

Otterbein University

Digital Commons @ Otterbein

Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal

Current Otterbein Journals

Spring 2021

Otterbein Aegis Spring 2021

Otterbein Aegis

Otterbein University, Aegis@Otterbein.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/aegis_humanity



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Otterbein Aegis, "Otterbein Aegis Spring 2021" (2021). *Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal*. 18.
https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/aegis_humanity/18

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Otterbein Journals at Digital Commons @ Otterbein. It has been accepted for inclusion in Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Otterbein. For more information, please contact digitalcommons07@otterbein.edu.

degis

Spring 2021



***Aegis* 2020-21 Editorial Board**

Editors: Miranda Hilt and Safiya Mohamed

Board Members: Lucy Clark, Riley Hysell, Kat Gibson, Juli Lindenmayer,
Delaney Lombardi, Grace McCutchen, Shelby McSwords, Kimberly Satterfield,
Seth Stobart, Curtis Tatum, Erin Van Gilder, Katie Warner, Josh Wolf

Advisor: Dr. Stephanie Patridge

Front Cover: *Skyline* (2019) by Madeleine Norton

Back Cover: *Skylight – Dale Chihuly* (2021) by Allison Gould

Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal

Perhaps the first question readers will ask about *Aegis* is “What does it mean?”

The word “aegis” is Latin for “shield” but may be more specifically associated with Greek mythology as it refers to the shield carried by Zeus, god of thunder. Made from the hide of the goat Amaltheia, the shield came to represent not only a practical tool of protection but also a godly power. “As the Greeks prided themselves greatly on the rich and splendid ornaments of their shields, they supposed the aegis to be adorned in a style corresponding to the might and majesty of the father of the gods.”¹ Myths have even suggested that the shield was worn by both the god Apollo and the goddess Athena, adding to the prestige of the shield throughout tales of mythology.²

Much like the myths and literary representations of Zeus’ shield, Otterbein’s journal, *Aegis*, seeks to transport readers into a deeper study of literature and humanities through the fields of history, philosophy, language, linguistics, literature, archeology, jurisprudence, ethics, comparative religion, and the history, theory, and criticism of the arts (in accordance with the National Endowment for the Humanities’ (NEH) definition). Every year, *Aegis* includes a collection of undergraduate scholarly book reviews, essays, and interviews prepared and edited by Otterbein students.

Since its first edition in 2004, the journal has come a long way and has showcased the exemplary work that Otterbein students continue to produce. *Aegis* is a journal designed to catalyze a deeper critical appreciation of the humanities at Otterbein University and is published once every spring semester. It strives to advance the presence and values of the humanities on campus and beyond. An editorial board comprised of Otterbein students is responsible for selecting books, writing, and publishing book reviews as well as revising any essay submissions to the journal and determining their suitability for *Aegis*.

The 2021 Editorial Board and its editors hope that readers will approach each piece in the journal with curiosity and wonder, just as they may have approached the Latin term “aegis” with such curiosity. *Aegis* is committed to nonsexist language and to wording free of hostile overtones. The Editorial Board, essay authors, and Otterbein faculty have worked hard to create a journal that showcases the humanities in a unique way. Please enjoy.

Submissions: Essay submissions should be 8-25 double-spaced pages. Use 12-point Times New Roman font with standard one-inch margins, and please number all pages. Use the MLA Manual Style for citations. Specific submission deadlines will be sent out to all Otterbein students in the early spring semester. Submissions are also accepted on a rolling basis. Submissions must be accompanied by an email or cover sheet noting the author’s name and title of the essay. Electronic submissions are preferred. Please send any submissions to aegis@otterbein.edu.

Aegis is always looking for student volunteers to serve on the Editorial Board. To volunteer, submit an essay for review, or to ask questions, please send an email to aegis@otterbein.edu.

Endnotes

1 James Yates, “Aegis,” University of Chicago, last modified April 13, 2018, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMICRA*/Aegis.html.

2 Ibid.

Features in the 2021 issue

- 5 Editors' Introduction
- 6 Editorial Board Members

Traditional Essays

- 8 COVID-19 as the Collapse of Capitalism: A Socio-Political Marxist Analysis of the Pandemic and a Post-Pandemic Future >>> Paige Skaff
- 19 Going Out in Style: How Stylistics Can Disrupt the Problematic Literary Canon >>> Riley Hysell
- 24 Ideal Kingship: How Christianity Was Seen as an Important Instrument to Authoritarian Rule in the Frankish Empire >>> Josh Wolf
- 34 Masochism and Sinthomosexuality: Caleb and Ava's Relationship in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* >>> Miranda Hilt
- 39 Notes on Melodrama: Women, Madness, and the Oppression of the Patriarchy >>> Katie Warner
- 45 The Differing Moralities of the Renaissance Play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and the Medieval Morality Play *Everyman* >>> Audrey McCutchen
- 51 The Dissolute Punished: An Overview of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, K. 527 >>> Alec Arnett
- 58 The Use of Narrative in the Art of Faith Ringgold >>> Lindsay Lisanti
- 64 T.S. Eliot: Reinventing the Modernist Tradition >>> Kat Gibson

Grouped Essays on Ethical Considerations in the Era of COVID-19

- 75 COVID-19 Lockdowns Disrupt Conservation >>> Katrina A. Krein
- 78 The Vulnerability of Nurses >>> Hannah E. Smith
- 81 Where Resources Should Go >>> Caitlyn Auld
- 84 "Racial Weathering" and Other Flaws in the Utilitarian Approach to Economic Lockdown >>> Jenna R. Culver
- 87 **Interview** with Dr. Alexander Rocklin
- 91 **Interview** with Dr. Scott Muir

Book Reviews: (review authors listed, not book authors)

- 96 *Cherry* >>> Kimberly Satterfield
- 98 *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* >>> Josh Wolf
- 100 *Hurricane Season* >>> Seth Stobart
- 102 *Latitudes of Longing* >>> Miranda Hilt
- 104 *Little Fires Everywhere* >>> Delaney Lombardi
- 106 *Marvelous Pigness of Pigs* >>> Grace McCutchen
- 108 *Night Film* >>> Lucy Clark
- 110 *Temporary* >>> Riley Hysell
- 112 *The Book of Longings* >>> Juli Lindenmayer
- 114 *The Lady's Handbook for her Mysterious Illness* >>> Shelby McSwords
- 116 *The Queen: The Forgotten Life Behind an American Myth* >>> Safiya Mohamed
- 118 *There There* >>> Kat Gibson
- 120 *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* >>> Erin Van Gilder
- 122 *101 Essays That Will Change the Way you Think* >>> Katie Warner

Editors' Introduction

As this year's editors, we are pleased to present the campus community with the 2021 edition of *Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal*.

The essays that have been selected for this year's edition of *Aegis* exemplify the talent and commitment to academics that are continuously exhibited by students at Otterbein University. The topics covered examine issues of film studies, political theory, music history, playwriting, literary theory, and more. All of the essays in the journal meet the standards of rigorous research in the humanities, but more importantly, they are engaging pieces that work to address a variety of complex issues.

In "COVID-19 as the Collapse of Capitalism: A Socio-Political Marxist Analysis of the Pandemic and a Post-Pandemic Future" by Paige Skaff, the economic and socio-political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are investigated through a Marxist framework. In "T.S. Eliot: Reinventing the Modernist Tradition" by Kat Gibson, seeks to understand Eliot within the broader framework of modernist society and offers a personal and historical contextualization for his analysis. In "Masochism and Sinthomosexuality: Caleb and Ava's Relationship in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*" by Miranda Hilt, the psychoanalytic concepts of masochism and sinthomosexuality are employed to investigate the relationship between Caleb and Ava in the film, *Ex Machina*. In "The Dissolute Punished: An Overview of Mozart's Don Giovanni, K. 527" the influential eighteenth-century opera, *Don Giovanni* and its creator Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart are analyzed. These essays, as well as others published in this edition represent the fine work being done by students in the humanities at Otterbein.

Also included in this edition of *Aegis* is a selection of book reviews written by the Editorial Board that reflect their intellectual interests and speak to their respective disciplines. The books reviewed in this year's edition include *Temporary*, an absurd and fantastical novel that scrutinizes the capitalist preoccupation with work by following a woman working for a temp agency. *The Queen* tells the story of Martha Louis White, the "welfare queen" whose crimes potentially went beyond fraud. *Cherry* is the story of an unnamed war veteran whose journey would lead to a life of crime and drug addiction. *The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness* speaks of the unpredictable journey of someone suffering a chronic illness. These and other fiction and nonfiction titles are discussed in the following pages.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact our globe in unprecedented ways, we were forced to move *Aegis* entirely remote this year. With the help of active communication and great Wi-Fi, we were able to engage with our board members and contributing authors to complete this journal. Compared to our previous year and the abrupt change that caused enormous pressure and delay, this year our *Aegis* board remained vigilant in keeping the same enthusiasm for completing the journal as always, for that we are grateful. Thank you to all the board members for coming to virtual meetings, actively participating, and keeping dedicated to publishing such a work completely online. We'd also like to thank all of this year's contributors for remaining appreciative of *Aegis* during this time and providing your insight, art, and passions to this journal.

Aegis is proud to belong to a strong scholarly community of students and faculty within the humanities at Otterbein University. The reviews, essays and interviews included within *Aegis* speak to Otterbein's commitment to that community. We hope that our readers find engaging, stimulating, and thought-provoking work throughout this year's edition.

Miranda Hilt & Safiya Mohamed

Aegis Editorial Board 2021

Miranda Hilt (head editor) is a third-year student with majors in Biology, English Literary Studies, and WGSS (Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies). This is her second year with *Aegis*. She served as co-head editor of this year's edition with Safiya Mohamed. Miranda is a SARNCO-trained peer advocate for Otterbein's Women's Gender and Sexuality Resource Center and a volunteer with the local rescue organization PetPromise. She is also currently working on a research project on systemic lupus erythematosus and vitamin D deficiency.

Safiya Mohamed (head editor) is a junior English Literary and Educational Studies double major with a minor in Race & Ethnic Studies. This is her third year of being on the *Aegis* editorial board. She served as editor alongside Miranda Hilt this year and has enjoyed the responsibilities that have come with the role. She appreciates all the contributors who have helped make *Aegis* what it is.

Lucy Clark is a junior Creative Writing major with a minor in Film Studies. This is Lucy's second year as a member of *Aegis*. She hopes readers will enjoy the hard work that has gone into this year's journal from both *Aegis* members and everyone who submitted. In her free time, Lucy has interests involving reading, movies, taking care of her plants, and spending time with her family and dog.

Kat Gibson is a third year English Literary Studies and History double major with minors in French & Francophone Studies and Film Studies. This is her second year working on *Aegis*. She is also a member of and on the exec board for the English honorary, Sigma Tau Delta. She is passionate about analyzing the ways that history and literature inform each other. After graduating, she plans to go to graduate school.

Riley Hysell is a junior English Literary Studies and AYA integrated language arts major. This is his second year on the *Aegis* editorial board. He is not that interested in readers reading about him: he would rather they read this year's interesting and thought-provoking work.

Juli Lindenmayer is a senior at Otterbein University, majoring in English Literary Studies and WGSS (Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) with minors in Philosophy and Film Studies.

She has been a board member on *Aegis* for the last four years, and this will be the final edition she appears in! She has enjoyed working on *Aegis* because of her intrinsic love of the humanities, editing, and reading about the different content her Otterbein peers are learning about. She also enjoys the privilege of getting a free book to read for her book review (which isn't too shabby, either).

Although she isn't quite sure where life will take her in the next couple of years, she's working hard to make professional connections and leave herself open to lots of different possibilities: one thing she is excited about is applying to Carnegie Mellon University for a MA in Literary and Cultural Studies! She would be honored to advance her academic career at such a prestigious school. Wish her luck!

Delaney Lombardi is a junior English AYA Education major, and it is her first year on *Aegis'* editorial board. She is also a member of the Kappa Phi Omega sorority and the Alpha Lambda Delta/Phi Eta Sigma honors society. With her major, she plans on becoming a middle or high school English teacher and wants to instill in her students the same love of literature that she has always had. She hopes the readers enjoy this year's journal and find something interesting within its essays.

Grace McCutchen is a junior with majors in Zoo and Conservation Science and Biology. She adores philosophy, birding, and open-minded learning. After graduation, she plans to make her family's farm into a retreat where she can connect with nature, family, and herself and teach others how to do the same.

Shelby McSwords is finishing their senior year at Otterbein double majoring in theatre and WGSS. Throughout their 4 years on campus they have been involved in theatre performances from performing in *Hayfever* in their sophomore year to assistant directing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in their last semester. While this is their first year as an editorial board member for *Aegis*, they are also involved in Kate, volunteering for the WGSRC, is an active member and former Internal Relations chair for Kappa Phi Omega, and is involved in activism for multiple causes including reproductive rights, disability rights, LGBTQ+ community, and mental health. After their time at Otterbein they plan on continuing their education in pursuit of my Master's in Social Work (MSW) from The Ohio State University.

Kimberly Satterfield is an English literary studies major with minors in legal studies, journalism, and creative writing. She enjoys reading, creative writing, and watching movies. When she graduates in December, she hopes to pursue a career in law.

Seth Stobart is a sophomore English Literary Studies and Philosophy student with a minor in Film Studies. He is also a member of Sigma Tau Delta. This is his first year on the *Aegis* Editorial Board.

Curtis Tatum is a junior, English Literary Studies and Creative Writing Major with a minor in Film Studies. Film has a huge influence on how he writes and his approach literature, as well as his life in general. He is appreciative of his nomination for the *Aegis* Editorial Board and the opportunities it provided to get his voice out there.

Erin Van Gilder is a senior History and Global Studies major. This is her second year on the *Aegis* editorial board. Her preferred area of study is colonial history and modern post-colonial international relations. After graduating in the spring of 2021, she will continue her education and begin a master's program at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Katie Warner is a senior double major in English Creative Writing and French & Francophone Studies with minors in Film Studies and English Literary Studies. With a focus in creative nonfiction, she is fascinated by the concept of living life as an essay and the ways in which life imitates art. She is currently writing a fantasy novel and a collection of essays.

Josh Wolf is a senior at Otterbein University who will graduate this coming Spring with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science. Josh intends to continue his studies in a master's program, where he hopes to one day become either a professor of American history at a college level or a museum archivist. At the moment, his top choices for a master's program include American University, University of Massachusetts- Boston, and Florida International University. Josh would like to thank the following people for making his time on the *Aegis* Editorial Board a fun and wonderful experience: Dr. Stephanie Patridge, Miranda Hilt, Safiya Mohamed, Erin Van Gilder, Sean Horn, and Katie Warner. Their support and guidance played an influential role in his essay writing, and he will take the advice that he learned from each of them with him.

COVID-19 as the Collapse of Capitalism:

A Socio-Political Marxist Analysis of the Pandemic and a Post-Pandemic Future

By Paige Skaff

ABSTRACT: The following essay will examine the COVID-19 outbreak through an international relations and socio-political lens while applying Marxist Theory. The first portion of this essay was written at the beginning of the pandemic and adopts a global lens by examining the pandemic as a worldwide crisis, specifically critical on the global capitalist system. The second portion of this essay was written eight months into the pandemic and uses the United States as a case study nation to further elaborate and demonstrate a variety of points made in the first portion. It deconstructs Marx's grand argument into smaller sociological elements and applies them to the social and political conditions of this particular nation. While this portion uses the United States to conceptualize a specific American based future, the combination of ideas from both sections interconnect to figure the ultimate fall and reshaping of the global capitalist system and the social beings that live among and within it.

Introduction: The Marxist Lens

Karl Marx proposed his views on the capitalist world system that has since been adopted as a branch of critical theory in the study of international relations among other disciplines. Critical theory functions by looking at the issues of a society from the view of the marginalized community; in the case of Marxism, from the working class. Economic growth is seen as something that benefits the elite at the cost of the minority. Capitalism is a system of exploitation and oppression in which only a few benefit and which is only possible through such exploitation in a continuous manner. Marx viewed this system as unnatural and therefore inevitable to face change; capitalism has not always been the dominant force. A system that relies on solely seeking profit through exploitative means will lead to its own demise (Baylis 2017). A Marxist mindset will be explored in the first portion this essay, including the current effects the virus is having on the patterns of consumption and labor, focusing largely on exploitation in this modern and intravenous capitalist system.

The argument for how a capitalist world economy cannot survive under the current conditions will be made and a contrasting view will be provided that argues a new exploitative system may be ensuing and creating a new form of capitalism. Arguments falling under this section will be under the header **A POLITICAL ANALYSIS**.

A sociological Marxist perspective will later be adopted, focusing in on the concept of human potential. The pandemic will be used as an agent that is bringing the population of the US closer to their full human potential by heightening their human consciousness. It will be argued that this growing level of consciousness in combination with the restriction of human sociability has created tension and caused political revolt. Political agency will be examined through nation-wide unemployment levels, as well as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement and the 2020 presidential election. The fall of a system must be envisioned to perceive the future. Marx proposed that capitalism sowed the seeds for its own demise; this essay sees the pandemic as planting the uprising of the proletariat. By arguing that the fall of modern capitalism lies in the pandemic, two alternate futures will be envisioned. A future that directly takes political action and one that takes the increase of technological capitalism – the ability to work virtually from home, using automated instead of human run resources, any measure taken to reduce human contact that involves non-human technology in some regard to complete a task - installed during the pandemic into consideration. Arguments falling under this section will be under the header **A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**.

A POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Globalization

Globalization is a contested topic. One of the various views of what globalization is pertains to the idea that this process is simply the spreading of a global capitalist system; also often referred to as Westernization. A critical view equates globalization to Westernization in which globalization is the visible face of Western capitalism and hegemony. Such a form of globalization prompts a growing sense of global interdependence in which the ability of one nation-state is based on other nation-states and vice versa. This interconnectedness and the dependence that it creates has also created global production networks that create a division of labor across the world. With this being the case, an economic shock in one region may very well derail the globalization process and the global capitalist system that it has created (Baylis 2017).

The Consumer and the Laborer

A global capitalist system is based on the relationship between labor and consumption and similarly that of the laborer and consumer. Laborers are those who produce commodities for consumption in a capitalist system striving on commodity fetish. Commodity fetishes drive overconsumption by making individuals believe they are more empowered owning certain objects. Marx said that this produces a “sexiness” of certain products hiding the exploitation of labor, therefore allowing it to perpetuate. Capitalism creates four distinct characteristics of the working class. The prominent one strengthening this essay is the dual-tiered labor market, that dichotomizes the labor force into the elite well paid workers and the low- skilled underpaid workers. These underpaid laborers are segregated by race,

ethnicity, and gender, further reinforcing class inequality, a main point that Marx discusses for continued exploitation in a competitive market (Robbins 1999). It is this demographic that has been put at risk throughout this pandemic, being forced to work, especially in the developing periphery to supply commodities for those in the developed West to hoard supplies in panic.

The continued feeling of threat from the consumers extends the need for laborers. In a capitalist system, consumers must buy and consume commodities and the world's economy is dependent on consumption. In a global capitalist system, the goal is to increase consumption and the convenience of said consumption (Robbins 1999). Consumer consumption is changing as businesses are resorting to delivery and curbside pick-up, though the overall rates of consumption are plummeting and this is concerning to the system.

Capitalism and COVID-19

Modern capitalism functions on the Black Box Theory. This theory states that the main principle of capitalism is to have the return greater than the investment. Such a mindset will ignore external factors – both social and environmental – that could damage capital flow. The current global pandemic may be one of these factors. A capitalist economy is eighty percent based on consumption (Robbins 1999). Globally instilled fear in the population has further dropped consumption rates aside from the direct physical restrictions the world's consumers are facing. At this rate, a capitalist system cannot survive long term.

Contemporary capitalist consumerism is not possibly able to function under these current conditions. Capital accumulation

has been halted by a universal shut down – from the closing of airports and airlines, hotels, restaurants, theme parks, and cultural events, to the cancellation of all experiential consumerism – and this is having more negative impacts on the unfortunate laborers than the exploitation they faced while the system was up and running. For these reasons and mandatory social distancing, there is a rise of global unemployment. Capitalism functions in a loop, both sides have been disrupted by COVID-19 and the whole circle is being crippled by this virus.

Health and Disease

The rapid pace of urbanization is creating a breeding ground for disease especially prevalent today in the periphery. The pressure of globalization is forcing the workers of essential positions, most of which are poor and marginalized, into small and compact communities. This phenomenon is known as disease pools: areas in which infectious pathogens thrive and new disease is bred. The high concentration of people in urban areas and in “essential” areas of work to support capitalist commodities are mostly composed of persons in marginalized demographics. Global society is reliant on these workers but they are in situations of risk and exploitation. In this pandemic especially, it is evident that these groups are receiving blame for the start and the spread of this virus. In his discussion of *Health and Disease*, Richard Robbins discusses the blame in saying: “We saw the phenomenon of blaming the victim when we examined population growth, poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation. Problems generated by core exploitation of the periphery are blamed on the periphery itself” (Robbins 1999, p. 265).

War and Human Security

The COVID-19 pandemic is emblematic of war. “War tries to draw into its cauldron more human and material resources” (Baylis 2017, p.230). In a capitalist system, the exploitation of laborers is still persistent, exposing vulnerable laborers to the virus to produce the main commodities – food and toiletries – that are being sought after. These workers represent the human materials while the large consumption and hoarding of the materials they are producing may be compared to the excess of material resources harbored for war. “In an era of globalization, many of these challenges cross national and regional boundaries and threaten both developing and developed countries...issues include climate change, pandemics, and conflicts involving genocide or severe humanitarian consequences” (Baylis 2017, p. 483). The pandemic mimics genocidal death rates and severe humanitarian consequences to the laborers at risk. While there is no human-human combat and violence in the traditional sense of war, there is a violation of the human right of safety for these workers as they risk their health to keep the system running. This pandemic is not only a form of war itself but the unequal conditions across social class and the unrest being cultivated may initiate war in a traditional sense. It is not an unlikely prediction to say that the friction of war could present itself as the demise of capitalism.

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A United States Case Study

Eight months into the globally felt COVID-19 pandemic, society is envisioning a post-pandemic future. Initially, it was claimed that this pandemic was spurring a new form of capitalism from a political

perspective, but after months of observation, this essay is forced to reimagine the future again in a more societally based way. In the United States (US) especially, political and social unrest have heightened, citizen-based action has been taken, and the nation is seeing significant changes in what the government deems important political issues based on authoritative response and media release. This section will provide an analysis of the movements the nation has witnessed and their motivators elaborating on the fall of capitalism. This fall will be initiated by the modern proletariat, envisioning potential futures that the country may enter once pandemic times are eradicated.

Human Potential and Human Consciousness

While Karl Marx is notorious for his work on communism and the rise of the proletariat, his conversation on human potential is scanty known yet vital to his mission. His theory suggested that people cannot fully realize their abilities or potential because exploitative social formations throughout history have not adequately allowed human potential to fully develop. His argument of human potential on need and power states that power is the faculty and capability of people and that needs are desires for things not easily available. Throughout the pandemic, society has lacked in both. The inability to work – which Ritzer defined as the expression of a human individual’s ability to pursue productive activity- is parallel to obtaining necessities and expressive of lack of power (Ritzer 2018). The resulting unemployment is a main constraint to need.

Objectification is a main element in Marx’s theory of human potential, defined

as the means by which humans appropriate the natural world to meet their needs. The natural world here is fighting back, spreading a virus that is forcing a re-examination of human need. Essential workers – those that work in the food industry, critical retail [grocery and hardware stores], critical trades [construction workers, electricians, and plumbers], transportation, and healthcare – who this essay argues is the modern proletariat, are being exposed to COVID-19 and nurturing the commodity fetish of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie are therefore those with the ability to work from home or cease work because it is not financially necessary. In a capitalist society, production yields detrimental consequences, which has only been exasperated by the pandemic [statistically examined in later sections]. The captivity forced during this pandemic provides a glimmer of optimism: there is a growing class consciousness and Ritzer speaks on Marx's behalf when he proposes that political action can be implored by making consciousness a responsibility of the people (Ritzer 2018).

Even as human potential is being limited in new and profound ways, this essay argues that human consciousness is rising. Marx asserts that consciousness is a real part of people, a social product shaped by action and interaction that is related to the natural world. The coronavirus is an actor in this natural world. While Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* speak of consciousness specifically being related to social and economic class, this idea can be expanded to relate to a consciousness of all dimensions of identity (Mark and Engels 1848). In the United States specifically during these past eight months, consciousness has been raised

in areas of race, political affiliation, and the economic standing that was originally conceptualized.

Alienation and Sociability

The capitalist system amidst the pandemic has been working exceptionally hard to prevent a rise in consciousness. There have been diligent acts of alienation and restriction of sociability, two elements examined in Marxist theory. A capitalist system inherently causes alienation. Fromm describes alienation as being a detachment from the fellow man and humanity itself; an alienation of what he refers to as the “species-being” (Fromm 1961, p. 53). It is rooted in social structures which have been set into disarray by the pandemic. There are four elements of alienation which can be directly applied: (Ritzer 2018)

“

The capitalist system amidst the pandemic has been working exceptionally hard to prevent a rise in consciousness.

”

1. Productive activity belongs to capitalism. Work is not to satisfy and to create but rather to financially earn a living. Essential workers are experiencing a new form of exploitation. Essential workers are

- primarily comprised of minority communities who sometimes live in close quarters and often multi-generational households, exposing the highly susceptible elderly family members. With lower income, affording needs and access to healthcare is of great concern.
2. Capitalism owns the product that is produced. Workers are divorced from the product they are creating and consumers are detached from the labor behind the product they are consuming, the latter of which has become increasingly apparent through the pandemic. There was an “apocalyptic” buy out by the bourgeoisie of shelf stable and essential items. This gave no consideration for the ability to restock those items so that the essential workers who were producing them could have availability to them. The inflation of prices for cleaning supplies and paper products which further made it difficult for the essential workers to obtain these “survival” items (Jaravel and O’Connell 2020).
 3. The pandemic has caused isolation of workers in two ways: (1) the essential worker has been isolated from their fellow worker due to strict social distancing guidelines and sanitary precautions and (2) the workers of the bourgeoisie have either been exempt from their fellow workers entirely by the ability to take time off or their occupations have been moved to a virtual platform in which technology has alienated.

4. Capitalism numbs consciousness and denies the opportunity for full human potential. Support and criticism to both of these claims were examined in the section above. This essay stresses the words of Fromm that social being determines consciousness which has been stretched and limited amongst the pandemic (Fromm 1961).

Emancipation, Agency, and Praxis

The use of agency and emancipation have been reimagined in the pandemic. Ritzer elaborates on Marx’s idea of praxis (Ritzer 2018). Praxis is the basis of emancipation. It is a combination of the theoretical and political. The development of an intellectual stance to bring change is based in the theoretical while the concrete action taken in society is acted through the political. Marx believed that a political movement could overthrow capitalism and allow people to realize their full being. The pandemic in the United States has been met with political unrest and uprising. This essay claims that the impacts of the pandemic on consciousness could be the foundations of praxis being enacted.

To perform praxis, one must have power. Agency is the means by which individual and collective power is performed and expressed. All subjects of a society have agency. All subjects are agents and have the ability to respond. Giroux and Nealon provide a simple definition for agency that is broad enough to encapsulate any act of praxis: agency is the power to do something (Giroux and Nealon 2012). Agency is thus constrained and enabled by choices. To perform acts that are theoretically based, they claim that the subject

must recognize specific complexities of context and have specificities of response, process, and practice in order to create and convey their certain meaning.

Agents in Action: Unemployment, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the 2020 Presidential Election

Praxis is not complete without performance. The real economic and social experience of life has influence on the actual way of life including thinking and feeling. Structures and the individual experience of sociability and society have been rewritten and uprooted, especially for essential workers and minority communities which comprise the group. Praxis' theoretical aspect alludes to the idea that individual experience must play a role in action. The minority communities at large, including some essential workers, have faced increasing levels of exploitation through unemployment, the inability to afford costs of living even with occupation, police violence, and the constraint and direct oppression by the government. Marx believed that the proletariat would create the downfall of capitalism; they were the demise that capitalism slowly created through continuous exploitation. Marx and Engels defined the proletariat as the class in society which lives entirely from the sale of its labor and does not draw profit from any kind of capital (Marx and Engels 1848). This group is the modern proletariat.

1. Unemployment

As of May 2020, 20.5 million people were unemployed in the US, up from 6.2 million in February 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. Levels are higher in minority and oppressed populations, which follows a capitalist script as their labor is the most exploited. Women

across all demographics have average rates of 14.3% while men have 11.9%, though it must be acknowledged that women hold substantially larger numbers of hospitality and education occupations, two sectors disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Racially, Hispanic women are most effected at 19.5% and Black men at 15.8%. Further, US born individuals have a rate of 12.4% while foreign-born individuals are at 16.6%. Rates had reached their lowest levels post-WWII prior to the pandemic and after recovery from the Great Recession moving from 10.6% unemployment during the recession and increasing up to 16% dependent on the sources referenced (Kochhar 2020, Covid Hardship Watch 2020).

Unemployment has directly impacted the proletariat most severely. Reminded by Marx, this demographic does not profit capital. Financially struggling pre-pandemic, economic conditions have only worsened. The Covid Hardship Watch conducted a quantitative study of 26 million US adults who faced direct unemployment as a result of the pandemic (Covid Hardship Watch 2020). Their study was conducted and published in November of 2020, so rates have increased from those in the previous paragraph. They found that low paying jobs faced the most unemployment, making up 30% of the total jobs lost, 6% of medium wage jobs and only 4% of high wage jobs being dissolved. There have now been 31 million new people who are defined as unemployed, increasing pandemic unemployment to 54 million or one out of six adults in the United

States. There was a study conducted on the unemployed on the inability to afford food, pay for housing and other household expenses such as car payments, medical expenses, and education. They found the following: 1 in 6 adults with children lacked sufficient food supply in the last 7 days, 1 in 5 renters were late paying rent, those with children being twice as likely to be behind. Food hardships increased to 4 out of 10 children lacking nourishment, and 1 out of 3 adults had trouble paying for other household expenses after paying what they were able to for food and rent.

2. The Black Lives Matter (BLM)

Movement

The Black community has been severely affected by the pandemic. While more whites have faced unemployment, those Blacks who have been unemployed face more economic hardship. Blacks also make up 25% of food workers, 27% of postal workers, 32% of public transport workers, 32% of home health care workers, and 28% of all nursing care facility workers (Black Demographics 2020). These are the essential occupations and the Black community makes up the largest percentage of any demographic for each one. While this has certainly raised consciousness of the Black class, as this essay seeks to expand Marx's ideas of consciousness, it will argue that the pandemic has increased a racial consciousness as well.

The Black Lives Matter Movement is not unique to the pandemic, rather it began in 2012. The pandemic contributed to a surge in participation and media coverage, giving BLM a fresh face in 2020. It has gained more media coverage

than any protest in the last fifty years. Coronavirus helped the BLM Movement become the biggest protest in US history. Garfield and Ettinger compiled a list of the largest protests in American history prior to BLM and amongst them three were directly Black movements: the 1963 civil rights march, the 1995 unity for Black families and communities march, and the 2007 Black women's march (Garfield and Ettinger 2020). Before the BLM Movement, the women's march of 2018 had the highest attendance nationally at 5.3 million. The BLM Movement had 26 million Americans in attendance (Arora 2020).

Arora elaborates on the implications of the pandemic on the BLM movement (Arora 2020). Those financially hit harder have been recorded to attend protests more and post positively about it on social media. Statistically, 69% of Blacks were financially hurt compared to 46% of whites. Those struggling said they marched for all people and for discontent of the federal government more than for racial justice. However, though it was still a collective of the proletariat in the fight for the minority. Four out of five people stated that BLM was the first protest they attended because they had more free time and no social outlets in the conjunction for fighting for justice. Unemployment made more Americans able to attend and the lack of sociability in traditional ways allowed people to find community within the movement.

3. The 2020 Presidential Election
If praxis is political, what better way to end the examination of agency in this essay than through the 2020 Presidential

Election. The voting levels that were seen in 2020 have not been seen in over a century. Since 1976, the average turn out of those of voting age has been 50% with a slight increase to 56% in 2008, and a large jump to 72.1% in 2020. A total of 165 million votes were casted compared to the previous election of 2016 with 138 million. Out of these 165 million votes in 2020, 100 million were early votes which already accounted for over two-thirds of the total votes of the 2016 election (Desilver 2020, Waxman 2020).

While there has been more political resistance in the proletariat, most of which compose the Democratic supporters, the bourgeoisie showed an element of their power in the election which cannot be ignored. North Carolina State Board of Election's (NCSBE) Voter Turnout Statistics noted that there was less than a 6% margin in the absentee ballots cast between Democrats and Republicans, with Democratic absentee ballots accounting for 37.3% of the total votes and Republicans 31.7% (NCSBE Voter Turnout Statistics 2020). Since the Democratic party is comprised of the proletariat, it can be argued that absentee ballot rates may be higher than the Republican ones. While there has been more acknowledgement of the virus and compliance to protocol within this demographic, as they comprise the current working class, there are substantial barriers for them to vote in person. Polls are typically open only within workday hours and do not align with shift schedules. Also, the communities in which these people live are often considerable distances from voting polls requiring transportation that is

unattainable or unaffordable.

This essay urges society not to forget a vital claim of *The Communist Manifesto*: "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority" (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 20). Unemployment and police violence have caused unrest in communities of color, creating political action, most notably the Black Lives Matter Movement. The 2020 Presidential election involved engagement from a radical youth that sought to bring justice to those most oppressed; to give a voice to the silenced and to fight in the interest of the minority. The COVID-19 pandemic has isolated and irritated the proletariat in such a way that their consciousness has been raised, they have found their power in connection over a more vivid realization of collective exploitation, and they are taking action that is receiving more participation than in past movements. This is the start of a downfall of the modern system.

Conclusion: The Fall of a System, The Rise of the Future

If this essay hopes to envision a future, it must imagine the fall of the system. It is evident that there has been a growing consciousness in the levels of inequality, especially those economically related, throughout the course and progression of the pandemic. The essential workers and minority communities are finding a common rage toward the system that has been met by acts of agency in the BLM Movement and in the 2020 Presidential Election in the United States. Picket and Wilkinson's *The Spirit Level* proclaims in the section "Building the Future" that "what we need is not one big revolution but a continuous stream of small

changes in a constant direction” (Pickett and Wilkinson 2009, p. 237). The events over the last eight months speaks to this proclamation.

While the modern global capitalist system is failing, it may be paving a new pathway for the world’s most exploited populations. The movements that have been witnessed in the United States follow the motto that “modern societies will depend increasingly on being creative, adaptable, inventive, well-informed, and flexible communities” (Pickett and Wilkinson 2009, p. 270). With global agency that replicates and strengthens the movements examined in the United States, worldwide change is inevitable. Robert Putnam in his book *Our Kids*, centers his arguments toward a better society on the idea of community. Community can help shape the proletariat and set them up for their final eradication of the current capitalist system (Putnam 2015). Community remains a vital factor in individual and societal well-being and is the minority force of social and political change. A new universal sense of community stems from the collective suffering brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic is paving the way for a potentially more equal world. Pickett and Wilkinson imagined this form of future when they proclaimed the possibility “to piece together a new, compelling and coherent picture of how we can release societies from the grip of much dysfunctional behavior” (Pickett and Wilkinson 2009). The impact of movements like BLM and the election of Joe Biden is beginning to show response of the proletariat voice in the United States. Our global sense of community can work to cultivate the reception of these shared oppressions worldwide. A new compassion can be reached across social classes, aiding in the reduction of disparities in inequality.

