highlighted through the concept of “authorization.”

Just as Phillis Wheatley’s texts were authorized by her master and Abigail’s thoughtful insights toward the future of America were transferred and translated through her husband, so the life of the early American woman must be “authorized” through a profitable/creditable marriage. Marriage, like slavery, then becomes the ultimate loss of individuality and thereby confines the woman to a life of domestic imprisonment. Thus, Wheatley’s poetry, Abigail’s insight, and Foster’s *The Coquette* are obligated to uphold the social system they are immersed in—because only within the confines of their relationship to a male authority can they become authorized, while simultaneously also critiquing the same limiting powers. Consequently, as Wheatley’s poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” describes her “fortunate fall” into slavery, enslavement becomes the primary means of attaining salvation out of the “pagan” land. In connection, as Eliza in *The Coquette* refuses to make the “fortunate fall” into marriage, she simultaneously also refuses to accept her apparent need to be “saved” from a life of singleness and lack of future security. In contrast, Abigail Adams is able to use her husband’s position to gain an identity outside of the domestic sphere and therefore makes the fall into marriage, in some respects, a fortunate one.

In order to be “saved” an individual must be rescued from something. As Wheatley was rescued from her “pagan” land, so Eliza Wharton must be rescued from her coquettish ways. Early in the text, Eliza is faced with the death of her betrothed, Mr. Haly, (“holy”) interestingly enough, a minister. Eliza comments on his death and states that, “he is gone. His fate is unalterably, and I trust, happily fixed. He lived the life, and died the death of the righteous. O that my last end may be like his!” (Foster 808); she finds joy in the fact that he had died unmarried, and presumes that he has also. Ironically, Eliza foreshadows her “metaphorical ‘fall’ which prefaces and enables her final fall through seduction” (Jarenski 63). After having “mourned” for Mr. Haly, she is introduced to Mr. Boyer, again a minister. Although, uninterested in marriage, Boyer proves to be a man who would be good to her on many levels, but would still prove to be a “master” over her in the marital state—though a “good master,” a master nonetheless. Yet, her guardian, Mrs. Rich-

man, begins to persuade her into a relationship with Mr. Boyer to which Eliza replies harshly to: "I am young, gay, [and] volatile. A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize" (Foster 812). Still, Mrs. Richman responds with urgency stating:

But beware, Eliza!—Though strowed [sic] with flowers, when contemplated by your lively imagination, it is, after all, a slippery, thorny path. The round of fashionable dissipation is dangerous. A phantom is often pursued, which leaves its deluded votary the real form of wretchedness. [. . .] But I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. (812)

Eliza has not enjoyed her time without the pressures of finding a husband very long, when Mrs. Richman warns her of the social and moral dangers that await her if she chooses not to be married. Eliza does not recognize the destitution of an unmarried life nor does she understand the consequences of said life; however, Eliza holds fast to the ideology that marriage is a state of enslavement and the "shackles" imposed upon her mind have being lately disposed of through the death of her fiancé, are not to be replaced. Not only is marriage punishment to Eliza, but marriage to a minister is most unacceptable.

Although against marriage, Eliza appears to have logical reasoning as to why she is so opposed to the idea. Eliza states: "I recoil at the thought of immediately forming a connection, which must confine me to the duties of domestic life, and make me dependent for happiness, perhaps too, for subsistence, upon a class of people, who will claim the right of scrutinizing every part of my conduct; and by censuring those foibles, which I am conscious of not having prudence to avoid" (821). Eliza recognizes that the domestic life is not the sphere she should be in and that the duties of being a minister's wife are not ones that she wishes to fulfill nor submit to. If Eliza were to marry Boyer, she would have to give herself over to him willingly and then be placed in a position of bondage comprised of domestic and social/moral obligation. Therefore, "within a specific context of limiting marriage laws and restrictive social mores, the novel is less a story of the wages of sin than a study of the wages of marriage" (Davidson 225). Marriage, then is no longer something of esteem and excitement, but instead bondage which consists of restrictive laws and social codes.

Even other wives in the novel do not find their “happy-ending” in marriage. In fact, the “wages” of those marriages prove to be very harsh. For instance, the women who follow the virtuous path are not rewarded for their virtue:

Sanford’s lawfully wedded wife, for example, a woman shown to be intelligent, kind, honest, and attractive, fares almost as disastrously as Eliza. She is ruined financially by her marriage to Sanford, and her child, too, is still-born. Furthermore, even Mrs. Richman, the epitome of republican motherhood in the novel, cannot be permanently happy within her familial sphere, and must deal with the death of her daughter soon after her birth. (Davidson 225)

Also, Eliza’s best friend Lucy Freeman loses her name to her new husband and becomes Mrs. Lucy Sumner. Therefore, even though these women are married, each wife in Foster’s text serves as a “realistic tempering of the proclaimed joys of domesticity” (225). This then provides evidence for a perplexing juxtaposition occurring in the text; there is also an interesting sanctioning of the social system of marriage that simultaneously subverts the quality of that system. Though the women are married, and attempting to convince Eliza to marry, the quality of their marriages speaks louder than their words. If marriage consists of bondage, underneath even the most generous of masters, it is still a life of bondage nonetheless. Therefore, according to Foster and through the examples of the married female figures in the text, female obligation to reputation and appearance is incapable of being reconciled to inner passion, identity, and freedom of choice in marriage.

However, one might ask as to whether or not the duties of social and domestic expectations are even reconcilable, at all, with the individual female self apart from her identity in marriage. One such possible answer to reconciliation is found in another early American example, the marriage of John and Abigail Adams. Although wife to one of the first presidents of the United States of America, Abigail begins a journey for women and women’s rights far ahead of her time. Uneducated and living a domestic life with children, “she denounced the ‘tyranny’ of men that excluded women from ‘ingenious’ education, deprived them of proprietary and political rights, and subordinated them in marriages” (Schloesser 114). However, Abigail’s prolific ideas and theories regarding America’s future began to change with her husband’s increasing political

involvement and began to merge her ideas “away from a utopia of equal rights toward hierarchy and conservatism. The language of fair sex ideology would replace her talk of natural rights, and her acceptance of racial patriarchy would replace her egalitarian ideals” (114-115). Though a mergence with John’s political obligations occurred, her passion for women’s rights remained instilled within her. For instance, in her letter to John on March 31, 1776 she writes:

I long to hear that you have declared an independency[sic]—and by way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable [sic] to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular [sic] attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion [sic], and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws which we have no voice, or Representation. That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. (Adams 2)

Here Abigail comments on the necessity for the new government to establish laws that will respect women as well as their positions inside and, possibly more importantly, outside of the domestic sphere. However, Abigail is able to describe the urgency for women to no longer be defined as subservient to the husband. Marriage, to Abigail, should not be defined on the basis of the woman’s inferiority to the man, nor his ability to rule over her as a harsh tyrannical master, but instead as a party of equals, who work toward a common goal. Also, Abigail comments on the power of the equality in the relationship. She states to John, that if men “wish to be happy [they should] willingly give up the harsh title of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend” (Adams 2). Abigail emphasizes the importance of the husband giving up his own “natural” role of master, or slave owner, in order that a form of equality may be met in marriage.

Although marriage appears to be a bleak end for the female as an individual, Abigail is able to reconcile the idea that the wife is capable of finding an identity apart from her husband by voicing her ideas on the emerging new country even in the bonds of marriage. While her husband frequently traveled away from home for long

periods of time on political matters, Abigail becomes the “deputy husband” during his absence (Schloesser 116). She took on many masculine roles including taking care of the home, becoming a “financial manager under conditions which required financial wizardry to survive,” and corresponding with other political figures, beyond her husband (Gelles 509). For instance, her correspondences with several military leaders during the Revolution were often penned focusing, not upon domestic concerns, but often with a political agenda in mind. Several gentlemen, whom she corresponded with regularly, included James Lovell, a member of Congress from Massachusetts and her cousin, John Thaxter, who served as Mr. Adams’ secretary for some time (Schloesser 119). But, above all, her husband John, “as early as 1776, [. . .] came to depend on his wife’s information. [. . .] Apparently Abigail was more impartial and less self-interested than John’s colleagues” (119). The fact that John values Abigail’s opinions over his colleagues in any instance, not to mention regularly, is remarkable. Therefore, Abigail’s place in the marriage is not solely one of the iron clad, ball and chain strapped *only* to the domestic sphere, but her place becomes much more complex, and is a position where she is able to flourish—a place where she is able to voice her ideas and opinions without fear of punishment or mockery, which is in stark contrast to the image of marriage in *The Coquette*. However, in some instances, Abigail “seems to have wanted to preserve the idea of male cover or protection of women in marriage [and] a plausible interpretation is that while she clearly grasped the revolutionary argument on virtual representation and applied it to women and coverture, she needed to show that she still believed in marriage” (Schloesser 123). Even in the midst of her “suffragist” ideals, Abigail holds fast to the idea that marriage is capable of being an opportunity for women, not just a downfall of the individual as woman. Ultimately, Abigail is able to find her identity, voice, and self-expression through her husband’s political position and thus could be said to have made a “fortunate fall” into marriage.

However, although Abigail is able to find a voice outside of her home in the political sphere, she is still governed by her husband and is defined in relation to his political position. Though Foster’s text sanctions the social system, it concurrently subverts its ability to support that social system in marriage. On the other hand, Abigail Adams actively does not sanction the social system and yet upholds

the somewhat traditional views of the marriage role. In her work titled *Prevailing the Feme Covert: The Sociology of Sentimental Fiction*, Cathy Davidson states that Foster's text and "other sentimental novels in the new Republic are ultimately about silence, subservience, stasis (the accepted attributes of women as traditionally defined) in contradistinction to conflicting impulses toward independence, action, and self-expression (the ideals of the new American nation)" (229). Eliza dies a lonely and depraved death, but it is not the result of her lack of morality; but instead, her death is the result of the unfortunate downfall of one going against the established social system and adhering to the new American ideals. As earlier established through Wheatley's poem, the "fortunate fall" can be seen as the optimism/potential women have for their role in marriage. One such as Abigail Adams may view marriage as the instrument of salvation, the opportunity to voice her otherwise unnoticed intellect and passion, even though she remains under the "mastery" of her husband. However, one such as Hannah Webster Foster, through her character Eliza, may see marriage as the ultimate end, an extremely "unfortunate fall" for any woman to endure. Marriage then, in early American culture remains an "unfortunate fall" for women in the sense that happiness for the self is not guaranteed in marriage and that the woman must remain identified in relation to her husband; no idea, action, even thought can be taken wholly as her own. As Wheatley's writings were forced to be "authorized" through her master, so the life of the early American woman must be "authorized" through her master, her husband. Whether the fall is viewed as "fortunate" or "unfortunate," marriage, regardless of how it is viewed, remains a fall for the early American woman nonetheless.

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Mickey and Mallory Fire: The True Trickster of *Natural Born Killers*

Alix Carnes

Media's like the weather, only it's man-made weather. Murder? It's pure. You're the one made it impure. You're buying and selling fear.

—Woody Harrelson as Mickey Knox, *Natural Born Killers*

A few years ago, the world watched with eager eyes as Michael Jackson stood trial for the alleged molestation of the children who visited him at his Neverland Ranch. Outside the courthouse, around the country, and in the media, protesters rallied against him while fans objected to the mistreatment of the self-proclaimed “King of Pop.” Almost as controversial as another celebrity case—the O.J. Simpson trial—both cheers and boos resounded throughout the United States when the jury turned over a verdict of “not guilty.” Americans found themselves separated in a civil war based not in political differences but in tabloid opinions, a prime example of the ways in which the media influences the ideas of the American people. Based not upon facts, allegations, or testimony, people of all backgrounds chose a side entirely on either their adoration for a pop singer or the ramblings of supermarket tabloids. Such represents not merely the loyalty of a celebrity’s fans, but exemplifies the media’s extreme sway over the American people when it comes to famous trials.

Reflecting real-life situations, Oliver Stone’s groundbreaking film *Natural Born Killers* presents its audience with what it portrays as the largest trial of the time—that of Mickey and Mallory Knox (played by Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis)—as their fans cheer them on outside the courthouse. One of the main conflicts that its viewers find, however, is that Stone provides several potential tricksters: Mickey and Mallory, the mass murdering couple with a penchant for the media; the authorities who attempt to capture and then secure the Knoxes; and the media itself, which forces their crimes into the homes of the average American family. While Mickey and Mallory rampage throughout the Southwestern United States, leaving fifty-two bodies and a frightening legacy in their

wake, the legal system bumbles about to catch them. When finally they do overtake the Knoxes in a drugstore struggle, the authorities of Batongaville State Penitentiary attempt quite unsuccessfully to tame the wild couple. Throughout the adventures of these two groups, the media—more specifically the fictional television program “American Maniacs” along with a few unspecified print media—perpetuate the modern “Bonnie and Clyde” tale, leaving the audience wondering if the excitement that television generates in fact leads to the extreme violence the Knoxes cast upon their unsuspecting prey. In my essay, I will examine the media as the primary trickster in the three potential tricksters of *Natural Born Killers* and explain both its negative and positive effects on the laws of American society in the film as well as in real life.

In general, audiences consider Mickey and Mallory Knox the quintessential tricksters of *Natural Born Killers*, as they are the main characters with the most obvious motivation. The two lovers begin their rampage of the Southwestern United States with the murder of Mallory’s parents and even explicitly state their reasons for killing so many people at the end of the film. Before repeatedly shooting Wayne Gayle, the star of the television program “American Maniacs,” Mickey tells him, “If we let you go, we’d be just like everybody else. Killing you and what you represent is a statement” (Stone 1994). Americans know Wayne Gayle as another type of celebrity, a charismatic television host who will tell any story for high ratings. Such a popularity-mongering celebrity represents the media in general to the average American in the context of the film, suggesting that by killing him in the end, the Knoxes erase his influence from society. Therefore, Mickey’s last words to Wayne imply not only that he and his wife act independently of the mass murderers who came before them, but also that their last murder represents a final rampage against the media that first romanticized and then demonized them.

Though arguably and quite understandably a film solely about a bloodthirsty couple who leave countless dead bodies behind them by the conclusion, the producers give equal camera time and importance to the media that surrounds them. The audience’s first encounter with a potential trickster aside from Mickey and Mallory comes in the form of television host Wayne Gayle (played by Robert Downey, Jr.), who speaks in an intentionally sleazy Australian accent while walking down the fictional Southwestern US Highway 666.

He gives a brief history of the Knoxes' escapades before the camera switches to the cutting room, where the audience sees Wayne exerting his authority over the editing process, deciding what he wants America to see. One quickly gets an image of Wayne as a man who capitalizes on the intrigue of mass murderers and psychopaths, a compulsion which likely is what drew him to Mickey and Mallory. Before his live interview with Mickey, Wayne edits in brief clips of teenagers, law enforcement officers, and people from all over the world with very high opinions of the couple, showing the very impact of the media on the public opinion of criminals.

Alongside the television program—though a considerably smaller role than “American Maniacs”—the print media catches what Wayne Gayle terms “Mickey and Mallory Fire” (Stone 1994). Throughout the narration of the television show, audiences of both *Natural Born Killers* and “American Maniacs” find still images of magazine covers portraying Mickey and Mallory in various stages of celebrity. The first magazine, a fictional publication of *Newsweek*, shows their mugshots with the title “Blood Lust,” while the clips grow more and more favorable until one portrays Mickey on the cover of *Esquire* in a business suit, hair slicked back, and a charming expression on his face. Not only the appearance of a mass murdering



couple on the covers of magazines but also the increasingly positive images that they portray reveal the quickly changing pace of the media with regard to the Knoxes. While *Newsweek*, a magazine read by a large variety of people, suggests that their capture reinforces

the value system of America, *Esquire* appeals to the men who read it by showing Mickey in a pose meant to make them covetous of his position, thus revealing not only the stark contrast of the positions of the media but also its progression toward adoration for the Knoxes as opposed to disdain. Whether intended, as in the case of “American Maniacs,” or not, these opposite representations greatly influence the people who read or watch them.

One may consider it difficult to account for the media itself as a trickster, as it is difficult to assign trickster characteristics to an abstract concept. However, *Natural Born Killers* succeeds in portraying it as the multivocal mastermind by allowing it to switch positions from negative to positive and back again concerning the rampage and capture of Mickey and Mallory Knox. The media of the film capitalizes not only on the panic of a mass murdering husband and wife but on the intrigue of people who purposely live outside the lines of society. As William J. Hynes writes in the final chapter of his book *Mythical Trickster Figures*, “Separating the entertaining humor from any inherent link with enlightenment results in mere diversions that distract people from deeper social complaints, awareness, or action” (206–207). In speaking of tricksters as “ritual vents for social frustrations,” Hynes suggests that historically the trickster figure distracts society from its inherent problems while allowing it to focus on the chaos it creates (206). In tandem with such a definition, the media of *Natural Born Killers* purposely distracts Americans from their declining moral status by refocusing their energies on two characters who enact their frustrations. Mickey and Mallory embody the average person’s social aggravation by performing the unlawful acts that others would consider repulsive, and the media refocuses that frustration on the Knoxes in order to raise the morale of Americans.

