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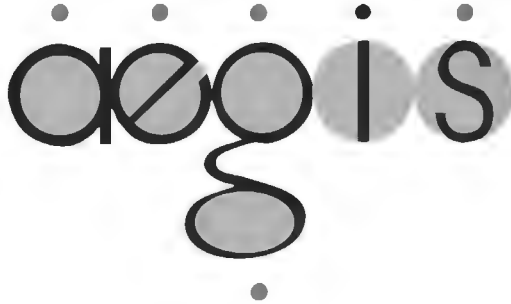
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Front Cover: *The Bouquet* (2022, mixed media on canvas) by Megan Walsh

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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, *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/SMIGRA*/Aegis.html.

2 Ibid.

Features in the 2022 issue

- 5 Editors' Introduction
- 6 Editorial Board Members

Traditional Essays

- 8 Art in Dire Times >>> Hannah Sturgeon
- 12 From Dust to Destruction >>> Ashley Bright
- 17 "Get Up, Peter; The Revolution's Calling" Revolutions, Sexuality, Feminism, and *LIFE* Magazine in 1968 >>> Allison Gammons
- 24 Having it All: *Ladies Home Journal* and Post-feminism in the Early 1990s >>> Maggie Daugherty
- 29 Mythic England and the Deranged Empire: Using *Wide Sargasso Sea* to Understand the Moral Illness of the Colonial Agent >>> Kat Gibson
- 36 On the Perversion and Commodification of Blackness: Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* >>> Ayan Abdi
- 41 You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Media Messages of Women's Liberation >>> Anna Walker

Interview

- 46 An interview with Dr. Amy Sheeran, Conducted by Kat Gibson

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

- 52 *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* >>> Seth Stobart
- 54 *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* >>> Lucy Clark
- 56 *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* >>> Riley Hysell
- 58 *Complaint!* >>> Grace Takahashi
- 60 *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America* >>> Kat Gibson
- 62 *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot* >>> Mitzi Cuaxico
- 64 *Hour of the Witch* >>> Kimberly Satterfield
- 66 *Klara and the Sun* >>> Miranda Hilt
- 68 *Negative Space* >>> Finley Lopez
- 70 *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* >>> April Martinez
- 72 *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture* >>> Addie Richmond
- 74 *The Midnight Library* >>> Allison Steele
- 76 *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century* >>> Emma Mierzejewski
- 78 *The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames* >>> Grace Guichard
- 80 *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* >>> Delaney Lombardi
- 82 *Thick: And Other Essays* >>> Deborah Adekunle-Odeleye
- 84 *What You Have Heard Is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance* >>> Olivia Culp
- 86 *When No One is Watching* >>> Safiya Mohamed
- 88 *Where the Crawdads Sing* >>> Ashton Bader
- 90 *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?: Big Questions from Tiny Mortals About Death* >>> Ashley Bright

Editors' Introduction

As this year's editors, we are pleased to present the campus community with the 2022 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 literary theory, environmental ethics, aesthetics, racial identity, and gender norms. 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.

"Art in Dire Times" by Hannah Sturgeon, investigates the way the post-apocalyptic novel, and art in general, deals with the subject of pandemics. "From Dust to Destruction" by Ashley Bright critiques the American funeral industry through a framework of environmental ethics. "Mythic England and the Deranged Empire: Using *Wide Sargasso Sea* to Understand the Moral Illness of the Colonial Agent" by Kat Gibson explores the colonial derangement of the Rochester figure in Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. "On the Perversion and Commodification of Blackness: Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*" by Ayan Abdi analyzes the depiction of blackness and black identity in Spike Lee's 2000 film *Bamboozled*. "You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Media Messages of Women's Liberation" by Anna Walker analyzes the conflicting messages about the role of American women in the articles and ads of *Ladies Home Journal* in the 1970s. "Having it All: Ladies Home Journal and Post-feminism in the Early 1990s" by Maggie Daugherty examines the persistence of traditional gender norms alongside new ideas of womanhood in the 1990s in *Ladies Home Journal*. "'Get Up, Peter; The Revolution's Calling': Revolutions, Sexuality, Feminism, and LIFE Magazine in 1968" by Allison Gammons explores the mixed messages of media through a deep dive into the cultural shift of 1968. These essays 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 *What You Have Heard is True*, a memoir about Carolyn Forché's travels to El Salvador. *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* gives a master class in Russian literature from George Saunders. The novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* unravels the mysterious life of a famous actress. *The Right to Sex* analyzes how our society approaches and understands sexual power. *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture* chronicles the history of Batman and the character's place in popular culture. These and other fiction and nonfiction titles are discussed in the following pages.

We'd 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.

Kat Gibson & Seth Stobart

Aegis Editorial Board 2022

Kat Gibson (head editor) is a senior English literary studies and history double major with minors in French & francophone studies and film studies. This is her third year working on *Aegis*, and she served as co-head editor of this year's edition with Seth Stobart. She is the current president of the English honorary, Sigma Tau Delta. She is passionate about analyzing the ways history and literature inform each other, which she explored in her honors thesis on mid-nineteenth-century Victorian social problem novels. She will attend graduate school for English in the fall.

Seth Stobart (head editor) is a junior double English literary studies/philosophy major with a minor in film. Seth serves as the treasurer of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. He is currently researching his honors thesis on *Dune*, post45 American literature, and Cold War studies. This is Seth's second year on *Aegis*.

Deborah Adekunle-Odeleye is a senior pursuing a history major with a minor in political science. She loves the humanities because it broadens your world and thinking skills. After graduating, she plans to take a gap year and eventually go to graduate school.

Ashton Bader is a senior and a creative writing major with an English literary studies minor. They are the communications director for *Aegis*.

Blaine Bishop (he/him) studies public relations and health communication, with a minor in film studies. Since coming to Otterbein in 2021, he has been a part of Vox Otterbein, Greek Life, the orientation team, and ResLife. His interests include psychology, sociology, popular culture, and studying diversity in education and the workplace. He is passionate about accessible public services for folks in rural areas.

Ashley Bright is a junior majoring in philosophy, religion, and theatre. This is her first year on the *Aegis* editorial board, which she is thrilled to be a part of. She hopes that readers will enjoy this edition and all the hard work that has been put in, by both the *Aegis* members and all who submitted. Outside of her time at Otterbein, Ashley works for Schoedinger Funeral and Cremation Services. Following her graduation, she plans on attending mortuary school in pursuit of receiving state licensing as a funeral director and embalmer. She hopes to continue to be an advocate for green burial and cremation.

Lucy Clark graduated from Otterbein University at the end of fall semester 2021 with a major in creative writing, and a minor in film studies. This is Lucy's third year as a member of *Aegis* where she served as the Director of Communications. 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.

Mitzi Cuaxico is a psychology and English literary studies double major with a minor in race and ethnic studies. She hopes to shape the world little by little through kindness and knowledge. It has been the greatest honor to be part of this edition of *Aegis*.

Olivia Culp is a sophomore Spanish and political science double major with a minor in legal studies. She also participates in the Otterbein Pre-Law Society, Raise Your Voice, and the Office of Social Justice and Activism. This is her first year as an editor for *Aegis* and she has really enjoyed collaborating with the other editors. She hopes that the readers enjoy all of this year's essays!

Grace Guichard is a junior BFA acting major with a minor in philosophy. As well as this being her first year on the editorial board, she is also the president of Mainstage Improv. She would like to thank *Aegis* and Otterbein humanities for this opportunity.

Miranda Hilt is a fourth-year majoring in biology, English literary studies, and women's, gender and sexuality studies. She is currently serving as the vice president of Sigma Tau Delta: Alpha Rho and Treasurer of Otterbein's chapter of Iota Iota Iota. She is also conducting a research project on vitamin D and systemic lupus erythematosus with Dr. Simon Lawrance. Hilt loves spending time with her animals and traveling in her free time. This is her third year with *Aegis*.

Riley Hysell is a senior literary studies major. This is his third year on the *Aegis* editorial board. He hopes everyone enjoys this year's journal!

Delaney Lombardi graduated in fall 2021 with an English AYA education major. She served on *Aegis* editorial board 2020-22. She was 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.

April Martinez is a senior psychology and Spanish & Latin American studies double major with a minor in philosophy. After graduation, April will be a Graduate Enrichment Fellow pursuing a Master's in Social Work (MSW) at the Ohio State University. April is passionate about helping others, especially helping those in the Latino community, pursue higher education. April enjoyed her senior year as a part of *Aegis* and is grateful for the opportunity to have been able to work with so many amazing people.

Emma Mierzejewski is a senior (fall '22) double majoring in psychology and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. She is a peer advocate at 150 W Main, Kappa Phi Omega's Title IX chair, the co-president of Tri Iota, a lead facilitator for Team Consent, a core member of the Coordinated Community Response Team, and this is her first time writing for *Aegis*. Emma currently is working on a distinction project thesis in WGSS and plans to attend graduate school next fall. She also has two cats, a frog, a betta fish, and too many plants.

Finley Lopez is a junior English literary studies and WGSS double major with a minor in psychology. This is his first year on the *Aegis* editorial board. He is currently training to be a peer advocate for Otterbein's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Recourse Center. He recently completed Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio 40-hour training.

Safiya Mohamed is a senior majoring in English literary studies, educational studies, and minoring in race and ethnic studies. She's grateful to have been a board member of *Aegis* since her first year at Otterbein and is proud of her work in the journal during the last four years. She hopes that all readers enjoy this year's edition of *Aegis*.

Addie Richmond is a junior, double majoring in theater and art history with a focus on costume design, and museum and gallery studies. She enjoys working as a part of the production team for shows in the Department of Theater and Dance, studying fashion history, and traveling abroad.

Kimberly Satterfield graduated from Otterbein University in fall of 2021 with a degree in English literary studies, with minors in legal studies, journalism, and creative writing. She enjoys reading, creative writing, and watching movies.

Allison Steele is a junior creative writing major. This is her first year on *Aegis*. She hopes that these essays provide readers with a new and interesting look on how literature interacts with the everyday.

Grace Takahashi is a junior triple major in biology, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, and English literary studies. In addition to being on the editorial board of *Aegis*, she is the Greek Senator of the Panhellenic Council and OUSG, the treasurer of Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity, the secretary of Tri Iota and Sigma Tau Delta, a lead advocate at 150 W. Main, and a core member of the Coordinated Community Response Team. She is also a facilitator of Team Consent and a proud member of Tau Delta. She enjoys playing video games and loves her cat, Suki.

Art in Dire Times

By Hannah Sturgeon

A common saying in the world of art surrounds the power that the subject holds in its unique ability to transcend boundaries. Whether referring to culture or the inconceivable limits of time and space, there are numerous varieties of art forms that have made a meaningful impact on the lives of many over time. The post-apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel illustrates how consequential several different art forms can be for individuals living in a world that has been destroyed by a severe outbreak of the Georgia Flu. Art has seemingly played a similar role for many throughout the global Coronavirus pandemic. Both the Covid-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the Georgia Flu in Mandel's *Station Eleven* show how during times of such uncertainty, whether in a fictional or real-world, communities have turned to art in order to transcend boundaries and reunite individuals once again.

A novel featuring many protagonists, one of the main characters of *Station Eleven* is Kirsten Raymonde who is a member of the Traveling Symphony. This cohort is composed of a variety of vagabonds who live on the road, only stopping to perform their various Shakespeare plays and Beethoven symphonies. Aside from the art of music and acting, Mandel also highlights the skill of drawing and writing through her character Miranda Carroll and her production of a comic book series. What can be collected of this art, as well as a plethora of other miscellaneous items,

are compiled by yet another character, Clark Thompson, in his Museum of Civilization. This collection of the past allows individuals both young and old to either learn about or reminisce upon how the world used to be. Though some may argue that art is not the primary focus of this science fiction novel, it is certainly one of the major themes as it plays an extremely important role in the lives of all of Emily St. John Mandel's characters.

In fact, both the opening scene of the novel as a whole and the first scene after the 'collapse' of the world caused by the outbreak of the Georgia Flu both include two different theatrical interpretations of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This novel makes it clear that art is one of the few things with the power to survive the collapse of an entire civilization as it was previously known. One can infer from Mandel's strong portrayal of art in her novel *Station Eleven* that she finds it to be necessary, or even vital, for the survival of human life and culture to an extent.

With a similar, present-day belief Audrey Azoulay, General Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (or UNESCO for short) issued the following remark to celebrate the inaugural World Art Day on April 15th, 2020: "Bringing people together, inspiring, soothing and sharing: these are the powers of art, the importance of which has been made emphatically obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic" ("COVID-19, Art"). Some, like Audrey Azoulay, might

have noted Mandel's portrayal of art and its importance coming to life during the real-world novel Coronavirus pandemic.

Art throughout time has always reflected life. As English actor, author, playwright, and director extraordinaire Ben Elton states: "artists don't create society, they reflect it." This idea can be seen in chapter seven of *Station Eleven* when the Traveling Symphony is discussing their artistic repertoire. They had begun performing modern plays in the first few years of the collapse, however, Mandel emphasizes that "what was startling, what no one would have anticipated, was that audiences seemed to prefer Shakespeare to their other theatrical offerings" (Mandel 38). Traveling Symphony member Dieter concludes that people ultimately "want what was best about the world" and not the realization of what the world has come to (38). Though Mandel's characters did try to use art that reflected life during the collapse after the Georgia Flu, individuals instead wished to be brought back to a time that once was; perhaps so they could attempt to believe that they were still there.

This specific instance in Mandel's *Station Eleven* once again portrays the power of art in a somewhat sorrowful and reminiscent way. Though characters in a world stricken by a severe outbreak of the Georgia Flu needed artistic representations of a different, better world in order to survive; communities today used art about the Covid-19 pandemic in order to get through times of isolation and uncertainty. In fact, UNESCO even launched what they fondly named the 'ResiliArt movement' as a way to show how art has managed to capture the world's resilience and bring us closer together than ever before ("COVID-19, Art"). Pieces created during the 'ResiliArt movement' show personal

interpretations by creatives in a variety of different mediums of what the world was going through together during a global pandemic.

Many of the artistic pieces established during Covid utilize current experiences and symbols as a way to communicate the meaning of their pieces across barriers of culture and language. These experiences and symbols include illustrations of quarantines, masks, and front-line workers. For example, the drawing pictured below illustrates the Coronavirus pandemic from the eyes of a child and shows a healthcare worker as an angel holding the earth with a representation of many countries' flags below it ("Creative Arts Combat COVID-19"). These symbols are universal and need no translation as this pandemic is something that the entire world has experienced together.



Figure 1 A healthcare worker illustrated as an angel holding the earth with a representation of a variety of different country flags below them and several people showing praise. Symbols of unity are depicted on the angel's wings.

A similar show of unity can be seen in a video that was published on YouTube by Guardian News during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic for the country of Italy in early March of 2020. Filmed on phone cameras across the country, cities could be heard flooded with the sounds of music. Singing united from balconies, the video captures the beautiful sounds from the cities of Siena, Naples, Benevento, and Salerno in Italy. From ballads like ‘Abbracciamme’ which translates to ‘Hug Me’ in English, to the Italian National Anthem, or even music created with whatever could be found; the country’s resilience was shown in the strength of their voices (Guardian News). With this video hitting nearly three million views, the beauty and unity captured in the country of Italy during their time of need touched the souls of many around the world. Even while in the midst of nationally enforced quarantine, these communities still found ways to come together through song.

Violinist Aldo Sebastián Cicchini, also from Italy, recounted his experiences with these so-called ‘balcony concerts’ in an article entitled “First Person: The Power of Art in a Time of Coronavirus Crisis” for the United Nations. He recalls how one of his colleagues from the orchestra called him in March of 2020 asking “every musician in Italy to open their window, or to go to the balcony, to perform at six in the afternoon” (“First Person: Art Coronavirus Crisis”). He agreed and began playing on a cold evening. After he had finished the piece, he heard his neighbors “clapping, shouting, and demanding more” so he continued playing and agreed to play again the following night at the same time (“First Person: Art Coronavirus Crisis”). He remembers this as “the beginning of everything” and recounts all of the music he played after that time (“First Person: Art

Coronavirus Crisis”). For Cicchini, he realized that “music is bringing people closer together during this time of isolation”, he goes on to state that “it is not a cure for the disease, but it is maybe a cure for our hearts” (“First Person: Art Coronavirus Crisis”).

Tying this similar musical example back to Emily St John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, one of the main quotes in her novel states that “survival is insufficient” (58). Italian violinist Aldo Sebastián Cicchini similarly believes that “in times like this, all the arts are very, very important. Right now, we need to survive, but surviving is not living. The beauty of art makes us united, and part of something that is bigger than us” (“First Person: Art Coronavirus Crisis”). In both worlds, whether real or fake, fighting the Georgia Flu or the Coronavirus pandemic, the societies recognize that there is more to life than simply surviving. Though survival is certainly important, it is hard to survive without a purpose or passion in life.

Music and art in general provide many with this sense of purpose and passion. The Traveling Symphony in *Station Eleven* found their purpose to be performing from city to city. Citizens of Italy found passion in their nightly balcony concerts. In both scenarios, the performers were able to continue their craft while the viewers or listeners were given something to look forward to, providing them with a sense of hope during hard times. Ultimately, art in both of these cases gave individuals the motivation vital to survive; but more importantly still, it gave them the means necessary to live.

Further still, Mandel’s character Miranda Carroll also found her purpose for life in the creation of her comic series: *Station Eleven*. The very series from which Mandel’s book received its name, Miranda spent years perfecting her

story and her craft. Towards the beginning of her development as a character, she is explaining to her boyfriend at the time that he does not “‘have to understand it,’ she said. ‘it’s mine’” when talking about her creation (Mandel 87). *Station Eleven* appears to be the one thing that she truly finds joy and solace in, and she ensures that everything about the scenes, characters, and the book as a whole is perfect exactly to her liking.

One of the copies of Miranda Carroll’s comics finds its way into the hands of Kirsten Raymonde, who cherishes it as one of her most prized possessions. She spends the entirety of the book continuing to search for other copies whenever possible. This component of the plot of *Station Eleven* once again shows the importance of art of all kinds for Mandel’s characters. This can be seen as yet another similarity between the worlds of the Georgia Flu and the Covid-19 pandemic. Comparable to how Kirsten clung to Miranda Carroll’s comic book in *Station Eleven*, others today have clung to music as a light at the end of a dark tunnel.

In conclusion, there are several differences, yet many similarities between the portrayal of art in Emily St John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* and the real-world Coronavirus

pandemic. Though characters in *Station Eleven* use art as a form of escape from the reality of their situation, communities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic have used it as a form of unity and solidarity across barriers of culture and language. However, there were more similarities than differences, with the largest resemblance being the real-world application of Mandel’s signature line: “survival is insufficient” (58). The clear recognition that there is more to life than simply surviving is what led the Traveling Symphony to their life of performances on the road, and it is also what led to the boom of the ‘ResiliArt movement’, as dubbed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Though the history of the Coronavirus pandemic will sadly include its ranking as one of the deadliest pandemics in history, it will also include stories of resilience and unity that can be seen through art. The portrayal of the Georgia Flu in *Station Eleven* and the real-world account of the Covid-19 pandemic both make it clear that during times of uncertainty, communities have turned to art in order to transcend boundaries and reunite individuals. Art has been and will continue to be a powerful tool for survival.

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From Dust to Destruction

By Ashley Bright

Death is something that everyone must handle at some point in their life. Upon the death of a loved one, a family must decide what to do with the body of the deceased. Americans typically will care for their dead through burial or flame-based cremation. Both of these care options harm the environment, and many families are unaware of the negative impact choosing them has on our planet. Aldo Leopold's *The Land Ethic* suggests that something is environmentally ethical when it "protects the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." Something is environmentally unethical when it does the opposite. Thus, the ways in which Americans care for their dead do not protect the integrity, stability, or beauty of the biotic community, and are therefore environmentally unethical.

The most popular form of death care in America since the Civil War has been burial with embalming of the corpse. Embalming preserves and protects a body from decomposition for a period of time. Once the embalming process is complete, the body is moved into the chosen casket and lowered into a burial vault at the cemetery, which is a protective layer that holds the casket in the ground. The vault protects the casket from the weight of the soil and allows for heavy machinery and cemetery equipment to pass over the grave without damage. Vaults are required by cemeteries only to maintain the aesthetic of the land.

Once the ground has settled after the burial, a headstone or grave marker is placed on the gravesite to memorialize the deceased. After all of the dust has settled from the burial, the environmental impact begins to take its toll.

According to the Funeral Consumers Alliance, cemeteries throughout the country bury the following amount of harmful materials per year: 827,060 gallons of embalming fluid, 2,700 tons of copper and bronze from caskets, 30 million board feet of hardwoods from caskets, 1,600,000 tons of reinforced concrete from vaults, and 14,000 tons of steel from vaults. This is a vast number of materials to be placed into the earth and all of them are harmful in many ways. Embalming fluids, according to Baksh, seep into the soil which further harms it and increases the risk of contamination to our food supply and overall climate health.

Families tend to expect an embalming to take place following the death of their loved one in order to have a picturesque final vision of body. Objections to the removal of embalming would stem from the loss of an aesthetic "natural" looking corpse. Families should not worry about the natural looking state of the corpse, as embalming actually takes away from natural look of a decedent. Death is natural, in most cases, and to put artificial chemicals into the body would be more unnatural than to just leave the body alone. If a situation arises such as a trauma in which the family would want an embalming,

there are cosmetics that can be used. If these cosmetics themselves are not enough, there are more natural embalming options.

According to Alexandra Harker, there have been studies that have shown elevated levels of copper, lead, zinc, and iron in the soil levels where caskets are buried; these metals are used in the production of caskets and burial vaults. Elevated levels of these metals put people at risk for increased health issues, such as difficulty breathing, headaches, irregular heartbeat, etc. Our soil is such an essential part of our planet's health, and its destruction puts everyone at risk. "Soils supply the essential nutrients, water, oxygen and root support that our food-producing plants need to grow and flourish...A healthy soil also contributes to mitigating climate change by maintaining or increasing its carbon content" (Food and Agricultural Organization). Thus, with this information, it is obvious that we must protect our soil by removing these chemicals, otherwise we face further damage to food productivity and continue contributing to climate change. These elevated levels of harmful metals are just one of the negative impacts caskets have been proven to have. Another example is how the amount of wood used for caskets alone comes from approximately 160,000,000 trees per year. The deforestation this causes is concerning considering the number of animals and plants that rely on these trees for survival. The removal of this number of trees also affects climate change as they absorb our carbon dioxide as well as the air emissions caused by humans (Nunez). Many companies also produce popular casket designs using endangered wood such as mahogany, creating an unstable future for these trees (Baksh).

Cemeteries themselves are not innocent

in the detriment of the environment caused by the modern death care industry. Across the United States, there are 144,847 cemeteries that account for around 140,000 acres of the country's land (Stevens). The large amount of land loss destroyed for aesthetic purposes is truly worrying because it is detrimental for wildlife and ecosystems to thrive. Cemeteries are also responsible for a percentage of air emissions when using machinery for the development and upkeep of the property. In order to keep up the aesthetic of the land chemicals are used, and they end up in our waterways, polluting them further and destroying an already limited resource that is desperately needed. Most cemeteries also use irrigation systems which use abundant amounts of water in order to keep the grounds looking pristine, further amplifying the water crisis (FCAM). The final component to environmental impact of burial is the use of headstones. According to Keegan Ramsden, the concrete industry accounts for 8 percent of the global carbon emission, mainly caused by the cementing process. Cement is how headstones and grave markers are placed in cemeteries, and with an uncountable number of monuments erected in cemeteries, one can only imagine how cement being laid in cemeteries has destroyed the air but also the soil that it is poured into.

Some may argue that cemeteries produce more emotional benefit than environmental harm. Families may enjoy coming to the cemetery in order to mourn and have a place of solace. These locations are seen as park-like and people would fear not having this around. Another objection to the argument against cemeteries would be the idea of not having headstones. Families would fear the lack of a marker to remember the final

resting place of their loved ones as well as the lack of remembrance of said decedent. This idea of cemeteries does not have to change. Instead of traditional headstone markers, families could plant things or places benches at the site of the grave. Not only would this fix the environmental issue of headstones, but it would also add to the environment in a positive way, whether that be by planting things, or adding a bench that people could come and enjoy being in nature while still paying their respects.

