

Otterbein University

## Digital Commons @ Otterbein

---

Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal

Current Otterbein Journals

---

Spring 2017

### Otterbein Aegis Spring 2017

Otterbein Aegis

*Otterbein University*, [Aegis@Otterbein.edu](mailto:Aegis@Otterbein.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/aegis\\_humanity](https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/aegis_humanity)



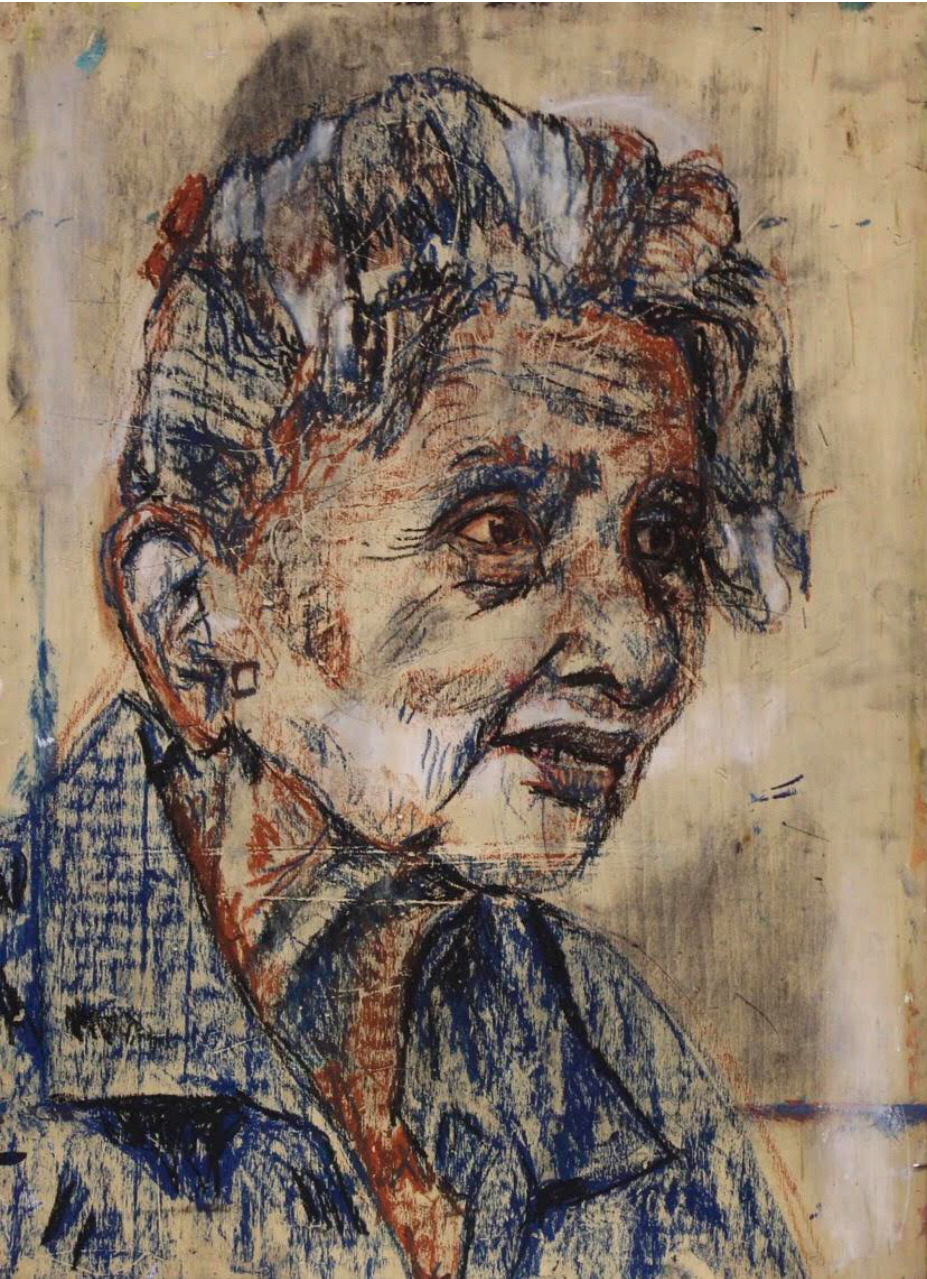
Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Otterbein Aegis, "Otterbein Aegis Spring 2017" (2017). *Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal*. 14.  
[https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/aegis\\_humanity/14](https://digitalcommons.otterbein.edu/aegis_humanity/14)

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



Spring  
2017



## ***Aegis: The Otterbein Humanities Journal***

As a journal designed to catalyze a deeper critical appreciation of the humanities at Otterbein University, *Aegis* publishes undergraduate scholarly essays and book reviews that advance the presence and values of the humanities on campus and beyond. *Aegis* is published annually in the spring semester.

In accord with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) definition of the humanities, *Aegis* will consider undergraduate scholarly essays in the following disciplines: history; philosophy; languages; linguistics; literature; archeology; jurisprudence; the history, theory, and criticism of the arts; ethics; and comparative religion.

Essays in the social sciences that are historical or philosophical in approach - or that involve questions of interpretation or criticism traditionally in the humanities - will also be eligible for publication in *Aegis*. We will also consider essays that use the disciplines of the humanities to interpret, analyze, or assess science and technology. Essays written in a language other than English will be accepted for review, provided such essays are accompanied by an English translation. Books for the book review section are selected and reviewed by Editorial Board members.

Submissions: Essay submissions should be 10-25 double-spaced pages. Use 12-point Times New Roman font with standard one-inch margins, and please number all pages. Use either the MLA Style Manual or The Chicago Manual of Style for citations. Submissions will be due at the end of the first week of the spring semester. Submissions are also accepted on a rolling basis. Electronic submissions are required. Please send to [aegis@otterbein.edu](mailto:aegis@otterbein.edu).

Submissions must be accompanied by an email or cover sheet noting author's name, address, and the title of the essay. Author name/s should not appear on submitted essays. Student volunteers are needed for the *Aegis* Editorial Board. To volunteer, to submit an essay for review, or to ask questions, please email *Aegis* at [aegis@otterbein.edu](mailto:aegis@otterbein.edu). *Aegis* is committed to nonsexist language and to wording free of hostile overtones.

### ***Aegis 2016-17 Editorial Board***

**Editors:** Viola Constable and Emma van Hasselt

**Board Members:**

Bethany Blinsky	Jaden Lunger
Madelyn Chennells	Riley Smith
Brenna Helm	Zack Triscari
Catherine Gallagher	Soon Wai Yee

**Front cover:** *Beyond the Language Barrier* by Adrienne Emerine (2016)

**Back cover:** *Star Nursery of Orion* by James Luke (2017)

**Advisor:** Dr. Stephanie Patridge

Students interested in serving on *Aegis*' Editorial Board for the 2017-2018 school year should contact *Aegis* at [aegis@otterbein.edu](mailto:aegis@otterbein.edu).

# Contents

5 Editorial Board Members

7 Editors' Introduction

8 Interview with Dr. A.W. Eaton

## 12 Essays

12 To Bury the Babbling Corpse: Theorizing Violence in Post-Colonialism >>> Hayley Kirst

18 The White Man's Blunder: The "Post" Colonial Condition Through the Lens of the Self  
& Other >>> Lydia Crannell

24 Imperial Language, Imperial Form: The Novel as Capitalist Propaganda >>> Carl  
Wiencek

29 The Tragedy, Man >>> James A. Simms

37 Friend or Foe? Agency of the Female Character in American Theater: David Auburn's  
Proof and Lynn Nottage's Ruined >>> Yoshi White

48 And tho' we've no Voice >>> Emma van Hasselt

54 The Life of the One and Only Frida Kahlo >>> Vincenzo Galizio

58 Beyond the Exhibition: Curatorial Intentions of Three Columbus-Area Museums >>>  
Catherine Gallagher

## 64 Book Reviews

64 Dear Committee Members >>> Viola Constable

66 City Squares >>> Emma Van Hasselt

68 Go Set a Watchman >>> Riley Smith

70 On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City >>> Bethany Blinsky

72 Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis >>> Jaden Lunger

74 The Sympathizer >>> Soon Wai Yee

76 Strangers in Their Own Land >>> Brenna Helm

79 Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic >>> Madelyn Chennells

81 Til Death Do Us Part >>> Zack Triscari

83 Problems >>> Catherine Gallagher

# Editorial Board Members

**Bethany Blinsky** is a senior at Otterbein University. In her spare time Bethany enjoys hiking, reading mystery novels, and cooking.

**Madelyn Chennells** is a junior, double major in English and History. As well as being on the editorial board of *Aegis*, she is the assistant to the editor for *American Imago*. She has worked in Otterbein's archives since her freshman year, and is heavily involved with Otterbein Christian Fellowship. Upon completing her bachelor's degree, she plans to earn a master's degree in Library Science.

**Viola Constable (Editor)** is a junior Middle Childhood Education major with concentrations in Language Arts and Social Studies. They intend to teach elementary or middle school following graduation, but life is a rich tapestry, so we'll see how that goes. Viola is thrilled and proud to have been part of bringing you this year's edition of *Aegis*, and they hope you enjoy reading it as much as they have. They'd also like to extend their sincerest wishes that you find some money in your laundry and take some time for yourself today.

**Catherine Gallagher** is a junior double major in studio art with drawing and painting concentrations, and individualized art history. She drinks way too much coffee, watches too much Netflix, and talks a lot. When she's not in class, she's in the painting studio.