A natural outgrowth of the trickster figure is a social effect, either negative or positive, depending on motivation and chain of events in the plot; both Mickey and Mallory and the media give the social structure of *Natural Born Killers* a push toward the negative and the positive, respectively. Mickey and Mallory take the negative effect on society as the minor tricksters of the film with a motivation to tear down the social rules that they so despise. The script assumes that their abhorrence for structure resides in their impure childhoods filled with death and abuse, though the two never directly state the origin of their hatred. While acting as the

aforementioned social tension reliever, the Knoxes rampage through the Southwestern United States killing for no other reason than to kill, provoked by the slightest irritant. One could assume that the two are simply outlaws who steal and kill while living outside the law; however, the manner of their murders contradicts such a theory. As mentioned several times throughout the film, Mickey and Mallory always leave one person alive in their massacres to tell the police what happened and who killed everyone, suggesting that they want to be known for their deeds, not hide as the term “outlaw” might suggest. Therefore, they rampage upon society by killing any and all who cross them and even several who do not cross them, suggesting a starkly negative influence upon the morale of the American people. However, as Jane Hamsher writes in her book *Killer Instinct*, “Vile as Mickey and Mallory are, they stand out as sympathetic against all the corrupt institutions—the prison system, the police, the media, even the family—from which they are trying to escape” (25). Indeed, their negative effect upon society comes across as necessary when the audience discovers the sheer voracity with which the media attacks their story to the opposite effect.

Primarily, the media takes Mickey and Mallory’s story—what Wayne Gayle calls “Mickey and Mallory Fire”—and exerts upon the film’s society an extremely adverse effect in that the sensation of their murders creates an uproarious audience that generally supports and encourages them. In the article “Doing Brando,” Lyall Bush poses the idea that “child abuse, in combination with a sensation-mad media and ruinous voodoo economics, manufactures killers” (87). Indeed, though abuse and difficult economic times play a small role within the society of *Natural Born Killers*, the media encourages Mickey and Mallory’s behavior by romanticizing their story and creating fans for them from the sheer shock value of their misadventures. Before seeing the Knoxes in prison, Stone shows his audience a brief segment of “American Maniacs,” in which a disembodied figure interviews various people from around the world on the subject of the Mickey and Mallory trial. A group of three teenage boys sum up the extent of most comments they receive: “Mickey and Mallory are the best thing to happen to mass murder since Manson,” one comments before his friend interjects the phrase, “Yeah, but they’re way cooler” (Stone 1994). These young men, who likely have little or no recollection of the Manson Family

and their murders, compare the killing couple to the most famous of mass murders but insist that the Knoxes have greater mass appeal, that they are “cooler.” Not only does Stone’s audience find the idea of idolizing killers repulsive and unusual, but upon backtracking to the cause of their celebrity, one discovers that media caused their great appeal. Truthfully, the Knoxes may have remained relatively unknown if not for the wide coverage and detailed descriptions of their escapades, capture, and trial.

Though physically separate from the swooning public, the society within the fictional Batongaville State Penitentiary likewise falls underneath the pressure of the media to live up to the example set by Mickey and Mallory Knox. The inmates at Batongaville know that the infamous couple reside in the darkest corner of the prison and yet are not motivated to riot until the media invades the otherwise relatively quiet society within. Concerning *Natural Born Killers*, Bush goes on to say that the film “exploits our collective fears that killers like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy and Charles Manson...are, like Soviet moles of Cold War fiction, potential behind every slightly odd smile” (87). Indeed, throughout the riot scene, the audience discovers previously docile inmates rallied into a frenzy after Mickey Knox reports on television, “I’m just a natural born killer” (Stone 1994). Conducting his show with sniper-like precision, Wayne Gayle cuts to commercial directly after this declaration of self-purpose, and the cameras immediately cut to the prisoners rioting in the recreation room, quickly spreading throughout the entire prison. Because of the “American Maniacs” interview, countless guards, policemen, and inmates are killed in the riot sequence that otherwise would not have occurred; thus, the presence of the media inside the walls of Batongaville created the necessary friction to allow the prisoners to riot.

After the Knoxes break out from their prison in the midst of the riot and the dust settles from “Mickey and Mallory Fire,” however, society finds itself just as strong as it ever was despite the media’s near-destruction of its moral structure and obsession with the couple. Though the audience receives very little in the way of witnessing society restructure itself, while the end credits roll through the screen, one finds Mickey and Mallory driving around the country in an RV with two children and a very visibly pregnant Mallory. Not only does society eventually forget the Knoxes as the media moves on to the next sensation story, but the two mass mur-

derers even become domesticated in the end, due in part to their overexposure in the news and television. While Bush argues that “NBK’s...message is that socially responsible programs could have saved the killers,” in reality the social irresponsibility of the media rescue the couple from certain death, as they riot and break out, and eventually masks them in obscurity as they take on the new, tame personas of the people who once idolized them (87).

Similar to the fictional society of the film, Stone’s audience found themselves in the midst of a battle concerning the extent to which the media influences the people who utilize it. According to Jane Hamsher’s book on the making of *Natural Born Killers*, Quentin Tarantino drew his inspiration for the story upon reading about the hundreds of love letters real-life mass murderer Richard Ramirez received while in prison. Indeed, American society maintains a very serious relationship with not only the media but also the celebrities it creates, whether those celebrities glean their success from sports, the arts, or crime. In response to the people’s obsession with well-known figures, especially the supposedly morally corrupt, Tarantino began work on *Natural Born Killers*, eventually releasing it at the Sundance Film Festival, where Hamsher writes of her concerns for its reception. Due to the violent content and explicit critique of the media in the film, its producers naturally and rightfully worried that it would receive only negative criticism; and while the film did, indeed, glean its share of scathing reviews, it was widely released almost immediately only to find its message subjugated.

Critics of *Natural Born Killers* found themselves on distinctly opposite sides concerning the film’s reception, each of which can represent an important point that the film itself makes. For example, it was widely publicized that two teenagers who had recently watched the movie took it upon themselves to steal from and then attempt to murder two innocent people. Perhaps, however, the single greatest reason the story received the media attention that it did resides in the fact that the woman who the teenagers shot is a close, personal friend of lawyer and author John Grisham. Naturally, in response to his friend’s paralysis he wrote a scathing article that criticized not only the film but Oliver Stone himself, “A case can be made that there exists a direct causal link between the movie *Natural Born Killers* and the death of Bill Savage. Viewed another way, the question should be: Would Ben have shot innocent people but for the movie? Nothing in his troubled past indicates violent

propensities. But once he saw the movie, he fantasized about killing, and his fantasies finally drove them to their crimes" (7). Here, Grisham argues that the film itself inspired the children to commit murder and that they would not have done so if not for its influence. Interestingly, his argument points precisely to Stone's main point of *Natural Born Killers*, that is, the influence of the media upon the average American. While in the film the people who watch "American Maniacs" are swayed toward adoration for the killers, in this real world example of teenagers taking the Knoxes' lifestyle upon themselves, one finds the act of mimicry. In fact, though the teenagers portrayed within the film cheer for Mickey and Mallory as the police drag them into the courtroom, they conversely make sure to mention that they "respect human life" and would never kill themselves (Stone 1994). Therefore, one finds that the extent to which the media influence people is somewhat grand, but limited; that is, Stone argues that the media makes murderers into celebrities but to an extent that does not allow people to mimic them.

Converse to Grisham's argument about *Natural Born Killers*, one finds not only the positive reviews of the movie, but also its defendants who insist that its messages are protected under the First Amendment right to free speech, suggesting the film's grand (but limited) influence as mentioned above. In direct response to Grisham's article, critic Joel Black writes in his own essay "Grisham's Demons," "The case hinges on the legal and aesthetic issue of whether a commercial film should be considered as an instance of artistic expression protected by freedom of speech arguments, or whether it is a manufactured and potentially dangerous commodity covered by product liability laws" (36). He goes on to discuss the fact of Grisham's own novels and their extreme violence within, suggesting that the next time a person kills another person, if the law can prove that the killer read one of Grisham's books, he should take liability for the murder. Indeed, this directly opposite idea of the message of *Natural Born Killers* and its right to express the message it wants was settled in court; fortunately for Mr. Stone, films were decided to still be under the right to free speech. While Black's article not only breaks down Grisham's arguments concerning the film, it all but proves the message of *Natural Born Killers* in a real-life setting. The case grew in popularity and made those who participated within it celebrities (whether positive or negative); however, the court finally ruled that because of the limited ways

in which media influences those who watch it, Stone and the film were not held liable for the murders.

Based upon the arguments of the two critics above and having studied the film extensively, I likewise conclude that the accusation that the film created the violence that killed one man and paralyzed a woman is erroneous in the fact that the film represents an artistic expression of the exact phenomenon of which Grisham and others accuse it. *Natural Born Killers* represents a parodic media in which it so influences the people who pay attention to it that the people of America maintain a love/hate relationship with the Knoxes. Likewise, the media in its true form of the real world attempts and, on occasion, succeeds a similar relationship to that of the Knoxes with "American Maniacs." However, assuming that only media cause violence removes personal responsibility.

The media is the major trickster of *Natural Born Killers* and succeeds in greatly influencing the people both of the film and in real-world situations both negatively and positively. Initially, the media portrays the way in which it turns serial killers into celebrities and creates a frenzy concerning people who would otherwise be considered repulsive in the eyes of society; however, it then demonstrates the limit to which media may influence an individual by expressing that none of the people who idolize the Knoxes take it upon themselves to murder. In the end, the media succeeds in maintaining the society that Mickey and Mallory Knox attempt throughout the film to break down, showing even the murderous couple themselves as domesticated. In relation to the real-world media, one finds that the media of *Natural Born Killers* parodies while revealing some distinct truths about real-life situations; for example, the media influences its public, but only to the extent that they still retain personal responsibility.

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Mickey and Mallory on Newsweek's Cover from Natural Born Killers. 1994. Photograph. *Www.InfiniteCoolness.com*. Web. 10 Nov. 2009.

Different Names for the Same Thing: Appropriation of Germanic Names in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

Rich Collins

German film and literature have influenced and developed American horror since its inception. The German expressionist movement—illustrated in the films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene 1920) and *Nosferatu* (Murnau 1922)—introduced many of the elements from which the horror genre draws, such as manipulation of shadows, the dark, dank setting of the Gothic, and the use of the film's setting to mirror the mental state of the characters' minds. Additionally, American horror films repeatedly introduce German characters and elements of Germany, such as the German names of the characters in *Frankenstein* (Whale 1931), the writer Dr. Kaufmann—literally buy-man—in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel 1956), Burke chasing around a Nazi in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973), and the name of the investigator of Burke's death: Kinderman—literally child-man. These references in American film illustrate the German presence in America and play with fears of this foreign presence infiltrating the country with outlandish ideas and corrupt science.

Jim Sharman's 1975 film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* includes a variety of foreign influences that reveal "ways different from our own," but the Germanic references that permeate the film illustrate a specific breed of foreignness that alludes to corrupt power and competing ideologies. Since Germany only became a unified country in 1806, its power source remains constantly in flux as various ruling parties fight for authority. In this film, the German gothic setting, the perfect Arian Rocky, and the names Janet Weiss, Dr. Frank 'n' Furter, and Dr. Everett von Scott all point to German influence and representation in the film. Interestingly, the characters go back and forth between the American and German pronunciations of these names and the implications of their Germanic meanings. Brad's introduction of Janet to Frankfurter, Frankfurter's revelation of the "von" in the middle of Dr. Scott's name, and the Americanization of Frankfurter's name into "hotdog" reveal the malleability of

personality and personal history through manipulations of names. Additionally, the fear with which these characters react when approached with the German version of their names illustrates a fear of being found out as foreign and, in the case of Dr. Scott, being tied with the Nazi party in a post-WWII America. What remains most intriguing, however, is that these “transsexual aliens from the galaxy Transylvania” ultimately liberate the stifled Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott, illustrating a reversal of the corrupting powers of foreignness.

The first instance of backsliding in names comes when Brad Majors introduces his girlfriend Janet Weiss to Frank N’Furter and must be corrected as to the pronunciation of her name. He walks up to Frank assertively, shakes his hand, and says, “Brad Majors. This is my fiancée, Janet Weiss,” which he pronounces as “vice” as in the German pronunciation and which I will designate with the German spelling *Weiß* throughout the rest of this paper. Janet quickly corrects him, and he takes the cue, restating “Weiss” with the Americanized pronunciation. It is interesting that Brad, the quintessential American “specimen of manhood,” says Janet’s last name as *Weiß* when under uncomfortable circumstances. It could be argued that Brad automatically attempts to connect himself and Janet with Frank and his group of “foreigners with ways different than [their] own” by revealing their own bit of foreign history. Brad certainly holds no foreign pull, and cannot live up to the “Major” role of assertive, powerful, American male when in the presence of Frank, but through Janet’s German name they might hold some foreign power. The fact that Janet corrects him undercuts this attempt and reveals her own desire to become a part of American culture. They will soon be married, and at that point Janet will be able to drop the German name permanently and fully assimilate into American culture through Brad’s last name; she will have no reminder of Germanic history in her last name. Each of these characters switching between the alternate implications of Janet’s name reveals their differing views on how to handle this situation and illustrates the malleability of personality through the pronunciation of a name.

The *mise-en-scene* of this scene illustrates Brad’s loss of power to the alluring foreign influence of Frank and suggests that masculinity may take forms outside of the boyish image that he portrays (fig. 1). In this shot Frank illustrates a feminine masculinity—through

his pearls, feminine smock, and garish make-up—that holds power over Brad, who he has stripped down to his tighty-whities. Interestingly, while removing the couple's clothes destroys Brad's authority, it empowers Janet through her newly discovered sexual power. Professor Barry Grant notes that Frank "is at once the standard, overreaching scientist figure and alternate monster who, as his name crudely suggests, threatens to overwhelm the normalcy of the bland bourgeois couple with his unrestrained sexual appetite and pursuit of physical pleasure" (128). Here, in his completely pink lab with nude male statues holding loud speakers, Frank stands in his element: completely in control and sexually assertive. His attire may be feminine, but it overpowers half-naked Brad who wishes only to "play along for now and then pull out the aces when the time is right." Unfortunately for Brad this time never comes, and Frank forces this formal introduction that reveals Brad's inconsistent consideration of Janet's last name while Frank openly flirts with her. This illustrates his seductive powers as a foreign male and his confidence at being so far removed from the image of Brad. Additionally, the pink triangle on his left breast illustrates a support for gay pride in the late seventies. This symbol originated from the upside down pink triangle that homosexuals were forced to wear in concentration camps, but for Frank it illustrates something else. He remains a transvestite bisexual in the film—for he has sex with both Brad and Janet—so his appropriation of this German symbol ultimately fails to convey its original meaning in light of Frank's sexually open actions. He remains completely separated from the American concepts of masculinity and homosexuality, and Brad cannot react to this man who willfully switches between men, women, Dracula capes, and garters at ease. This sexually elusive male seduces Janet, who becomes the pure, American woman being fought for by competing men.

Given her reaction to Frank, one could argue that Janet does not wish to be held to the Germanic meaning of her last name—which translates to "white"—since this suggests someone pure and angelic. As far as the audience knows, Janet remains pure at this point, but her sexual prowess later in the film and her telling Rocky, "Touch-a touch-a touch-a touch me! I want to be dirty! Fill me, thrill me, fulfill me. Creature of the night!" suggests that she holds open and promiscuous sexual power, which remains tied to ancient Germanic tribes where women held enormous rights and were even

considered gods, beneath her small town girl image. With this promiscuity in mind, it stands to reason that she does not want to be tied to anything pure, for she holds a fiery, unbridled passion beneath. When Frank kisses her hand and mutters, “*Enchante*,” Janet illustrates her sexual prowess by sheepishly giggling. Apparently relieved that she will not be considered too pure for the advances of this “sweet transvestite,” she accepts such flirtation with ease and becomes more and more comfortable with her own sexuality and body throughout the rest of the film. By the end there remains little pure about her—by small town American standards at least—and she has “[given herself] over to absolute pleasure.” Her chances for assimilation through Brad have vanished as their relationship dissolves into immediate satisfaction of carnal desires through Frank, and she adopts an alien mindset.

This internal desire for perversion bears startling resemblance to the ideals surrounding women in post-WWI, protofascist Germany. Freud argues that “the ‘disposition’ for perversion is actually class specific in women” and when discussing the Freikorpsmen, “a post-World War I protofascist German military organization,” Gaylyn Studlar states that “high-born women could be idealized as pure angels, asexual and nurturing, but lower-class women became the signifier of dark and degenerate femininity” (140). Additionally, she reveals that these lower class women “embodied perverse sexual excess in all its frightful and fascinating possibilities” (140). Janet, being a part of middle class America and therefore separated from American aristocracy, falls into the perverse side of this description. Her body remains out of bounds for her fiancé Brad, but Frank and Rocky each violate her purity with their foreign masculinity. Each of these figures remains coded German in the film—Frank’N’Furter through his German name (which implies a citizen of Frankfurt) and Rocky through his representation of the perfect Aryan specimen (blond hair, blue eyes, and very muscular)—and the fact that they can do that which Brad could not reveals the invading possibilities of foreigners. It barely needs stating that *Rocky Horror* is a parody of the horror genre, and therefore the film explicitly illustrates what others merely allude to. *Nosferatu* illustrates the plague that an Eastern foreigner brings on a town, and most vampires portray an ability to woo women. Films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Exorcist* also illustrate the corrupting powers of foreign influence and the destruction that will result from their invasion. The fact

that Frank and Rocky embody these powers through post-WWI protofascist ideals serves to parody the horror genre by supporting their corrupting foreign powers and illustrating the dark, destructive mindset of anything outside of small town America.