The second most popular form of death care in America is flame-based cremation. Cremation is the process that reduces human remains into bone fragments (CANA). Although cremation is less harmful to the environment than traditional burial, it is not a better way to care for the dead. Cremations have been proven to release carbon monoxide, soot, sulfur dioxide, heavy metals, and mercury emissions into the air. Around 28 gallons of fuel are used per cremation which produces 540 pounds of carbon dioxide that is released into the atmosphere, which sums to 270,000 tons of carbon dioxide being released per year. “That’s more CO₂ pollution than 22,000 average American homes generate in a year” (Herzog). These toxic emissions produced by flame-based cremation retorts (the cremation chamber) only threaten our current climate issue further. “The buildup of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases like methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are causing the Earth’s atmosphere to warm, resulting in changes to the climate we are already starting to see today” (EPA).

As shown in the previous paragraphs, the American death care industry is

environmentally unethical according to Leopold’s *The Land Ethic*. Again, this suggests that something is environmentally ethical when it “protects the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community” (Leopold). Something is environmentally unethical when it does the opposite. Despite these two care options in American death care, there are more environmentally ethical alternatives.

The first is green burials and embalming, and this is not a new idea. Burial has only recently been modified to include vaults, caskets, and embalming. The Green Burial Council (GBC) states that, “Natural burial grounds, cemeteries, and preserves all seek to bury without impediment. That means no embalming, no liners, or vaults, and using biodegradable containers, whether caskets, shrouds, or nothing at all.” Without caskets or vaults, the environment is no longer harmed by the outrageous amounts of trees being used to produce caskets, the air emissions from casket and vault production would drastically decrease, and the land is no longer harmed by toxins from concrete or metals. The removal of these units also allows for the body to decompose in a natural state that gives back nutrients to the land. In cases where embalming is required or requested, the GBC approved a product made with essential oils that was found to not cause harm to the surrounding environment or to the morticians using it. Green burials also preserve the integrity of the land, create more space by depleting headstones and vaults, and allow for the natural ecosystems to be restored.

For families who wish to avoid burial, there is a more environmentally ethical cremation option. Alkaline hydrolysis is a cremation process that uses 95 percent water, 5 percent chemicals, heat, and agitation to

reduce the corpse to bone fragments. Like flame-based cremation, the result consists of “ashes” that are placed in an urn and given to the family. These machines run off electricity, contrary to the fuel used by their flame-based counterparts, which according to the Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association, “the electricity can be sourced from renewables or carbon free sources.” The use of electricity reduces the amount of harmful fuel and carbon footprints produced by traditional crematories. Along with the reduction of fuel, no harmful toxins are vented into the air, thanks to the water-based solution. This further reduces the carbon footprints of the death care industry. Instead of wasting millions of gallons of water, the effluent that results from the process can be removed with other wastewater without harming the waterways further. This water can then be sanitized and processed, allowing reuse by the public.

Families who use funeral homes to care for their dead may have objections to changing the way American death care has been for hundreds of years. Those who have these objections tend to have the fear of the cost being higher in order to perform green burials or alkaline hydrolysis. They also tend to just not want to change tradition, especially if the traditional way of handling the dead has been embedded in their lives for a long time. People do not like change, especially when it is during a time of grief and jumbled thoughts. Families know the

traditions of death care and want to do what is comfortable and old.

The objection of cost is a quick solve. Green burials are actually much cheaper in regard to a traditional burial. This stems from not having to pay for a casket, vault, or embalming (in most cases). As far as alkaline hydrolysis, it is at a comparable price point to traditional cremation. So, in almost all cases, being green would not only save the planet, but save you a lot of money and stress. Change is sometimes a good thing and with our current climate issues, something needs to be done and although people like traditional funerals, most would prefer living on a healthy planet.

Unlike the traditional death care methods, these alternatives, such as green burials and alkaline hydrolysis, do protect the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, and are therefore environmentally ethical, based on Leopold’s argument in *The Land Ethic*. For the protection of the environment and future of our planet, we must understand and acknowledge that there are ethical alternatives to the standard way of American death care. It is the job of the funeral industry to educate families and change their ways of environmental destruction. It is also the job of the families to be willing to change and protect the environment from further harm. Everyone involved must be held accountable for death care in the United States to change for the better.

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“Get Up, Peter; The Revolution’s Calling”

Revolutions, Sexuality, Feminism, and *LIFE* Magazine in 1968

By Allison Gammons

1968 was a tumultuous year in American history, full of anti-war protests, news from the Civil Rights Movement, student movements, and assassinations of prominent leaders. Out of this turmoil emerged a new emphasis on youth rights and the burgeoning sexual revolution. In many ways, these two movements complemented and informed each other. Together, they collided with the dominant culture that had emerged following World War II (DeStefanis), creating a counterculture movement that would greatly affect the next generation. An instance of this counterculture movement was the growth of youth movements like Students for Democratic Society, or SDS. The Radical feminist woman and the young man involved in SDS were seen as antagonistic to suburban happiness, the ideal life of their parent’s generation. The many ways in which the dominant and counter cultures clashed throughout the 1960s are easy to see in the news media of the time. In the year 1968, this was as true as ever. The pages of *LIFE* magazine are an ideal place to see how these cultural pressures played out against each other. Despite the fact that the readership of *LIFE* was mainly comprised of an older generation that largely resisted the sexual

revolution, *LIFE* was careful to depict all sides of the cultural shift, offering occasionally contradictory coverage of the year ‘that rocked the world’. Because of the range of opinions expressed in *LIFE* magazine’s articles and advertisements, there is disunity that reflects the upheaval in the dominant culture.

One of the many articles through which *LIFE* magazine comments on the growing sexual revolution is this article, published on August 23 by Margaret Mead: anthropologist, professor at Columbia University, and household name. She attempted to assuage the fears of *LIFE* magazine’s readership by addressing the myriad of changes to family, sex, and marriage that were brought on by the sexual revolution and second-wave feminism. Mead was well known for her anthropological efforts at understanding the marriage and family traditions of indigenous cultures around the world, and so was well known to the middle-aged crowd to which *LIFE* magazine was oriented. Being in her sixties herself, she was well equipped to understand the parental concerns her generation had for their sons and daughters. Mead was also suited to speak to the culture of the college students, being a college professor herself. Irene Neves, the *LIFE* journalist who

recorded this interview with Mead, described her as “express[ing] opinions so original and provocative that they speak both to an alarmed older generation and to a restless youth” (30). Being able to speak to both groups positioned Mead in the middle of the ongoing dialogue about the student sexual revolution – one of the many topics she discussed in her article.

Foremost in this article, Mead confronted the idea that culture was changing so rapidly among young people because they disrespected their parents and the culture of the generations before them. Instead, she suggested that young people were simply ignorant of the historical perspective; the lack thereof made the tumultuously changing world much more difficult to navigate. Mead recognized the pressures on Americans that were creating this feeling of rapid and barely understandable change, pointing to the war in Vietnam, mass media, and the sexual revolution as factors that were unbalancing society.

The Vietnam War, and the opposition to it, created a culture of “confronting the bomb” where young men felt living their regular life was not worthwhile if they were only going to be drafted and sent to war anyways (Bailey 238). 2.2 million young men were drafted, and 58,000 soldiers were killed, proving that no one was safe. In addition, the anti-war movement had gained strength by 1968 and was driven in part by young leaders (DeStefanis). Young people, whether they supported the war or opposed it, were bombarded by information from the Vietnam War. Photos of badly burned Vietnamese citizens and bombed-out villages, news of rising death tolls, and scandals like the My Lai Massacre, where US forces killed 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians after they were

told to “kill anything that moved”, fanned the flames of the anti-war movement and instilled in the younger generation their first lessons about organizing and protesting. This sense of urgency, along with the sexual revolution, propelled young people into serious relationships at a younger age than their parents. Mead also described mass media as part of the problem, saying “this is the first generation who have been brought up by the mass media instead of by parents” (Neves 31).

However, Mead wasn’t entirely critical of the youth movement. She also drew on her background as an anthropologist by pointing out that changes to marriage, family lifestyles, rebellion against parental ‘oppression’, and changing cultural values are nothing new. She said, “there have always been young people who are questioning the system, rebelling against it and expressing it in their clothes and sex behavior,” (Neves 31), a sentiment that did not seem to calm the anxieties of parents certain their children were destroying the sanctity of marriage and destroying their lives by living together pre-maritally. Unsurprisingly, some readers took issue with Mead’s line of reasoning, though it was meant to be reassuring.

Included in the Letters to the Editors on September 13th, two issues later, are a wide range of responses to Mead’s article. One reader from San Francisco, California, a self-described “guilty divorced woman”, thanked Mead for being a voice of objectivity. Another woman, this one from Wisconsin, said she “found it difficult to figure how [the editors] could headline [Mead’s] nonsense as ‘sound insights.’” One scathing reviewer mocked Mead’s thoughts about accepting change and understanding the origins of the youth

movement, saying “therefore, we must accept that when our wives join the new generation in a peace march, flirt with their daughters’ boyfriends or fall in love with one of the clerks at the local supermarket...they are in, in fact, updating their roles relevant to our society’s present urge for humanity...” (“Letters to the Editor Margaret Mead” 30a). From the context provided and knowledge of the general readership of *LIFE*, one can assume these concerned readers were part of the older, more conservative bloc. This underscored *LIFE*’s interest in publishing articles that discuss issues of sex, sexuality, family life, and marriage; all of these were issues that interested a wide demographic of people.

Another article, published May 31st, reflected the truth of Mead’s reassurances to the greater public. The article, “‘The Arrangement’ at College: Unmarried Couples in the Sexual Revolution Learn that Love Still Makes the World Go Square” and its companion, “How a Liberal College Copes with the Problem”, spoke to a lot of the same new cultural shifts that Mead was attempting to explain to the older generation. These articles catered towards the older generation and attempted to soothe the fears of the sexual revolution, saying that to “judge by the arrangement, the sexual revolution may come to an even duller and more conventional end than did the old standard” (McWhirter 60). Although the rising trend of unmarried couples living together on college campuses was a concern for many people, including the college institutions themselves, the youths were often having less sex than their peers. They had entered into a sort of domestic bliss and were exercising their freedoms by living together and sharing household responsibilities like spouses would. Multiple

student pairs were interviewed for the article, and many of them shared similar feelings of domesticity, partnership, and cooperation. It also seemed that these young couples benefitted from that sort of domestic stability. Perhaps many students understood that, in many ways, the sexual revolution was less about rebelling against the status quo, and more about achieving greater happiness in relationships.

Second-wave feminism, which gave birth to the sexual revolution, was begun with Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*, in which Friedan made it clear just how much women of her generation were suffering in restrictive relationships. Twenty years after she graduated from Smith College, Friedan was able to connect with her classmates from Smith College, many of whom were dissatisfied with their lives. Friedan described the problem, saying “Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: ‘Is this all there is?’” (DeStefanis). Friedan’s words struck a chord with many middle-class women, who shared this same frustration and longing. Published in 1953, *The Feminine Mystique* was the beginning of a feminist movement, and Friedan used her platform to challenge women to live an examined and purposeful life (Rosen 6), something that is true about the unwed couples who were participating in ‘the arrangement’.

A generation younger than Betty Friedan, college student Linda LeClair grew up hearing about how dissatisfied her mother’s generation was. Young women of LeClair’s generation had grown up with these experiences in common, and they knew they were facing the same prospects. They wanted something better

for themselves. Part of that, for many college students, was participating in an 'arrangement' where they were respected in the relationship. The students in unwed domesticity were enjoying a "great deal of comfort and peace of mind", as one student reported to *LIFE* (McWhirter 60). In short, many students considered this to be the ideal situation, and many parents noticed the positive change in their child as well. "When the parent of a college undergraduate finds his child cheerful, clear-eyed and relaxed, his checkbook balanced, his grades going up, and wanting to strike up a conversation, perhaps he should begin to suspect something", says the author of the *LIFE* article, proving the success of these relationships (McWhirter 57).

The whole debate over these types of unwed domestic situations was brought to the public eye after Barnard College at Columbia University acted against Linda LeClair, who was living with her boyfriend Peter Behr under one of these 'arrangements'. In order to punish her for lying about her living situation, LeClair faced an inquiry from Barnard's Judiciary Council. The college attempted to frighten Linda into ending her relationship with Peter by banning her from the snack bar (McWhirter 56), but instead, they inspired her to make her domestic situation a public affair, the exact opposite of what Barnard College wanted. *LIFE* said that "a sexual anthropologist of some future century...may consider the case of Linda LeClair and her boyfriend Peter Behr, as a moment in which the morality of an era changed" (McWhirter 56). LeClair was politically adept on her campus, and quickly mobilized other young women who had also been hiding their domestic situation from the university. Perhaps recognizing a chance

to make her mark on the sexual revolution, LeClair distributed a survey on campus, garnering 300 replies, most of which admitted to some violation of Barnard's housing regulations, (Bailey 251) which at the time included rules like "the three feet rule" where a couple must have at least three feet on the ground at any given time (McWhirter 58). A further sixty women went public and signed forms that read "I am a student of Barnard College and I have violated the Barnard Housing Regulations... In the interest of fairness I request that an investigation be made of my disobedience" (Bailey 251). And so the public awareness of these unwed couples began. The *LIFE* magazine article quotes Martha Peterson, the president of Barnard College, as saying "We learned also, to our regret, that public interest in sex on the college campus is insatiable" (McWhirter 58). This was certainly true of the backlash from concerned older generations, as evidenced by those who wrote letters to the *LIFE* magazine editors about 'The Arrangement' article. One reader said she found herself saddened by the article, saying that the students were only "playing house". Another asked why *LIFE* felt the need to "publicize, advertise, and glamorize whoredom and phallic worship by a minority of our populace, to the moral detriment of our young folk, who thereby gain the impression that all of our era do it so it has to be right to do so" ("Letters to the Editor: The Arrangement 21). Contrarily, the next letter remarked upon how late *LIFE* is reporting something that was acknowledged as a common fact, saying it was so commonplace as to be not worth mentioning ("Letters to the Editor: The Arrangement 21). While some respondents came in support of 'the arrangement', most did not, and

accused *LIFE* of degrading the moral fiber of the country, encouraging perversion, and blinding the youth to the consequences of their “premarital marriages” (“Letters to the Editors: The Arrangement” 21). And so, it was clear that public opinion was divided between the dominant culture and the rising counterculture.

Articles like Mead and ‘The Arrangement’ that attempted to provide context for the rapidly changing world of the sexual revolution seem to stand at odds with the advertisements that surround them. While the articles were intended to provoke thought and report on the details of the ongoing counterculture movement, it seems as if most advertisements worked to reinforce the dominant culture that was being rebelled against. One such ad, only a few issues before the Margaret Mead article, boasted about the effectiveness of MONY, Mutual of New York Insurance Agency. In this ad, a woman sits with a large German Shepard dog, captioned “Life Insurance? For a wife? That’s money down the drain!” The ad went on to explain how Denise Kodner, of Highland Park, Illinois, met with an agent from MONY who convinced her that her husband should have a life insurance plan for her in case anything were ever to happen to her. Kodner was quoted as saying that meeting with Harry the insurance agent “made [her] realize for the first time all the things I have to do for the family that they’d have to pay for. Like the cleaning and cooking and just keeping the house running” (Advertisement for Mutual of New York Insurance Agency). She went on to explain how the insurance agent explained how taxes and Social Security worked as well, implying that she did not know even the basics of taxes. It is unlikely that Kodner,

well into her forties at the time the ad was run and a successful dog breeder, association president, and show-woman (Canalizo), was so clueless about insurance and taxes. Kodner’s image being used in such a way was part of the long tradition of women being used as props to sell products.

By exploiting Kodner’s position in society as a mother and a woman, the life insurance advertisement fit right into the larger world of oppression against women. Kodner appeared to have missed the point about just how important her work is to the family. She recognized that, without her, the family would have to pay someone else to do household work that she was naturally inclined to take care of without thanks or payment. The advertisement eliminated anything that connected Kodner’s words to the larger women’s rights movement, and how in turn that was connected to the youth sexual revolution that Margaret Mead talked about in her article.

Whether it was women’s sexuality, women’s cluelessness, or violence against women that was on display, this advertising tactic was present throughout the post-World War II years of economic prosperity and suburban monoculturalism (DeStefanis). The life insurance advertisement itself may seem innocuous, but it was indicative of a larger problem, along with cigarette, car, hair dye, perfume, makeup, and air travel advertisements. In this case, the ad was not problematic because it exploits Kodner’s sexuality, but because it exploited her supposed cluelessness and her role as a woman in her family.

In the case of another ad in the same issue of the magazine, a woman’s sex appeal was exploited in order to sell products. In this

case, a young woman shows off her lightened hair in a black and white image that creates an air of drama and mystery. The title line reads “How do you keep a beautiful blonde true?” grabbing the attention of male readers with the wordplay of “keeping” a woman “true” (Advertisement for Clairol Colorfast Shampoo). It is unclear just how much control men had over the hair care choices of women at the time, but there was a cultural pressure for blond hair, evidenced by the proliferation of hair dye ads in *LIFE* magazine. The smaller text went on to clarify the language of the title, making it clear that this ad was about long-lasting hair color, and not preventing a wife from leaving her husband or cheating on him. But the phrasing of the ad reveals something deeper about cultural fears, far beyond the need for hair dye.

This usage of the female image as something to sell products was one of the aspects of culture that up-and-coming Radical feminists spoke out about in the late 1960s and 1970s. Radical feminists worked to bring attention to these small but significant acts of oppression through a tactic they called “consciousness-raising”. Through conversation, women would point out to each other the restrictive and uncomfortable expectations, behaviors, and objects that society forced upon them. By calling attention to shoes, clothing, and undergarments as physical objects of women’s oppression, they were also bringing attention to adaptive behaviors like playing dumb about important things, pretending to agree with men, and alienating themselves from other women (Rosen 196-198). Radical feminists were drawing attention to how the personal becomes political, a common rallying cry. Denise Kodner might have

benefitted from a consciousness-raising experience in order to understand how her image was used to perpetuate the idea that women were to be looked after because they did not know enough about how money worked to do it themselves. So too could the unidentified woman in the hair dye ad have been made new by the rage described by many who participated in consciousness-raising. One woman pointed out that “many women are acting ugly now because they feel ugly. For a long time, these women acted sweet when they didn’t necessarily feel sweet. They did so because deep in their being they believed their lives depended on being sweet. Now when you think of that time, of all that life spent on their knees, they feel green bile spreading through them and they feel that their lives *now* “depend upon calling men ‘male chauvinist pigs!’” (Rosen 199).

As the Radical Feminists point out, these advertisements did not exist in a vacuum, separate from the articles surrounding them, so one wonders what the juxtaposition is supposed to indicate to readers. To rapidly flip from an article about rationalizing the youth revolution to an ad describing the thankless work of a wife creates a sense of disunity, one that was certainly reflected in the opinions of the time. The world was in great disagreement: young against old, male against female, married against unmarried. Along with these divisions came a division in media, which is clear to see when one examines what is printed within a single year’s span of *LIFE* magazine. By looking at documents that speak directly to the tumultuous events of 1968, it becomes easier to understand how the gap between different ideological groups continued to widen, greatly affecting culture and society.

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Having it All:

Ladies Home Journal and Post-feminism in the Early 1990s

By Maggie Daugherty

In March 1970, a sit-in was arranged at *Ladies Home Journal* to protest how the women's magazine featured ads and articles that exploited women. To address the biases of the male-run paper, they advocated for more women to be hired, a woman as editor-in-chief, and a special section dedicated to the women's liberation movement in the magazine. The editor ultimately agreed to providing them this section, saying: "[w]e had been following this movement with great interest, of course. But it wasn't until 200 of these new feminists marched into the Journal's office and stayed for 11 hours that we were literally confronted with the intensity and reality of this brand of women's rights thinking" (Rosen 300). By August, the magazine featured an eight page insert that included information about the Equal Rights Amendment, lists of women's groups across the country, poetry, and more. From 1972 to 1980, Letty Pogrebin wrote a regular column for the magazine that covered numerous feminist issues of the time. Starting in 1979, *LHJ* began to feature a section called "It's not easy to be a woman today!" that covered a variety of topics such as singlehood, personal growth, and more (Rosen 309). But by the early 1980s, the women who grew up during second wave feminism were called the "Post-Feminist Generation." As Rosen points out

in *The World Split Open*, this generation would be the first "without the support of a movement, who tried to have it all – sexual freedom, career, marriage, and motherhood – without realizing that feminists had never wanted women to do it all" (274). So where does the breakup of second wave feminism leave those same women by the early 1990s? When compared to the 1950s, it appears that not much had changed by the 1990s, as is evidenced in the articles and advertisements that continued to be run in women's magazines. Those found in *Ladies Home Journal* between 1993 and 1994 have a lot of unity in what and how they expect women to be and provide insight into what gender and sexuality looked like during this time. They promoted the image of a woman who had it all and upheld an exhausting list of what they should be achieving. An analysis of some of these articles and advertisements will demonstrate that instead of heeding the advice and wants of second wave feminists, women's magazines continued to perpetuate harmful, impossible, and archaic standards of womanhood. In addition, abandoning second wave feminism in the 1980s led to a clash of ideals and expectations for those navigating adulthood in the 1990s.

In many of the ads and articles featured in *Ladies Home Journal* there is a promotion

of marriage and maintaining it. A regular article called “Can this marriage be saved?” aims to give women advice on how to be better for their husbands when they feel like their marriage is failing. There are ads about how to remain attractive for one’s husband, which can be done by losing weight, dying one’s hair, doing the housework, and making a decent dinner. An ad that encompasses this is for potatoes. It features a very satisfied looking man sitting on a step alone. Pitched as “America’s favorite vegetable,” it says, “Bill has been married for forty-four years. His wife has been making potatoes for forty-four and a half years. We’ll let you figure this one out” (Advertisement for potatoes). This particular ad promotes marriage, and the way to woo a man is by cooking and providing for him. The corner of the ad even has his wife’s recipe and says, “serve & enjoy and never go to bed angry at each other” (Advertisement for potatoes). Ads like this serve as a reminder that the woman’s “role in the home seems not to have changed since the 1950s: she remains the cook, the major parent, the household consumer” (Walker 223). But this contradicts the 1960s and the ideas about marriage that became popular during second wave feminism. Helen Gurley Brown published the wildly popular book *Sex and the Single Girl* as a “guidebook for the unwed working woman.” It targeted other women who did not have much use for marriage and reminded them that they did not need a husband during their best years (D’Emilio and Freedman 303). The potato ad highlights a contradiction that women who grew up during and participated in second wave feminism faced by the 1990s with these conflicting ideas.

Another focus of the ads in *Ladies*

Home Journal was on a woman’s appearance. Through hair, makeup, skincare, deodorant, and more, women are expected to present themselves in a very feminine way. There are numerous makeup ads that tell women they will look younger if they use their products, and there is a fixation with age and making sure women do not look old or tired. This obsession with age and appearance went beyond the ads though. How women felt about their age and stayed so youthful looking were among the hard-hitting interview questions asked the female celebrities who graced the covers of *LHJ*. CNN also had a regular piece on current events and “news,” which included best products and most flattering dresses for parties. One such ad from *Ladies Home Journal* is for Maybelline. It is an all-black ad with a picture in the center of a woman holding balloons. Above it, the ad reads “[s]he’s 40. It’s astonishing. And if you ask her why she looks so young she’ll tell you.” Continuing under the picture it says, “[j]ust take some time off. Maybe a few years” (Advertisement for Maybelline). The ad is meant to imply that women can take some time off their face (wrinkles, and other lines) and overall appearance if they use the Maybelline product, or others featured in the magazine, to look younger. In addition to the message about youthful appearance, the model takes on a childlike pose as she holds balloons behind her back and looking coyly over her shoulder while dressed maturely in her black dress and heels. It is as if to say that women should be childlike and innocent while allowing themselves to be infantilized and sexualized. In contrast to the messages women received in the 1990s, in 1968, women expressed their outrage at the degrading

pageants that supported the “mindless-boob girlie symbol.” In response to it the freedom trash can was started to throw away “girdles, bras, high-heeled shoes, false eyelashes, and hair curlers” (D’Emilio and Freedman 302). This preoccupation with looks and remaining young highlights another shift by the 1990s that occurred among those who experienced second wave feminism.