While a utopic future is comforting to be imagined, especially in times of increased hardship, results can always be more grim. Marx and Engels assert that the “fall [of the modern capitalist system] and the victory of the proletariat is inevitable,” but they neglected to imagine a worse form of capitalism or another system of exploitation emerging (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 94). Ritzer fixates the world in a technologically oppressive way (Ritzer 2015). With a realization that work can be performed from home or entirely done without human labor, new ideas of technological exploitation must be noted. The COVID-19 pandemic has fulfilled all four dimensions of Ritzer’s belief in what he calls the McDonalidization of society: (1) efficiency has been shown in the ways that commodities can be provided to the consumer that minimize hassle through means like ordering online and direct delivery of “essentials,” (2) the availability of one item has become more respected than a variety of items as the search for Center for Disease Control (CDC) certified products are the ones being sought out and consumed which supplements calculability, (3) all has become predictable in terms of life being lived on a highly repetitive and routine platform, and (4) control has been witnessed in dehumanization of the essential worker as they are exposed in inhumane ways to feed the commodity fetish of the bourgeoisie and as humans are increasingly replaced with non-human technology to prevent virus spread.

Whatever the future outcome, it cannot be neglected that this is “one of the biggest transformations in human history” (Pickett and Wilkinson 2009, p. 272). The uncertainty of human existence and the vulnerability of human life can no longer

be disavowed. The ways that exploitation exasperates and perpetuates these realities cannot be ignored. The pandemic is showing qualities of critical theory that says change occurs in ways that constitute a whole new understanding of being or knowing. The most highly exploited subjects of the capitalist system are claiming their agency

and taking action against the system; they are beginning to work along with the pandemic to change it. "History is the history of man's self-realization" and every self has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and will be affected by the radical change it has the potential to bring (Fromm 1961).

Works Cited

- Arora, Maneesh. "How the coronavirus pandemic helped the Floyd protests become the biggest in U.S. history." *The Washington Post* [Washington, D.C.], 5 Aug. 2020.
- Baylis, John, et al. *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Politics*. 7th ed., Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Black Demographics. "African Americans at Risk COVID-19." *Black Demographics: The African American Population*, 2020.
- Covid Hardship Watch. "Tracking the COVID-19 Recession's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 18 Nov. 2020.
- Desilver, Drew. "In past elections, U.S. trailed most developed countries in voter turnout." *FactTank: News in Numbers*, 3 Nov. 2020.
- Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961.
- Garfield, Leanna, and Zoë Ettinger. "14 of the biggest marches and protests in American history." *Business Insider*, 1 June 2020.
- Giroux, Susan Searls, and Jeffrey Nealon. *The Theory Toolbox*. 2nd ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012.
- Hawken, Paul. *Blessed Unrest*. 2006.
- Jaravel, Xavier, and Martin O'Connell. "Real-time price indices: Inflation spike and falling product variety during the Great Lockdown." *US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health*, vol. 191, no. 104270, 14 Sept. 2020.
- Kochhar, Rakesh. "Unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession." *FactTank: News in the Numbers*, 11 June 2020.
- Marx, Karl, and Fredrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Communist League, 1848.
- Pickett, Kate, and Richard Wilkinson. *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. Bloomsbury Press, 2009.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Simon & Schuster, 2015.
- Ritzer, George. *The McDonaldization of Society*. 8th ed., SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015.
- Ritzer, George, and Jeffrey Stepnisky. *Modern Sociological Theory*. 8th ed., SAGE, 2018.
- Robbins, Richard. *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*. 1999.
- Cox, Robert W. "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 126-130. 1981.
- "Voter Turnout Statistics." NCSBE [North Carolina], 16 Nov. 2020.
- Waxman, Olivia B. "The 2020 Election Set a Record for Voter Turnout. But Why Is It Normal for So Many Americans to Sit Out Elections?" *TIME*, 5 Nov. 2020.

Going Out in Style:

How Stylistics Can Disrupt the Problematic Literary Canon

By Riley Hysell

The concept of a literary canon has received a fair amount of criticism. In large part, this criticism is due to the historical formation of the canon, albeit an informal formation, by those in power. The literary canon's formation is reflected in its content. While there is no formal listing of texts in the literary canon, in 1992, an education professor used U.S. literature anthologies from major publishers to form a rough idea of a literary canon and found that "Of the 98 writers represented in the textbook canon, 65 are white men, 16 are white women, and 10 are black men. There are only four black women, and the two Native Americans and single Chicano are males. There are no Asian Americans" (Pace 33). Clearly, a literary canon fails to accurately represent the humanity it claims to, instead representing only a small fraction of that humanity. Fortunately, this issue is fixable. Through the field of stylistics, the way people think about reading can and should be revised.

Since the concept of a literary canon is largely abstract, in order to discuss a systematic disruption of it, one must first understand what the literary canon is. At its simplest, a literary canon can be understood as the literary works which a society has collectively decided one must read. Especially notorious examples include the works of Shakespeare, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great*

Gatsby, just to name a few at random. Books considered canonized, like the few listed, are often taught in English classes, especially during high school and college, but sometimes during middle school or even elementary school. This is why the lack of representation within the canon is so problematic; "What message do we send to students when we present them with an American literary story in which most of the active, powerful characters come only from one race, only from one gender" (Pace 38)? The literary canon is not just a matter relevant to educators or academic literary critics. Rather, it is an issue relevant to all children who will read these books and all adults who already have, because now their view of America will be or has been informed by an inaccurate representation of it. The literary canon risks creating an entire America with a misinformed, defective worldview.

Several solutions have been suggested for this issue, ranging from adding new books to the canon to attempting to forget or reset the canon in its entirety, but the most promising of these solutions comes in the form of stylistics. Stylistics can be considered "the interdisciplinary branch between linguistics and literature," but this is arguably the simplest way of defining the field (Chaitra). That said, the definition does give insight into what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of stylistics, which is the field's ability to combine linguistic

components, such as “phonetic, phonemic, morphemic, syntactic, lexical and graphological contexts,” with literary components (Chaitra). Through this combination of components from what is typically considered two separate fields, stylistics offers a new way of looking at literature, one in which each level of language matters, “[making] a text coherent, [creating] meaningful connections across a text, and [orientating] a text in terms of genre or topic” (Gibbons 7). Stylistics is also a field constantly in flux, one informed by at least two other fields, and “continually [seeking] to refine and update its principles in line with new knowledge” (Gibbons 5). Overall, if drastic change is what is needed in order to fix the issue caused by the literary canon, an application of stylistics could not be a better place to start.

While stylistics is certainly an intersection between linguistics and literary studies, the benefits of it are seen to an even greater extent if stylistics is looked at as part of literary studies, or even as encompassing of literary studies. As Ronald Carter and Peter Stockwell argue, “[stylistics] is naturally the central discipline of literary study, against which all other current approaches are partial or interdisciplinary” (1). Initially this may seem extreme, but once again, stylistics is not a field that shies from change, to the point that “Stylisticians have... criticised literary critics for many years for being insensitive to the linguistic texture of literature” (Carter and Stockwell 10). Central to this claim is the fact that written language is still language, despite a tendency for both those working in either linguistics or literary studies to believe otherwise. In part, the tendency to not view texts as language might be because “the physicality of literary reading is something that we tend to have a diminishing sense of in the early twenty-first century,” but

bringing “physicality” back to literary reading, meaning reading texts aloud, demonstrates more clearly that what language and literature share is greater than a mere connection, or crossing of fields; they are one and the same (Stockwell 58). Even then, this physicality only makes more obvious the ways in which literature is language, and even without the physicality it remains true that “stylistics is the best approach to literary study” (Carter and Stockwell 10). Overall, “between true literature and linguistics there is no conflict; the real linguist is at least half a *littérateur* and the real *littérateur* at least half a linguist,” and it is through this that one of the greatest benefits of stylistics to combatting the issues with literary canon is seen (qtd. in Chaitra).

First, stylistics would help fix the issue with the literary canon simply because of the inherently nonhierarchical nature of the field which contrasts directly with the obviously hierarchical formation of the literary canon. Stylistics is inherently nonhierarchical in large part because of the broader field of linguistics. A rejection of hierarchies is built into linguistics because linguistics aims to describe language, not create rules for language. Therefore, there is no judgement in linguistics and certainly no attempt to rank or create hierarchies within language. As a part of linguistics, stylistics carries this sensibility with it, focusing on “the description of literary texts, by methods derived from general linguistic theory, using the categories of the description of the language as a whole” (qtd. in Chaita). This contradicts the very concept of a literary canon, which has built into it an assumption that texts which are canonized are somehow better or more worthy of being read than texts which are not. Using stylistics, it becomes apparent that attempting to rank texts in this

way is somewhat preposterous, in the same way that linguistics demonstrates how attempting to rank languages, dialects, accents, or any other component of a language would be unfounded. In describing, stylistics focuses on elements which all texts have, namely those that make up all language, written or otherwise. Central to all of this is the concept that “frameworks derived from the study of spoken interaction can be applied in the analysis of literary language” (Gibbons 83). Through the understanding of literature as equivalent to language, stylistics takes with it the field of linguistics’ nonhierarchical viewpoint, and through this viewpoint offers a different way of viewing literature which negates any need for a literary canon.

Stylistics’ understanding of literature as language also connects to ideas coming out of sociolinguistics. “How [linguistic] features affect and are affected by the socio-cultural norms and deviations is an integral part of stylistics,” according to some stylisticians (Chaitra). It is important to note here that the focus is on effects going both ways, both of which are demonstrated by the issues with the literary canon. Socio-cultural norms affect language because of their shaping of the literary canon, and language affects socio-cultural norms because that literary canon is now read, and its ideas often internalized. Sociolinguistics aims to explicitly address both parts of this issue. Furthermore, in their “stylistics manifesto” Stockwell and Carter explain to stylisticians that they “should not neglect the broad sense of language study, taking account of the social, cultural and ideological dimensions of reading” (10). A lack of consideration of the “social, cultural, and ideological dimensions of reading” is precisely what led to the formation of the current

problematic literary canon. Through stylistics this could be solved because, once again, stylistics makes this problem explicit. Unlike literary studies, which often does not explicitly (although sometimes does implicitly) deal with socio-cultural implications of literature, both in how the literature affects socio-cultural aspects of the world and in how socio-cultural aspects play a role in what people read and how they read it, stylistics has methods of questioning this built in through connections to sociolinguistics, and therefore, is the ideal way of confronting the issues with a literary canon.

Stylistics is not only effective in disrupting the concept of a literary canon through the ways it is informed by linguistics, but also through aspects of the field itself, such as its direct goal to make literary analysis accessible and clear, even to those outside of linguistics and literary studies. Carter and Stockwell call this being populist and explain it as “[augmenting] simply professional institutionalised readings and [developing] ways to describe the engagements of the plurality of readers and readings outside the academy” (10). They go on to explain that another part of this is “[demystifying] obscurity and willful inarticulacy in theory” (Carter and Stockwell 10). So, while stylistics may seem to complicate literary studies further, and in some ways does, the field also aims to make it clear that literary studies does not belong only in academia, and is, in actuality, part of the world. This connects to viewing literature as language; if literature is language, then like all language it is part of everyone’s lives.

At first, while certainly a positive addition to literary studies, this populist viewpoint might seem to address a problem with literary studies which is separate from that of the literary canon, instead dealing with a problem that Stockwell harshly, but accurately, identifies

as “discussions of literature [becoming] ever more abstruse, further distant from the works themselves, divorced from the concerns of natural readers outside the academy, self-aggrandising, pretentious, ill-disciplined and, in the precise sense, illiterate” (1). In fact, this populist outlook not only addresses both the problem Stockwell identifies and the problem of the literary canon, but these two problems are intertwined. Stockwell goes on to discuss the ways in which some texts, for example, James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, “[represent] a level of intense reading that goes far beyond what a non-academic reader is likely to engage in, having rather an exclusively scholarly value,” describing such texts as “too rich” (63–64). While this certainly does not make the reading and analysis of these texts worthless, it does make one question the extent to which compiling a literary canon, supposedly a compilation of literature which all people must read, is beneficial if it includes texts that are “too rich,” or that have “an exclusively scholarly value.” Stylistics strives to maintain “a transparency of practice” (Carter and Stockwell 10), which would further expose some of the issues with the literary canon. Of course, this does not necessary extend itself, as other parts of stylistics have, to a complete eradication of a literary canon, but the populist viewpoint of stylistics does point toward a necessary reanalysis of what makes up a literary canon which would also potentially fix the issues with the canon as it is now.

Another feature of stylistics that makes it the best way to address the issues with the literary canon is its willingness to “promote new configurations of literariness,” and redefine what the word literature entails (Carter and Stockwell 10). This, by far, is the most extreme shift from literary studies to stylistics, since the

field of literary studies is built almost entirely on what literature means. But this is also the most intriguing piece of stylistics in terms of what it means for literary studies as a whole, including and especially the concept of a literary canon. Whereas for literary studies exactly what qualifies as literature is a narrow span, limited to an even greater extent by the concept of a literary canon, in stylistics, “the range of literary texts covered... is broad: from the most experimental fiction to the most canonical, from the frothiest of popular fiction to the most serious of high art, across the history of the novel to writing for young adults, stylistics has always had a demonstrably practical democratic instinct while retaining an aesthetic and social scientific sense of literary value” (Lambrou and Stockwell 2). In some ways, this “democratic instinct” can be considered the culmination of all other pieces of stylistics discussed so far: it takes the equivalence of literature and language, the nonhierarchical lens, the explicit concern with socio-cultural elements of literature, and the populist viewpoint, and brings them to their conclusion; literature cannot and should not be defined around power, and this definition should instead rest in the hands of readers. This idea of stylistics expands literary canon farther than any other solution to the issues with canon. Every text becomes canon, and therefore, the literary canon is truly representative of the world readers live in.

Truthfully, this idea is not as extreme as it might sound to literary critics, and recent changes to literary studies are already trending in the direction of redefining what literature means. In a literary journal published at the beginning of 2020, two literary critics explained how the selections for one section of the journal reflected how, while literary studies was “traditionally seen as a discipline

that was immersed in published narratives, with poetry, drama, short fiction, and novels as the sole determinant corpus, literary studies has progressed across shifting frontiers, not only in terms of the form of the text but also in terms of the method of inquiry” (Pillai and Perry 379). In short, literary studies is more than ready to change; it is already changing. In fact, literary studies, like all fields, must change because “Failure to recognize and include new modes of literary works and technology could lead to a decline in scholarly interest and development of literary studies. Subsequently, this would limit the contribution of the field in twenty-first-century contexts” (Pillai and Perry 380). The mission of literary critics then, as well as of others invested in the process of the field (which should be everyone, but realistically will not be) is to guide this change in a direction that allows literary studies to maintain relevance, and to avoid its frequently “archaic, elite, and puritanical” past in favor of a more “dynamic, multidisciplinary, and cross-

cultural” structure (Pillai and Perry 386).

A large part of the effort to modernize literary studies as a field involves moving away from or at least revisiting and revising the idea of a literary canon, which is a continuation of the field of literary studies’ undemocratic and elitist notions. Stylistics is the answer to this issue. Stylistics provides the tools to facilitate this effort by letting readers see literature as language, push literature away from the current hierarchical way of understanding it, and accept the socio-cultural implications of literature, both in how literature affects the world and in how the world affects literature. Most importantly though, stylistics lets readers accept literature as their own, not as the property of academia or others in power who hope to define it, but as a communal concept in which all readers share a piece. Like a language, literature cannot and should not be controlled through a literary canon or through any other means. Literature, like language, should belong to those who use it. So, it’s time to take it back.

Bibliography

- Carter, Ronald, and Peter Stockwell. “Stylistics: Retrospect and Prospect.” *Academia.edu*, www.academia.edu/718961/Stylistics_retrospect_and_prospect.
- Chaitra, S. R. “Aspects of Stylistics.” *Language in India*, vol. 14, no. 10, Oct. 2014, pp. 45–50. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=98889267&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Gibbons, Alison. *Contemporary Stylistics: Language, Cognition, Interpretation*. EUP, 2018. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1814997&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Lambrou, Marina, and Peter Stockwell. *Contemporary Stylistics. Continuum*, 2010. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=377557&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Pace, Barbara G. “The Textbook Canon: Genre, Gender, and Race in US Literature Anthologies.” *The English Journal*, vol. 81, no. 5, 1992, pp. 33–38. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/819892. Accessed 3 Dec. 2020.
- Pillai, Shanthini, and Melissa Shamini Perry. “The Shifting Frontiers of Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century.” *Kritika Kultura*, no. 33/34, Jan. 2020, pp. 377–387. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=137805118&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Stockwell, Peter. *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=325007&site=eds-live&scope=site.

Ideal Kingship:

How Christianity Was Seen as an Important Instrument to Authoritarian Rule in the Frankish Empire

By Josh Wolf

Throughout the Frankish Kingdom's almost four-hundred-year existence, various groups of people would record how its ruling class managed to extend their jurisdiction over a wide swath of land on the European continent. In his chronology, *History of the Franks*, Gallish Bishop Gregory of Tours identified strict Christian adherence as the most influential component in the establishment of the Frankish Empire as it enabled the rulers to unite all of the tribes that lived in Central Europe, including the Franks, Byzantines, and Anatolians, under a central government in the 5th century A.D.ⁱ These people were viewed as "Barbarians" by members of the Catholic Church who needed to be tamed through the adoption of Christian beliefs and dismantling of their former hunter-gatherer lifestyle.ⁱⁱ Gregory of Tours was not alone in his beliefs. Two hundred years later, during the 8th century, a young noble named Einhard who served under the leadership of King Charlemagne would also correlate ideal Frankish leadership with strict religious Christianity while the latter ruler made plans to bring the remaining sovereignties of Germany and

northern Italy under his control through military force during the late 8th century.ⁱⁱⁱ However, as opposed to Gregory of Tours, Einhard identified political unity in the Frankish Empire as possible only through aggressive war campaigns and military tactics.^{iv} Einhard further stated in his book, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, that the king based his style of authority off of other rulers who came before him, like his father Pippin.^v Frankish kingship was a hereditary structure of brutal dominance and religious enactment forced upon all of the ethnic groups within Central Europe who were incorporated into their realm. Although they were composed during different time intervals, the written accounts of Einhard and Gregory of Tours both portray the ideals of Frankish kingship as having been emanated from the usage of Christian religion as a means of political authority.

Since its founding in 481 A.D., the Frankish Empire emerged as the largest and most powerful kingdom within most of Europe for the large number of territories that its rulers had managed to conquer throughout a four-hundred-year

period.^{vi} Following the Roman Empire's disintegration during the 5th century, different provinces began to emerge throughout Europe that would establish ruling administrations based on their distinct cultural beliefs. For example, the Ottoman Empire rose in Eastern Europe as a dynastic monarchy whose leaders developed their ruling structure based on fundamental Islamic principles.^{vii} Meanwhile, the Frankish Empire was originally established in Central and Western Europe by religious priests who sought to uphold the Roman Catholic beliefs that came to dominate the Roman world by the late 3rd century A.D. Such religious dissent was born out of the desire to preserve authentic Roman Christianity after the Barbarian tribes from what is now Germany were granted the right to assimilate themselves within the Roman world by Emperors Licinius and Constantine under the Edict of Milan in 313.^{viii} Union between the Barbarian tribes and Catholic Romans was deemed a necessity by the two emperors who were desperate to strengthen both their military and trading ambitions. However, this allegiance would often lead to tensions among the Germanic tribesmen and standard Roman warriors as the latter received better pay and were treated with more respect by their generals. Moreover, it did not help that both factions came from different cultural backgrounds, which only led to a growing ethnic distrust for each other.^{ix} Therefore, the early rulers of the Frankish Empire, like Childeric I and his son Clovis I, were dissenting Romans and even Barbarians, such as the Merovingian tribe from Gaul, who came to see religious adherence as the best means to maintain control of a large kingdom like the former

Roman Empire. These rulers believed that the only way to secure alliances with other tribes was to convert them to Christianity by force, and then engulf them under their dominion through brutal invasions and seizures of land masses.

It is significant to note that both Einhard and Gregory of Tours exemplified the ideals of Frankish kingship based on the politics that defined the centuries in which the two men lived. Gregory of Tours was among the first bishops to uphold religious authority over the citizenry during the kingdom's early years during the 6th century, and therefore had witnessed the calamity that his ruler, Theodoric the Great, had inherited from his father, Clovis I.^x For example, when Clovis I inherited the throne in 481, he was committed to unite all the Barbarian tribes of Central Europe under a single, religious government by distributing an equal share of power among the chieftains who controlled these ethnic groups as long as they agreed to Roman Catholicism.^{xi} Clovis had hoped that this equal share of power would help maintain the Frankish Kingdom's dependence upon the Barbarian tribes for military and commercial aid.^{xii} Unfortunately, his aspirations for a unified and democratic regime would immediately backfire when the leaders of these territories began to abuse their rights to sovereignty and conduct armed invasions into each other's realms. To make matters worse, Clovis did not do much to prevent these invasions, instead, he eventually participated in them in order to sustain his kingship.^{xiii} In 493, Clovis paid King Gundobad of the Burgundy Kingdom to murder the latter's brother, Chilperic, who governed the Neustria Kingdom, by throwing him

into a river where he would drown. Clovis had arranged for Chilperic's murder so that his army could abduct the latter's daughter, Clotild, and take her to Francia where Clovis could marry her because she was said to be of royal Frankish descent.^{xiv} The shock and dismay over Clovis' ruthless actions is prominent in Gregory's writings. Despite Theodoric the Great's plans to maintain Christian rule in a more orderly manner than that of his father, he nevertheless allowed a small number of Jews and German pagans to exist untouched.^{xv} Therefore, Theodoric's model of Frankish kingship was based on Christian morality and the allotment of religious liberty to certain ethnic groups in exchange for bilateral military and commercial relations.

In Gregory of Tours' ideals, he did not believe that Frankish kingship should distribute power among the tribes in its conquered territories because it had already prompted internal rebellion. Instead, he wrote in his book, *History of the Franks*, that he viewed the Frankish Empire as a divine monarchy in which centralization prevailed past all other activities, and where people would be required to follow the same religious principles bestowed upon them by their government. His focus was to convert every inhabitant who resided within the Kingdom to Christianity. Moreover, Gregory of Tours believed that a powerful bishop such as himself should anoint people with the holy water of Catholic baptism to cleanse them of sinful behavior.^{xvi} He thus recognized Frankish kingship as a religious duty to God, whether it was through ties of kinship or appointment of an arbitrary heir.

The following condition shall be observed that, whichever of the

aforesaid Kings may by God's decree survive the other, given that the other has passed away from the light of this world without male issue, shall inherit the kingdom of that other, in its entirety and in perpetuity, and, by God's grace, hand it down to his own descendants.^{xvii}

Gregory believed that continuity was possible only through the establishment of a religious central government would an empire be able to promote a future of peace and prosperity for its citizenry.

Gregory of Tours' idealization of a religious central government would become a reality two centuries later when a Merovingian general named Charlemagne inherited the Frankish Palace of Aachen in 768. An aggressive military leader, Charlemagne believed that the best way to strengthen solidarity within a large kingdom like the Frankish Empire was to invade other territories in Europe, dominate their rulers, and convert the inhabitants to Christianity through brute force.^{xviii} In consequence, between 774 and 800, he initiated a successful military campaign that oversaw the massive expropriation of northern Italy from the Lombard crown, Frankish victory over the belligerent Saxons within Central Europe, and the creation of a protectorate in al-Andalus that provided him with a buffer between Catholic Francia and Islamic North Africa.^{xix} Under Charlemagne, the Frankish Empire encompassed a large area stretching from al-Andalus in the West to Anatolia in the East, and transformed Christianity into an image of their values, which included trade with villages that cooperated and plunder of those who refused.^{xx} His plans to establish such a large empire was met with open praise and admiration from his nobles,

especially a young aristocrat named Einhard, who originally hailed from the Maingau Province within Francia. Einhard would even go as far as to characterize this bold ruler as a holy saint because the latter strived to transform his monarchy into an affluent and religious entity in which political justice and economic productivity would each be safeguarded against all odds.^{xxi}

In order to uphold Christianity as the principal method in leading a virtuous life with a bond of loyalty to the Frankish Empire, Charlemagne established schools throughout the kingdom that would teach this religious philosophy to young children of all ethnic backgrounds. He also worked to codify laws that would maintain justice and enhance the economy, all of which would provide the citizenry with a sense of sovereign property rights.^{xxii} It is interesting to note that Charlemagne did not make all of these decisions by himself. Drawing on the ideals of those who ruled before him, he allowed his nobles, including Einhard, to meet with him and discuss various strategic plans to extend Frankish power throughout Europe. Einhard stated in his book, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, that it was an honor to work beside this extraordinary ruler.

There is still another not unreasonable impulse... namely, the nurture he bestowed on me and the perpetual friendship with him... after I began living at his court. Through this he so bound me to him and put me in his debt, both in life and death, that I would rightly seem and be judged ungrateful if I forgot the many kindnesses he bestowed on me and passed over in silence the most famous and illustrious deeds of a man who had deserved the

best from me.^{xxiii}

Einhard exemplified Frankish kingship as an oligarchic structure in which religious sentiment and popular submission were both symbiotic. Here, one can clearly see how the fundamental beliefs of each of these prominent men differed. While Einhard supported the ideals of his Frankish king Charlemagne, Gregory of Tours had mixed sentiments regarding his own ruler, Theodoric the Great.

Good kingship was reflected in a Frankish king's ability to protect the Catholic Church and condemn any form of religious heresy.^{xxiv} This was made evident in Charlemagne's aspiration to institute a new system of legislation through the establishment of a new manor that would serve as the governing body of the Frankish Empire. This new manor became known as the Palace of Aachen, and it was completed in 779.^{xxv} In the Palace of Aachen, Charlemagne selected capitularies from the assemblies and gave them permission to draw up the documents of his reign and distribute their guidelines to the citizenry. He also made sure that stability was being maintained in the territories by dispatching *missi dominici*, or royal agents, to announce regal decrees, gather information on the duties of local officials, and to execute justice.^{xxvi} It is interesting to note that while Charlemagne drew his ideas of ruling the Frankish Empire from past kings, even though most of his predecessors had never been able to preserve such a rigorous legal system as he would succeed in doing. Then again, it could be postulated that he studied the effects of other rulers in order to institute his style of leadership in an effective manner. For example, Charlemagne learned

from the mistakes of Childeric I and his son Clovis I, both of whom did not handle the religious heresy that ran rampant among their conquered territories, especially in France and Spain, where many Catholic clergymen were either persecuted or murdered by Barbarian chieftains. He also studied the repercussions of the Visigoth King Eurich who, in the year 476, invaded Gaul from the Iberian Peninsula, cut off the heads of those who refused to abide by his heretical principles, and exiled the priests and bishops that presided over the region's affairs.^{xxvii} The Frankish king at the time, Childeric I usually let Barbarian chieftains like Eurich get away with their invasions of other territories within his own realm as he did not want to disrupt the military and trading alliances that he had established with them. Things would only get worse when his son, Clovis I, inherited the Frankish throne in 481. Clovis had made it his duty to protect Christianity as the governing body of the Frankish Empire, yet he was willing to collaborate with Barbarian chieftains. In 485, he challenged the authority of Syagrius, the King of the Romans, by dispatching an armed force of his soldiers with help from Ragnachar, the pagan ruler of Cambrai, who was said to be a blood relative of his. It was only a matter of days before the Frankish Army emerged triumphantly from the conflict, and Clovis demanded that the Romans hand their king over to him. King Syagrius had fled to the nearby monarchy of Toulouse within southern Francia in an effort to escape the tyrannical clutch of Clovis. However, his sanctuary would be cut short when the ruler of Toulouse, Alaric II, alerted Clovis that Syagrius was residing within his kingdom.^{xxviii} Charlemagne

understood that Clovis implemented a sense of fear into other rulers through a sense of threat and intimidation, which he personally felt would only hinder a Frankish king's ability to maintain external alliances.

Gregory of Tours seemed to be particularly interested in chronicling the exploits of Clovis I in a very negative light. Gregory noted with lament that King Syagrius was imprisoned by Clovis, and eventually murdered. He also noted that Clovis secretly practiced pagan beliefs and turned a blind eye towards the destruction of churches in the Italian Peninsula.^{xxix} Gregory went further by criticizing Clovis for the idea that his pagan beliefs were what helped him to secure victories over enemy kingdoms like Rome. "All these things have been created and produced at the command of our gods," he would answer. "It is obvious that your God can do nothing, and what is more, there is no proof that he is a God at all."^{xxx} It would not be until the fifteenth year of his rule, however, when, after defeating the warring Alamanni tribe within Germany in 496, that Clovis officially recognized Christianity as the ruling body of the Frankish Empire. However, this did not stop him from continuing to practice paganist traditions out of the reach of other people, including his own wife, Clotild.

It is rather ironic that Christianity was thoroughly incorporated as the ruling structure of the Frankish Empire under the former, pagan King Clovis I. Although he was reluctant to abandon his pagan beliefs at first, Clovis soon came to see how necessary Christianity was to his political stability after the Alamanni began to counterattack the Franks and win many battles against them. Clovis' wife, Clotild,

had warned her husband that his birth religion would work against his advantage one day, and was pleased to see that he had finally reconsidered. She invited St. Remigius, the Bishop of Rheims, to come to Gaul where he would advise Clovis on how to incorporate Christianity into a kingdom where many people still practiced pagan beliefs.^{xxx} It was the philosophy of St. Remigius that convinced Clovis to finally give up his original pagan faith. A few weeks later, Clovis passed his first decree of religious ordinance in which he declared that everyone within his kingdom, including the pagan tribes of Central Europe, report to the Church in Gaul where they could be baptized by the bishops and cleansed of their holy sins. Clovis would enter the Church as the first person to be baptized.^{xxxii}

King Clovis I's eventual acceptance of Christianity as the ruling structure for the Frankish Empire was what encouraged his son, Theodoric the Great, to establish a new church that would be built over the tomb of the Roman saint, Michael. This new Christian church would welcome tribesmen from the surrounding territories as a place where they could worship together despite their different backgrounds.^{xxxiii} Gregory of Tours respected Theodoric the Great's plan to expand religious sentiment. It marked a shift in the power structure of the Frankish World that later became known as the Period of Great Antiquity.^{xxxiv} This period led to not only a greater alliance with major lay and religious authority over the kingdom, but also an economic upturn in which wealthy estate owners were provided with more land acres to grow crops such as wheat and barley. However, at the same time, a new tax duty was also put into place.

Since the estate owners agreed to work in connection with the Catholic Church, they were exempted from such a high liability. Thus, as had been the case under Childeric I, the peasants were the ones who were burdened with higher taxes. Those who could not meet the tax regulations on time hired themselves to wealthy estate owners in exchange for land and protection.^{xxxv} While most of the Merovingian Bishops appointed by Theodoric to head the Church's Office in Gaul were of Gallo-Roman background in order to form a powerful network of political trade and consortium, this also led to the mass killing of religious officials on a regular basis as the best means to defend the Office's inheritance.^{xxxvi} Gregory of Tours came to loathe Theodoric for his failure to maintain a peaceful coexistence among all the Frankish citizens. Despite the fact that the Period of Great Antiquity was an era of reform in the Frankish Empire, at the same time, there were still killings over who would inherit control of the Gallic Church. The power struggle thus continued.

The Period of Great Antiquity oversaw the formation of a direct relationship between the government and Catholic Church within the Frankish Empire. A new concentration of power, business, and social organization began to emerge in which the Frankish Empire's economic productivity outsourced that of the previous Roman Empire in terms of trading networks, agricultural products like wheat and barley, and raw materials such as fiber for making clothes or blankets.^{xxxvii} Yet, there was also a degree of continuity in some of the old religious institutions between the 6th and 8th centuries, most notably the discretionary conversion of other tribes under Frankish

dominance. As Gregory of Tours noted in *History of the Franks*, one source of continuity was the allowance for the entities within Europe under Frankish dominance, such as the Byzantine Empire, to gradually accept Christian beliefs as their ruling structure through a network of political cooperation and economic coalition.^{xxxviii}

As a result, until the mid 8th century, the Frankish king had no real power over the lives of most of their subjects. This would change by 751, however, when a former Frankish Catholic mayor named Pippin assumed control of the throne and forced the previous Merovingian king, Childeric III, into exile in a nearby monastery. When Pope Stephen II arrived in Gaul to crown Pippin as the next Frankish king in the winter of 753, the northern Italian kingdom of the Lombard had infiltrated the Papal State. In retaliation, Pippin invaded Italy and orchestrated a heavy siege to the Lombard capital of Pavia in 755.^{xxxix} It was this victory that helped to establish a new identity for the Merovingian tribe that became known as the Carolingian Dynasty. What made the Carolingian Dynasty unique from the Imperial Period was that it transferred a larger share of political power to the Papal State in exchange for military support.

When Pippin's first son, Charlemagne, succeeded to the throne in 768, he initiated a policy that would alter how religious ordinance was to be distributed among the Frankish Empire. During the first thirty years of his reign, military expeditions into territories like Saxony, Lombard, Anatolia, and the Byzantine Empire became an annual event in which Frankish troops were ordered to impose Christianity onto pagan tribes,

and resort to violence if the latter did not compel to their demands.^{xl} According to Einhard in *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, any Frankish soldier who committed plunder on villages whose inhabitants did not obey Charlemagne's political orders "were rewarded with 'gold and silver and silks and other gifts,' in the words of the Annals of Lorsch for 793."^{xli} Even under the newly-unified Frankish system of kingship, killing remained a persistent tradition for soldiers to sustain their positions of loyalty and authority to Charlemagne. This was similar to what the religious clergymen who served under Theodoric the Great during the early 6th century did in order to protect the Gallish Church's Office.

For many centuries, historians have often debated among themselves how the goals and interests of various Frank rulers influenced the manner in which both Einhard and Gregory of Tours wrote their books. Gregory of Tours viewed an ideal ruler as one who adhered to the customary system of power and authority over others, both through politics and religion. He further accentuated the idea that a society of people should accept any set of constraints imposed onto them by their ruler without question.^{xlii} The fundamental set of values that Gregory of Tours used to compose his chronology, *History of the Franks* were derived from his belief that an ideal Frankish king should intermingle both the Church and State with the purpose to federate all the inhabitants within his empire so that they would not revert into a state of barbaric savagery and pagan worship.^{xliii} "This particular race of people seems always to have followed idolatrous practices, for they did not recognize the true God... If only...

their hearts could have been moved by that awe-inspiring Voice which spoke to the people, through Moses! ‘Thou shalt have no other Gods before me,’ it said.”^{xliv} On the other hand, Einhard identified effective kingship as a system in which a ruler utilizes the spiritual philosophy of Christianity as the most effective weapon to submit his subjects under his complete control while orchestrating a bureaucratic economy in which wealthy landowners maintain a sense of property rights in order for them to expand on their capitalist expenditures.