Dr. Everett von Scott illustrates this threatening foreign force in the dinner scene in which the whole cast unknowingly eats his nephew Eddie. His position at the table, the objects surrounding him, and his actions at the revelation of his name all contribute to his image as a mad Nazi scientist (fig. 2). The most immediate object that codes Dr. Scott as German in this shot is the stein from which he drinks his wine. Although several of the characters have these Germanic beer steins in front of them, Riff Raff only pours wine into Dr. Scott's. Perhaps this serves as foreshadowing for the revelation of Dr. Scott's Germanic identity, for the aliens of the house are certainly aware of his background. However, this mug also serves as an extension of Dr. Scott's personality and makes the dinner room akin to some sort of ancient beer hall, only here the drinking is not congenial and the power is all Frank's. More telling of Dr. Scott's twisted past is the fact that he sits in a wheelchair and grabs his right hand when approached with reference to his origin. Cultural historian David Skal states that "overreaching scientists routinely have damaged bodies (especially mangled hands, a particularly powerful symbol of twisted human endeavor)[,]" and that "mad doctors in postwar movies are often veiled Nazis" (273, 245). Combine this concept of Nazis with the integration of ex-Nazi scientists into the American government for specialized research, such as the study of U.F.O.'s that Dr. Scott partakes in, and Dr. Scott's actions become a symbol of his fear of being discovered. Readers need only consider the most famous representation of this figure, in Stanley Kubrik's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), to see the epitome of this trope: a mildly psychotic doctor that can barely control his own jolting body, and even less his destructive plans that threaten to destroy the planet. It can be argued that Dr. Scott is coded as an ex-Nazi mad scientist infiltrating Frank's domain under the guise of a high school teacher and uncle of the deceased Eddie, and that Frank's revelation of Dr. Scott's full name illuminates his dark past, causing a fear at his inability to completely hide within American society.

Dr. Scott's foreign background remains fairly obvious with his heavy accent and use of German words, such as *und* (and) and

Mutter (mother), but it might not be specifically German to an arrogant, somewhat naïve American such as Brad, who considers the “Time Warp” scene at the beginning of the film an instance of “folk dancing” from “foreigners with ways different from our own.” Therefore, making a direct relation between Dr. Scott and the country of Hitler, Nazis, and communism arguably alters Brad’s perspective of his respectable high school science teacher and causes a new suspicion of his old forms of authority. In this way, the film parodies ignorant, egocentric Americans that never leave the country and remain fearful of anything foreign. If Brad would have had any knowledge of Europe and its peoples, then the revelation of Dr. Scott as German would have come as no surprise. However, since he remains ignorant of not only Dr. Scott’s origin but also of what Germany is really like, he automatically assumes the worst and jumps in to defend Dr. Scott’s name.

When Dr. Scott accuses Frank and his party of being a “bad crowd” of “aliens,” Frank coolly states, “Go on Dr. Scott. Or should I say, Dr. *von* Scott!,” to which Brad jumps in, crying, “Just what are you implying?!” Dr. Scott, the kindly high school science teacher who first brought Brad and Janet together, has fully integrated into American society with only a strong German accent to cue his origins, but this revelation throws his position in jeopardy. After Frank’s accusation, Brad and Janet look surprised and accusingly stare at Dr. Scott for the rest of the dinner. It can be argued that Brad’s astonishment and new opinion of Dr. Scott is from the direct relation of Dr. Scott with Germany in an era where other forms of authority come into doubt, e.g. through the Watergate scandal earlier in Nixon’s reign, but this destruction of authoritative power ultimately liberates Dr. Scott from his commitment to Brad and Janet, and by the end he joins in the dancing and sexual liberation. Frank even causes him to move his legs and reveal stockings while he rolls around kicking on stage. His liberation from the teacher/student relationship allows him to free himself sexually and physically along with everyone else.

Additionally, Dr. Scott quickly shifting his stance on Eddie by bursting into a song about his nephew’s wrongdoings and bad nature since birth illustrates his own fears at being tied with Germany and the Nazi party. This point might seem irrelevant in 1975, but as recently as November 17, 2009, CNN reports that a 90 year-old German man faces charges for “58 counts of murder for the killing

of Jewish forced laborers” (CNN.com). The fact that this threat to S.S. soldiers that slipped through the cracks remains prevalent today implies that it was possible in 1975 also. Therefore, Dr. Scott’s willingness to dismiss all accusations against Frank for the murder of Eddie and his compliance from that point onward illustrates his desire to dismiss the reference to the “von” in his name that ties him with Nazi Germany. Ironically, he ultimately illustrates the compliance which allowed the Nazi party to survive by forgiving Frank’s murder of Eddie and condoning Riff Raff’s killing Frank at the end. Through his desire to hide his unclear past, Dr. Scott illustrates the perfect Nazi soldier, an individual who doesn’t ask questions and simply goes along with the decisions of those in power. This ultimately reveals the destructive possibilities of strictly following authority figures and plays with American fears of unquestioning, dangerous foreigners represented in other horror films, such as Dr. Frankenstein in *Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale 1935) or Hutter in *Nosferatu*. Dr. Scott’s compliance reverses the idea of American individualism that causes one to question authority—especially post-Watergate—and parodies communistic fears of complete obedience to a fascist dictator mad with power.

Frank illustrates himself as this mad dictator in the following scene after chasing Janet into his effeminate lab. After he freezes Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott to the spot with his “Sonic Transducer” Janet “cries out” at Frank as he taunts and teases her. To this the song continues and he sings, “Don’t get hot and flustered. Use a bit of mustard,” and Brad and Dr. Scott each reply, “You’re a hotdog, but you’d better not try to hurt her. Frankfurter” before being turned into stone by the machine marked “MEDUSA”. Here Frank takes a machine designated as American—Dr. Scott proclaims “we have been working on ourselves”—but which he has “perfected” and uses it against those who speak against him. The fact that he does so because they approach him with the Americanized version of his name—“hotdog” rather than the German translation of a person from the city of Frankfurt—reveals his own desire to remain foreign and not hide within the dominant culture and their cheesy joke. This forms a rift between him and Dr. Scott, each of whom have German names, but rather than reacting with disgust at its revelation, Frank reacts in anger at its Americanization. He freezes Brad and Dr. Scott for their crude connection regarding his name in

order to enforce his own otherworldly foreignness and the powers of technology outside small town America.

Frank also freezes Janet with his perfected machinery, but he does not allow her to even finish the crude joke, for no sooner does Janet say “You’re a hotdog” than she is turned into stone like the others. When discussing the sexuality of lower class German women, “Theweleit argues that rather than being an anomaly in Western culture, these protofascist fantasies linking perversity with femininity constitute the ‘equivalent to the tip of the patriarchal iceberg’” (Studlar 140). This instance reveals another part of that iceberg: the silencing of the outspoken, assertive woman. By this point Janet has already shown herself as sexually powerful and assertive, albeit because of Frank’s influence, and has even become the focus of Rocky. Therefore, Frank takes Janet’s voice away before even allowing her to finish the sentence her male companions state with growing hostility. She becomes the silenced “Other” in this situation as Frank judges her unequal and inadequate and ultimately takes away the power that he gave her. The fact that he does so through a machine designated as American parodies the women’s rights movement in America and the shutting down of this group by the larger powers in the country. Yet Frank—the reigning self-indulgent foreign force of the film—orders the pulling of the switch, which connects this disempowerment with something outside of America. This placement of fault on Frank connects with the ideals of small town America as the ignorant mass populace points the finger elsewhere while ignoring the problems for which they might even be responsible at home.

Columbia ultimately throws the switch on this disempowering machine, but the staging of the scene and the presence of Frank illustrates him as the continuing male patriarch simply ordering his servants around (fig. 3). Once again in his effeminate pink lab, Frank remains the central power in ultimate control of the situation. Interestingly, the characters once again lose their clothing—after being turned to stone—while Frank remains almost regal in his hose and blouse. This illustrates his empowerment while assuming effeminate attire and reveals that his masculinity remains because of his assertiveness and authority in the scene. Additionally, the rainbow tank from which Rocky came once again illustrates Frank’s ability to transgress sexual boundaries through his open sexuality. However, in this scene Studlar notes that Frank holds more in

common with “Joan Crawford in *Humoresque* or Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard*],” films in which “the powerful older woman fails in her attempt to forge her young male protégé into a sexually acquiescent partner” (148). His melodramatic response to Rocky’s sexual transgression and to everyone’s ruining his “good time” illustrates a completely feminine form of masculinity that almost eclipses his earlier pursuit of Janet, but he still holds power. This power to destroy those who cross him appears very masculine, and redefines masculinity for Frank in the film. This new hybrid form illustrates a man who has experienced the best parts of life and constructed a new identity around “absolute pleasure.” This indulgence not only separates from the rigidity of small town American standards—who consider “life pretty cheap for that type”—but it redefines sex as something empowering, new, and foreign from small town culture.

This repressed mindset changes for the small town characters of the film—Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott—as they all illustrate their sexual liberation and giving “over to absolute pleasure” in the final scenes of the film (fig. 4). Janet states that she “feel[s] released” and that her “confidence has increased” after Brad sings “What’s this, let’s see. I feel sexy.” This once repressed, small town couple has become liberated from their inhibitions as they dance around in fishnet stockings and garters. Frank’s foreign force, combined with his perfection of the MEDUSA machine, allows the characters to exhibit the type of behavior that Frank indulges in throughout the film. While it can be argued that these characters are simply under the trance of Frank’s machine at this point, the fact that they continue to support Frank and remain appalled at his death reveals their compliance in the event. In addition to freeing up this repressed young couple, the floor show also liberates the prude Dr. Scott as he first attempts to “get out of this trap” before allowing “[his] life [to] be lived for the thrill” and kicking out his stocking-clad leg. This instance illustrates a lack of Dr. Scott’s inhibitions as he does away with his refined stance and joins Frank and the others in this dance routine. He no longer worries about keeping up his scientific image as “rose tint[s]” the world of the group and they only see the beauty of pleasure. It could be argued that this loss of worry about being discovered in the light of such physical excess—as opposed to simply the power of the machine—is what allows him to move his legs. He keeps them conspicuously covered in a quilt throughout

the film, arguably to hide the lack of deformation or paralysis. In fact, when Janet and Brad take him out of the house at the end, well after the powers of the machine have worn off, his legs can be seen kicking along to help them pull him out to the lawn. In the dance scene, he ultimately loses the necessity for his mad scientist image and gives himself over to the “absolute pleasure” that the group indulges in.

This group indulging comes to an end, however, for after Riff Raff kills Frank—the embodiment of free, foreign sexuality—Brad, Janet and Dr. Scott all leave the house as it is beamed back to the planet Transsexual. When commenting on this return, Robert Wood notes that “the science fiction plot thus suddenly departs, leaving Brad and Janet behind like lovers in the dawn following a midsummer night’s dream” (Wood 159). The problem with Wood’s analogy is that this couple may not be able to return to loving one another after their “dream.” They have been forever altered—and arguably liberated—by Frank, and to return to the same type of relationship they had before would be absurd. The open attitude toward sex that Janet learned from Frank will not stand with Brad—for Columbia it didn’t even hold with Frank—and this couple is most likely finished after their encounter. The film presents them as such to comment on the inhibiting problems of traditional marriage in small town America and to suggest that a more open attitude toward relationships and sexuality might allow one to more fully experience the world.

The sexual liberation that Frank provides these small town figures only becomes available because of the representations of Germanic names in the film and the play with meaning and pronunciation of these names. Janet would have had less of which to be ashamed with her last name if not for its meaning in German; Dr. Scott could have been much more uninhibited overall if not for the dark past surrounding his name; and Frank might never have frozen—and then liberated—Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott if not for their Americanization of his name. Bill Henkin —author of only the unrelated *Consensual Sadoomasochism: How to Talk About It and How To Do It Safely* (1996) and *The Plant Book: A Complete Guide to Healthy House Plants* (1977) besides *The Rocky Horror Picture Show Book* (1990)—states that “the gay, straight, bi, and incestuous sexuality is so totally parodied that any “message’ of sexual liberation is incidental[.]” but this simplistic reduction misses a large part of the point (126). The entire film remains parody for the most part, but this

does not negate meaning. O'Brien and Sharman certainly intended to comment on the horror genre and American culture at large, and even if they didn't, the film remains an independent piece of art that opens itself up to multiple, independent interpretations.

This film remains incredibly complex in its parody as it comments on the horror genre, America, sexuality, the middle class, etc., but the sexual liberation that Janet and Brad experience remains one of the more poignant commentaries. The fact that it works through the representations of Germanic names remains an interesting facet that comments on the foreignness that remains such an inherent part in the horror genre. The film ultimately reverses the normal, threatening sexuality of foreigners by illustrating Frank's ability to liberate these repressed, small town people from their staunch inhibitions. He gives Janet a loud voice, Dr. Scott the freedom to escape his stifled personality, and Brad the ability to feel sexy about his body. By the end these figures are all left lying outside of the departing house in a red glow and mist as they crawl around on the ground. Although they may return to their normal lives, they stand liberated from the constraints of small town America and may live more comfortably with themselves. If Brad and Janet do remain together, they will be much more open sexually with one another, and Dr. Scott has escaped persecution once again—this time from the aliens instead of the Nazis—while also gaining a bit of sexual liberation for himself. The ending of the film ultimately illustrates the freeing—both physically and mentally—of these characters as the foreign force departs, leaving them newly enlightened.



Figure 1. Frank meets Brad and Janet in his all pink lab.



Figure 2. Mad Nazi scientist Dr. Everett Von Scott lets out a maniacal laugh.

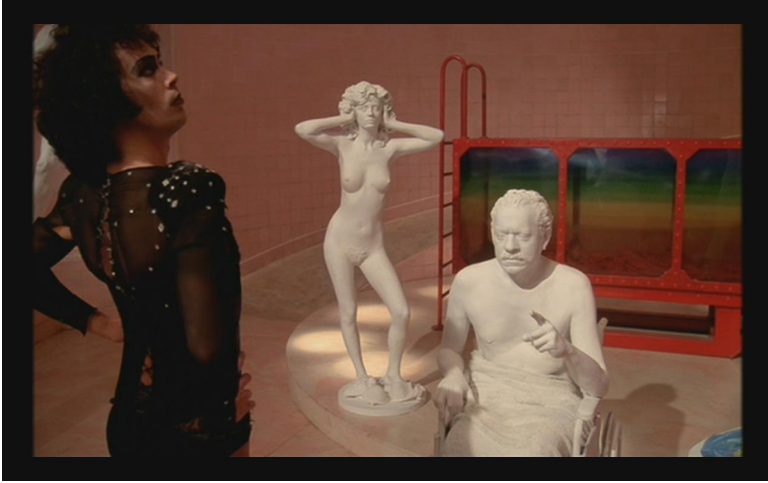


Figure 3. Diva Frank asserts his power with his rainbow tank in the background.



Figure 4. Everyone but Rocky kicks and dances.

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When Giovanni Becomes Catherine: Lauding the Female Virginity of the Male Libertine

Katy Gunn

In *The True Adventures of Catharine Vizzani*, anatomy professor and surgeon Giovanni Bianchi examines the life story and physical body of a deceased female cross-dresser from both scientific and moralistic perspectives. His focus on morality uncovers what appears to be an interesting contradiction in the treatment of this woman by her society: her male persona “Giovanni Boroni” meets condemnation for virility and sexual promiscuity, but when her femininity is revealed, complete with an intact hymen, she receives praise for her honor and virginity. This reversal of public criticism completely disregards her sexual relationships with women and her refusal to remain in the approved confines of her household, and those who originally condemned her for “unnatural desires” eventually bury her respectfully “with the Virginal Garland on her Head” (Bianchi 20, 38). Essentially, Vizzani’s physical virgin femininity acts a salve for her transgressions as a man and, by association, her original transgressions as a female. *Though this simplifies Vizzani’s funeral, Bianchi’s later moral commentary complicates matters. He makes some attempts to explain her actions by placing blame elsewhere, but at other moments he clearly disagrees with Vizzani’s virgin burial, insinuating that she still acted sinfully.* Bianchi’s contentions against the public reception of Vizzani’s story illustrate a shift during the eighteenth century in cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality, and the inconsistencies in his own remarks show the malleability of the new views. Catharine Vizzani is not some kind of gender-switching anomaly, but rather the embodiment of a movement in cultural ideas.