Both ads represent what is seen throughout *Ladies Home Journal* regularly and reflect where women were by the 1990s. There was a lot of pressure on women to meet these new criteria of womanhood. This shift for them following second wave feminism does appear to relate to Rosen’s description of them as the post-feminist generation. Women who came of age during second wave feminism emerged with the idea that women could have it all without a feminist movement. Some post-feminist women believe that feminism was no longer needed because it had already achieved its goals. The word feminism also came with negative connotations for the post-feminist generation. For those who were “daughters of the feminists, the women’s movement triggered painful childhood memories.” Women stopped identifying as feminists because “they believed in gender equality and aspired to combine a career with a family life.” It was associated with “icy monsters who have let themselves go... exhausted superwomen, or unkempt, hairy, man-hating lesbians.” Some saw a bitterness when it came to feminism, saying “you’ll see some happy women; and then you’ll see these bitter, bitter women. The unhappy women are all feminists.” There were other women who even saw feminism and its language as “irrelevant to their lives” and believed that

women could accomplish things individually (Rosen 274-275). The splintering of second wave feminism did not help women by the 1990s who already saw a backlash to the movement. Without feminism though, as it was known in the 1960s to the 1980s, a reinvention of the ideal woman emerged with more expectations.

“Can This Marriage Be Saved?” was a regular article in *LHJ* that began in the 1950s. It evaluated a marriage from the perspective of the wife and the husband and concluded with a therapists’ input and the results of counseling. One couple experienced a problem where the wife felt like she was constantly being criticized by her husband. She talked about his temper, their lack of intimacy, and her own self-consciousness since gaining weight. For his part, the husband blamed the wife. He said their kids were “not able to cope in the world” because she did not let him discipline them, and if she had supported him in one instance he would have behaved differently. Regarding their lack of intimacy, he said that he thought his wife was “one of those women who is hard to satisfy sexually,” and accused her of “becoming less feminine and more aggressive as time goes by” (Sobel 12-13). The counselor mentioned that both were trying to break away from what they saw in their own parents’ marriages and neither communicated their expectations. After some counseling the couple started to do better, and after the wife lost weight, she felt attractive, and the husband became more responsive.

This article is a great representation of gender and sexuality in the 1990s, and it highlights a tension between generational values. Post-feminists who grew up during second wave feminism were raised by an

older generation with different experiences. Divorce was rare in the 1950s, and marital counseling was popular to help couples avoid the “stigma of divorce” (Rosen 9). There were women who denounced feminism and claimed that “women who engaged in demanding intellectual work cheated their husbands and children” (27). By the 1960s and 1970s, there was a clash of beliefs about the role of women in the house. On one side, there was a concern that women in the workplace meant the “erosion of American family life” (67). On the other side, there was a revulsion to marriage with protests at bridal fairs and the Marriage License Bureau. There was the emergence of “therapeutic feminism” that encouraged women to think positively and “achieve some form of self-realization and emancipation” (315-316). It is understandable that by the 1990s some women were conflicted and confused about what their role in the home was meant to be, but due to the absence of the feminist movement, women were forced to navigate this on their own.

The 1990s were about women having it all. They led fulfilling social lives and were satisfied romantically and financially. *LHJ* continued to promote this checklist of what women should be doing to be considered successful. In the article “A Day in the Life of the New American Woman,” different women were examined to demonstrate how the values of the traditional womanhood were being challenged. It celebrated the struggles that some women went through and set the standards of what was acceptable. For instance, when talking about childless couples the example was a couple who each had a six-figure income, and the woman could not see herself with a car seat in the back of her

red Porsche. This set the expectation that the only acceptable reason for a woman to not have kids was if she was focusing on her career and making enough money to support a family in the event she changed her mind. Then there was the depiction of the busy mom and a celebration of her exhausting life. “Wife, mother, and a registered sales assistant... [s]he rises at six am and puts in a full day at the office before coming home to her husband [...] and their kids [...] [t]hen her evening turns into the usual balancing act of feeding, chauffeuring, and cleaning” (Weiss 65). In most of the examples provided in the article women were celebrated for breaking the mold, and though the article tries to romanticize careerism, it still idealizes domesticity (Rosen 309).

These two articles found in *Ladies Home Journal* illustrate the “kaleidoscope chaos of women’s lives” (310). There were so many demands made of women by the 1990s, and the articles highlight them. Some women ended up repeating their mother’s life without realizing or questioning it (310). While women tried to rail against the system that they felt harmed generations before them, they ultimately did not escape the same fate as those women. Abandoning second wave feminism and rejecting feminism completely left a void for women who were reaching their thirties, forties, and fifties by the 1990s. Instead of deconstructing a system that upheld standards of femininity and expectations for women, leaving feminism in the 1980s resulted in the same standards being maintained with some additions.

In 1989, *Time* ran an article that stated feminism was endangered because it had been successful. “Feminism is a victim of its own resounding achievements. Its

triumphs – in getting women into the workplace, in elevating their status in society and in shattering the ‘feminine mystique’ that defined female success only in terms of being a wife and a mother – have rendered it obsolete” (338). But feminism was not about having it all, it was about interrupting systems and doing away with the expectations and standards that were put on women and society as a whole. It was about freedom trash cans, manifestos, sit-ins, a shift towards intersectionality, redefining

femininity according to women, and more. Yet magazines like *Ladies Home Journal* missed that as they continued to perpetuate impossible and growing standards for women. As can be seen in these articles and advertisements, magazines like *Ladies Home Journal* did not display a shift in womanhood in the 1990s but preserved the stereotypes of the 1950s (Walker 224). By abandoning feminism completely, the post-feminist generation was forced to cope with these demands on their own.

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Mythic England and the Deranged Empire:

Using *Wide Sargasso Sea* to Understand the Moral Illness of the Colonial Agent

By Kat Gibson

Postcolonial literature must grapple with the role of the colonial agent and how they are represented and understood within the context of the novel as it works to deconstruct the meaning of the colonial project in the past and its vestiges that remain apparent in and underpin the present. Postcolonial writers such as Conrad, Coetzee, and others thus explore the paradoxes of the colonial project through the characterization of these agents in their work. Jean Rhys, for example, understands colonial derangement in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* through her intricate conception of the character of Edward Rochester, originally from Charlotte Brontë's Victorian novel *Jane Eyre*. It is during his trip to the Caribbean that Rhys describes in her novel as taking place before the events of Brontë's that Rochester fully degrades into the unhinged figure we meet in *Jane Eyre* who locks his wife in an attic. In her novel, Rhys interrogates the surfacing of his madness as an individual expression and internalization of the madness of colonialism. This derangement materializes in Rochester's thoughts, dialogue, and actions throughout the novel's second and third sections as he spends more time in the West Indies with his new bride, Antoinette, eventually deemed Bertha Rochester. It is not

the space of the West Indies itself that causes the derangement, but rather, Rochester's confrontation of colonial immorality and impotence always present but never revealed to him while in England. The emergence of his derangement while he is immersed in the colonized space reveals to him the abhorrent atrocities of colonialism and the myths constructed about the empire that its agents must confront.

Rochester's entrance into the Caribbean leaves him quickly disturbed by his surroundings after he comes to marry Antoinette for money. These new surroundings are entirely unfamiliar to him as an Englishman, and he feels that they are overpowering to him. He reflects internally, "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers are too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger" (Rhys 70). The overwhelming feeling of the environment emphasizes his out-of-placeness in this colonized space, and he begins to feel his own sense of disgust and alienation. He knows that he has no place here and feels he has no reason to want Antoinette other than the economic gains which all colonial relations fundamentally

promise to the colonizer. In some ways, he feels physically and psychologically attacked by the vividness of this space as a foreign agent and, in this early scene, is shown how little power he has here from the very outset. The West Indies' antagonization of him with its very appearance reveals how the colonized space is taking power over him and he is, whether he likes it or not, subject to its will.

This feeling of everything being "too much" thus reveals his lack of power in and over the colonized space. In her essay "Navigating the Wide Sargasso Sea: Colonial History, English Fiction, and British Empire," literary theorist Laura E. Ciolkowski argues, "The exotic excess Rochester records in his narrative promises to spill over into and infect the English body" (345). The beginning of his derangement comes from this feeling of being overpowered by the attributes of the colonized space as an outsider, and he seeks to not have his identity or morals as an Englishman worn down by its excesses. His commentary on the island's "exotic excess" also serves as a way for him to attempt to distance himself from integration into the space. The differences between the colony and England must stay prevalent in his mind as his internalization and acceptance of the Caribbean space would normalize or equivocate it to the empire. The perceived aggressiveness of the environment instigates the internal moral sickness of Rochester's desire to conquer the colonized space and locates its depravity by making him feel unwelcome in the West Indies. The sickness of the colonial agent is manifested physically in the illness Rochester comes down with shortly after entering the Caribbean and marrying Antoinette. His unbelonging in the space leads him to feel that the environment itself is attacking and trying to drive him out in

any way imaginable, manifesting as illness in both his mind and body.

Rochester's developing greed is also symptomatic of his feelings of being physically and psychologically attacked as he tries to take control over his surrounding environment. So then, his desire to conquer the Caribbean island himself comes as a response to this perceived excess and how he feels it overwhelms him. He reflects on the landscape again later: "It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing'" (Rhys 87). He feels that he must excise everything that this land has to offer while he feels simultaneously repulsed by it and desires it. To Rochester, the West Indies holds promise in its depths and has more wealth to offer him than Antoinette and the money he received for marrying her. Immersion in England's colonial holdings is ignited within him the intense desire to exert the power he has always been told is his.

Rochester's ambivalence toward the Caribbean likewise connects with author Aimé Césaire's conception of the inherent sickness of colonialism and the backwardness of European nations that seek empire, which he tackles in his work *Discourse on Colonialism*. In this piece he forwards his idea that "colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism..." (Césaire 35). This understanding of the decivilization of the colonial agent while enacting force in the colonial space is precisely what happens to Rochester as he feels antagonized by the island and desperately yearns to take control over it. By using Césaire's

understanding and definition of the effects the process of colonizing has on its agents we can see how the sickness of colonialism is awakening within Rochester and consuming him while in the colonial space. He is trying to reap the benefits that England as an empire has promised him could be found and claimed in the Caribbean. However, what actually happens there is the revelation of these preexisting tendencies for brutality within him. His greed and desire for control have always existed, and in his mind, England's colonized space is the ground where he can and should exert this dominance freely. This desire for power further develops into more outwardly violent and inhumane tendencies.

For Rochester, his new bride Antoinette is merely an extension of the Caribbean that he must also subjugate and bring under his control. In fact, he feels that if he is able to control her then he will be able to hold on to his identity in the colonized space. For him to fulfill his role as a colonial agent, it is not only necessary for him to take control over the land and wring it of resources but to do the same with the people as well. The act of subjugation is a necessary extension of his power in the colonized space, and his new role as Antoinette's husband makes him feel that he has a double claim to her and her body. She is another resource of the space itself, and he draws this comparison when he likens her to native flowers, "Then I passed an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for her one day. 'They are like you,' I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud. This brought me to my senses" (Rhys 99). This moment signifies an interweaving of his desire to take control over and destroy the natural aspects of the island and Antoinette. He fears

both overpowering him, which consumes him with an intense desire for violence.

However, Rochester understands that he cannot physically brutalize her—he does not have that kind of power. Instead, he must resort to neutralizing her through abuse and crushing her spiritually. This moment where Rochester notes that destroying the flower, "brought me to my senses" is also critical. For a moment he slides into a gesture that seems romantic and affectionate toward Antoinette, like he is seeing her as equal to himself and worth loving. His destruction of the flower snaps him back to how he is supposed to view her, as separate from and less human than himself. As Ciolkowski notes in her essay, "In his narrative, Rochester sets out the proper relationship between the English Self and ethnic Other by establishing and defending the moral and physical differences that are enlisted as the signifiers of English national identity" (343). Any moment where Rochester catches himself starting to blur these lines between himself and her and by being genuinely affectionate, he must default back to his role as dominator. This desire to establish these moral and physical differences, therefore, is what pushes him to pursue, believe, and create the idea that Antoinette herself is mad. This allows him to deflect any sympathetic feelings he may begin to feel for her as well as the reality of his own degrading mental state. As he starts to decline in the colonized space, he attempts to hold onto himself by projecting his delusion and devolvment onto the Other, and, most importantly, the Other that he finds himself inextricably bound to.

This act of subjugation, however, only serves to continue his spiral into madness and will not and cannot resolve his feelings of powerlessness. This idea is also furthered by Césaire's theories about the trappings of

colonialism. He writes, “colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience, gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal” (Césaire 41). Rochester tries to see Antoinette as an animal, and he ultimately succeeds in that. He animalizes her by breaking her, and what he always hated about her was her freedom and humanity because he believes she should not have or be seen as having either. For him, a critical part of this process of animalizing and subjugation is renaming her from Antoinette to Bertha. This is the name she is known by in Brontë’s novel when she is characterized as a terror to the peace of Jane and Rochester’s lives. Rochester has to create this animalistic image of her in order to allow himself to ethically demand and believe that she must be locked away in his home in England.

The creation of Antoinette as the mad woman is not only critically necessary for Rochester as a means to subjugate and take dominance over her and, by extension, the Caribbean itself. It is also crucial and essential to quell the ethical and moral issues she raises for him about the realities of imperial England. The project of colonization hinges ethically on claims that white Europeans are humanizing, not animalizing as Césaire writes, the natives of their claimed territories. England tells its colonial agents that not only are they and the empire benefiting from this relationship, but the natives in these spaces are as well, and, in fact, the natives need them the empire to help them become civilized. They are depicted as fundamentally inferior to Europeans in every way and these agents thus have a moral duty

to intervene and show them what is right. This idea, in turn, leads colonized individuals to be taught under colonialism to have grandiose ideas about England and other dominating Western nations as well, and this too is seen by Rochester as a point of weakness. Antoinette is fascinated by the very idea of England, as she has always been told she should be, and this also causes Rochester to question what his Englishness means. He remarks, “her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe.... Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. It would be only a mistake, misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change” (Rhys 94). Her belief that England is so beautiful causes him to shift as he feels the discordance between her conception of the nation and the greed that he knows he represents from its depths. She, and the Caribbean itself, in its dream of England, reveal to him how flawed his ideas of England’s morality and his English identity are.

Antoinette’s dreams about England and ideas about Europe confront Rochester with the falsehoods of the claims of morality its imperial projects have. Since, for him, she is interchangeable with the colony she represents, this feels like a psychological attack on his beliefs. He knows that England is not the dream land she imagines nor is the colony the playground he imagined. As Ciolkowski describes, “Englishness emerges in Wide Sargasso Sea as an empty fiction that is as seductive and dangerous as any of the other tales of identity that circulate in and around the text... The English gentleman of Rhys’s text is himself no more than a pretender” (349). Rochester’s displacement from England reveals its falsehoods to him which further degrade him as he is no longer able to hide from the emptiness of England, its morals, or its colonial

claims. This revelation, which Rochester comes to face more clearly as the novel progresses, is what originally causes him to feel so overwhelmed by the colonial space itself, he had just not yet realized it.

In her essay, “England: Dream and Nightmare,” Judith Raiskin also describes this issue with the conceptualization of England and the colony by both parties and how this makes the presentation of reality shattering for both individuals. She articulates that is not only Antoinette’s false ideas about England that Rochester must be confronted by but his incorrect conception of the colony as well.

Raiskin argues,

Rochester, too, has grown up with a cultural representation of a foreign land—that is, with the English literary creation of the abundant but menacing New World. Antoinette and Rochester represent for each other the seductive yet terrifying differences of the New and Old World invented by European literature and art. The ‘dream’ each of them seeks in the other embodies within it the nightmare of the strange (254).

Rochester is thus confronted by the nightmarish reality of the falsehoods of both imagined New and Old World. He knows that the colony is not as he imagined, and that England is not as Antoinette imagines it. Finally, he must question and thus realize that England is, too, not what he imagined or learned it was. This only leads to the revelation that there is no basis for the colonial relationship, and there is no way to substantiate it ethically or otherwise. It is a project that seeks only to exploit other nations for materialistic gain.

This idea that Rochester was unaware of the inhumanity of England and the fact that there truly is no moral basis for colonialism raises an issue, especially when we consider

Césaire. To say that Rochester fully believed in the ethics of the civilizing English savior could make him seem unimplicated in the colonial problem. Césaire tells us, “no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased” (39). It is thus impossible that Rochester ever believed in his English ideal of England and its empire. Within the context of the novel, this can be pointed at in the incidence of slavery and the recent abolition of slavery in the West Indies by England. The construction of this enterprise is not only fundamentally inhumane but has been acknowledged as such by England before the beginning of this novel. This major error in the continuity of the empire’s morality and ethical mission stares Rochester directly in the face the entire time he is in the Caribbean.

While it could appear on the text’s surface that issues of race and identity among Antoinette and the other inhabitants of the West Indies are the only way the continued problems produced by slavery surface, it certainly is not. The empire and colony are not the only entities who have to face responsibility for this legacy—Rochester does too as a colonial agent for whom it provides an inescapable flaw in the picture of English identity and morality. Ciolkowski states this eloquently in her piece, “Rochester wrestles with his recognition of the emptiness of the English moral and ethical claims he makes and with the ways in which these claims are profoundly compromised by the abominable history of slavery in the West Indies. The troublesome traces of historical memory are everywhere and nowhere in Rhys’s text” (346). This legacy is simultaneously everywhere as Rochester finds himself surrounded by the putrid inheritances

of colonial domination and subjugation, of which he is part of, and nowhere as the historical memory is unable to be coherently pinned down. This unethical monster of slavery actively swirls throughout the text and haunts it like a phantom at the same time. With this knowledge, Rochester is unable to be absolved for his participation in England's colonial project for lack of knowing better. It is impossible for him to escape its degradation and being fully confronted with his role in the colonial project while in the physical space of the Caribbean and with its people. This reality and guilt are too much for him to handle. The West Indies are forever marked by the abuses of *his real* England, and neither his nor their imagined England ever existed in the first place.

Now we must ask ourselves why these revelations about Rochester as a colonial agent matter, both in the context of postcolonial literature and *Wide Sargasso Sea's* relation to Brontë's original novel. In the context of postcolonial literature, Rhys' move to depict not just a tortured image of the colonized subject but an unhinged vision of the colonial agent is incredibly important. It brings to light the very sickness of not only the empire itself but anyone who opts to take any part in it. Rochester may think he is only coming to the West Indies to marry Antoinette for money but, in fact, he is taking part in a repetitious pattern of domination that the empire has convinced him he is not only allowed to partake in but is his right to do so. His appearance in the colonized space reveals to him that the place itself and the people he finds there are not lesser than, and he has to do an incredible amount of work to convince himself of their depravity and need for him as a civilizing force, which he is ultimately unsuccessful at. He is met with Antoinette's intense existentialism about her place in the

empire that fully cements the fraudulence of the power he believes to have. She says to him, "I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys 102). Her uncertainty shakes him, and he can only meet her lack of understanding by creating her a new identity as Bertha and forcing her into the place he feels she is meant to be—entirely dominated and controlled by him. This demonstrates the intense fragility of the psyche of the colonizer and not just the pain felt by the colonial subject.

In the context of *Jane Eyre*, this novel is written to directly precede and by its conclusion, collide with the original text. Our image of Bertha Mason as a madwoman Rochester was forced to lock away in his English manor house attic in the original novel is problematically simplistic. Rhys seeks to make us understand in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the problem not only with the lack of voice Bertha or Antoinette is given in the original text but our trusting of Rochester as a reliable narrator. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's desire for control and willingness to lie to get what he wants is apparent, so why do we trust that Bertha is mad? Perhaps she is only locked away in the attic because she was not the Englishman, and this is not her country as it was promised to her. In Rhys' novel, Antoinette cannot fathom that she is in England at all—that England could ever be a place so grim.

Wide Sargasso Sea's understanding, then, of Rochester as the mad one, the one who is so unhinged he can only project madness and self-victimize is an important twist to consider in reading the original text. Rhys asks us to not see the ending of *Jane Eyre* itself as romantic redemption but as Rochester's wounded psyche being fully returned to the false state of domination, privilege, and control that we see Rochester seek here. He returns to England

and locks Antoinette away as a way to dodge his sickness and his responsibility in colonial subjugation. Once Bertha dies in *Jane Eyre* and Rochester and Jane are able to be together, not only is the primary victim of his abuse and representative phantom of his guilt gone, but he has achieved the respectable English ideal wife and life he always felt was stolen from him. He is able to return to the safety he finds in the false dreams and promises of England.

Rhys' addition to *Jane Eyre* as a novel that grapples with English colonialism is also critical because it demands that we look for these colonial underpinnings in classic British literature. A novel that seems as removed from the colony and imperial pursuits as Jane's romance with Rochester is another myth of the good and beautiful England that we must question. Its colonial darkness exists but only beneath the text's surface, and Rhys wants to make readers conscious of the connection between this text and the dark project of colonialism. These images of England's peaceful, dreamy moors and manors are always inseparably bound to and a part

of England as an exploitative empire. If, as Césaire claims, England is inherently a "sick civilization" (39) for being an empire, can we unquestionably consume its texts and stories it tells about itself? Clearly, the answer is no. Rhys, by connecting her anticolonial rhetoric to Brontë's novel, is emphasizing the inextricable bond between our mythic romantic England and that which was, in our reality as well as these fictive spaces, a nation that promoted and sought the subjugation of lands and people globally. She and the other theorists I have cited demand that we live and read knowing and grappling with the dissonance between the mythic England and the British Empire. For if we are willing to only let the subaltern speak and not to understand the colonial agent as morally diseased, we are ourselves implicated in the poisonous rhetoric of the empire. Rhys challenges us with the "too much"-ness of her monumental ideas in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to force us to ask ourselves what our role is in the postcolonial landscape and what phantom voices of colonialism we are choosing to continue to privilege over others.

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On the Perversion and Commodification of Blackness:

Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*

By Ayan Abdi

About a little over an hour into Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, protagonist Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans) sits down with his assistant, Sloan Hopkins (Jada Pinkett Smith), his boss Dunwitty (Michael Rapaport), and media consultant "Wiz" Myrna Goldfarb (Dina Pearlman) to discuss further plans regarding *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*, Delacroix's newest hit program. Lee starts with an establishing shot of the four in the meeting room and then proceeds to toggle the camera among all of them with mostly medium close-up shots. Some of these close ups are tight on the character that is speaking, while others are shot from an angle that sometimes tilts up. This conversation is highlighted by Goldfarb's suggestions on how to get around the problem that the show is creating. She ultimately suggests that they should smile, wear Kente cloth, use the world community regarding the show, invoke the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr, etc. In her mind, this will be enough to make people "understand" what the show is trying to achieve. While she lists off these suggestions, Lee cuts to Hopkins and Delacroix who both look baffled and amused. Here is a white woman telling Hopkins and Delacroix that *Mantan* is just a show, a satire and nothing else.ⁱ However,

Delacroix understands what she does not. Lee shoots Delacroix with a close up as he says, "We are not one monolithic people" (*Bamboozled*). Black people will of course not all react the same toward a minstrel show because of its content. Minstrel shows strip blackness into something that is simple and relies on racist ideals for shock value and entertainment. In doing this, blackness becomes something that can be reshaped at will by anyone regardless of the damage it may create.ⁱⁱ Goldfarb does not see this as a possibility because she believes that a minstrel show will have no effect on black people. It cannot be racist because Delacroix created the show, and he is black. Him being black does not matter though. Indeed, this is the very thing that Lee seeks to exemplify with this film. *Mantan* has taken this image of "blackness" and perverted it by subjecting it to fit into racist stereotypes that can be ignored by the characters in this movie because it provides an overall economic gain.