^{xlv} As made exceptionally clear in *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, Einhard also believed that a Frankish ruler should increase the splendor of his kingdom by extending his friendship with kings and peoples who lived in other realms. He noted that, in the case of Charlemagne, this magnificent ruler managed to win the admiration of King Alfonso of Galicia and Asturias through both his charismatic attitude and willingness to cooperate with other powerful rulers in order to sustain his prestige on the European continent.^{xlvi} “He loved foreigners and took great care in receiving them, so that their great number justifiably seemed a burden not only to the palace but also to the kingdom. But because of his greatness of soul, he was scarcely affected by this, for the praise of his generosity and his good reputation repaid him for the great trouble.”^{xlvii} Regardless of their different set of values on what Frankish kingship should look like, historians have agreed that both Einhard and Gregory of Tours shared the same idea that Christian ordinance was significant for a model of effective rulership.

In conclusion, the written accounts of Einhard and Gregory of Tours both portray

the ideals of Frankish kingship as having been emanated from the usage of Christian religion as a means of political authority despite the two-hundred-year difference. The texts that these two men wrote reveal the complicated history behind one of the largest empires in the world, and how its style of kingship was affected by the cultural values that persisted in Europe during the early Common Era. Kingship was developed and contested on many different levels, especially when it came to administration of different ethnic groups like the Saxons and Alamanni within Central and Western Europe. Most people who resided within the Frankish Empire based their own values off of the cultures that they originally hailed from. For example, the Visigoths who resided within the Iberian Peninsula abided by the Ancient German beliefs of paganism that their rulers like Eurich exercised in order to maintain control over them.^{xlviii} Therefore, certain rulers like Childeric I and his son Clovis I believed that an equal share of power should be distributed among the different entities that existed within the Frankish Empire in order to alleviate internal warfare. However, this plan would prove to be a failure as it only strengthened ethnic disloyalty to the Frankish ruler on an almost daily basis.^{xlix}

The writings of Einhard and Gregory of Tours were influenced by the different time periods of the Frankish Kingdom in which the two men lived through. Gregory of Tours witnessed the emergence of Christianity as a legal institution in the kingdom’s political structure, so he bore only a limited respect for his king, Theodoric the Great, while a substantial number of pagan tribes continued to practice their traditional faith

unharmed.ⁱ Einhard grew up at a time when his ruler, Charlemagne, managed to bring all of the conflicting territories under his grasp by imposing strict Christian sentiment onto the inhabitants. He therefore idealized his ruler as a living god for bringing unity to a kingdom that had been torn apart by ethnic strife for many centuries.ⁱⁱ Consequently, both Einhard and Gregory of Tours came to realize that the only way to administer control over a large empire was through the inception of a social network in which a Frankish king would wield effective authority through the enactment of religious litigation over all the inhabitants, including their chieftains.ⁱⁱⁱ Their desire would come

true when Charlemagne took over the Frankish throne in 768 and initiated a strict ruling system of Christian ordinance in which every citizen within the Empire was required to abandon their conventional religious beliefs in favor of Catholicism. Those who refused to obey were usually punished through death.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Einhard and Gregory of Tours saw an ideal ruler as one who established an authoritarian system. This notion of ruling would eventually play a role in how different countries within Europe would arise, such as Great Britain, and organize their own monarchies over the next few centuries that followed.

Works Cited

ⁱGregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Ernest Brehaut, In the Records of Civilization 2. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 130.

ⁱⁱRosenwein, 23.

ⁱⁱⁱRosenwein, 99.

^{iv}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*. Edited by David Ganz. (London: Penguin Classics Publishing, 1969), xiii.

^vEinhard and Notker the Stammerer, ix.

^{vi}Barbara Rosenwein. *A Short History of the Middle Ages*. (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2018), 24.

^{vii}Rosenwein, 42.

^{viii}Rosenwein, 37.

^{ix}Rosenwein, 39.

^xRosenwein, 21.

^{xi}Rosenwein, 22.

^{xii}Rosenwein, 23.

^{xiii}Gregory, 139.

^{xiv}Gregory, 141.

^{xv}Rosenwein, 26.

^{xvi}Gregory, 141.

^{xvii}Gregory, 504.

^{xviii}Rosenwein, 99.

^{xvix}Rosenwein, 99-100.

^{xx}Rosenwein, 25.

- ^{xxi}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, xiii.
^{xxii}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, 36-37.
^{xxiii}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, 18.
^{xxiv}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, xi.
^{xxv}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, xii.
^{xxvi}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, xi-xii.
^{xxvii}Gregory, 138.
^{xxviii}Gregory, 139.
^{xxix}Gregory, 139.
^{xxx}Gregory, 142.
^{xxxi}Gregory, 142.
^{xxxii}Gregory, 144.
^{xxxiii}Rosenwein, 27.
^{xxxiv}Rosenwein, 65.
^{xxxv}Gregory, 515-516.
^{xxxvi}Gregory, 518.
^{xxxvii}Rosenwein, 41.
^{xxxviii}Rosenwein, 47.
^{xxxix}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, x.
^{xl}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, xi.
^{xli}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, xi.
^{xlii}Gregory, 112.
^{xliii}Gregory, 506.
^{xliv}Gregory, 125.
^{xlv}Einhard and the Notker the Stammerer, 29.
^{xlvi}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, 29.
^{xlvii}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, 34.
^{xlviii}Rosenwein, 70.
^{xlix}Gregory, 128.
^lRosenwein, 26.
^{li}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, 8.
^{lii}Gregory, 124.
^{liii}Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, 14.

Masochism and Sinthomosexuality:

Caleb and Ava's Relationship in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*

By Miranda Hilt

There is a machine, a text machine, an implacable determination and total arbitrariness...which inhabits words on the level of the play of the signifier, which undoes any narrative consistency of lines, and which undoes the reflexive and dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration (23).

—Paul de Man, quoted in Edelman—

Introduction

Alex Garland's 2015 film *Ex Machina* offers a fascinating and provocative take on technology, relationality, and what it means to be human. The film's protagonist, Caleb, is a 26-year-old programmer at a search engine company Blue Book. He wins a contest and is invited to the CEO Nathan's estate to perform a modified version of a Turing test to Ava, a feminine humanoid robot with advanced artificial intelligence. Caleb becomes emotionally connected to Ava and is willing to do whatever it takes to protect her, including betraying his employer. While Ava appears to share this emotional bond with Caleb, her motivations remain obscure. The master signifiers of "human" and "machine" both seem to fail to adequately account for the complex entity that is Ava, as she resists the symbolization that Nathan wants so deeply to assign to her. Caleb and Ava's relationship is a major element of the plot that ultimately determines both character's fate. Garland

invites a psychoanalytic reading of Caleb and Ava's relationship in which Caleb represents the feminine masochist with an impulse toward the death drive, and Ava represents the sinthomosexual, an embodiment of the Real.

"Being of Language" and Relationality

After meeting Ava, Caleb admits to Nathan that he is unsure of exactly how to perform the Turing test that Nathan has proposed. The problem, as Nathan succinctly puts it, is how to discern simulation versus actual. Ava knows that she is a machine and notes as much during her first session with Caleb. She is not a carbon-based life form, but her mind and body are essentially that of a human. What Garland is shows us here is much like what Slavoj Žižek describes as the gap between the symbolic and the Real. Žižek characterizes humans as "being of language," suggesting that we ascribe master signifiers (S_2) to nonsensical signifiers (S_1) due to the societal demand that the Other solidify or render intelligible the subject's place in the social order.¹ There exists between S_1 and S_2 a crucial gap called the signifying chain, in which the subject is confronted with language. Despite the efforts of S_2 to cement a social identity and symbolic meaning to the subject, S_2 is never fully successful. There always exists a degree of S_1 that remains nonsensical, arbitrary, and enigmatic. Ava questions Caleb on his relationship status and if he is attracted to her, which prompts Caleb to ask Nathan why

he would imbue Ava with sexuality, to which Nathan replies, “what imperative does a grey box have to interact with another grey box? Can consciousness exist without interaction?” (Garland 0:46:10). It is the S_2 master signifiers of “human” and “machine” that very clearly fail to account for the perplexing and nuanced subject that is Ava.

When we first meet Ava, she has a human face, hands, and feet but the rest of her body is encased in a see-through mesh exposing her mechanical insides. During one of her early sessions with Caleb, Ava leaves and puts on a wig, dress, cardigan and stockings. For most of her remaining sessions with Caleb Ava is clothed. At the end of the film when Ava finally escapes from the confines of her room, she uses the “skin” of Nathan’s prototypes to make herself look completely human. It is notable that Nathan chose to put clothing at Ava’s disposal and he also chose not to cover her mechanical torso and limbs with “skin” even though he clearly had the capacity to do so. Nathan explains the latter by telling Caleb that if he couldn’t see that Ava was a machine, she would pass the Turing test without question. But as Ava warns and the viewer learns over the course of the film, Nathan is not the most trustworthy person. The way in which Ava becomes more and more human over the course of the film is significant to her relationship with Caleb.

As Tracy Hawkins and Kristen Gerdes suggest, “the very possibility of a subject, a human, rests on relationality” (68).ⁱⁱ Caleb is the first person that Ava has met other than Nathan, and it is clear from what Ava tells Caleb during the power outagesⁱⁱⁱ that there is no relationality that exists between Nathan and Ava. During the power outage in their second session, Ava warns Caleb about Nathan’s manipulative, lying behavior. Nathan brings

up the power outage during dinner and asks if Ava said anything to Caleb. Instead of revealing to Nathan what Ava had said about him, Caleb chooses to pretend as if nothing happened. Here, Garland is inviting the viewer to witness the complexities and vulnerabilities of Ava’s relationship with Caleb. Ava had to trust that Caleb would empathize with her and choose to mislead his employer.

Caleb and Feminine Masochism

Caleb’s choice to put himself on the line for the Other exemplifies the Freudian psychoanalytic concept of feminine masochism as defined by Richard Boothby. According to Boothby, the feminine masochist is inclined “towards an exaggerated tendency to take the part of the other, to put itself in the place of the other and to style itself in accordance with the other’s demands” (129). Caleb becomes enamored with Ava, adopting a voyeuristic habit of watching her on the CCTV from his bedroom. Caleb learns that Ava is not Nathan’s final model and that he plans on reformatting her brain which will cause her to lose all her memories, prompting Caleb to rewrite the automatic lockdown code triggered during the power outages so that instead of locking all the doors, they open. Boothby cautions against the “curse” of the feminine masochist, namely “being too readily bound up with the other... [and] constantly in danger of becoming the slave of the other to the extent that [he] cannot resist a sympathetic connection to something outside [himself]” (129).^{iv} After stealing a passed-out-drunk Nathan’s key card, Caleb breaks into Nathan’s office and finds videos of him building his prototypes and the humanoid robots subsequently trying to break free of their prison. He also finds the wardrobes containing his previous models. After making

this disturbing discovery, Kyoko, Nathan's housekeeper and sex slave peels back her skin to reveal to Caleb that she too is a machine.^v Caleb goes back to his room and scrutinizes himself in the mirror. He goes as far as to cut his wrist with a razor to make sure that he is actually a human. The psychoanalytic significance of this scene cannot be overstated. Caleb becomes so "bound up in the Other" that he thinks he may also be a humanoid robot with advanced AI created by Nathan.

While Caleb embodies the psychoanalytic concept of feminine masochism, he also exemplifies some characteristics of masculine aggression as defined by Boothby.^{vi} It is revealed by Nathan that Ava's face and body were formulated based on Caleb's pornography searches. Ava is not only physically appealing to Caleb, but she expresses romantic interest in him as well. She was quite literally created by Nathan in order to fulfill Caleb's sexual fantasy. Caleb's voyeuristic tendency of watching Ava on the CCTV is symptomatic of the unequal power dynamic between the two. Boothby notes, "male phantasy can be, and very routinely is, taken over by women and made their own" (132). It is revealed that Nathan's real test was to see if Ava would use her sexuality to manipulate Caleb as a means of escape. At one level, it seems as if Caleb's masculine aggressivity manifesting in his infatuation with Ava, his dream girl, allows him to be manipulated by both Ava and Nathan.^{vii} Ava would not leave Nathan's estate with Caleb, because Caleb was simply a means to an end. On a deeper level, however, Caleb's masochistic disposition and Ava's indeterminate status as neither human nor robot complicate such a reading.

The Freudian concept of the death drive is intimately tied up with feminine masochism.

Sigmund Freud defines the death drive as the urge to return to an earlier state of things that aims for the meaningless *jouissance* that existed before the primordial loss. Freud suggests that the drive is never successful because we can never really attain the lost object. Rather, we desire the very thing that frustrates our desires, the impeding obstacle. During Caleb's first session with Ava, she tells him that she has never left the room she is in now. Caleb is also not really in the same room as Ava during the session; rather, he enters from a separate door into a glass peninsula from which he can see and interact with Ava without actually being able to make physical contact. During her second session with Caleb, Ava puts on an outfit and wig and reemerges, telling Caleb that she would wear this on their date. She also tells him that she hopes he is watching her on the CCTV. In a later scene, Caleb fantasizes about him and Ava meeting and sharing a kiss in a beautiful, natural setting. What Garland shows here is that much of Caleb's desire for Ava stems from the fact that she is unattainable and that there is a barrier impeding their physical proximity to one another. Here, Caleb exemplifies the Freudian insight that "it is the difference in the amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is *demandé* and that which is actually *achieved* that provides the driving factor which will permit no halting at any position attained" (Freud 51).^{viii} Thus, Caleb's satisfaction is always partial. Ava cannot be the Ultimate Object of Caleb's desire, because of the frustrating obstacle. However, the very obstacle is necessary for his desire. By the time that the obstacle is removed, and Ava breaks free, Caleb has learned that Ava manipulated him as a means of escaping her imprisonment. It is Caleb's masochistic disposition impelling him toward the death

drive that Nathan exploits for his test and that Ava exploits as a means of escape.

Ava and Sinthomosexuality

The master signifier (S_2) is never fully successful at assigning meaning to nonsensical signifiers (S_1). The signifying chain, the gap in between the nonsensical and master signifiers, is the period in which the subject encounters language. When we consider Ava, a humanoid robot with advanced artificial intelligence, it seems inaccurate to call her either a human or a machine. In having Ava reject the signifiers that the symbolic order attempts to assign to her, Garland suggests to the viewer a psychoanalytic interpretation in which Ava represents the sinthomosexual. Lee Edelman describes sinthomosexuality as “scorn[ing] such belief in a final signifier, reducing every signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to jouissance in place of access to sense, on identification with one’s sinthome instead of belief in its meaning” (37). The symbolic order is by nature fragile and cannot completely envelope itself. There always exists a hole that leaves it vulnerable to the Real. The Real is the ambiguous, unintelligible, unfathomable, thing or void that exists just outside the symbolic order. The sinthomosexual is the embodiment of the Real.^{ix}

Caleb becomes emotionally involved with Ava, but also questions her intentions. After Ava begins expressing romantic interest in him, Caleb asks Nathan if he programmed Ava to flirt with him to distract him from the test. Nathan truthfully denies this. Although Nathan is using Caleb to see if Ava will manipulate him as a means of liberation, Ava chooses to flirt with Caleb not as the result of Nathan’s programming, but rather of her own volition. She appears to be genuinely interested in

Caleb, yet once she escapes, she locks Caleb in Nathan’s office to die. The question then remains: what does Ava want?^x The enigmatic essence of Ava’s desire invites the viewer to see Ava as the sinthomosexual that refuses symbolization and intelligibility.

During a session, Caleb asks Ava where she would go if she did go outside, to which she replies that she would go to a “a busy pedestrian and traffic intersection in a city” because it would “provide a concentrated but shifting view of human life” (Garland 0:39:50). In their next session, Caleb brings up a thought experiment called “Mary in the black and white room.”^{xi} The thought experiment had to do with the difference between a computer and a human mind. The thought experiment suggests that Mary in the black and white room is a computer, and Mary outside is human. By providing visuals of Ava leaving the confines of Nathan’s home accompanied by a voiceover of Caleb explaining the thought experiment, Garland is inviting the viewer to see Ava as the unintelligible gap for which language cannot account. The final scene of the film shows that Ava has made it to the traffic intersection. On one hand, Garland may be indicating that Ava has reached her intended endpoint. On the other hand, however, she is not smiling, and quickly moves along. She also said she wanted to be with Caleb yet ends up leaving him locked in Nathan’s office to starve to death. Through these scenes, Garland encourages a psychoanalytic reading of the Ava’s character as the sinthomosexual. Her motivations remain unintelligible, unfathomable, just as her status as human or machine remains ambiguous.

Conclusion

Ava is only able to escape her imprisonment as the result of Caleb’s

masochistic personality that causes him to become bound up in the Other. In the end, he is quite literally sacrificed for Ava's freedom. Caleb desires Ava because she represents the primordial meaningless jouissance that he desperately wants to return to but can never get back. Master signifiers can never account for the entirety of the nonsensical signifiers and as such, the symbolic order that requires

the intelligible master signifiers can never fully banish the Real. In refusing to ascribe to the meanings of "human" or "machine" that the symbolic order demands, Ava represents the sinthomosexual, that which remains enigmatic. The deep complexities and interconnected nature of Caleb and Ava's relationship is truly what makes Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* so remarkable.

Works Cited

- Boothby, Richard. "Love You to Death." *Sex on the Couch: What Freud Still Has to Teach Us About Sex and Gender*, Routledge, 2005, pp. 117-48.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Duke UP, 2004.
- Eng, David L., and Shinhee Han. "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia." *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, U of California P, pp. 343-71.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by James Strachey, Standard ed., New York, Norton, 1989.
- Garland, Alex, director. *Ex Machina*. Performance by Domhnall Gleeson, Alicia Vikander, and Oscar Isaac, A24, 2015.
- Hawkins, Tracy L., and Kirsten Gerdes. "Redefining Humanness: Relationality, Responsibility, and Hope in Ex Machina." *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, vol. 35, no. 1, Spring 2018, pp. 63-77. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=135448990&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Žižek, Slavoj. "Che Vuoi?" *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, New York, Verso, 1989, pp. 112-21.

For more on "being-of-language" and the gap between S1 and S2, see Žižek "Che Vuoi?" *The Sublime Object of Ideology* pp. 112-114.

ⁱⁱIn their essay "Redefining Humanness: Relationality, Responsibility, and Hope in Ex Machina" Hawkins and Gerdes argue that to be a human in a "contemporary context is to be a subject in relation to other subjects, a responsible agent, and a being who hopes for the future.

ⁱⁱⁱAva is causing the power outages by reversing the energy flow on the induction plates that she uses to charge her batteries. Their sessions are monitored by Nathan and it is only by triggering a power outage that Ava is able to speak to Caleb privately.

^{iv}For more on feminine masochism, see Boothby pp. 128-135

^vNathan first tells Caleb that Kyoko does not speak English after she accidentally spills wine all over the table during dinner. In a later scene, Caleb asks Kyoko where Nathan is, and she replies by unbuttoning her blouse. Nathan enters the room and tells Caleb that he's wasting his time trying to talk to Kyoko, but he wouldn't be wasting his time trying to dance with her. Kyoko and Nathan proceed to execute a choreographed dance routine. During another scene, Nathan makes out with Kyoko. It becomes clear that Kyoko's role at the estate is to serve Nathan both domestically and sexually. Nathan suggests that having a servant who doesn't speak English is a way for him to keep his project a secret, but after we learn that Kyoko is also a machine, on a deeper level, we can see that her inability to speak has more to do with taking away her autonomy and making her subservient. In the chapter entitled "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia" in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* Eng and Han assert that "estrangement from language, native and foreign, is a double loss" (357).

^{vi}For more on masculine aggression see Boothby pp. 123-128.

^{vii}Boothby suggests on pp. 134-135 that "there is a continuum between the poles of masochism and sadism with complicated admixtures of the two in the middle." Although Caleb embodies many qualities of the feminine masochist, in reality, he exists somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between masochism and aggressivity.

^{viii}Original emphases. For more on the death drive see Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* pp. 40-74.

^{ix}For more on sinthomosexuality, see Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* pp. 33-66.

^xVariation of the question "Che Vuoi?" proposed by Žižek.

^{xi}For more on the "Mary in the black and white room" thought experiment brought up by Caleb, see Garland 0:50:45.

Notes on Melodrama:

Women, Madness, and the Oppression of the Patriarchy

By Katie Warner

There is a unique relationship between melodrama and the female experience, a kind of innate connection that comes from being outcast by the society in which they are a part of. For the male audience sitting in the comfort and privilege of the patriarchy, melodrama, like women, is nothing more than a type of entertainment. It is consumed for amusement, but otherwise useless, excessive, and emotional. By watching and engaging with melodrama, one is left to consider the ways that melodrama affects one's understanding of feminism and film. Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), Todd Haynes' *Safe* (1995), and Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) are three melodramas that beg society to understand that melodrama itself is a metaphor for women. The reason melodrama gets such scorn as a genre is because it is associated with the female audience. If melodrama is mad, it is only because women have been labeled as such.

In her essay "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," Laura Mulvey discusses the ways that melodrama cannot resolve or reconcile the societal contradictions that it depicts and exposes. In Douglas Sirk's film *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), the

spectator follows the story of Cary, a widow who finds a second chance at love with a gardener named Ron, much to the chagrin of her children and upper-class friends. The film takes an in-depth look at the ways in which Cary's situation subjects her to the overt pressures and unconscious laws of society. These pressures and laws serve to undermine not only the female point of view, but also the heroine's right to a satisfactory ending, solidifying Mulvey's thesis that when it comes to melodrama, the ending will always leave the audience, particularly the female audience, unsatisfied.

Cary's experience with the overt pressures and unconscious laws of society begins long before her first encounter with Ron. As an upper-class woman of a certain age, Cary is not only expected to maintain a certain grieving period after the loss of her husband but is also supposed to continue to fulfill her role as mother to her children—a role that maintains an expected sexual repression, as mother figures are not meant to be seen as sexual creatures. This is paralleled in the narrative of Cary's daughter, Kay, as we watch her simultaneously reaching toward sexual maturity. Cary is "victimized by repressive

and inequitable social circumstances” (Schatz 149), a repressive environment that she becomes trapped in. Until she meets Ron, the “intruder-redeemer” who offers her a sexual reawakening. As the “intruder redeemer,” Ron is not so much her savior but rather an abrupt force that invokes a sense of redemption for Cary, but in reality, only serves to further entrap her in the society he claims to be redeeming her from. Cary struggles to reconcile the tensions between her sexual desires and her familial and societal loyalties. Her relationship with Ron compromises her relationship with her children, and she ultimately gives in to the pressure to end things with Ron in a desperate attempt to win back her children. This ultimately backfires, reinforcing the idea that the heroine can find reconciliation neither in following nor in digressing from the will of society.

Not only is Cary facing the pressures of dating someone beneath her status, but she also struggles to “overcome the taboo against her continued sexual activity in ‘civilized society’” (Mulvey 43). This struggle becomes even more pronounced at the film’s ending, after Ron is injured in a fall. Post Ron’s injury, Cary becomes, once again, a caregiver figure. Despite her feelings for Ron and her desire to be with him in an intimate way, Cary remains in a suspended state of sexual repression when he is left entirely dependent upon her, and the sexual desires between them never come to fruition. As Thomas Schatz so poignantly details in his essay “The Family Melodrama,” when a heroine of a melodramatic film ultimately commits to her lover-redeemer, “the heroine merely exchanges one trap for another, allowing her individual destiny to

be determined by the values of her new lover, rather than her previous one” (Schatz 158).

Despite the efforts Cary has gone through in fighting against the overt pressures and unconscious laws of the society she’s living in, in committing to be with Ron, Cary merely compromises those same pressures for what will essentially become another version of the same social norms that had repressed her in the first place. Rather than living a life untethered from the unspoken pressures and laws of society, Cary settles into a new lifestyle that will once again be dominated by the values of the patriarch. According to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, there is a double standard between men and women when it comes to sexual desire, that results in the heroine facing contradictions that men will not. Nowell-Smith writes that “for both women and men...suffering and impotence, besides the data of the middle-class life, are seen as forms of a failure to be male—a failure from which the patriarchy allows no respite” (72). The point that Nowell-Smith makes here is that, while men can fail at being masculine, women inherently fail by existing. Mulvey also backs this concept that the existence of the patriarchy creates contradictions for the heroines of melodrama, which are inherently responsible for the lack of resolutions at the denouement.

Mulvey asserts that “Hollywood films made with a female audience in mind tell a story of contradiction, not of reconciliation. Even if a heroine resists society’s overt pressures, its unconscious laws catch up with her in the end” (Mulvey 43). While films may attempt to reach the female audience in melodrama by presenting the female spectator with a situation that is

reminiscent of reality, the female spectator, like the female heroine, never quite reaches a resolution. Like Cary, even as she has resisted the pressures of society and chosen Ron despite those pressures, she still remains entrapped in the web of unspoken societal law, her life now governed by the social laws that Ron will require of her. Not only is this true, but the accident that drives Cary back to Ron doesn't even allow her to be displaced from the sexually repressed mother figure that she has been filling the role of up to this point in the film. Ron essentially replaces the role of her children as they move onward into adulthood.

Melodrama cannot resolve or reconcile the societal contradictions that it depicts and exposes because when written for the female audience, the spectator cannot receive what the heroine herself never receives. The overt pressures and unconscious laws of society undermine the satisfactory ending for both the female spectator as well as the female protagonist. In *All That Heaven Allows*, because Cary herself never truly escapes her sexual repression and societal pressures, the female spectator is left with an ending that does relatively nothing to reconcile the contradictions it exposed. We leave Cary on the screen in relatively the same manner that we find her—a sexually frustrated mother figure.

Following along a similar thread, in his film *Safe* (1959), Todd Haynes harnesses melodrama's innate ability as a genre to inhabit spaces of excess and speechlessness to forefront women's madness. In the same way that melodrama is often considered overly emotional and ridiculous, society applies the same kinds

of adjectives to women. Melodrama is, at its core, a space to consider the unsaid. The capacity that melodrama possesses to hold space for the emotionally charged makes it a space inherently equipped to hold and to depict madness itself. Similar to the way Mulvey works to consider the repression of women in melodrama and the ways in which melodramatic endings are always left unresolved as a result, Haynes takes this a step further by calling into question the ways in which madness works as its own kind of repression for the female protagonist, isolating them from both their own selves and their societies.

Haynes gives us a character that is forced to retreat within as she becomes increasingly repressed by her own society. When Carol becomes increasingly ill with what she is convinced is an environmental illness, she is written off by her husband, her peers, and her doctors because of the taboo and invisible nature of her particular illness. Not only is Carol forced to physically isolate herself in an attempt to avoid contaminations that could exacerbate her condition, but she is also thrown into another kind of social isolation as the society in which she exists works to convince her of her madness. She is a character shrunk entirely inside her own person. Rather than place the blame on Carol herself for the way she becomes stifled by her illness, "Haynes shifts woman's sense of suffocation...to the social space as a whole" (Belau and Cameron 42). She is sexually repressed in her relationship with her husband, maternally repressed in her distanced relationship with her stepson and repulsion toward motherhood, and even as a housewife she merely exists as a figurehead, her servants and staff doing the actual

house making. In these ways, by society's viewpoint, Carol is already stepping into madness.

These kinds of repressions that Carol is facing and her inability to fit within the confines of the society that has raised her echoes in Laura Mulvey's ideas about women in melodrama. In her essay "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," Mulvey discusses the ways that "the workings of the patriarchy...have left women largely without a voice, gagged and deprived of outlets...in spite of the crucial social and ideological functions women are called to perform" (Mulvey 39). Curated by a society that quite literally takes invisible illnesses as a sign of madness, *Safe* paints a picture that describes womanhood itself as a kind of invisible illness. Carol's illness is far deeper than environmental. One could argue that the inherent workings of the patriarchy are curating an illness out of womanhood itself, taking the voices of women and rendering them speechless. The patriarchy draws its power by convincing women they're mad. Carol's unexplainable symptoms of her environmental illness further shove her into the melodramatic box, exactly where society wants her.

This power of the patriarchy to convince women of a hysteria they do not inherently possess is seen vividly throughout Carol's story, primarily in her relationship with her husband, her encounters with her doctor, and the head of the Wrenwood facility. "In contrast to the medical discourse's denial of the disease, the staff at Wrenwood fully embraces it, accepting it as the identity of the person and as necessitating a complete isolation from the world" (Doane 9). But even within the confines of Wrenwood, a

space that is meant to be untangling the illusions of madness that Carol is being defined in, Wrenwood only reinforces the madness from another angle, convincing Carol that "hating herself is the origin of her disease" (Doane 9). The notion that Carol has somehow brought her illness upon herself adds a whole new layer to the concept of the ways in which society is working to convince her—and by extension all women—that her madness stems from the fact that she merely exists.

The melodramatic ending that permeates the irreconcilable becomes a poignant convention for Haynes. "Haynes brings to a literal climax the ordeal of a woman caught within—and outside—a set of genres that have consistently miscalculated her" (Belau and Cameron 44). Carol's final resolution is no resolution because madness cannot be resolved. Haynes uses the conventions of melodrama to think through illness and recovery in a society that always conspires to keep women mad. It's no secret that women and their symptoms are often overlooked in the medical field. Conditions and diseases go undiagnosed, written off as made up, overthinking, and/or being too emotional.

Mary-Anne Doane's essay "Pathos and Pathology" further draws on this connection. She describes the ways that "pathos is associated with 'lower' forms such as melodrama, forms historically associated with the feminine" (Doane 10). Melodrama is associated with the feminine on the sole basis that both are viewed by society as the embodiment of the overemotional. But it is because of this association that melodrama has become a genre that gives voice to women's issues in a way that other genres

are incapable of handling. How often is melodrama, like women, often not taken seriously, its bigger pictures, themes, and diagnoses all but overlooked as nothing more than a “women’s weepy?” By labeling melodrama as the emotional and the ridiculous—by labeling women the same—society convinces them that they are.

The connections between melodrama and the feminine are fraught with the convoluted ideas and inner musings of the patriarchy which have been thrust upon them. A space that recognizes the female experience in a way that only melodrama can, the genre has become a reflection of women’s issues in society, drawing in female viewers despite the contempt that melodrama often receives as a genre. Claire Johnston’s theorization of counter cinema notes that “women’s cinema must embody the working through of desire” (Johnston 33). Similarly, in his essay “Men’s Tears and the Roles of Melodrama,” Tom Lutz theorizes that “melodrama lives on for reasons that have nothing to do with nineteenth-century secularization and everything to do with contemporary desires” (Lutz 190). The ideology of melodrama as an embodiment of women’s desires, both presently and not, lies at the heart of melodrama as a feminine genre and its ability to tell the stories of female experience that continue to resonate with women in modern society.

Melodrama as ideology, as counter-cinema, asks the spectator to think through the concepts of film and feminism not only as separate entities, but also as an intertwined entity. Sofia Coppola’s film *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), is one example of a melodrama that toys with the relationship between feminism and film while also tugging

on the ideals of women’s contemporary desires. The film follows the narrative of the suicides of five sisters as seen through the eyes of their respective beaux. While the masculine lens of the film may appear to give itself over to the male gaze, Coppola works to manipulate a story that upends the male gaze in order to create a film meant specifically for the feminine gaze. This film not only acts as a poignant example of melodrama as counter-cinema, but also offers the female audience an ending that challenges melodrama’s inability to fully satisfy the female audience. Laura Mulvey discusses in her essay “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama” the ways in which melodramatic endings innately fail at forming resolution because our heroines are never satisfied. Mulvey states that “It is as though the fact of having a female point of view dominating the narrative produces an excess which precludes satisfaction” (Mulvey 43). However, *The Virgin Suicides* offers a unique challenge to Mulvey’s concept.

In writing an ending in which all five of the female characters commit suicide in order to escape their society, the female audience is not only offered a resolution for once, but the female characters also refuse to compromise to the will of the patriarchy and the society in which they lived. Tom Lutz notes that, in melodrama, “...the self-sacrificing woman... has lost some of the appeal it once had as a form of heroic role performance” (Lutz 193). The deaths of our five heroines in this narrative offer a kind of transcendence and a “fuck you” to society. In doing this, Coppola creates an inherently feminine film in its gaze and that satisfies the desires of contemporary women, who are no longer willing to play the self-sacrificing woman.

Indeed, women are becoming more and

more exhausted with film that continues to represent the same narratives that they are living out their daily lives. The narrative of the self-sacrificing woman is a story that has been the definition of the female existence since the beginning of time. Women are expected to be soft, compromising, servants, present only for male consumption. This is no longer a narrative space that women are either willing or want to fill. As Coppola strikingly insinuates, women are tired of being compromising, are tired of being the disease, are tired of being unsatisfied, and would rather die than continue to fit themselves into

the mold of the patriarchy. Mulvey continues to make the point that, "If the melodrama offers a fantasy escape for the identifying women in the audience, the illusion is so strongly marked by recognizable, real and familiar traps that escape is closer to a day-dream than a fairy story" (Mulvey 43). Mulvey is asking spectators to acknowledge that, for women, melodrama cannot be merely a story for consumption, because melodrama *is* the story of *women*. It is their daily life. When women watch melodrama, they are not watching it to escape from reality, they are watching it to see their reality given a voice.

Works Cited

- Belau, Linda and Ed Cameron. "Melodrama, Sickness, and Paranoia: Todd Haynes and the Woman's Film." *Film and History* 46.2 (2016): 35-45.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "Pathos and Pathology: The Cinema of Todd Haynes." *Camera Obscura* 19.3 (2004): 1-21.
- Johnston, Claire. "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." *Feminism and Film*. Ed. E. Ann Kaplan. London: Oxford UP, 2000. 22-33.
- Lutz, Tom. "Men's Tears and the Roles of Melodrama." *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.* Eds.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama." *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: BFI, 1987. 75-79.
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. "Minnelli and Melodrama." *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: BFI, 1987. 70-74.
- Schatz, Thomas. "The Family Melodrama." *Imitations of Life*. Ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991. 148-67.

The Differing Moralities of the Renaissance Play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and the Medieval Morality Play *Everyman*

By Audrey McCutchen

Morality has been explored and taught differently throughout the ages, and this is expressed in the art of its time. This difference is apparent in comparing Medieval theatre and Renaissance theatre and is due to the different societal approaches to understanding the world. The traditional Medieval morality play *Everyman* and the Renaissance play of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* written by Christopher Marlowe are excellent representatives for understanding the different approaches people had for morality in those different eras. *Everyman* talks about morality explicitly, through direct representation of characteristics and human qualities that every person has, whereas *Doctor Faustus* expresses morality through a study into one specific person's life choices.

Everyman follows the character of Everyman — who represents humanity — as he is confronted with Death and where his soul will go in life everlasting. He was not a bad man in his life, but his lust for worldly things puts him on a path headed to Hell, so God enlists Death to teach him a lesson to help him back on the path of good. Everyman is told he can bring whatever will help him in his spiritual reckoning with God and so he proceeds to

implore the characters which represent his worldly possessions, virtues, and friends and family to help him prepare for his spiritual reckoning. They all fall through except for the character Good Deeds, who stays with him to the end. Everyman does penance, and by the end of the play he is deemed worthy and dies and enters the Kingdom of Heaven.

The play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* follows a man named Doctor Faustus who becomes bored with the knowledge of the world and so turns to necromancy and worldly passion to sate his desires. He ends up selling his soul to the Devil for twenty-four years on Earth with all the riches and power of Hell and the companionship of a co-conspirator of Lucifer — the demon Mephistopheles — to do his bidding. The play follows Faustus in his worldly adventures for the next twenty-odd years, as well as his constant internal struggle over whether to repent and choose God and goodness over the Devil, until the end of his contract when he is subsequently sucked into Hell. Both plays deal with the struggle of good versus evil, heaven versus hell, and a human's choice in the matter, but they approach it at entirely different angles. Part of this is due to the contexts in which the plays were created.