**Brenna Helm** is an undergraduate student at Otterbein University and a member of *Aegis'* editorial board.

**Jaden Lunger** is a junior Philosophy major with a minor in Sociology. Jaden enjoys studying ethics, social theory, and topics on sustainability and consumerism. He is currently a captain on Otterbein Men's Soccer team and will also be the President of Men of Vision in the 2017-2018 school year. He hopes to travel some after college and then go on to graduate school to get a master's degree. He enjoys photography, music, reading, and writing.

**Riley Smith** is a major in English Literary Studies with a minor in Spanish and Latin American Studies. Her favorite subject so far has been adolescent science fiction. This is Riley's first time as an editor for *Aegis*, although it is not her first dabble in the world of communications. In her spare time, if she is so lucky to have any, she enjoys reading, watching Netflix, participating in the arts at Otterbein, and spending time with her friends (especially those within in band) and family.

**Zack Triscari** is a junior Music Education major at Otterbein University. He is also a freelance show choir choreographer, show designer, and clinician. Zack is currently the Worship Leader for Crossroads Campus Ministry. He is also a member of Phi Delta Theta - Ohio Xi. Zack enjoys the observation of modern pop culture through television, film, music, and more. He is honored to be part of the *Aegis* editorial board this year.

**Emma van Hasselt (Editor)** is a senior who will be graduating with a degree in History and minors in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Film Studies. They wish to congratulate all the editors and contributors of *Aegis* for their hard work, especially their co-head editor, Viola, and thank everyone for helping make their senior year a good one! After graduation they hope to go into publishing, but are happy to go wherever the wind takes them.

**Soon Wai Yee** is a double major in English Creative Writing and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with minors in Film Studies, and Race and Ethnic Studies. She loves durian, stinky tofu, languages, water sports, daydreaming, art films, and chocolate banana milkshakes. When she is not engaging any of the above, she is either busy with school, work, or she is meeting Zhou Gong.



# Editors' Introduction

>>> Emma van Hasselt & Viola Constable

As this year's editors, we are pleased to present the campus community with the fourteenth edition of *Aegis*: The Otterbein University 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 in history, literary studies, curatorial critique, and more. All of the essays in the journal meet the standards of rigorous research in the humanities, but more importantly, they are engaging pieces that work to address a variety of complex issues.

In "Behind the Exhibition: Curatorial Intentions of Three Columbus-Area Museums," Catherine Gallagher discusses the set-ups and strengths of exhibits in three local art museums, including Otterbein's own Frank Museum. Yoshi White, in her piece, "Friend or Foe? Agency of the Female Character in American Theater: David Auburn's *Proof* and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*" investigates female agency in two Pulitzer Prizewinning plays, as well as discussing the lack of gender parity off-stage. In "To Bury the Babbling Corpse: Theorizing Violence in Post-Colonialism," Hayley Kirst discusses the construction of colonial violence and intimacy through the analysis of three post-colonial texts. The essays published in this edition are representative of the fine work being done by students in the humanities at Otterbein. Also included in the fourteenth 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. Included among the books reviewed is Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman*, the long-awaited and hotly contested companion to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In *City Squares*, photographs and essays from eighteen authors share the function of squares in the lives of the people inhabiting them. A review of *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic* discusses the parallels between Mexican immigrants' and rural Appalachians' experiences within the opiate trade in the United States.

This past year, Otterbein was fortunate to have brought a wide variety of guest scholars in the humanities to campus, one of which *Aegis* had the opportunity to interview. In this edition members of the editorial board interview with A.W. Eaton on art, pornography, and the sociopolitical lines between them.

*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 our fourteenth edition.



## 8 | An Interview with

## Dr. A.W. Eaton

Associate Professor of Philosophy  
University of Illinois at Chicago

**Aegis: You have a PhD in Art history and Philosophy- why did you choose those two subjects and how do they work together?**

Dr. Eaton: I have only one PhD, but it's in two fields. I got a PhD in Art History and Philosophy--so I had to do all the coursework and exams for each field, and then I wrote just one dissertation. And that's because my university, the University of Chicago, does not allow two PhDs from the same division. I started out in Art History as a graduate student, I got a Master's degree. And then I was in a PhD program, but I found myself constantly drawn to questions about art that were foundational, to questions that are much more basic, like "How should we decide what counts as art in the first place?" or "What makes an object a work of art and not something else?" I was also taking philosophy classes, and had been doing so since I was an undergrad. So, I was at the same time engaging in these kind of questions in philosophy, and I felt like I really need to go do this right, if I'm really interested in these types of questions--not just take a class here or there, but go and really get proper training in philosophy, if I want to pursue these questions. But I didn't want to give up what art history has to offer--which is a real historically informed, materially attentive kind of approach to art. You don't get in that kind of approach in philosophy, which tends to be much more abstract. I wanted both of these things: I wanted to ask the abstract questions about art works, but I also wanted also to be really attending to art works in a serious way. That's how I decided I wanted to do them both, and that's how they work together. I don't know anybody else who's done that, I don't know if there's anybody else out there with a PhD in both of those fields, but I would really love to meet them if there were.

**Aegis: Tell us a little bit about your research.**

Dr. Eaton: I work on a lot of issues that are related to the issues Professor Patridge works on. I'm interested in issues pertaining to gender. I've done and continued to do research on pornography, and I work on questions about the relationship between moral and aesthetic value of art. I've also done a bit of research--and I think this is where my work diverges from Professor Patridge's--I do some work on artifacts and artifact functions, which is how we know what an artifact is and what its function is. But for the most part, I'm interested in the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, and feminist philosophy topics like pornography, and the difference between erotic art and pornography.

**Aegis: The talk you will give this afternoon focuses on pornography within the art world, and how pornography is classified is such. Do you have any ethical stances for or against pornography?**

Dr. Eaton: I will talk about the question of whether there is pornography in the art world, or whether they're distinct things. That's what I'm interested in—"What do we make of the artworks that might look pornographic?" "Do we want to say they're pornographic art, or are they something different?" I'm not against pornography in principle. I don't think there's anything in principle anyone can say about pornography, because there's a lot of really interesting pornography out there that's now. People have been making what we call 'feminist pornography' or 'alternative pornography' for quite some time now, and there are lots of places where you can explore that. The Feminist Porn Awards in Toronto, and another set of feminist pornography awards that happen in Berlin. And, there are a lot of people making terrific, very forward-thinking, women-positive, gay-positive, trans-positive, fat-positive, disability-positive porn out there. I don't think there's anything one can say about whether pornography in general is good or bad. I think the bulk of heterosexual pornography is not good for women, trans bodies, fat bodies, or disabled bodies. So, in that way, I think pornography can be ethically problematic.

**Aegis: Fifteenth-century Italy is very different from modern America. How do you think history plays a role in your questions about philosophy and art history?**

Dr. Eaton: Actually, I think it comes out in the talk I'm going to give this afternoon, in that I think it's very important to attend to the historical specificity of artworks. It's something philosophers are not especially good at, because we're not trained in it. It takes a lot of work to get into thinking about the historical context of a particular artwork, and I think philosophers tend to overlook that when they're asking questions about art. The kinds of artworks--especially the visual arts--that philosophers like to focus on also tend to be quite modern and even post-modern in their orientation, and what's important about that is that they tend to be artworks that question boundaries, works like Marcel Duchamp's Fountain, or Andy Warhol's Brillo Box, works that come up again and again in the philosophy of art. I think it can be quite misleading, if we want to think about art more broadly because paintings had a very different role in the period that we now call the Italian Renaissance. They had very different kinds of functions, and I think it's important to attend to that fact. Another thing that's really important is to keep in mind is just the sheer paucity of artifacts in that world. We live in a world where we're just surrounded by human-made things, but in the period that I worked on as a graduate student, which was sixteenth century Venice, even the wealthiest people owned very few things, and the average people had almost nothing. Even paintings, which were very labor-intensive to produce, you have to think if it's wood panel about preparing that panel, or once you move into the availability of canvas about having to stretch the canvas and prepare it. It's a tremendous amount of work, and then you have to prepare the binding into which you grind your pigments and mix them up. Someone had to do all of that. Big famous people had people do it for them, unless you're Michelangelo, who was just such a control freak he insisted on doing it himself. So, these are labor intensive, very precious artifacts, and I think it's really hard for us to really capture their importance.

**Aegis: So, you're saying that philosophers don't ask questions about historical context?**

Dr. Eaton: They tend not to, and I don't mean that as a criticism of philosophers. Art historians, when they ask these kind of abstract philosophical questions, don't ask them as well as philosophers do because they don't have the history and the development of thought in philosophy. So, I think each discipline brings something really great to the table. It's not a criticism of either one. But, yes, historical context isn't something philosophers focus on.

**Aegis: Last question, do you think that this question of porn in the art world that you're asking has any significant moral consequences?**

Dr. Eaton: I don't know- I suppose that's the question I've been struggling with since I was an undergrad. It's a good question. I think there's a lot of stuff that we call art, and there's a lot of quite famous art that is deeply morally problematic. For instance, the thing that got me onto this whole topic was the tradition of Italian Renaissance paintings that eroticize rape, which is still a problem in our society today. Fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century rape law in Rome and Venice, is in some ways much worse than things are today, not that things are perfect today, but in some way it's quite similar in the way these issues are dealt with now. I think that these are not small moral problems, I think that they're really big ones and they're really important to take on. What does it mean for how we ought to do with those paintings? I can't answer that question. But, I would like to see us take certain artworks more seriously morally, and take their problems more seriously morally, and not say 'Oh, well, that's art. Just fantasy, fiction, myth, that kind of thing.' That's the hard question, I think.