To understand Lee's vision on blackness in this movie, one must look at how the characters not only define but also pervert blackness. Dunwitty, Delacroix's boss, is the character with the most ideas on what blackness is and what it is supposed to be. Within the first ten minutes of the movie,

Delacroix goes to Dunwitty's office for a meeting. Lee's first shot of the office is one of Dunwitty staring out of the window. The scope of the camera is small, and while Lee does not reveal an establishing shot, the audience is allowed to see more as the two characters make their way around the office. Lee's use of *mise-en-scene* works well here. The way Dunwitty's office is decorated gives insight into his character without being explained explicitly by Lee or any other character in the scene. His office seems to be covered in black iconography and artifacts. In his conversation with Delacroix, he suggests that even though he is white, he is blacker than Delacroix and proceeds to justify his use of the n-word. What is even more striking is his ideas on what Delacroix has been presenting him. He says, "The material you have been writing for me is too white bread. It is white people with black faces [...]. It's too clean, it's too antiseptic. It's too white" (*Bamboozled*). He insists that people want to be entertained. Ruth Doughty, Programme Leader for Film Studies at Liverpool John Morris University whose interest in research includes African American cinema, fleshes out the underlying message saying that,

Dunwitty is equating black creativity with the working-class. He implies that there is no entertainment value in the bougie tales that Monsieur Delacroix is penning. Instead, it is suggested that prime-time audiences want to see two-dimensional, ghetto stereotypes to which they have become accustomed, rather than middle-class tales equitable with white society and culture.

Dunwitty is exemplifying the notion that black people should be entertaining, that they should stick to "shucking and jiving."ⁱⁱⁱ This belief does pervert what blackness is. Dunwitty

does not see a space for black people to be represented in an "everyday" light and this, among other reasons, is why the minstrel show seems like the best and only option.

Throughout this film, Lee has characters contesting what makes something black. This is explicitly stated by Goldfarb in the meeting she had with Delacroix. Goldfarb directly asks, "Who determines what is black" (*Bamboozled*)? Lee uses a close up shot on her when she says this. Using this kind of shot emphasizes the question and forces the audience to recognize this pressing question. Dunwitty's insistence that he is blacker than Delacroix also plays into this construction of what blackness is. Lee also shoots Dunwitty with a medium close up shot as he says this. Dunwitty believes that because he is "keeping it real" and is not as "uppity" as Delacroix, he is ultimately blacker than Delacroix. The issue with this statement is that Dunwitty has separated this idea of blackness from the reality of what being black is. Dunwitty is white but because he does not exhibit the same pretentiousness as Delacroix, he deems himself black. Dunwitty is inherently perverting the definition of blackness that goes beyond physical realities. This belief and insistence on Dunwitty's part plays into the notion that blackness is portable, and it can be portable at the expense of black people.^{iv} Delacroix is sitting in front of someone who is claiming to be black by way of his own constructed definition of what being black is while also negating Delacroix's own blackness.

Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show quickly becomes a hit. This direct commodification of blackness via a minstrel show is, as Delacroix describes, "...the latest, hottest, newest sensation across the nation" (*Bamboozled*). Delacroix says this

in voiceover and continues speaking as Lee displays children donning blackface masks while yelling, “trick or treat”! This use of voiceover allows the audience to see all the magazine covers that have come out and works to separate the viewer from what is happening in the movie. Anytime a director makes use of this tactic, it must be noted. Lee is drawing attention to the notoriety that *Mantan* has been gaining. Images of kids in blackface masks are crosscut in the next scene where Lee shows the audience the mass advertising for the show with shots of multiple buses and billboards. Lee shows the audience that Manray (Savion Glover) and Womack (Tommy Davidson), stars of *Mantan*, are in the club and are no longer slumming it on the streets. Lee then cuts to the advertisements displayed all over the city then Lee goes back to Manray and Womack partying. The frequent cuts that Lee uses show the buildup of *Mantan* and how much it is starting to consume general media and how it is also becoming a commercial product.

Another scene that affirms the overall mass commodification and perversion of blackness happens about two hours into the film. Honeycutt (Thomas Jefferson Byrd) has taken over Womack’s role and goes out into the audience. Lee shoots Honeycutt from behind in a long shot. We see the bottom half of his body and in the background, the whole audience is adorned with blackface. Lee also makes use of sound here. A nondiegetic sound plays in the background. It sounds somber and is camouflaged by the screams of the audience. This use of cinematography and sound is remarkable. One may dismiss the fact that the audience is in blackface because *Mantan* has become a cultural phenomenon and a successful commercial product.^v

However, as Honeycutt screams “This is a new millennium” (*Bamboozled*), he runs into the audience and asks multiple people if they “are a ni**er?” Honeycutt is obviously asking non-black people if they are “black” by way of a racial slur. Now one might be alarmed and may find some humor in the absurdity of this scene, but Lee draws that abject horror in more concisely. The music only seems to be getting louder as more proclaim that they too are a ni**er. As Honeycutt’s scene ends, he starts to sing and proclaim that, “Ni**ers is a beautiful thing” (*Bamboozled*). The use of camera movement in this shot works to highlight the dialogue. After Honeycutt utters this, Lee cuts to a crane shot of Honeycutt that is zooming in at a fast rate. The music playing in the background starts to crescendo. This simultaneous use of cinematography and sound has a profound impact and leaves the audience to deal with what Honeycutt just said. This word choice cannot be overlooked. The use of the word “thing” separates black people from being black at all. By viewing blackness in some way as a thing rather than something that it tied to actual people, it allows for perversion to flourish; so, one can separate something like a minstrel show from the ideas it presents on what being black/blackness is.

Bamboozled may be fictional in part, but the history behind it is not and never has been. The conclusion of this film is unflinching.^{vi} Hopkins presents Delacroix with a tape and forces him to watch. Lee plays a montage of real-life minstrel shows. Hopkins urges Delacroix to pay attention, to not ignore what he is watching. Her persistence in not ignoring the tape seeks to highlight the idea that history cannot be ignored. The way black people have been

represented in common media must be confronted. One can turn to Hopkin's gifting of historical collectibles throughout this film to highlight this idea of "facing" history. She presented Manray and Womack with portfolios of posters from early minstrel performances. Manray gets a tap-dancing blackface doll. She gifts Delacroix with a "jolly ni**er bank" not long after their first show. Hopkin's refusal to ignore history and those who were a part of these shows in real life must be highlighted. She serves as a reminder of the real-life implications of blackface and minstrel shows.

Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show, Lee's creation of a fictional minstrel show works so well in this film because of the perversion and commodification of blackness exhibited by the characters. Blackness evolved into a portable thing that could be manipulated and used to fit any sort of image. It fits both on a personal level with characters like Dunwitty but also culturally with shows like *Mantan*. Overall, this is exhibited in the characters Lee depicts in this movie, and how they define and separate blackness from being black and the black identity. Because blackness became a portable thing

stripped from the black identity, it was used for economic gain. It became a commodity that was bought and sold at will both by TV executives like Dunwitty and the average person in their consumption of this show. *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show* was able to take this simplistic, caricaturist, and racist version of what being black is and make it into a commodity—something that could be bought and sold. Beyond this movie and what Lee was trying to portray with an actual minstrel show, these ideas about blackness persist. Blackness in modern times has become its own entity. There is not much left for black people when their whole identity has been stripped from them and placed into the "culture." It is something that is both revered yet looked down upon (people want to be black but not really be black). They can consume black culture in a way that alienates the black people that this culture originates from. So, if this identity must fit very certain and specific ramifications to be accepted, what is blackness really? Does it or can it hold any real meaning? While Lee offers no explicit answer on where to go from here, *Bamboozled* may be a place to start.

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ⁱ Letitia Guran Tudorica refutes this point in her study on the Post-Soul aesthetic which is explained in her work titled, "Reconsidering African American Identity: Aesthetic experiments by Post Soul Artists. Tudorica says, "...the public's embrace of blackness implies a deeper ingestion of the stereotypes put forth by traditional blackface minstrel shows to the level where people revel in a simplistic, caricatured, commodified image of 'blackness' and do not even realize its own offensive potential" (16).

ⁱⁱ In his work, "Rhetoric of Identity: An Inquiry into Symbolic Syntax and Composition of Black Identity in *Bamboozled*," Gerald Alan Powell Jr. writes about black identity saying, "To this end, black identity, however researchers have attempted to describe it...Situated between reality and imagination, human beings have the ability to identify, misidentify, create, and destroy the very notion of identity. If identity is this fluid, there needs to be a container. Emerging from this meditation are two distinct questions. If symbolic material is truly worth investigating, we must ask ourselves: who controls the discourse, language, and ideas to which our fantasies and desires are attached? And to what degree does this abnegate our autonomy in terms of us shaping our identity" (52).

ⁱⁱⁱ In an interview with Jamie Barlow, Spike Lee himself said, "Whites in general, though, whether they admit it or not, want to 'see [blacks] act the fool.' Or, as it is put in the film, whites like 'shucking' and 'jiving'; they 'want blacks to entertain them with no consequences to themselves' ("On Keeping it Real").

^{iv} A similar idea is staged in the film when Delacroix's dad Junebug (Paul Mooney) said, "Everybody want to be black, but nobody wants to be black" (*Bamboozled*).

^v Tudorica touches on this phenomenon saying, "... as the show gathers momentum, its success traps as much as it 'enslaves' the public to which it was destined" (15).

^{vi} Film critic Ashley Clark writes more on this topic saying, "The film's final montage thus confronts the viewer with a long history of racism in and through representation," Clark writes wonderfully that Lee "streaks the screen with unhealed psychic scars and demands that the viewer join the dots between the past and the present. When the final picture emerges, the viewer must sadly concede that it does not look pretty" (66).

You've Come a Long Way, Baby:

Media Messages of Women's Liberation

By Anna Walker

The women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s marked a turning point in American cultural attitudes towards gender roles. Through the publication of books such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* as well as a continued presence in the workforce, American women were beginning to break free of the rigid gender roles that had defined the previous decade. But an ever-growing frustration remained, stemming from a lack of political representation and continued sex discrimination both in the workforce and at home (Rosen 65-73). The movement toward liberation became inevitable as women increasingly "described and defined a system of gender oppression" in society and came to the realization that the traditional society only served to maintain their position as inferior to men (D'Emilio and Freedman 310-311).

Many women during this time period relied on monthly magazines, geared primarily toward homemakers, for both entertainment and education. One such magazine, *Ladies' Home Journal*, navigated this landscape. Despite its editorial content beginning to take on increasingly feminist ideas, many of its articles and advertisements reinforced, either overtly or subtly, the status quo of gender roles from decades before.

Ladies' Home Journal did not shy away from publishing articles promoting equality. In a March 1971 article titled "No Space for Women?" famed biochemist and science fiction author Isaac Asimov makes the case for female American astronauts. Asimov point blank states that qualification or lack of interest is not to blame for the lack of women in the U.S. space program – instead, he says, "women are just not wanted" (115). He goes on to argue his claim from both a medical and psychological standpoint; women, claims Asimov, are "biologically sounder" than men and less prone to disease and stress, as well as more likely to live longer. He argues against, almost ridicules, the stereotype of women being too emotional and more susceptible to hormonal changes that would make them unworthy of space exploration. After all, Asimov points out to his reader, women becoming an "ill-adjusted neurotic during certain phases of their menstrual cycle" are no more fearsome than emotional men – in fact, he argues, the pressure for men to hide their emotions could not only lead to just as many problems but does not have an easy solution the way female hormones do (201).

Asimov does not dance around the question of sexuality, either. He points out that any intergalactic colonies could only

be considered “true societies” if women and, consequently, children, were present. But his argument goes beyond sexuality as a biological necessity and emphasizes its emotional necessity as well. Questioning whether the notion of sex between male and female astronauts on an extended mission to Mars was an offensive possibility, he cheekily asks the reader if something similar happening between two cooped-up male astronauts would not be considered just as offensive – the implication being that male astronauts would resort to homosexuality instead of having no form of sexual satisfaction at all (202). And he notes that previous space missions were so short that the absence of sex was not even a factor, writing that even land-based explorers of centuries past enjoyed the “promise of relief” when they reached their destination (200). Clearly, Asimov views sex as an emotional necessity for both men and women, an increasingly common view as the Sexual Revolution progressed, and the possibility of “orgies” among astronauts on long-term missions is emphasized to be beneficial to both sexes.

Asimov’s arguments, while he applies them specifically to space exploration, are unquestionably feminist and almost combative. He unequivocally states that women are equally qualified to become scientists, and hold jobs in society as a whole, as men. Asimov takes a solidly pro-liberation stance, arguing that female scientists would be more common if “the social climate were more favorable” and stating that he does not believe that a woman should be sent to space to be “sexual partner and surrogate mother for the men who do the real work” (202). Some of his arguments are rooted firmly

in science, of course – clearly, he takes the view that the presence of women in space would prove valuable for experimentation on the effects of space on the female body (201). Asimov is a science fiction author, after all, and it is only natural that his article would focus just as much on the scientific possibilities as the societal ones. But the Journal’s article is unabashedly pro-women’s liberation, and it is written by a noted science fiction author to boot – certainly more knowledgeable on the topic of space exploration than the average journalist.

In the November 1972 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, an edition of the regular column “The Working Woman,” which had begun appearing just earlier that year (Rosen 309), emphasizes the benefits of the Equal Rights Amendment. Columnist Letty Cottin Pogrebin refers to the ERA as “right[ing] the wrongs that keep women down” (48) in the column’s subheading and formats the article as a seven-point list of the ERA’s benefits with an introduction and conclusion. Pogrebin, obviously, takes a pro-ERA stance, citing the amendment as an “emblem of America’s commitment to a nonracist *and* nonsexist rule of law” (50). She argues that federal laws treat women as second-class citizens, and that some statutes enacted to protect them were in fact continuing to enable that treatment, citing federal labor regulations which specified physical limitations on women’s work but kept them from higher-paying jobs that defied such limitations (48).

Yet Pogrebin’s stance is decidedly egalitarian. Though the article focuses on the benefits of the ERA for women, she makes its benefits for men just as clear, arguing that both sexes have “legitimate beef” with the then-current Social Security regulations

entitling a woman to her late husband's benefits but denying a man access to his wife's. She cites unfair divorce laws that favor women for child support and alimony and makes it clear that in her view, the ERA is "a guarantee against second-class citizenship for any woman or man" (48-50).

This view of feminism as benefitting both sexes rather than just women was not uncommon for the time. The most famous feminist organization at the time was the National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966 by a group of women frustrated with the lack of enforcement of sex-based discrimination in employment. NOW took a legal approach to its activism, primarily focusing on changing political attitudes, enforcing equal opportunity employment, and providing equal legal protections to women – and, naturally, the passage of the ERA soon became its target (Rosen 74-81). NOW focused on the average working woman – a woman who was at a lower-level position, rather than a high-powered professional – and its leaders desired a view of their organization as "respectable," much to the frustration of younger members, who saw its attitude as elitist (84-85). Pogrebin's article highlights a similar attitude. By appealing to both sexes – even though the ERA clearly has a much stronger benefit for women – Pogrebin makes an attempt to reach more hesitant readers who may not be completely sold on women's liberation. Her approach does not come all the way to complete liberation – it instead settles on fairness.

It is clear from both Asimov's and Pogrebin's articles that *Ladies' Home Journal* promoted a feminist stance that was progressive for the era, even while it

was geared more towards NOW's brand of middle-class equality of the sexes – particularly given that both articles framed feminism as a men's issue as much as women's. On the other hand, many of the magazine's advertisements from the same time period continued to play toward stereotypes and misogyny. An ad for Emeraude Perfume printed in the May 1971 edition of the *Journal* features a tight black and white close-up of a young woman with a full face of makeup and bare shoulders gazing at the camera, eyebrows raised and smiling just a little bit. Underneath the picture is a two-sentence caption, printed in a way that it looks handwritten: "Want him to be more of a man? Try being more of a woman" (Advertisement for Emeraude 8).

Obviously, the ad has sexual undertones. The woman has no visible clothing, and she is posed in shadowy lighting that emphasizes her facial features and shoulders. The caption's connotation is straightforward: a man's masculinity (and, perhaps, his sexual ability) can only be brought forward if his female lover is romantic and desirable, and the easiest route to that desirability is the feminine act of wearing perfume (Emeraude Perfume, of course).

In direct opposition to the women's liberation articles that were increasingly dotting the pages of *Ladies' Home Journal* – some in this very issue, even – the ad not only frames a woman's desirability in the context of male desire, but also implies that she is responsible for *his* masculine identity as well. The woman, in this context, is seen in the usual woman's role of bearing the emotional burden for both halves, supporting her husband or boyfriend as he becomes more of a man and only reaching her true

womanhood for his personal fulfillment instead of her own. It is an extension of the popular attitude of earlier years that, as D'Emilio and Freedman put it, "women's interest in the erotic appeared strongly attached to love and romance, to seriousness of purpose" (301). In other words, women's sexual pleasure was derived primarily from romance and from a man loving them even if that pleasure placed the burden on her to deliver reason for that romance.

Even the *Journal's* more seemingly liberal advertisements carried undertones of sexism. In April 1971, the magazine published an ad for Virginia Slims cigarettes, one in a series of ads that would become famous for their tagline "You've Come a Long Way, Baby." This particular advertisement printed the words of a song from the early 1900s that proclaimed the singer wanted "a girl just like the girl that married Dear Old Dad," who will do household chores and not "smoke or be a suffragette." Aside from the allusion to the girl being the singer's mother, which carries its own separate set of weird undertones, the song is clearly sexist and reinforces a traditional view of female submission. Superimposed over the song lyrics are black-and-white images of women doing household chores. But the bottom of the ad cuts to the chase: those sexist days are over. A color photo of a modern woman holding a cigarette takes up the bottom of the page, along with the aforementioned tagline and a picture of a Virginia Slims box (Advertisement for Virginia Slims 5).

Clearly, the brand is attempting to capitalize on the newfound women's liberation movement. By juxtaposing the dated song and old photographs with the image of the modern liberated woman with

Virginia Slim in hand, the advertisement proclaims that the true marker of women's equality is being able to smoke in public just like men. The ad makes it clear that this newfound freedom was "vulgar" and was what feminism was really all about – the notion that "smoking a Virginia Slims cigarette had a contribution to make to their personal freedom," as Rosen sarcastically puts it (311). (It also gave them the so-called freedom to harm their health in the long run, but the ad naturally avoids that topic.) The tagline of "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" adds a sort of sentimental touch to the ad – women *had* come a long way since the days of the old song in plenty of ways.

And even despite the ad's proclaimed feminism, it does not exactly preach equality. There is still a delicateness, a femininity, associated with the ideal Virginia Slims woman. Underneath the image of the cigarette box is a proclamation that Virginia Slims are "slimmer than the fat cigarettes men smoke, with rich Virginia flavor women like" (Advertisement for Virginia Slims 5). Women are just as equal as men, the ad says, but they are still more delicate. They need smaller cigarettes, and those cigarettes have to taste good. The ad reinforces the very stereotypes it is trying to kill – even when trying to sell emancipation, it still conforms to the view of women and femininity as weak.

Overall, there is a clear disparity between *Ladies' Home Journal's* editorial content and its advertising. Given the magazine's shift towards pro-liberation articles, why were its ads still so seemingly old-fashioned? One answer might lie in a split of opinions among its readership. According to Rosen, the magazine held a readers' poll shortly after its landmark August 1970 issue focusing on

the women's liberation movement, which had been published in response to a sit-in led by activists at the *Journal's* office. Forty-six percent of the magazine's readers described themselves as against the movement, and twenty percent had mixed feelings. Only thirty-four percent were pro-women's liberation. But, Rosen notes, circulation of the magazine rose after the issue's publication, an indication that if the magazine's readers were not buying it solely for its views, they were at least curious to see what it had to say (301).

It is fair to assume then that the *Journal* continued to publish these articles as a way of keeping their new audience interested – an audience that, given its interest in the topic, was likely younger. As Rosen points out, other women's magazines such as *McCall's* quickly followed the lead of the *Journal* (301), no doubt in an attempt to capture the same increase in readership, so there was no shortage of competition for the magazine. But some of those readers were not new – after all, according to Rosen, millions of women would end up becoming educated on feminism through the same familiar magazines they had read

for years, and those readers were older and perhaps had more discretionary income to spend on products advertised through the magazine (310). Perhaps advertisers banked on the audience of *Ladies' Home Journal*, a magazine historically targeted towards female homemakers, continuing to hold more traditional values even as the magazine began running more progressive articles. Given the aforementioned statistics from the *Journal's* poll of its divided readers, they were not entirely without just cause.

The divide between advertisements rooted in stereotypes and articles advocating for progress in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1971 and 1972 serves as a microcosm of an increasingly divided nation as women debated their roles in society at large as well as their own homes. By appealing to those homemakers whether they stood on the side of liberation or tradition, the *Journal* managed to capitalize on both sides of the debate. But it also helped spread the message of a movement, and brought women's issues further into mainstream society, where gradually they would remain for good.

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An interview with with Dr. Amy Sheeran, Conducted by Kat Gibson

Amy Sheeran is Assistant Professor of Spanish at Otterbein University. Her work on early modern Spanish literature and culture focuses on questions of race, gender, and sexuality in local sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iberian contexts as well as their reverberations into the present. Her current research areas include the relationship between literature and the body, early modern discourses of race from transatlantic and global perspectives, and connections between the early modern Hispanic world and new media forms. By drawing on historically contextualized, interdisciplinary, and theoretically driven approaches, she explores the ways literature codes the body and how the body resists representation and interpellation, considering how this tension leads to the construction of multilayered, conflictive identities. She has published one peer-reviewed essay in *Cervantes* and has a forthcoming essay in *Revista Hispánica Moderna* on genealogy and the Immaculate Conception in María de Zayas's *Desengaños amorosos*, as well as forthcoming essays in several edited volumes. In addition, she is the co-editor, with Amanda M. Smith, of the graphic novel adaptation of Giannina Braschi's *United States of Banana* (The Ohio State University Press, 2021).

Kat Gibson (KG) – *To begin, what are your areas of research interest and how do they relate to your current project, adapting Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play *La vida es sueño* (Life is a Dream) into a video game?*

Dr. Amy Sheeran (AS) – My general area of research is early modern Spanish literature and culture. I mostly focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. My degree is in literature, and that's my first love, the basis of everything else. I'm always trying to think about ways to make meaningful connections between early modern Spanish literature and culture and other disciplines or eras. Some of those connections are, I think, more obvious than others. For example, United States of Banana was a graphic novel project that I worked on with a colleague in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Latin American literature, Amanda M. Smith. That work includes a re-interpretation of a major figure of seventeenth-century Spanish literature in it—Segismundo, the protagonist of *La vida es sueño*—so it's a great connection to my research. Sometimes the connections are less obvious, like my interest in connecting video games with early modern Spanish literature.

Seventeenth-century Spanish literature is the home base for the project.

I'm very interested in considering the relationship between literature and the human body in this period. I'm working on a book that concerns the relationship between genealogy and literature, so it's about the ways people narrate experiences they view as embodied—the mutually influential relationship between what's going on in human beings' bodies and the ways that they're writing and thinking about it, how they imagine their lineage and genealogy to affect their everyday lives and how they reframe their bodily experience accordingly. That connects to this adaptation project I'm working on with Dr. Stephanie Patridge because we're thinking a lot about what it means to engage with something digital or virtual and what the relationship is between your lived, embodied reality and the slightly different ontological reality you engage with in a video game.

KG – *What inspired you to try to adapt Calderón's play into a video game? What does this medium offer that you feel lends itself to his work?*

AS – I'm interested in thinking about how early modern literature and culture are reinterpreted over time and the stories that people tell about it. I was looking into adaptations of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* as part of an upper-level Spanish seminar that I was teaching on Cervantes. The last unit looked at Cervantine adaptations from the seventeenth century to the present. I had long had this quixotic dream about making a big, sprawling video game adaptation of *Don Quixote*, so I was

looking into the ones people have already made. There were a couple that were really fascinating and bizarre to me, so I started researching those to figure out what they were about.

Video games are a relatively new and compelling area of academic research, and I like playing them. It's something I do for fun in my free time. This was a way for me to connect my research with something that doesn't seem to be in my obvious scholarly wheelhouse. So, I worked on an article about a couple of different game adaptations of *Don Quixote*, which got me into thinking about games in a more scholarly way. The premise of that piece was the nature of your interactivity with a novel compared to a game. The thesis was that, with Cervantes, and for early modern readers generally, there was no clear difference because there's no clear separation between your physical engagement and your intellectual engagement with something. From an early modern perspective, following a humoral understanding of the body, those two are intimately connected. What happens in your imagination also has a major impact on your physical body and vice versa. Don Quixote himself is a classic example of this—his madness is intellectual or psychological, in that he reads too much, but it's also physiological—according to Cervantes, his brains dried up. The piece was a way of trying to read twentieth- and twenty-first-century game adaptations through an early modern lens. Through that project, I contacted one of the creators of one of those games. Christopher Totten is a professor of game

design at Kent State University who made a really fun card game adaptation of *Don Quixote* called *La Mancha*. That's how I started connecting games, and especially video games, with my main research interests.