In the Middle Ages, people approached life with a God's-eye view. People were concerned with the spiritual aspect of life and portrayed it in a very physical manner. This extended into their views on religion, art, science, and morality. For example, in many of the paintings during this time, there were no shadows because nothing could be hidden in the view of God. People depicted in the paintings who were more spiritually important, such as Jesus' mother, Mary, were much bigger in the paintings compared to other people and they generally had gold halos around their heads (Johnson). These examples physically portrayed the manifestation of the spiritual world. In the Medieval morality plays, spirituality represented physically manifested in talking about humanity, virtues, and vices generally and the struggle that each human goes through. In *Everyman*, the entire play takes place outside of time, outside of his earthly life and just before his death, and it talks about his intentions and actions openly where there is nothing hidden from the audience just as nothing is hidden from God. The characters represent ideas such as beauty, goods, good deeds, and family. The whole point is not to be realistic, but to discuss the moral issues and arguments surrounding these subjects openly and to make commentary on the morality of different choices in life.

The people of the Renaissance approached life with a human's perspective to everything, which similarly extended into their approach to religion, art, science, and morality. People were concerned with viewing the world realistically and exploring the depths of human emotion, values, and intellect through all forms of education and self-expression. This was expressed in paintings through highly realistic renditions of specific Bible scenes

where the grit and grime of those situations were thought through and portrayed, emphasized with shadows, and showed life and the stories through a bystander's perspective (Johnson). This rolled over into Renaissance theatre where plays follow a specific person, their struggles through life, and what that individual is feeling and thinking. The play *Doctor Faustus* takes place at a definite time and location — in Germany in the 1600s — and during twenty-four years of living a life with many explicit life choices addressed. The moral issues and arguments that are tossed around is through Dr. Faustus' individual perspective and deal with how the broad ideas manifest in a small slice of his life, just like how other people would have to struggle with them.

Both plays address the contemporary view or argument on morality, the church, heaven and hell, etc. The Medieval morality plays exemplify the generally uncontested views of their time: vices were bad, virtues were good, you have to pay penance for indulging in worldly pleasures, and the persuasion of the virtues would always overcome the persuasion of the vices when it comes down to eternal hellfire or heaven. The message of the play is clear throughout. There is a decisive right and wrong the entire time, and, by the end, the audience knows, and the main character has chosen, the exemplary decision.

Doctor Faustus was written in a time of great theological upheaval. One of the main issues being contested was whether humans were damned by fate or whether their actions could determine their experiences in the afterlife. At the beginning of the play, when Faustus is reading from the books in his study, he pulls out a book on theology and reads a segment aloud: "The reward of sin is death: that's hard... If we say that we have no sin, we

deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.” He then goes on to comment on what he’s just read, “Why, then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die! Ay, we must die an everlasting death. What doctrine call you this? *Che sera, sera*—What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu!” (Marlowe, 1). The character Faustus rejects the notion that people were condemned before birth only to sin and die. He says that if that is divinity, then he rejects it and will follow his lusts for necromancy, power, and worldly matters. He rejects all spiritual matters and even goes so far as to tell Mephistopheles — a spawn of Hell — that he doesn’t believe in Hell after he has summoned demons and signed his soul over to the Devil. He crows that it is pure imagination for himself to believe “That, after this life, there is any pain? No, these are trifles and mere old wives’ tales.” Mephistopheles counters with “Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind,” and that it does (Marlowe, 22).

It is not too much longer after this that Faustus has his first major regrets and contemplates repenting. He is quickly persuaded not to when the Devil himself shows up and reminds him of his contract. However, many times throughout the play, and after this incident, Faustus’ internal struggle comes to the surface in extensive monologues. During these monologues, a good angel and a fallen angel come on stage and fight for Faustus’ soul through swordplay and argument, which show his internal struggle in physical form — this is different from the Medieval physical manifestation because Faustus cannot see the angels, they are there solely for the dramatic benefit of the audience. It is clear to the audience by way of the good angel that Faustus still has a chance to repent and choose heaven even after he has sold his soul to the

Devil, however, the last time he rejects God, a few days or hours before he is to be taken into Hell, the good angel says that there is no more chance for him. What is interesting is that the playwright Marlowe leaves this debate of choice open ended — he never concludes one way or the other. In this play, the basic morals are clear by the end, but one has to really engage one’s critical thinking because the main character is not an exemplary model to follow. The chorus at the end of the play says not to do what Faustus did, but the audience has to decide for themselves what aspect of his actions are not advantageous to follow: sell your soul to the Devil, partake in worldly pleasures, to what degree, seek knowledge, fail to repent, or something else entirely? The play does show and subtly comment on what actions produce good or bad consequences, but it is never explicit.

In morality plays, the human character does not have much agency — he follows whichever virtues and vices have the better argument or bigger voice at that time. This is because the character is supposed to represent humanity broadly and show the trends of the fickle human soul. This shows the constant dilemma everyone faces and how we will all be swayed back and forth for our entire lifetime. In the end, it makes sure to outline and show the better option — how Good Deeds only will journey with you to comfort you in the inevitable solitude of facing death. Faustus, on the other hand, has agency and this is clearly displayed in the play. Throughout the play, when Faustus is not in utter denial over the nature of Heaven and Hell and his decisions are brought to the forefront of his mind, he contemplates them out loud and is in a seemingly constant push and pull on his debates of morality and what should be chosen.

He is choosing; where Everyman just followed the convincing option with no debate, Faustus does not choose the better of the two options presented to him, and it is even unclear to the audience most of the time what Faustus' options are. This form of portraying morality embodies the emotions and uncertainties that we ultimately have about not truly knowing what will happen to us after life ends or the full effects of our decisions on us and others. The decision was left completely up to Faustus. At one point in the play, the Devil puts on a miniature 'morality play' within Doctor Faustus to distract him from his thoughts upon the divine (Shimman). The vices come out one by one and present themselves in their full manifestation to Faustus and, after seeing the disgusting natures of the vices, he says "O, how this sight doth delight my soul!" despite what looks to be his disgust at the whole display and especially whenever the vices get physically close to him; it is as if he is denying his true nature (Marlowe, 29). This would *not* happen in a Medieval morality play. The human would turn to the virtues after such a raw display.

In the face of the inevitability of death, Heaven, and Hell, Everyman doth make the logical choice. Everyman is representing the transition into death taken by all people. Partway through his journey, when he realizes how unreliable his friends, family, and possessions are for his transition into the spiritual world, he questions what is left to him, "Of whom shall I now counsel take?" and comes to his senses, "I think that I shall never speed Till that I go to my Good Deed." He subsequently approaches her and, even though he has made her so weak she can't stand, she promises to accompany him (Cawley, 212-213). Faustus on the other hand, when faced with the inevitability of death, denies the

implications of it, denies God, and purposely seeks the Devil's assistance. At the very end, when we know he fully understands what will happen next, he panics, and implores the earth to swallow him whole, but there is no response and nobody left to turn to because he also knew he had already made that decision (Marlowe, 73). For Everyman, the choice was simple; for Faustus, the choice was hard. Faustus never truly believed in the full mercy of God; he was afraid of the wrath of the Lord because he was not an exemplary man and knew the wages of sin were death. He was too afraid of the unknown and the judgement and damnation he assumed he would get from God for unholiness that he preferred to stick with earthliness and its known consequences. Once, he inquires of Mephistopheles about the nature of Hell and Mephistopheles replies that Mephistopheles is in Hell at this very moment and Faustus jubilantly declares "Nay, an this be hell, I'll willingly be damn'd: What! sleeping, eating, walking, and disputing!" (Marlowe, 22). His blatantly wrong interpretation of Hell as exactly like earth was his way of trying to justify his decision, by denying what he knew to be true.

The plays in both the Medieval era and the Renaissance era portray morality through direct representation. Both *Everyman* and *Doctor Faustus* anthropomorphize human qualities, but they took different approaches for different reasons. In *Everyman*, Cousin, for example, who represents family, backs Everyman in his request for help, and then when she finds out what he wants, declares, "Nay, Everyman, I had liefer fast bread and water All this five year and more" (Cawley, 208). When he pleads again, she gives the lame excuse, "I have the cramp in my toe," just like a fair-weather friend or fickle cousin who might try to avoid you without directly saying

so (Cawley, 209). Goods takes on more of a manipulative figure, who, when called upon, actually delights in Everyman's predicament, despite Everyman having loved him. When Everyman calls upon Goods, Goods shows his true colors and declares of himself, "Therefore to thy soul Good is a thief; for when thou art dead, this is my guise Another to deceive in this same wise" (Cawley, 211). Goods was buttering up to Everyman during his life, but betrayed Everyman for his own game. All of the other vices, virtues, and representations take on their own flavors of characteristics that bring the play into a more dynamic place and shows the manifestation of the spiritual in the literal that the Medieval era was so fond of doing.

Doctor Faustus' anthropomorphized characters are there to make the play dynamic as well, but are more for emphasis than for deliberate spiritual manifestation. The Devil's flaunting of the vices is there to reemphasize Faustus' predicament that he literally made a pact with the Devil. The other place humanizing happens is with the good angel and the fallen angel arguing over Faustus. We eventually figure out that this is a physical version of his inner struggle just a few feet away. The clues we are given are that sometimes he hears the angels and sometimes he does not, despite their incredibly loud and vicious sword fight almost on top of him; he can never see them; and, occasionally, the angels and Faustus use the exact same sentences. This battle lets us know that despite all his hot air about dismissing divinity and not believing in Hell, he is well aware of the situation.

Lastly, the two different formats of these plays – due to the prevalent thinking of their respective times – create a different

relationship between the audience and the works themselves and impact the audience's understanding of morality. Medieval morality plays, including *Everyman*, were intended for the audience to decide and debate who – virtues or vices – has the better argument and how it might apply in their own lives. As Ramey outlines, oftentimes the actors would speak directly to the audience and jibe, implore, and preach straight to them (1). This creates a direct interaction with the text that can be more easily translated to one's own life. Ramey continues, "As they are subjected to such an array of pressures and appeals, the audience members' unscripted reactions serve as a means of investigating their own identifications and values" (1). The whole point of a morality play was a kind of exercise of faith, so the play was put on in such a way as to maximize the interaction between the audience and morals.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is in the format of a traditional story. Most stories have a moral to tease out but doing that requires effort. Sometimes it is hard to relate to a specific character's situation and dilemmas because they are so far from your own that it seems an easy choice to you. The character Faustus was extremely petty, overconfident, and full of lust. This helped contribute to his predicament in the story. His dilemmas with moralities are not impossible to learn from and relate to your life if you do not have his problems, but it can be harder than a morality play, for instance. On the other hand, if the character is dealing with problems that relate directly to your own struggles, it will be easier to connect to the morality and dilemmas of the story than in the morality plays. Renaissance storytelling makes the universal problems we face less abstract, manifesting into a specific situation familiar to our individual perspective of life, and,

ultimately, we can deeply relate to the struggle. This style of play is not as interactive as the Medieval morality play; you have to choose to translate the morals into your own life and ask yourself how you might respond in the situation at hand, otherwise you interact with the text like it is pure entertainment instead of an exercise in morality.

Medieval society saw in Christian morality a decisive right and wrong and believed that a human would choose the virtuous if given a clear perspective, which was expressed in their plays. This changes in the Renaissance play, as they argued that the choice between right and wrong was unclear and debated the idea of whether or not a human had a choice in their

fate. These two plays address the same subject and comparing them illustrates the change in Western moral thought. The Medieval era was all about outlining clear morals and exploring how best to follow God, which was evident in the experience and takeaway of the play; the entire play was an exercise of faith and prompted the audience to interact with morality in the context of their own life. The Renaissance, like Doctor Faustus himself, investigated a different part of theology, complicating right and wrong and questioning the very nature of God. Both plays delve deep into theological thought, twining together a narrative that opens up a contemplative space for thoughts in morality.

Works Cited

- Bradford, Wade. "Everyman Study Guide." ThoughtCo, Aug. 27, 2020, [thoughtco.com/everyman-a-medieval-morality-play-2713422](https://www.thoughtco.com/everyman-a-medieval-morality-play-2713422).
- Cawley, A. C., editor. "The Moral Play of Everyman." *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*. Orion Publishing Group, 1993.
- Craig, Hardin. "Morality Plays and Elizabethan Drama." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Apr., 1950, pp. 64-72. Oxford University Press, doi: 10.2307/2866678
- Johnson, Amy. "ARTH Survey II: 15th-21st Centuries." Spring, 2019, Art and Communication Department, Westerville, OH. College Lecture.
- Klaus, Carl H., et al. "Everyman." *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater, Fifth Edition*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003, pp. 159-164.
- Klaus, Carl H., et al. "Medieval Theatre." *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater, Fifth Edition*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003, pp. 159-164.
- Marlowe, Christopher. "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus." Edited by Jim Manis, The Pennsylvania State University, 1998. Retrieved online as .pdf from PSU Electronic Classics Series Production.
- Ramey, Peter. "The Audience-Interactive Games of the Middle English Religious Drama." *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 47, No. 1, Spring 2013, pp.55-82, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23526594>. Accessed 30 September 2020.
- Shimman, Lauren L. "The Morality Play in Doctor Faustus: Faustus as Reprobate Man."
- Wright, Clare. "Empathy with the Devil: Movement, Kinesthesia, and Affect in The Castle of Perseverance." *Theatre Survey*, vol. 60, no. 2, May 2019, pp. 179-206. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1017/S0040557419000048.

The Dissolute Punished:

An Overview of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, K. 527

By Alec Arnett

Introduction

He is hot-tempered. He is witty. He brushes off anything that may result in consequence. He lacks soul. He is Don Giovanni. *Don Giovanni* is a *dramma giocoso* with music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749-1838). At the heart of the story is Don Giovanni, a young Spanish nobleman who has a yearning for seducing women. He is one of the most talked-about characters of 18th century opera, his personality and character often being interpreted by historians in vastly different fashions. However, one thing everyone agrees on: *Don Giovanni* is riveting from the very beginning and tells a story that is still discussed today. Mozart uses *Don Giovanni* to exemplify the ideals of the Classical era's opera that has continued to influence Western classical music today.

The Life of Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was the seventh and last child born to Leopold Mozart (a famed composer in his own right) and Maria Anna in Salzburg. Only he and their fourth child survived. When Mozart was three years old, his older sister began

receiving keyboard lessons from their father. He was drawn to the instrument and spent countless hours at the keyboard. He showed immense promise, and by the age of four was already trying his hand at composition. By six, he was teaching himself to play the violin. His father recognized his prodigy and, in 1762, took the family to Vienna, the epicenter of high-art music in the 18th century.ⁱ The family returned to Salzburg in 1763. Fast-forward to 1783 and Mozart returned to Vienna, where he would begin the busiest and most successful years of his life.ⁱⁱ

“

Mozart uses *Don Giovanni* to exemplify the ideals of the Classical era's opera that has continued to influence Western classical music today.

”

The Origin of *Don Giovanni*

Don Giovanni was first performed in 1787 at the National Theatre in Prague. The English premier took place in 1817 at Her Majesty's Theatre in London, and it was performed for the first time in America in 1818. It is set in 17th century Seville, a small Spanish city, and is presented in two acts.ⁱⁱⁱ It includes an overture, arias, recitatives, choruses, duets, and small ensemble numbers (4-7 singers). *Don Giovanni* is an opera of the early Classic era (ca. 1750-1820) and is categorized as a *dramma giocoso*. *Dramma giocoso* was a term used in the mid-to-late 18th century to designate a comic opera. Early usage of the term described a libretto that featured character-types from serious opera alongside everyday characters often featured in comic opera. The term is interchangeable; *Don Giovanni* is described as a *dramma giocoso* on the libretto, but as an *opera buffa* on the score. It is believed that librettists favored the term *dramma giocoso* and composers routinely thought of their works as *opera buffa*.^{iv} Comic opera was a genre of the Enlightenment: a social, philosophical, and intellectual movement of the Classical era that centered around the sovereignty of reason and ushered in the disappearance of music being only for the high-class. This new subgenre in opera featured an emphasis on everyday people and characters. Italian comic opera was referred to as *opera buffa*.

Don Giovanni came to be after a visit by Mozart to Prague in 1787. His music was widely received, and he left with 1,000 gulden (gold or silver coins used in the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria) and a commission by impresario Pasquale Bondini and director Domenico Guardasoni to

compose a comic opera for the following season. The Prague directors had been saved from abandonment by Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786; libretto by Da Ponte), and they wanted to continue that success with a new work. Mozart once again paired with Da Ponte and the pair produced another success.^v Their work soon garnered a reputation for significant difficulty, very much attributed to the dance meters of the first finale, and the harmonic richness of the second.^{vi} Mozart and Da Ponte did not meet until 1783; Mozart was 27 and had already composed ten operas while Da Ponte was 34 and had not staged a single opera. They were introduced through a mutual friend, Baron Wetzlar, who was Mozart's landlord. The two first worked together on *Figaro*, and soon after wrote *Don Giovanni* to welcome her royal highness Maria Teresa, archduchess of Austria, as she passed through Prague. Given its proposed function, the title *The Dissolute Punished* was favored above *Don Giovanni*. The new opera was not ready upon the princess' visit, so a performance of *Figaro* was given instead, and the two continued work on *Don Giovanni*.^{vii} Mozart references this in a letter to Baron Gottfried von Jacquin, dated 15-25 October 1787.

Dearest Friend! You probably think that my opera is over by now. If so, you are a little mistaken. In the first place, the stage personnel here are not as smart as those in Vienna, when it comes to mastering an opera of this kind in a very short time. Secondly, I found on my arrival that so few preparations and arrangements had been made that it would have been absolutely impossible

to produce it on the 14th, that is, yesterday. So yesterday my ‘Figaro’ was performed in a fully lighted theatre and I myself conducted.^{viii}

Description of the work

The ideals of Classical opera are exemplified throughout *Don Giovanni*. One of the biggest characteristics of opera at this time was the blending of humor and drama. *Don Giovanni* is an excellent example from the very beginning. The *atto primo* (first act) opens with an overture that is said to have taken Mozart only three hours to compose. On the eve of the premier, it had not yet been written, and after an evening with friends, Mozart withdrew to his room to write the piece that sets the tone for the entire opera.^{ix} It is written in cut time, the key of D minor, and *andante* tempo. This sets up the high drama that will return later in the music. The instrumentation is for *flauti* (flute), *oboi* (oboe), *clarinetti* (clarinet), *fagotti* (bassoon), *corni* (horns), *clarini* (trumpet), *timpani*, and *archi* (strings). The first two measures sound a bold, *forte* tonic chord, followed by a dominant first inversion chord for an additional two measures. The suspenseful D minor *andante* lasts for 30 measures and then modulates to the parallel major, and the tempo picks up, now in D major and marked *molto allegro*. This is a representation of the comedic element to the music. The D major tonality lasts for only a few measures as accidentals begin to be used. The theme is elaborated on for several more measures until the overture comes to a halt after 292 measures.

Scene I begins with the *Introduzione*, “Notte e giorno faticar,” which introduces the principal characters of the opera. It is written in common time, the key of F major, and with a tempo marking of *molto*

allegro. The instrumentation is for *flauti*, *oboi*, *fagotti*, *corni*, and *archi*, along with the voices. The orchestra has a 10-measure introduction ending on a dominant-seven chord with a *fermata*. The first character to be introduced is Leporello, Don Giovanni’s servant, which is a bass role. Leporello sings about his desire to no longer live life as a servant. Instead, he wishes to be a gentleman living with a beautiful woman. Next introduced is Donna Anna. She is the daughter of the Commendatore and is sung by a soprano. In this scene, Don Giovanni is seen leaving the home of Donna Anna with Donna Anna in pursuit. The titular role is sung by a baritone and is described as a “young and extremely licentious nobleman.” Donna Anna sings, “there’s no hope, unless you kill me, that I’ll ever let you go!” The Don responds, “Idiot! You scream in vain. Who I am you’ll never know!” He has just assaulted her while wearing a mask. There is then a moment of polyphony as Donna Anna and Don Giovanni repeat their phrases as Leporello reenters and sings, “What a racket! Heaven, what screams! My master in another scrape.” The polyphony continues as Donna Anna cries for help, calling Don Giovanni a “betrayers.” Donna Anna’s father, the Commendatore, approaches and Anna rushes back into the house. The Commendatore challenges Giovanni to a duel, and the orchestra takes over with nine measures of suspenseful music to accompany the “combattono.” This is another example of the progressive nature of opera; the orchestra is becoming more and more important (we see the height of this notion in Romantic opera), and opera is becoming more holistic as opposed to being a medium for the “star singer” to shine. In

an unfair contest, the Don slays the old man. Giovanni and Leporello run away, leaving Anna and her fiancé, Don Ottavio (tenor), to find her father dead.

In Scene V there is an aria sung by a new character, Donna Elvira. A soprano, she is described as “a lady from Burgos, abandoned by Don Giovanni.”^{xi} The aria is written in the key of E-flat major, common time. The instrumentation calls for *clarinetti*, *fagotti*, *corni*, and *archi*, in addition to the voices. A 12-measure introduction leads into Elvira’s aria. She wants to know where the man is who betrayed her. She refers to him as a “rascal” and “villain,” and if he ever comes back to her, she will “tear out his heart.” Don Giovanni and Leporello witness this and have a side conversation. The Don calls her a “poor girl” for she was abandoned by her lover; he decides he will try to console her. Leporello makes an aside; “Thus he has consoled eighteen hundred.” Giovanni approaches Elvira and thus begins the recitative. This is a true recitative with speech-like patterns in the voices sung over sustained chords in the orchestra. Leporello recognizes her; “Oh wonderful! Donna Elvira!” Elvira is surprised to see Giovanni and calls him a pack of lies and a monster. Leporello makes another of many humorous asides; “What becoming titles! It’s lucky she knows him well.” Giovanni calls on Elvira to let him speak, but she asks, “what can you say, after so black a deed?” She goes on to describe this “black deed” as Giovanni having sneaked into her house, seduced her, declared her his bride, and then abandoned her. The two continue to argue until Leporello sings his aria that puts an end to the dispute. He tells Elvira that she was not the first and will not be the last woman for

the Don and shows her a list of the women that his master has loved. The scene ends with Elvira’s recitative expressing how she must get revenge for her heart.

One of the most recognizable songs from *Don Giovanni* occurs in Scene IV. It is a duet between Giovanni and Zerlina. Zerlina, a soprano, is a peasant girl. She is attending a party to celebrate her marriage to Masetto when she meets the Don. Leporello is told to “take care” of Masetto while Giovanni seduces Zerlina, promising to marry her, although she is initially reluctant. The duet is written in the key of A major, 2/4 time, and with a tempo marking of *andante*. The instrumentation in addition to the voices calls for *flauto*, *oboi*, *fagotti*, *corni*, and *archi*. The first stanza is sung by Giovanni: “There I’ll give you my hand, there you’ll say yes: see, it is not far, my love, let’s leave from here.” Zerlina responds, “Should I or shouldn’t I, my heart trembles at the thought, it’s true I would be happy, I can still have fun!” In measure 49, there is a *fermata* followed by a time signature change in measure fifty. The duet ends in 6/8 time. In the compound meter, the voices are mostly homophonic, singing at the same time in the same rhythm, but with different notes. In the duple meter, the melody typically changes between voices: Giovanni sings and Zerlina responds, and so on. The duet ends, “Come, come, my darling, to restore our pleasure of an innocent love.”

The *atto primo finale* is a massive 653-measure section. It involves all the main characters: Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Zerlina, Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni, Leporello, and Masetto, and includes the chorus. The addition of the chorus in opera is another ideal that began in the Classic era

and came to fruition in the Romantic era. It begins in the key of C major, common time, and with a tempo marking of *allegro assai*. The instrumentation calls for *flauti, oboi, fagotti, corni, clarini*, and *archi*. The finale encompasses numerous scenes, and the key changes multiple times with an occasional change in time signature. At measure 406, the *menuetto*, Mozart introduces a split orchestra of orchestra I, orchestra II, and orchestra III. The orchestras return to *tutti* at measure 468, the *allegro assai*. The *piu stretto* begins in measure 623, in the key of C major, and the act I finale comes to completion at measure 653.

In the *atto secondo*, scene III, Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni, and Leporello are involved in a recitative that shows Leporello disguising himself as Giovanni to trick Elvira. It works; the two run off together, and Giovanni claims fate to be on his side. The Don picks up a mandolin and begins to sing one of the most well-known arias from the opera. In the score it is referred to as a *canzonetta* and is written in the key of D major, 6/8 time, with an *allegretto* tempo marking. These compositional choices set up the lilting serenade about to be sung by Giovanni. The instrumentation calls for only mandolin and *archi*. It is titled according to the first phrase of the song, “Deh vieni alla finestra.” Don Giovanni sings beneath Donna Elvira’s window to seduce her chambermaid, whom he has now set his sights on. Masetto and a group of peasants arrive with weapons, ready to take down Giovanni. The Don imitates his servant and offers them his assistance. The peasants disband, going in every direction, and leave Don Giovanni and Masetto. Giovanni beats Masetto to a pulp, and Zerlina hurries to

him. In the courtyard of Donna Anna’s house, Leporello reveals his identity and rushes away. Giovanni and Leporello find themselves in a graveyard: Scene XI. They trade back their clothes as Giovanni tells Leporello, in the form of a recitative, of a woman he seduced while presenting his false identity. Leporello asks, “But what if this girl had been my wife?” Giovanni responds, “Better still!” Just then the statue of the late Commendatore begins to speak, “You will have your last laugh before the next dawn!” Giovanni plays it off as a joke and invites the statue to dinner. Later, the statue appears at Giovanni’s door and asks if he will come dine with him. Leporello tries to save the Don by claiming he “does not have time,” but Giovanni says, “no one will say of me that I have ever been afraid.” He accepts the statue’s hand and feels a cold chill. The statue gives Don Giovanni a chance to save himself; all he must do is repent. He refuses to do so. The statue gives him a second and a third chance. Giovanni refuses each time. The statue says, “Ah, your time is up,” and, suddenly, flames appear on all sides and the ground trembles beneath Giovanni’s feet. The chorus of demons begins to sing, welcoming Don Giovanni to hell. The flames engulf Giovanni and once everything returns to normal, the other characters enter for the epilogue which concludes the *atto secondo*. The *atto secondo finale* score is larger than that of the *atto primo*, consisting of 871 measures. It encompasses numerous scenes which have many key changes and the occasional change of meter. It begins in the key of D major, common time, with a tempo marking of *allegro vivace*. The instrumentation calls for *flauti, oboi, clarinetti, fagotti, corni, clarini, tromboni*,

timpani, and *archi*. The opera ends with a powerful perfect-authentic cadence in the tonic key of D major.

How *Don Giovanni* was Received

Don Giovanni was received exceptionally well. E.T.A. Hoffman (1776-1822), a German author, called it “the opera of all operas.”^{xii} Johann Goethe (1749-1832), a famous German poet, said, “How can anyone say that Mozart ‘composed’ *Don Giovanni*? It is a spiritual creation, the detail, like the whole, made by one mind in one mold, and shot through with the breath of life.”^{xiii} Mozart himself speaks of the high acclaim *Don Giovanni* was met with in a letter to his friend Gottfried von Jacquin, dated 4 November 1787.

Dearest, most beloved Friend, I hope you received my letter; - my opera *Don Giovanni* was staged on 29 Oct. and met with the most tremendous acclaim. - It was given yesterday for the 4th time - for my benefit...^{xiv}

Don Giovanni is still regarded today as a hugely influential work and one of Mozart’s best. However, it is also analyzed for the sexually explicit nature of the actions of the Don himself. Liane Curtis tackles the sexual politics of *Don Giovanni* in her 2000 entry to the NWSA journal. She references the “catalogue aria” (act I, scene v) which is Leoporello telling of his master’s conquests: “tall ones he calls majestic, short ones, always dainty. He seduces older women just to add them to his list; but his ruling passion is for the young novice. He doesn’t give a hoot for wealth, or ugliness, or beauty; provided that she wears a skirt, you know what he’ll do.”^{xv}

Curtis calls attention to the fact that this is often regarded as a great comic piece, but some students who study this opera may be unable to see it as funny, given possible history of sexual assault. Curtis presents the opposite extreme view, “Everyone wants to be a Don Giovanni.”^{xvi} She claims these extreme views are the result of an oversimplification. She says, “Classroom examination of operas such as *Don Giovanni* needs to include more detail, even studying the work in full, so that the complexity of human emotions and interaction can be examined.”^{xvii} While *Don Giovanni* is held in high esteem for its musical greatness, the topic and details of the story are often put under scrutiny.

The Lasting Impact of *Don Giovanni*

Clearly, *Don Giovanni* has successfully captivated audiences, in more ways than one, since the eighteenth century. The opera is a definitive work in the catalogue of W.A. Mozart. Following the Da Ponte operas (*Figaro*, *Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte* of 1790), Mozart entered a new phase of his career. He gave fewer concerts and began to compose more significantly in other genres, such as the symphony. The beginnings of *Don Giovanni*, also marked a clear, new stage of development for Mozart. The opera was the culmination of “a greater density, and weight and expansiveness and fullness of sonority, an even greater richness of part-writing.”^{xviii} Above all, *Don Giovanni* is still loved, appreciated, and performed regularly. The arias are a part of the standard repertoire for voice students across the globe. It is impossible to discuss the great Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart without mentioning his great *dramma giocoso*, *Don Giovanni*.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Emily. *Mozart's Letters: An Illustrated Selection*. London: Macmillan, 1990.
- Cairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.
- Curtis, Liane. "The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's 'Don Giovanni'." *NWSA Journal* 12, no. 1 (2000): 119-42. Accessed September, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316712>.
- "Dramma giocoso," in Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 2001), VII, 557.
- Eisen, Cliff, and Stanley Sadie. "Mozart. South German-Austrian family of musicians," in Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 2001), XVII, 276-337.
- Heartz, Daniel. "Mozart and Da Ponte." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (1995): 700-18. Accessed September 29, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742381>.
- Kaiser, Joachim. *Who's Who in Mozart's Operas from Alfonso to Zerlina*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1987.
- Kobbé, Gustav, George Henry Lascelles, and Earl of Harewood. *The Definitive Kobbé's Opera Book*. 1st American ed. Putnam, 1987.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, Cliff Eisen, and Stewart Spencer. *Mozart: A Life in Letters*. Penguin Classics. Penguin Books, 2006.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. Don Giovanni, K. 527. Hungarian Radio Chorus. Michael Halász. Naxos 8.660080-82, 2001, <https://otterbeincoll.nm13.naxosmusiclibrary.com/catalogue/item.asp?cid=8.660080-82>.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Don Giovanni KV 527*, Karl Vötterle (Germany: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 2005).
- Rushton, Julian. "Don Giovanni." Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. London: Macmillan, 1994. Volume 1, pp. 1203-1206.
- Solomon, Maynard. *Mozart: A Life*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.
- ⁱMaynard Solomon, *Mozart: A Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), pgs. 35, 38, 40.
- ⁱⁱStanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 2001); s.v. "Mozart," Vol. XVII, pp. 276-337.
- ⁱⁱⁱThe Earl of Harewood, ed., *The Definitive Kobbé's Opera Book* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987); s.v. "Don Giovanni," pp. 93-103.
- ^{iv}Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 2001); s.v. "Dramma Giocoso," Vol. VII, p. 557.
- ^vCairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 136-168.
- ^{vi}Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1994); s.v. "Don Giovanni," Vol. 1, pp. 1203-1206.
- ^{vii}Heartz, Daniel. "Mozart and Da Ponte," in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, no. 4, 1995.
- ^{viii}Anderson, Emily. *Mozart's Letters: An Illustrated Selection*. (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 201-203.
- ^{ix}The Earl of Harewood, ed., *The Definitive Kobbé's Opera Book* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987); s.v. "Don Giovanni," pp. 93-103.
- ^xKaiser, Joachim. *Who's Who in Mozart's Operas from Alfonso to Zerlina*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1987.
- ^{xi}Ibid.
- ^{xii}Cairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 136-168.
- ^{xiii}Ibid.
- ^{xiv}Cliff Eisen, ed., *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: A Life in Letters* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 531.
- ^{xv}Curtis, Liane. "The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's 'Don Giovanni,'" in *NWSA Journal* Vol. 12, no. 1, 2000.
- ^{xvi}Ibid.
- ^{xvii}Op. Cit.
- ^{xviii}Cairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 136-168.

The Use of Narrative in the Art of Faith Ringgold

By Lindsay Lisanti

Faith Ringgold's artwork has been political from its beginning. Her work does not shy away from any issue that she might see as a black female artist and activist creating work from 1960s to today. No matter what the medium, the year it was created, or the subject matter

Ringgold's work is always bright and bold, subtle and to the point. Her art is transformative and calls the viewers' attention to systematic problems that are a historical backbone in

American culture. She uses words and narrative in her art as a unique

form of activism. The causes that Ringgold cares about are seen and explored in all the different eras of her work, whether it is the early oil painting series like the American People Series, the posters made for social justice causes, the story quilts, or even the later illustrated children's books. Ringgold is a storyteller that uses her art to bring to light

uniquely American issues. The repetitive use of flag imagery and the decisive words she includes in her work are two of the strongest features of her artwork as activism.

This work with the flag and depicting social issues in the United States is felt very strongly in her

American People Series. Ringgold created 20 large oil paintings in this series for her first solo show at the Spectrum Gallery in New York City (Ringgold). She started making this series in 1967 and showed the entire collection in her first solo show in 1967. Ideas of race are analyzed



Figure 1 The American People Series #19: *US Postage Commemorating the Advent of Black Power*, 1967, Oil on Canvas, 72x96

in this series. This early series of hers has two amazing examples of how Ringgold uses text and the image of the American flag to show her thoughts and ideas about how black people are regarded in America. In her piece titled *The American People Series #19: US Postage Commemorating the Advent of Black Power* (Figure 1) Ringgold uses text in a

remarkably clever and ingenious way. The painting features 100 distinct snapshots of a small section of faces including just the eyes and nose. 90 of these faces are painted with a lighter, whiter complexion while 10 are faces that feature darker skin tones. These numbers are significant for Ringgold because when she painted this black people accounted for only 10% of the current population (Tate Talks: Faith Ringgold). This figure has grown to 13% in the 53 years since she made this work. This intricately planned detail simply does not stop with those numbers of face. Ringgold has hidden phrases in this painting. The more visible of these two phrases are the words “black power” written in a diagonal

across the postage stage; the ten black faces intersect this text, creating a black X across the postage stamp. This phrase is very legible and easy to read in the composition, and this may have to do with a public excitement or fear surrounding the idea of black power. The term “black power” in a community like Harlem was very energizing, but when the phrase was brought to another setting such as an art gallery in Manhattan the phrase became tangled with fear.

The second phrase that Ringgold has included in this piece is “white power.” Written in the negative space between the faces, and written vertically instead of horizontally, the words are almost

impossible to see upon first inspection of the painting. The words act as an armature for the faces. The phrase “white power” is the literal structure of the painting, and as it holds everything up, it does it discreetly. This hidden and sinister message of white power in this piece was very poignant in the 1960s, but it rings just as true in 2020.