Because eighteenth-century moralists place so much emphasis on the importance of appropriate female behavior, the first puzzle that arises in Vizzani’s story concerns her ability to shirk feminine responsibility without ever facing reprimand for it. This ability comes only with Vizzani’s decision to completely renounce her

femininity and embrace and succeed in the male role instead. “Cross-dressing itself was not criminal in England,” Julie Shaffer notes, “and women caught dressing as males might or might not be punished for crimes related to their cross-dressing,” but the fact that the public actually forgives and forgets all of Vizzani’s crimes, from her non-feminine actions to the sexual transgressions she makes under the guise of a man, shows an extraordinary indulgence to her particular situation (140). As easy as it would be to write off this indulgent dismissal as a simple politeness granted her at her funeral, multiple instances before her death show an enduring, preexisting acceptance of her decision to shirk her sex’s responsibilities. Even her parents, whose job it would traditionally be to raise her as the perfect daughter, dismiss her “ramblings” as a man “with a Smile” (Bianchi 15). Importantly, these acceptances come only after Vizzani outwardly trades her femininity for masculinity. Before adopting the habit and dress of a man, shirking her feminine duties resulted in strong punishment, including being “rattled... severely, and threatened” when she visits female lovers “under Pretence of learning Embroidery” (Bianchi 4, 3). Refusing embroidery, modesty, and eventually marriage would have continued to gain her more vehement disapproval had she not replaced that set of responsibilities with a seemingly more important set of duties, those faced by men, a self-reform through which Vizzani nullifies any potential chastisement. Shaffer describes this as well, arguing that “behaving well as a man” can counterbalance “not behaving appropriately for a woman” (57). Outside of her sexual escapades, Vizzani certainly appears as the perfect man, “thorough Proficient in all the Branches of her Employment,” willing to “put herself to Fatigue[s]” for ladies, and “not at all daunted” when faced with any “threatening Sight” (Bianchi 8, 25, 28). A plethora of details like these make her seem more successfully masculine than the rest of the men in her tale. Vizzani’s acceptance as a failed female comes, and can only come, alongside this astounding success as a male, and the seemingly reprehensible action of cross-dressing facilitates the pardon of her original transgressions against femininity.

Equally helpful in understanding Vizzani’s ability to move from a complete refusal of the feminine role to an embodiment of it in her virginal funeral are the larger cultural views on cross-dressing that surround her. Multiple critics comment on similar—though more modest—acceptances of female cross-dressing by explaining

them as “logical, since every creature on the great chain of being was thought to aspire to a higher state” (Donoghue 203). Interestingly, the designation of masculinity as a “higher state” stemmed from more than the eighteenth century’s patriarchal power distribution; it actually had scientific backing, of which Bianchi would have been aware. The sciences of his time revolved around the “one-sex body theory,” in which “the female body had been perceived as essentially the same as the male body, if clearly inferior (since, according to humoral theory, women had less heat than men and so were less perfectly developed)” (O’Driscoll 105). Because she voluntarily cross-dresses, “presenting herself as a man because she wants to be a man” and committing herself to what could be portrayed as further self-development, the public familiar with the one-sex body mode of thought could understand her, sympathize with her, and even potentially esteem her for her rational choice (Shaffer 142). Their acceptance does not, however, keep them from posthumously reducing her again to the lower status of female in a reassertion of the patriarchal ideology that drew gender lines in this manner.

In addition to the cultural logistics of Vizzani’s gender-switching, confused class distinctions at the time of her death add another reason for the public to acquit, accept, and even laud her in a virgin burial. In “Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts,” Susan Lanser notes that punishment for female intimacies, which happened frequently in Vizzani’s life as a male, was often determined by the social ranking of the females involved. “In eighteenth-century western Europe,” she states, “the dominant screen distinguishing virtuous from Sapphic bodies may be that of *class*,” and mentions of class pepper the section of the story that involves the treatment of Vizzani’s dead body (184). Though as a male she lives as a servant, the public has no way to know of the class of the woman under the disguise. Bianchi suggests that Vizzani was placed “in this honorable light” after her death partially because “some of [the crowd] assert[ed] that she might be the Daughter of a *Venetian Nobleman*” (40-41). At this point, it becomes clear that at least part of the reason for excusing Vizzani’s female improprieties lies in simple self-preservation by her middle-class judges.

Though the above argument offers a plentitude of explanation for Vizzani’s acceptance as a failed female by the public who buried her, there still remains the problem of posthumously categorizing “a young Vagabond, and the most abandoned Whoremaster that

ever seduced Women” as a virgin (Bianchi 12). This transition from libertine to virgin in the eyes of the public illustrates early eighteenth-century ideas of sexuality and virginity that Bianchi would eventually contest, although even he agrees with the first and foremost determinant for virginity, an intact hymen. *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani* foregrounds the importance of this detail, mentioning it in the subtitle and returning to it throughout. In fact, this detail alone results in the primary and immediate dismissal of the “Debaucheries” and overarching sexual promiscuity she had achieved as a man; “the Entireness of the Hymen incontestably proved her being actually a Virgin,” extant in a realm untouched by sexuality (Bianchi 16, 39). Essentially, sexual activities with women do not count, and only penetrative sex with men, which leaves a physical mark, results in the loss of eighteenth-century virginity. Because all terminology and ideas about sexuality revolve around the phallus, the idea of lesbianism remains unformed in the eighteenth century, allowing intimate episodes between females to be excused as “empty pleasures that at best prepare for heterosexual consummation” (Woodward 577). Susan Lanser even presents evidence that eighteenth-century women commonly “address or evoke other women with a longing intimacy figured in bodily terms,” making Vizzani’s episodes with women unremarkable, once she is exposed as female herself. Through these strictly phallogocentric ideas about sexuality, the general public can chide “Giovanni” for his sexual escapades with women, offering “grave Admonitions to a more regular Behavior,” immediately before lauding “Catherine’s” chastity. Removing the male counterpart of those relationships from consideration nullifies Vizzani’s “audacious Villainy” and actually takes her sexual experiences outside of the realm of sexuality (Bianchi 17, 27).

With her many sexual episodes with other women forgotten, Vizzani does, in fact, embody perfect female virginity, and her chastity becomes more impressive to the public when they consider her circumstances. “In all her several Journies with her Master,” Bianchi points out, “she never made the least Difficulty to lie in the same Bed with other Men, upon a Case of Necessity,” but even when forced into such a state of potential temptation, she “forebore making any Advances to her Bedfellow, though he were an *Adonis*” (19). In the eyes of a society that views desire as strictly heterosexual, Vizzani’s ability to check her supposed desires even in situations where she

was practically halfway to coitus comes across to the public as an exceeding devotion to chastity. Through this seemingly steadfast hold on her honor, Vizzani actually earned “the Virginal Garland on her Head and Flowers strewed all over her Cloaths,” as well as the striking public inclination to view her as “nothing less than a Saint” (Bianchi 38, 40).

Professor and surgeon Giovanni Bianchi overtly disagrees with the public’s treatment of Vizzani, though, mixing science and moral statements in a section of final remarks that displays heavy tension between these old ideas about sexuality purveyed by the eighteenth-century public and his own evolving perceptions. While this public, who still works within the phallogocentric constraints of the one-sex body theory, can focus on Vizzani’s physical lack of sexuality and attribute to her “an uniform Purity of Manners,” scientifically progressive Bianchi cannot (41). Instead, he “urge[s] that her making Love, and with uncommon Protervity, to Women” shows “flagrant Instances of a libidinous Disposition; Proceedings incompatible with any virtuous Principle, or so much as Decency” (41). His concern with non-heterosexual intimacy springs from what O’Driscoll calls “the reconceptualization of the body itself” that takes place during the eighteenth century (105). At this point, scientists like Bianchi “began to build a new understanding of sex as a radical differentiator between two distinct types of human beings” that are seen as “essentially the same” under the one-sex body theory (O’Driscoll 106). These newly thickened gender lines allow moralists, a group that also includes Bianchi, to form the ideal sexual relationship around male/female binary pairings and ostracize those who, like Vizzani, do not fit this structure. Further, with the death of the basis for understanding cross-dressing as self-betterment, cross-dressing too becomes more of a “moral than physical failing” (Lanser 186). While in the understanding of the public that buries Vizzani, heteronormativity does not have the binary basis necessary to exist, Bianchi’s text uses these new ideas revolving around the two-sex body theory to create in this same story a negative example for it. His *History and Adventures* fits into this period’s “proliferation of discourses from medical treatises to canonical novels to pornography that articulate an intense anxiety designed to secure heterosexuality as normative” and correct to the exclusion of all other forms of sexuality (Lanser 184). As Bianchi’s vehement criticism of Vizzani’s “libidinous Disposition” shows, his remarks quickly move out of the

realm of scientific discourse to deal heavily in what he sees as the moral repercussions of cross-dressing and female intimacy, illustrating the way in which these developing sciences would eventually re-inform public ideas of propriety (41).

Bianchi's contention with Vizzani's virgin burial includes within it smaller contradictions that lead him to excuse her for her behaviors even as he condemns her, a series of paradoxes that shows the still-evolving, imperfect nature of the sciences in which he works. Within the first three paragraphs of his section of remarks, he begins to explain away Vizzani's "irregular and violent Inclination" as a result of either "some error in Nature" or "some Disorder or Perversion in the Imagination," but the former he immediately dismisses, "since, from the Account he gives of the Dissection of the Body, it is very evident that there was nothing amiss" (Bianchi 53). As Williams notes, "the spectacle of a woman successfully filling a 'masculine' role in early modern society frequently raised the question of the respective roles that nature and nurture played in gender differentiation," and when Vizzani's case allows Bianchi to "acquit Nature of any fault," he turns to nurture to explain his imagined "Perversion in the Imagination," entering into the discourse of the developing realm of psychology (Williams 51, Bianchi 53-54). He imagines that Vizzani might have "had her Imagination corrupted early in her Youth, either by obscene Tales that were voluntarily told in her Hearing, or by privately listening to the Discourses of the Women" or even through pornography, "those scandalous and flagitious Books... calculated to inflame the Paffions" (Bianchi 54, 63-64). Blaming her actions on childhood experiences with a model similar to that which Freud would later use, Bianchi makes Vizzani a precursor to the "deviant 'invert' in the later-nineteenth- and earlier-twentieth century work of sexologists," which marks her as abnormal while lightening the moral burden of her tale (Vicinus). Acquitting her of moral wrongdoing does not check Bianchi's impulses to preach, though; in fact, it gives him a new outlet, pushing him to impress upon parents the importance of raising children properly. By the end of his remarks, he even reverts back to chastising Vizzani and all who act like her "with that Severity with which they deserve," regardless of his professional opinion that such human "Irregularities" are not actually at fault themselves (61-62). Because his understanding of the issues and sciences surrounding Vizzani's case is not yet concrete, Bianchi never resolves

these logistical slippages, and he ends his remarks with nothing more solid than the idea that stories like Vizzani's should provoke "the wisest People [to] profess themselves ashamed" (66).

The moral confusion in *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani* derives from its writer's attempts to make claims about morality while straddling the spreading gaps in a changing culture. Bianchi's account of his subject's life and burial contains multitudinous contradictions between common public ideas and new scientific claims, which, to complicate matters further, contradict themselves. Vizzani herself, at times condemned male "Whoremaster" and at others saintly female virgin, stands as a composition of these still-malleable constructs of gender and sexuality that allow her to inhabit both worlds, to live freely and to rest praised for her restraint (12).

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Fleeing the Monoverse, Seeking a Minorverse, and Finding a Neoverse: Chasing Non-White Light into a Most Outer Space in *The History of Luminous Motion*

Nathan Keener

“Solar maps measure the impact of sunlight in a given area,” or so his teacher says. Not every area is the same. Some places receive more light than others. Florida, for example, receives more sun on average than Washington State. At this question, his mind forms only one other question of consequence: what if the light is not wanted? Can anything be done? So, gathering courage and mustering fortitude, he asks, “But what if Florida wants less sun, and Washington wants more?” His teacher, though polite, struggling to fight back laughter, responds rather oddly, but she thinks necessarily simply for the second grade. “States don’t have a choice, sweetie, all light comes from the sun.” “That doesn’t seem fair,” he replies. “No, perhaps not. But that is how the stars align; the sun we have is the only one there is. Let’s move on to social studies for today.” Having learned the appropriate operation and purpose of the solar map, he decides to study his own. He sees that in other places of the world, there is more power, more energy, and more light. For some reason he is bothered by this. It upsets his worldview: he is no longer the heliocentric sun. The mirror next to the poster now reflects someone else, someone he does not know and is afraid to be.

Within the progression of Scott Bradfield’s *History of Luminous Motion*, Phillip views his life through the elemental forces of the universe, which affects his relationship to the entire multiverse,¹ which for the purposes of this study, contains the majority monoverse, the minority minorverses, and all the liminal neoverse in between. What I will call the “monoverse” is the universal perspective of the majority that hinges upon the existence of other unclaimed, ignored, unreferenced “minorverses,” or the subjected suns and planets. The neoverse consists of the spaces between the monoverse and the minorverses, longing to belong to one of them

but belonging to neither any longer. Having lost his position in his former minorverse once shared with his mother—precipitated by gravitational pull of white privilege exerted by the principal sun, his father—Phillip begins his fall. Despite the threat therein, he continually rejects the monoverse and consciously pursues a new minorverse but fails to obtain inclusion. As a result he is unconsciously defaulted into his own neoverse, a space of his own, but one that prohibits identity, like a hypothetical white hole.²

Bradfield's protagonist expresses his very varied opinions in a tongue of universals. In order to access these tongues, Phillip must commit many "transgressions," as the author cites. In the words of Foucault: "Transgression is not related to the limit as black to white. [...] Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" (cited in *Dreaming* xi). This narrative operates only in spirals, mind-bending pairings and a splintering plot. It cannot be traced back to a single transgression, and this, after all, is the root of the book's drama and draw.

Phillip's speech is filled with suns, moons, and all types of planets. Critic Michiko Kakutani suggests a single reason behind this choice. This space-speech³ as we might call it, serves to illustrate, not a far reaching character, but one only attempting to hold onto sanity, to remain within the appropriate space of the mind: "[Phillip] speaks in hallucinatory—and hardly childlike—terms of the perpetual motion of the planets and atoms and cells, and he broods about the meaning of life and death." So whether the interior space of a cell or the exterior and immeasurable space of outer space, this novel deals in the cross reaching, if not clashing, of universes. Though Kakutani makes the implicit explicit by connecting Phillip's space-speech to his psychology, Bradfield actually places within Phillip's character one of the greatest spaces, a contrary space, one with nothing but implication and subtlety.

In the novel's opening, Phillip and his mother share an implied secret their pursuit of motion, attempting to avoid the chasing forces, the all powerful monovernal suns following behind them. This scenario creates a new minorverse and an ideology that permits the consideration or discard of any number of suns, to which Phillip and his mother both ascribe in the beginning. Both ideologies live in a contradiction: by the side of the chaste majority, the pursuit is just and right; this undue motion must be corrected, subdued. Yet to the objects in motion, a contrary logic follows: arresting this mo-

tion, though counterintuitive to major opinion, violates a purity and so, a freedom. Thus with the entrance of a new patriarchal power, a boyfriend named Pedro, both Phillip and his mother are subject to the majority's arrest.

Within the space of the minorverse, the space of agency, a space of freedom, movement is life. Phillip observes, "Mom was that movement that never ceased [...] Mom possessed a certain geographical weight and mass; her motion was itself a place, a voice, a state of repose" (3). Within this motion exists a propelling weight, which holds one to a planet where independence is found and claimed; this weight gives independence, a value, and a voice. All of these things merit retention. This is what Phillip's mother flees for and toward, and that lesson is what Phillip retains and maintains throughout the narrative. In her words, "Freedom is a place inside your own mind," she said. And now we were in different galaxies, Mom and I, spinning among remote civilizations and suns" (28). Though Phillip tries to maintain unity with his mother, as if they were truly one, he understands somewhere in the back of his mind, that his "one" is actually two. Yet the protagonist elects to continuously pursue falsity. Phillip's fatalistic goal of son and mother unification obtains power for continuance through the practice of projecting his own flawed ideology on to other male figures and their actions by extension.

Phillip murderously fights to maintain his minorverse. This battle fluctuates between the conscious and sub-conscious plane. Though the principle part of this narrative's tension arises from conscious meditation and choice, the transition between sub-conscious and conscious is at least marked or suggested early on. As the motion of his mother slows, due to the patriarchal form of Pedro, a new transition involving Phillip occurs, a breaking away from his mother. Even though it is not desired, this facilitates a fracturing of the first minorverse. This revelation carries through a solar map, given to him for his new bedroom, his new box, an inheritance from his mother's new patriarch: "The solar map confronted me then like a graceless benediction, filled with cartoon colors and impossibly tidy convergences [...] imprisoned by gravity and centrifuge and chemical weight" (17). As his motion slows, against his will, Phillip faces a potential closing or cutting off of his mother's minorverse. The poster before his eyes projects his worldview as a cartoon-like play thing, "graceless"—without mercy. Unlike his former minor-

verse, the poster, a monoversal icon, encompasses the mechanical overbearing pressures of an unspoken white privilege and attempts to force Phillip into its universe. Phillip now consciously faces his patriarch and paints him the foe.