# To Bury the Babbling Corpse: Theorizing Violence in Post-Colonialism

>>> Hayley Kirst

This essay ties Césaire's image of the "babbling corpse" to the image of the white colonial woman, specifically focusing on Jane from *Guerrillas*. My argument is that in understanding Jane's character, we can theorize post-colonial violence and the impossibility of colonial intimacy. The argument made focuses both on Jane's character portrayal as a childish, ignorant "woman with no memory" and her toxic relationship with Jimmy. The essay compares *Guerrillas* to both *July's People* and *Chocolat*, and draws parallels between Jimmy and Jane, July and Maureen, and Aimee and Protee. Specific references to these works are drawn, concluding that it is the attempted or perceived intimacy between the white, colonial woman and the non-white, colonized man that provides an outlet for colonial anger, and that it is these fundamentally flawed attempts at intimacy that push characters like Jimmy over the edge. After the discussion of Jane and Jimmy, I move to the next part of the argument, which explores the function of the colonial gaze in *Guerrillas* and *July's People* and its inversion from the colonized to the colonizer in these contexts. The three aspects of the colonial gaze I explore are the changing relationship with the physical body, in which I discuss Fanon's essay "The Fact of Blackness", the erasure of culture, which is demonstrated by Jane's murder and the destruction of her passport, and the limits and boundaries of colonial space, tied to *July's People* and *Chocolat*. To conclude my essay, I tie the questions proposed by this essay to our society today, including the psychology of charity and volunteer work. I revisit the question of whether or not it is possible to move past colonialism, ultimately concluding that it's all too easy to fall back into the violent patterns colonialism left behind.

*Guerrillas*, written by V.S. Naipaul, is one of many texts depicting the violence of post-colonialism. It was published in 1975. The story follows Jane, a colonial, white woman, and her character caused many to criticize Naipaul's negative depiction of women. However, by studying this text, and by comparing it to other post-colonial works, including *July's People* and the film *Chocolat*, we learn that Jane's characterization is intentional, and that it theorizes a bigger problem.

Post-colonial violence streams directly from the impossibility of colonial intimacy. By understanding the flawed, broken relationships between people who exist within the colonial system, we can understand colonialism's hierarchy of power, confinements of space, and underlying rage. In his essay, "Discourse on Colonialism", Césaire presents us with the image of the 'babbling corpse', a figure of death and rot who spouts ignorance and lies. This 'babbling corpse' image can be directly tied to another image; the image of the white, colonial woman.

This essay will argue that Jane's character in *Guerrillas* ties directly to the image of this "babbling corpse", and that through understanding Jane's character as a colonial, white woman in a post-colonial setting, we can theorize post-colonial violence.

Naipaul has often been criticized for his portrayal of women, and it's easy to understand why. Jane is depicted in this novel as childish, memory-less, and foolish. When Roche describes her, he states that "Everything about Jane was simple, exaggerated and, oddly for a woman of twenty-nine, schoolgirlish" (Naipaul 90). When Jimmy describes her, he claims "she is like a girl, she knows nothing" (Naipaul 72). Even in important matters, such as politics, Jane is shown to have no real opinion. The best she can do is to talk about things everybody knows already to make herself sound empathetic. In other circumstances, she takes no real opinion at all. In a conversation with Roche, Jane claims that "'Perhaps I don't have a point of view,'" to which Roche replies, "'I wish you wouldn't pretend you have,'" "'But you were saying nothing. It was just a cheap way of showing off,'" he continues. (Naipaul 22) This brings us back to that babbling corpse image; a figure of importance spreading meaning-less words. While Jane's ignorance may initially seem harmless, perhaps even endearing, her position of privilege gives her power over others, and her ignorance affects the way she interacts with those around her.

There is an underlying idea of a white-god complex which must be addressed here. The way white people in the post-colonial context interact with the 'third-world' tells us everything. The white first-worlders continue to exist in a position above 'them', using this 'other' to define themselves as saviors. The most obvious example of this is through charity; white people donate money to non-white people in the third world, and in this way, they still exist in a position of power while simultaneously benefitting by feeling better about themselves for helping. And what is the first thing Jane does when she meets Bryant, a black boy? "She took out a purse from her shoulder bag and offered a red dollar note, folded in four. Raising his arm...he took the note, let his hand fall on the bed, and said, 'Thank you, white lady.' And then there was nothing more to do or say" (Naipaul 12). Her charity allows her to feel superior, which becomes a sort of safety around Bryant and around Jimmy, one that encourages her to let her guard down and eventually leads to her downfall.

Keeping these things in mind, we must now examine the relationship between Jane and Jimmy. This relationship is defined by the post-colonial system, but it is complicated by two major points; Jimmy is not fully African, and he does not work for Jane. So in order to understand these complexities, we must first examine a more clearly defined relationship. For this purpose, we turn to the novel *July's People*.

Maureen is a character who is like Jane in many regards. She is a white, ignorant woman existing in the post-colonial condition with a seemingly-intimate relationship with her family's servant, July. Maureen considers herself to be almost a friend to July, in fact, she prides herself on the fact. Accordingly, she is frustrated and confused when July continues to call himself her 'boy', a term playing on their intimacy and his status as something beneath her. "Bam's not your master. Why do you pretend? Nobody's ever thought of you as anything but a grown man" and "I got on your nerves. So what. You got on mine. That's how people are" (Gordimer 71) are prime examples of how Maureen envisions their relationship. She sees July as equal to her in a way, and the stupidity of this only fuels July's anger. He knows that any relationship between them of friendliness is a façade, something to make Maureen feel at ease rather than reality. When Maureen tries to push too far, however, it results in anger on July's part.

Something similar happens between Aimee and Protee in the movie *Chocolat*. While there is clear sexual tension between these two characters, Protee's status as her servant manifests in an unspoken agreement of boundaries. Protee is never allowed the privacy or the human decency that Aimee is, being forced to shower in the open, for example. The relationship between him and Aimee is overwritten by their unequal power dynamic. When Aimee tries to touch Protee, he is enraged because she has broken the unspoken agreement between them. She has used her privilege against him, touching him in a way that he could never touch her. He ends up dragging her to her feet and pushing her away. The incident causes her to ask her husband to exile Protee from the house, even though she was the one to behave inappropriately, once again displaying their power dynamic. The point here is that this colonial intimacy cannot be allowed to exist outside of the colonial power system, and as such, it cannot be allowed to exist.

In both circumstances, we see the ignorant attempts at intimacy being denied and replaced with anger. We see it in the interactions between July and Maureen; in one argument, told from Maureen's perspective, she states that "She had never been afraid of a man. Now comes fear, on top of everything else, the fleas, the menstruating in rags- and it comes from this one, from him" (Gordimer 98). We see it in Protee's violent rejection of Aimee and in his scarring of France, a symbol of the scarring that colonial intimacy leaves on both sides. Colonial intimacy, initiated by the white woman, enables colonial rage. This is evident more than ever between Jane and Jimmy, especially in the instance of her death. Bryant is horrified by the end of the attack, but he is also angry; "Bryant, the cutlass in his hand, was crying, like a man who at any moment was going to scream" (Naipaul 239). The fact that Jimmy and Bryant come together to attack and kill Jane is of course important; both men have been affected by her and both are bursting with suppressed rage, desperate for an outlet. Jane allows herself to get close to them both, and that connection opens her up as an embodiment of colonial violence, an outlet for them to take revenge against. The violence of her death echoes the violence against Bryant and Jimmy, a violence Naipaul lays out for us in excruciating detail.

In their relationship, Jane flaunts herself at Jimmy because she feels as if she is entitled to him. When the two have sex for the first time, Jimmy notes that she "lay on the middle of the bed and turned her face to the wall, as though he were not in the room." (Naipaul 73). He continues the thought that "He felt isolated by her indifference and began to fear that he might be losing her as well" (Naipaul 73). Jane acts coy and indifferent to Jimmy in every interaction between them from there on out. She acted in the same way towards Roche; as he said, "She had invested little in this relationship" (Naipaul 96). As well as this, she lies about Jimmy to Roche and lies to Jimmy about having past lovers; "She gave the smile with which she acknowledged her exaggerations, mischievousness, or untruths" (Naipaul 230). Being the woman without memory, as Roche repeatedly calls her, she sees herself as "under no obligation to make a whole of her attitudes and actions" (Naipaul 96). Her privilege allows her to treat people poorly and to cause them pain, and it's this that drives Jimmy over the edge.

(Allow me to clarify something: nothing in this essay is meant to excuse Jimmy's behavior in any way. The argument I'm trying to make is that Jane's position as a woman of privilege and a woman capable of attempting intimacy with Jimmy allow her to become something for Jimmy to project his rage onto. This rage comes from the colonial hierarchy of power, which he and Jane both exist within the confinements of.)