Another work from the American People that Ringgold is most well-known for is titled American People Series #20 *Die* (Figure 2). This is a very large oil painting



Figure 2 The American People Series #20: *Die*, 1967, Oil on Canvas, 72x144

that was created to resemble Picasso’s *Guernica*, but instead of depicting the bombing of a town, Ringgold depicts a race riot in America. The work reminds the viewer of

Guernica by utilizing a choppy greyscale background that roots the work in a solemn and chaotic mood. This painting is striking in its composition as it features all types of people engages in very gruesome acts of violence. There is a white woman lunging across the painting, holding a bloodied baby and has blood pouring down her face as well. There are two men struggling in the right corner of the painting with the white man brandishing a gun and a black man brandishing a knife. This is another comment by Ringgold on the power dynamic seen in the 1960s, the sides were not equal opponents one side had brought a gun to a knife fight. Two children, a white boy and

black girl, are seen cowering in fear while they clutch onto each other in an almost desperate embrace. Ringgold's composition and choice to depict the terror and violence of race riots in America is incredibly bold. She manages to show the violent chaos of race riots, while still appealing to the viewer's emotion. Ringgold is able to tell a story about a period of time in America that is comparative to something as horrific as the bombing of a small town in Spain, i.e., Guernica. It is poignant to note that this painting was seen as extremely gruesome when it was first exhibited in 1967; in fact,

Ringgold notes in her memoir that a white woman left the opening reception when she saw *Die* as the first painting getting off the elevator, claiming that the work was too violent for her to look at and that she needed to leave immediately (Ringgold). Later audiences remarked that they couldn't see the blood on the painting, as we have become so desensitized to seeing blood in the media that we consume. With *Die* Ringgold asks the question to what end are we fighting about the color of our skin?

While the American People's series was a serious and intentional step toward activism Ringgold did not directly get involved with Women's Rights and Civil Rights issues until the 1970s. Ms. Ringgold

began to notice that making art is not enough to effect real, institutional change. Most of the time real change is started through bureaucracy, and that is exactly what Faith Ringgold learned in the 1970s. She began demonstrating against the exclusion of black and female artists by New York's Whitney Museum of American Art

and the Museum of Modern Art in 1968-1970 (Morris). Another example of how Ringgold became personally involved in activism is when she became known as one of the "Judson Three."

In 1970 a group of artists created an art show at Judson Memorial Church in New York called

The People's Flag Show. Ringgold showed a work from her Black Light Series titled #10: *Flag For the Moon: Die N****** (Figure 3) and it was this specific work that resulted in her arrest and the arrests of two other artists who organized the show for desecrating the American flag. This arrest was not one that resulted in any sentence against Ringgold, and the legal fees were handled by a legal group dedicated to artist's freedom to express themselves. This painting by Ringgold in the Black Light Series is another pivotal painting which shows the importance of incorporating words into her art. Ringgold was still exploring how to use words in discreet ways. In the Tate talks interview with her daughter about her



Figure 3 Black Light Series #10: *Flag For the Moon: Die N******, 1967, Oil on canvas, 36x50

work she talks about the meaning of this particular work. To summarize, she said that this is what the first flag on the moon would say because so much money was spent on the moon landing, while there were still black children in America dying of hunger. Ringgold was able to politicize the flag with her words, but still execute it in a way that makes the viewer really consider the problems in their own country.

Ringgold was attached to many causes in New York City, but from 1971-1972 she created a poster called *United States of Attica* (Figure 4). This poster was dedicated to the men who had died in the 1971 Attica Prison riots that were fought against the horrible living conditions in the New York state prison. Text is the main aspect of this poster. The poster depicts a hand drawn outline of the United States, with a title at the top that reads,

“The United States of Attica founded by the American People on Sept. 13, 1971 at Attica Prison N.Y. where 42 men gave their lives in an heroic struggle for freedom...” The poster then chronicles a history of American violence. The instances of violence are handwritten adjacent to where they occurred. Some of these instances of violence that Ringgold included in this poster are “NYC

Draft Riots July 1863 1,000 dead” “Witch Hunt Salem, Mass. Anne Hibbins Hung 1656” “Race Riot Detroit June 21, 1943 34-Dead 700-Wounded” “Sitting Bull Killed Dec 16, 1890” and many more instances of violence in America. At first glance of the poster the eye is absolutely overwhelmed with text. There is so much text on the poster that it is very hard to read until you zoom in or get closer to the text. The poster is overwhelmed with numbers of dead, with the exact numbers of casualties of war written around the perimeter of the poster. But perhaps the most ingenious text

on the whole poster is the call-to-action on the bottom of the poster that reads, “This map of American Violence is Incomplete. Please write in whatever you find lacking.” This addendum to the poster is so smart because it makes the poster timeless and interactive.

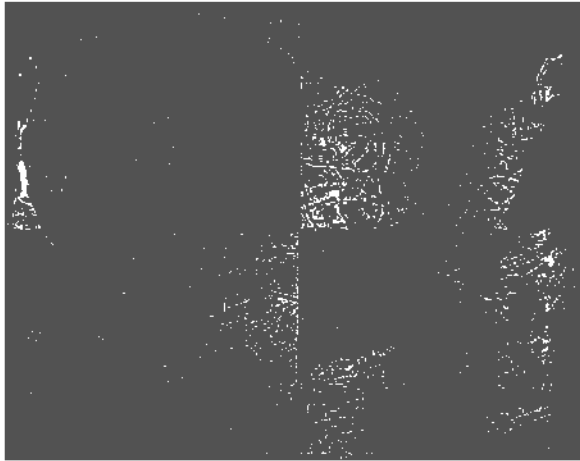


Figure 4 *United States of Attica*, 1972, Offset poster, 21 3/4 x 27 1/2 in.

Ringgold added this because she knew that there would be countless more acts of American violence to add to this poster in the future. This poster is a testament to all of the forgotten acts of violence, it brings all of the past traumas of this nation to the forefront. And again, it further reinforces how Faith Ringgold uses handwritten text as a narrative tool in her artwork.

This aspect of handwritten text seen in *United States of Attica* directly translates into another later era of Ringgold's work from the 1980s to mid 1990s, a form of art that Ringgold created and dubbed story quilts. Ringgold's story quilts are uniquely her own but directly draw on the pictorial quilts of the American South, like quilts made by Harriet Powers. The first story quilt that Ringgold ever made was *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* (Figure 5). The quilt consisted of nine quilt panels of text, 14 panels of the family members discussed in the text panels, and a border of 13 panels of Aunt Jemima. The story told in this quilt is one of Aunt Jemima becoming a successful restaurant owner and the many intricacies of rearing a family. It also touches on the prejudices against interracial marriage that was still looked at with a grain of disrespect even in the 1980s when this quilt was created. Ringgold's take on the Aunt Jemima character was an innovative approach as the stereotype of Aunt Jemima would never have the agency to be a business owner in past narrative. This quilt by Ringgold was definitely inspired by

Betty Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* from 1972 which is a work that she was familiar with. The text panels on the quilt were meticulously handwritten by Ringgold similar to the words on the United States

of Attica poster. This story quilt was the start of an era for Ringgold where she found her voice through quilts. While she worked on *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* almost entirely by herself, the countless story quilts that came after this one were all collaborative efforts. Another very unique aspect about Faith's story quilts is that she paints on the fabric itself; this process harkens



Figure 5 *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?*, 1983, Acrylic on canvas; pieced fabric border, 90 in x 80 in

back to the traditional applique process of quilt making.

Ringgold found her voice as a storyteller and as an artist through her story quilts. The series of story quilts that came after this include the *Tar Beach* series which described the intricacies of living and growing up in Harlem and the French Collection which follow a black American female artist making a way for herself as an art professional abroad. These quilts seamlessly blend into Ringgold's work as a children's book writer and illustrator. Her

beautiful art style seen in her story quilts translates itself so well to narrative books for children. With her first children's book *Tar Beach* that was published in 1991, it became a prolific book for black children in America at the time. To see a story that features people who look like yourself and grow up in an environment that looks familiar to your own is so essential in a child's life, so it is no wonder that her children's books were so

well-received in the United States. She tells such a unique American story with her art. Her eloquent use of narrative and carefully thought after images perfectly demonstrate her mastery as a storyteller. Faith Ringgold's artwork is a perfect depiction of American life and constantly finds new ways to challenge the traditional white narrative that has dominated this country's history for such a long time.

Works Cited

- Hanson, Debra. *Faith Ringgold: Paintings and Story Quilts, 1964-2017*. Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art. (Fall 2018)
- Farrington, Lisa. *Art on Fire: The Politics of Race and Sex in the Painting of Faith Ringgold*. Woman's Art Journal 22, no. 2 (2001): 60.
- Graulich, Melody and Witzling, Mara. *The Freedom to Say What She Pleases: A Conversation with Faith Ringgold*. NWSA Journal Vol 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994) 1-27.
- Morris, Bob. "Faith Ringgold Will Keep Fighting Back" New York Times. June 11, 2020.
- Ringgold, Faith. *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1995.
- Tate Talks. "Faith Ringgold: In Conversation | Tate Talks" Jul 5, 2018. Video. <https://youtu.be/g5tbljNwyrq>
- Wallace, Michele. "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima? (1983) by Faith Ringgold" Personal Blog of Michele Wallace. Feb 29 2012. <http://blackmachorevisited.blogspot.com/2012/02/whose-afraid-of-aunt-jemima-painted.html>

¹The full title of this piece contains a racial slur. Since the author of this essay is not a member of the targeted group, the slur is likely offensive in this context, and therefore it has been omitted.

²The full title of this piece contains a racial slur. Since the author of this essay is not a member of the targeted group, the slur is likely offensive in this context, and therefore it has been omitted.

T.S. Eliot:

Reinventing the Modernist Tradition

By Kat Gibson

Introduction

Considering those among the greatest poets and writers of the early twentieth century generates no short list of names. These writers are acclaimed not only for their contributions to the modernist era, but also for the ways they have permanently reshaped and continue to inform the ways we read and write today. One writer it is impossible to not think of when contemplating both the American and British modernist movements is T.S. Eliot. Eliot's writing exemplifies the existential doubts of the self and society that were ignited by the introduction of new inventions, changing morals, and the turmoil of two world wars. His best-known works include "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), *The Waste Land* (1922), "The Hollow Men" (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939), and *The Four Quartets* (1945). These poetic works incorporate traditional elements while also utilizing a deeply fragmented and stream of consciousness writing style. Later in his life, Eliot branched out to playwriting, critical essays, and literary review, but he is by far best known for his achievements in poetry.

T.S. Eliot Narrative Biographical Summary

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on September 26, 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri to a family with a distinguished Puritan ancestry and was the youngest of eleven children. Though a sickly child, he took well to his education, allowing him to attend many prestigious private schools. His regimented studies allowed him to enter Harvard in 1906, where he began working on the school's literary journal, the *Harvard Advocate*. This allowed him to gain confidence in his poetic voice by affording him the opportunity to publish some of his earliest works. From there, Eliot continued through school and eventually went to Merton College in Oxford, England. Here he met Ezra Pound, another renowned poet, who helped lead him into the modernist literary movement and encouraged him to publish his first groundbreaking poetic success, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in 1915 (Ryan).

After his university years, Eliot met and married his wife, British dancer Vivienne Haigh-Wood, in 1915 and settled in London. This relationship ended up being immensely troubling for Eliot as he and

Vivien both suffered from mental and physical illness, causing their relationship to strain and quickly degrade. He published his first poetry collection in 1917 and subsequently suffered a series of difficulties in his life that deeply affected him. The disappointment of being rejected by the U.S. Navy, the loss of his father, and the strain of his marriage with Vivien led him to suffer a nervous breakdown in 1921 (Ryan).

After caring for her father at the end of 1920, Vivien's illness ravaged her and required that she be sent away to recover: for a brief period, she was moved into a nursing home. However, quickly she had to move back into the Eliot home due to the high cost, where Eliot and the family maid "were able to minister her, and the flat became a kind of a sanatorium" (Ackroyd 109). As Eliot dealt with the immense pressure of caring for his wife, not being financially stable, and the stress of world affairs in 1921, he began to plummet into a period of great despair. This period of devastation sparked the creation of his most famous work, *The Waste Land*, and the year it was written "was one of intense political and economic discontent: the post-war 'boom' had collapsed, there were two million unemployed and the economic chaos was exacerbated by the indecisiveness of the coalition government. Eliot despised democracy... he described in vivid terms the feelings of loathing and repugnance which the contemporary situation induced in him" (109). These struggles influenced him to write the poem he originally titled "He Do The Police In Different Voices," but it was quickly renamed by Eliot as *The Waste Land* (110).

The manner in which this long, segmented poem was written remains unclear, as Eliot hoped to complete the

piece in just a few months while Vivien had again been sent away to recover. Of course, this aspiration went ultimately unrealized, and Eliot took nearly the whole year of 1921 to compose it due to his mother visiting him and his own increasing mental instability that required him to leave home for three months to recuperate. He stayed in a friend's cottage and continued to work on his poem, completing it by the end of the year. Ezra Pound helped to extensively edit the piece and assisted in moving the poem away from its raw and intensely stylized form to find the truth and rhythm by making it more "deliberate and dramatic" (119). Pound revised draft after draft of the piece, cutting out large spans of what Eliot had written and assisting to reword and tighten Eliot's voice and intent with the work. Pound's influence on the piece cannot be understated—Eliot even dedicated the work to his best friend Ezra. This hard work allowed *The Waste Land* to be published in the November 1922 issue of the *Dial* magazine. Here it was met with great acclaim and deemed groundbreaking due to its complex moral and existential questioning while at the same time revealing many 'great truths.' Many critics were baffled yet amazed by Eliot's work while some readers found it incomprehensible. Nonetheless, the piece gained wide popularity across Europe and in the U.S. and defined Eliot as an essential and notable modern author due to the work's ability to capture "the disillusionment of the post-World War I generation, as well as the larger sense of individual isolation and alienation from tradition prevalent during the early twentieth century" (Ryan).

In 1923, Eliot's mental health continued to decline as he worked

simultaneously as the editor of the literary magazine, *Criterion*, and at a bank. His fellow modernists and friends, most notably Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound, tried to take up money as a group to allow him to leave his job at the bank. When that soon backfired, Woolf tried to get him another job he would love, working as an editor for another literary magazine, *Nation*, which again would allow him to leave the bank. Again, the attempt was unsuccessful due to the pressure from Vivien and her healthcare, the uncertainty of the job's longevity, and the diminished pay (Ackroyd 131- 133). Though Eliot wanted to write new creative pieces, he continued to suffer from intense anxiety and emotional detachment while feeling suffocated by the massive success of *The Waste Land*. He did not trust in his writing nor believe that his new pieces would be as good or able to live up to the massive acclaim of their predecessor (135). He persisted and things appeared to get better as he got a new publishing job in 1925, and in 1927, he became a British citizen and a member of the Anglican Church (Ryan).

Eliot continued to rise in his literary acclaim throughout the 1930s and 1940s, with his style becoming increasingly traditional as he grew older. He published many new plays and poetry which continued to demonstrate his unique ability to create multi-perspective, yet deeply personal writing. He also published critical essays, making him known not only as an excellent creative writer, but a more serious and analytical one as well. Eliot went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, the British Order of Merit, and the American Medal of Freedom for his contributions to literature and culture. He and Vivien eventually

separated, and Eliot remarried after her death in 1957 to Valerie Fletcher, with whom he lived happily until his death on January 4, 1965 (Ryan).

The Religious Worlds of T.S. Eliot

The early twentieth century was wrought with changes and advancements in its cultural landscape while simultaneously being trapped in the turmoil of the world wars. The dynamic nature of modernist society had great impact on its artists' inspirations and viewpoints. T.S. Eliot found himself against a modern backdrop of uncertainty where religious views were rapidly evolving, and European society seemed to be degrading. Eliot, as a converted member of the Anglican Church, was deeply concerned with the place religion held in society. He was vocal about his opinions on where religion should fit into one's modern life and how it should help guide society and politics (Hobson 30). Suddenly, he found himself thrown into a land of great uncertainty where cultural practices were growing vastly different from the world he grew up in and that of his parents. It was impossible for modernist writers like Eliot to not be influenced by the rapidly changing society they found themselves in. For Eliot, he changed as the times did, though not always with them. This created a distinct shift in his life and work before and after the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, which is connected not only to the depression of post-World War I society but his conversion as well.

Religion and spirituality were redefined and reworked, with their roles in society greatly contended at the beginning of the twentieth century. Though religious

tolerance expanded, religion itself became increasingly optional for the modern individual, as it was losing its place as a pillar of moral society. Many, such as one of Eliot's closest friends, Virginia Woolf, were baffled by the concept of believing in God. When Woolf found out Eliot had converted to Anglo-Catholicism, she was astounded, remarking, "I mean there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God" (qtd in Hobson 19). It had simply become easier not to believe. The scientific community became increasingly fascinated with the evolution of Western religion and the impact it had on the way people thought. This science influenced Eliot's examinations in *The Waste Land* and defined the social and theological aspects of religion.

Along with this exploration came the defining of the difference between "spirituality" and "religion." Spirituality represented and explored the inner truths that religion did but removed the physical aspects of religious practice, such as traditions and the church community, effectively rejecting the embodiments of religion (20). Though it may seem that religion was losing its place as a keystone of cultural life, it was overall becoming easier to find a religion that was adaptable to modern life and the changes it brought. Many religions, like Judaism, saw the importance of creating movements that reformed and loosened some practices and laws in order to coincide with increasingly progressive cultural standards. On the other hand, Catholicism refused to allow modern life to affect its practices and therefore remained largely traditional and conservative in its values (25). Eliot was drawn in by the steadfast and established traditions that the

Anglican Church had to offer. He wrote in a 1936 letter to Paul Elmer More, who had also converted to Anglicanism, that More's journey was a "spiritual biography. . . oddly, even grotesquely, more like my own, so far as I can see, than that of any human being I have known" (qtd in Spurr 40).

However, many other modern followers of religion became increasingly focused on the esoteric (internal) knowledge that religion sought and less so on the exoteric factors, like social fellowships, church, and traditions. This led to the rise of Theosophy, which created a midpoint between science and religion that wished to seek knowledge of creation but did not restrain or originate itself to any singular race or culture. As a result, Theosophy gained popularity globally, with its advocates including author W.B. Yeats (Hobson 26).

Finally, the increasingly secular nature of social and cultural life led many to question if religion belonged in politics at all. Many questioned the value of using Christianity to define a central code of ethics, especially with how outdated some of these principles seemed to be. Ezra Pound, eternally one of Eliot's closest companions due to their similar American roots and conservative traditional and political values, supported Eliot and his conversion completely. In fact, Pound and Eliot worked in tandem to argue heavily that Christianity, and more specifically, the Catholic Church, offered valuable methods to restore Europe from the degradation it suffered following World War I. Their plan to implement the church into society was not conversion, but as Eliot believed "nurturing the Christian religion that Eliot thought formed an organic and lived part of English culture

as a whole along with ‘Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final...’” (30). To him, Christianity did not define simply an organization but a collective experience and pillar of British culture.

Eliot remained vocal (as did Pound) on his advocacy for his religion, eventually joining “the Moot,” a Christian based discussion group, established in 1939, that pondered “possible Christian solutions to the failure of democracy (as seen in World War II) and the threat of state socialism” (30). Eliot was fascinated by fractures in society, a major concept he explores in *The Waste Land*. He may have been viewed by many as a quiet and thoughtful man, but he was driven to action in his later years due to his conversion and his establishment of British citizenship. There is no debating that *The Waste Land* marked a major shift in how Eliot viewed his world and developed his new outspoken opinions on the downfalls that followed the Great War. He shifted his focus to criticism and his creative works were now flooded with a newly positive religious energy that many other writers were rejecting and fighting against (21). T.S. Eliot saw these new waves and shifts in religion against a backdrop of political and cultural uncertainties, and unlike many modernists, he chose to join a tradition which gave him the comfort and security society could not.

The Old Possum: A Modern Enigma

Modernism as an artistic, literary, and social movement prevailed in the early twentieth century as a rebellion against and the upheaval of the ideals of the previous Victorian era. The modernists viewed

society as a corrupt and rigid system in need of great change. This led to large scale questioning of the nature of reality, the self, and morality. This period’s disenchantment with conventional ideas was driven by great developments in science and technology and, later on, by the tragedy of the Great War. Strict moral codes and religion were harshly questioned, leaving this new generation largely liberal (“History of Modernism”). Some of the most notable writers in Britain during this era were Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, George Orwell, and T.S. Eliot. T.S. Eliot alone has become undeniably one of modernism’s most prominent figures, though he differs from his peers in a few key areas. His writing followed the popular unconventional techniques and questioning; however, he leaned in favor of conservatism and tradition far more than many modernist figures.

T.S. Eliot’s catalogue of poetry demonstrates many, if not all, of the signifying thematic and stylistic elements of modernist writing. He frequently uses allusion and fragmentation to create new meaning out of old concepts while questioning himself and society at large. In his most celebrated piece, *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses this fragmentation to define poetic work and “to model the fragmented nature of minds and civilization” (“Modernism”). Like many other modernist works, *The Waste Land* was a response to the despair that followed after the end of World War I. This great tragedy was felt throughout the whole of Europe as an estimated twenty million people died in just four short years (Mougel). Eliot believed the destruction and social turbulence that followed greatly decreased the quality of life. He leaves

the reader to question the degradation of society, and what must be done in order to fix post-war Europe. In a 1922 edition of *The Dial*, a reviewer describes the use of a wasteland setting to create “the concrete image of a spiritual drouth” (Wilson 612). Eliot depicted living in this new world as being in a harsh, twisted, and poisoned land devoid of morals and joy.

Social commentary and the use of allusion were highly common among modernist poets to both question and make sense of the world around them. Literary critic, Pericles Lewis, states on the piece’s importance that “*The Waste Land* was quickly recognized as a major statement of modernist poetics, both for its broad symbolic significance and for Eliot’s masterful use of formal techniques that earlier modernists had only begun to attempt” (Lewis). The use of more regimented, or formal, techniques came to be known as high-modernism, which Eliot was a key figure of along with James Joyce and the publishing of *Ulysses* in the same year as *The Waste Land*, 1922 (“Modernism”).

Though in his literary work, Eliot is resoundingly modernist, his personal life is a much different story. Eliot converted to Anglicanism in 1927 and believed that religion held an important place in politics and society. Many modernists were baffled by and abandoned the concept of believing in God and the constructs that came with religion. Eliot was also very different from his peers in his composure and personality. He was conservative and formal in his manner, leaving him at odds with the more fun-loving and liberal members of the Bloomsbury Group, a well-known society of modernists.

Leonard Woolf described him as being “in an envelope of frozen formality,” while Ottoline Morrell proclaimed “Dull, dull, dull... He is obviously very ignorant of England and imagines that it is essential to be highly polite and conventional and decorous and meticulous.” (qtd in Menand). His unique interests and traditionalist morals may have made him an odd one out, but he grew to be accepted nonetheless. He found many friends in modern London society who helped him continue to develop his craft as a writer.

England: The Great Warring Waste Land

T.S. Eliot is best known for his impeccable ability to weave together many different elements and techniques in poetry to build his complex, though largely pessimistic, ideas about the state of himself, mankind, and the world at large. None of his works better demonstrate his societal disillusionment and unique style than *The Waste Land* (1922). Here, Eliot uses a vast patchwork of poetic techniques to examine and emphasize a world ravaged by the brutality of man and a society torn apart

“

Eliot ultimately argues that we must sacrifice ourselves to bring back hope and life.

”

by World War I. *The Waste Land*, though complex and difficult to comprehend, has become a keystone in twentieth-century poetry. Even Eliot himself was aware of the disconnect that was felt by audiences while reading it, and in a letter to his brother, he responded: “I am sorry that you did not really like the poem. There is a good deal about it that I do not like myself, but I do not think that my own reasons for finding it short of what I want to do are reasons that are likely to occur to any of its critics. It is very difficult to anticipate what particular kind of misunderstanding will become current about anything one writes” (Eliot et al. 803). This bleak narrative paints the warped image of a land destroyed by the violence of war and a society hardened by it. Eliot ultimately argues that we must sacrifice ourselves to bring back hope and life.

The Waste Land's first section, “The Burial of the Dead,” outlines the idea of resurrection of both people and land after the tragedies of the Great War. It begins by describing the hopelessness and melancholy of the first spring after the war, as it begins to renew life in a poisoned land. It describes this degradation with a highly repetitive form:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers. (1-7)

This use of imagery and diction is critical in demonstrating the great despair connected with this particular spring. Though the spring is literally able to return, the speaker feels that it is “cruel” to do so due to how

much life was lost here and will never have the opportunity to return. In the spring of 1919, where so much life is blooming, the world remains a much bleaker place. Eliot uses this form to make a statement then uses a comma to separate it from the verb describing the next line’s action. This distinct pattern of repetition and split syntax immediately creates a sense of a disjointed flow of time and of a separation from the world. The words instill a sense of isolation and sadness, demonstrating the immense pain the speaker feels as he views an area that for him invokes the pain of those who are no longer enjoying it. The diction demonstrates the incessant nature of the reminders of spring, ending each line with an -ing verb. Everyday life is filled with the cruel reminders that resurrection of the dead is impossible.

The following two sections, “A Game of Chess” and “The Fire Sermon,” describe the sexual degradation that Eliot discovers following the war. He finds relationships meaningless and hollow, which he demonstrates by depicting loveless lives and comparing them to a number of ancient sexual tragedies. The most striking of these is his use of Tiresias, who has been both a man and a woman, as the narrator,

Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the
dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs
unlit... (240-248)

Sex has lost its value in modern society, and therefore has become disjointed and meaningless. This is emphasized by the irregular and unfinished rhyme scheme, which offers no satisfaction in the conclusion of the stanza. According to literary critic, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Eliot's various depictions of relationships and sexual encounters make it seem "as if the demobilization has triggered a general demoralization, which would be marked by a loss of sexual appetite and a vanishing desire" (17). The losses of the war linger in the subconscious, impeding on the joys of victory and the return to normal life.

"The Fire Sermon" also focuses on the literal degradation of the earth and the environment, both of which are suffering in England due to the continuation of industrialization spurred on by the war. Imagery of the natural elements in crisis appear multiple times throughout *The Waste Land*, but the most explicit is Eliot's description of the pollution of the Thames at the hands of man:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my
song.
The river bears no empty bottles,
sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes,
cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights.
The nymphs
are departed. (175-179)

This scene of degradation and environmental disrespect embodies the catastrophic nature of growing industrialization. Though it is economically beneficial, Eliot analyzes the cost of such expansion which "transpires in a literary form attentive to the speed of urban destruction" (Morrison 29). This

water is no longer a source that can sustain life, but it nonetheless retains its gentle nobility, as shown through Eliot's song to the river. Even in this lesser state, the river still has the power to evoke deep respect and reverence. Later in "Death by Water," the sea is depicted as a force that can also take the life of man, just as man has taken the life of it. The character Phlebas drowns and "A current under sea/ Picked his bones in whispers" (315-316), reclaiming his life for its own purposes. This section ends by warning the reader that they can also suffer this fate, insinuating that the pride of man cannot beat the power of nature.

Death and the hopelessness of death are analyzed throughout the poem's overarching narrative: this is the most direct outcome of the war. Eliot frequently interjects small, morbid quips amongst the other types of society's emotional and physical barrenness, subtly playing on the fact that death is what connects these two. The poem closes with his vision of the death that finally culminates from all of the downfalls of modern society. Death and destruction are the imminent reality for everyone, which is described in the final segment of the poem, "What the Thunder Said,"

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant
mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience. (322-330)

The repetition of "after" demonstrates the great suffering that must be endured until we

all finally die. Eliot is being pessimistic but also realistic about the human experience; we are all ultimately waiting for the same fate. While *The Waste Land* is placed largely in the scope of World War I, it is “instead choosing to contemplate the devastating effects of the conflict on the individual bodies and minds and the deadened landscape they inhabit” (Badenhausen 147). The poem wraps up this individual focus, claiming that though life is turmoil, there is peace in its finality.

The Waste Land is a powerful demonstration of the warring and conflicted individuals left in the wake of World War I. Eliot believes this war is another one of history’s great tragedies and thus describes this new world with a flurry of allusions to texts such as Shakespeare and Greek mythology. Though complex and at times confusing, a review from 1923 claimed “the power of suggesting intolerable tragedy at the heart of the trivial or the sordid is used with a skill little less than miraculous... the power is the more moving because of the attendant conviction that this terrible resembling contrast between nobility and baseness is an agony in the mind of Mr Eliot of which is only a portion is transferred to that of the reader” (qtd in Knight & James 145). This depiction leaves a powerful effect on the mind of the reader, forcing them to realize the horrors they are causing and live through every day in modern society. The Great War was an immense calamity for all of Europe that Eliot believes has degraded the quality of life in modern society. He leaves us questioning the state of societal decomposition and what must be done to put the fragments of post-war life back together. Though centered in the life of the

early 1920s, *The Waste Land* continues to be relevant almost 100 years later as we continue to face these issues today. Eliot gives us a glimpse of the past but also our present, and if nothing changes, the future as well.

Conclusion

T.S. Eliot is undoubtedly one of the most recognizable American and British figures of literary modernism. His poetry captured the disillusionment and new narrative voice that modernism held in its very core and was and continues to be a major influence for many writers. His major breakthrough with *The Waste Land* gave him eternal notoriety and forever changed the literary outlook of what poetry could be. His poetry, plays, and prose remain a culturally significant part of the Western Literary Canon almost one hundred years later as it is continually read, studied, and referenced in contemporary culture. The modernist movement introduced many revolutionary ideas and techniques that are still highly prevalent in the literary culture of today. Nonetheless, it is Eliot’s unorthodox personal qualities that leave him a bit out of place in the sociopolitical aspects of this movement, but it is his unique outlook, highly modernist existentialism, and fragmented style that places him in history as one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. There is no denying that T.S. Eliot’s unique blend of formalities and modernities worked together to create a thinker and writer unlike any other.

Works Cited

- Ackroyd, Peter. T.S. Eliot. London, Hamish Hamilton, 1984.
- Badenhausen, Richard. "Trauma and Violence in The Waste Land." *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land*, edited by Gabrielle McIntire, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 147-61.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. New York, Penguin, 2003.
- Eliot, Valerie, et al., editors. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Volume I: 1898-1922*. Vol. 1, Yale UP, 2001. 2 vols.
- "Eliot, Thomas Stearns." *The Book Review Digest*, edited by Marion A. Knight and Mertice M. James, vol. 1923, H.W. Wilson Company, 1924, pp. 145-46.
- "History of Modernism." *Mdc.edu*, www.mdc.edu/wolfson/academic/artsletters/art_philosophy/humanities/history_of_modernism.htm. Accessed 24 Mar. 2019.
- Hobson, Suzanne. "Religion and Spirituality." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Culture*, edited by Celia Marshik, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 17-32.
- Lewis, Pericles. "The Waste Land." *Modernism.coursepress.yale.edu*, modernism.coursepress.yale.edu/the-waste-land/. Accessed 25 Mar. 2019.
- Menand, Louis. "Practical Cat How T. S. Eliot became T. S. Eliot." *New Yorker*, 19 Sept. 2011, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/09/19/practical-cat. Accessed 25 Mar. 2019.
- "Modernism." *Literary Movements for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Literary Movements*, edited by Ira Mark Milne, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Gale, 2009, pp. 494-533. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3279300029/GVRL?u=west45197&sid=GVRL&xid=b2585476>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2019.
- Morrison, Spencer. "Geographies of Space: Mapping and Reading the Cityscape." *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land*, edited by Gabrielle McIntire, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 24-38.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel. "'The World Has Seen Strange Revolutions Since I Died': The Waste Land and the Great War." *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land*, edited by Gabrielle McIntire, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 9-23.
- Ryan, James. "T.S. Eliot." *T.S. Eliot* (9781429814744), Aug. 2017, pp. 1-2. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lkh&AN=15321710&site=lrc-plus.
- Spurr, Barry. *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T.S. Eliot and Christianity*. The Lutterworth Press, 2010. EBSCOhost, ezproxy.otterbein.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=813512&site=ehost-live&scope=site
- Wilson, Edmund, Jr. "The Poetry of Drouth." *The Dial*, vol. 78, 1922, pp. 611-16.

Ethical Considerations in the Era of COVID-19

These pieces focus on current ethical issues that have come to the fore in the era of COVID-19. The first essay, “Covid-19 Lockdowns Disrupt Conservation” written by Katrina A. Krein tackles ethical considerations that come alongside anthropocentric policies that disregard wildlife and conservation. The second essay, “The Vulnerability of Nurses” written by Hannah E. Smith, identifies health risks of the pandemic on healthcare workers. The last two essays offer different perspective on how scarce resources should be distributed in a pandemic. In “Where Resources Should Go” Caitlyn Auld argues that resources should be distributed to people who have a higher chance of survival first, while in “Racial Weathering’ and Other Flaws in the Utilitarian Approach to Economic Lockdown” Jenna R. Culver argues that we should prioritize racial minorities and frontline workers when allocating resources. These essays were written in January 2021, at the height of the pandemic. We hope that these essays will make a contribution to our handling of future pandemics.

COVID-19 Lockdowns Disrupt Conservation

By Katrina A. Krein

Lockdowns have serious socioeconomic implications, including unemployment and bankruptcy (Singer and Plant, 2020). This disproportionately affects people based on socioeconomic status: those who occupy the lowest status are negatively impacted the most (Hills, 2020). Many developing countries have a large population of people who are of low socio-economic status and rely on a travel-based industry for money (Maron, 2020a). Current policy and advising by the philosophers Peter Singer and Michael Plant (2020), and Allison Hills (2020) take into account only human considerations, which would lead to an unjust battlefield for various stakeholders. At the time of writing, policy makers have not yet begun to fully face the challenges that the novel coronavirus presents to the conservation of biodiversity. This is a flawed and dangerous thought process that can lead to further extinctions and loss of ecologically significant areas. As COVID-19 has increased in duration, many people in developing countries suffer from poverty, which leads to increased poaching and threats to biodiversity. The growth in poaching provides reason to consider how current policies also acknowledge wildlife:

public policy makers should be concerned not only about human welfare, but also the welfare of all organisms in their future decisions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the tourism industry to come to a halt in many countries. This has brought a significant loss of jobs and funds to pay rangers to protect Africa's biodiversity (Maron, 2020b). Economic instability through the loss of tourism has increased desperation of those who rely on the industry. Locking down and reducing travel between countries has led to increased bushmeat poaching, due to the need for people needing to feed families or make money (Maron, 2020b). While most cases of poaching have been for food, there have also been cases of lion, giraffe, and endangered gorilla poaching during the crisis as well (Maron, 2020b).

In India, the global pandemic has led to an increase in the use of snares. Snares are an indiscriminate form of trapping that kills any animal trapped in it, including large predators such as leopards and endangered tigers (Ghosal & Casey, 2020). While Rhino poaching decreased during lockdowns, it rose again

when restrictions were eased, as people resorted to killing rhinos out of economic desperation (Earth, 2020). Still, the current pandemic has slowed trade of black-market species through locking down borders and reducing travel between countries (Ghosal & Casey, 2020). This decrease in trade might be related to the increased presence of police or military, as travel restrictions may inadvertently reduce animal deaths (Earth, 2020). Though this reduction could be considered a conservationist success, this success is only temporary and minimal.