This project came about because I was playing a video game, *Mass Effect 2*, with a strange ethical system. The kinds of ethical systems that appear in video games often strike me as very odd. In *Mass Effect 2*, you have two parallel systems that calculate your ethical viewpoint along Paragon and Renegade meters. Sometimes the choices that are counted as Paragon actions versus Renegade actions have this arbitrary and inscrutable calculating process that tries to boil down major ethical issues into a point-based system.

I began thinking about this seventeenth-century play, Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*, or *Life is a Dream*, while playing *Mass Effect 2* because that's the sort of thing I do in my free time. The play's protagonist, Segismundo, is the crown prince of Poland, but due to a prophecy that he will destroy the kingdom, he's kept locked in a tower for his whole life. The first moment he's let out, he must learn how to act in society with no previous understanding of how to do that. I saw a neat parallel in how he's forced to suddenly figure out what rules govern ethical behavior in society are and how people assign value to his actions. In games like *Mass Effect 2*, the player also has to figure out the ethical system in place.

In Calderón's play, Segismundo is never sure if he's awake or dreaming. He

escapes the tower he's being held in and immediately does many highly unethical things. He's drugged and thrown back in the tower, so when he wakes up, they can convince him that none of those events really happened—they tell him that he was dreaming the whole time. I thought there was a potentially cool connection to be made about the relationship between your dreaming ethical life and your waking ethical life and your ethical self in a video game versus your ethical self in the real world. My idea is that a video game adaptation of this play could help you explore those differences in compelling ways.

Another thing that struck me about how this play would be a good fit for video game adaptation is that its structure is very similar to that of many adventure, RPG, quest-type games. These also tend to be set in the medieval, early modern-ish era where there are historical features like knights and codes of honor and portents and the like. For this reason, I think players will already be prepared to feel a kind of historical distance in a game with this type of plot. I think that will be like a pretty easy leap for players to make—it will in some ways resemble games they've seen before, but also ask them to think about what they were doing in those games in new ways.

KG – *What is the historical significance of Life is a Dream? How would you describe the play's cultural importance?*

AS – So, Spain and England were both premiere theatrical cultures of

the early modern world. Spain had an incredibly well-developed theatrical society with a whole stable full of really prolific, popular, sometimes well-funded playwrights. I think we don't hear about that as much in the English-speaking world because we tend to focus mostly on Anglophone literature and culture. But elsewhere, Calderón is pretty widely read. Throughout literary history, the playwright Calderón has been regarded as one of the finest examples of dramaturgy that Western Europe produced, alongside Shakespeare.

One of the reasons that we read Shakespeare today and think of him as this singular genius and luminary is because of his reception by a group of German scholars in the nineteenth century. When they were elevating Shakespeare above the rest of his contemporaries, they were also looking at Spain, and they identified Calderón de la Barca as his Spanish counterpart. They elevated both of them to the level of these singular geniuses of the human condition as presented in drama.

If you read any Spanish drama from this period, Calderón is one of two writers you're probably reading, and if you read any one single play, it's probably going to be this one, *Life is a Dream*. It's the play that, if you grew up in the Spanish-speaking world, you had to read at some point in high school or college, and like people do with Shakespeare, you, at the very least, have to pretend to have read it and know what it's about. In the Spanish-speaking world, it's common to find it put on, but there are productions in English in the U.S. all the time, too.

It's the cultural touchstone of one of the most important aspects of what's known as the Golden Age of Spanish literature and culture.

KG – *There have been other adaptations of this play. Are you using any of these other adaptations as inspiration or to help in the process?*

AS – We haven't started to do that yet, but we will. To my knowledge, there has never been a video game adaptation of *Life is a Dream*, which is surprising to me given that *Don Quixote* has a handful. If you've read anything from Spain in this period, it's *Don Quixote* or this play. It was a ripe opportunity for adaptation for that reason. So far, we have mostly focused on the seventeenth-century cultural context and looking at specific video games that may help us think about how to approach some of the issues that we want to explore.

KG – *How are you going to integrate the historical context into the game? Is this adaptation more faithful to the original work or will it be modernized?*

AS – We're currently in the early planning stages of the project, so we are deciding our overall approach. Our initial thinking is that we want it to be recognizable as this play but don't want it to be as scripted as an actual play—so it will be more interesting for the player. One of the major benefits of adapting it into a video game is that there's space to experiment and figure out what happens if you approach problems from different angles.

For example, in the play, when Segismundo is first let out of the tower, he does terrible things. One of these is when a soldier talks back to him and tells him he's behaving improperly for a prince. Segismundo throws the soldier out of the window and kills him in response. We want players to be able to make those decisions to see how it impacts possible outcomes. We want players to feel unsure of whether their actions are going to have consequences—unsure if they're limited to something like a dream or if it's going to affect the subsequent action in the story.

We want it to have the feeling of the play, and it should feel early modern—the dialogue, the images, and the setting. We want to use the same characters and the same ethical conundrums that appear in the play but not necessarily have it end up in the same place. In Calderón's ending, Segismundo is never sure if he is awake or dreaming, and the conclusion he reaches is that one should behave ethically regardless of whether one is awake or asleep because, well, God. We don't necessarily want there to be that kind of clear, ethical center in this game adaptation. One of the reasons for that is to force the player to choose what the ethical center is—they're the organizing principle.

KG – Who is working on this project with you and how long do you think it will take to complete this adaptation? How far are you now?

AS – We are early in the process and having exploratory meetings with who we currently have as our core team: me,

an early modern Spanish literacy scholar; Dr. Stephanie Patridge, an expert in philosophy and ethics; and Christopher Totten, our expert in game design. We recently brought on Dr. Shelby Moser, who's a philosopher of aesthetics and video games as well as augmented and virtual reality at Azusa Pacific University.

*Right now, we're applying for a grant that will help us bring together the expertise of Calderón scholars and game designers to work through questions of how we'll design and create the game. This will be a large-scale collaborative project that will certainly take some time, but a model we're looking at is a similar process behind the making of the game *Walden*. It's an adaptation of Henry David Thoreau's book *Walden Pond*, and that project also involved the expertise of many humanities experts and produced a really incredible video game that adapts the original without being just a straightforward one-to-one adaptation, and while asking questions that are specific to the medium, as well.*

Unfortunately, things in the humanities work incredibly slowly. This grant is just for the first stage. After that there would be prototyping and production, which would also require funding. It's a long-term project, but I think the core team that's involved are all committed to making it happen. Regardless of the grant outcome, we think there'll be enough ways that we can get creative to make this happen.

KG – How will the game balance the Spanish and English languages to make it accessible to the English audience while

still capturing the nature of the source material? What language will the game be in?

AS – Ideally, we are going to make it available in both English and Spanish because we want it to be accessible to an English-language audience, but it's useful and of interest to the Spanish-speaking world, as well. There are many models to make a faithful adaptation in English largely because there have been numerous English translations of the play produced over the years. Also, because of the kind of game we want to make and the video game market, I think it's less difficult than you might imagine to make this game accessible.

KG – What do you feel modern audiences will get out of this piece? How do you think the video game format (and its genre) will allow them to interact with the material more meaningfully?

AS – One outcome we want is to make Calderón's play accessible and compelling for audiences who might not otherwise interact with it. In the United States, it tends to be most well known in theater circles because people interested in theater are aware of the importance of Spanish Golden Age plays. We want to bring it to people's attention and make them feel it's something they can connect with. I can imagine a hesitation to accept that a seventeenth-century Spanish play is something that's going to be super interesting and compelling for the general audience, but a video game is certainly an easier sell.

KG – Do you imagine this game being played more by students or general video game players? What could each group get out of this experience?

AS – I hope both. As someone who teaches early modern Spanish literature, I think it's important and exciting, so I want people to learn about it. I would love to be able to use it in a classroom to illustrate the ethical dilemmas and philosophical questions the play stages in a way that students can more readily grasp, but I also want it to be interesting as a game. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to work with Christopher Totten. He's adapted numerous works into game formats and likes preserving what was interesting about the original while also making a good game. It should be fun, and people should be able to pick it up and get something out of it regardless of whether they know the original work. This is especially evident in his *Don Quixote* game, *La Mancha*, which also draws on some of the ready-made tropes about medieval and early modern periods that people have absorbed from general cultural knowledge and are able to adapt and use in really fun ways.



Book Review by Seth Stobart

A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy

Authors: Nancy L. Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead

Publisher: Princeton University Press, 2019

In *A Lot of People are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*, political scientists Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum present a new model of conspiracy theory for the modern day they coin the *new conspiracism*. Their work comes in three parts: defining this new term, outlining its effects, and presenting solutions.

Muirhead and Rosenblum begin by outlining how new conspiracism differs from what they call *classic conspiracism*. The first of these differences, outlined in their first chapter, is that classical conspiracism has political theory, whereas new conspiracism “sheds political theory” (Muirhead and Rosenblum 19). Classic conspiracy requires some amount of detective work on errant or unaccounted for data that then gets turned in an explanation of the event in question. The new conspiracism operates at the level of bare assertion. Muirhead and Rosenblum posit that these new conspiracies “arise out of thin air” and that they “posit odious designs but not the how or why, and often not even the who” (25). It is because this

new conspiracism offers no constructive political theory that Muirhead and Rosenblum suggest we think of the new conspiracism as being purely deconstructive and operating solely to delegitimize.

The authors spend the second section of the book detailing the importance of certain democratic and knowledge-producing institutions and how the new conspiracism makes those institutions its target. The first of these institutions is political parties. The authors argue political parties are integral to democracy because parties distill the multitude of political views into legitimate political advocacy/opposition, “parties translate the pluralism of society into organized political conflicts” (84). The new conspiracists delegitimize these institutions by first attacking their leaders (e.g., birtherism with Obama), then extend that critique to posit that the opposing party is now illegitimate, subversive, and willfully ruinous because of X new conspiracy theory. Muirhead and Rosenblum point to other key knowledge-producing institutions that

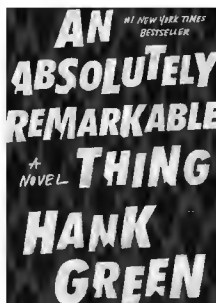
have found themselves in the crosshairs of new conspiracism: expert knowledge, news media, and skepticism itself. The authors suggest that by attacking the very institutions which are responsible for producing facts about the material world, new conspiracism has shifted the focus of public debate. That our disagreements are no longer based solely on what we do given a set of facts but are instead the very facts themselves.

Muirhead and Rosenblum then turn to their two solutions for resolving this epistemically troubling situation. Their solutions focus on the relegitimization of the democratic and knowledge-producing institutions they showed were important to democracy. The authors suggest we must a) speak truth to conspiracy and b) enact democracy. By speaking truth to democracy, Muirhead and Rosenblum mean trusted political leaders need to engage in actively dispelling conspiracy in order to bring back legitimacy to institutions. Enacting democracy to the authors means “more than faithful adherence to the regular political and legal processes of constitutional democracy” (159). The goal of enacting democracy is to exhibit and publicize the institutional integrity that was previously delegitimized by the new conspiracism.

I find concern in their second solution, enacting democracy. My concern is twofold. First, comes from seeing the new conspiracism as a result of the structure of our regular democratic and legal processes. A strict return to normalcy will at least recreate the issues which spawned the new conspiracist

phenomena. Second, Muirhead and Rosenblum say the main value of enacting democracy is that it creates a government which is more legible. Muirhead and Rosenblum show that the regular epistemic authorities (political parties, universities, three-letter agencies, press, etc.) are not to be trusted by a good new conspiracist. These are precisely the institutions we would need to trust to make themselves more legible, but the new conspiracist has presumably already chopped off their connection to those branches. By adhering strongly to the regular political and legal processes of this constitutional democracy, we not only allow for a return to the conditions which spawned the new conspiracist movement, but we may also find the solution to be completely ineffective at stopping the new conspiracist movement.

Muirhead and Rosenblum effectively map a model for understanding contemporary conspiracy and communicate it in a way that it is suited for general audiences. Despite my perceived flaws in their solutions to the new conspiracist movement, I would still recommend reading *A Lot of People are Saying* as the work done within the first two sections is not at all undermined by the work done in the third. Particularly the work they do to differentiate this new conspiracist movement from classical conspiracy. This makes it an excellent place to begin further research into contemporary conspiracy, but also a helpful book to just pick up and try to make sense of our epistemically fraught situation.



Book Review by Lucy Clark

An Absolutely Remarkable Thing

Author: Hank Green

Publisher: Dutton, 2018

Hank Green's *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* follows 23-year-old April May on her way to internet stardom. April May, a recent art school graduate living in New York, discovers a large, robot-like statue in the middle of 23rd street. April and her friend, Andy, record a video of the robot-statue, naming him Carl. The video blows up overnight, reaching millions of views, as the world realizes there are Carls in every major city across the globe - and are likely not of this earth. Thus begins a science fiction story slash fable-esque tale about the consequences of internet fame.

Green's debut novel, however, falls short of its intriguing premise. To begin, the novel is written clumsily. That clumsiness extends in all facets of the novel - plot, characters, world building, mystery, etc. Beginning with the novel's protagonist, April. She is clunkily written, lacking motivation and depth. We begin the book with her working at a startup, and while she spends pages going on about how horrible it is, she quickly abandons and never mentions it again. Details are haphazardly thrown around - such as her being a pet detective when she was younger to support her "detective work" in figuring out the mystery of the Carls, and just pages later admitting she's bad at decoding the Carls' messages.

She is also a deeply flawed and unlikeable narrator. Not Tony Soprano flawed, but completely irredeemably annoying. She is flakey, she lacks motivation for every action, is unabashedly selfish, and Green spends the majority of every page forewarning us about how truly horrible of a person April is. She is in a relationship with her roommate and friend from art school, Maya, who she treats like a burden and chore the majority of the book. Again, less debonair, Bond-like bachelorette, but instead reeking of entitlement and self-absorption that makes it extremely difficult for the reader to be invested in anything she does.

Don't worry, though. This treatment is not exclusively reserved for her girlfriend. While the novel is meant to be in part a cautionary tale about the downside of internet fame, April begins her character arc (if you could call it that) as someone who only cares about herself, and admittedly so. She treats everyone around her as a means to an end, and a stone in her shoe when they are anything less than yes-men.

The rest of the book's characters lack substance as well. While every character has distinct character attributes - Andy being a camera geek, Maya being an effective speaker (yes, that is her one and only character attribute), etc. - they feel incredibly shallow, as if Green jotted down a

quirk for every character and nothing more.

Furthermore, the reader cannot help but notice Green's authorship shining through the lines of the text. It is not so much the case that he has a distinct writing voice, but that his own experience is quite clearly and jarringly different from that of the characters he writes. His female characters read as caricatures of a stereotypical femininity, in a way that feels cheap and outdated. For example, he mentions nothing of April's appearance or fashion sense throughout the book, only to randomly and quite pointedly interject at one point that she never leaves the house without wearing makeup, something that not only doesn't add to her character, nor seem important to the story, but also does not fit who her character is made to be. This is never mentioned again.

So too is the case for his treatment of sexuality. When April is put in contact with an agent, Jennifer Putnam, she asks April about her sexuality. April lands somewhere around bisexual, but states that she doesn't care much about labels. Jennifer asks her to identify as just a lesbian for the sake of simplicity. While this opens the door for quite meaningful dialogue, the scene moves on with the same door thudding shut behind it. It is brought up again during an interview with an anti-Carl journalist, who throws her bisexuality in her face to devalue her credibility, calling April a liar. April barely reacts, and it is never mentioned again. Instead of these identities being represented as genuine opportunities for authentic representation and intersectional dialogue, it reads as cheap virtue signaling, again treating these character attributes as quirks.

The mystery of the Carls is at best subpar, and at face value deeply unbelievable.

The Carls appear overnight, stationed in over 64 cities, warm to the touch, made of unearthly materials, and hovering a millimeter above the ground. Anyone who touches the Carls is the carrier for "the Dream," an airborne phenomenon wherein everyone who carries it has the same dream every night, containing a series of puzzles and codes. April and pro-Carl enthusiasts posit this is to bring humanity together, as the puzzles require knowledge of most languages, literary canons, disciplines, etc., and online forums are used to unite people from around the globe to solve them. They are soon identified as extraterrestrial beings, yet no major governments nor their citizens seem to react, except a group of right-wing extremists called the Defenders, ranging in religious fundamentalists to doomsdayers. Again, the whole situation is written quite thinly, leaving little room for the reader to want, or even care, more.

Lastly, the editing of the book itself is quite poor. For one, Green switches from past to present tense very frequently, averaging out at least every 2-4 pages. It is jarring, as is most of the book. There are numerous, quite glaring errors in the construction of the text itself, which perhaps would be forgiven if the content held its weight. It also ends on a cliffhanger, leaving the narrative arc a story should follow unfinished.

Overall, *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* simply falls short of the reader's expectations. Which is a shame, because the premise is quite interesting. As someone not too well invested in science fiction, I was left disappointed, and I fear a more avid fan would be left upset. Green's novel is, sadly, not that remarkable.

Book Review by Riley Hysell

A Swim in a Pond in the Rain

(in Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life)

Author: George Saunders

Publisher: Independently Published, 2022

There is something jarring, unsettling even, about a piece of writing that is so whole-heartedly, unwaveringly committed to talking directly to the reader, to forcefully pushing the reader into the active role that some readers take on only sparingly. When I was younger, I would read Choose Your Own Adventure books, and I would be especially agitated if I got a particularly bad ending. (That happened to *me!* Not a character, a stand-in, but the actual, real *me.*)

George Saunders' *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*, a collection of seven classical Russian short stories and corresponding analyses, is not as far from those Choose Your Own Adventure Books as it might initially seem. Instead of placing readers in a castle, submarine, or haunted mansion, Saunders places them in a classroom, offering a "modest version" of a class he's taught before (2). There is classwork to complete; "Taking your time, answer these questions," Saunders instructs, before listing three questions for the reader to contemplate after having read just the first page of the first story (12). There are lessons about, as the book's subtitle indicates, writing, reading, and life. There is even homework, in

the form of three appendices in which Saunders gives readers a few exercises to complete which align with the ideas he presents throughout the rest of the book. Saunders might never tell the reader to turn to certain pages to go right or left in this classroom, but he will offer multiple, conflicting readings of Leo Tolstoy's "Alyosha the Pot" and leave them equally valid. And by the end of the book, he will tell the reader, explicitly, "go forth and do what you please" (384). Turning the control over to the reader is discomforting, but so are many of the most powerful learning experiences.

Saunders structures his book as if he is having a discussion. He wants to share some stories and a craft that he clearly loves and teach what he knows about them, but he also wants to see what readers will do with these stories, with this craft. "A story is a frank, intimate conversation between equals," he says after reading and reflecting on Ivan Turgenev's "The Singers" (115). He returns to this idea throughout the rest of the book, while reflecting on the stories that follow. Saunders is not necessarily telling a story here, and yet, it's apparent he has carried across the sensibility with

which he would tell a story; this book, too, “is a frank, intimate conversation between equals” (115). Saunders does not want to tell the reader how to read or write (or live for that matter). He wants to explore some ways one might read and write (and live). He wants to see what Turgenev, Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, and Nikolai Gogol have to tell us about reading and writing and living. And he wants to tell us what he has discovered about reading and writing and living for himself.

A Swim in a Pond in the Rain’s greatest strength is this conversational tone and placement of author and reader on surprisingly equal footing, but it also impedes what might draw people to the book in the first place. As Saunders explains in what is perhaps an already aggressively meta book’s most meta sentence, “One of the dangers of writing a book about writing, is that it might be perceived to be of the how-to variety” (384). Saunders compiles a few “universal laws of fiction” (151). He breaks stories down into patterns and organizes their elements into tables. Freytag’s pyramid is even included as part of his analysis of Chekhov’s *The Darling* (136). But he always makes clear that there is no writing formula, that there is nothing he can say that will magically create perfect writers. There is no such thing as a perfect writer. If one is looking to be told otherwise, they have picked up the wrong book.

In fact, Saunders does not even grant the Russian stories perfection, despite his obviously abundant love for them. He explicitly points out the places

they seemingly diverge from his “laws of fiction” and embraces these in his analyses. Saunders never discredits the stories for what might initially appear to be flaws, but embraces this as part of their charm, as part of what makes them worth reading, as part of what led him to include them in his book about reading and writing in the first place. His analysis of “The Singers” is perhaps the most intriguing of the whole book for precisely this reason. “A story with a problem is like a person with a problem: interesting,” he starts, before moving to focus not on *what* this problem is, but on *why* it is, and on *how* it impacts the story (82). In this way, Saunders undermines even his own advice about writing, making it even more clear that his goal is not really to offer advice at all.

Saunders invites readers into a classroom, but, like all good teachers, he does not just want to lecture at you. What Saunders is seeking is a real and honest conversation about literature. About these seven Russian stories, yes, but also about what reading looks like, about what writing looks like, and about why reading and writing are so important for all of us. “The part of the mind that reads a story,” he tells us in the book’s introduction, “is also the part that sees the world” (6). Needless to say, a conversation about how we see the world can be uncomfortable, can be difficult, can be hilarious, can be exciting. But through all of this, it is a conversation well worth having.



Book Review by Grace Takahashi

Complaint!

Author: Sara Ahmed

Publisher: Duke University Press Books, 2021

In her book *Complaint!*, Sara Ahmed uses a feminist lens to closely scrutinize how complaints are ignored and covered up by people in power. This feminist lens allows her to look at how systemic forms of oppression influence authority and make them especially unwilling to listen to complaints from certain people. In addition to not being listened to, marginalized people are scrutinized as if they themselves are being investigated and become even more vulnerable. By looking at how complaints are dealt with, Ahmed unpacks how authority works to resist any change and to keep itself powerful. She uses testimonies from staff, faculty, and students who have made complaints about sexual harassment, sexual assault, bullying, racism and more to form the foundation of this book. Ahmed begins by describing the institutional mechanics of complaints through policies and procedures, which are put into place by universities, businesses, and other institutions to make it appear like complaints are heard, not to solve any problems. She then moves on to examine how institutions stop complaints from being made. People are stopped from following through on complaints through warnings, threats, and by making the complainant complacent by telling them that a change will be made. An example that Ahmed

provides is from a student that was sexually assaulted by a professor. When the student told a research assistant what had happened, the woman says that she supports her but then goes on to warn her about what would happen if she made a formal complaint, therefore deterring her from complaining. The receiver of the complaint might also respond with a blank stare to make the complainant second-guess themselves, use strategic inefficiency, or make the complaint an issue of sensitive information and disclosure. Ahmed then examines reasons why a person might complain, such as they are in a difficult situation or because of how spaces are taken up. The question of how spaces are occupied can also be looked at as whether the spaces are inclusive and accessible to everyone. Finally, Ahmed discusses complaint collectives which is a gathering of complaints from multiple parties, so the complaints have more force behind them. The people in these complaint collectives support each other and lift each other up; they help each other work through the pain from their similar experiences.

The main audience of *Complaint!* are people who seek equity and to put an end to institutional violence. This book is for people who have made complaints, have been in a situation where a complaint was warranted, or may make a complaint in

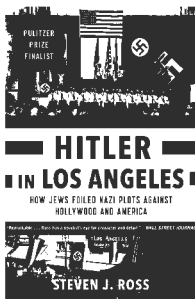
the future. Sexual assault and harassment are mentioned throughout this text, so this book could be triggering for some people. If more people can understand how institutions work to stop and ignore complaints, then they can also understand how to make their complaints heard. When complaints are heard and dealt with, real change can happen. Having this knowledge will also give people an advantage in an inherently unequal system where they may be disadvantaged. *Complaint!* encourages readers to not give up fighting to be seen and listened to. This book reminds us that our voices matter; that we must not be silenced by the people in power. There are a lot of things that need changing in the world, in our workplaces, and even here at Otterbein. Ahmed asks her audience to shift their view on the connotation of the word “complain.” By complaining, we are not signaling weakness or being pests to swat away. We are instead putting up boundaries of what behavior we will and will not accept. We must complain to bring issues to the attention of administration and demand a resolution. We must be willing to confront authority and to continue to complain again and again until there is a real solution.