These intimate relationships can also be represented through children. In *Guerrillas*, Jane gives Bryant, a child compared to her, a dollar. In *Chocolat*, France, Aimee's daughter,



grows close to Protee. And in *July's People*, Maureen reminisces about a time when she had a servant, Lydia, who would walk her home from school. These examples all end in tragic ways; Bryant murders Jane, Protee breaks France's trust by letting her get burned, and Maureen realizes that in her relationship with Lydia, there may have been something that "she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know" (Gordimer 33). In the post-colonial system, still defined by colonial roles, nobody is innocent. Not even children. One is born into their role, and one will inevitably take part in theirs respectively. This is perfectly illustrated by the scars on France's and Protee's hands. Although she is young, France cannot escape the scarring of colonial violence, and she carries that scar throughout her entire life. When she gets her palm read, she is told that she has no past or future. She cannot exist outside of the moment of the scarring; she cannot exist outside of colonial violence, despite her apparent innocence.

So we have established how Jane, as the white, female figure, embodies the violence of the post-colonial condition. Now, we must define the mechanics of the post-colonial system that employ that violence. In "The Imperial Imaginary", Shobat and Stan identify what they call the "colonial gaze". According to them, media, specifically cinema, has the ability of "transforming European spectators into armchair conquistadors, affirming their sense of power while turning the colonies into spectacle for the metropole's voyeuristic gaze" (Shobat 4). Throughout the history of colonialism, the colonized figure is taken apart and redefined by the gaze itself. The authors of these post-colonial novels, however, are African. Therefore, they have the unique opportunity to invert the colonial gaze from the colonized to the colonizer. By examining the colonial gaze in relationship to Jane and Maureen, we can understand its mechanisms and functions.

One effect of the gaze is the objectification of the black body. If we examine Fanon's essay, "The Fact of Blackness", we find a fragmented relationship of self that is primarily driven by a fragmented relationship with the body. Fanon describes his experience as "Shame and self-contempt. Nausea" (Fanon 261). Among white men, finding himself the minority, Fanon states, "I was an object in the midst of other objects" (Fanon 257). In *July's People*, however the inversion flips this on its head, and it is Maureen's whiteness that is othered and objectified. She becomes the minority in this non-colonial space, and the effect is made obvious by the language Gordimer uses to describe her physically. When she works in the fields, she is described in this way: "She rolled her jeans high, yellow bruises and fine, purple-red ruptured blood-vessels of her thighs, blue varicose ropes behind her knees, coarse hair of her calves against the white skin showed as if she had somehow forgotten her thirty-nine years and scars of childbearing..." (Gordimer 92). The women laugh at her because she is different than them, and she becomes more aware than ever of her physical body. Roche also sees her differently; he sees her in the context of her body as well, "She was lean, rough-looking- the hair on her calves, that had always been kept shaved smooth, was growing back in an uneven nap after so many years of depilation" (Gordimer 89). For the first time, Maureen's body begins to be mistaken for her identity, and she cannot exist without being aware of it in exaggerated detail. Like somebody who has been reminded of the labor of breathing or blinking, Maureen remains aware of her whiteness wherever she goes. This idea is echoed in *Guerrillas* as well. Jane, who is one of the few white people on the island, comes to have a similar relationship with her own body. And just like Bam, Roche becomes increasingly aware of Jane's whiteness: "And again it seemed to Roche that she was very white, with a color that wasn't at all like the color of local white people. She was white enough to be unreadable; even her age might not be guessed (Naipaul 8). 'Jane said, 'I wouldn't call Mrs. Grandlieu white.' Roche said, 'Not as white as you.'" (Naipaul 128). Byrant also calls her

“white lady” when he meets her, using the color of her skin as her defining trait, which would only happen in a space where white is the minority, or a non-colonial space.

This objectification doesn’t only apply to their whiteness, however. It can also be applied to their changing relationships with their feminine sexualities. Both Bam and Roche come to find these women less and less sexually appealing as time and setting changes them. It begins with Maureen; “for the first time in her life she found that she smelled bad between her legs, and-sending the children out... disgustedly scrubbed at the smooth lining of her vagina” (Gordimer 9), and continues with Jane, “She came down hard on the very edge of the bed, which dipped below her weight, but she didn’t sit; she threw herself backward in an apparently abandoned attitude, opened her legs, raising her feet up against the wall, and inserted what Roche now realized was the tampon...” (Naipaul 122-123). Jane’s sexuality becomes a source of disgust in Naipaul’s novel in a way that doesn’t apply to Gordimer, and while that may be a product of Naipaul’s inaccurate portrayal of women, it could also be read as commentary on the way Jane moves throughout the novel. Her sexuality is used against Jimmy because her whiteness allows her to take whatever she wants from him, much like Aimee being allowed to touch Protee when he can’t touch her back, and perhaps it’s this arrangement that morphs her sexuality into something disgusting instead of her sexuality itself.

The second part of the colonial gaze enacted here is the erasure and rewriting of the object’s consciousness. The most literal example are the stories written by Jimmy about Jane. Not only are these stories about Jane, they are also written from Jane’s point of view. He writes her as being completely in love with and fascinated by him. One excerpt reads, “I dream about this man but I don’t know how we will meet again. I know he will never forgive a second intrusion and I have no desire to aggravate his impatience. He is an enemy to all privilege and I am middle-class born and bred...” (Naipaul 34). Consider Fanon’s statement about identity, that “by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories.” (Fanon 258)., and compare it to what happens to Jane. The sentiments line up. The most important scene in the novel is when Jane is killed, and it’s not even written from her point of view. None of the events leading up to her attack are from her point of view, even though most of the book had been up to this point. The events are told from Jimmy’s perspective. He even tells us this explicitly; “He scarcely felt the neck; he felt only his own strength, the smoothness of his own skin, the tension of his own muscles. He concentrated on that smoothness and tension until she began to fail...And then there was nothing except desolation” (Naipaul 238). Her death is disguised under his own feelings, and that same death is literally erased at the end of the novel, when both Roche and Jimmy attempt to cover it up. After she disappears, Roche tries to make it look like Jane has left him by disposing of her most important document, her passport. “The passport couldn’t be torn up and flushed down the toilet. It couldn’t be burned; there was no open fire in the house, there was only a metal contraption beside the porch for barbeques” (Naipaul 246). The symbolism here is alarmingly blunt. A passport is the written document of one’s identity and existence. The questions are even written in her own handwriting: “Roche, looking at the passport, read Jane’s handwritten responses to the printed queries. *Occupation: Publisher. Place and Date of Birth: Ottawa 17 July 1943*” (Naipaul 246). By the end of the novel, Jimmy and Roche and Byrant have come together to erase not only Jane’s life, but her memory.

The final part of the colonial gaze to be discussed is the idea of colonial ‘space’. This idea plays back into boundaries and intimacy; there are places for the colonizer that the

colonized lack access to. In *Chocolat*, we see this in terms of the shower and the bedroom. Protee is only allowed into the bedroom in certain circumstances, and he is not allowed to use the private shower. Aimee has total access to these colonial spaces because she is white. We also see that she has the option of intruding onto Protee's own space; she can see into the public shower just by walking past it. The inversion of this is seen once again in *July's People*. Maureen and Bam are taken from a colonial to a non-colonial space, and there are now places that they are refused access to due to their status as white people. One example of this is when Maureen wants to work out in the fields with the other women. When she asks, July treats her with superiority: "He smiled at the pretensions of a child, hindering in its helpfulness- That's not your work.- (Gordimer 96). Another example is the space in the yellow bakkie, which becomes restricted to Maureen and Bam when July takes the keys from them. Maureen reminisces about the importance of colonial space when she thinks of her old home. In their new home, Maureen and Bam's relationship begins to disintegrate. As Maureen believes, "Lack of privacy killed desire; if there had been any to feel- but the preoccupation with daily survival, so strange to them, probably had crowded that out anyway" (Gordimer 79). The space they exist in does not welcome or accommodate them, much like Protee cannot feel welcomed into the colonial bedroom without an explicit invitation in.

There is a continuing question of whether it is possible to move past colonialism. In studying Jane's character, it becomes apparent that while colonial violence exhibits itself systematically, in formats such as the colonial gaze, the true nature of colonial violence that continues to this day is the effect it has on ones' mind. How is it possible to do charity and good work without placing oneself on a pedestal? How is it possible to exist beneath someone in a hierarchy of power and not come to resent them? Even in our society today, we see examples of these things. Every person who goes to Africa takes photos of themselves, their white skin standing out against their surroundings. Every teenager resents the control their parents have over their lives. In studying Naipual, it's fair to claim that he may have been biased against Jane from the start because she is a woman. But there is always truth to even the strongest exaggeration, and the point still stands. The most damaging aspect of post-colonialism is the ignorance-based lie of the possibility of colonial intimacy. Every article, novel, and movie we have studied teaches us that colonial intimacy simply cannot exist.

So how then do we escape colonialism? How then do we escape the constructs of our own minds? Moving forward, we must always be aware of these possibilities of violence. Self-awareness is the most important weapon we have. There is no real way to put colonial violence to rest without risking forgetting. To forget or to excuse colonial violence is to increase the chances of it happening again without our knowledge. When we try to bury the memory of colonialism, the babbling corpse comes back.

### Works Cited

- Cesaire, Aime. "Discourse on Colonialism." New York: Monthly Review Press. 1972.  
 Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness." *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*. 2000.  
 Gordimer, Nadine. *July's People*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981. Print.  
 Naipaul, V.S. *Guerrillas*. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.  
 Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam. "The Imperial Imaginary." *Unthinking Eurocentricism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 100-36.