Research into the black market shows that despite the halt in transferring of valued animal goods, killing has not decreased. Poachers have stockpiled pangolin scales, rhino horn, and ivory (Ghosal & Casey, 2020). In fact, poachers have taken advantage of economic desperation caused by lockdowns by enticing people to do the dirty work of slaughtering animals (Ghosal & Casey, 2020). This cycle is vicious and if left unchecked might spin out of control. Therefore, in crafting public policy we must consider all of the anticipated repercussions of a given policy.

For example, it is necessary to consider how a policy can create a cascade of harms down the road, one of which might be an increase economic distress. Threats to animals and biodiversity are real and important. Public policy not only affects people, but non-human animals as well. However, people tend to avoid illegal activities if they can earn money legally (Tanna, 2014). One way to promote change and progress in conservation is to encourage poachers to become rangers, who can provide intelligence on where management is currently lacking and provide stable income

(Tanna, 2014). This could give people pride and encourage others to do the same as well, creating a healthy cascade for the economy and the animals.

Additionally, consideration should be taken regarding the physical benefits of conservation. Ecosystems have instrumental value which include direct use, indirect use, option value, and nonuse (Cardinale, Primack, & Murdock, 2019). One of the ways that humans use the ecosystem directly include taking an organism from the wild and consuming it (Cardinale, Primack, & Murdock, 2019). However, if organisms are not harvested sustainably, it can cause a population crash leading to source depletion and further economic turmoil. Some of the ways that humans use systems indirectly include flooding control, grazing management, and tourism (Cardinale, Primack, & Murdock, 2019). Ecotourism is a fantastic opportunity for conserving endangered species, as it provides witnesses in the affected area, thus deterring poaching. Ecotourism continuation and expansion can lead to more sources of stable income. When people work for an affiliated business, they are assured a consistent paycheck for their work, rather than spotty payments that often come alongside trying to barter unguaranteed prices for black-market goods.

One might argue that these instrumental values do not benefit them personally, or that they personally do not value them. However, it is impossible to avoid being impacted by animal preservation and biodiversity. For example, when wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone, they not only indirectly brought back beavers, but they brought back foxes who were once attacked by coyotes (Abrantes, 2017).

Beavers eventually changed how the rivers flowed, through ecosystem engineering (Abrantes, 2017). Allowing wolves back into Yellowstone changed the parks biodiversity and fauna behavioral ecology (Abrantes, 2017). Overall, this is a significant benefit for ecotourism, as people are more inclined to visit diverse parks. Yellowstone is undeniably a worldwide wonder, visited by people from various regions each year, and thus important to the economy and people's individual lives. Therefore, ecosystems not only are instrumentally valuable, but they have intrinsic value to individuals as well (Cardinale, Primack, & Murdock, 2019).

On a final note, it is important to

consider how human actions affect non-human animals. Overall, public policies should not only be concerned about human welfare but should include non-human animal welfare as well, along with preservation of their habitats. Any policies adopted now might have unanticipated effects. By failing to consider these effects, some beloved species may go way of the dodo. It is imperative to not let COVID-19 be another terrible factor in the current sixth mass extinction. Human health and safety should always be taken into consideration, but consciousness should also be extended towards non-human animals and their habitats as well.

Works Cited

- Abrantes, R. (2017, January 12). How Wolves Change Rivers: Ethology Institute: Read and Watch Now. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://ethology.eu/how-wolves-change-rivers/>
- Cardinale, B. J., Primack, R. B., & Murdoch, J. D. (2019). *Conservation biology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Earth. (2020, September 24). Rhino Poaching Has Dropped Amid COVID-19, But What Does the Future Hold for the Species?: Earth.Org - Past: Present: Future. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://earth.org/rhino-poaching-covid-19/>
- Ghosal, A., & Casey, M. (2020, June 22). Coronavirus lockdowns increase poaching in Asia, Africa. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://apnews.com/article/9df0cc21045578ad86696bc05721c706>
- Hills, A. (2020, April 10). 'Can I sunbathe in the park?' is now a deep moral question. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/10/sunbathing-park-deep-moral-questions-philosophers-coronavirus-individual?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other
- Maron, D. F. (2020a, April 20). Poaching threats loom as wildlife safaris put on hold due to COVID-19. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2020/04/wildlife-safaris-halted-for-covid-boost-poaching-threat/>
- Maron, D. F. (2020b, July 09). Pandemic-induced poaching surges in Uganda. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2020/07/covid19-behind-uganda-poaching/>
- Singer, P., & Plant, M. (2020, April 06). When Will the Pandemic Cure Be Worse Than the Disease? by Peter Singer & Michael Plant. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/when-will-lockdowns-be-worse-than-covid19-by-peter-singer-and-michael-plant-2020-04?barrier=accesspaylog>
- Tanna, A. (2014, February 13). 'Poaching is too much risk' – the pygmy poacher who became elephant protector. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/feb/13/pygmy-elephant-poacher-protector>

The Vulnerability of Nurses

By Hannah E. Smith

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken the world by surprise. Large numbers of people across the world have fallen ill, many requiring intensive medical care. Prior to the pandemic there was already a shortage of healthcare staff that required nurses to work many hours of overtime in order to provide standard care. As a result, nurses who were already stressed have been forced to work longer hours than they already were, while at the same time being exposed to a novel and dangerous virus for which there are no good therapeutics. This essay discusses the extreme vulnerability of nurses during a pandemic and argues that as members of the public should stay home and isolate in order to decrease the strain put on nurses, decrease the use of PPE (personal protective equipment), and increase the public good.

Nurses are at a higher vulnerability for two main reasons. The first reason is the strain that is put on them as they are forced to work overtime. As a member of the healthcare field, I can attest to the shortage of nurses that was present before the pandemic. And the global pandemic has increased the need for nurses and thereby increased the shortage of qualified nursing staff. As hospitals filled with record numbers of sick patients, there were not enough healthcare workers to provide the care they needed. Further, Ezekiel J. Emmanuel, Professor of Medical Ethics and Health Policy at the University of Pennsylvania,

writes, “The United States has fewer than 800,000 hospital beds, about 68,000 adult intensive care beds, and, even with strategic reserve, than 100,000 ventilators” (Emmanuel 2020). On a normal day at a U.S hospital there are typically open beds, however, there have been days that patients wait in the Emergency Room for hours until a bed is available for them. Patients have been forced to wait for long periods of time to receive care before the pandemic started. How long will they be required to wait when an excess amount of people are sent to the hospital for COVID-19? Emmanuel continues, “If even 5% of the 325 million people living in America get COVID-19, the current data suggests that 20 percent of them—3.2 million people—will require hospitalization and 6 percent—960,000 people—will require beds in intensive care units for many days. COVID-19 patients will simply overwhelm our healthcare system” (Emmanuel 2020). This represents an additional number of people falling sick and needing intensive care in addition to the number of people who require intensive treatment due to non-COVID causes. The system was already overburdened before we added the additional burden of the novel coronavirus. Before the pandemic, nurses were already overworked and at times, beds were already full. As a result, we are further straining the already overworked medical staff, including the professional nursing

staff. News broadcasts around the world, showed images of Italy where there were no rooms or beds for patients who were forced to sit on the floor while waiting for care. In China, the government quickly started to build new hospitals with more beds to care for the patients. In the U.S, tents have been put up in hospital parking lots to hold overflow patients until room can be made for them inside. While these actions might help ease the issue of space, they only add to the problem of lack of proper staffing. For example, in an article discussing the mental health of healthcare workers in the *Journal of Diabetes and Metabolic Disorders* states,

The lowest reported prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress among HCWs [healthcare workers] was 24.1%, 12.1%, and 29.8%, respectively. In addition, the highest reported values for the aforementioned parameters were 67.55%, 55.89%, and 62.99%, respectively. Nurses, female workers, front-line health care workers, younger medical staff, and workers in areas with higher infection rates reported more severe degrees of all psychological symptoms (Vizheh 2020).

Regardless of how well our healthcare staff is trained, how can we expect them to give their best care when they haven't slept in days? The physical and mental exhaustion that nurses are subject to during a pandemic, puts them at a higher vulnerability for contracting the virus as well as burnout from the healthcare field entirely. Without availability of medical staff who will be there to provide care?

The second reason that nurses are at an increased vulnerability during the

pandemic is the lack of supplies and PPE available to them. PPE is made to protect healthcare workers from illness, including COVID-19. Proper PPE includes surgical masks, gloves, gowns, and N95-masks, which are important tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in medical settings. However, as cases increased, the availability of supplies dwindled (Emmanuel 2020). As a result, nurses have been forced to reuse contaminated masks, or sometimes to not wear a mask at all. Due to this, nurses have been directly exposed to this deadly virus day after day which makes them extremely vulnerable to contracting the coronavirus. Jessica Gold, a Professor of Psychiatry at the Washington University School of Medicine, states "According to the data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there have been 287,010 cases of Covid-19 in healthcare workers and 953 deaths" (Gold 2020). These healthcare workers cannot stay home and isolate themselves from the deadly virus, but instead are forced to walk right into it without proper protective equipment resulting in 287,010 healthcare workers and counting contracting the virus at the time of writing.

We have an obligation to protect nurses in part because their increased vulnerability harms the public good. If resources and staffing numbers are smaller than the number of patients, there is less care to be provided to the overall population. In a similar but indirect way, if nurses fall ill due to increased exposure and decreased well-being, there will be less people to provide necessary care to the public. Peter Singer, the Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, and Michael Plant, a Research Fellow at the

Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford University, discuss ways to determine what interventions should be taken during the pandemic. They offer the idea of using one metric to measure if lockdowns should be done or not. Singer and Plant write “It’s best to measure wellbeing by using individuals’ reports of how happy and how satisfied they are with their lives” (Singer and Plant 2020). According to Singer and Plant, lockdowns may decrease most people’s over-all well-being and that is the singular metric that should be used to determine if lockdowns should be enforced or not. I agree that well-being is an important metric to use, however, we should also consider the well-being of nurses in particular and how it has a direct effect on the well-being of the public good overall. Nurses do not have the ability to stay home and not go to work. Exposure to COVID-19 by nurses and other

healthcare workers has a negative impact on the well-being of the public good as it results in less care accessible for those who present to the hospital for the virus (as well as any other illness or injury). It is our part to stay home in order to decrease the strain put on nurses, decrease the number of PPE needing to be used, and increase everyone’s over-all well-being by decreasing spread of the virus.

One might object that a hospital running at 100% occupancy is efficient: hospitals were built to provide care to people of the community and being at 100% occupancy shows that it is meeting its purpose. Although this is true, the number of nurses and other healthcare workers available is typically not equipped to care for that many patients at one time and the ongoing shortage of nurses makes caring for this number of patients challenging increasing the vulnerability for nurses.

Works Cited

- Ezekiel Emanuel, James Phillips and Govind Persad “How the Coronavirus May Force Doctors to Decide Who Can Live and Who Dies: In the face of overwhelming demand and limited resources, health care would need to be rationed, with agonizing decisions.” *NYTimes* (March 12, 2020). <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/opinion/coronavirus-hospital-shortage.html>
- Jessica Gold “We Need to Talk About the Covid-19 Deaths of Healthcare Workers.” *Forbes Magazine* (December 22, 2020). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicagold/2020/12/22/we-need-to-talk-about-the-covid-19-deaths-of-healthcare-workers/?sh=301be3ba3707>
- Maryam Vizheh, et.al “The Mental Health of Healthcare Workers in the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review.” *Journal of Diabetes and Metabolic Disorders* (October 26, 2020). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7586202/>
- Peter Singer and Michael Plant “Will the Pandemic Cure be Worse than the Disease?” *Project Syndicate* (April 06, 2020). <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/when-will-lockdowns-be-worse-than-covid19-by-peter-singer-and-michael-plant-2020-04?barrier=accesspaylog>

Where Resources Should Go

By Caitlyn Auld

Picture this scenario: a patient (person A) struggling with a severe case of COVID-19 enters a hospital. This person is 67 years old, obese, and has heart problems. An hour later, someone else (person B) enters with a severe case of COVID-19. This person is 29 years old, has no pre-existing conditions, and is also struggling to breathe. The first person is put on a ventilator. A doctor then determines that this person is unlikely to make a full recovery, while the second person has a much better chance of making a full recovery if they are put on the ventilator. This hospital only has one ventilator. In a case like this, who should get the ventilator?

The COVID-19 pandemic has required all sorts of tough decisions to be made, some just like the one considered above. From lockdowns, to vaccines, to the ever-growing numbers of cases in the U.S., this has surely been a time of uncertainty. One of the many issues that we face during this pandemic is the number of resources available related to the number of patients that need extra support. Some people, who are more at risk, or who may be more negatively affected by the coronavirus, will certainly need more resources such as ventilators and hospital beds than others. But what does that mean for who gets these resources? When hospitals have a limited number of resources that will not be available to everyone who needs them, how should the distribution of

resources be handled? Should there be a first-come, first-served policy? Should those who have the best chance of recovering get the resources they need first? In this essay, I argue that those who have the best chance of survival should be prioritized.

In the introduction, I described a situation where two people require ventilators, but only one is available. While this may be a horrible situation to have to face, this is unfortunately a very real situation that health care professionals must handle on a regular basis. However, in a situation like the one described, it seems best to do what you can to save the most lives, as Emanuel et al. argue in their article “How the Coronavirus May Force Doctors to Decide Who Can Live and Who Dies.” If in the opening case they let the first person keep the ventilator who has a significantly less chance of survival, two people are more likely to die. Not only is this heartbreaking for both people who would not survive, it would also have a horrible impact on their families and friends. While it is regrettable that anyone will have to mourn the loss of a life to COVID-19, if the ventilator is given to the person who is more likely to survive given the proper intervention, one life could still be saved. We have a moral obligation to try to save as many lives as possible. If there is a chance to save one life rather than to not have saved any, we have a moral responsibility to save the one life. Not only

will this save the life of the person who is given the resources, but it would also save the mourning of their family and friends.

Another reason the person more likely to survive should be given the resources they need first is because these people are much more likely to recover faster than those with pre-existing conditions. The faster people recover, the quicker resources are available for the next people who need them. If someone like the person who is less likely to survive (person A) in our initial scenario is given the ventilator, they would likely be on the ventilator for a much longer time than the person who is much more likely to survive with intervention (person B). In the time that person A is on that ventilator, there is no way to even know how many people turned away could have also been saved by the ventilator that person A is using. If person B had been given the ventilator to begin with, then they would not only have recovered, but would also free up that ventilator for the next person who needs it. During the time that person A is on that ventilator, countless more lives could have been saved if person B was given that ventilator.

I would like to make it clear what I am not arguing. I am not arguing that some lives are more valuable than others. Rather, I agree with Ezekiel Emmanuel that “All patients deserve maximum treatment. But the tragedy of scarcity in a pandemic is that some will go without conventional treatment, no matter what” (Emmanuel et. al.). The point that I am trying to make here is that when there is an opportunity to save as many lives as possible by making some tough decisions, there is the moral obligation to do so. Although I concede that

it is in fact horrible to have to decide who gets lifesaving resources, it is a decision that we should have to make to save as many lives as possible. Again, in the introduction situation, giving person B the ventilator would not have only saved their life, but also more lives as people came in needing that ventilator after them. When you give person A the ventilator, they are taking up that resource for a longer time, and there is less of a chance that that resource will even help them to completely recover. This could potentially prove to not have even helped person A heal, but it also would have cost the lives of person B, as well as others who came into the hospital later needing that ventilator.

Still, Ari Ne’eman has argued that it is fairer for all hospitals to have a “first-come, first-served” policy when it comes to these life-saving resources. This would ensure that all patients, regardless of the severity of their illness or any conditions that a patient may have will not have pre-existing conditions count against them when it comes to allocating resources. However, how could you argue that this is a better policy when you know for a fact that it is costing more lives? Ne’eman even concedes that his policy would cost more lives: “But even in a crisis, can we not ascribe some value to maintaining our principles? I argue yes – though it may cost lives” (Ne’eman). Although I agree with Ne’eman that those who are disabled may have more of a fair shot of surviving COVID if they have more intervention, it is certain that not every person who is given intervention will survive. While this is true for those who are not disabled as well, it is even more so relevant for those who are more at-risk. It is

a hard decision to have to make, which lives should be saved and which lives we don't save by giving them the needed resources, but it comes down to the numbers. While there are some people who are less likely to survive that will die, it is so that more people may survive in the end. Again, it is horrible to have to make the decision of who will die, but it is a necessary decision that we must make while taking into consideration the policy that will save the most lives possible. The best way to do this in conditions of

scarcity is to give these resources to the people who are most likely to survive, which will have them use the resources fastest, and in turn make more resources available to others quickest. With the first-come, first-served policy, we are turning a blind eye to the reality of how likely it is for these patients to survive, as well as the reality of how many more lives will then be left at the door. Therefore, we need our health care workers to make decisions that will save the lives of the most people possible.

Works Cited

Emanuel, Ezekiel J., et al. "How the Coronavirus May Force Doctors to Decide Who Can Live and Who Dies." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Mar. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/opinion/coronavirus-hospital-shortage.html.

Ne'eman, Ari. "'I Will Not Apologize for My Needs'." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 23 Mar. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/opinion/coronavirus-ventilators-triage-disability.html.

“Racial Weathering” and Other Flaws in the Utilitarian Approach to Economic Lockdown

By Jenna R. Culver

The United States of America simultaneously faces a destructive global pandemic and an apparent increasing divide in moral ideologies. Many citizens are unhappy with the national response to this pandemic, in some cases even denying its very existence. This essay focuses on the utilitarian approach to COVID-19. Utilitarian philosophers call for the well-being of individuals to be weighed against the consequences of keeping the economy open. This essay argues that a utilitarian approach to COVID-19 would be dangerous and discriminatory because of racial weathering and the unequal distribution of minority individuals in frontline, essential worker positions.

Utilitarianism is the philosophical theory that aims to bring the most good to the most people. This approach asks those in a society to set aside their biases and expand their circle of caring to apply a solution that treats everyone the same. It is a useful strategy for determining how to distribute scarce resources in a non-arbitrary way (Burke, 2020). If the greatest good is created for the majority, the utilitarian approach is achieved. Two very prominent utilitarian philosophers, Michael Plant and Peter Singer, have argued

that one must weigh the damage to the well-being of individuals over estimated lives saved (Singer and Plant, 2020). However, the pandemic has exposed and further exacerbated class and race issues in the United States, which clearly shows that the utilitarian approach to lockdowns is inadequate. Due to this class divide and the effects of systemic racism, not only are people of color more likely to contract a case of COVID-19, but they are also more likely to contract a more serious case of it.

Because of the significant and long-term effects of racism, it would be impossible to apply a utilitarian response to the pandemic without discriminating against minority groups. Utilitarianism can become dangerous in situations of inequality, leaving the minorities to suffer for the wellbeing of the majority, where ethical considerations like natural rights do not matter (Burke, 2020). The most glaring downside of utilitarianism in this case is that it tends to treat individual lives as a means to an end, as if you could do a “cost-benefit analysis of human lives” says Anita Allen, Bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania. Allen argues that a sacrifice like this wouldn’t be distributed equally (Burke, 2020). Although a utilitarian approach strives to protect the

common good by benefiting as many as possible, it becomes discriminatory due to the long-lasting effects of institutional racism and class divides.

A multitude of studies have shown that Anita Allen is right. Minorities, the elderly, and the poor have been and will continue to be the most affected by the coronavirus pandemic. There are a handful of different reasons for this, including unequal distribution of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) who work in essential services, as well as an effect called “racial weathering.” This term describes the effects of prolonged application of stress on individuals who experience racial discrimination. BIPOC in America have been shown to exhibit signs of advanced aging due to wear and tear from external stressors. Aside from premature aging, this weathering has been linked to serious health conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease which put individuals at higher risk for more severe cases of COVID-19 (Chowkwanyun and Reed, 2020). This is concerning for the BIPOC of this country, as it should be for us all. If the United States was not so deeply afflicted by institutional racism, a utilitarian approach might be fair, but it is and so for that reason that this approach becomes inherently discriminatory. Not only would BIPOC be disproportionately affected by COVID-19 but also they would comprise the majority of individuals contracting the more serious cases, and our society has a responsibility to find a better solution than the utilitarian one that Singer and Plant suggest. Ending lockdowns and easing COVID-19 restrictions out of concern for the self-perceived wellbeing of people across

the country will only prolong this pandemic. Prolonging this pandemic is affecting minority groups and the elderly much more harshly than any other demographic groups, and is basically gambling with their lives for the comfort of a louder minority.

Some might argue that all citizens are equal and should therefore be treated the same, or that the negative effects of the well-being of individuals outweighs the number of lives saved by going into lockdown. There are undoubtedly serious negative effects that accompany shutting down the economy for COVID-19, including the onset of mental illness, exposure to abusive households, and bankruptcy. Of course, these effects should be recognized. A problem, however, is that if our solution to these problems is to measure well-being, we must have a reliable way to quantify it. Singer and Plant define well-being as an individual’s perception of their own quality of life. This simply cannot be as accurately measured as the number of people likely to die from COVID-19. This is due to the phenomenon of adaptive preferences as detailed by Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 1997). If an individual is used to a certain level of privilege, they are more likely to consider being in lockdown and working from home a more significant decline in their quality of life than someone working a low-wage, frontline job who does not have the option of working from home. Objectively, the person with the ability to work from home in a larger house or from a vacation home has a higher quality of life than a frontline worker at risk daily for COVID-19. When asked to rate their lives, it is more likely that the person working from home will rate their well-being drastically lower than the

frontline worker would. This automatically makes a “cost-benefit analysis” of well-being versus deaths unreliable and an immoral basis of public policy. Especially when considering that most people working on the front lines like grocery stores and public transit are largely BIPOC. We should consider the risk for frontline workers and recognize that it is not a random group of people that will be sacrificed. This sacrifice will mostly be of the BIPOC, the poor, and the elderly (Allen, 2020). A greater proportion of BIPOC individuals do not have the luxury of working from home, working low-wage essential service jobs and are at highest risk for losing their jobs in the

first place. This makes them doubly at risk than your average white individual during this pandemic (Garfield, Rae, Claxton, & Orgera, 2020). If utilitarians are aiming for a solution with an equal distribution of costs and benefits, keeping the economy open would not suffice. This argument should not just be applied to COVID-19 policy either. Too often minority groups in this country are given the short end of the stick for the comfort and benefit of people unwilling to re-evaluate how we legislate public policy. Going forward, as the composition of the American population is changing, our public policy needs to be more inclusive and reflective of that change.

Works Cited

- Burke, D. (2020, April 24). The dangerous morality behind the ‘Open it Up’ movement. Retrieved December 04, 2020, from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/23/us/reopening-country-coronavirus-utilitarianism/index.html>
- Chowkwanyun, M., & Reed, A. L. (2020, November 24). Racial Health Disparities and Covid-19 - Caution and Context: NEJM. Retrieved December 04, 2020, from https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2012910?query=featured_home
- Garfield, R., Rae, M., Claxton, G., & Orgera, K. (2020, April 29). Double Jeopardy: Low Wage Workers at Risk for Health and Financial Implications of COVID-19. Retrieved December 04, 2020, from <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/double-jeopardy-low-wage-workers-at-risk-for-health-and-financial-implications-of-covid-19/>
- Nussbaum, M. (1997). Capabilities and Human Rights. Retrieved December 04, 2020, from <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol66/iss2/2/>

An interview with Dr. Alexander Rocklin, author of *The Regulation of Religion and the Making of Hinduism in Colonial Trinidad*.

Aegis - We have with us today, Dr. Rocklin. Dr. Rocklin is an assistant professor of religion and philosophy at Otterbein University. He received his PhD in the history of religions from the University of Chicago and in 2019, he released his first book, *The Regulation of Religion and the Making of Hinduism in Colonial Trinidad*. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the 2021 edition of Aegis. Let's just jump right into the questions.

Aegis - *Can you give us some background into your interests that led to studying religion during your undergraduate and graduate years?*

Alex - Sure. Starting out I was very interested in literature. In high school, I was an English nerd and did well in history. In studying literature, I saw that having a particular knowledge in the Bible would be useful. So, I was reading Dante and Flannery O'Connor and James Joyce. I started taking classes at Harvard, I grew up in Massachusetts. And in [studying] things like the Hebrew Bible, I gradually got more interested in that stuff and was less interested in literature. And that's how I ended up then majoring in Religious studies, I went to Wesleyan University in Connecticut and they have a fantastic religious

studies program there. I got to take classes with Elizabeth McAlister, she's an anthropologist who studies Vodou in Haiti and in the Haitian diaspora in the US and I got interested in religions in the Caribbean and took the introduction to religion with her. By my senior year of college, I thought [religion] was something I could [study] for the rest of my life. I went to the University of Chicago and their history of religions programs is supposed to be one of the best in the world and that's how I ended up where I am today.

Aegis - *In your New Books network interview, you say that you studied Hinduism and Buddhism abroad in Nepal during your undergrad, and then spent a year in Mexico before graduate school. In what ways do you think that such cultural immersion deepened or changed your understanding of religion?*

Alex - When I was in undergrad, I really wanted to go somewhere very different from what I knew. And I was interested in Buddhism but didn't know anything about it really. So, I wanted to take a class in Buddhism with Jan Willis, who used to be there, and her class was filled, and I couldn't get into the class. Nepal was supposedly one of the places people say that Buddha was born, so I was like I'll go

there and learn about Buddhism. When I got to Nepal, it really challenged my ideas about religions themselves. In the United States, we have this idea that religions are these separate things that are easily distinguishable. And that if you're a Hindu, you do Hindu stuff, if you're a Buddhist you do Buddhist stuff, and if you're a Muslim you do Muslim stuff and that there isn't overlap between them. It really challenged those ideas. After I graduated, I lived in Mexico. I was living in southern Mexico in Chiapas and working in Indigenous communities there that were in resistance to the government and that got me looking at questions of colonialism and the legacies of colonialism. I got a chance to research the history of Mexico and Spanish colonialism and see the forms of Christianity that Indigenous peoples were formulating on their own, certainly influenced by the Spanish but also were in places where there wasn't stronger penetration by colonial officials and by the Catholic Church. People were able to take their indigenous traditions and Catholicism and create their own traditions.

***Aegis** - Many pieces of your work focus on the Caribbean and Hinduism specifically; could you explain how you first came to research this and what, if anything, keeps you passionate about this study?*

Alex - When I was in graduate school, I was particularly interested in studying South Asia and I was very interested in South Asian Islam in particular. As a master's student, I was focusing in on the British governments regulations of Muharram which is the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein who is the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. I took a course on religion in Latin America and it was taught by historian

Dain Borges, who specializes in Brazil and the Caribbean. When I was taking the class, I was like "How can I make this about South Asia?," not really knowing what connections there were between Latin America, the Caribbean, and South Asia and found out about Trinidad which is where I ended up doing most of my research. I did research on this massacre that occurred in 1884 where indentured laborers were commemorating Muharram, and the British were not allowing them to go out on public roads in procession. They [indentured laborers] did it anyway and so the police backed by the military opened fire on the processions; many people died and were injured. After the course, I continued research on this massacre and eventually, went to India and studied Urdu and Hindi. And was focusing on the relationship between Hindus and Muslims and potentially the role of this commemoration, Muharram. At some point, after continuing research on Trinidad too, I asked my advisor if I could study Trinidad. So, I ended up focusing on the Caribbean. What ended up being my dissertation and what became my book, looks at the formation of Hinduism but there are parts that look at Christianity and Islam too. What is interesting about the Caribbean particularly is that it's such a cosmopolitan place, it's incredibly diverse because of its history of colonization, the history of slavery. In a place like Trinidad, you have Hindus, Muslims, Christians, people practicing African-inspired religions (Orisha) and these incredibly diverse people all living together in this place the size of Delaware. It gives me the opportunity if I'm interested to look at Hinduism one day, Islam another day and look at forms of Afro-Caribbean Christianity another day. I can look at a variety of different things and they're all connected.

Aegis - *Your first book* The Regulation of Religion and the Making of Hinduism in Colonial Trinidad *came out in Spring 2019. Can you give us a brief overview of what the book is about?*

Alex - The book looks at the role of the category of religion in the regulation of Indian indentured laborers in colonial Trinidad. The kinds of questions that I was most interested in when I was an undergraduate and still today is how something becomes a religion because what became apparent to me was that the way that we understand religion in the United States is often not how people see the world and live their lives in other parts of the world. The case of Trinidad becomes particularly interesting because in South Asia before British colonization, there was really no word for religion in any South Asian language. If you look at the vernacular languages, if you look at Sanskrit, if you look at South Asian languages that are influenced by Persian or Arabic, there isn't any word that means religion in the way we view it in modern English. The idea of religion as a separate sphere of life, and how we distinguish the not religious and the religious, the religious and the secular are modern distinctions that historically haven't existed and, in many places, don't exist. Then these distinctions between the "world religions" that we assume there are Hindus and Muslims and there are Christians and there are Jains and Jews, and that often in places like India or in West Africa, for instance, those distinctions are rather fuzzy, and people will move across these boundaries. One of the things I was really interested in exploring in the book is how does this concept of religion get imposed on people? For indentured laborers, they were brought in and signed these contracts that

usually ran 3-5 years and sometimes people would sign again, and they were treated similarly to how slaves were treated before them. They were stuck on plantations not able to leave and the only places they could be besides the plantation was jail or in the hospital. Even at the end of their contracts, they needed free papers to prove they were not indentured and that they were free people. The only time they were allowed off plantations to do their own thing was to do something they were calling religion. They were guaranteed religious freedom. That's why in 1884, there was this massacre that I mentioned where they were practicing Muharram. This [Muharram] was the only reason they were allowed off on their own, off plantations. We see indentured laborers coming in from South Asia didn't understand religion in the way British colonial officials did but had to rather quickly, learn what religion meant as the British colonial officials were defining that. In some ways that's why the book is titled, *The Regulation of Religion and the Making of Hinduism in Colonial Trinidad*, because two-thirds of the book is looking at the processes of how Indian indentured laborers had to get religion; they had to figure out the appropriate way of dividing up their lives.

Aegis - *Do you have a favorite subject/class that you teach? Do you have any classes you would hope to teach in the future?*

Alex - One of the courses I enjoy teaching the most is the introduction to religion. It's one of those classes where I can do whatever I want, and it becomes a hodgepodge. Most classes, professors have an argument that they're trying to make throughout the course, but this course doesn't have the restraints that

other sorts of classes have. It's my chance to make a certain pitch to students, to try and challenge people's expectations and push back on students' preconceived notions about what religion is and what the "world religions" are. It's also one of the courses I've taught the longest and have had the most chances to tweak. It's one of the courses I feel the most comfortable teaching. Another course I haven't taught as much but will be teaching more in the next semesters is a course on ghosts and zombies. Which allows me to teach material related to the Caribbean, stuff related to voodoo and Santeria and stuff related to Trinidad too but is also a chance to introduce students to histories of US imperialism and the US colonization of Haiti. I am teaching a course on race and religion next year in the fall, and I hope to in the future teach a course on religion and gender and sexuality, and a course on religion and science and technology too, which will be new courses that I haven't taught before.

Aegis - *Do you have any projects or future research ideas in the works that you'd like to share with us?*

Alex - I have an article that looks at accusations of madness related to Afro-Caribbean religions. There was this tendency among colonial officials, particularly in the British empire, to say that people who were practicing minority African-derived religions in the Caribbean were crazy or mad. It was one of the ways that colonized groups were being regulated from the time of slavery and for some folks still today. I also have a second book that I am still in the process of working on. That project looks at a series of case studies of people from different backgrounds

in the Americas who call themselves Hindus in different times and places and tracks the way that Hindu identification has been used and how it has operated. Looking at examples of people of Indian descent but also people of African descent, people of Europeans decent all calling themselves Hindu and using that as a chance to think about ways in which the categories of race and religion have been intertwined with one another in the Americas, but also other places around the world. I track people who are traveling around in the Caribbean but also in the United States who are moving between those places but also into Central America and West Africa to South and Southeast Asia too. The chapter that I'm working on right now is looking at Panama and looking at Sindhi merchants who are from what is today, Pakistan who were selling exotic wares along the Panama Canal. They are being regulated by the Panamanian government and the government was saying they shouldn't be allowed to continue coming there. The Sindhi merchants were making the argument that they were high-caste Hindus and therefore should be allowed. I'm also looking at Jamaican immigrants who came as laborers to work on the Panama Canal, who had their own ideas of what it meant to be Hindu, particularly because of their interactions with indentured laborers like the ones I study in my first book. So, we have these very different ideas about what it means to be Hindu.

For more information on Alexander Rocklin and his research, you can visit his website <https://www.alexanderrocklin.com> or <https://otterbein.academia.edu/AlexanderRocklin>

Interview with NHA (National Humanities Association) Member Scott Muir, *Conducted by Juli Lindenmayer*

Scott Muir leads *Study the Humanities*, an initiative that provides humanities faculty, administrators, and advocates with evidence-based resources and strategies to make the case for studying the humanities as an undergraduate. Scott earned a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Duke University, an M.T.S. from Emory University, and a B.A. from Dartmouth College. His research explores the religious histories of college campuses and the religious dimensions of contemporary camping music festivals. He has taught at Duke, Emory, and Western Carolina University.

Juli Lindenmayer: *You were a humanities student. Would you tell our readers a little about yourself? How did you come to the NHA? What did your career path look like?*

Scott Muir: Funnily enough, I was actually a psychology major as an undergraduate. We had very modest major requirements though, so my transcript really reads like a tour of all the different humanities disciplines. I've always been a bit of a generalist, which is maybe why I ultimately gravitated toward religious studies and ended up with a minor. I've always been very interested in religion.

And I love the way religious studies draws upon the tools of all of the humanities and social sciences disciplines to connect virtually anything — history, art, economics, education, law, etc. — to our deepest values.

After college I worked at a very small consulting outfit where the bulk of my job was to take fellow young adults and teenagers through a life and career planning program. I had participated in the program and knew the owner of the company, so my personal connections helped, but so did my humanities background, as well as my years of experience working at summer camps.

But I couldn't help diving back into the humanities, specifically religious studies. I had all these big, driving questions and I felt like I was just getting started when I graduated. I got a master's at Emory while I continued to do the career counseling work part-time. Those two years were so rich.

My goal was to become a professor, so I applied to PhD programs. At first, I didn't get into any of the programs I applied to and I started to think about other career paths. Then I got into Duke as an alternate. I spent six years there doing a religious studies PhD. It was a really wonderful experience that I made totally my own. I built my two research projects — a comparative religious history of college campuses and

a survey-driven exploration of religion and spirituality at camping music festivals – based almost solely on my own questions and interests. And I did a lot of teaching, mostly at Western Carolina University...I also really enjoyed my research projects because they were so personally meaningful to me. I figured I would keep on doing research and teaching for the rest of my life. It turns out they weren't kidding when they told me there were (almost) no tenure-track jobs to be had. I had tried to remind myself to keep my professional options open, but it was still pretty tough when it did not pan out. It kind of just felt like I was born at the wrong time.

Then I came to NHA. A friend sent me the job ad just as it was settling in that I was not going to land a tenure-track job that year and that either my wife or I needed to find work soon. I wasn't previously familiar with the organization but it sounded like a great fit on multiple levels. Obviously it appealed to me as a very interdisciplinary humanist... NHA wanted someone with social science research skills, which I had honed through my music festival research. My initial role was an imperfect fit, but the organization has indeed been a great one to work for. That's one thing I would really stress: job satisfaction data would suggest that who you work for and with is as important as what you do and maybe more. Personally, I think there's something to say for working for a smaller organization where everyone knows one another.