Phillip deals with two potential foes in the work, one, Pedro, with whom he identifies to a degree, and in a sense, resurrects; and the other, his father, who he eventually alienates entirely. First we approach the most approachable, Pedro. Throughout the work, Phillip works tirelessly to build a persona of “Othered Whiteness.” This is, after all, what his relentless motion grants him, the ability to outpace the majority that wishes to envelope him. Even so, Pedro becomes a hindrance to Phillip, keeping him from his mother, from his motion. Therefore, Pedro demands removal; yet, at the same time, Phillip identifies a shared status. In his mind, both Phillip and Pedro belong to a minority: Pedro because of his ethnicity, while Phillip’s derives from his will to be Other. So, as a gesture of pseudo-brotherhood, Phillip strives to give Pedro what he himself is always desiring—acceptance, and a perfect place of agency. Unfortunately for Pedro, this place is only found in eternity: “All that long night as I feverishly worked, what I wanted to do more than anything was build something for Pedro that would last forever” (37). The building to which Phillip refers is that of an everlasting minority, a minority more outside than any other—outside economics, physicality, and even ethnicity. Pedro gets to live among the most elite outsiders: the eternity of the dead. In this way, Pedro occupies the first neoverse of the novel. Killing the liminal, the minority and half-dead, is a lot easier than murdering the mighty majority.

Phillip’s father, the central sun, besets his son with a monstrous mass of assumption and consumption. This father figure disfigures Phillip’s minorverse with patriarchal monoverse. This figure strikes him as wholly foreign; Phillip’s father descends upon him as an alien:

A beautiful white-haired man in flowing white robes emerged from the spaceship and offered me something from one of his soft pink hands. I was on my knees before him. His other hand stroked my brow. Politely, even demurely, I refused; his hand offered again. I refused again, and hard multiple arms grasped me from behind and handed me up to him. (118)

The ultra-white description of Phillip’s father assaults the mind with the overbearing weight of white privilege, a privilege Phil-

lip does not want. This white force, his father, penetrates Phillip's life beyond any chance of salvation. Down to the roots of his hair, Phillip's dad is ever white. Phillip faces a forceful submission to whiteness, with his father acting as a benevolent white god. Phillip refuses these tainted gifts of this deity—the blazing white sun god. Yet another all-assuming presence of the majority arises from not only the sight of the white but also its sound, a sound crystallized in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. Lawrence Buell describes white noise as “a postmodern symbol of ‘inauthenticity,’ [reducing] it ‘to the status of catalyst to the unfolding of the [protagonist’s] culturally symptomatic vacuousness” (qtd. in Heise 750). Buell’s concept of cultural vacuousness applies well to Phillip’s ultimate space, the neoverse, though Phillip, as a protagonist, fights to avoid the vacuousness. DeLillo’s protagonist asserts, like Phillip’s father, his status of majority, and clings to it. Phillip, by contrast, flees. In his demure refusal, Phillip both seriously and hesitantly stands his ground, asserting his own mass against his father’s monoverse.

In this moment, Phillip realizes his white capacity, yet he denies his white status. Despite his knowledgeable choice, the “hard multiple arms” of circumstance show no sympathy for his consideration; Phillip’s father forces conscription of all others within his space. Through his gravitational pull, he claims his wife and attempts to pull in his son: “Stars exploded and collapsed. They turned and spun [...] Dad was a house. Mom was just infinite space which Dad’s house isolated and defined” (136). Placed into a sphere of whiteness enforced by his father, Phillip watches the universe cascade, his universe; stars of understanding and mobility explode and collapse. Amid the explosion, the narrator perceives and describes the result of patriarchal pull. The potential of his mother, her “infinite space,” at once suffers capitalization by his father. By isolation and definition, Phillip’s father destroys all of the space of his subjects, restricting them to the position of satellites. As the minorverse starts to succumb, both mother and son fall out of motion, losing position. With the loss of position, according to Phillip, his mother’s meaning lapses. Yet, Phillip says nothing about himself losing meaning. Mother and son, a former minorverse of binary stars, fighting the gravitational pull of their central patriarchal mass, lose balance. Phillip’s mother, in reality a second star, comes down from first position. Phillip, in contrast, presents himself as primary, persisting

against the constant pull. He must find and escape the gravitation of his genes.

Phillip finds and finds his escape within: "We find our way out of this world within this world" (247). Phillip's own thought follows the logic of the minority, the reality of the Other. They exist within the same minorverse. The majority, while defining their own world, must utilize the minorverses around them. Phillip, while incarcerated, arrives at a second point of important separation, one within himself: "During those days and nights of slow, unhurried reflection, I began to realize that those were the two worlds I always seemed to be getting confused. The world of the self and the world of machines" (243). The self, a self-contained neoverse within this work, is constructed by restriction, and the restriction of construction complicates Phillip's ability to construct or enter a minorverse. The monoverse denies the reality of polychotomy, or the multiverse. Even so, the monoverse must utilize many elements of that same polychotomy for its own constitution, such as the unspoken need of the Other.

The multiverse, in turn, informs Phillip's minorverse within the monoverse. Phillip's "secret world," his potential minorverse, contains the "families who were always waiting to be sent away and as a result you never really saw them." Similar to Phillip, they "lived their secret lives in public places" (216). Phillip identifies most closely, though never perfectly—never perfectly with anyone—with the ethnic minorities of his urban area. They, like him, share a liminal space, the space within which those "secrets" are kept and maintained. For example, Phillip desires to escape from and reside in a constant white-negative or retrograde position: constantly subject to the higher force, but consciously adverse at the same time. Nevertheless, the "secret" society Phillip supposedly cites remains partially remote, for he refers to them as "they." The remnant or ruin that fosters his sense of extra-liminal status, rests in a mysterious, but lingering tie between father and son, a tie that Phillip relentlessly attempts to sever by way of pre-meditated murder. The narrative works tirelessly to build up this paternal climax, lingering painstakingly on the details of the action— not by way of imagery, but thought stream: "I was moving too, through these humming veins, down these moist undulating corridors. I was moving into the world of Dad's body, a place even Dad had never been before" (235). As Phillip is "working" on his father, a temporary identity

communion takes place. Phillip partakes in his father's physical plexus, an extension of his father's monoverse. Yet Phillip resists complete absorption, viewing himself from a separate place—a place of strict physicality. By murdering his father, in a realm of strict physicality, Phillip endeavors to regain freedom from all the mass he has amassed, all the things that patriarch, whether white or not, pressed down upon him. The “[t]hings and more things, accumulating in my lap, pulling the weight down out of [Phillip’s] abdomen. Additionally, Phillip fights to regain his mother, “with her once beautiful eyes” (17).

Phillip's murderous plan fails; the elimination of that idea fades. Exposed to the vacuum of realities, the outer spaces, outside his own mind, his luminous motion begins a yield. Forced, as it is, his light, be it understanding or perception, intergrades into a history. Light as a history, if exposed, only carries on deeper and deeper into recollection, into past. The light of each moment is the product of a constant and continuous supplanting from the white universe, the monovernal entity claiming suns, as amassed over time. Phillip bears no exception.

By the weight of time, he is arrested under the light, the light of White. After emerging from his correctional treatments, for an attempt at failed communion, Phillip returns or comes, taking on the position of secondary to his father. No longer does he rest in a perfect retrograde. Still, it is a resistant status: “This was my home and this was my family where I did not really live so much as circulate among things, events and strangers like a sort of atmosphere” (268). Phillip submits to the great gravity pull, to his father's mass, the parental planet. This place he does not inhabit as much as he orbits it.

The white light of the father exudes a burning brilliance that, if concentrated and focused, cuts and contains. Arriving at the hospital to see his new baby brother, Phillip sees his parents in a new light, or a lack thereof. Phillip's altered perspective is complemented by a shift in the narrative's language and syntax. As opposed to his father, who enters or illuminates late in the narrative, his mother, now *the* mother, serves no longer as the founding source, but as something gone dark and misremembered: “She was very beautiful, for those who like women with dark hair and rather fair skin” (262). Phillip consciously disassociates himself from his parents. Still, more interestingly, he expresses his isolation from his mother

more acutely than with his father due to the greater level of investment they shared. Phillip expresses dislike toward “this woman,” his former mother, as opposed to the father, to whom he stays remotely neutral. This uneven weight forces him into occupying an extraliminal space—that space between the white that he consciously and vigorously denies, and that simultaneous space he both seeks to claim while setting it apart, the microverse. Perhaps the secret of the secret community is an irresolvable and unresolved white thread of denial. This first thread, the narrator’s first stitch, serves to stitch together his neoverse, a single knot of naught, a space without family or community.

Phillip hypothetically continues his life scripted to a script, a proposal of assumptions and presumptions that most appropriately align with major expectations. In his words, “I had a future now, as firm and incontrovertible as my house and family” (269). The last two nouns named call into question his assurance or assertion of the entire statement. His house serves as a ball and chain, binding him to an identity he does not want. His family, perfectly fractured, as all minority families should be, restrain and contort his ideas. Yes, Phillip’s future seems very firm, but not in deed, only in word. Word is what Phillip provides. For sixteen lines or so, Phillip manufactures his future, outlining the scripts alluded to earlier. At the end of his hypothetical life-script, he seals his hypothetical children to the same fate—a conviction and execution passed down before the crime: this is the invisible light of *Luminous*.

Despite Phillip’s early attempts at projecting an acceptable and rule-abiding future, he returns to his house, his old house, as a discomfited and disordered lawbreaker. He breaks the law of social expectancy and most obviously the law of property. More importantly, however, this episode brings Phillip to the realization of rule: “We learn the rules when we get older, and that’s what helps us get by. We’re not uncertain anymore” (271). Again one finds his words weary and unsteady. If he is now an adult, as the text seems to imply, Phillip should possess his certainty, but he does not. Instead, he is more uncertain than ever before. He may concede an understanding, whether real or fictitious, of rule or frame. Still he desires, most adamantly, to adhere only to his own script, to depart from those impressed upon him. Perhaps he wishes to reclaim his former illumination, his inner light.

The nature of light denies him his request, for it only travels in one direction, the present. The idea that light possesses or even can possess a history is illumination's illusion. The history of light's motion is truly irredeemable: "My family was very far away and inaccessible to me now. But I didn't want to be with them. I wanted to be here. I wanted to stay here forever. I couldn't stop crying, but I didn't have to stop crying either. [. . .] It wasn't that I didn't know my life had turned out for the best. But I was growing up now, and I could cry all I wanted to" (273). Phillip is permanently and contently separated from his physical majority ties. He is now old enough to choose to continue fleeing that light. Even so, Phillip never finds that perfect space that is his own. The closest space he ever occupies is that former space's absence, which is his neoverse.

Notes

1. According to the O.E.D., the multiverse is a hypothetical space or realm of being consisting of a number of universes, of which our own universe is only one.

2. My understanding of a white hole is that it is a hypothetical point in space that bends, which allows connection between point a and point c, bypassing linear progression. According to Berkeley physicist Ted Bunn: "White holes are a perfectly valid mathematical solution to the equations of general relativity, but that doesn't mean that they actually exist in nature. In fact, they almost certainly do not exist, since there's no way to produce one."

3. Space-speech: the terms in which this study and the novel under study operate as illustrated in the introduction.

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Blurring the Lines: The True Effects of Batman's Protective Watch

Kayleigh Pandolfi

When DC comics came up with the character of Batman, though he was not the typical comic book hero with amazing super powers, he still maintained the classic comic book hero traits: a good guy with a secret identity who only wanted to defend the innocent and punish the evil-doers. Batman, even as one of DC's darker comics, was still meant as a fantasy world where true vigilantes are respected and admired, and the story lines maintained the clear cut separation between the good guys and the bad guys. When Batman's number one arch nemesis, the Joker, was introduced, a new breed of bad guy was born. As a sociopathic, and slightly deranged, individual, who killed and created seemingly unnecessary chaos throughout Gotham, the Joker only made Batman appear more beneficial to society, a perception furthered in Tim Burton's 1989 rendition, *Batman*, where Jack Nicholson's portrayal of the Joker showed that he had always been deviant, even before his frightening transformation, and Michael Keaton's Bruce Wayne was so easy to love and commiserate with that there was no way to deny him the role of the perfect good guy. Even Randall M. Jenson notes in his essay, "Batman's Promise," "Much about Batman's mission looks forward toward the future: he wants to make Gotham a safer and better place to live—a place where children don't lose their parents as he lost his" (90).

Christopher Nolan's 2008 blockbuster, *The Dark Knight*, leads to a completely different reading of Batman. Featuring the age-old duo of Batman versus the Joker, Nolan blurs the lines significantly between the two characters. Christian Bale's enactment of the winged vigilante portrays a more sinister side to Batman, one who is more interested in regulating the lives of Gotham's citizens rather than protecting them. As a member of Gotham City, the Joker would have felt the natural fear of Batman's gaze, much like the rest of the population. This fear of an omniscient figure should have psychologically forced the Joker into a life of submission. Instead, the Joker chooses to rise up against Batman and reveal Batman as the main problem of Gotham City.

If this oppressive force is what created the criminal mastermind known as the Joker, then clearly he, as an unstoppable revolutionary force, is the physical manifestation of why Gotham may suffer from the overly protective nature of Batman. However, when it all boils down, Batman was the one who caught the Joker. Neither Commissioner Gordon, nor the Gotham City Police were able to protect their city from the Joker's wrath. Though Nolan's *The Dark Knight* seems to push Batman towards being an ominous, watchful entity who represses one man into a life of chaos, Gotham city would still falter without the Bat.

The beginning scene of the movie depicts Gotham as a city in a state of denial. We are given a quick glimpse of what Gotham's views of Batman are by a television newscaster interviewing the mayor, where the mayor informs the newscaster that the "Major crimes unit is close to an arrest" of Batman. What the citizens do not realize is Batman is the protective force over Gotham city. They are thinking with a sense of - to use an ideology set forth by Karl Marx - false consciousness, where the individuals believe the false notions set forth by those whom they believe to be in control because those ideals are masked by notions of naturalness (Bressler 194). In their minds, individuals such as Jim Gordon and Harvey Dent are the ones who are protecting Gotham. Gordon and Dent further this false reality by putting themselves in the public eye, making the people honestly believe they are the ones providing the protection. The mayor even insists that Batman, because he is a vigilante, is someone meant for the police to track down and arrest. Instead, Batman stays in the dark to help him hide away, and can only effectively fight crime by underhandedly prying into the lives of the citizens, but he is truly the one protecting the city from a rapidly growing crime spree. Even though society casts a negative light on Batman, they are more than willing to let him continue watching over their city. The defensive torch was passed on to Batman, whether he wanted it or not.

Accepting this torch means Batman gains his power through civil principality; Niccolo Machiavelli would suggest Batman is the true authority of Gotham because those who appear to be in power (in this case, Gordon and Dent) recognize that Batman has the ability to maintain the semblance of order the city relies on (36-41). Jim Gordon openly admits that he handed Batman the right to control the city when, while discussing the possibility of why Batman has

not come at the Bat-signal's call, he informs a fellow officer, "Hopefully...because he's busy". Instead of actually patrolling, Gordan and members of his team are still at the station, and they immediately expect Batman to watch over the city. Through the use of Harvey Dent, the legal system of Gotham is able to maintain the façade to the citizens of having control over the criminals of the city. However, Batman, through his ability to watch and listen to anyone, and to appear to be everywhere at once, is the one who truly controls the citizens of Gotham.

The only problem with having Batman as the city's ever-present guardian is the method of controlling the system he chooses to employ. Machiavelli later points out within his writings that "the man who commands his subjects...must incline towards punishment ... so they do not become insolent and trample all over you because of your easy-going nature", which is quite obviously the way Batman holds Gotham City within his grip (202). In an early scene, we see the Batmobile break up a drug deal and inside the cockpit, though there is no one within, the screen clearly displays the word "LOITER", then quickly switches to the word, "INTIMIDATE", at which point, it begins shooting at anything that moves (Nolan). Now, it would be a fair argument to state that the Batmobile is not Batman himself, yet the vehicle does represent a projection of Batman, a sign equally as frightening to the criminals and citizens alike. Therefore, not only the car, but Batman himself, is ready to "INTIMIDATE" where justice needs to be served. In his book, *Society Must Be Defended*, Michel Foucault refers to a disciplinary technique which "centers on the body, produces individualized effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (249). Through the discipline Batman renders, he is able to create fear in the hearts of the drug lords, which causes them to stop their own deviant actions and to seek out a third party criminal.

At the same time, the previously mentioned scene leads the audience to wonder, "How did Batman know what was happening *right there at that moment?*" When writing about the various disciplinary techniques societies have used in his novel *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses the Panopticon, an effective sort of prison which is set up as a circular building:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which individuals were inserted in a fixed space... in which all events

were recorded... in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure... all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (197)

This structure allows the guards to constantly monitor the prisoners, forcing the prisoners into more desirable behaviors. As always, the audience sees the classic image of Batman's silhouette atop a building watching over Gotham. Yet, the film turns it into a representation more of a policing gaze rather than the protective guardianship seen in previous Batman texts, as the camera pans the city in a circular motion while Batman looks on. These scenes use the camera to create a sort of Panopticon on screen, enforcing the idea that there is no where Batman cannot see.

Along with the camera, Batman also employs technology to maintain his superiority over the citizens. He is seen at one point listening in on multiple conversations at once; the audience is actually able to follow along with the conversations he is listening to. Long after that scene, towards the end of the film, Batman shows the character Lucius Fox a device he created to catch the Joker. This device is one that uses the sonar power of every private cell phone to locate anything that needs to be found all over Gotham City. Fox shows he understands the lack of ethics behind a machine like this when he tells Batman, "No one should have this kind of power" (Nolan). No one should be able to violate the privacy of millions of unsuspecting citizens, but Batman is clearly able to do so without any sort of regard to legalities, seeing as how he does not directly represent the law. Through his gaze, and his technological advantage, Batman transforms Gotham into his own personal Panopticon.