# The White Man's Blunder: The "Post" Colonial Condition Through the Lens of the Self & Other

>>> Lydia Crannell

In this essay, I argue that we have not reached any form of "post" in what scholars consider a postcolonial world. As in, the current structure economically, culturally, and socially still remains heavily engrained in a colonial mindset. I approach this idea by clarifying that the colonial mindset is based off of Edward Said's concept of the Self and Other. By using these two phrases interchangeably, I am able to consider any possible timeline colonialism may have. I begin with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, referring to a period of time not typically associated with the height of imperialism. The essay then jumps to Jamaica Kincaid's novel *A Small Place* where I discuss the Self/Others connection to tourism, but more so the Westerners ability to *become* the tourist. I then investigate Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and its purposeful blending of the Self/Other role. I am particularly interested in how he denies the Westerner the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the position of the Self. All of the texts previously mentioned affirm my theory that the colonial mentality has been perpetuated throughout a number of centuries and into today. Hamid's book however, transitions us into the question of solving our colonial problem. The main concern when looking for a solution is that of the Self/Other's capitalist base. Because the world economic structure will not change, the complete destruction of the Self/Other mentality is not possible. This leads me to authors such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Frantz Fanon in hope of a way to balance the Self/Other relationship instead of destroy it. I close this essay by looking forward, beyond a hegemonic Self/Other struggle, and into a world where a postcolonial space can actually exist.

The creation and study of the "post" colonial space is rooted in fallacy and fantasy—a delusion that economically and culturally, we as a society have moved past a colonial mentality. The idea of a "pre" or "post" colonial system is problematic when we consider Said's Self and Other concept to be the main backbone of the colonial mindset. By exploring Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that predates the European Enlightenment (and climax of imperialism) as well as current works by Kincaid and Hamid, we can conclude that Self and Other, and therefore colonialism, has spanned time before the "establishment" of the Orient and into present day. Although we are stuck in this colonial interregnum, we are left wondering if we will ever move beyond the imperialistic structure and if so, how. Due to its capitalist foundation, the Self and Other conundrum is impossible to undermine or destroy; however, authors like Fanon, Ngugi, and Hamid offer us ways to equalize the current Self/Other hierarchy. This

balance between the Self and Other, the East and West, the past and present, allows us to imagine a world beyond the colonial sphere.

Before we discuss the lifespan of colonialism, we must first understand that the colonial mindset is based off of one thing: the European perspective and concept of Self. It is important to note that this European perspective is a part of a superstructure cultivated from a capitalist economic base; however, to fully understand the Self and Other relationship, I will save this point for a later section of this essay. Edward Said introduces the idea of Self in his book *Orientalism* where he questions the motivation and principle behind the “creation” of the Orient and consequently the Other. He blames the European’s solipsistic existence wherein the Self is only concerned with its personal gain or growth. Said opens his text by confirming that the Orient was “almost a European invention” and later elaborates:

The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be “Oriental” in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental. (Said 9, 13-14)

Said is claiming that the imperial invasion and naming of the Orient had little to do with the Oriental himself, which only adds to his otherness. The European is only interested in the Oriental project because the Orient’s entire existence allows the European to validate his own belonging and assumed superiority. This leads us to Said’s central point concerning this relationship: without the Other, there would be no Self (and vice versa).

With the understanding that the colonial system is a result of this unbalanced, hegemonic relationship, we can now begin to disassemble the perceived colonial and “post” colonial timeline. Although the colonial space is typically synonymous with the Enlightenment and rise of imperialism, I argue that the Self vs. Other relationship has appeared before the era of Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” mentality. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* allows us to explore the exchange between Self and Other as well as the power struggle it creates. Written in 1610, Shakespeare lived through the beginning of colonial expansion, however his play predates the European’s “Orientalization” of the East giving us a clear depiction of Prospero as the European Self and Caliban as the Other.

The othering of Caliban can be seen before the play even begins. In the opening cast description, Caliban is labeled as “a savage and deformed slave,” already appearing as the opposite of Prospero (Shakespeare). Caliban is so much so the opposite of Prospero that he seems to be given his own species—half witch, half devil. He is also given the role of Prospero’s slave, monster, and disobedient subject. I use the term *given*, because the representation of the Other is created by the Self and rarely reflects his true social, economic, and linguistic reality. Caliban’s entire purpose is to both argue and reflect Prospero. This can be seen in lines like the one below that emphasizes his obsession with defeating Prospero:

I say by sorcery he got this isle;  
From me he got it. If thy greatness will  
Revenge it on him – for I know thou dar’st,  
But this thing dare not – (III, ii, 51-55)

Caliban is never a character just for himself—everything he says or does is some how related back to Prospero and the goal to reclaim the colonized space.

The Self vs. Other relationship is also seen through Prospero's domination over Caliban's island and language. It would be redundant to compare Prospero's control over Caliban's land to colonial forces spreading throughout Asia and the Americas; instead, let us study the importance of language as a tool for colonial discourse. Once again, Caliban is *given* parts of his identity such as a new language and subsequently a new culture. Alden and Virginia Vaughan refer to Prospero's power over Caliban through language in their book *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. They write, "Language is necessary to expression, and expression is essential to change, but it is Prospero's language and therefore largely Prospero's vision of the future that Caliban must accept" (Vaughan 166). Not only is Caliban bound by the geographical conditions of the island and Prospero's magic, he is held prisoner by a language that is not his own. Caliban even acknowledges this himself—a moment of the Other recognizing his own Otherness. Not long after Caliban is introduced he cries, "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (Shakespeare, I, ii, 367-370). While Caliban's use of language does not get him very far in his rebellion, the concept of dialectic ownership has been a much-discussed topic in present day colonial theory. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's collection of essays *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* approaches the power of language when in the hands of the oppressed. Ngugi's analysis however, will be saved for a later section of this essay when we explore possible solutions to the colonial power dynamic.

If *The Tempest* represents a period of time that is supposedly "pre" colonial, we must now consider texts from what has been named the "post" colonial. As stated before, these categories are neither necessary nor relevant when we discuss the colonial space through the lens of the Self and Other. Jamaica Kincaid's novel *A Small Place* returns us to the present colonial situation, where although we do not have a literal deformed Other character, we now have to make space for a new imperialist monster: tourism. It is easy for the reader to assume the position of the Self, the tourist, and the intruder due to Kincaid's explicit use of "you" in the first chapter of her book: "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" (3). It is easy to point out the opposing binaries: tourist vs. "islander," Prospero vs. Caliban, Self vs. Other.

But the reader's Caribbean vacation isn't the epitome of Said's Self vs. Other theory or colonial discourse. What proves the present day colonial mentality is the Westerner's *ability* to travel to a colonized nation, act upon its social, cultural, and economic system, and call it all a vacation. Like Prospero giving Caliban his role as a character, we have given countries, peoples, and cultures the title of "destination" and "paradise." Kincaid tells us that "anybody from anywhere can come to Antigua and for a sum of money can get what he wants" (47). The entire Self/Other question is based on *wants*—except the white man is the only voice that is heard. The Other is often silenced and thought to appreciate the Westerner's intrusion. The only thing that matters to the European is himself and his desires, automatically Othering what gets in his way.

Kincaid's novel also reminds us that the tourist has the privilege of movement, specifically through time. Kincaid's description of Antigua, its people and environment, is incredibly stagnant. She describes the island's library with damages that remain "pending" and writes through the tourist's naïve perspective:

What a strange, unusual perception of time they have. *Repairs are pending*, and here it is many years later, but perhaps in a world that is twelve miles

long and nine miles wide . . . twelve years and twelve minutes and twelve days are all the same. (Kincaid 9)

The tourist's ability to move in and out of the colonial space is an example of the Self's flexibility, while the Other remains locked in one location and in one time. Kincaid's Antigua, although different from her childhood, remains a fixed entity. But if we refer back to Said's original theory, the Other doesn't necessarily need to exist in its own timeline. The Other is unchanging unless purposefully altered by the Self.

My second example of the colonial mindset in present day is Mohsin Hamid's satirical self-help book *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* where he breaks open the idea of the Self and what it means to assume that position. Hamid opens his book by stating that the entire self-help genre is an oxymoron (3). How does one gain "self-help" from someone who isn't the self? Unlike Shakespeare or Kincaid, Hamid is blatantly telling us that there is a difference between your perceived self and everyone around you. He is telling us that the Self vs. Other construct is still relevant in today's society, even for the average 21<sup>st</sup> century Westerner still looking for ways to exploit the Orient. The colonial system of *wanting* has not vanished.

Hamid then goes one step further by blurring the reader's position of power: am I the Self or am I the Other? Yes like Kincaid, he uses the word "you" to directly approach his reader, but it is obvious that the male character he creates is not supposed to represent the reader or the European persona. The first transition from first-world "you" to third-world "you" appears on page four when Hamid says,

This book is a self-help book. Its objective, as it says on the cover, is to show you how to get filthy rich in rising Asia. And to do that it has to find you, huddled, shivering, on the packed earth under your mother's cot on cold, dewy morning. Your anguish is the anguish of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen. This is all the more remarkable since you've never in your life seem any of these things. (Hamid 4)

We can conclude two possible reasons for this, the first being Hamid wanting to break out of the expected hierarchy. Hamid takes back the colonial power in this text by removing the reader (or any first world figure he could relate to) from center stage. Hamid then goes as far as to rip the reader away from the plot at the beginning of each chapter, only to remind the reader that this story, this experience, is not about him.