Complaint! relates to the Me Too movement that arose in 2016. Much too often, reports of sexual assault are brushed under the rug, and nothing comes out of the bravery that the survivor mustered up to report. The Me Too movement is an example of complaint activism that is explored in this text. Complaint activism’s goal is to make institutions become more equitable by creating change through complaining. This movement has made these complaints more visible to more

people and has made complaints more powerful by making them a part of a collective. We are more powerful when we stand together; we are more likely to be listened to and heard.

Ahmed is very skilled at using an intersectional lens while writing. She considers how structures of identity such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation affects how a complaint is received and handled, and how the people who make complaints are treated differently because of these aspects of identity. Ahmed also has a unique writing style that makes her a noteworthy author. She plays with the multiple meanings of words and sentence structures to make memorable and compelling statements. I appreciated that Ahmed uses real testimonies of complaints and writes from the first-person point of view which makes her writing more personal and real.

I would highly recommend this book. Sara Ahmed’s writing style makes this an incredibly enjoyable read while still being very informational. I really appreciate that this book recognizes how people’s realities and ability to complain are affected by their different identities. Ahmed’s writing inspires me to fight against injustices and refuse to be silenced. *Complaint!* changed the way that I think about activism and what it means to complain. We are conditioned to not complain and to allow pain to be afflicted upon us. We are taught that people who complain are weak and annoying— that complaints are insignificant and not worth our time. This is not the truth, but instead a tactic that institutions use so that they can remain oppressive.



Book Review by Kat Gibson

Hitler in Los Angeles:

How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America

Author: Steven J. Ross

Publisher: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017

In our social and cultural recollections of history, it is known that there are many stories, people, and events that go under-recognized and under-studied. Though we certainly cannot know all of history, there are many events that are highly important and necessitate greater social awareness as they provide greater understanding and depth to our knowledge of major historical events. Historian Steven J. Ross brings to light one critical, yet largely unknown moment in United States history before and during World War II in his book *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*. Ross' book tells the story of how, Jewish attorney, Leon Lewis organized a spy ring that was vital in revealing and thwarting Nazi and fascist plots that sought to grow support for fascism and spread antisemitism in the United States. Fascist groups present in Los Angeles during the 1930s conspired to generate support for Nazi ideologies, Hitler, and the Third Reich and to weaken U.S. defenses as a precursor to what they hoped would become Hitler's eventual dominance of the nation. These planned subversions included spying on and sabotaging U.S.

military missions, spreading German propaganda, invading the Hollywood film industry, throwing out Jewish employees, and plotting to assassinate major Jewish figures in Hollywood, such as Louis B. Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn, the co-founders of MGM Studios, and actor Charlie Chaplin, among many others.

Lewis began his spy group in 1933 and continued operating it until the end of World War II. The organization proved critical in foiling these criminal plots and protecting the West Coast from insurrection. This was especially the case since, for a majority of the period between 1933 to 1941, the U.S. government and groups such as the FBI, HUAC (the House Un-American Activities Committee), and military were less concerned with the presence of fascists and their sympathizers in the United States and preoccupied with finding and stopping Communism. Lewis saw the danger in the rising Nazi and fascist groups who were spreading inhumane ideals, rampant antisemitism, and threats of violence as covertly as possible. He was determined that if the government did not see the danger these

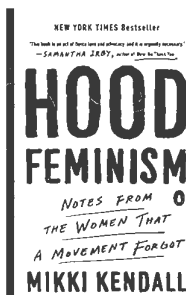
groups presented, he would show it to them and the American public, and if they would not stop them, he would. Lewis recruited spies who infiltrated these groups, gathered information, and gained trust while also creating division amongst their members.

Hitler in Los Angeles is a feat in historical writing as it weaves together a large body of information, many key figures in Lewis' spy ring and their supporters as well as major leaders in these fascist groups, and the details of the plots that were found out and foiled thanks to the work of Lewis' group. Knowing the chronology of this event is incredibly important as it reframes the amount of danger that European fascism, antisemitism, and Hitler and the Third Reich threatened the United States with long before the beginning of World War II. *Hitler in Los Angeles* thus also aids in demonstrating the total worldwide destruction and conquering that Hitler was aiming for from the very beginning. Thematically, readers can take great inspiration from the stories of Lewis and his many spies, all of whom put their lives in danger to protect their nation and fellow citizens and fight against corruption. Their service was organized independently and entirely on a volunteer basis. They refused to allow fascists to take power and spread evil ideologies and were unconcerned with the recognition or compensation, or, truly, the lack thereof, they received.

The book was a finalist for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for History and has received great critical praise. However, Ross' book could be difficult for the

casual reader and is best fit for someone interested in history. While the book is very well written, the sheer number of names, facts, dates, and locations can make it feel at times overwhelming. However, it is not critical that the reader bear in mind all of the information Ross provides to follow the timeline of Lewis and his spies. This could leave someone not used to reading books about history or someone who typically dislikes reading nonfiction to feel disengaged with the material. However, I would recommend this book for anyone interested in American history or learning more about it and feel that its subject matter is important and themes incredibly relevant.

Ross' book shines an important light on a lesser-known American battle against fascism and Nazism that captures a willingness for organized, ethical resistance to injustice which the United States needs desperately to hold on to. Such collective action remains critical in modern social activism movements. Though not spy rings, contemporary movements organized of civilians that seek to protest, end prejudice and discrimination against minority groups operate with this same interest in rooting out corruption and violence that is being systemically un- or greatly under-acknowledged. Ross' book is empowering in its demonstration of successful collective action and could provide some hope for the possibility of action against modern hate-based groups.



Book Review by Mitzi Cuaxico

Hood Feminism:

Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot

Author: Mikki Kendall

Publisher: Penguin Books, 2021

The movement known as feminism is divided into subgroups, causing confusion, anger, and even contempt. The definition of feminism differs from individual to individual. What does it mean to be a feminist? Why does the movement exist? Curiosity about the movement is currently rising. What we know is that the feminist movement is a shapable theory. We know it must become accessible. As such, we as a society can learn from the voices that have been silent for too long. Education through literature, especially in the matters of oppression, makes us reflect deeply into our individual biases.

At the young age many of us live, we can reflect, change, and even cultivate a culture that will hear the voices of everyone, even when some voices are muffled by the screams of others. This is addressed in the book *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot* by Mikki Kendall, where the reader is introduced to feminist theory through the eyes of the people who have been forgotten in the making of this theory. As such, we see the history of the movement and how POC and LGBT voices have impacted it with

not much recognition. Thus, Kendall brings into question: who is the feminist movement for? Is the movement only for those who maintain privilege? And how does this movement differ for POC and LGBT women? Kendall brings into question privilege and the consequences of holding that privilege. Therefore, she argues for a different approach. She writes, "An intersectional approach to feminism requires understanding that too often mainstream feminism ignores that Black women and other women of color are the proverbial canaries in the coal mine of hate" (11). From social-economic status to machismo culture in families, *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement* addresses the current and mainstream knowledge about feminism, but also the movement's hypocrisy and blind eye when it comes to women of color. The conversation is meant to make the audience uncomfortable. It is a hard pill to swallow to see a beloved movement like feminism nitpicked, and thus, not perfect. *Hood Feminism* is a deeply rebellious, daunting, and jarring book. It's a text that holds power in demonstrating the cruel reality of violence. It is violence

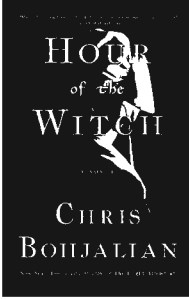
that is real and lives within the bodies of women/ feminine presenting people. Mikki Kendall explains disparity, survival, and learning that dares to confront the mainstream media, culture, and language.

Ignoring the intersectional oppression that many women and fem presenting people live through erases the experiences of many WOC and LGBT women, making the feminist movement a narrower and smaller group. Kendall makes her audience realize that ignorance is not an excuse. One must educate themselves and stop blaming ignorance for the harm that silence has caused. Thus, we must see the issues that plague division based on privilege. Issues like poverty, racism, police brutality, and lack of accessible education plague the lives of POC women, and Kendall knows it from personal experience. She, as a Black woman, has heard, seen, and lived overshadowing and misinterpretation. Kendall cites current issues like the Mississippi Appendectomies, Trans-rights, Kavanaugh, and even Beyonce. It is a ferociously truthful collection of personal experiences that reflects the cruel reality of intersectionality. Kendall opens up to us and reveals her stories that serve as mirrors to other POC women's lives, where microaggressions and assaults against POC women are so common to the point of invisibility. Thus, the current approach to feminism creates invisibility for women in marginalized communities. She writes, "When feminist rhetoric is rooted in biases like racism, ableism, transmisogyny, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia, it automatically works

against marginalized women and any concept of solidarity" (7).

One key aspect Kendall talks about is the concept of #Fasttailedgirls. A concept where young POC girls are often shamed for the way they dress and behave around members of the opposite sex. As a result, Kendall discusses how young Black girls are deemed as less innocent compared to their white peers when it comes to sex and sexuality. Thus, sexualizing the bodies of children. The Twitter tag started by Kendall herself, opened a safe space where many women of color have confessed to having been shamed by elders and family members for being "sexually precocious"(47). Kendall reaffirms the desire for freedom of the body. Fast Tailed girls claim their freedom at the anger of elders and the judgment of their peers, where miniskirts, tank tops, and crop tops speak against the objectification of the body.

So, what makes a feminist? Kendall's argument for feminism is strong, loud, and so incredibly in touch with the modern woman. Through her use of social media, slang, and common language, she explains such a difficult theory and the antiquity of some aspects of it. Thus, Hood Feminism is for everyone willing to listen. The audience of such rawness should come with the empathy to sit, listen, think, and act. In a world full of despair, loss, and setbacks, one must find and build a community that understands those setbacks and can provide shelter for the underrepresented.



Book Review by Kimberly Satterfield

Hour of the Witch

Author: Chris Bohjalian

Publisher: Doubleday, 2021

In his novel, *Hour of the Witch*, Chris Bohjalian blends historical fiction and thriller to tell the story of Mary Deerfoot, a young Puritan woman attempting to divorce her abusive husband. The setting is 1662 Boston, and divorce, while not unheard of, is certainly frowned upon. As Bohjalian lays out, the city has only granted seven divorces up until this point—for adultery, cruelty, and impotence. While Mary's husband Thomas exhibits all three of these behaviors, divorcing him turns out to be a difficult task. Using old English language and a slow-building narrative, Bohjalian tells Mary's story as she attempts to free herself from the confines of her marriage and become her own woman. Bohjalian's attention to historical detail does not weigh down the story, but rather gives it more depth. Through the character of Mary, Bohjalian honestly and thoughtfully explores what it means to be a woman, specifically a woman who is a victim of abuse but who refuses to remain a victim. The intersection of religion, witchcraft, and feminism makes Bohjalian's novel uniquely historical, while also commenting on womanhood today.

Bohjalian devotes the first 100 pages of his novel to carefully crafting the relationship between Mary and Thomas.

He drinks too much, verbally berates her, and blames her for their lack of children. Mary's breaking point comes when Thomas stabs her hand with a fork. Bohjalian writes, "But she had heard a word and she had heard stories. The word was *divorce*" (66). Mary's bravery comes from pursuing a path that few women had taken before. The idea of divorce is a fantasy, an intangible idea that Mary takes refuge in. She does not know what lies ahead, but she knows that suffering abuse at Thomas' hands is the worst option. Devoutly religious, Mary believes that she has worth as a person, and that God's plan for her life must include more than her marriage to Thomas. Bohjalian's taking the time to develop Mary's character as quiet but strong makes her pursuit of divorce believable. The process of divorce is incredibly traumatizing: Mary must go in front of a panel of judges—all of whom are friends with Thomas, who has power in the town—and answer to deeply personal accusations about herself and her marriage. Although divorce is technically an option for women who have suffered at the hands of their husbands, Bohjalian uses the corrupt justice system of the time to show how women lose their freedom even as they try to gain it.

The cost of Mary's pursuit of divorce is high: she is labeled a witch. Forks play a significant role in the story—the one that Thomas stabs her with, the one that their servant girl finds buried in the yard. In 1662 Boston, forks are known as “the Devil's tines,” and they are symbols of witchcraft. Bohjalian explores the meaning of the word witch by portraying women who are labeled as witches. *Witch*, Bohjalian shows us, means intelligent woman, misunderstood woman, unconventional woman. Mary illustrates the historical practice of calling women witches as a punishment for attempting to change the status quo. Because Mary goes to court in an attempt to divorce her husband, the judges and townspeople punish her with that label. She is a clearly innocent figure, devoutly religious and frightened of the Devil herself. But she is more frightened of her reality as an abused wife, which is why she pursues the divorce, even at the risk of death. Bohjalian does something different with the character of Constance, an elderly woman who lives alone on the outskirts of town. Constance has always been called a witch, and she probably is one. At one point, she even concocts a poisonous tincture for Mary to use on Thomas. However, Bohjalian portrays Constance as a positive character, as intelligent and wise and a loyal friend to Mary. Her solitary life and separation from the townspeople seems to be the only rational response to a society that brands her as a witch, and she calmly accepts this label. She speaks wisely about the damaging effects of male power in the town, telling Mary, “Let no man underestimate thee, ever” (259). Although

the characters of Mary and Constance operate in different ways with regard to the word *witch*, Bohjalian uses both characters to redefine the word. Mary is called a witch and Constance actually is one, but both women are strong and capable characters who are able to find friendship with one another.

Bohjalian wrote a large portion of this novel during the Brett Kavanaugh Senate hearings. During that time, Kavanaugh's ability to maintain and gain power even in the midst of sexual assault allegations raised a lot of questions about the way we treat women who are survivors of abuse. Even today, we do not believe women. Female survivors of abuse are blamed and scrutinized in a way that male perpetrators rarely are. Bohjalian's nuanced story about womanhood and victimhood, then, is very relevant to the current moment. Although divorce is now much easier for women to obtain, many women are still trapped in abusive relationships. Mary's fight for her freedom in 1662 Boston inspires women to stand up for their rights, even while we wish that we did not have to. Ultimately, Mary runs away from the town, marries a man she loves, and has a child. But her abuse at the hands of Thomas—and at the hands of the townspeople—forever scar her, changing her definition of who and what the Devil is. “Yes, this may be the hour of the witch,” Bohjalian writes at the end of his book. “But the Devil? He most definitely wears breeches. The Devil can only be a man” (396).



Book Review by Miranda Hilt

Klara and the Sun

Author: Kazuo Ishiguro

Publisher: Knopf, 2021

In today's rapidly evolving, technologically-driven world, artificial intelligence plays an ever-growing role in our daily lives. We rely on digital voice assistants to help us complete many tasks, from sending texts, making appointments, acquiring information, and much more. The increasing complex capabilities and integration of technology into our lives begs the questions: what qualities make humans unique and is it possible that artificial intelligence will become able to possess such qualities? In *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro explores these questions from the perspective of Klara, an Artificial Friend, or AF. Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is a contemplative read that masterfully ties together seemingly unrelated plot elements to reveal a shocking twist.

The story follows Klara from the store where she is put on display and eventually sold to the home of Josie, the little girl whose parents purchased Klara to provide companionship to their daughter. The manager of the store describes Klara as having "extraordinary observational ability," and it is because of Klara's ability to mirror Josie's limp that the mother decides to purchase Klara. (Ishiguro 45). Josie is a sickly child whose world is mostly confined to her house and yard; her only human friend is her neighbor, Rick. The nature of

Josie's illness is never fully revealed, but it is implied that her illness has something to do with being "lifted." The "lifted" children are considered smarter and are of higher social status than the "unlifted" children. Josie and Rick have a very special bond and even have some unspecified plan for their future together, but because of Josie's illness and Rick being unlifted, their futures remain uncertain. Josie's illness predominates the storyline and Klara's role within the family becomes more complex as the novel progresses.

All the AFs, like Klara, run on solar energy, and throughout the story Klara refers to the nourishing capabilities of the sun. When she learns that Josie is sick, she fully believes that the sun will be able to heal Josie. Klara devises a few different plans in order to persuade the sun to give Josie his special nourishment. She enlists the help of both Rick and Josie's father to carry out her plans. As Josie's illness progresses, both Klara and Josie's mother become more determined to save Josie, though by very different means. Dr. Capaldi, an "artist" with a special interest in AFs, asserts that we "want to keep believing there's something unreachable inside each of us. Something that's unique and won't transfer. But there's nothing like that, we know that now" (Ishiguro 207).

However, through her observations of Josie and her relationships, Klara comes to believe that Mr. Capaldi was “searching in the wrong place” and that the specialness of a human is “not inside the individual, but rather inside those who loved them” (Ishiguro 303).

The entirety of the novel is told from the perspective of Klara, the artificially intelligent humanoid robot. Klara occupies an enigmatic space between human and machine, which is reflected in the way she is treated by the humans in the novel. For example, Klara is invited on a family outing with Josie and her mother, yet she stands in the corner facing the wall while the Josie and her mother eat breakfast. Similarly, Josie’s mom values Klara’s opinions, but also says to Klara that “it must be nice sometimes to have no feelings” (Ishiguro 97). Klara is treated with a certain amount of respect and politeness that would be given to another human, but it is also made clear by many of the characters such as Josie’s mom that she is not actually a human. It is also interesting to consider how Klara’s role as narrator further blurs Klara’s position between human and machine. If nothing else, Klara’s remarkable ability to relay the emotional complexities of the other characters in the story makes her seem much more human than machine.

Along with her keen observational abilities, Klara does appear to show some level of emotional capabilities, though it is less clear whether or not those emotions are actually hers, or rather in response to her observations of the people around her. For example, Klara seems to genuinely want Josie to become healthy, and is even

willing to put her own life in danger in order to try and save Josie. However, her actions to save Josie could also be interpreted as an act of self-preservation given what will happen to her if Josie dies. Further, after going to Morgan Falls without Josie at her mother’s request, Klara becomes concerned that Josie is upset with her. Again, however, it is difficult to judge whether her emotions are genuine or in response to her observations of a shift in their dynamic and a desire to return to a state of normalcy. It is through Klara’s complex character that Ishiguro ponders what, if anything, makes humans unique.

The years during which the novel takes place remain unclear, as do the cities and towns. The ambiguity of these details makes this novel more timeless, as it could feasibly be any town, at any time in the future that the story takes place. Moreover, the question of what it means to be human is an enduring one; one that will likely only become more prevalent in the future. It also makes the novel more accessible to the reader, because it allows them to immerse themselves in the plot without having to take too many steps into a fictional universe.

Through Klara’s journey, Ishiguro ruminates on what it means to be human and how we relate to one another, particularly in an increasingly technologically advanced society. This novel would likely be enjoyed by those who like realistic science fiction and complex storylines. As our lives and technology, particularly artificial intelligence, become more intertwined, we will likely continue to ask ourselves the questions that Ishiguro explores in *Klara and the Sun*.

Negative Space**B.R. Yeager**

CONTENT WARNING: Discussion of drug use, self-harm, suicide

Book Review by Finley Lopez

Negative Space

Author: B.R. Yeager

Publisher: Apocalypse Party, 2020

“Everyone knew Tyler was going to die young” (Yeager 1), a daunting prelude to the tragedy that is B.R. Yeager’s *Negative Space*. The tragedy of *Negative Space* is thrown in as a plot device for encompassing the death seeping from his book. In all regards, happy endings are not meant for Tyler or anyone who makes contact with him. Tyler is like many teenagers, lost in his youth and trying to make sense of the world. He takes his search to the extreme by using drugs and self-harm to explore the darker aspects of humanity. The reader is never privileged to Tyler’s thoughts because we are given his life through his friends. Through Yeager’s experimental narrative, we are constantly filtered through perspectives that never form a cohesive picture. What we see are the destructive behaviors of adolescence as teenagers try to understand the world. Specifically, among three teens: Ahmir, a middle-class queer black boy who is Tyler’s secret love interest; Lu (or Lou), a middle-class genderfluid autistic white individual who knows Tyler through Jill; and finally, Jill, a lower-middle-class queer white girl who is Tyler’s main love interest.

The normalization of intersectionality comes when it is no longer the plot, but simply an aspect of life. Yeager accomplishes this idea with ease, as he never outright says who these characters are, but through

actions we come to understand them. Identities such as queer youth are explored through young love in the love triangle of Ahmir, Tyler, and Jill. We do not have to be told that they are gay. As any other book does with heterosexual couples, their sexuality is established through intimate actions without having to explain their relationships. The importance of identifying these characteristics is the minuscule representation present in media entertainment, where such characters are often absent, let alone the main characters telling us their stories in unfiltered truths. Yeager structurally lays out his book starting off with the characters’ names in bold, then breaking off into what can be a paragraph to a page of either Lu, Ahmir, or Jill’s observations, and then he sections off into another character whose experiences and interactions with Tyler are entirely unrelated. What is most striking about this book is the reworking of the trope of a young white male being the center of the story; we see his impact on others’ lives. We leave the forced universal experience of the white male for the marginalized experience.

In *Negative Space*, Kinsfield is a bleak, small town that can be any other town in any other part of North America. However, this town happens to be riddled with drugs and an epidemic of suicide. Our

four teenage outcasts are no different from everyone else. They are constantly abusing a hallucinogenic substance called WHORL. Yeager makes out WHORL and the suicides to be an almost paranormal event, but that would be a superficial reading of his book. The stark reality is teenagers fighting to understand why there is so much suffering surrounding them while trying to become individuals. WHORL acts as an alternate realm for them to make everything appear fantastical, yet they are on the brink of death. Of course, the death we are meant to anticipate from the very beginning is Tyler's. Tyler symbolizes a youth lost to a world of drugs, depression, and suicidal ideation. To be more explicit, he is among the population of young males who do not have a healthy outlet for their emotions. These emotions are thrown into unhealthy outlets that reinforce negative thoughts.

Yeager has a brilliant method of showing this obsession with violence and death through a spoof 4Chan thread. The thread is shown in Lou's passages, but we can assume that one of the recurring users is Tyler. A recurring user by the name of *yung_caligula* uses similar language and has the same interests as Tyler, which deepens our understanding of his inclination toward suffering. When a user asks why it is only males hanging themselves, another responds "mostly, cuz hanging is mostly masculine. its violent & demonstrates anger. one last fuck u" (31). Toxic masculinity is intertwined with rage and violence. Even in death, men cannot escape the ideology of inherent aggression. Yet *yung_caligula* has a different approach to answering the question, "it is more than that. the loop is everything that is happening or was happening or will happen.

The loop meets its self and either it ends or it starts again" (31). To break down what Tyler is saying, the noose is a metaphor for the suicide epidemic grasping Kinsfield (but we can look at Kinsfield as North America's suicide culture). The suicides have been happening for so long there is no longer a beginning and no foreseeable end to teenage death and mental illness.

After examining multiple topics from Yeager's *Negative Space*, we have barely scratched the surface of corruption in Kinsfield. He is not squeamish in confronting difficult conversations that are affecting today's youth. If anything, he bulldozes through hot-button issues with satirical characters such as Crazy Bob, a white, wealthy drug-dealing rapist who appears rather comfortable openly dealing WHORL to everyone in town. Other topics of interest are school shootings, toxic relationships, homelessness, police power abuse, rape, and mental illness. Yeager's rapid-fire address is an example of trauma that we are not always privileged to dissect yet must live with. His novel is full of painful events, but we can never sit too long with them as we must push forward to new beginnings (or ends). Tyler's initial suicide attempt shows that Jill never faces how Tyler might be gone but uses drugs to cope until something else occurs to change her circumstances. One of the most painful aspects of Yeager's book is that not everyone escapes trauma. Some of us may succumb to the heartache of our youth and deteriorate in the place we promised we would one day flee. For anyone considering reading *Negative Space*, take seriously the topics mentioned as they may be triggering for some readers.