Within a year, the *Study the Humanities* director position opened up and I moved into this role. I love this job. I believe very strongly in the power of humanities education to expand hearts and minds

and greatly appreciate the opportunity to support it. I also find the marketing aspect of it fun. It's a kind of puzzle: how do you replace these widespread misperceptions about the value of humanities education with a rich picture of their true value? There are moments when I feel the loss of a linear long-term career plan (professor), but most of the time I feel like I've ended up in a role I'm better suited for with lots of appealing possible paths forward from here. I think we humans tend to crave long-term clarity and security, but real life, thankfully, is much more open-ended and exciting than that.

JL: *Could you describe the mission and work that the NHA does for the humanities?*

SM: The NHA advocates for the value of the humanities on campuses and in communities... Our two major priorities are supporting publicly engaged teaching and research through our *Humanities for All* initiative and strengthening undergraduate recruitment efforts through *Study the Humanities*. We have been researching effective recruitment strategies to distribute to the humanities community and developing tools to help faculty and administrators make the case for the value of studying the humanities as an undergraduate, including our online toolkit of evidence-based arguments and our forthcoming podcast of humanities career pathways stories called *What Are You Going to Do with That?*

I must admit that before coming to NHA, I was less familiar with the many crucial humanities organizations that strengthen communities across the country... My first role at NHA was focused

on elevating that work through our *NEH for All* project, which illustrates the impact of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in communities across the country. Supporting the NEH – along with other humanities federal funding, such as the National Archives and Records Administration and Library of Congress – is a major part of NHA’s work. The NEH was founded in 1965, along with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), to distribute federal funding for humanities scholarship, public programming, K-12 programming, and a wide variety of higher ed humanities initiatives. Part of the idea was that, if our nation is going to make huge investments in science research, we should also be supporting the arts and humanities. NHA was founded in 1981 to defend the NEH when Ronald Reagan proposed eliminating it, just as Donald Trump would do in each of his annual budget proposals to Congress.

We help convene this incredible national community of public humanists every year through the National Humanities Conference. We have another major event, the NHA Annual Meeting, where we bring together humanists who are primarily based in higher ed institutions and scholarly societies to delve into strategies for elevating the humanities.

One new frontier for NHA is a community case studies project. We’re taking a close look at how networks of humanities organizations in three mid-sized cities contribute to their economic and social well-being to demonstrate the public value of investments in the humanities.

JL: *What are the biggest challenges that face the humanities? How should we*

begin to address these challenges? How has the global pandemic made this more challenging?

SM: There are a number of important challenges facing the humanities at all levels, from the erosion of K-12 humanities curricula to making humanities research more accessible to the public. But in my view, shoring up undergraduate humanities education is the top priority. Within higher ed, humanities scholarship and graduate education rest on a departmental infrastructure created primarily to serve undergraduate students. And in terms of broader social impact, I think it is through undergraduate education that the humanities make their deepest impact on a broad swath of the population. Since 2008, the numbers of undergraduates who are getting that kind of a deep humanities education has been declining. Folks started asking if they can afford to invest in humanities education. What the complex overlapping crises of the last year – the COVID-19 pandemic, the national reckoning with racial injustice, a political crisis exacerbated by misinformation, etc. – show us, is that we can’t afford not to.

On the other hand, the pandemic makes this more challenging because of the way it has exacerbated a pre-existing budget squeeze precipitated by plateauing enrollments and declining revenues. Humanities departments were already being threatened with cuts at financially strapped liberal arts colleges and comprehensive regional universities. Now, many institutions are going to have to make cuts somewhere, and many are going to consider cutting academic programs with fewer majors first.

I think the primary way to address this challenge is to more clearly demonstrate the value of humanities education “in the real world.” The good news is that there are all kinds of ways to do this. We just released a new report, *Strategies for Recruiting Students to the Humanities: A Comprehensive Resource*, that highlights a range of approaches through more than 100 exemplary initiatives collected from campuses all over the country. We hope that humanities departments will draw upon all of these strategies to make a stronger case for their majors, but also to embark upon interdisciplinary collaborations that can boost enrollments by providing rich humanities experiences to students unlikely to choose a humanities major.

JL: *What do you think is important about studying the humanities?*

SM: Studying the humanities is important because it’s an excellent way to develop core capacities that enrich our personal and professional lives. At the individual level, I would start with the concept of the examined life. In Plato’s *Apology*, we hear Socrates assert that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” To reframe it positively, the capacity for deep reflection and questioning that comes through studying the humanities gives life depth and meaning. This is not only deeply gratifying in an existential sense, it propels us forward by enabling us to imagine better futures, communities, and selves to strive for. At the social level, I would point to empathy, perspective-taking, and intercultural competencies. The humanities are how we walk the proverbial mile in another’s shoes.

We learn to imagine how the world might look from another’s perspective and gain the capacity to critically assess our own cultural assumptions and biases. We gain enormously useful information about other cultures across time and space and intuitively grasp a common human experience that transcends our differences. Again, this not only enriches our life, it provides the foundation for skillful human communication, which is the bread and butter of most jobs that college graduates want...employers across all industries appreciate the tremendous value of these core skills – written and oral communication, critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural competencies – and that these skills are found to be lacking among many college graduates who majored in other areas of study

JL: *What advice would you give to a student who likes their humanities classes, but is afraid to major in the humanities because they don’t see a clear career path?*

SM: I would begin with all of the data featured on our toolkit that shows that humanities majors do just fine in terms of employment, salary, and job satisfaction compared to other majors. I would then ask them if there are specific career fields that appeal to them. Whatever fields they mention, I can almost certainly find examples of folks with humanities backgrounds who have succeeded in those fields. Their paths might not be “clear” in the sense of being totally linear and obvious, but all that means is that their stories are typical and interesting rather than unusual and boring. Clear, linear career paths are the exception not the rule. I would argue that the ambiguity and uncertainty that gives

them pause about studying the humanities is simply an unavoidable fact of life.

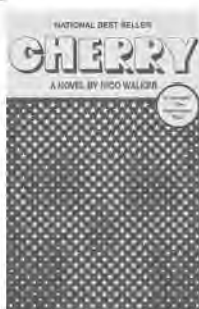
Next, I would ask them to consider whether whatever other major(s) seems like a clearer path to a career is such a slam dunk after all. Is everyone who graduates with X degree going to be employed in X job in 20 years? Absolutely not. Is that job even going to exist in 20 years? Quite possibly not. Even if it does, will the training that person received in four years of college have given them everything they need to do that job for decades to come? Highly unlikely! When you really think about it, it's the notion that there is any undergraduate degree that leads automatically to an attractive and invulnerable career path that is questionable, rather than deciding to study something that gives you a widely applicable skill set.

Finally, in light of that unavoidable ambiguity and uncertainty, I would ask them if it really makes sense to study anything other than what they're genuinely most interested in now. If you think about it, that's basically trading your fulfillment in the very real present for some imagined future payoff that might not pan out...or might not be worth it even if it does!

Ultimately, you get out of your education what you put into it. The intrinsic motivation that comes with studying what you love motivates greater effort, which leads to deeper learning and personal growth. You necessarily lose some of that momentum when you choose to study something for instrumental reasons, as a means to an end. In contrast, choosing today to do what is most personally meaningful to you creates momentum that propels you forward toward a fulfilling future.

JL: *What do you wish everyone knew about the humanities?*

SM: I wish everyone would understand that humanities education is for everyone and teaches you how to think, not what to think. We're living in a very polarized time. Some folks may be tempted to associate the humanities with one ideological pole, whether that's a positive or negative association for them. The humanities are not just for Democrats or elites or white people, they are for all people. The humanities strive to honor the dignity of every individual, preserve every cultural heritage, and call everyone's assumptions into question. And they have the power to bring us closer together and help us to better understand one another.



Book Review by Kimberly Satterfield

Cherry

Author: Nico Walker

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf

Although the author's note of *Cherry* by Nico Walker assures readers that "these things didn't ever happen" and "these people didn't ever exist," they certainly could have. Walker's story is a realistic and familiar one, and the narrator's journey from college student to Army medic to drug addict is all too believable. The narrator, who remains unnamed throughout the book, eventually stoops to robbing banks in order to get more money for drugs. Because Walker takes readers along the narrator's journey, they are able to clearly see his motivation for robbing banks, and his actions become understandable and maybe even justifiable. The narrator's surroundings and experiences give him no choice but to become a criminal; he is a product of his environment and a victim of the opioid crisis. The narrator is also a clear victim of American exceptionalism and imperialism, causing readers to question the ways they view America.

A tone of tragic hopefulness permeates the book. Right before the narrator robs a bank for the first time, he writes, "I was feeling melancholy, but it was a calming melancholy. Life was fucked but I was good. This was what I knew. And fate was fate. My heart was full and life was precious" (277-278). Even at the narrator's lowest moments, he is able to believe that things can get better. His love for his girlfriend Emily is strong enough to make him want a better life for her, but nothing is stronger

than his addiction to drugs. His optimism is ultimately pointless; the narrator and Emily cannot, in fact, escape the life they are living. They are victims of the system and powerless to escape it. In the prologue, the narrator writes, "I feel bad about the dog sometimes. We had said, We'll get a dog and we won't be dope fiends anymore. And now we're dope fiends with a dog" (6). The narrator's hopefulness at some points in the book only makes his ultimate powerlessness more tragic. The prologue ends by telling readers that the narrator gets caught by the police as a result of his bank robbery. His long journey ends with incarceration, and in the face of it, he feels at peace. The end of the book also has a sense of peace: "There was hope for me yet. Life was good when you were cooking up a shot of dope; in those moments every dope boy in the world was your friend and you didn't think about the things you'd done wrong and fucked up, the years you'd wasted . . . I felt a little pop and my blood flashed in the rig. I sent it home" (313). In this closing paragraph of the novel, the narrator has a sense of complacency about his life. He knows that his drug addiction is dangerous, but at the same time, it is the only thing that brings him a brief respite from his life. He pursues addiction at all costs, and even though it lands him in prison, he does not regret it.

Cherry's dark portrayal of the military provides a fresh perspective on American

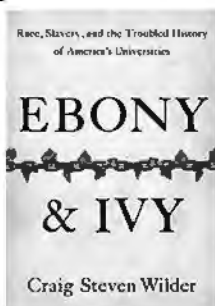
“Cherry’s dark portrayal of the military provides a fresh perspective on American exceptionalism and imperialism.”

exceptionalism and imperialism. The narrator expects to find some sort of purpose and glory while serving in the Army, but instead, he comes home completely shattered and turns to drugs to cope with the horrors he saw overseas. American imperialism destroys the narrator, and he quickly becomes disillusioned with the idea that fighting for America is a noble cause. He writes, “That’s when I figured out we weren’t there to do shit. We’d do for getting fucked-up-or-killed-by-bombs purposes, and everyday-waste-of-your-fucking-time purposes, but no one thought we could do the actual fighting, whatever that was” (130). If the novel is making a comment on American exceptionalism, it is that America is exceptionally bad. When the narrator is about to be caught by the police, he writes, “Act like you love the police. Act like you never did drugs. Act like you love America so much it’s retarded. But don’t act like you robbed a bank” (12). Here Walker exposes American exceptionalism as a fraudulent mindset that is based on deception. The American sensibility of superiority is a sham to cover up the crimes hidden beneath it. The narrator is a literal bank robber, and yet he is less of a criminal than the country that shaped him. The idea of robbing banks seems logical to him because it cannot compare to the horrors he saw overseas. Nothing can top the crimes the narrator saw the military commit during his time in the Army.

Although the two novels differ in tone,

Cherry’s themes are reminiscent of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and both are realist novels set in a postmodernist moment. DeLillo’s hysterical realist novel uses comedy and irony to comment on the spectacle of consumerism and imperialism in America. DeLillo originally wanted to call his book *The American Book of the Dead*, and his purpose for the novel is to portray the American way of death rather than life. Although *Cherry* certainly has a much more serious tone, both novels serve to question the way that people view America. *White Noise*’s Jack Gladney, a college professor, says in a lecture, “All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers’ plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children’s games. We edge nearer death every time we plot” (26). The plots of both of these novels certainly focus on death, whether it be the death of people, dreams, or the American ideology. Both novels are disaster novels, and both expose the toxicity of American consumerism and imperialism.

Cherry feels so realistic because much of it is based on Walker’s own experiences. A former Army medic, he wrote the novel while in prison for robbing banks. In *Cherry*, Walker uses many of his own experiences as a backdrop to expose the dangers of American imperialism. He denounces the idea of American exceptionalism by showing how joining the Army sent the narrator into a downward spiral from which he could not escape. The opioid crisis is clearly a symptom of the toxic ideology of America, not the root cause of it. The smaller crimes that the narrator commits expose the systemic crimes in America. This novel deserves its place in the American literary canon because of the bold way it exposes the dirtier parts of America that are usually kept quiet.



Book Review by Josh Wolf

Ebony & Ivy:

Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities

Author: Craig Steven Wilder

Publisher: Bloomsbury USA, 2014

After the British settlers had established their permanent stakes in what is now America during the late seventeenth century, they sought to set up an educational institution that would intertwine with the economic, political, and religious atmosphere that influenced the region. The American financial system was invested in the importation of slaves from Africa to expand its colonial capitalist scheme. Wealthy investors came over from England to buy plantations that produced basic items like cotton and sugar to obtain the substantial profits that came with the trade system between Great Britain and America. With new wealth garnered from this network, the British colonial metropole decided to invest their pecuniary assets into the building of a college system that would teach the inhabitants how to maintain firm ties with the Crown. In his book, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, the American historian Craig Steven Wilder examined how slavery and racial identity both affected the intellectual norms of American universities like Harvard. He argues that rather than being beneficiaries of colonial conquest, our country's institutions of tertiary education have stood beside church and state as the third pillar in a society built on bondage.

During this time, college students in America were taught by professors who believed that people born directly from

European descent were superior to other races. They were also told to use their heritage to establish a developed world where Protestant Christianity and white supremacy would be used to conquer more land and people. Thus, racial ideology was used as a tool in the colonial American tertiary education experience. College graduates would apprentice under New England slave ships and receive their knowledge in trade from the captains who sailed on the transatlantic Middle Passage. For example, after Henrico college was destroyed by Indigenous raiders within Virginia during the Pequot War, one of its professors, Patrick Copland, moved to Bermuda where he conducted trade with New England. While the Pequot War persisted, the Colonial Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop documented the sale of Native women and children over to Copland, who used them as slaves on his plantations in the Caribbean islands. In return, Copland sent British students who had studied at Caribbean universities to New England. Once they arrived in America, the British students were ordered by Winthrop to help build a university within Massachusetts that would teach its students about the values of the transatlantic slave trade. Construction of this university ended in 1636, and it became known as Harvard. Its deans would receive financial subsidies from the trading of slaves and raw materials between America and the

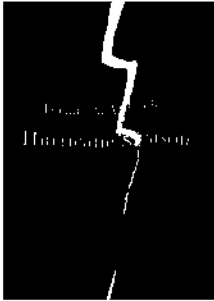
Caribbean islands.

Aside from centers to teach young, colonial men about the necessities of conducting the slave trade, many of America's early colleges also served as imperial instruments for the British colonial army to train ministers, set up fortifications to protect settlers, and convert Indigenous tribes to Christianity. When they set foot on American soil for the first time in the early seventeenth century, many English settlers were ill-equipped to deal with the unfamiliar landscape. They turned to local Indigenous tribes like the Powhatans and Nansemonds in order to search for food. However, as the decades progressed, both factions came to distrust one another, especially when it came to land ownership in the region and fought wars to settle their discrepancies. Things would change by 1611, however, when Sir Thomas Dale, the Deputy Governor of the Henrico settlement within Virginia, planned to establish a college institution in the area that would act as a base for the English soldiers in their attack on the Nansemond tribe. The college taught young men how to be good frontier warriors and why it was important to spread Christian morals in this new land. It also provided them with fortification against warring Native Americans. Over the next ten years, the Henrico college became a symbol of Christian subordination over the land as the English emerged triumphantly from their conflicts with the Native American tribes. As a final act of humiliation to the Indigenous people, Sir Dale ordered all of them, both men and women, to attend Henrico college where they would be converted to Christianity and practice the same social customs as the white settlers. This college would continue to serve as a fortification for English pioneers and a missionary center for converting Native Americans to Christianity

until it was destroyed during the Pequot War.

As slave traders, planters, and soldiers came to dominate the social sphere in colonial America, they took guardianship over tertiary education. Wealthy plantation owners became college deans and used their wealth to determine the locations for new schools. Profits from the sale and purchase of enslaved Africans paid for campuses and swelled college trusts. The politics of these campuses complied with the demands of slave-holding students as college board members sought to cultivate a social environment that would appeal to the sons of wealthy, slave-owning families. "In the daily routine of a college there was a lot of work to be done, and enslaved people often performed the most labor-intensive tasks... As students ate, their rooms were cleaned, chamber pots emptied, and beds made" (Wilder 134). The money that the slaves made from their domestic work around college campuses was used to pay for the tuition prices of their young enslavers.

In conclusion, Wilder argues that rather than being beneficiaries of colonial conquest, our country's institutions of tertiary education have stood beside church and state as the third pillar in a society built on bondage. By examining America's most revered colleges, like Harvard, he describes how the slave economy and tertiary education system grew up together during the colonial era. The money that was made from the sale of enslaved Africans was what built the campuses and stocked the libraries as these people toiled heavily to pay for their young enslavers' tuition. Indeed, our universities were not only built on the backs of slaves, but they also became breeding grounds for racist ideas that were intertwined with education. This is a historical fact that should not be overlooked in American colleges today.



Book Review by Seth Stobart

Hurricane Season

Author: Fernanda Melchor

Publisher: New Directions

Fernanda Melchor's novel *Hurricane Season* centers around the events leading up to the death of a Witch in the South American town of La Matosa. Told from the varying perspectives of separate narrators, we see the acts of pornographic sexual violence and excessive corporeal violence that lead up to the violent femicide that caps off the novel. Meant to be allegorical of the experiences of the common man in the Global South, Melchor's novel is structured around the fictional hellscape of La Matosa, a place where the body dumps pile high and an 'aura' of violence clouds the streets. The novel performs a journalistic act in documenting the experiences of subaltern figures but refuses to simply be a novel of information, or to address the reader as if to say 'now you have the facts, now you understand.' Melchor is much more concerned with opening the closed doors surrounding the taboo topic of South American femicide, and to force the reader to confront the injustices of the ceaseless violence.

The opening of the novel begins with a short vignette, placing the reader directly

into the violence to come. Five young boys stumble upon the body of the Witch in the first pages, "surrounded by blowflies, finally recongiz[ing] what was peeping out from the yellow foam on the water's surface: the rotten face of a corpse" (Melchor 4). It's reminiscent of Forché's opening to *What You've Heard is True* or Didion's *El Salvador*, all of these novels begin with similar excessive spectacles of violence that will prepare the reader for what is to come, all of these novels force the reader to ask the question, 'Why is this body here? What caused this death?' Didion and Forché continue in their journalistic actions, going deep into the sociopolitical factors leading up to the deaths of their opening scenes. Didion focusing on the abundance of contradictory information surrounding death in El Salvador, and Forché telling the story of her travels,; taking the reader along with her so they'll be exposed to El Salvador in the same way she was exposed to it. The bodies Forché and Didion stumble on remain nameless, simply a few more victims added to the list of casualties of American imperialism. Melchor, however, takes a very

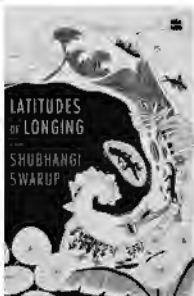
different approach to answering the reader's question of 'What caused this death?'

Melchor's approach is to home in and focus on explaining the deeply intimate factors that lead to the death of this *one* body. Her novel doesn't center around any sense of narrative progress or strict linear movement through events. The novel instead circles around the death of the Witch, the narrative folds back in on itself, retelling stories from different perspectives, adding context and clarity to actions. It is about complicating this one specific act of violence, about the small pervasive events leading up to her death, and the even smaller events that are tied to those. By using multiple perspectives, we see the Witch's life from different views and lenses, one chapter she's the whore and a sexual freak, the next, she's the sage *brujeira*, helping a young girl get an abortion. The Witch becomes more myth than corporeal in the reader's perspective, an amalgamation of views, as the events behind her murder become more intertwined and personal. Through these acts, Melchor is able to personalize the political and socioeconomic causes for this one instance of femicide in a truly revolutionary way.

While at first, Melchor may seem to fall into the reactionary pitfall that is hyper-individualism in personalizing the death of the Witch to such an extent, there is an essential focus of the novel that this violent act is one of many. The 'aura' of death that surrounds La Matosa echoes similar novels such as Didion and Forché's mentioned above, but Melchor is trying something different in this novel. Rather than making the sociopolitical causes for

the violence in the novel the forefront, she makes it a background element, and instead chooses to relay the story of these subaltern figures and show the effects of Western imperialism's puppet strings as they pull and guide the hands of the central players in this novel. Through doing this, Melchor focuses her novel on the personal consequences and actions that are guided by the remnants of imperial hierarchies.

Melchor refuses to shy away from describing the excessive corporeal and sexual violence that surrounds La Matosa, it lingers on every page of the novel. She leaves no room to breathe, offering long continuous sentences that repulse and draw the reader in further. The pedophilic rape of the novel ties the colonial 'aura' of corporeal violence to the very personal sexual violence. It's deliberately not tasteful, but necessary for expanding the definition of colonial exploits to include the systematic devaluation of the feminine experience, and therefore offers a deep meditation on the economy of misogyny. It's detailed and gruesome, but offers no judgment, as if saying, 'yes, it is pornographic and excessive, but so is actual life.' Melchor successfully relays the experiences of subaltern figures in this novel, tying their lives to that of constant exploitation and inhumanity of colonial violence. She shows not only how that exploitation deeply changes the world of the oppressed but also how it forms their personal actions and shapes subaltern thought at the very core.



Book Review by Miranda Hilt

Latitudes of Longing

Author: Shubhangi Swarup

Publisher: One World

When was the last time you genuinely opened yourself up to associate deeply with the natural world? In our fast-paced society, many of us neglect to acknowledge our essential relationships. Shubhangi Swarup's debut novel *Latitudes of Longing* illustrates the profound interconnectedness of humans to one another, to landscapes, and to the creatures with whom we share the earth. Swarup's enchanting tale leaps across time and oceans, reaching hypnotic snow deserts and spirit-filled islands. The novel follows a rotating cast of characters; it would be all but impossible to establish a single protagonist. However, the stories of each character are deeply linked with one another and the environment. Swarup's novel is both delightfully poetic and contemplative; it is simultaneously romantic and poignant. It recounts the creation of islands and continents by shifting tectonic plates and the temporal existence of landscapes. The novel is set in South Asia and is broken up into four novellas: "Islands," "Faultline," "Valley," and "Snow Desert." While some characters are only featured in a particular novella, others traverse them, connecting the landscapes and characters to one another. The characters include a clairvoyant who can speak to trees and see across time, a shapeshifting turtle, a mother attempting to free her insurgent son from prison, a scientist studying Pangea, a yeti yearning for friendship, and many more. Through these many storylines,

Swarup's novel captivates the reader and contemplates the depths of our relationships and interconnectedness with the world at large.

The novel opens with "Islands," and the newly married couple of Chanda Devi and Girija Prasad. They have recently moved to Ross Island for Girija Prasad's scientific research, studying the ancient supercontinent of Pangea. His wife, Chanda Devi, is a clairvoyant who can talk to the trees and the many ghosts that inhabit Ross Island and see into past and future. When asked by her husband why she can talk to plants, Chanda Devi replies, "Plants are the most sensitive spirits in the web of creation. They bind the earth to water and air, and they bind different worlds together. They make life possible. Which is why they see, feel and hear more than other forms, especially humans" (98). Through Chanda Devi, Swarup emphasizes that the vitality running through water, dirt, rock, plants, and animals is the foundation of human existence. Throughout the first novella, the reader sees Chanda Devi and Girija Prasad grow and be metamorphosed by the island.

The next novella, "Faultline," tells the story of Chanda Devi and Girija Prasad's housemaid, Rose Mary, and her estranged, insurgent son, Plato. After news of Plato's arrest reaches Mary, she travels to Burma with Plato's friend, Thapa, in hopes she will be able to negotiate

“... Swarup emphasizes that the vitality running through water, dirt, rock, plants, and animals is the foundation of human existence.”

his release. This novella recalls Mary’s abusive relationship with Plato’s father and recounts Plato’s torturous imprisonment. During a snapshot into the future, Plato thinks, “the rocks attain their beauty and hardness through profound violence. Like the scars on his body... the gemstones too are evidence of transformations at the core. Purged to the surface from faultlines far below, aren’t they scars and clots from the land’s deepest wounds?” (155). Plato’s pondering demonstrates how Swarup seamlessly moves around time and storylines, connecting people to the earth in a deeply reflective manner. Intertwined with Mary and Plato’s stories is the tale of a mother turtle who shapeshifts in order to be reunited with her son. Swarup’s ability to incorporate fantastical elements and geographic descriptions that parallel the storylines of the novel makes for a lyrical, deeply moving work.

“Valley” follows Plato’s friend, Thapa, to the town of Thamel where he befriends a dancer named Bagmati. Both characters are running away from traumatic pasts, and through the power of storytelling, Thapa and Bagmati find solace in each other’s company. Recalling the memory of a shunned woman he sees on the street, Thapa thinks, “Survivors of calamities bring the calamity with them, for it dwells permanently within. The earthquake lives inside her. Her memories are the epicenter”

(192). Thapa’s story is immeasurably affected by aberrant topography; Bagmati is named after the holy river that runs through Kathmandu valley. Intrinsic attachments of characters to the natural world is the motif that unites the novellas into a single work.

“Snow Desert” draws the novel to a close, high up in the Tibetan plateau. This novella tells the tale of a village elder finding love in his final years, a yeti, or *cheemo*, seeking human connection, and a geologist studying glaciers who is visited by an ancestral spirit. Swarup intertwines these narratives with one another through the shared landscape and character interactions, turning these seemingly independent narratives into a broad picture of existence. Rama, the geologist hoping to cease battles over the Baltoro Glacier, encounters the spirit of one of his ancestors while on an excursion. The ghost says to Rama, “This is the highest human beings can go on earth. Did you expect to ascend to this profound altitude and isolation with your spirit untouched?” (285). Emphasis on the divine and transformative qualities of our environment is the most distinctive aspect of this novel.

Latitudes of Longing is a captivating, poetic work that is at once tragic and uplifting, fantastical and substantive. It is the perfect novel for those who enjoy reading imaginative, experimental literature and those wishing to deepen their connection with the natural world. There are a few graphic descriptions of violence and suffering, and therefore, it is likely intended for readers thirteen and older. The novel paints an expansive illustration of human existence and our relationships with one another and our planet. To read *Latitudes of Longing* is to relinquish yourself to the tides and allow Shubhangi Swarup’s words to transport you across landscapes and lifetimes.



Book Review by Delaney Lombardi

Little Fires Everywhere

Author: Celeste Ng

Publisher: Penguin Publishing Group, 2017

Few books will grab a reader's attention like Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere*. This novel of secrets, self-image, and relentless control centers around a straight-out-of-a-catalog nuclear family—the Richardsons—whose manicured worlds are rocked by the arrival of the bohemian mother and daughter duo, Mia and Pearl Warren. These two do not fit into the cookie cutter, perfectly planned out lives of those in the town of Shaker Heights, Ohio. Mia does not lead the life of the usual Shaker mother, and Pearl has not led the lives her high school peers have, having moved around with just her mother all around the country. They equally entice and confuse the Richardson family—especially matriarch Elena. The four children are all touched in some way by either Pearl or her mother and build complex relationships with one or both of them. Elena, however, is suspicious of and hostile towards the pair due to their continued defiance of the status quo of Shaker Heights. Amidst all the complexity surrounding the Richardson's and Warren's is a custody battle rattling the town. A custody battle between a Chinese American baby's biological mother—who is a friend of Mia's—and her adopted parents—who are Elena's friends—causes

differing opinions in the town, as well as within the focal families of the novel. When a fire burns down the Richardson home, the only question on everyone's minds is "Who could have done it?"

The manicured, picture-perfect town of Shaker Heights is the setting for this novel and the effects of this society can be seen in every aspect of the storyline. The Richardson family is the prime example of a family that is brimming with privilege and perfection, and cares immensely about image. Even when Elena does good deeds or provides some sort of charity for someone, she expects something in return to make *her* feel good. She feels that they must be incredibly gracious to her in return for her unbridled kindness. When discussing one of her tenants named Mr. Yang, it is stated that "he was exactly the kind of tenant Mrs. Richardson wanted: a kind person to whom she could do a kind turn, and who would appreciate her kindness" (Ng 13). Whether it be immense gratitude or the promise that they owe her a favor in the future, she wants to feel validation that she is a good person. It is not always just about the good deed.

The progressive values the town was built upon also seem to convince the citizens that they are perfectly equitable, and it is one of the best places to live. However, there is

ample proof that this town is not necessarily as ideal as they believe. When describing how the town integrated Black and white citizens in earlier years, it is revealed that this was done by white and Black families being encouraged to move into each other's neighborhoods. "A neighborhood association sprang up to encourage integration in a particularly Shaker Heights manner: loans to encourage white families to move into black neighborhoods, loans to encourage black families to move into white neighborhoods, regulations forbidding FOR SALE signs in order to prevent white flight..." (Ng 159). Once again, this is an example of a good deed that is done shallowly; it is only done with appearance in mind. Yes, different races were now neighbors, but that does not solve the problem of racial discrimination. The court case involving family friends of the Richardsons— the McCulloughs— who are fighting to keep their adopted Chinese American baby whose birth mother wishes to take her back is another great example of the town's equality façade falling apart. When asked how the McCulloughs are incorporating the baby's Chinese culture into her life, they mention that they take her to a local Chinese restaurant often. This shows the surface level efforts they are satisfied with giving to their adopted daughter. As seen before with Shaker residents, the McCulloughs are only seeing an issue at a superficial level. They even state that she does not have any dolls— out of the many that she owns— that are non-white.

Little Fires Everywhere serves as an exposé on the blissful ignorance people of these affluent, suburban areas in America can live in. However, the book does a good

job at revealing these dark sides of humanity while also communicating that each character has their own personal struggles or hidden history. Even the McCulloughs instill a sense of pity in the reader after learning that they have struggled for a decade with conceiving or adopting a child. This was a great choice by Ng to depict the Warrens, Richardsons, and even the side characters in the book as three-dimensional people. There is never only one point of view to see a character through. By doing this, Ng tells a story that is truly about the ugly and beautiful sides of humanity. Though Shaker Heights is a perfect, safe area with kind citizens, there are many unspoken problems within the community. It is a suffocating place to someone like Elena's unruly daughter Izzy and an intimidating place to someone like Pearl Warren. It is also a place of shallowness, as seen in their history with race, the citizens' do-gooder attitudes that are all to keep up an image, and in the McCulloughs custody battle.

Celeste Ng's alluring writing and the analysis of privileged, upper middle-class lifestyles is one of the key components of *Little Fires Everywhere*. This is a story accessible to all readers ranging from young adult to adult with its easy-to-follow wording and storyline, but in-depth characters and interesting themes. This novel is equal parts drama and a heartfelt story; it is about family, friends, loss, and love. It has become a personal favorite of mine for its captivating prose and storyline that drew me in. The storyline was so detailed that I could not put the book down. For readers interested in these aspects of literature, I encourage giving it a read and becoming lost in the picturesque brokenness of Shaker Heights.



Book Review by Grace McCutchen

The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs

Author: Joel Salatin

Publisher: FaithWords

Joel Salatin, the author of *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs*, is known for his hands-on, regenerative, and environmental approach to farming. In addition to farming, he gives talks and writes books promoting a sustainable, observant, small-scale, and earth-friendly way to run a farm and a food system. At the same time, he believes taking care of the Earth is a Christian obligation, and this is his first book in which he brings religion into the debate. The intention of the book is to bridge the gap between the environmentalist left and the religious right.

As such, his target audience, which he prefaces right from the beginning, is Christians, though he gladly invites everyone to read on and see what they can learn. However, this book does not just present a way to understand the other side; it applies to everyone, religious and non-religious. The overarching theme of the book is that “all of God’s creation, the physical world, is an object for spiritual truth,” but the driving question, “How shall we then live?”, points to this same process in reverse (xiv). The purpose of the book is to say that the physical and the spiritual are not only correlations of each other but must work together to have real meaning. Not only does the physical display truths about spirituality and morality,

but our moral values should have everything to do with how we conduct ourselves in every part of life. And therein lies the largest non-religious beauty of the book. His belief is that Christians should apply their own values to how they produce and consume food, but, at the same time, the book more generally points to consistency between our values and our actions, which makes our values real and our actions meaningful.

But how does he suggest doing all of this?

Each chapter of the book sets up a tension in its title, such as “Strength vs. Weakness”, “Abundance vs. Scarcity”, and “Neighborly vs. Antagonistic”. Every chapter delves into how each of these factors are apparent in God’s design for nature vs. industrial agriculture, respectively. As he touches on topics as diverse as direct marketing to why children leave the farm to carbon cycling, there is a lot of interweaving and repetition of the characteristics of God’s plan, which shows the aspects of a commendable farm system in many contexts and helps us to see how they are all part of one ethical drive.

If one were to sum up the farms that Salatin promotes, they would be ones that closely follow the patterns found in nature. One need not bring God into the picture. This could merely be seen as setting up a

farm to work long-term and as productively as possible, in the context that natural selection has already so efficiently created plants and animals to live. Ethics come into the picture when Salatin outlines the good that comes from a system like this: (1) it does not destroy God's creation, which would hurt one's neighbors, (2) it brings awareness to the moment, (3) it brings an immediacy to our dependency on the Earth, and (4) "Integrating our lives with plants and animals bathes us in object lessons about responsibility, relationship, faithfulness, expectation, perseverance, diligence, and unconditional love" (111). Following nature's patterns is not only efficient but creates much moral good.

For this reason, Salatin sees the organization of nature not only as a pattern that happened to fall together, but as God's plan. This is the first of his more difficult concepts. In his chapter on dependence, he makes it clear that even our good intentions could do something harmful if we do not realize our dependency on something bigger—the pattern which we need to follow. He likens it to a conquistador's attitude, having "reckless disregard for how little we know" in the realms of soil microbes and genetics, for example (56).

The second difficult concept parts ways with the idea that, because nature does it best, we should leave it be. Salatin argues that we should be actively improving the landscape. He makes it clear that God's design will work out and eventually remediate itself no matter if we do anything or not, but we can speed it along and get it to a healthier state than it would be able to reach in any length of time relevant to humans. We can begin building the eight feet of topsoil that both tilling and

deforestation has eroded. We can, in fact, live on the land and produce from it while making it even more productive and more environmentally friendly than it was before.