The second explanation behind Hamid's "you" could be that he is reversing the colonial system of representation. As stated before, the European invented the concept of the Orient and therefore how the land and its people were to be represented. The Other is told how he will be perceived. The Other has no choice. As we open Hamid's book, we lose our ability to represent ourselves, because suddenly we no longer know our (the European as a whole) role in this story. Hamid also chooses to leave the main character without a country of origin—we do not know where we physically begin or end. This is what it feels like to be Othered, to be the Oriental, to be Caliban, or the islander, or the colonized.

What is so interesting about Hamid's approach to *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is that it in part answers the question I proposed in my opening statement: how do we reach past this colonial space? Note that I did not ask how we destroy the Self and Other



construct. This is because Said's Self/Other principle is unbreakable in our current capitalist society. Neil Lazarus points out in his essay *Spectre haunting: Postcommunism and postcolonialism* that the colonial system and ideology based around it (i.e. the Self and the Other) is deeply rooted in economic motivation and domination (120-121). Because the world, specifically the West, is so entrenched in the monetization of markets, there will always exist a "you vs. me" approach. Instead of concentrating on breaking the Self/Other psychology, we must concentrate on making its parts equal.

This is where Hamid's text comes back into play. By fighting the colonial novel or self-help book form and by mixing the positions of Self and Other, Hamid leads us into a new wave of theory and literature. Other authors like Ngugi and Frantz Fanon introduce different approaches to minimizing colonial discourse and in turn finding a balance between the Self and Other.

If we return to the role of language in a colonial state, Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African* tells us that "language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (13). This tells us that language is an integral part of one's existence meant to expand societies. A large portion of Ngugi's essay theorizes how replacing the colonized native tongue with the colonizer's language impacts the Other's sense of identity (13-18). Ngugi's essay presses that the colonized not only loses a sense of identity but also is no longer able to culturally evolve (14). Like we have seen in *The Tempest*, being trapped linguistically creates a frozen moment without progress or the possibility of a future. Thus, Ngugi proposes a way to maintain the Other's sense of self and ultimately balance the colonizer and the colonized (specifically in East Africa). He says: I would like to see Kenya peoples' mother-tongue (our national languages!) carry a literature reflecting not only the rhythms of a child's spoken expression, but also his struggle with nature and his social nature. (Ngugi 28)

To push past the colonial assumption that the English language is superior, Ngugi urges the Other to remain true to his native language, producing work that speaks from the oppressed position and tongue.

The last scholar that we can draw from is Fanon in his essay *The Fact of Blackness*. He writes from the perspective of the Other, solely through a racial lens, reaffirming that the position of the oppressed is a silent and choice-less one: "I am given no chance. I am over determined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance . . . I am *fixed*" (Fanon 260-261). Fanon is telling us that we are locked in a Self/Other relationship that is founded upon racial and physical difference. He explains that this racial hierarchy does not breed a sense of inferiority, but instead a feeling of nonexistence (Fanon 265). Fanon's entire place in the world relies on his physical appearance and then how he must simultaneously react and not react to the space around him. Therefore, if we are ever to equate the Self with the Other, we must first allow every man, regardless of race, to be a whole body. The Self and the Other must exist equally and on the same level regardless of who views the relationship. We must end the way the black man is viewed in relation to the white man or end the comparison all together. No longer will Fanon or his countrymen be considered "triply."

We have explored works by Shakespeare, Kincaid, and Hamid circling around the existence of a colonial structure. By modeling our concept of the colonial system off of Said's idea of the Self and the Other, we can see that this relationship, and therefore system,

has existed for hundreds of year and still reaches into today's literature. This produces the conclusion that the Self and Other relationship operates without a timeline or set limits. Although this relationship cannot be altogether destroyed at this point in time, Ngugi, Fanon, and Hamid give us ways to balance the Self and Other, thus making the colonial mindset obsolete. Through questioning form, awareness of language, and promoting complete racial equality, we can begin to break down the hierarchy within the Self and Other relationship. Once the Self and Other are equals, the need to name the Self or the Other is irrelevant, wiping away any perceived notion of the two. At this point, it is safe to say that we will have truly reached a postcolonial world.

### Works Cited

- Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness." Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*. By Les Back and John Solomos. London: Routledge, 2000. N. Print.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. New York: Riverhead, 2013. Print.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988. Print.
- Lazarus, Neil. "Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012): 117-29. Print.
- Lindley, D. (ed.) (2013) *The Tempest*: Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/the-tempest/33B93FE15F684A11BD129F2EE953238A>
- Thiong'o, Ngugi Wa. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey, 1986. 4. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978. Web. 02 Dec. 2016. <[https://sites.evergreen.edu/politicalshakespeares/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2014/12/Said\\_full.pdf](https://sites.evergreen.edu/politicalshakespeares/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2014/12/Said_full.pdf)>.
- Vaughan, Alden T., and Virginia Mason. Vaughan. *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.

# Imperial Language, Imperial Form: The Novel as Capitalist Propaganda

>>> Carl Wiencek

**This paper discusses the form of the novel in post-colonial studies, its ties and promotions to capitalism, and its shortcomings as a medium. It draws on theorists Neil Lazarus and Fredric Jameson as well as author Mohsin Hamid. Using support from Jameson, the paper explores the dimension of allegory in novel writing, how it relates to capitalism, and how it helps to break the mold as well as where it can do negative work to support it. It moves on to take up Lazarus' call to re-center the post-colonial discourse on capitalism. Here the essay expounds on the novel's invention through a capitalist society and how this consistently reinforces colonial discourse. The paper wraps up in a discussion of Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Here it makes a move to propose a new form through the experimental, Marxist-modern novel.**

There is power in reclamation; there is freedom in innovation. A major theme of discussion swirling about Postcolonial Studies is that of the Postcolonial literary theoretical discourse itself. How does literature move past the interregnum, this moment in time that seems suspended in chronology, that postcolonial studies currently inhabits? By challenging the accepted forms of the discourse, namely the novel. The reclamation of the novel in order to resist the brutal colonial rhetoric. But the form falls short in its attempts to move past the current literary moment. As long as Postcolonial authors default to the English language and as long as postcolonial authors continue to write using the form of the novel, the postcolonial moment will be recreated and perpetuated ad infinitum at the pleasure of the capitalist agenda of the culture that created the novel in the first place. The recreation of the postcolonial moment will do little to resist or reclaim the damages accrued by the conception of colonialism and would likely rather reinforce calls to resist against the wrong adversary—worthy of resistance though he may be. Capitalism is the real force working through the novel underneath the postcolonial moment. Therefore, if the literature moves away from the novel form, then it can start to create a new culture, rather than continue to resist the current culture; a culture that engages in the resistance of global capitalism itself rather than the injustices suffered by it.

Language creates culture and the culture that has been created is capitalist. Some writers and theorists have picked up on this and have noted that the capitalist base super-structure is the main culprit for keeping the globe grounded in post-colonial studies. While most post-colonial literature will hint at the effects of capitalism, few will name it as the primary source of violence in literature. This is the inquiry of Fredric Jameson and Neil Lazarus—two prominent post-colonial Marxist theorists—as well as Mohsin Hamid a

form-altering author. The novel is developed in the eighteenth century as a medium to write through the deeply individualist problems that the European enlightenment prompted. At the same time, the novel tracks the inception of universal humanism—the white European idea of unalienable rights afforded to the human race through civilization. This catch—civilization—led the imperial project. Colonialism is developed to aid in the civilization of what white, colonial Europe thought of as sub-human cultures. Colonization brought capitalism. What the aforementioned theorists assert is that post-colonialism is stuck because even when the colonizers granted independence and went home, they left their capitalism behind. And global capitalism promotes the colonialist situation. This is why colonial government did not really change after independence in these nations, capitalism creates a need for more of the same greedy faces.

The novel as represented in western literature is personal, reflective, and about the “I”. However, as Fredric Jameson pens, “the third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce” because they are written differently, for a different audience (Jameson 65). The audience of the third-world writer, of the post-colonial writer, is the post-colonial subject. To this end, all of the post-colonialist’s writing has no time to be reflective but must address the collective situation. Therefore, it is violent to let post-colonial literature “remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development” because they are not in the same vein of literature (65). These texts are telling a different story and they must be allowed to do so because it is these allegories, the ones that are collapsing the binaries that the western novel has spent a legacy upholding, that are going to pave the way to a new literary form that can move past the universal humanism of absolute sameness and the colonial logic of radical difference of the Enlightenment induced novel.

Jameson’s assertion of the post-colonial allegory as a much more complex form than the west would like to believe offers some hope. Allegory, as a genre, must remain representative rather than inductive and thus is able to become personal and political at the same time—a binary rigidly upheld by the western novel. As the allegorical form starts to transcend the binaries of “private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between...sexuality...and classes, of the economic, and of secular political power”, all of which are markers of the capitalist society as Jameson names them, the allegory itself starts to deconstruct these all together (69). As this deconstruction occurs, it would follow that the novel would start to fall in on itself. The blurring of lines between the political and personal would have to impact also the modes of production. Capitalism, personal accumulation and exchange is challenged by the public realm of Marxism. If everything is political, if everything is connected, if everything is communal, then the act of exploitation for the accumulation of resource and wealth for the few cannot continue to go unnoticed.