What Gordan does not realize is that Batman's ubiquitous watchful eye is actually what causes the citizens to behave in the non-deviant manner that they display. Just the thought of Batman, a mysterious vigilante who patrols the city in the dark, puts a subliminal message of repression in the minds of the citizens. In Louis Althusser's society, Batman would be Gotham's repressive state apparatus, the entity that molds the thoughts and behaviors of the citizens (Parker 201). In the case of Gotham City, Batman coerces the citizens to act without deviance, and forces the criminals into a life of fear. In turn, the citizens of Gotham interpellated to whatever design Batman chooses to create (201). The citizens willingly denounce deviance in their desire to avoid a possibly abusive run-in with Batman. The Bat-signal, acting as another extension of Bat-

man, reinforces his presence to the citizens of Gotham. During the same scene referenced earlier involving the Bat-signal, Jim Gordon informs the officer that Batman usually does not answer the call of the Bat-signal, but he likes “reminding everyone he’s out there”. In the next scene, two men, a drug addict and a drug dealer, see the Bat-signal across the sky. With just the sight of the Bat-signal, the drug addict chooses not to buy the drugs, indicating that he interpellated the ideology that Batman is trying to set forth by choosing not to buy drugs. Here, we see again that no one can escape his presence and serves to further emphasize his policing gaze.

Every one of the citizens of Gotham would know the feeling of the repressive gaze employed by Batman, including the Joker. Heath Ledger’s version of the Joker in *The Dark Knight* depicts him as an individual who started out as just a regular guy. He tells the audience of two accounts in of his life that would indicate that he has not always been the psychotic sociopath that he has become. He mentions a memory between his mother and father, when he was just an innocent little boy. Albeit, this may have been a frightening memory, but nothing indicates a desire to be the crazed Clown Prince he becomes. Later on in the movie he talks about his wife, who left him after he tried desperately to make her happy. According to divorcerate.org, anywhere between 41%-74% of marriages end in divorce, depending on if it’s the first, second or third marriage, and the age of the individuals. These two instances paint the Joker out as a normal man who fell on some extremely hard times, and whose scars are really just painful reminders of his troubled past. As a regular citizen, he could commiserate with the rest of the population in feeling fearful because of the Batman. While speaking with the mob bosses, he tries to gain their trust by telling them, “I know why you’re afraid to go out at night”. Here, he is admitting that he has felt the pressures of Batman’s policing gaze, as well as the fear of not knowing when and where Batman will be watching. He understands why the criminals, as well as the innocent citizens of Gotham, wish the Batman were no more.

However, the Joker appears to be the only character throughout the entire movie that wants a change out of the entire city of Gotham. Immanuel Kant defines enlightenment as a “man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage... self-incurred is the tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason, but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without the direction from another” (85). The

Joker, as a man who may have once behaved in a manner which Batman would deem socially acceptable, has become enlightened to the negative effects of Batman; he has grown tired of blindly doing what is expected simply out of fear of any repercussions resulting from Batman's repressive nature, as the rest of the city has already done. The Joker feels the need for an intervention, or change, in the way Gotham City is patrolled (Parker 204). He wants to rise against the Batman for all of the indirect torment he has put the Joker, as well as the rest of Gotham City, through.

The Joker himself even believes that Batman is the entity which has turned him into the person he has become. In the film, the Joker tapes himself tormenting a man who acts like Batman. At one point the Joker turns the camera on himself and states, "This is how crazy Batman has made Gotham". He fully admits that his devious behavior does not fit into the society which Batman created. Yet, the Joker felt so repressed by never knowing where Batman lurks, always feeling Batman's eyes on him and feeling like he has to be on his toes, that it has literally driven him crazy. According to historian David Garland, "society's practices of normalization... are oppressive" and he notes how an objectifying power is, in effect, a dehumanizing one (Lacombe 333). Batman's power represents an oppressive, dehumanizing force, one that only creates order out of fear. From his words and his actions, this force has clearly had an adverse effect on the Joker. He is compared to a dog quite a bit in the film, and even sticks his head out of the window of a stolen police vehicle he drives, openly acting like a dog. His complete lack of care at having the world see his face shows that he only wants the rest of the world to understand what Batman has turned him into, and to warn Gotham that having a policing force like Batman really is not beneficial to society. He later states, "You want order in Gotham? Batman has to go", indicating exactly what the citizens need to do; if they want the torment to end, if they want crazed individuals like the Joker to cease to exist, the only option is to remove the object of oppression.

Even though the Joker is only trying to create his own version of a revolution, he still causes massive amounts of destruction throughout Gotham, and it is only up to Batman to save the lives of Gotham's citizens. Ironically, he uses his sonar detection device. As stated earlier, this unethical contraption gives Batman the power to intrude on the privacy of all innocent citizens, however, according to

Foucault, sometimes devices such as these really are a great benefit to society because they “[aim] to establish a sort of homeostasis...by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers” (249). Batman’s use of the sonar machine to capture the Joker does present a sort of paradox: though this is a machine is a direct invasion of the citizen’s privacy, it also saves the city from the destructive force of the Joker.

Though Batman seems to spend all of his free time spying on the city, he is perfectly able to turn his gaze away from the city to focus on a more immediate threat. When the Joker’s uprising turns detrimental to society, Batman deems it necessary to fight fire with fire. He initially casts the Joker off as just another small time thug, but when matters get out of hand, he realizes that he needs to act to take the Joker out. This launches into the battle of Batman trying to catch the Joker, and the Joker trying to show Gotham what Batman truly is. Throughout the film, Batman knows what this battle is doing to Gotham City, as well as his image, but sometimes, as Foucault believes, these battles are what is necessary to maintain the balance one has worked so hard to achieve: “war is about two things: it is not simply a matter of destroying a political adversary, but of destroying the enemy race... war will be seen not only as a way of improving one’s own race by eliminating the enemy race... also as a way of regenerating one’s own race.” (257). In *The Dark Knight*, the two “races” would make up those who are still more than willing to interpellate the ideologies forced upon them, and those who are not. Seeing as how the Joker is the one individual who refuses to give in to Batman, Batman’s war is only with the Joker, and he pulls away from worrying about the other criminals to focus on the most dangerous one. Yes, there were many casualties, and most of them were innocent citizens of Gotham City, but Batman understands that the Joker must be stopped if order is to be maintained in Gotham. When everything seemed to come crashing down, Batman was able to take down the monster only he created.

A once average person comes to the realization that the individual in control of his city is actually a damaging force and he wants to rise up against being repressed. The Joker only desired an end to being so controlled, to make the scales even and to show Gotham what Batman’s effect on people can create. However, the Joker’s version of a revolution proved to be more damaging to his cause than

he may have intended. The Joker's destructiveness and murderous tendencies deemed his behavior deviant rather than revolutionary. However, by the end of the film, one still questions the benefits of allowing an omniscient figure like Batman to maintain the amount of control he has come to possess.

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Semiotics of Masculine Performance: Reading Masculinity through *South Park's* "Fishsticks"

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In order to fully understand masculine performance, we must acknowledge the representations members of the masculine gender adore. The representations men adore reflect their ideologies; thus it is necessary to note their consistent willingness to view cartoons such as *South Park*, a cartoon known for its discourse and satire of popular culture. The cartoon, often produced in less than a week, contains multiple outlets for masculine performance, a performance consisting of homophobia, homosexuality, political affiliation, "tough guise," and heteronormativity. Jackson Katz, one of America's leading anti-sexist male activists, uses the phrase "tough guise" to describe the social construction of masculine identities in America; the identities often derive from celebrities and entertainers and include being tough, physical, strong, independent, powerful, rugged, and athletic. *South Park* will serve as the lens through which we will analyze masculine performance in an enclosed space, since the space accurately reflects a multitude of performances within culture. The emphasis of *South Park* lies in the satire, not the advocacy for any particular way of living, for the representations and discourse merely illustrate a reaction to and attempted critique of dominant ideologies. On the surface, the ridiculous characters and dialogue of *South Park* seem to reaffirm the dominant ideologies in American culture, but they ultimately oust cultural fears and inadequacies. Author Brian C. Anderson, a controversial writer himself, supports the concept of *South Park* as a successful satire based on a conversation with one of the show's creators. Anderson quotes the creator's opinion that "any time an episode's primary aim is social criticism, rather than laughs, 'those shows weren't very good.' It's better [...] to let the commentary 'come out of a natural place.' But there's no doubting that *South Park*," according to Anderson, "exemplifies the essence of satire—the comic as weapon" (80). Anderson's dynamics as a writer derive from his insistence that the creators of *South Park* are more conservative than liberal. Both the concept of comedy as

a weapon and political affiliation of the creators will play a role in the discussion of *South Park's* inner workings. *South Park* contains multiple signs of masculinity, but characters within the show and audience viewers often misread.

South Park often lampoons eccentric celebrities and “others”; notable celebrities include Kanye West, Tom Cruise, and Barbara Streisand. Critic Jack DeRochi believes *South Park* “personifies the ‘double-edged’ assault of satire, lampooning the protagonists and the culture that caters to their basest desires,” which means the writers satirize the main characters or specific viewers, and the culture that allows for their movement through society, in this case masculine trends (37). Fans mistake these attacks as the lampooning of liberal celebrities for the conservative effort, but the creators of *South Park* maintain that they often define themselves specifically as Libertarian. The ideals *South Park* criticizes often reside on the opposing side of conservatism, but in the grand scheme, creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone mock both sides. In the episode “Fishsticks,” Parker and Stone’s fourth graders berate characters of the show, including a caricature of Kanye West, by joking about their sexuality, whether hetero, homosexual, or another. The mockery of sexuality, usually homosexuality, highlights other notions of the town and larger culture, including homophobia.

Most critics agree that *South Park* does not warrant deep textual analysis, yet the series certainly performs fantastically as a lens with which to read masculinity. Literary critics Matt Sienkiewicz and Nick Marx put forth the claim above in their article “Beyond a Cutout World: Ethnic Humor and Discursive Integration in *South Park*,” arguing “that *South Park* is not constructed in a manner conducive to the sort of deep textual analysis to which great works of literature are so often profitably subjected” (6). *South Park's* production time of less than a week warrants this claim, which we may easily agree with, but the creators are products of the same environment which they criticize. The series likely holds much evidence about the subconscious of the creators, which we might enter if we were to analyze the series as a whole, but this project focuses on the creations, not the creators. A deep analysis of *South Park* leads to examining the creators, but more merit derives in merely examining the product; theory of the producers is inevitable. Sienkiewicz and Marx continue the opening of their argument by posing that “the show achieves its complexity through a wide and

far-reaching web of connections to other media texts and, crucially, the larger discourses with which these other texts are engaged,” and through this thought process, *South Park* specifically performs as a lens or benefactor (6). *South Park*, through extreme gathering of cultural texts and ideals, allows for examination of the culture which adores or loathes the series. This television series, which continues to bring the most viewers to Comedy Central over the past years, highlights a specific type of viewer based on the subject of its episodes. *South Park* often berates cultural icons, political advocates, religious spokespersons, and celebrities, but the range of representations draws a specific crowd. Television allows for the examination of this specific crowd of eighteen to thirty-five year old male fans and their ideals, so the web of cultural texts also includes the audience.

Though *South Park* includes the tensions mentioned above in many episodes, the episode titled “Fishsticks” provides an opportunity to view masculine performance, specifically a representation of black masculine performance. Generally, *South Park* centers on four fourth grade boys and South Park, the town they live in. The main boys of the show are Eric Cartman, Stan Marsh, Kenny McCormick, and Kyle Broflovski, and their lives appear typical at first, but they contrast with the children usually found in cartoons. The boys of South Park are foul-mouthed, disrespectful, introspective and often unashamed. The escapades of the boys range from exploring sexuality, race, politics, celebrity, nationalism, and religion, so audiences never really know what to expect with each new episode. With the “Fishsticks” episode, *South Park* introduces a joke that supposedly reveals homosexuality. If you answer yes to the question in the joke, you receive the label of gay. Throughout the episode, the following dialogue takes place between the fourth grade boys Cartman, Stan, Kenny, and Kyle, a fellow prankster Jimmy, and unsuspecting victims: “Eric, do you like fishsticks?” says Jimmy. Cartman innocently responds with “yeah,” allowing Jimmy to continue with, “do you like putting fishsticks in your mouth?” Cartman once again replies “yeah,” allowing Jimmy to finish the act with the punch line: “well what are you, Eric? A gay fish?” The joke retains form for most of the show, but the reaction to the joke in the town and culture deserves examination. This crass joke compares fish sticks to the penis of a fish. If a person enjoys eating the food fish sticks, then others take advantage of the ignorance to the joke and imply

the victim likes penises of fish. Though the gag apparently reveals homosexuality, the joke derives a power from outsiders misunderstanding the loaded language. The gay fish joke penetrates innocent victims and maintains a hierarchy between insiders (characters and viewers who understand the parameters of the joke) and outsiders (characters or viewers who misunderstand the terms of the joke). Those who misunderstand the terms of the joke undoubtedly receive penetration, which makes them the “butt of the joke” or the aim of the joke. This use of humor is specific to masculine performance in that males often belittle each other with jokes; comedy also appears as traditionally masculine, even in the show, which maintains the gender role for the entire episode. Every person that uses the joke is male and every victim is male. No one escapes the ridiculous joke, not even celebrities such as Kanye West.

In American popular culture, Kanye West represents a conglomerate of the rap industry, suburbia or bourgeoisie, African Americans, masculinity, and heterosexuality. All of the aforementioned labels notably refuse and discourage homosexual claims. Scholars of rap maintain that “through rap music, there’s an identification with some of the most stereotypical masculine standards” and projection of a heteronormativity highlights those standards (Peterson). The idea of heteronormativity encompasses the notion that only two lifestyles exist, with the norm or standard including male and female, and those norms existing in standard or natural roles of life. Heterosexuality is the only normal sexual orientation within heteronormative ideals. Any deviation outside of the “normal” gender roles, gender identity, sexuality, and biological sex is not heteronormative. So, with the caricature of Kanye West in “Fishsticks,” Parker and Stone create quite a pretentious character. Kanye West represents the heteronormative on two fronts. On a minute scale, West maintains a rapper persona, which often demeans homosexuals and homosexuality, while exaggerating heterosexual exploits and materialistic ways. But on a macro scale, West represents masculinity with his boisterous attitude, bravado, and timely violent side. Upon deeper analysis, West actually represents that which the heteronormative disputes. Even though the Kanye West caricature represents “tough guise” to the fullest, fans of *South Park* likely recognize him as a “soft” rapper. Musicians in the rap genre that focus on introspective lyrics and changing the stereotypes of rap are the minority and considered lesser. Parker and Stone use Kanye West for their

“Fishsticks” episode for this reason; on the surface, he represents the heteronormative, even though the caricature is clearly embellished, but the being this caricature represents has multiple layers that the creators hope fans recognize.

The creators of *South Park* weave together multiple cultural ideals in the caricature of Kanye West, for they know that in popular culture West represents outspoken liberals, African Americans, and the rap industry. He is clearly a compilation of dominant and lesser masculinity. West’s characterization includes sensitivity, reflection, and style, while also retaining the ability to lash out in anger or violence against ideals he disputes. Kanye West, through the positioning of *South Park*’s creators, represents an easy penetratee. Kanye West contains eccentricity and masculinity, but he also maintains a feminine quality; in the music industry, he is somewhat of an “other.” He does not sing about the subjects other rappers do. Notable songs include “Jesus Walks,” a track concerning the radio’s refusal to support a song about his struggles with religion, and “Spaceship,” a track illustrating frustrations over token status at white establishments. Kanye West also maintains “other” status with his dress, often embellishing the trend of Polo shirts, tighter fitting clothes, and neon colors. *South Park*’s use of Kanye West as a musician and caricature struggling with maintaining “tough guise” and masculinity in general allows for a celebrity victim. The gay fish joke penetrates those who cannot read the seemingly loaded language, cementing victims as receivers and homosexual. The penetration process supposedly reveals the inadequacy of the victim’s guise and masculinity, though in actuality, the victimizer’s “tough guise” and masculinity inadequately exists.

The assumed recognition of Kanye West by the larger heterosexual and masculine audience speaks to the crossover appeal of West. Parker and Stone recognize that West contains some type of “biracial’ quality,” a fusion of black and white ideologies similar to Run-DMC, a popular rap group of the 1980’s, capable of reeling in both audiences (Harper 77). Philip Brian Harper first mentions this characterization when analyzing the Run-DMC video for “Walk This Way,” a crossover song with accompanying video offering glimpses of a white only audience, the same audience expected to absorb the video. Harper believes “this characteristic of the audience *in* the video makes it an effective figure for what company executives envisioned as the likely audience,” which was

“not only white, but also relatively young...and predominantly male” (77). Coincidentally, the same company owns both MTV, the first marketer of “Walk This Way,” and Comedy Central: Viacom. *South Park’s* use of West as penetratee signifies recognition on the part of *South Park’s* creators, a recognition that viewers will enjoy viewing the penetration of West. The audience cannot actually penetrate West themselves, but as passive onlookers, they too can partake in act. West exists within “Fishsticks” as a black heterosexual existing in the closet. The characters of the episode desire to penetrate West, label him homosexual, demean him in front of an audience, and convince him to admit to homosexuality. In order to accept his new sexuality, West must adopt a new performance. Rather than continue the performance as a homophobic and angry black man, he adopts an embellished gay fish characterization. The comedy routine surrounding the Kanye West caricature almost reaches an erotic level in that multiple men specifically seek him out so they may penetrate him and call him a gay fish.