Book Review by April Martinez

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes

Author: Suzanne Collins

Publisher: Scholastic Press, 2020

In a world where we are born into social classes and taught that with hard work and determination we can escape poverty, it is no surprise to see that dystopian novels for young adults are so prominent. This includes Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. In *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, we see Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist, who is from District 12 forced to take part in the 74th Hunger Games to save her sister. Throughout the books, we see her interactions with the president of Panem, Coriolanus Snow, a powerful and threatening man who could take the ones she loves at any moment. Eventually, Katniss agrees to become the revolution's Mockingjay to stop to President Snow. This is vastly different from how we see President Snow in Suzanne Collins' latest novel. *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is a prequel to her famous *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. The book focuses on future President Coriolanus Snow and his life as a Capitol adolescent living in the aftermath of the war between the Capitol and its thirteen districts.

We come to learn about Coriolanus Snow and the development of the *Hunger Games*. In the beginning, the

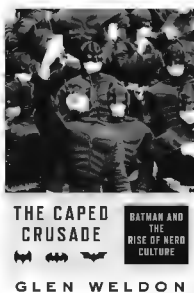
Games were not executed with much thought or attention to detail as we see in the original trilogy. Unlike in *The Hunger Games* where everyone watches the Games out of obligation or for enjoyment, during this time the people of Panem are not obligated to watch and most do not. For them it is a reminder of the war and death that many people suffered. To counteract this Dr. Volumnia Gual, the creator of the Games, implements a new aspect, mentors. The mentors are chosen from the pool of students at the Academy, where the kids of the most prestigious families in the Capitol attend. Coriolanus attends the Academy although his wealth has diminished almost completely after the passing of his parents during the war. Now with no wealth and no future, Coriolanus has only his family's name and reputation. Snow, as a student of the Academy, is selected to be a mentor for the 10th Hunger Games for a chance to win a full ride to University in the Capitol. With the Snow's poor financial situation, this may be the only way for Coriolanus to keep the family name alive. He is excited for this opportunity until he learns that he is to mentor the

female tribute from District 12, which is historically one of the most disadvantaged districts. Snow takes his place as mentor and makes an effort to connect with his tribute, Lucy Gray Baird.

This prequel allows for us to sympathize with and better understand the antagonist of the original trilogy—the one man who has power over all of Panem, President Snow. Because Snow is a kid in the equivalent to high school, we can understand the difficult decision he must face when choosing between his future and doing what is right. We see that Snow is the only one of the mentors who wants to connect with his tribute. He goes to meet Lucy Gray and brings her a rose, his signature scent. He wants to earn her trust, but he still sees her as lower than him. He questions his own motives as to why he wants to help Lucy Gray win the Games: is it to return her to her family or because it will benefit him? Snow's problem of having to choose between right and wrong only becomes more complicated when he begins breaking rules and is threatened by many higher ups, including Dr. Gaul, who, we can only imagine, has a macabre mind and is not afraid of getting rid of anyone who opposes her. So much at stake for Coriolanus and Lucy, we cheer on the antagonist of the original trilogy and come to understand him as another victim of the Capitol.

I recommend this novel for anyone who appreciates dystopian novels and especially for anyone who enjoyed *The Hunger Games* series. The story of Snow resonates with the reader because it's from the perspective of someone

choosing between loyalty or rebellion against those in power and control—something one has to do often when living in today's social climate. As someone who appreciated and reread all three books multiple times, I was excited for the prequel but was still weary that it would change the story drastically. I was more than pleased to know that even though it does not contain many of the characters we know and love, we get to see how things came to be. We get a better understanding of Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, and life in District 12. We see the Capitol come up from the ruins of the war and slowly become the Capitol we all recognize today with all its gluttonous people. If you are a first-time reader of *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, you can begin the series as it's intended with the first book, *The Hunger Games* or with the prequel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. If you choose the second option, I recommend once you read all the books to go back and reread the prequel because it will give you greater insight on how things came to be and Coriolanus Snow's rise to power.



Book Review by Addie Richmond

The Caped Crusade:

Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture

Author: Glen Weldon

Publisher: Simon & Schuster, 2017

We all know Batman, but how well do we really know Batman? How is it that this cowl-wearing, gadget-wielding, dark knight of justice exists so prominently in our pop-culture lexicon of iconic characters? It appears that Glen Weldon, NPR book critic, podcast panelist, and author of *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography*, may have the answer. In his 2016 “fanboy manifesto,” *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture*, Weldon outlines the rowdy dowdy history of the Batman, from his 1939 origins as one of many rip-offs of the pulpy detective serial *The Shadow*, to the hyper-realistic Christian Bale portrayal, “croaking his dire threats like an enraged, laryngitic frog” (Weldon 1).

At the beginning, the character of The Batman was a far cry from resembling the one we know and love today. In fact, in the past century since his creation by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, this Caped Crusader has taken many different defining characteristics and existed in many different stylized universes that may seem to have little congruency from one another. However, in examining the long series of events in both his published canon and overall publishing history, Glen Weldon is able to identify a common theme—the underlying purpose of all

Bat-men that serves as a core trait to the character.

Bruce Wayne is first given his superhero origin in 1939’s *Detective Comics* #33 in a now iconic moment where his parents are shot and killed in an alleyway when he is a small child. It is not this moment exactly that Weldon defines as the real start of the Batman, but rather what happens right after:

Having seen his parents gunned down before his eyes, wee Bruce Wayne makes the following vow by candlelight: “And I swear by the spirits of my parents to avenge their deaths by spending the rest of my life warring on all criminals.” The oath is ridiculous on its face, so laughably grandiose and melodramatic that only a child could make it. Which is exactly its power (4).

It is this moment, as Weldon defines it, that Batman is given a purpose wherein he sets himself a selfless, unachievable goal by which he will determine the course of his life as well as define his every iteration, reboot, and reissue to come. This force of will, this iconic precedent is what keeps the readers coming back.

Superhero stories are often built on trauma. Tragedy is a common enough trope in many genres of fiction as an inciting

incident, as it is common enough in the real world. It could also be said that trauma plays a similar role in the origins of villains as well, but it is the difference in how these characters respond and choose to act that fuels the plots and rivalries of good and evil. In real life, we all know our own tragedies and traumas. They may not be as dramatic as the characters we read about, but when the question arises of how we handle and move on from it, there are always choices. Batman's entire existence is built on the choice that he makes, and we read it because in an endless battle against those forces of evil, it is this Dark Knight that remains, ironically, a shining beacon of hope.

This book, though witty, humorous, and endlessly engaging, is not exactly what one might define as "light reading." Its 300 pages are filled to the brim with references, names, and allusions to various moments embedded within the web of complicated storylines that make up the Batman canon. All of which may prove to be a challenge to keep track of for any casual reader whose prior interaction with the character of Batman may consist only of bat-themed toys thrown in their McDonalds' Happy Meal. Nevertheless, I would still qualify Weldon's work as being accessible *enough* to appeal to nerds and "normals" (a term Weldon uses to describe anyone not indoctrinated into comic book fan culture) alike. Moreover, I would say to anyone interested in picking up a copy of *The Caped Crusade* (regardless of whether or not their Detective Comics trivia is up to snuff), that this book is, most assuredly, worth the effort.

Weldon's colloquial writing style allows for a light, casual tone, making the reader

feel as though they are having a nice chat with a friend. His work in researching sources shines through as thorough and informative without being too bookish, and Weldon's analysis of the subject is fresh, topical, and often hilarious. Understanding, let alone unraveling, the tangled history of comic publication is no simple feat (one could easily get lost in the mess of *reboot* this and *retcon* that) which would make a fascinating story on its own, but it is a task that Weldon takes in stride, guiding the reader through the history of bat-mania via nine clearly defined eras. What is perhaps most endearing, however, is the clear passion Weldon holds for Batman in all his forms. As a self-professed nerd himself, he is able to embed in his writing this uncanny sense of joy that comes when authors write about something they love. This joy is infectious, creating a work that is enthusiastic, self-aware, and, more than anything, just plain fun.

With the rise of streaming, eBooks, and digital platforms of all kinds, there has never been a better time to be a comic book fan. Every year more and more superhero blockbusters and television series bring beloved comic book characters, including Batman, further into the mainstream where they have become more accessible and more recognizable than ever. As the line between nerds and "normals" begins to blur, *The Caped Crusade* gives some idea of why Batman continues to exist. Moreover, it reminds us of one of our beloved character's humble origins and the massive cultural impact of the comic book industry that has shaped much of the media that we consume today.



Book Review by Allison Steele

The Midnight Library

Author: Matt Haig

Publisher: Canongate, 2020

Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* is a story about regrets and asks, "what makes life worth living?" The novel follows Nora Seed, a thirty-five-year-old woman with a lot of regrets. She didn't become a competitive swimmer, she didn't study glaciers, she didn't stay in her band, she didn't move overseas with her best friend, and she didn't get married. Each of these were an opportunity Nora had, and these are what weigh on Nora at the beginning of the novel. *The Midnight Library* is a book for an adult audience, and it deals with some heavy topics. The book gives no warning in its description, but it has a large focus on depression, it mentions self-harm, and suicide is a major plot point. Nora commits suicide at the beginning of the novel, which is the catalyst for the rest of the story and continues to have suicidal ideation for more than two-thirds of the novel.

The main draw to the world *The Midnight Library* builds is the library itself. Existing in a space between life and death, Nora gets to pull books from the shelves, each a life in which she made a different choice and a chance to undo her regrets. In one, she becomes an Olympic swimmer, in another she is a

famous musician, and in yet another, she is a glaciologist. Each book addresses a specific regret that Nora has, allowing the reader to begin to fantasize about where their lives might have led if they made different choices. All of these lives come with a twist, however, and Nora learns about the downsides each of those lives contains. The butterfly effect of Nora's different lives based on one choice varies between logical outcomes and complete stretches, and the message about finding joy in the life you have loses a bit of its impact for having Nora experience things completely out of her control.

The novel targets people like Nora, the adults who have regrets about what could have been. This is where my issues with the story began. Haig makes it abundantly clear that Nora is at a low point. She is already on anti-depressants, and in the span of twenty-four hours, her cat dies, she loses her only piano student, and she loses her job. Worse, Nora doesn't appear to have any kind of support system around her. Her best friend is in Australia, and she hasn't been in contact with her brother, her only remaining family, since she left their band. To make matters worse, Nora

always experiences some consequence of another life that is similarly distressing, yet it is clear from the beginning that the *Midnight Library*'s main purpose is to prove to Nora that her life is worth living.

It makes Nora's road to recovery much less convincing when her reasons for believing that life is worth living are "I'm not married to a man who cheats" and "my brother isn't dead." After Nora's second book, Mrs. Elm, the librarian, tells her, "Sometimes, the only way to learn is to live" (Haig 67). It's a fine statement to make, not terribly egregious, but it is a statement that can be interpreted differently depending on the mental well-being of the person it is said to. Nora comments after her first book, "I have wanted to die for quite a while. I have carefully calculated that the pain of me living as the bloody disaster that is myself is greater than the pain anyone else will feel if I were to die" (62). She is in a bad state mentally, and she believes whole-heartedly that the logical choice is for her to cease to exist, yet all of the bits of wisdom Mrs. Elm gives to Nora do not focus on ways for Nora to improve her mental health or guide her to find the good things in her life until the last third of the book. In fact, Mrs. Elm is clearly meant to be the mentor character, the one who is supposed to guide Nora through her self-discovery and help her become a happier person, but she often comes off as mean and uncaring. If she is supposed to be a "tough-love" kind of character, she's a lot of tough and no love. This makes the book and its themes come off as preachy and inauthentic.

Books that cover such serious topics

have to walk a fine line. Plotlines like those in *The Midnight Library* that focus on a character's struggle and recovery must be especially careful, and I worry that for some people the novel could be triggering. Especially as we continue to live through a pandemic that has left many people feeling the same kind of isolation that Nora deals with in the beginning of the book that led her to take her life, the book should have taken more care to prepare the reader for the kind of story they were about to read. It is clear that the novel was written with the best of intentions, but the lack of warning in the book's description and the continued suicidal thoughts from Nora could do someone more harm than good. It is wonderful if some people gain from the in-your-face, self-help message *The Midnight Library* has, but it is not a book that considers a wider audience.


 The image shows the front cover of the book 'The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century' by Amia Srinivasan. The cover is dark, possibly black or dark grey, with the title 'THE RIGHT TO SEX' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters at the top. Below the title, the author's name 'AMIA SRINIVASAN' is printed in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

THE RIGHT
TO SEX

AMIA
SRINIVASAN

CONTENT WARNING: Conversations relating to sex and sexual violence

Book Review by Emma Mierzejewski

The Right to Sex:

Feminism in the Twenty-First Century

Author: Amia Srinivasan

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021

Sex, it seems, has always served as a sensitive topic. How our society punishes sexual assault, regulations around sex work and pornography, as well as its relevance in the classroom setting, have long functioned as a political point of contention. Framing how we talk about sex in a reactive manner affects how we perceive, engage with, and understand sex to behave. The current feminist movement operates from this call to punitive action: through demands of violence on the accused during the #MeToo movement to commodifying catchy phrases like “kill your local rapist.” Although it is common and valid for survivors of sexual assault to want harm to befall their abusers, a collective response of violence does not address the larger issues at play. Who is entitled to have sex? Why do rape and sexual assault occur in our society? How can we hold abusers accountable in a productive and healing way? What can we do to move society toward sexual violence prevention? Amia Srinivasan seeks to answer these questions and address larger flaws in how we perceive sex in her groundbreaking book *The Right to Sex*.

One of the most publicized and visible addresses of widespread sexual assault

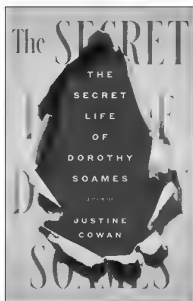
was during the #MeToo movement, where survivors would share their experiences with sexual violence on social media. Sometimes, participants of the movement publicly called out their abusers for the harm they have caused them, like infamous director Harvey Weinstein. Srinivasan speculates this media movement stemmed from a blatant lack of regard for victims’ rights in the justice system, stating that “When the power of the carceral state is not available... women turn to the more diffuse punitive power afforded by social media” (22). This method of response offers public humiliation and outcast as a means of accountability where the justice system fails survivors. While this may seem like a satisfying solution, Srinivasan urges readers to consider the consequences of this reaction. If the exile of sexual predators from the public sphere served as a deterrent for sexual violence, there would have been a sharp decline in assaults following this social phenomenon. Concurrently, exile is not a permanent solution as people who have been outcasted for sexual violence have still been able to make a living and continue on with their lives, like in comedian Louis C.K.’s instance. Srinivasan shows us here that it

is not enough to demand only an apology, since “Patriarchy has lied to these men about what is and what is not okay, in sex and in gender relations as a whole” (21). It is easy to apologize for harm believed to be caused by you. Understanding why the action was wrong or harmful is a separate understanding. These men only apologized because they got caught and scrutinized in the public sphere, not as an admission of guilt. Teaching why the sexual act was harmful, fostering understanding of bodily boundaries, and experiencing genuine remorse is missing through what #MeToo and our current justice system have aimed to do.

After understanding the relevance of this critique, Srinivasan moves to establish driving forces behind sexual violence in our society. Commonly believed misconceptions around what causes sexual assault have forced it to remain a hotly debated systemic issue. Srinivasan articulates different viewpoints for influences on sexual violence, specifically arguments on pornography’s impact, sexual desire, and capitalism. These forces work together to create a culture of male entitlement to have sex with women even when they don’t actively want it. They work to undermine men at the source of their personhood, which is masculinity. For example, pornography instills an idea of the type of sex men should have and often shows thin, young, white, and non-disabled women as the object of their desire. When they can’t achieve this masculinized ideal in their lives, they feel a sense of worthlessness and as if they have to make up for it. An entitlement to sex forms as a result because they believe

that women have a responsibility to reinforce their masculinity through sex. This translates to misread boundaries or sexual violence and murder at its worst, like with Elliot Rodger, who popularized the “involuntary celibate” or “incel” movement. Srinivasan here asks, who really has the right to sex? When external forces coerce behavior in this fashion, is anyone really capable of making mutually beneficial sexual decisions?

The Right to Sex urges readers to think critically about how we communicate about sex and the ways we attempt to grapple with its capacity for great harm. It requires us to reflect upon our own attitudes about sex and sexual violence and why these beliefs came to be. In addition, it also asks us to envision how an ideal world would respond to sexual violence and how it can move toward one that responds non-punitively. While Srinivasan leaves more questions for readers to ruminate over rather than answers, she asks crucial questions the modern feminist movement must address before they can make any progress. Personally, *The Right to Sex* has provided me with more complex frameworks to shape my comprehension of contemporary feminist movements. This book is excellent for anyone who already has a solid background in women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, as well as the literature around nuanced understandings of consent and sexual violence prevention. I highly recommend it for anyone wanting to complicate their views on how sex is negotiated in the varying settings of our daily lives, especially if they want to advocate for a more sexually ethical society.



Book Review by Grace Guichard

The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames

Author: Justine Cowan

Publisher: Harper, 2021

Like mother, nothing like daughter. These are not the words of Justine Cowan, author of *The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames*, but they might as well be. From birth, the pair struggled to connect, incapable of understanding each other. Something was in the way; but neither could address it, not until it was too late. In *The Secret Life*, Cowan recounts the uncovering of her mother's hidden past and how she came to understand the woman she never truly knew.

It starts, "I always knew my mother had a secret" (1), Cowan acknowledges the undercurrent of their relationship from the start of the memoir. In real life, the past was a forbidden topic. All Cowan knew of her mother was that she was born Eileen Weston and raised among the British elite. The two were effectively estranged. Eileen made attempts to open the door to connection, but Cowan could not set aside her own resentment until after her mother's death. What she would discover shocked her. Eileen Weston was originally named Dorothy Soames after being committed to a foundling hospital: an institution constructed to turn illegitimate children into domestic

servants. She was not a member of the English upper classes, but a girl raised to constantly know the disgraceful nature of her birth.

The Secret Life reads part history, part memoir. Cowan's interest in her mother comes too late. All that remains are the hospital records and her mother's few living friends/acquaintances. While she has her mother's incomplete memoir, she fills in the gaps with research on the psychological effects of institutional life, the history of the hospital, and records of daily life. One of the best sections of the memoir is a series of letters Cowan discovers from her biological grandmother. It is in these that Cowan uncovers the most unique part of her mother's life.

As one reads this memoir, one cannot help but think of Dorothy. Described as "difficult, defiant, erratic" (231), the portrait is not favorable. So unfavorable that Cowan's descriptions reminded me frequently that this is a memoir built on one sided memories of a woman that—by Cowan's own admission—she did not know. Throughout my reading, I wondered what Eileen would have thought of this portrayal. Would she

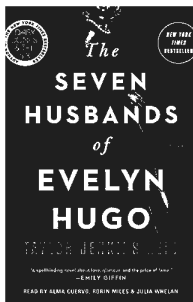
have deemed it fair? No doubt, she was a difficult woman raising her children in a “warped, dystopian version of what she imagined a proper British upbringing to be” (92). But I often contemplated whether her past excuses some of the present.

Dorothy overcame abuse, trauma, and a loveless childhood. Her conception of family came only upon her own entrance into parenthood. Previously, her sole understanding came from her relationship with her foster mother, a cold, distant woman. Due to the nature of her upbringing, she, like many of the foundlings, “failed to grasp basic concepts about family structures, the difference between foster and biological families, or that members of a family had the same surname” (157). A woman who grew up with her mother asked Cowan: “how would she have known how to be a mother?” (280). It is a rare moment where Cowan’s view of her mother is challenged. Because while Cowan discovers the girl her mother was, she never truly reconciles the woman she knew. She admits, “I suspect that resentment had already taken too strong a hold of me” (151). This concession of fault gives Cowan more humanity. I only wish we would have seen more of this same three dimensionality gifted to Eileen. While Cowan has boundless empathy for Dorothy, she detaches her from the woman she became.

Unlike Cowan, my relationship with my mother is filled with love and friendship. I suspect no life altering secrets to arise. However, as I read *The Secret Life*, I could not help but think of

the unique perspective a child has on their parent. On one hand, we know our parents in ways no one else can. On the other hand, we are not privy to the life they led before us. When we hear stories from their pasts, we can only accept their tales as truth. Most likely, it is true—save for natural exaggeration and the influence of memory. But for those like Cowan, the hidden past is another source for disconnection.

Ultimately, *The Secret Life* is a fine addition to the recent popular memoirs dealing with strained parent/child relationships. Where many other memoirists write of difficult childhoods, adult success, and a journey towards healing, Cowan breaks from her contemporaries in her discovery, understanding, and love for the girl who would become her mother. “Love cannot be forced or conjured up” she says (290). It was too late for her to love her mother, Eileen Thompson, but “[she] had grown to love that little girl” (290). For those interested in an investigation of family ancestry, history of foundling hospitals, and a tale of family discovery, *The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames* is a must read. I would not, however, pick up this book looking for a story of happiness and reconciliation. I leave the memoir wondering if, for Cowan, “a broken mother was better than no mother at all” (202).



Book Review by Delaney Lombardi

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo

Author: Taylor Jenkins Reid

Publisher: Atria Books, 2017

Readers can learn all about secrets, love, regrets, self-made success, and everything in between in Taylor Jenkins Reid's captivating novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. The book begins under the guise of a simple story. Journalist Monique Grant, is asked to write a story on world famous, classical Hollywood actress Evelyn Hugo. However, this proposal is a strange one given the circumstances. Monique is relatively unknown, so she is an odd choice to write on such a star. To add to the confusion, Evelyn asks not for a piece in the magazine Monique works for but instead requests that Monique go behind her company's back and write an independent work—a biography of Evelyn's life. This appealing yet risky offer ends up turning Monique's world upside down. The reader is introduced to the world of Evelyn Hugo, which includes the success story of a poor Cuban girl from Hell's Kitchen, New York, great Hollywood love stories, and, at the heart of it all, deception, secrets, and tragedy. In the end, Monique ends up learning as much about herself as she does about Evelyn and finds that their lives are more connected than she ever could have imagined.

The most prominent themes surrounding Evelyn Hugo, the person, and *Evelyn Hugo* the novel are trust, honesty, deception,

and mystery. Readers are privy to the revelation of a mega-famous movie star's dirty truths about her career and personal life. Though her face and name graced the covers of tabloids for decades, the world knew next to nothing about the truth of who she really was. "Evelyn always leaves you hoping you'll get just a little bit more. And she always denies you" (Jenkins Reid 16). As much as Monique and everyone in Evelyn's life thought they knew her, there was more than meets the eye. The real person behind the Evelyn Hugo façade was elusive, and it shows through the stories she tells Monique in excruciating, shameless detail. Being entrusted with this information is a heavy responsibility thrown onto Monique, yet she becomes emboldened with her identity and the choices she makes concerning her own life as a sort of side effect of getting to know Evelyn. True too, however, is the devastating impact that can come from being on the receiving end of those truths, which is something Monique eventually comes to learn painfully well.

Though Evelyn is an open book and totally unapologetic about her past, much of that past is shrouded in deception and secrets. To get to Hollywood and achieve her dream of successful stardom and escape from a less-than-ideal life in New

York, Evelyn had to make sacrifices and, yes, take advantage of more than a few people on her way there. Her identity itself and her appearance were manipulated and changed to fit the mold of what a movie star was expected to be. She lies about her age, her name, and hides her Cuban heritage throughout her entire career. At the most fundamental level of identity, she was a fraud, but the artifice does not stop there. Once in Hollywood, as well as in order to get there, Evelyn engages in multiple relationships under the false pretenses of love and “happily ever after.” These marriages are often the focal point of her career, and they tend to define her. Behind the scenes though, Evelyn is playing the public like a fiddle and orchestrating the relationships to benefit from them for her own good and sometimes for her partner’s. Readers will have to pick up a copy themselves, however, to discover that Evelyn’s grandest romantic scheme was kept out of the harsh glow of the spotlight and was the truest and most intimate of all her loves.