This is the first move in ground clearing to make space for a new form. There is still much to be wary about. In the breaking from one form, great care must be taken to not reproduce the form again. Just as colonialism was replaced with post/colonialism was replaced with post-colonialism but there was no tangible change for the collective, it would be easy to slip into replacing with the novel with the new form that seeks the same power and authority and totalitarianism as the novel did. This is a reproduction of form and it has already been concluded that this is not a helpful exercise. The allegorical novel is a great mode and medium for discussing the problems of the situation at hand, it can only comment on what it knows. Therefore, allegory is a great cultural diagnostic it does not always offer a solution or a way forward. By burying the capitalistic thread underneath the societal situation allegory

can limit access to mode of production that brought this moment to its current stage. Literature can stall out beneath allegory if it does not properly contest the mode of accumulation that underlays all the facets of societal challenges.

As post-colonial writers start to experiment with the novel form, interesting observations have been rediscovered. Namely, the novel has remained the novel. As long as this is true, authors will be trapped within its system. So much work has been done to undo the power that the novel has helped colonialism exert over much of the globe; battles have been won, but the war rages on. Neil Lazarus proposes that it is time to open up an old front; attack the mode of production itself. Reclamation of the novel is powerful, but innovation of the form is freedom. In an essay titled "Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism" he draws up his battle plan. Post-colonial discourse has led itself astray. It has allowed itself to be content to allow its precepts to be "faithfully reproduced rather than challenged or even questioned" (Lazarus 118). His critique of "third-worldism" at once questions the perspectives taken up by post-colonial theorists (121). When the author focuses on the situation of the "third-world", even as Jameson writes, what is missed is the underlying structure which continues to create the third-world; "to look elsewhere than at this specifically capitalist history in developing their various accounts of domination, subject formation and resistance in the colonial and postcolonial worlds" is to fail to implicate Marxism successfully in its antidote (121). What Lazarus is calling for is a specifically Marxist approach to, and lens through which to view, post-colonial studies. For this to have space to happen the novel needs dealt with. Due to its rooting within the capitalist structure it cannot adequately articulate a socialist construction. The novel cannot be produced without using strictly Capitalist modes of production. Just as Europe needs an other to be able to define itself, so the capitalism needs Marxism to define itself. The form that can accomplish that is the novel. The novel cannot then subvert the capitalist superstructure because it is made from that superstructure.

Lazarus' attention to capitalism is applaudable. With this particular vein of thought, he has named the novel as obsolete. He deconstructs the meta-colonial process and redirects the discourse towards modes of production. By bringing in the narratives of the post-Soviet states, there is a case for the argument that not all colonizers employ the same mechanisms. Post-Soviet states, almost homogenously, share a strong aversion to socialism. This distaste for socialism is incongruent with the rest of postcolonial discourse and therefore validates the particularity of capitalism in other post-colonial countries, especially since the former bloc is now submitting to the global capital economy. Yet all of the literature coming from almost every other post-colonial state is fairly anti-capitalism. But the novel veils modes of Marxism as it is intrinsically personal and individual while Marxism is intrinsically public and collective. Therefore, all of the accepted work in post-colonial studies is heavily steeped in global capitalism, but because its literature is in some sense trying to mirror the western novel it fails to properly address it.

This logic starts to come to a standstill however when combated with an argument in reduction. If all of this can be reduced to modes of production, then the lived lives of people do not matter. Once again, a return to the former eastern bloc can help tell this story. They lived real life socialism, and the real life people in these states are still wanting to claim post-colonialism for themselves; but if the issue of post-colonialism could be reduced to means of production, then these states should have successfully moved past the post-co-

lonial moment when their independence from their colonizers was attained. A more global project needs to be undertaken as the economies of sovereign states cannot exist as sovereign economies. Global socialism needs to reconcile somehow with the liberal humanism of the individual self in relation to the collective global human. Unlike colonialism, perhaps a global socialism can exist outside the binary of radical difference and paved-over-sameness. Still, there remains some anxiety about a move back towards the rhetoric that developed the idea of Europe or a decisively negative step forward towards globalization, which harkens back toward civilization. And if it is a new attempt forward at civilization, then there is permission and an opportunity to reproduce colonialism once again.

To be clear, there have been several experiments made at breaking the form of the novel. Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* indicts the tourist industry, which is a move against capitalism. Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* indicts the education system—amongst other things—that was created to make good capitalists. But Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* indicts capitalism itself. The satire positions the reader as both the reader of a get-rich-quick book and as the wealthy water tycoon somewhere in rising Asia. At each turn, his work indicts itself as it becomes more absurd in its goals as it goes. It takes up the call both of Jameson and Lazarus. It is a post-modern, post-colonial, experimental-Marxist novel. Hamid is working hard to dismantle the western idea of the novel. He makes several experimental moves. First, he indicts his reader as a third-world capitalist. He breaks the narrative barrier all throughout the book, reminding the reader that he is reading, which creates more of a dialogue rather than the telling of a story. Hamid uses this tactic to constantly remind the reader that it is he who is playing into the hands of global capitalism. Even the genre itself, self-help, calls out the inherently capitalist reader who reads self-help books. For there to be a self, there must be an individual. Not only does Hamid call out the modes of production that have tied down post-colonialist nations, but he calls out the modes of production that capitalism uses to produce the self.

Hamid succeeds in shifting the perspective of the post-colonial reader from that of the post-colonial's specific situation to that of the underlying reasons as to why that situation exists. It exists because there are readers who only want to know how to help themselves make a better self (capitalism), that want to escape the world through literature (capitalism), or who want to exploit the economies of other nations (capitalism). For Hamid, as well as Lazarus, the words post-colonial and capitalism are interchangeable. This is made clear all throughout *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. The main character, identified as "you", is seen through the reader's eyes as if the reader is constantly looking in a mirror, reminiscent of Fanon's gaze as the reader is looking at himself as someone who is looked at as the book opens: "it has to find you, huddled, shivering on the packed earth under your mother's cot one cold, dewy morning" and then reminds the reader that he himself is a capitalist already in the next lines, "your anguish is that of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen," all of which the self in the book has never known but the first-world capitalist reader can relate to (Hamid 4).

The novel ends with a nod towards global humanism, which is its greatest downfall. It does all this work to change the perspective but then lands it at our universal sameness on the last page as Hamid asserts that "you are ready to die well, ready to die like a man, like a woman, like a human, for despite all else you have loved...and so may you, may I, may we, so

may all of us confront the end" (222). The human quality and capacity for love is what makes us the same. All humans do not have the same capacities or experiences or displays of love, so does not that give cause for systematic correction? This is problematic because this is exactly the kind of rhetoric that allowed for colonialism to exist in the first place. When the world is seen as basically the same, then there is permission to force it to conform to sameness. Yet, because the world is not all basically the same, this is not a project of good intention and humanitarian effort but rather one of violence and exploitation.

Is there a way to write about the radical differences in humanity that celebrates them rather than exploiting them? I must concede that I do not have an answer or a tangible alternative to the novel as of yet. The form needs to continue to be pushed against, to be brought to its outer limits. There are novelists doing this, and as the discourse comes to rest more fully on capitalism and socialism as the operating binary that produces everything else it will become clearer in how to move past the novel because it will become impossible to write through these theoretical claims trying to use a biased medium. Authors cannot become complacent in their choices of form; they cannot just default to the novel as it is known. There is a way past it, we just have to find it.

### Works Cited

Hamid, Mohsin. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. New York: Riverhead, 2013. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Allegory in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986). Print.

Lazarus, Neil. "Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.2 (2012):117-29. Print.



# "The Tragedy, Man"

>>> James A. Simms

I.

"Lo! 't is a gala night  
Within the lonesome latter years!  
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight  
In veils, and drowned in tears,  
Sit in a theatre, to see  
A play of hopes and fears,  
While the orchestra breathes fitfully  
The music of the spheres."  
Edgar Allen Poe- "The Conqueror Worm"

Across the endless sea of darkness, across blackest uncertainty and harshest doubt, hope comes twinkling like a blazing star, illuminating even the darkest recesses of the human mind. Yes, humans have eyes that can pierce the abysmal gloom, and ears that can detect the faintest chime of beauty in the deafening silence of the universe's great, grinding machine. Humans are like the character in a play who speaks with an aside to his audience, aware at least in part that he exists in fiction. When Edgar Allen Poe composed the above poem in 1838, it can well be noted that he himself was no exception to this. Indeed, life was a play. But this was no comedy of friends. This was a tragedy, an ever-unfolding mockery of that pitiful race of creatures who dare call themselves intelligent beings. And the writer? A masterful villain, a monster who delights in watching his creations writhe in pain and suffering. He sits on his throne of heaven, observing with his servants his cruel narrative take form. It would seem that Fortune herself exists only to torment her most ardent followers.

Poe was hardly the first to look at Fortune and God and their relation to each other. In fact, there was a man long before him who wrote perhaps the greatest treatise on all three ever composed. His name was Boethius, and he was no stranger to pain. A Roman philosopher living during the collapse of the Roman Empire and the rise of Theoderic the Ostrogoth to the throne of Italy, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius was as much a product of fortune as Poe was. Born to a patrician family, Boethius nevertheless suffered greatly through his life, eventually being brutally executed by the order of Theoderic. But his greatest work *The Consolation of Philosophy* is a testament to his belief that, while Fortune is fickle and stays with no man too long, truth and wisdom never leave him, and his place in the universe is not made less by the fact that he is suffering.