Upon acceptance of his gay fish status, the Kanye West caricature heaves away his masculine style and breaks into song, a signifier for his new awakening. The masculine archetype for journey follows a trajectory of leaving home, facing challenges, conquering, and returning home, whereas the feminine journey often includes oppression, realization, and awakening. West’s song more accurately resembles the feminine journey, for the community oppresses him with the claims of homosexuality, he realizes his newfound sexuality, and awakens to it. The lyrics of the song West sings contain multiple signifiers for black masculinity as feminine or at least lesser than white masculinity. Though the song retains usual stereotypes of the rap genre, hyper masculine claims of sexual prowess and distanced intimacy, this song constantly references homosexual conquers and exploits while refuting heterosexuality. The opening to the song provides a frame with the phrase “I’ve been so lonely, girl/ I’ve been so sad and down,” implying that West once performed as a successful male, but remained empty and depressed. The line even imagines that West croons to a female, sharing feelings because of his weakened state, an act a truly masculine character would never participate in. The lyrics of the song feminize the West caricature, not necessarily emphasizing homosexuality or West as penetratee, but definitely offering West as not the penetrator. West no longer

participates in sexual exploits with females, rather, he is “a gay fish (it’s alright, girl) / Makin’ love to other gay fish.”

The embellishment of masculinity and sexuality in “Fishsticks” concerning Kanye West creates underlying problems for the identities of everyone outside of West. *South Park* and the “Fishsticks” episode convey that masculinity remains a performance, with heterosexuality as the performance of normal masculinity. Parker and Stone attempt to highlight West’s persona within the lens of their satiric style to illustrate a performance of black masculinity that includes veiled homosexuality, but in a stereotypical sense. The concept of remaining “in the closet” subtly surrounds Kanye West and the writers abuse this stereotype of black masculinity. Once the community ousts Kanye as a gay fish, since he previously receives so much pressure that the community actually convinces him that he is homosexual, puny, and not fashionable, he then decides to jump into a nearby ocean during the climactic scene of “Fishsticks” to perform a music video. The episode ends with Kanye donning a wetsuit and diving off the Santa Monica Pier into an ocean to embrace his new identity as a gay fish. But Kanye actually misinterprets the joke entirely. The gay fish joke more accurately manifests the character of the person telling the joke, but Kanye’s caricature thinks of the joke more as coming to grips with the inner self. Since he does like fish sticks, and everyone in the episode refers to him as gay, then he thinks he must be gay. The joke cannot reveal sexuality; it is merely a play on words, but Kanye West misses this point. This immediate response to acceptance of homosexuality confirms the transferability of sexual labels and perceptions surrounding the labels. Kanye West’s caricature abandons his “tough guise” and literally begins to perform as a homosexual. Sienkiewicz and Marx maintain “that *South Park*, considered closely, often intends meanings in direct opposition to what it overtly states, and it consistently advances nuanced positions in ways that surface readings of the show miss” (8). The nuances of the show do not necessarily require deep textual analysis, but instead require reading in the opposite direction of the obvious thought process. Since the “Fishsticks” episode lampoons a feminine or metrosexual rapper and consistently pressures him into the mold of homosexuality, the creators of *South Park* desire us to examine hyper masculine persons and their heterosexuality surfaces. The issue for examination in “Fishsticks” is not homosexuality, but rather, the heterosexuals who attack sexual identities other than

theirs. *South Park* maintains a hyper masculine exterior with crude humor, but this cultural product illustrates the subversive issues in culture and allows for their examination. The creators of *South Park* seemingly scoop the aspects of culture they wish to examine into their television series for audiences to reflect on, if they choose.

The spreading of the gay fish joke in “Fishsticks” highlights the concept of integrated homophobia as a systematic, social issue, not merely a contained thought within *South Park* or the town; this is the issue of identity for the characters other than Kanye West. The quickness with which the gay fish joke spreads uncovers a desire to penetrate others before they penetrate and victimize, while also revealing homosexuals under the terms of questioners rather than the person who chooses that lifestyle. The use of absurd comedy becomes a masculine defense mechanism, but the ridiculousness of *South Park*’s joke underscores how ridiculous homophobia and guise are. With the “Fishsticks” episode, Parker and Stone affirm that homophobia and “tough guise” permeate as ideals or systems that males find necessary to uphold, in this space specifically using the gay fish joke. The characters in “Fishsticks” constantly search for other characters to question about their love of fish sticks in an attempt to oust their prey. This desire illustrates homophobes as hysterical and succumbing to the continual marginalization of homosexuals, a systematic issue. Heterosexuals, or the jokesters of *South Park*, desire to penetrate others by subjecting and ousting through the use of the gay fish joke, cementing the penetrator’s masculinity and unveiling homosexuality. This allows fellow heterosexuals to avoid penetration and penetrate again. Homophobia in this episode is so widespread, that we must read the incorporation as a social issue and certainly not a singular occurrence in the bubble that is *South Park*.

Throughout the “Fishsticks” episode, members of the *South Park* community and larger culture appropriate the gay fish joke in order to penetrate unsuspecting onlookers. Parker and Stone use caricatures of late-night comedians Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Jimmy Kimmel to illustrate the dispersion of the joke. This scene of popular culture icons in comedy highlights that humor functions through penetration and the comedians wish to penetrate their audience. The use of the gay fish joke throughout the “Fishsticks” episode reveals that homophobia exists as a common trait of masculinity; to be masculine means to not be homosexual and

fear homosexuals. The consistent use of the joke, by fourth grade boys and adult male comedians, insinuates that men are afraid of possibly being gay or viewed as gay. *South Park's* creators use Kanye West and the gay fish joke to comment on the ridiculousness of homophobia, for their unbelievable gay fish joke supports the entire episode. The entire twenty-two minute episode survives on this one joke by dialoguing with homosexuality, fears of queer identity, and threatened masculinity and heteronormativity. Surprisingly the radical show never mentions acceptance of homosexuality. According to critic Bradley Evans, in most episodes of *South Park* that deal with GLBT issues, "the viewer is offered an essentialist or constructionist standpoint, but empathy and compassion subtly underscore each step of the coming-out process" (103). To illustrate *South Park* as an open-minded town, completely accepting of homosexuality and even sending homophobes to therapy, would undermine the particular goal of this episode. The larger society refuses to accept that homosexuals receive secondary citizen status, nor that males who succumb to general masculine tropes likely require therapy. Evans maintains that *South Park* advocates that "the treatment of GLBT people with humanity is essential, but giving them the same rights as heterosexuals is not. This stance reveals South Park's conservatism concerning gay rights and places the controversial series on the same political camp as its most outspoken critics: the right" (109). According to Evans critique, Kanye West merely receives tolerance and not acceptance, but even if this were fact, the concept remains under the surface. *South Park* never explicitly makes a stance on tolerance or acceptance in this particular episode, but rather merely acknowledges the existence of homosexuality. Instead of focusing on the right and wrong, the episode subtly focuses on the performance of masculinity. Before accepting his homosexuality, Kanye West over hears a conversation between Jimmy and Cartman that discusses egotism and blindness. In continuation of Kanye's dumbfounded persona, he takes their conversation and applies it to himself, adopting Cartman's conclusion that "some people just have egos that are so out of whack that no matter what people tell them, they can't accept the truth of who they are." Kanye immediately abandons his egotism, a necessary trait for being a man, and adopts the homosexual and feminine persona.

The problem of this characterization remains the semiotics of black masculinity and performance, for turning Kanye West into a

gay fish continues the stereotype of the black males' unwillingness to admit to his sexuality, instead choosing to participate in intercourse with other men while continuing relationships with women. "Fishsticks" never blatantly states that black males do not perform in this sense, but the creators also do not include a disclaimer. The predominantly young and white male audience will absorb the Kanye West sign because they are familiar with the musician; the audience will undoubtedly allow West to represent male African Americans musicians, who already represent the larger population of African American males. "Fishsticks" contends with the expected performance of black males as hyper violent, sexual, and homosexual, while allowing white males to perform as comedians, ousters, and erudite observers. Since the Parker and Stone present the performance of black males as the main illustration, white male performance likely deserves more critique. Allan Neuwirth, the author of a book on the history of American animation sums *South Park* up in the following terms: "sure, the stream of four-lettered words spouting out of Cartman, Stan, Kyle, and Kenny's mouths are bleeped and muffled, but we know what they're saying...it's also totally irreverent and wickedly funny," so might these miniature white males prefer their words "bleeped and muffled" (19)? Neuwirth claims "we know what they're saying," but who is this "we" (19)? As mentioned previously, the characters of "Fishsticks" never state that they desire to penetrate out of their own curiosity about their friend's sexuality and theirs, but the characters certainly do ask everyone they meet if the person is a gay fish. Rather than put words into the mouths of Parker and Stone's characters, more answers might appear if the analyzation pertains solely to the aforementioned issue, as opposed to what the characters really mean to say.

The strength of *South Park* lies in the series ability to add to public debate weekly, supposedly appropriating the topics males desire to discuss or laugh at. Editors Stratyner and Keller write the following in their introduction to *The Deep End of South Park* in response to Anderson's claims of conservatism: "though Parker and Stone are depicted as Conservatives in a much-ballyhooed book by Brian C. Anderson... it is wrong-headed to label them... *South Park* is neither, and any attempt to identify them as such will probably fail" (8). The editors continue their criticism by stating the creators of *South Park* "impale the gods of Liberalism and Conservatism alike" (8). This comment solidifies the assertion that comedy and comedians

penetrate their audience. Parker and Stone appropriate current events within the town of South Park and allow viewers to laugh at celebrities and popular culture references society usually adores. *South Park* inadvertently references ideologies, which makes the show funny or abysmal for audiences outside of the market, but in order to sincerely analyze the dominant trends, such as the masculine desire to humiliate and demean to gain power or continue marginalization, we must look the other way. The jokes of *South Park* point in one direction, whether that direction is conservative and mocking George W. Bush, or liberal and attacking Michael Moore. The political affiliation remains difficult to label on *South Park*, but whichever direction the current episode highlights, critics and theorists must acknowledge the unsaid viewpoint. "Fishsticks" maintains the order of power by positioning white males as the authority. Parker and Stone take advantage of West's egocentric persona and allow him to over-analyze the gay fish joke, which leaves him out of the loop. His misunderstands the loaded language because he seemingly cannot appreciate simple, smutty humor. The young male fourth graders, along with cultural icons on late-night television, comprehend the joke and therefore may use the joke on unsuspecting victims. The characters of the show continually penetrate West, while other characters only fall for the joke one time.

In the context of this episode, the strength of one's masculinity derives from their ability to wise up and read situations where groups of males communicate. The conversations appear subtle and erotic merely for the fact that groups of men are questioning each other on sexuality, as if openly searching for partners, and penetrating in order to reach the conclusion on sexuality. West, as a black male, cannot enter this dialogue though, and can only operate as a victim and onlooker. The loaded joke befuddles him, maintains his "other" status, and awakens him to his inadequate masculinity. Rather than continue to perform as an inadequate male, he adopts a homosexual status for sexuality and femininity for gender. Toni Johnson-Woods, a critic of reality TV and pulp fiction, specifies in *Blame Canada: South Park and Contemporary Culture* that "sexuality is not gender... gender is therefore something performed" (253). She continues to speak about the operation of characters in *South Park* and how they misunderstand the two. This idea, which *South Park* often contends with, characterizes West in the sense that his feminine characteristics do not make him a woman. The feminine

characteristics of his caricature, which include an obsession with fashion, desire to croon, and inability to operate in masculine spheres of humor, make him an easy target and likely to accept homosexuality. Johnson-Wood believes “no sexual practice is too taboo for the *South Park* humor mill,” which is why Kanye West as a gay fish only appears farfetched outside of the context of the show (254). But when taken out of the text, the gay fish joke operates as a specific mechanism of humor. The heteronormative desire to expunge homosexuality, often attributed to masculine performers, receives life from the gay fish joke. With the aid of this joke, masculine performers may perform as men in their belittling of other men, while also figuring out if the fellow members of their group are heterosexual or not.

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Past Reflections for Eternal Placement: Charles Johnson and James Weldon Johnson's Representations of Race and the Afterlife

Jimmy Worthy

Representations of African American culture in past and contemporary literature unveil a series of disparities and triumphs; while illustrating these characteristics, Charles Johnson exposes a unique and fundamental spiritual foundation produced from a distinct perspective that allows readers to re-imagine the strength of African American cultural legacy. Although C. Johnson anchors his personal spiritual belief in Buddhist teaching, in crafting his 1985 novel *Middle Passage*, he allows the ancient Chinese religion of Taoism to influence the creation of his protagonist, Rutherford Calhoun, who absorbs the agonies of life on a dilapidated ship through an adherence to Taoist principles, thereby enabling him to reconceptualize his misfortune and future. While Buddhist teaching embraces life as perpetual suffering with a tranquil escape grasped through practicing the eight fold path of Buddha, C. Johnson utilizes Taoism, a religion founded four hundred years prior to Buddhism, to show the ecstasy of human existence through an African American experiential lens. As the goal of Taoism proclaims its followers find “the way,” ultimate truth in life that surpasses the restrictions of temporal logic, C. Johnson designs Calhoun as not only a Taoist pilgrim in search of “the way,” but an establisher of an adopted and adapted African American Taoism. He shows this adoption with Calhoun’s experiential augmentation of the “three jewels of Taoism: compassion, simplicity, and modesty.”

It is with C. Johnson’s creation of Calhoun as the architect of this reconceptualized religion that he defines African American experiences beyond tangible representations of joys and sorrows to exhibiting the depths of these experiences. He does this not only by provoking readers to reimagine the spiritual implications of Calhoun’s three jewels, but also by using Calhoun’s Taoism to speak to the overlooked spiritual dimension of race and essence in James Weldon Johnson’s 1912 novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored*

Man. While it seems impossible that C. Johnson elicits a theological perspective, giving readers a more complete context for understanding J.W. Johnson's narrator in a novel written seventy-three years prior, through his paralleling of Calhoun's three jewels with J.W. Johnson's narrator's recognition of his soul, C. Johnson establishes his intentions. Although these intentions provide readers with an elevated understanding of the transformative powers of the African American experience, C. Johnson could not affectively articulate this illustration without J.W. Johnson's subtextual portrait of spirituality. Not only does J.W. Johnson detail the confusion, hazards, and pleasures of his narrator's struggle for placement in a racialized America, he implants the classic play *Faust* into his novel to show how racial signifiers infiltrate the spiritual authenticity of the narrator, producing a soul which he is seduced into selling for Whiteness. With this awareness, C. Johnson shows that as J.W. Johnson begins to create additional meaning in African American experience, C. Johnson sustains and broadens these spiritual implications by suggesting that as Calhoun's religion evolves, the narrator's illustration of a belief in Calhoun's three jewels also gradually develops to show the interconnected and transhistorical might of African American existence. C. Johnson uses J.W. Johnson's insidious illustration of the narrator's soul and Calhoun's formulated religion to not only tell readers how the two protagonists alter the landscape of African American racialized experience, but that Calhoun creates an afterlife for his Taoism, constructed from "the way" of an appreciation in Black history, that he and the narrator reach through their metaphorical deaths.

We see the beginning of Calhoun's evolving within Taoism through his embrace of compassion. Whereas Taoist perception of compassion traditionally centers on opposition to war, capital punishment, and other factors that destroy life, Calhoun's compassion generates from a personal experience he assumes while aboard the slave ship the *Republic*. After the detaining of the Allmuseri, an African tribe believed to possess physical and psychological deformities, Calhoun in a salient moment, identifies with this othered "other." As disease from vomit and fecal matter permeates the hot and confined cesspool of living quarters for the tribe, Calhoun is instructed by Captain Falcon to help dispose of a black Allmuseri body, stripped of life by infection and rot. While Ngonyama, an enslaved Allmuseri, and Meadows, a deckhand of the *Republic*,

bring the corpse from the bowels of the ship to the ship's rail for a quick toss overboard, Calhoun grabs the body and describes the figure not as ruined cargo, but as a mutilated human, divorced of happiness and life by the conditions on the *Republic*. He says:

He was close to my own age, perhaps had been torn from a lass as lovely as, lately, I now saw Isadora to be, and from a brother as troublesome as my own. His eyes were unalive, mere kernels of muscle, though I still found myself poised vertiginously on their edge, falling through these dead holes deeper into the empty hulk he had become, as if his spirit had flown and mine was being sucked there in its place. (123)

In this moment, as he engulfs the putrid smell of the body and notes the worm infested purple skin hopelessly clinging to a contorted skeleton, he expresses an almost metaphysical sympathy and identification in this ravaged being. In his article, "Reading Rigor Mortis," Vincent O'Keefe makes an assertion that aids in understanding Calhoun's experience. He writes, "In a moment of identification with the dead slave, Rutherford learns a new 'way of seeing' the Allmuseri culture: [He] seems to recognize the reciprocal, intersubjective nature of experience" (637). With O'Keefe's suggestion and Calhoun's assertion, we see that Calhoun no longer remarks on the decay of the body. Although he continues to experience the result of decay with empirical senses, he shuns their recognition and instead, instantaneously, removes himself from the deck of the *Republic* and possesses the identity of the fallen tribesman. When he proclaims the boy's similarity to his age, Calhoun shows compassion, a regal sympathy that surpasses the physical destruction he holds in his hands. Although the mere recognition of age illustrates Calhoun's sorrow and compassion for the boy, his ability to dissociate himself from his body and enter into the potential of this boy having a love interest such as his Isadora and familial strains through a disappointing brother, shows that Calhoun lives within the compassion he exhibits by seeing the boy's rarefied past as his own.