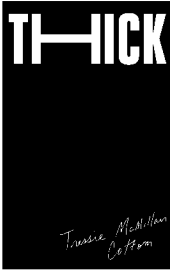
Evelyn Hugo is more than just a scandalous fictional biography though. Through its weaving storylines and vibrant characters, readers may just be able to pick up on a lesson or two. Firstly, this novel gives representation to the LGBTQ+ community, touching on biphobia, labels, and the stigmas one may face. Largely set in the early to mid-1900s, this story provides a close look into what living as an LGBTQ+ individual meant during that time and the extra difficulties that fame added on. *Evelyn Hugo* is also full of inspiration and life lessons. Evelyn is a headstrong, confident, hard-working woman and encourages

those characteristics in others. She does not allow anyone to tell her who she is and rejects anyone’s opinion on herself except her own. The book sends a message to readers to view their life as a series of lessons rather than regret past mistakes:

“No one is just a victim or a victor.

Everyone is somewhere in between. People who go around casting themselves as one or the other are not only kidding themselves, but they’re also painfully unoriginal” (366). Evelyn refuses to feel sorry for the hardships she has endured and — for better or for worse — for the hardships she may have brought upon others. The novel gives readers a lesson in looking exclusively forward and taking life by the reins. Evelyn made life happen for her, not to her, and this rubs off on Monique in the conflicts within her own life.

Jenkins Reid has outdone herself with her novel of truth, lies, love, sacrifice, and the importance of having a strong will. Her conversational writing and dynamic characterization simultaneously immerse readers into busy modern-day New York, sitting in Evelyn’s study with Monique, and fabulous 1940s Hollywood with all its glitz, glam, and drama. There is a connection made with every character you come across and each is given their own significant role in the events that shape Evelyn’s history and Monique’s present. Young adult readers of fiction—and anyone looking for a little scandal paired with a whole lot of heart—should dig into this novel and lose themselves in the tangled-up, heartbreaking, and inspiring tale of a life lived with resilience and abandonment and — of course — a couple husbands along the way.



Book Review by Deborah Adekunle-Odeleye

Thick: And Other Essays

Author: Tressie McMillan Cottom

Publisher: The New Press, 2019

In a culture where black women are reduced to one-dimensional tropes (oversexualized jezebel, political mammy or superwoman) Tressie McMillan Cottom's book "Thick: And Other Essays" is a breath of fresh air because black women are allowed to live in the contemporary world and have agency in their stories. The musings and problems of black women are given center stage and taken seriously, a rarity in our discourse. In a world where *"All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave"* Tressie McMillan Cottom centers black woman's worries, hopes and struggles throughout her essays. Most importantly, the book is specific and written through the lens of a middle-class dark skin, fat, southern woman and the reader is able to see how the intersection of these identities shape her worldview. Furthermore, she maintains that while most black people want freedom; their other identities influence what that look likes to them.

Thick: And Other Essays avoids the pitfalls of erasing stratification in the black community in an era where we scream "representation matters" and it does. However, McMillan Cottom notes that black people are not a monolith. We do ourselves a disservice when we flatten blackness because class, location, and sexuality affect people's experiences. In "Black Is Over (Or, Special Black)" she addresses delicately the

tension between native black Americans and their immigrant counterparts. While racism affects black people regardless of national origin, she notes how black immigrants are exoticized by the system. Noting that in her academia career, she was assumed to be an immigrant because she was smart. However, while black ethnics relatively flourish in academia compared to their native black peers, it is not a holistic story. Black ethnics are more likely to be deported by immigration officers and by every generation, this exotic buffer from racism weaken. Not putting those contexts in the essay reduce black immigrants to their "talented tenth" erasing the struggles of these community. Overall, McMillan Cottom handles such a touchy topic with grace, refusing the false binary of blaming black ethnics or papering over the differences. However, she could have buttressed her point by proposing policies to remedy the problems that each black ethnic group face.

Whereas, *Black Is Over (Or, Special Black)* is a very thought-provoking essay her magnum opus is "In the Name of Beauty". In this essay, Tressie McMillan Cottom refuses to dismiss beauty as frivolous but as a hegemonic force which dictates women access to capital. In a society which professes that everybody is beautiful, Tressie McMillan Cottom argues that beauty standards are not random but very political.

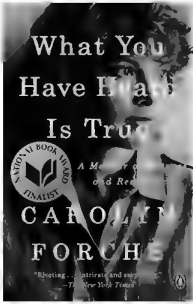
Studies have shown that more attractive people earn more, are given preferential treatment which compounds over time. Something we intuitively understand that is why we strive to be presentable at interviews and dates. The conundrum is that while being beautiful has material consequences, we are not expected to acknowledge its personal benefits or deliberately strive for it. Leading to a world where we exalt supermodels for being the pinnacle of beauty, but we also ridicule people for getting plastic surgery. If beauty is a mere commodity, why do we punish people for not participating in it or being too eager? McMillan Cottom forces the reader to stop seeing beauty as a personal choice but another avenue where hierarchy is displayed. This essay critiques how society treats “ugly people” by rendering them invisible due to false positivity.

The most controversial part of this essay is that black people and other oppressed people negotiating with beauty is counterproductive. For example, black women’s herculean effort to change the narrative that they are ugly by default with the “black is beautiful” campaign. She argues that this effort actually makes more black women internalize their oppression and legitimize this system. Especially in a society where most women (especially black women) cannot meet the standard of beauty by design. This essay is very contentious considering we currently see more black women on screens and advertisements than ever before. Nevertheless, she makes us confront the fact that beauty is not inward but an external quality with a lot of ramifications. Her essay refuses to give the audience easy answers and forces them to question how they feed into

this system. It also begs the question that by trying to reform a system are you giving it credence in the process? Moreover, the reader is still left with the question how do black women get decency in society without being considered desirable?

While these two essays ‘Black Is Over (Or, Special Black)’ and ‘In the name of beauty’ were personally captivating to me because of how they address hot button issues in the black community. It also grapples with how black people negotiate their dignity in antiblack systems and asks whether it is futile. She refuses to recommend self-love as a way to overcome structural problems. In our individualist society, her acknowledgement of systems is a breath of fresh air. Although McMillan Cottom does not subscribe to post racial myths about the state of black Americans, she is not a fatalist either. She believes that society can really advance if it takes the voices and plight of black women seriously. An arduous task where black women are expected to only exist to serve other people needs while being considered incompetent.

Overall, McMillan Cottom work brilliantly encapsulates the voice of a recently upwardly mobile black woman, their fears and aspirations. She is able to weave both data and personal anecdotes to keep the reader both informed and invested. Her sociology background shines in this book as she observes our opaque social hierarchies and her place in it. Most importantly, McMillan Cottom is a wonderful writer. Her words are nicely organized and digestible, which keeps the reader’s attention. I would recommend the reader to read the rest of the book because it forces you to think about our society in a different way.



Book Review by Olivia Culp

What You Have Heard Is True

Author: Carolyn Forché

Publisher: Penguin Books, 2020

What You Have Heard Is True by Carolyn Forché is a book that vividly transports you into the years leading up to the civil war in El Salvador. What appears to be the story of a young woman learning of the injustices in El Salvador is actually a memoir of understanding, resistance, finding oneself, and learning to see clearly. Forché poetically uses her experiences in El Salvador to show the audience that you do not need any qualifications to make a change. You simply need to “try to see” (Forché, 281).

Carolyn was living a quiet life in California where she hung out with her friends and worked on her poetry. With no knowledge of Spanish and no experience in central America, she was the last person one would expect to become intricately involved in the Salvadoran Civil War. However, soon after meeting Leonel, a charismatic friend of a relative, she is made aware of the hardships of the *campesinos* in El Salvador. As a result, she soon joins Leonel in a trip to El Salvador to experience the brewing conflict firsthand and write about what she sees.

Serving as her guide, Leonel shows Carolyn every aspect of the Salvadoran experience. He begins with

introducing her to the rich founder of one of El Salvador’s largest paramilitary organizations. Under the alias as an interested American poet/ journalist, Carolyn did nothing but listen to the general and Leonel talk. Her presence served to plant a seed in the mind of the general that Americans were concerned with the activities happening in El Salvador. This meeting, according to Leonel, established Carolyn as a “mysterious person of some importance,” (Forché ,74) which might just save her life.

Immediately after meeting the wealthy general, Leonel takes Carolyn to the *champas*. These shelters are really a series of hut-like dwellings where many of the *campesinos*, or poor farmers live. In contrast to the rich estate she just left, the conditions of the *champas* are abysmal. Carolyn must use the bathroom over an open sewage pit outside a campesino’s hut and realizes the severity of the Salvadoran’s poverty. Leonel tells her that eighty-percent of the country lives as poor as these people. For the first time, she starts to see and understand the scope of the injustice in El Salvador.

As Forché continues her stay in the Salvadoran countryside, she meets person after person and begins to

better understand their way of life. She volunteers at a hospital with a saint-like woman named Dr. Vicky. A woman is working with hardly any supplies and staff but far too many patients. She later visits one of Leonel's coffee farms where despite being better than most other farms, the workload of the farmers is backbreaking. Here, Leonel wishes to give his employees a real mattress to sleep on but the notion of improving the worker's living conditions is a dangerous rebellion itself. The two of them drove all over El Salvador meeting both poor campesinos and rich elites. For every visit to a slum, they would also visit the grand estate of a business owner. Although the meetings initially appeared random, Forché soon realized that every meeting was something important. "Each seemed a puzzle piece to be locked into place so as to reveal a picture he [Leonel] imagined he was showing me," (Forché, 110).

The picture taking shape was one of perpetual inequality. As Leonel points out, there was a devastating gap between the elites and the working class all the way back in the 1930s. Hardly anything has changed and in the face of such a monumental problem. In the face of harsh economic disparity and extreme poverty, Leonel continues to ask Carolyn, "What do you think?" (Forché, 110).

Carolyn Forché is not a great scholar. She is not an expert in Central America, war, or politics. She is not a doctor nor is she a real journalist. However, she has eyes that are willing to see and observe. She has a pen that writes down the harsh truth of everything she sees. Despite starting her journey as

someone cluelessly following a guide, the struggle of the Salvadoran people becomes her struggle as well. One night, Carolyn meets four young poets who proudly share their work with her. The young men wrote political poetry in an act of rebellion against the oppressive government. In a political climate where the government's enemies end up dead or missing, the poets have no delusions that they would make it out unscathed. Consequently, they asked that Carolyn take a mimeographed copy of their poems, translate them, and publish them in the United States.

From that night forward, Carolyn became committed to ensuring that the stories in El Salvador were heard. She turned the poems of the young rebels, the stories of poor coffee farmers, and the propaganda of the elite into a memoir which ensures that no story will be forgotten. Seeing and understanding the plight of the Salvadoran people, Forché decided that the world must also see and understand.

Everyone should read *What You Have Heard Is True*. This memoir loudly declares that we don't need flashy credentials or extensive knowledge to be a change for good. In a world full of seemingly impossible problems, everyone should take the time to read a book that encourages them to be part of the solution. Forché's work stresses that in the midst of a tragedy nothing is more harmful than looking the other way. To forget is to allow a disaster to repeat itself. Just as Leonel taught Carolyn, we need to open our eyes and truly see the world if we want change.



Book Review by Safiya Mohamed

When No One is Watching

Author: Alyssa Cole

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2020

“Five families have moved from Gifford Place in less than a year... and the change has been noticeable to say the least. It’s gotten to the point where I feel a twinge of dread every time I see a new white person on the block. Who did they replace?” (Cole 11).

Hoping to reset her life after a divorce, Sydney returns to her childhood home in Brooklyn, New York. Anticipating the warm embraces of her mother, friends, and loving old neighbors, Sydney is surprised to return to a neighborhood she no longer recognizes. Her mother is ill, many of the neighbors Sydney has known are gone, and unfamiliar, rich white people now occupy their homes. The area is filling up with vintage thrift stores, new cafes, organic grocers, and for-sale signs. Author Alyssa Cole’s thriller, *When No One Is Watching* (2020) explores the gentrification of the predominately Black Brooklyn neighborhood, Gifford Place, that turns into something more eerie than readers will ever expect.

The novel begins with Sydney attending a historical tour of Brooklyn neighborhoods. Right away, Sydney, a Black woman, is bothered by how her community is being represented to the audience of outsiders. The tour guide, who

is English, only details the wealthy white people who resided in the area hundreds of years ago. Upset by the erasure of historical Black figures in the neighborhood, Sydney decides to host her own tour during the neighborhood block party in the following weeks. During her historical research of Brooklyn, Sydney finds an unlikely partner in Theo, her new neighbor, who switches perspective with her throughout the novel.

As Sydney’s research of Brooklyn progresses, the plot becomes more sinister. As a new tech company plans to move into the neighborhood, the small community Sydney had left is vanishing in mysterious ways. A young, bright student is suspiciously charged with selling drugs, leaving his family with no other choice but to sell their home for legal payments. Mr. Parkins, the neighborhood leader, moves out in the middle of the night without telling anyone. The local grocer, Abdul, encounters immigration issues, and his store is sold. Sydney’s best friend and housemate, Drea, has vanished without a trace as well. Sydney is trying to preserve what is left of her neighborhood, and the recent events have only further complicated matters.

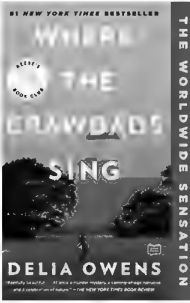
Readers will find Cole’s novel unsettling because of the close relation

of fictional events and actual incidences that are too familiar to most. In one scene, Sydney tells Kim, a white neighbor and Theo's girlfriend, that she skipped the line at the store. Kim starts to cry and accuses Sydney of being aggressive, even threatening to call the police on her. Kim uses her whiteness against Sydney as a threat, knowing that her race will offer her privileges that Sydney could not afford to fight. This scene is reminiscent of the many incidences of white people calling the police on Black people for minor inconveniences. Cole also borrows the concept of mobile neighborhood forums like Nextdoor with the fictional version of OurHood. Nearly every chapter of the novel ends with a post from OurHood where readers can view the clear distinction of how the different groups of neighbors react to the events occurring around Gifford Place.

One of the greatest aspects of the novel is that Cole uses actual historical elements to explain the history and formation of Brooklyn. The practice of redlining is highlighted in the novel to explain the housing discriminations that would lead to lower incomes, higher crime, and worse educational performances in the redlined communities. Cole uses Theo, a white man who has little understanding of how racial minorities experience America, to have the opportunity to confront the privilege he has during his research. When reflecting on his judgments, Theo says, "When I think of a Black community, the first thing that comes to mind — even if I don't want it to — is crime. Drugs. Gangs. Welfare. That's all the news has talked

about since I was a kid. Not old people drinking tea. Not complex self-sustaining financial systems that had to be created because racism means being left out to dry" (204). As someone who hasn't had to think about the spaces he is occupying, Theo, like unfamiliar readers, is shocked to find out the horrific ways that people of color, especially Blacks, were continuously refused access to safe and affordable housing and the aftermaths of it.

Although it's a work of fiction, Alyssa Cole's novel, *When No One Is Watching*, is an excellent introduction to the real, disturbing history and effects of gentrification on communities across the country. The mental anguish that the characters deal with due to racial inequities, rising costs of living, and continuous harassment from interested homebuyers is a reality for many people living in the city. This novel is not an easy read to get through, and at times, readers will be uncomfortable about the experiences of Gifford Place's residence. The discomfort readers feel, I believe, is purposeful. Cole wants readers to understand that what Gifford Place is going through is happening to actual neighborhoods in the world, and we should not be complicit. *When No One Is Watching* is a fascinating thriller novel that seamlessly intertwines social commentary into it. The lead, Sydney, is relatable and grows personally throughout the novel. She has flaws, and as the novel furthers, she becomes more vulnerable with others. Sydney is proud of the Gifford Place that her community has created, and she intends not to lose it, no matter who she must destroy in the process.



Book Review by Ashton Bader

Where the Crawdads Sing

Author: Delia Owens

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2021

Where the Crawdads Sing is a novel written by Delia Owens that was published in 2018. It is a story that follows the main character Kya and her turbulent family life. Kya lives a life of poverty and abuse within the swamps of North Carolina, and the story takes place in the past, during the years of 1952-1969. The characters and story line are well written, leaving an everlasting impression upon the reader that makes this novel never soon to be forgotten. Though this book is full of hardship, Delia Owens intertwines some warm and heartfelt moments through the novel. *Where the Crawdads Sing* deals with topics such as abuse, poverty, and racism, and highlights key issues of that past that are still very much present in modern times.

Kya was very close to her mother, a woman who left a deep impression on her. She felt as if her mother was the glue that held her family together, the sunshine and buffer against the unkind world of poverty and abuse. However, she is forced to watch her mother and all her older siblings leave in search of a new life, leaving Kya to wonder if they will ever return. "The next morning, Kya took up her post again on the steps, her dark eyes boring down the lane like a tunnel waiting for a train... Kya returned to the porch steps later and

waited for a long time, but, as she looked to the end of the lane, she never cried. Her face was still, her lips a simple thin line under searching eyes. But Ma didn't come back that day either" (Owens, 12-13). While such a simple line this may seem, it conveys deep emotion very well.

We also see that Kya must struggle to grow up early and must become self-reliant. She is left alone with her abusive father, and this speaks a lot to what it is like to grow up in foster care. Having personal experience within the foster care system myself, I know all too well what it is like to be a child and to grow up in poverty, abuse, and to grow up early to carry on and maintain life. Like Kya, many children in America suffer from poverty and prejudice because of it, and poverty is not a simple cycle to break. Within the foster care system, a child is shuffled from home to home, trying to lay down roots and grow in a safe environment. However, the system is heavily flawed and has resulted in abuse and mistreatment of children.

Kya herself is a wild and independent child, that eventually grows and turns into a wild and independent young woman. She must learn how to live alone, isolated within the North Carolina swamps. Because of poverty and her lack

of knowledge of the world, she resorts to attempt to revive an old garden. "Kya looked through the trees at Ma's corn and turnip patch, all weeds now. Certainly, there were no roses. 'Just forget it. No god's gonna come to this garden'" (Owens, 93). I found this to be an interesting quote that shows us Kya's thought process as a child. She has knowledge of God, of a higher power, and has knowledge of feeling left behind and forsaken. Though this uncertainty of feeling alone, abandoned and without aid, she continues to persevere because of her innate drive to survive within the cruel world that she inhabits. This is not unlike anything that children experience within foster care and heavily poverty filled areas such as Appalachia.

There are elements of racism within the novel as well, and I find this to be troubling yet important to the story. We have characters such as Jumpin' and his wife Mabel who become important characters within the story who also deal with their own issues. Kya did not grow up with racism. She views Jumpin' and Mabel as people, not as individuals who should be prejudiced against. She loves them as friends, though she is reluctant to form a bond with them due to her trauma. Jumpin' and Mabel deal with their own issues of facing racism, as they live in an area of North Carolina which is disagreeably named 'Colored Town.' Though, we must remind ourselves about the time period this book takes place, it is a little odd for a white author such as Owens to write about the strife of black individuals, even mentioning racial slurs within her writing.

It is no secret that America has an issue with racism. It was only last year during 2020 that we experienced another civil rights movement, and the Jim Crow era did not end in America until 1968. To put in perspective, that is, respectively, only 53 years ago. That means that America still undergoes issues such as racism even in the modern era. This novel shows us that not only is racism something that happens in history but continues to perpetuate within our present as well. However, this novel is incredibly popular and is written by a white author in a fictional format. It could perhaps also show the issue in which America tends to digest literature that was written in the gaze of a white individual that deals with racism, rather than to read a piece of non-fiction, which is inherently true, that was written by a black individual.

Overall, *Where the Crawdads Sing* is a novel that is aimed towards young adults and adults. The novel itself is worth a read, if you can bear to stomach some of the difficult topics it addresses. Please do research before reading this novel, as it does deal with other problematic issues that I do not wish to divulge at this time for sake of spoilers that can prove to be triggering to some. Owens does a wonderful job at depicting characters, their developments, their emotions, and the hopelessness of a child left to fend for itself. Its strengths are aptly to empower the reader and to engross the reader within the world of Kya, Jumpin' and other characters that are both side and main influences on the storyline. It is an inspirational novel that speaks to the ever-present issue of racism and can be linked to the issues of foster children within America.



Book Review by Ashley Bright

Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?

Author: Caitlin Doughty

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019

What is it about death and mortality that makes us so uncomfortable? As a whole, society fears death for a plethora of reasons, whether that be an ending to one's current projects, being a burden on the survivors, the idea that dying is painful, and too many others to name. These predisposed feelings towards mortality elicits the belief that death is a taboo topic that should be averted at all costs, regardless of natural curiosity. This aversion instills the anxiety of talking about death as a natural experience and asking questions that would allow for education, and later, acceptance of one's own mortality.

I have the privilege of working as a Transfer Specialist, which consists of removing the decedent from their place of death and bringing them into our care, at Schoedinger Funeral Home. I am the first person at Schoedinger that families are able to meet in person and interact with. I am also the person that first confronts families with the reality of mortality and must handle the situations that death anxiety among loved ones presents.

Despite death being such an ostracized topic, curious and innocent children are not yet exposed to the predisposition of societal death anxiety, which allows them to be more forward with their death curiosities. "The medical consensus is that honest and specific conversations with children about death can

actually help with their death fears" (209).

In her most recent novel, *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?* Caitlin Doughty tackles death questions asked by "tiny mortals" in an honest and specific way in order to help them embrace and alleviate the fear of mortality that will soon be imposed upon them. Regardless of the fact that this book was written for children, adult readers can be greatly impacted and educated on death as well.

Doughty takes this opportunity to share 35 of the most intriguing questions that have been asked throughout her 15-year career in the death care industry, including but not limited to, "Can we give Grandma a Viking funeral?" "What would happen if you swallowed a bag of popcorn before you died and were cremated?" "Can I keep my parents' skulls after they die?" and "Can everybody fit in a casket? What if they are really tall?"

So, can everybody fit in a casket, even if they're really tall? According to Doughty, yes (and no, morticians don't cut off tall people's legs). "There is always a way that doesn't involve the creative use of an electric saw" (124). Her responses to curiosities such as this have many ways of reshaping current societal perceptions about death.

In order to gain the trust of readers who most likely have some form of death anxiety, Doughty must create a safe and comfortable environment in order to somewhat

extinguish the anxiety of discussing the topic. She is able to do this using her morbid sense of humor; using “silly” questions that are easy to follow, making jokes throughout her responses, and validating their fears.

In my personal experiences, the establishment of trust between us (The transfer team) and the family is crucial to help alleviate the anxiety and fears in the room following the death of a loved one. This trust is built on the validation of the fear of death. I spend almost every day working with the dead and their families, but that doesn't always entirely remove my fears and anxieties of mortality. I am a human being who grew up with the previously mentioned predispositions, and my job at times only accelerates those fears. For instance, recently I had to go on first calls for an 18-year-old girl and a 10-year-old girl within a 12-hour span. This was such a difficult experience because it heightened the reality of death. While those two transfers were the hardest that I have ever had to do, I am thankful for the experience because it allows me to connect with families by understanding and validating those fears.

Once Doughty has established trust with the reader, she is able to properly educate them, using her knowledge and experiences in the funeral industry, in a way that the average death-fearing person can understand and accept. She executes answers beautifully about our bodies and experiences before, during, and after death, using terminology and real-life examples that allow the reader to further grasp the ideas.

Once trust has been established between our transfer team and the family, we are able to walk them through their next steps at Schoedinger and answer and address any

kinds of questions or concerns that they may have. Answering questions families may have can be tricky at times, especially being in a position in which we don't want to accelerate those fears and anxieties about mortality; However, I have always answered questions openly and honestly, regardless of the harshness of the answer, and have found that honesty not only furthers the level of trust between us but opens that person up to asking more questions and breaks down their wall of anxiety.

Reception of this kind of information unlocks a sense of vulnerability and susceptibility which allows individuals to question societal restrictions regarding death and allows for Doughty to offer the idea that having conversations about death is actually a very healthy strategy to begin embracing the mortality of themselves and others. Doughty and I both are very “death positive” individuals who hope to use this unlocked and newfound vulnerability to encourage our “future corpses” to have the same outlook on death.

Caitlin Doughty has created a safe, educational, thought-provoking, and reflective environment throughout this novel, that will allow readers to feel validated in their fears of death and understand that they are not alone in their anxiety, learn about death and how it is a natural process that should not be feared, and reflect on how conversations about the feared topic can actually encourage a positive outlook on mortality. In order to embrace the fact that we are going to die someday, we must be willing to put aside societal taboos and have positive conversations, especially with children. After all, they are our future corpses, and Doughty proves that it is time to embrace this fact.