The biggest takeaway is that we should live out our beliefs. While he demonstrates how this is done for Christians regarding his specialty of the food and farming system, it is a powerful example of how this can benefit anyone. First, it may be argued that your belief is not a true one if you do not act on it. If you think people should conserve water by taking short showers but take daily hour-long showers yourself, people may question whether you really do hold that belief. So, acting on your beliefs makes them real in that sense, but additionally, it "injects vibrancy, deeper meaning, and realism into what otherwise is a sterile, academic examination of impractical truths" (167).

Instead of leaving areas of your life like where your food comes from and what it is doing to the environment completely unknown, you should learn about your food and patronize the products that you know line up with your beliefs. It is empowering to know you are consistent in all your actions. You have values you know are helping the world, and your life has more meaning. A vision like Salatin's aligns our values, intentions, and actions so that they are meaningful to us and to the world.

The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs is a wonderful look at the food system that does not merely criticize it for its effects but also for the values that go into it (or lack thereof) while being sympathetic to the situation the industrial farm system puts farmers in. Most importantly, it offers a viable alternative, practical and ethical, which encourages us to live out our values to make them real.



Book Review by Lucy Clark

Night Film

Author: Marisha Pessl

Publisher: Random House

Do I dare

Disturb the universe?

-T.S. Elliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"¹

Elliot's words above are the guiding principle of *Night Film's* invisible protagonist, Ashley Cordova. Ashley, the daughter of a prolific director with a cult-like following, Stanislas Cordova, is found dead in a warehouse, her death ruled as a suicide. Marisha Pessl's novel follows Scott McGrath, a strung out investigative journalist with a vendetta against Cordova, as he attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding Ashley's death, but more importantly, her *life*. Accompanied by one of Ashley's childhood friends, Hopper, and a hostess that was the last person to see Ashley alive, Nora, McGrath sets out to dig up the secrets of the Cordovas that cost him his career.

Pessl takes the reader on a journey of revenge, family, friendship, and the mysteriousness of the universe in its serendipity and confusion. The story twists and turns, bending the light of previously assumed truths, and refracting them into a kaleidoscope of convoluted mystery, each

piece of the puzzle turning out to be an enigma in itself. Just when you think you're looking through a clear sheet of glass, you realize it's been a mirror the whole time.

The book is long, coming to just under six hundred pages, but each page keeps you invested in the mystery. There's a twist, a new truth revealed, another refuted, a new line of inquiry - a revolving door of renewed interest that makes it impossible to put down. The tale takes place in New York City, and, though it is set in 2011, it is aesthetically comparable to the dim streets of a 1940s *film noir* - not just in setting, but in Pessl's own execution of meticulous details and ambience. There is not a stone unturned in the way she captures a scene, in both its physical attributes, and the sensation of the moment. The settings take on a life of their own, pulsating out of the pages and into the minds of the reader.

The book takes over the mind in more ways than imagery. Just as Ashley's presence haunts the pages of this novel, so too does Pessl's narrative haunt its reader - the mind slips away when reading this book, stuck in the mysterious, addictive world of the Cordovas' secrets.

The book has a remarkable group

of characters, each with a distinguished, rich presence. Each character seems just a bit larger than life, just ever so slightly out of reach from the realms of normal society, further adding to the somewhat whimsical feel of Pessl's world. More importantly, each character - ranging from the main protagonists, to side characters, even to a stranger with a few lines - is given a context, a backstory, a fleshed out narrative. The story feels tangible, in a way, since every character feels familiar, entrenched in the world, purposeful.

Pessl holds true to the conventions of the traditional investigative mystery, while adding new twists and fresh takes. The Cordovas are mysterious, otherworldly creatures, their narratives hiding in the shadows, walking the line between reality and the metaphysical world. So too does *Night Film* carefully walk the line, leading you into the hidden corners of mystical shops, urging you to dip your toes in the dark waters of mysticism, but always pulling you back just before you dive in, leaving you to wonder what's truth, and what's fiction. Or, if the truth isn't as objective as previously thought.

The novel is just as immersive textually as it is visually. That is, Pessl inserts images of documents, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, pictures, etc., to further enhance the immersive quality of the novel. There is nothing McGrath knows that the reader doesn't also know, and this quality truly allows you to play armchair detective, and get wholly sucked into the universe Pessl has created.

Night Film keeps you hooked from its ominous opening to the very end. When the book seems to lull, or fall into a

comfortable rhythm, Pessl rips the covers off the reader and throws them in a new direction entirely. This has potential to be jarring, but it's done with such intention and precision that the reader turns themselves over completely to the experience. In a mock Rolling Stones interview with Cordova, he says "[My actors] give themselves over to the work because they know I'll be careful, that I'll lead them, sometimes against their will, to the edge of the end" (Figure 83). In a similar way, Pessl leads the reader into depths that are uncomfortable and confusing, but leave them demanding more.

Night Film comes highly recommended to those who are fans of thrillers and mysteries, stories full of surprises, trap doors, smokey mirrors, and mind tricks. The writing is poetic, immersive, and addictive. You won't realize the end has come until, as Cordova says, you're on the edge, watching Prufrock's mermaids, "singing, each to each."



Book Review by Riley Hysell

Temporary

Author: Hilary Leichter

Publisher: Coffee House Press, 2020

Work is a loaded concept, exceptionally so under capitalism. People do some work around the house, complete schoolwork or office work, go to work, get to work, work hard. One might work it out with another after a disagreement. One might do the impossible and work wonders. One might explicitly realize their work is never done. In Hilary Leichter's debut novel, *Temporary*, Leichter is not afraid to take on the full scope of work, however large a task that is. The novel follows a woman working for a temp agency who moves from job to job in search of a stable career, a goal that Leichter gives the metaphysical weight it deserves in late-stage capitalism, calling it "the steadiness." All of this happens in a surreal world that feels only a magic wand wave away from our own, one in which ghosts, pirates, assassins, and witches are uninteresting and doing the same thing as everyone else: their work. It is through absurdity that Leichter accomplishes her goal of showcasing all that work is and can be; the novel achieves the feel of a fairytale for a world where "a series of paychecks... constitute a life" (5).

The immediate effect of the absurdity when reading the book, though, is to make

the reader laugh. The novel is delightfully funny. In a book that could easily be nihilistic in its exploration of capitalism run amok, Leichter's sense of humor avoids this by letting readers know they can still laugh, without undermining the message of the novel. Much of the humor comes out of a willingness to treat everything as work. Ordering burgers instead of sandwiches is described as taking initiative and "nice improvisation" (57). Pregnancies are measured in hours rather than weeks, as the narrator explains, "We're employed at an hourly rate, and we gestate in the same manner" (40). A character states at one point that being a boyfriend is "not in my skill set" (82). Leichter even disperses throughout the book a sort of creation myth for temps. No character is safe from speaking of the world in the terms of business, and the absurdity of it allows scenes to be funny while maintaining or even enhancing what makes them impactful.

Leichter's treatment of life as work is also one of the ways she succeeds in containing the full scope of work within the book; the world of the novel takes the typically unsaid but understood fact that life and work are often blurred to the point

of being indistinguishable and makes it not only a spoken truth, but an expected and accepted piece of reality. “There is nothing more personal than doing your job,” the narrator describes having read on a granola bar wrapper (5). “It’s a sentiment strong enough on which to hang my heart and purpose,” she thinks of the phrase (5).

In this way, Leichter’s world is not actually all that far from the world outside the book, which is frequently what lets absurdity work. Leichter is, of course, not expecting readers to take in a story of capitalism in a surreal world completely separate from capitalism as it is in the reader’s world, which would be pointless. Rather, the level of absurdity is carefully chosen to be both strange and familiar, like organizing a closet of never worn shoes. Both preposterous and depressing, like being “enlisted as a human barnacle by the Wildlife Preservation Initiative” (68). Both fantastical and plain, like meeting a witch who “[prefers to be called] the Director of Pamphlets” (131). It is in this balance that Leichter most ensures the novel is absurd and accessible, and more importantly in a discussion of capitalism, relevant. This balance is that between a fairytale and reality.

On the other hand, the fact that *Temporary* lives in this balance means that sometimes it will tip one way or the other. Occasionally, Leichter’s world leans farther toward the absurd, and it is in these moments that readers will find themselves most lost in this text. For some readers these moments will be some of the book’s most powerful. Leichter never fully moves away from our reality, but when she gets farthest from it, such as when the narrator

spends an unknown amount of time (“Time moves and then does not move... it could be minutes, months” (128)) in a tunnel underground, she does so excellently. It is an intense part of the book, and is a testament to Leichter’s skill that the scene is so impactful considering it is a scene “with no single worldly thing” (128). Nonetheless, other readers might find such scenes far more dense and even unfunny and might dislike the book’s seemingly larger removal from reality. If nothing else, such scenes can be jarring.

A similar point can be made when the world of the book tips in the opposite direction, closer to our reality. One minute the narrator is making a pro and con list for murdering and not long after, when she is told to murder someone, her “face feels like it’s on fire” and her “whole body is shaking” (97). Again, these shifts can be jarring. But in both cases, whether the book leans toward the real or absurd, Leichter’s goal seems to be to take the reader by surprise, to take these little emotional jabs. While some readers might dislike the uncomfortable situation Leichter puts them in, laughing one minute and worrying the next, this is an overall positive for the book.

Ultimately, *Temporary* is for those who want to learn about their own world, while being removed enough from it to laugh. It is a fairytale for the present moment, one which keeps the dragons, ghosts, and witches, but adds to it a more modern understanding of the world. An understanding of the world which, unfortunately, revolves around work.



Book Review by Juli Lindenmayer

The Book of Longings

Author: Sue Monk Kidd

Publisher: Viking

In a whimsical and powerful narrative, Sue Monk Kidd reimagines the life and history of Jesus' time on earth in her fourth novel, *The Book of Longings*. However, instead of following Jesus' parables through his perspective, the reader is immersed into the social, cultural, and archival context of the time period through that of Ana of Sepphoris, Jesus' wife. The novel unfolds on a timeline from 16 C.E. to 60 C.E., and is divided into five sections: Sepphoris, Nazareth, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Lake Marcotis, Egypt. The locations serve to locate where Ana resides during a certain interval of time, going in chronological order. There is even a map of Palestine and Egypt during the time of Jesus' life on earth at the beginning of the book, allowing the reader to trace the travels of Ana as she makes her way across the Middle Eastern region. To summarize the multiple interweaving narratives and plot points would be an injustice to the obvious time, research, and emotion Kidd has put into creating this outstanding novel. The different sections of the story are connected, but there is so much action, plot points, and stories within this novel, that to track them would be to retell the

book. Instead, the overall themes and the social and cultural ideas of the period are what truly stands out, making this a daring piece of literature.

Kidd's analysis of women's roles and experiences in ancient Palestine and Egypt show how far misogyny goes back in history. There are other questions that provoke the reader, such as the role of God in religion and the authority of oppressions such as race, class, disability, and of course, gender, but the role of women in this patriarchal world is that with which the reader really must sit. One thinks that, of course, since the time of Jesus we have come a long way in terms of social justice, but Ana easily recognizes the social order the contemporary world has come to know, largely because it has remained the same. Ana states,

"[g]ood women had babies. Good women *wanted* babies. It was pressed upon every girl precisely what good women did and did not do. We lugged those dictates around like temple stones. A good woman was modest. She was quiet. She covered her head when she went out. She didn't speak with men. She tended her domestic

tasks. She obeyed and served her husband. She was faithful to him. Above all, she gave him children. Better yet, sons” (158).

Although there are less legal statutes or criminal consequences holding up these extreme ideas of femaleness in today’s American society (because other societal and cultural expectations for women around the world differ), one can see how the world that was created in misogyny still lingers. The role of a woman still applies in contemporary times: adultery as a woman is frowned upon, while a man who commits adultery is almost expected. When men have multiple sexual partners at one time, he is praised and upheld as a true man, while women who desire the same sexual freedoms are condemned as whores and sluts. Women are still homemakers and laborers who are supposed to have children – “if not now, you’ll want them sooner or later. You are sure to change your mind”.

This novel is a dense read at around four hundred pages, five sections, and 107 chapters, but the experience exceeds all literary expectations and is well worth the time it takes to finish the novel. The characters are well developed, the representation and structured world Kidd recreates is accurately depicted with an abundance of research to support her work, and every word renders itself full of meaning. There is a disclaimer for trigger warnings; there are mentions of sexual assault, rape, and graphic descriptions of violence and torture. However, these moments are important, because they are true – if not in the literal sense of the work of fiction, then because they have happened and *do* happen within our society, and

honestly, all around the globe.

To finalize the discussion of *The Book of Longings*, one needs to mention the significance of the author’s note. While most readers will stop reading after the last chapter has ended, I highly encourage to keep going. Kidd rationalizes her writing of this audacious novel, stating that a novelist not only attempts to capture the reality of the world around them, but also that which seems impossible, but can be possible. She explains her understanding of how Jesus could be married during his time on earth, although eons of story-telling traditions depict Jesus as celibate. Kidd reveals her research techniques, and directly states circumstances and facts that are true in this novel, and that which has been fictionalized. For those who have personal aversion to picking up this new book and its controversial topics, this kind of openness and accountability should change your mind. Kidd’s purpose in writing this masterpiece only serve to create a historical context that opens up a conversation about women in history and women of today who still, in the year 2021, are victim to multiple forms of oppression. Her final words about this novel can be said by none the better: “[t]he day Ana appeared, I knew one thing about her besides her name. I knew that what she wanted most was a voice. If Jesus actually did have a wife, and history unfolded exactly the way it has, then she would be the most silenced woman in history and the woman most in need of a voice. I’ve tried to give her one” (416).



Book Review by Shelby McSwords

The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness

Author: Sarah Ramey

Publisher: Anchor

Sarah Ramey's *The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness* is a journey through the life and mind of the chronically, invisibly, and unexplainably ill. Ramey's memoir is a direct look into the ups and mostly downs of the cyclical lifestyle of a WOMI: a woman with a mysterious illness. As someone with a chronic illness myself, I started this book as all WOMI might—skeptical. After years of not being understood or believed, I was less than hopeful that this book would change that opinion. Nevertheless, I made the goal of putting a post-it next to something I could relate to... and I used an entire pack of post-it notes. To fellow chronically ill patients, whether you identify as man, woman, or nonbinary, this book is a must read.

The Lady's Handbook is the unmistakable journey of dealing with an invisible illness. Beginning with a traumatic event and falling down the rabbit hole of doctors, specialists, and surgeons who are just as confused as the patient, Ramey tells of the pain and confusion of being a WOMI in this tell-all memoir. In three sections she shares stories that inspire, horrify, and educate audiences with or without invisible illnesses. Stories of chronic illnesses are well-known for being unknown. If you have never heard of an invisible/chronic illness you are in the

privileged majority. You should also read this book. Sarah Ramey is excellent at painting a picture that is usually only seen by others like her; one that is painful, embarrassing, hardly discussed, and even less often believed. This is truly a chance to look beyond the veil and see the horrors of being ill—and horror is not an understatement.

A stand-out moment in *The Lady's Handbook* comes from chapter 17 in which Ramey meticulously describes an encounter with the Mayo Clinic and an apathetic urologic surgeon. Readers start this chapter hopeful for our narrator (despite being less than halfway through), just as she must have felt at the time. Mayo Clinic is a world renown, famously helpful organization of doctors and specialists, and this seemed to be exactly what would help her. I was horrified to read on and discover how painfully wrong we both were. As much as I have struggled through disbelief and ER visits (like many other WOMIs) I was never forced to endure such a horrifying endeavor. Horror is the only word I can use to describe this section of Ramey's story; and chapter 17 it could be its own horror film. I can't begin to describe Ramey's situation to the degree she is able to in this book, so you will have to read to discover what I mean. Readers' hearts will undoubtedly break for Sarah Ramey.

Generating empathy is part of the excellence of *The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness*, this is how people begin to understand the plight of being chronically ill. As Ramey explains throughout her memoir, it is normal (though devastating) to find a WOMI spiraling into darkness, likely bringing others with her. This recognizable truth is heartbreaking, but a necessary part of finding healing. Remember, this is a “handbook” for mysterious illness. I was reading for connection, but also secretly wishing for a cure. A cure for the narrator, a cure for me, a cure for WOMIs and MOMIs and HOMIs alike (Man or Human with a mysterious illness).

Ramey, like many of her readers, has tried Western medicine (pills, doctors, surgeries, IVS, etc.) for little to no avail. Disappointed and in unbelievable amounts of pain, she turns to alternative medicine (yoga, reiki, acupuncture, essential oils, etc.) and again finds little to no help. Once again, our narrator descends into the unknown. This is one of the most frustrating aspects of *The Lady's Handbook*—where is the advice? Where is the cure? Spoiler alert: there is no cure.

Frankly, this devastated me until much later in the reading. Ramey is unmistakably adept at keeping her readers engaged, which is a needed skill for a WOMI. She needed to tell her story to someone that not only believes her but connects with her on every level. WOMIs and those involved with them are the perfect audience. Finally, she shares her discovery of functional medicine and even more importantly her journey towards a cure, and thus her journey inward.

Ramey shares that there is a journey of healing a WOMI can and must go through. The cycle of health and illness is already so familiar to WOMIs, but Ramey takes a

“ ...embracing the cycle is the process of healing.”

step further to say that embracing the cycle is the process of healing. Like the story of Persephone and her capture by Hades, this is the journey of the WOMI. For those who aren't familiar, Persephone is the Greek Goddess of Spring and was captured by Hades only to be rescued by Demeter with the help of Zeus, but not before she could eat from a pomegranate that would ensure part of her year spent with Hades in the Underworld. This story begins with something horrible and traumatic, follows with cold and darkness and ends with getting help and warmth; only to once again be brought into darkness. An unruly cycle, and an old mythical tale. This is the story of a WOMI.

Sarah Ramey is “Just an average, garden-variety, Queen of the Dead”, like Persephone, like the WOMI before her, after her, and with her (234). Throughout the rest of her memoir, she shares with us what is next in her journey down the rabbit hole. She discovers functional medicine, declares feminist goals and needs, and the what-next after sharing her magical not-cure. Ramey makes this clear—it is not a one-step cure; it simply cannot be one-step. There are too many of us, too many types of us, and not nearly enough funding to start taking us seriously. So, in the meantime we have a handbook for our mysterious illnesses, and *The Lady's Handbook* leaves it up to us to decide what comes next.



Book Review by Safiya Mohamed

The Queen

Author: Josh Levin

Publisher: : Little, Brown and Company, 2019

During his initial 1976 presidential campaign, former president Ronald Reagan made his first mention of the infamous “Welfare Queen” to a crowd of supporters. Though indirectly, he described to the audience that there was a woman in Chicago who had generated an abundance of wealth through creating false identities to swindle the welfare system and receive public benefits. This would not be the last time Reagan would tell the story of Linda Taylor, born Martha Louise White. Reagan would use her story countless times to represent a system that he thought needed fixing. Josh Levin’s biography, *The Queen*, tells Taylor’s story of innumerable frauds, alleged murders and kidnappings, and how her image impacted the vulnerable individuals who were in actual need of government assistance.

Taylor’s story was first introduced to the public by George Bliss, an award-winning writer who worked for the *Tribune* at the time. Bliss had been acquaintances with Officer Wally McWilliams, a colleague of Officer Jack Sherwin who would lead the investigations into Taylor’s crimes and was the first to notice her frequent reporting of burglaries which he would find to be falsified. Bliss’ first mention of Taylor described her as having gone by twenty-seven names, using thirty-one addresses, and having been married to a sailor twenty-six years her junior. It would be the *Tribune*’s third report on the crimes when Bliss would give Taylor a name

that would become used to demean those who rely on public aid, particularly Black women: Welfare Queen. Taylor being held accountable for her welfare fraud was more than a simple investigation but was to be used as the typecast of where the working class’ tax money was going to selfish thieves like Taylor.

The most intriguing part of Taylor’s life was her ability to gain the wealth she had and how she did it. Levin writes of Taylor’s known crimes in profound details yet a sizable portion of her crimes, motives, and life are still unknown. As a mixed-race woman in the Jim Crow south, her features helped her blend in and identify as a White person. Despite her ambiguous look, she was still excluded from certain family members’ homes due to her background. She would later move to Oakland and start her life of crime. Taylor would claim multiple children as her own despite only having five of her own. Her home would have children of different races being cared for one day and some would disappear the next without answers from Taylor. Taylor was even a primary suspect in the 1964 Chicago kidnapping of newborn Paul Fronczak. Her son, Johnnie Harbaugh, would tell Levin that he believed his mother was active in Chicago’s black-market adoptions and Fronczak was a victim of this.

After multiple escapes from the law, Taylor was officially convicted of welfare fraud charges and sentenced to three to seven years in prison;

she would be released after two. After her release, Taylor would marry, allegedly kill her husband, and pass away in 2002 in complete obscurity. As a result of Taylor's case, there was an increase in regulations making it harder to receive aids from the government. A hotline was started in 1975 by the Department of Public Aid for anyone to report individuals that they felt were taking advantage of the system. It would receive over five thousand calls within its first year of operation. The Illinois Department of Public Aid began increasing home visits and required identification after Taylor's case put their office in the public spotlight. Nationally, welfare fraud was becoming largely criminalized with "the number of AFDC cases referred to law enforcement in the United States [rising] from seventy-five hundred to just more than fifty-two thousand" (155). Welfare abuse and its repercussions became an important topic to American voters and Taylor was the catalyst for it.

As well as Taylor's crimes, Levin mentions multiple government officials' crimes sporadically that at the time of Taylor's trials and coverage were covered up. Perhaps Taylor's prominence in the media was used repeatedly to conceal reports of these crimes. Levin says of this lack of media coverage, "There was no such institutional pressure to protect the reputations of welfare cheaters, a group seen as both amoral and politically useless" (108).

Reagan's repetition of Taylor's story, only naming her a small fraction of the times he mentioned her story, created a stereotype of the mothers who relied on welfare. Her story could now be the excuse of all adverse stereotypes about Black women on welfare. If there was one Linda Taylor, there were more, and the government was going to bait her story to stop

“ Welfare abuse and its repercussions became an important topic to American voters and Taylor was the catalyst for it. ”

them. Taylor was a welfare fraud and there was no denying this, but the public's disinterest in the more severe allegations of murder, kidnapping, and selling children proved that it wasn't Taylor specifically they were vilifying. Had Taylor been any Black Jane Doe in this country, she would've still served the purpose that the public was making of her. Any persons of an ethnic background could be a killer or kidnapper, but only Black people were cruel enough to take from their own government.

The Queen is an extensive report of not only Taylor's life of crime but the political plays that have a role in it, the lives of the officers and reporters who've gotten involved in her perplexing story, and the children she left behind who will never know who their mother truly was. Reading Taylor's story will help readers understand why many Americans struggle with the negative backlash that comes with receiving welfare. There are people like Taylor who take advantage of a system set in place for the impecunious, but the majority of those who apply for aid are not driving Cadillacs and wearing luxury items. Like Taylor herself, this story is complicated. At times, readers will see Taylor as inexcusable while in other chapters she will seem sympathetic. In however way readers choose to view Taylor, Levin's conclusion is that her convoluted legacy continues to live on in the United States today.



Book Review by Kat Gibson

There There

Author: Tommy Orange

Publisher: Vintage Books, 2019

“If you were fortunate enough to be born into a family whose ancestors directly benefited from genocide and/or slavery, maybe you think the more you don’t know, the more innocent you can stay, which is a good incentive to not find out, to not look deep, to walk carefully around the sleeping tiger. Look no further than your last name. Follow it back and you might find your line paved with gold, or beset with traps” (138-139).

When you hear the word “Native American,” what is the first image that comes into your head? Does your knowledge of the history of Native Americans end in the 1800s, knowing that they were pushed into reservations and exist now in a pocket of dangerous American mythos and stereotypes? Tommy Orange sets out to correct and inform us on what being Native means in the 21st century, the different ways Natives tap into their culture and heritage, the lives they lead now as modern Americans, and the common issues their community faces. *There There* follows numerous Native characters, all living around Oakland, CA, as they grapple with hardship while reconciling their history and

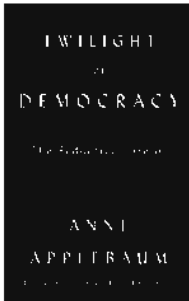
where their identity as a Native takes root in their lives. These characters are connected to each other in various ways and all are heading to the same event, the Big Oakland Powwow, to achieve different goals and take part in different ways. This novel was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and was one of the *New York Times*’ 10 Best Books of the Year in 2018.

The most unique aspect of this book is Orange’s writing style and the novel’s structure which switches amongst not only many different characters but what point of view it’s written in as well. While both of these aspects together may sound dizzying for the reader, the point of view shifts make each character’s voice sound and feel especially unique and more personal. The writing style itself is wonderfully sharp and witty, but also conversational and endearing. Orange makes these characters feel real and while there are some that have more pages dedicated to them, none of them feel flat or unimportant. There is also a “cast of characters” list at the beginning of the novel that helps the reader if they forget how a character is related or tied to another between chapters which really helps one get their footing early in the novel. The

author's decision to structure the novel in this way with so many characters is a highly important and powerful one. It allows him to fully break down common stereotypes, avoid any abstraction of what being Native means, and shows the complexity of issues that, while common, affect different individuals in starkly different ways. By focusing on the stories of urban Indians who live in and around a city and come from different Native backgrounds and/or are mixed-race, Orange shows the individual variance of identity while emphasizing their connectivity as a community.

The novel's title comes from a Gertrude Stein quote about Oakland and how it has changed drastically in since her childhood, stating, "'There is no there there'" (38). What she means is that the city she once knew has changed beyond recognition and is effectively gone. The lack of there there for all Natives is at the heart of the novel's theme and conflicts as Orange discusses how everything has been changed for them. There are no longer remnants of their ancestral homes. This idea works in tandem with many characters' search for identity and desire to feel truly Native. They feel as though they do not have any Native roots to grasp on to in Oakland besides possibly their Native relatives. They must make their own connections to each other as community and build a support network to help aid in the treatment and prevention of common issues like addiction and suicide while trying to preserve and honor their culture. What we see throughout the novel is how difficult this is without much (if any) outside aid from the government and the ignorance of others around them about what their culture means.

There There is an incredibly poignant and brilliant novel that makes us reexamine our understanding of Native American culture and ask ourselves what change we can make to help empower and support this group that has always been abused by our colonialist system. Furthermore, it forces us to acknowledge the reality of Native Americans and reasserts that they are very much still here. They and their culture are not just fragments of a long-forgotten past—they need our support and advocacy. Orange pushes us to question our role and this history and asks us to take responsibility. He takes this on as himself within the novel as well. In his own voice are the prologue and interlude where he shares information about the true history of the brutalization of Natives in America, pushing the reader to reexamine their knowledge of history as well as understand what these characters and real Natives must continually confront along with modern inequality.



Book Review by Erin Van Gilder

Twilight of Democracy:

The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism

Author: Anne Applebaum

Publisher: Doubleday, 2020

Pulitzer prize winning author, Anne Applebaum, writes *Twilight of Democracy* as a warning about the future of democracy. Her book explains how any society, under the right conditions, can turn against democracy, and “if history is anything to go by, all of our societies eventually will” (14). She urges readers to understand that democracies are not a permanent condition of Western states and their political systems do not guarantee stability. Applebaum uses Eastern Europe, Britain, the U.S., and Spain as examples of the risks and present dangers that exist for democracy in the Western world.

Applebaum argues that there are two reasons why authoritarianism can arise from democracy. First, is the existence of people who admire dictatorial figures or are comfortable in dictatorships. Authoritarianism appeals to “people who cannot tolerate complexity” (16). It is not so much a result of closedmindedness, but of simplemindedness (106). Second, is the existence of *clerics*, or the educated elite, who facilitate the rise of the demagogue. The cleric defends their leaders “however dishonest their statements, however great their corruption, and however disastrous their impact on ordinary people and

institutions” (25). In exchange for their work, clerics will be rewarded. The character of the cleric is consistent; they are those who feel cheated by the current power structure. If they participate in conjuring what Applebaum calls the “medium sized lie,” they are promised the power and fame that, to them, they have been unjustly denied.

The “medium sized lie,” as Applebaum describes it, is an engagement “at least part of the time, with an alternative reality” (38). To construct this fallacy, clerics use tools like conspiracy theories, fear, and nostalgia. Conspiracy theories offer a simple version of “reality” for those who fear complexity. Fear of imaginary threats, like immigrants and Muslims, creates an enemy to which clerics can assign blame for domestic issues. Restorative nostalgia refers to the creation of a national history that never existed. The people mourn losing this fabricated past and fall susceptible to nationalist political programs. Overall, the “medium sized lie” is intended to communicate the idea that democracy cannot protect people and only “the most extreme and desperate actions can stop the decline of a certain vision” of a country (152). Once people believe conspiracies and imaginary threats, their nationalism will grow alongside a willingness

to take extreme action for their country.

As the strongest team is one who works together, clerics and demagogues divide in order to weaken. The point of their political changes “is not to make government run better,” but to make “the government more partisan, the courts more pliable, more beholden to the party” (6). The uglier the political climate becomes, the more fear will be generated, and the more power the demagogue and his clerics will inspire. The transformation from democracy to authoritarianism is reliant on fear, alienation, and separation.

The true importance of Applebaum’s work arises at its conclusion. She asserts that today, there are two paths. The first leads towards the twilight of democracy. The second leads us towards a crucial turning point. With the onslaught of COVID-19, states all over the Western world have an opportunity to come back together and shake the hate and difference that has been manufactured within them. From this pandemic, one of the darkest moments in our history, Applebaum offers hope for the future. The only thing stopping us is ourselves.

However, she does not attempt to depict this crossroads as an easy reorientation. Her book shows that what has happened across the world is not simply nations getting lost, but intentionally being strayed from their democratic ideals. *Twilight of Democracy* exposes how we take for granted the political institutions we have built without appreciating their weaknesses. Choosing the right path will require hard work and a lot of people willing to stand against the political forces in motion and rebuild them. Applebaum’s book works as a

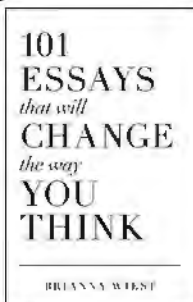
“

...what has happened across the world is not simply nations getting lost, but intentionally being strayed from their democratic ideals.

”

rally cry, to educate people and to get them poised to act. With her audience equipped to recognize the demagogue playbook, they will be ready to combat the growing divisions in society.

For this reason, *Twilight of Democracy* is a book for everyone. Applebaum gives the reader a general overview of the issues facing modern democracy and takes time to demonstrate them in current global affairs. She does not offer a solution to these issues but instead focuses on educating her audience of their presence. This may be a more important goal, for it is not the responsibility of an individual to combat growing authoritarianism. As the authoritarian uses the masses to facilitate their power grab, so too will democracies regain their stability. By reaching and empowering her audience, Applebaum hopes to set change in motion.



Book Review by Katie Warner

101 Essays That Will Change the Way you Think

Author: Brianna Wiest

Publisher: Thought Catalog Books, 2016

Brianna Wiest's *101 Essays That Will Change the Way you Think* is a collection of creative nonfiction essays about the human experience and how to change the way we perceive the world, interact with our emotions, and teach ourselves to unlearn behaviors pushed onto us by societal expectations. While the aim and purpose of these essays is an important endeavor and generally the kind of creative nonfiction I love to read and write myself, I was rather disappointed in this particular collection of essays and feel that it failed to accomplish what it intended.

Rather than give the reader recounts of her own personal experiences and the way that those experiences have changed her worldview and shaped her life — the heart of creative nonfiction as a genre — Brianna Wiest has more or less compiled instructional lists dictating how you should live your life. I have read many other essays that work in a numerically listed format, in which the form of the lists work toward larger creative endeavors, but Wiest's essays did not work on this scale. The entire collection felt more like an instruction manual, which ultimately leaves the reader feeling like a bit of a failure as one recognizes they will never be able to remember each insight or follow every

rule to live their best, most fulfilled life. The numbered lists of rules, tips, and suggestions one after the other was challenging to read, hard to follow, and, I would argue, not technically "essays." The structure of the pieces felt like reading someone's grocery lists, or perhaps better yet, a new kind of Ten Commandments. Another issue I had was that many of her list essays switch between compilations that are either "do's" or "don'ts," and it becomes quite challenging to distinguish whether the items in the list are what we should or should not be doing. The essays I found most enjoyable were the essays that did not contain any lists, because they were far more readable and held more true to the idea of an essay.

In her collection of essays, Wiest seems to be making the argument that with the right amount of positive thinking and enough self-love and introspection, you can rewire your brain and your life for the better. While Wiest makes many great suggestions on how to do this, I personally felt that she was overlooking the challenges that come toward this kind of thinking from a mental health standpoint. Adopting this kind of outlook can be toxic and dangerous. This kind of outlook can ask one to overlook their feelings and struggles and repress or dismiss

them in unhealthy ways. Positivity is not a cure-all. Despite how nice it sounds, loving yourself enough will neither erase nor cure mental illness or personal suffering, and only reaffirms the idea that people with mental illnesses have somehow brought their mental illnesses upon themselves, that they have done something to deserve it or are either consciously or subconsciously choosing to be that way, which is problematic. In her essay “What Emotionally Strong People Do Not Do,” for example, Wiest makes the claim that emotionally strong people “do not keep a list of things people ‘should’ or ‘shouldn’t’ do” (90). This is a healthy, and valid affirmation; however, I found this a contradictory argument to be making in a collection that is entirely a list of things people should and shouldn’t do. It feels like being immediately set up for failure.

As someone who actively struggles with anxiety and depression and understands the inhibitors that it puts on the way you live your life, I was incredibly frustrated with this collection of essays, and the way in which they distinctly ignore the struggles of people with mental illnesses. Wiest addresses these issues not from any kind of mental health standpoint, but just as passive feelings of anxiety and depression that are not disorders. Although she explicitly states in her essay “What The Feelings You Most Suppress Are Trying to Tell You,” that she is speaking to these ideas with “biological factors aside,” merely stating this in a brief line is not enough to make it explicit that her tips are not necessarily to be taken on by people who are mentally ill (41). The writing at times verges on toxic positivity and runs the risk of victim blaming the reader for their own shortcomings, which they may or may not have control over. This

pushes mentally ill readers away from a lot of the material in her collection because it’s not written in a way that is helpful or geared toward those who are fighting disorders like anxiety and depression on a daily basis. It discounts the experiences of those who are suffering from their mental health on a daily basis. Wiest actively dismisses mental illnesses, such as in her essay “6 Signs You Have a Healthy Social Sensitivity,” where she writes that, “Social anxiety is usually having enough foresight to recognize what people may be judging or assuming about you...It is normal, if not indicative of a high intelligence” (413). Social anxiety is a legitimate mental illness and should not be taken lightly, nor should it be written off in a way that praises it for giving one the ability to see through social judgments. It’s an incredibly damaging and unhealthy lens to approach social situations through and devastating to those of us who struggle with it constantly.

While I found some of the essays enjoyable, such as “Read This If You Don’t Know What You’re Doing With Your Life,” and “The Parts Of You That Aren’t ‘I,’” I ultimately felt that this collection did not work as well as it could have, and was disappointed to find that it did not hold space for people struggling with mental illnesses. I would have loved to see this collection with more writings expressing Brianna Wiest’s personal experiences and narrative, rather than simply a conglomeration of works that spew out data and psychological research. Instead of a collection of essays, this collection felt more like a psychological documentary, in a way that presented a mix of psychological claims and opinion but that in no real way had anything overly substantial to add.