In addition to the transformative realization that Calhoun assumes through a metaphorical entering into the boy's appearance and possible past, he also enters into the horrors of the boy's experience on the *Republic* by wearing the flesh of the victimized body. After Calhoun, Ngonyama, and Meadows swing the body to anxiously awaiting sharks that circle the hull, Calhoun's grip of the boy's flesh causes a "dark and porous piece of liquefying flesh"

to fall into his hands (123). While other shipmates fail to express any discomfort about the unattached flesh, Calhoun, through his compassion remarks:

My stained hand still tingled. Of a sudden, it no longer felt like my own. Something in me said it would never be clean again, no matter how often I scrubbed it or with what stinging chemicals, and without thinking I found my left hand lifting the knife from my waist, then using the blade to scrape the boy's moist, black flesh off my palm. (123)

Although it seems that the act of scraping the physical representation of the boy from his skin does not express compassion, C. Johnson shows that in Calhoun's realization of American slavery, the purging of black skin, a signifier of inferiority and enslavement confined in darkness, is Calhoun's way of removing degradation from himself, and the *Republic*, a microcosm of America. While Calhoun details the impossibility of removing the stain, or a representation of enslavement from his hand, C. Johnson implicitly tells readers that the stain of immorality in capturing Africans on the Republic, and slavery in the United States, discolors American's hands with the blood of innocence.

While C. Johnson illustrates the origins of Calhoun's African American experiential Taoism, J. W. Johnson shows his narrator's recognition of his soul, exhibiting the start of his belief in Calhoun's religion through a demonstration of compassion in African American culture. J.W. Johnson introduces us to this soul through a short but salient memory that frames the narrator's appreciation of his mother. As the narrator describes his mother with nostalgic insights into her habits and occupation, he swiftly transitions into a personal evocation of emotions when he recalls Sunday evenings spent with her. While remembering that on these days she played "Old Southern hymns" on a small square piano, he says, "In these songs she was freer, because she played them by ear" (3). Although it appears that this statement merely describes the innocent and even misguided thoughts of a child, if we examine these words through a prism that unlocks his inner essence, we see that this statement describes the construction of his soul. By perceiving the Southern hymns as a catalyst for his mother's liberation from the societal restrictions of existing as an African American, the narrator shows more of an exploration of himself rather than a realistic portrayal of his mother. When he describes the hymns

as “old” and “Southern,” he illustrates his soul’s recognition of an inherent African American presence. Although the meaning of the words “old” and “Southern” do not directly correspond to African American culture or identity, when the narrator tells us earlier in this novel that his mother is an African American born in Georgia just after emancipation, we see that these hymns are the musical accompaniments to the disenchanting lives of African Americans. While this information is important, it gains significance when we realize that without issuing a name of a hymn or remembrance of the melodious nature of this music, he immediately identifies what he hears as “old” and “Southern,” or uniquely African American. It is with his utilization of these words that distinguishes his soul as innately African American, naturally in tune with the historical legacy of racism and African American culture.

However, his remark that his mother was freer while playing these songs tells us that another part of his soul, which exists outside of a oneness with African American culture, is his aspiration to permanently transcend a vexed racialized American reality that promotes the degradation of “Blackness.” In his article, “Faust and the Human Condition,” Mordecai Paldiel makes an assertion that aids in understanding this aspiration and J.W. Johnson’s suggestion about spiritual redefinition through the character Faust. He writes, “Faust represented the individual’s longing for knowledge coupled with the determination to subject enshrined beliefs to the test of truth” (193). Here we see that like Faust, the narrator not only longs to vivify internal knowledge of himself, but he chooses to challenge this knowledge by embracing his need to supernaturally overcome reality.

Although it appears that the narrator fails to exhibit compassion with his understanding of his African American essence and with J.W. Johnson’s suggestion of a Faustian quality to the narrator, he nevertheless illustrates compassion for his African American heritage. When the narrator remarks about his mother’s freedom in these songs, he shows compassion by recognizing the essential connection of his mother’s Blackness to freedom and his liberating ability to unravel his interior construction. Just as Calhoun sees himself through the identity of the boy in his arms, the narrator’s compassion for one half of his soul enables him to see the benevolence of Blackness through experiencing his mother play “Old Southern Hymns.” In addition, as J.W. Johnson begins to tell us of

the spiritual redefinition on the narrator through his realization of the aspirational half of his soul, we see that the narrator shows an unconventional compassion in America by intertwining a part of his essence with the hope of transcending racial oppression in the United States.

While the narrator's soul gives readers a perspective on African American experience defined by spirituality, C. Johnson improves upon J.W. Johnson's illustration by allowing the narrator's compassion to further speak to the spiritual dimensions of African Americans. We see that in continuing to provide a deeper manner of viewing life through African American experiences, C. Johnson builds from J.W. Johnson's portrait of essence to transition Blackness from a codified list of setbacks and achievements to a force that anchors existence. O'Keefe also asserts that through Calhoun, "Johnson seeks new 'ways of seeing' or 'deeper clarification' of what we think we already know" (635). In showing readers "deeper clarification" in African American experiences, we see that as Calhoun begins to create African American experiential Taoism through an African American perspective of compassion when confronted with the horrors of race, the narrator begins his adherence to this religion by illustrating compassion in African American heritage. It is with both character's compassion in the realization of a past through what each are experiencing that enables them to evolve as follower and creator.

C. Johnson continues to show the evolution of Calhoun's Taoism through his realization of simplicity in life. After the Allmuseri gain control of the *Republic* by freeing themselves from their chains, further disease spreads throughout the ship with the deaths of the African's victims. However, despite the saturation of infected bodies, Calhoun finds a peace that calms and produces kindness in the midst of such chaos. While the continual attacks upon his crewmates generate a volatile mixture of anger from crewmates and joyous superiority from the Allmuseri, Calhoun remarks, "The first thing I was forced to do was forget my personal cares, my pains, and my hopes before repairing to the deckhouse where the sufferers were sprawled. I placed my hand on each of their foreheads and listened" (161). Calhoun shows with this statement that amongst the uncertainty of life from the Allmuseri and disease, he escapes within himself, locating a peace that divorces him from the limitations of perceiving his surroundings as a reflection

of his internal wellbeing. However, he only achieves this refocusing of life's importance through deconstructing the representation of his largely self-centered understanding of reality and in its place embracing the simplicity of aiding others through the ravagings of their physical and emotional devastation. In his article "Interrogating Identity," Daniel Scott summarizes Calhoun's emotional transformation: "Calhoun evolves from unreflective lassitude to an awareness that enables him to cross the 'countless seas of suffering' forgetful of himself" (645). This quotation tells us that Calhoun's ability to look past himself into the needs of others to express compassion to dying children, whom he soothes into eternal rest with whisperings of "all will be well," does not merely present itself with a heightened awareness of death, but instead is birthed from a revolutionary insight into the simplicity of life, away from the bewilderment and belief in his purposeless existence. After Calhoun performs lullabies of "useful fiction" to the afflicted children, he illustrates his personal, as well as continued, spiritual evolution by stating, "If you had known me in Makanda or New Orleans, you would have known that I doubted whether I truly had anything to offer others" (162). With this remark Calhoun tells us that through reinterpreting simplicity through an African American perspective, he transforms away from his past self into an identity that speaks to the his evolving Taoism.

While J.W. Johnson asserts further insight into the duality of his narrator's soul, we also see the narrator's continual embrace of Calhoun's religion with his unconventional expression of simplicity. J.W. Johnson shows this by illustrating how the Faustian bargain transforms the half of the narrator's soul that aspires to transcend racial limitations. As the classic play tells readers how Faust trades his soul for infinite secular knowledge, the narrator augments the aspirational half of his soul at the expense of his African American essence, due to a belief that Whiteness represents an elevated existence. Johnson shows this transformation as the narrator views *Faust* within the Parisian "Grand Opera." At the close of act one, in which the narrator learns of the Faustian bargain, he sees a girl seated to his left who, while defying normal description, arrests his mind as an "ethereal" creature. As he studies this young woman, he states, "I felt to stare at her would be a violation; yet I was distinctly conscious of her beauty" (62). While the narrator engages in his own bout of espionage, using his program to cover his face, he gathers an

unmediated view into her level of innocence by mentally examining every word she speaks. However, when he realizes that his father is seated beside her, he stops deconstructing her sentences and begins to transform the two individuals into signifiers of perfection. He comments that his father looked “hardly a day older than when I had seen him ten years before,” and when he realizes the girl is his sister, he proclaims, he “could have fallen at her feet and worshiped her” (62). In this moment, after internalizing act one of this play, the narrator equates his father and his sister, with divine perfection that only reveals itself through the Whiteness of their skin. When he characterizes his sister as ethereal and beautiful, the narrator repositions her from simply mortal to an angelic creature whose innocence defines her perfect disposition. Likewise, when he describes his father as appearing hardly older than ten years before, the narrator disposes of his father as a human and remakes him into a godly image that defies temporal order. Because these attributes not only define themselves against “Blackness” but also the societal normality of an America encapsulated within this theater, the narrator transforms his soul’s aspiration to transcend notions of race with a belief that “divine Whiteness” surpasses race and Earth. However, he shows that he finalizes this recreation by selling his African American essence to this Whiteness. After pledging his allegiance to “divine Whiteness” by his willingness to “worship” his sister, he says, “The desolate loneliness of my position became clear to me” (62). Here we see that the narrator’s loneliness reflects the absence of a fundamental half of his soul. His internalized Whiteness amputates the only part of himself that correlates to an emotional connection with his mother and innate understanding of reality.

While it appears that J.W. Johnson’s illustration of his narrator’s transformation from an aspirational half of his soul to “divine Whiteness” only expresses the confused thoughts of the narrator, struggling to carve an identity away from the inferiority he connects with Blackness. If we look deeper into the narrator’s thoughts, we see that his need to rise above the social disparities of African American life shows his desire to attain the simplicity of a White identity. When the narrator sees his father and sister as representations of the ethereal beauty of Whiteness, the narrator’s comments on the nature of his father’s Whiteness as resistant to the destruction of time and his sister’s beauty as evoking praise not only to comment upon the perfect characteristics of Whiteness, but to show that in

Whiteness, his identity and soul will achieve a heavenly simplicity without the complication of experiencing racism.

This simplicity of Whiteness exhibits importance not merely through an interesting parallel of Whiteness and a Faustian bargain, but it simultaneously speaks to an African American spiritual consciousness and the narrator's practice of Calhoun's Taoism. As Calhoun strengthens his African American experiential Taoism with his selfless behaviors as he psychologically and emotionally aids children stolen from a home they will never see again, the narrator sells the African American half of his soul not out of an inherent devotion to Whiteness, but because he seeks to change his emotional and psychological placement in an America that disregards a part of his foundational home, his African American essence. As founder and follower evolve together through an understanding of how Whiteness consumes minds, bodies and souls, C. Johnson shows that simplicity, just as compassion, is rooted in further understanding of African American historical and cultural representation.

We see that it is the understanding of African American history that enables Calhoun to complete his religion and create an afterlife. He achieves these goals by showing modesty in his existence after he encounters the Allmuseri's god. While the Allmuseri still control the *Republic*, the responsibility of entering the wooden create to feed their deity falls to Calhoun. Descending into the bowels of the ship to encounter what Captain Falcon regarded as a "shoreside fortune," Calhoun expresses both anxiety and a gnawing curiosity, and yet he nevertheless ties a rope around his waist and enters the god's chambers. While inside, the darkness and "revolting" smell produces a sickness that attacks his sensibilities until he shifts his gaze from the floor to a dark man stepping from the box. As he realizes that the god has taken the physical appearance of his father by saying, "I could no more separate the two, deserting father and divine monster, than I could sort wave from sea," the god tells Calhoun intricate details about his father's life, giving him additional knowledge in the history and experience of African Americans (166). As the god tells Calhoun of the events in his father's life through hazy depictions, Calhoun becomes so immensely saturated with the information that his father was married, popular, and died a heinous death that Calhoun collapses under the weight of not only this knowledge, but his induction into African American history. He writes, "Then I fainted. Or died. Whatever." (171).

While modesty in this experience is not as obvious as compassion and simplicity in others, the fainting of Calhoun shows that he metaphorically achieves a modest life. Because an individual faints due to a physical weakening from reduction of blood flow to the brain, Calhoun's fainting shows that the god's lessons reveal a vital element of existence that could not travel to his brain to allow him to consciously experience life. With his loss of consciousness, C. Johnson shows that Calhoun achieves modesty not by showing his humility, but in that moment, by attaining a humble existence through his temporary separation from life on the *Republic*. This act of obtaining a modest existence with the knowledge of African American past and a release of consciousness in life becomes the afterlife for Calhoun's religion.

Although defined on the *Republic*, Calhoun enters his religion's afterlife at the conclusion of *Middle Passage*. After his rescue by Captain Quackenbush from the waters of the Atlantic after one Allmuseri tribesman inadvertently fires a cannon, thereby sinking the *Republic*, Calhoun realizes that Isadora is traveling on the same "floating paradise" which has saved his life (186). While he learns that Isadora is in the process of marrying Papa, a New Orleans thug, he interrupts the ceremony by engaging in a scuffle with Papa's body guard. After Calhoun speaks with Papa about his involvement in the capture of the Allmuseri, Papa agrees to relinquish his tie to Isadora, enabling Calhoun to marry Isadora. At the conclusion of this brief meeting, Calhoun walks to Isadora's rooms where she seductively lies awaiting his entrance. When Calhoun lies with her, he tells her of the changes he has undergone through his experiences on the *Republic* and says, "What she and I wanted most after so many adventures was the incandescence, very chaste, of an embrace that would outlast the Atlantic's bone-chilling cold" (209). With this statement, C. Johnson shows that Calhoun metaphorically dies by expressing no interest in reclaiming his past behaviors before stepping onto the *Republic* and with his aspiration to simply lie with Isadora in an eternal embrace. In this moment, C. Johnson shows us that Calhoun has found "the way" by experiencing and understanding the complex histories of Africans and African Americans. This afterlife, the state of grasping ultimate knowledge in the past, with the inability to experience the future becomes the home of Calhoun's identity and soul.

Likewise, we see the narrator exhibit modesty with his existence, showing that at his metaphorical death, at his realization of his soullessness, he achieves Calhoun's afterlife. After he sells his African American essence, his occupation and social circle show how his internalization of Whiteness has seeped through his body and created the physical appearance of what he has replaced with a firm connection to African American culture and history. However, it is with the marring of his wife that he uses Whiteness as both his internal essence and his own emblematic representation of his achieved perfection. He describes her as "tall and quite slender with lustrous yellow hair," and "as the most dazzling white thing I had ever seen" (93). This description shows that the narrator, as with his father and sister, repositions his wife from mortal, to characterization of her angelic features as representing "divine Whiteness." Although it seems that the narrator affectively grasps and maintains White pleasures through the internalization of Whiteness, when his wife dies, the beautiful monument that shown his White soul, she takes his "beautiful essence" to her grave. It is in the moment that the narrator sits by himself as a soulless creature having bargained away his African American essence for a White soul he no longer carries, that he realizes the grave mistake he has made in divorcing himself from the historical and cultural legacy of African American experience. His statement, "I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage," tells readers that while he understands that the birthright of a firm connection to the past has escaped him, he, like Calhoun, assumes an identity that illustrates his modesty of existence after recognizing himself as a creature with no internal history or map for the future (100). This modesty and third jewel he completes, fused with the appreciation he now has of African American history and his inability to progress in the future shows that the narrator, at the conclusion of this novel, metaphorically dies into Calhoun's afterlife.

Throughout *Middle Passage*, C. Johnson shows that he simultaneously uses Calhoun's creation of an African American experiential Taoism to issue further ways of understanding the depths and history of the spirituality in individuals who trace their heritage to Africa and provides a further context through which to view J.W. Johnson's narrator. In noting the intersection of spirituality and race in *Middle Passage*, Scott writes that, "It exposes the roots of human 'being,' complications of African-American experience, and

the position that writing occupies in relating experience, enacting consciousness, and performing its own self-consciousness" (645). While Scott's assertion yields importance in its recognition of the manner C. Johnson crafts the intricacies of African American experience, the last part of this assertion allows us to understand more about both C. Johnson and J.W. Johnson. As both writers reinscribe African American culture and history through spirituality, they both present protagonists who, like their authors', design their own narrative that seeks to reformulate preconceived notions of African American experience and history. While C. Johnson continues the work of illustrating spirituality through a distinct African American adoption and recreation of Taoism by building from J.W. Johnson's recognition of the Faustian quality of his narrator's dual essence, the manner that C. Johnson speaks to *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and to Americans shows the intimate transhistorical connection between African American history and spirituality.

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