Despite the fact that these two men lived 1300 years apart means little with regards to their intelligence. Both were brilliant men whose views of the world would come to greatly influence all who came after. Neither man was terribly happy, and misfortune tended to follow them wherever they went. So, how could they develop such differing points of view? These two men, alike in so many ways nevertheless came to believe very opposing concepts about the universe. The points they discussed affect us even now. Any question about the

universe that begins with “why” is not one to be ignored. Humans are ambitious creatures. And sure, ambition may be made of sterner stuff<sup>1</sup>, but the universe is nonetheless still out there, waiting to be analyzed. And whether it is a cold, unfeeling tragedy or a narrative of troubles to be given a happy ending, we as humans must discover these facts for ourselves, keeping in mind that

“If you desire  
to look on truth  
and follow the path  
with unswerving course,  
Rid yourself  
of joy and fear,  
put hope to flight,  
and banish grief.  
And bound in chains  
where these hold sway.”<sup>2</sup>

## II.

I who once composed with eager zest  
Am driven by grief to shelter in sad songs;  
All torn the Muses’ cheeks who spell the words  
For elegies that wet my face with tears.<sup>3</sup>

Boethius was born around 480 AD to a very old family, the *gens Anicia*. His father had been a consul under the barbarian king Odoacer, who ruled Rome after deposing the last emperor, the boy Romulus Augustulus. When Boethius was young, his father died, and he was sent to live with another patrician, Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus. His stepfather introduced him to philosophy and literature, the study of which would come to define his life. He went on to marry Symmachus’ daughter when he grew up, and became a scholar of Greek. A born prodigy, Boethius was renowned for his encyclopedic knowledge of Greek and his great eloquence when speaking.

Rome was forever altered in 493 when Odoacer was murdered by an Ostrogoth king, Theoderic. Theoderic was a brutally efficient warlord who was no stranger to killing dissenters. While being such, Theoderic knew his limits, and came to regard Boethius as a great aid to his power. He would, over time, appoint Boethius to many great offices, including consulship, and then finally to *magister officiorum*, a title, while bearing little more than titular power, still involved great responsibilities to the king. It was during this time that Boethius embarked on his life’s calling: translation. He translated many ancient Greek works to Latin, including Aristotle, indeed, Victor Watts said, “...it was only through Boethius’ translations of his logic that knowledge of Aristotle survived in the West.”<sup>4</sup> High praise indeed.

While by no means strictly a barbarian, Theoderic was still a very opinionated person. Educated in Constantinople, and bred in the cold crucible of Gothic warfare, Theoderic was fully aware of his position as overlord of Italy. For reasons that are not known to us, he turned against Boethius, throwing him in prison. During his imprisonment, Boethius com-

posed *Consolation*, his greatest work. It was not long after that Theoderic had him executed by beating.

If Plenty from her well-stocked horn  
With generous hand should distribute  
As many gifts as grains of sand  
The sea churns up when strong winds blow,  
Or stars that shine on starlit nights,  
The human race would still repeat  
Its querulous complaints<sup>5</sup>

It would seem that, no matter what his position, man has a drive to complain. Boethius was keenly aware of one thing in particular throughout his life: man will bemoan his place in the universe because, at heart, he is dissatisfied with it. "If only Fortune would favor me more!" he cries. And who has more to complain than a former politician, days from execution for crimes he may never have committed? Boethius wrote under these circumstances, tragic though they are.

But he did not complain *per se*. Rather, he wrote of his *own inability* to affect his destiny.

"No man is rich who shakes and groans  
Convinced that he needs more."<sup>6</sup>

Boethius, despite his impending fate, seemed oddly content (though no less afraid). True, he would not want this death (I can't imagine anyone would), but he made his peace with it. "Fortune favored me once" he might say. "And that's that."

During Antiquity, Fortune was seen as a goddess, a living figure who influences man's destiny the way the gods so determine. And while Christianity had become the dominant way of thought by this time, some of the old ways had not died out yet. Boethius, a scholar of Greek texts would have been well aware of this. Most likely a Christian himself, Boethius was well versed in both worlds. In writing *Consolation*, he put together these views into a cohesive narrative that preaches a single lesson: "No one is lucky forever."

It is easy to get drunk on your own success. Fortune eventually favors everyone at some point in their lives. Just as Boethius was raised to a great position in life because of his perceived worth to the king, so anyone else could at any time be similarly raised up beyond their wildest dreams. But does this make them virtuous? Is good luck "good" luck? In other words, does Fortune do this because "she owes them"? Hardly.

"But it is said, when a man comes to high office, that makes him worthy of honour and respect. Surely such offices don't have the power of planting virtue in the minds of those who hold them, do they? Or removing vices? No: the opposite is true. More often than removing wickedness, high office brings it to light, and this is the reason why we are angry at seeing how often high office has devolved upon the most wicked of men..."<sup>7</sup>

Fortune gives such men her favor, as she does to all. She alone apart from God has this impunity. Men think that when she has favored them that they are set in that way for life. They come to believe that they get there because of their raw talent. And while that is true to a degree, Boethius argues that Fortune plays the role ultimately when a person's life is involved. It is man who ensures his downfall by taking for his own what is to be credited to fortune. It is a mortal error to assume that you have more power over yourself than you do. It would seem that power corrupts.

And what happens when Fortune grows weary of the man with whom she has been staying? She simply leaves him. He falls from his height, and is reduced to the lowest of men. Fortune gives *and* takes away, and there is nothing man can do about it. But he should not fret. All men rise and fall in accordance with her will.

“From one beginning rises all mankind  
 For one Lord rules and fathers all things born.  
 He gave the sun his light, the moon her horns,  
 He closed in bodies minds brought down from high,  
 A noble origin for men.  
 Why then proclaim your kin and ancestry?  
 Look whence you came and see who made you, God.  
 No man degenerate is unless through sin  
 He leaves his proper source for meaner things.”<sup>8</sup>

All men are equal in this way. We are all subject to Fortune’s fickle personality. But this is a good thing. Boethius argues that the only time we can fully appreciate our lives is when we have had the chance to be at the top of the world and lose it.

“If you want to be resplendent in the dignities of high office, you will have to grovel before the man who bestows it: in your desire to outdo others in high honour you will have to cheapen and humiliate yourself by begging...If fame is what you seek, you will find yourself on a hard road, drawn this way and that until you are worn with care. Decide to lead a life of pleasure, and there will be no one who will not reject you with scorn as the slave of that most worthless and brittle master, the human body.”<sup>9</sup>

Boethius tells us that it is very human to suffer. People are subject to the will of things beyond their fathoming. But this is not to dishearten you. Rather, it should fill you with hope. No matter your position in life, rich or poor, a good man becomes so by understanding truth. He makes his peace with destiny, and goes wherever she tells him to. He that does this understands himself.

Boethius was a very gifted man who had everything to lose with his fall from favor. And Theoderic, in no way a fool, served as the instrument with which Fortune stripped Boethius of the gifts she had given him. A lesser man would have quailed and cried to high heaven how unfair she had been to him. And while Boethius was most certainly unhappy with his predicament, he understood what little he had in the way of control over his own life. “There is no doubt, then, that these roads to happiness are side-tracks and cannot bring us to the destination they promise.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Philosophy herself came to visit him; it is her dialogue that make up *Consolation*. Her lessons inspired him to face his death with understanding, if fear is not totally absent. Therefore, Boethius argues, do good and be good. “Avoid vice, therefore, and cultivate virtue; lift up your mind to the right kind of hope, and put forth humble prayers on high. A great necessity is laid upon you, if you will be honest with yourself, a great necessity to be good, since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things.”<sup>11</sup>

## III.

“That motley drama- oh, be sure  
It shall not be forgot!  
With its Phantom chased for evermore,  
By a crowd that seize it not,  
Through a circle that ever returneth in  
To the self-same spot,  
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,  
And Horror the soul of the plot.”

One often wonders what tragedy would drive anyone to become a man like Edgar Allen Poe. A figure of unimaginable misery, Poe wrote worlds, indeed universes, of death-haunting gloom, with little in the way of hope for his characters. The characters themselves seem trapped, in fact, in a prison of their own forging. They are prisoners of their own nature, however gentle the reader may make it out to be. Poe knew more than he said, and his unspoken melancholies colored his works in a way many authors could not replicate. This man, an enigma in every way, appeared almost out of nowhere and revolutionized the American literary world in a matter of years. And just a few years after that, was found dead in the streets of Baltimore. During his short life, Poe was driven by an obsession with fate and death that dominated his works. This may or may not have been influenced by the death of his young mother when he was two; indeed, many of his stories and poems concern the fading away of beautiful and enigmatic women attached to the main character. It is no coincidence that Poe chose to put many of his poems and stories into first person, almost begging the reader to understand his soul.

“That she loved me I should not have doubted; and I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion. But in death only was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection.”

Despite his sadness, Poe was a very passionate man, who saw love as something that could save a man from himself. And if he had been showed love for more than a year or two at a time, he perhaps might have ended up far better than he did.

Poe was born in Virginia in 1809. His father deserted the family, and his mother, young and beautiful, died of tuberculosis when Poe was two. He was adopted by the Allen family, but proved to be a disappointment, drinking and gambling excessively.

He began to write after his expulsion from West Point, and married his younger cousin, Virginia Clemm. After rising to stardom due to successes like “The Raven”, and “The Tell-Tale Heart,” Poe was beset by the tragedy of Virginia’s death, ironically of the same disease as his mother. He began to drink more heavily, and was found dead in a gutter in Baltimore, the city that had for so long been his home. In life, he seemed to be a failure in many regards: a son, a husband, a critic, and editor. But in death, his works came to turn heads towards America, letting the world know that this new country had much in the way of art to offer. Despite the morbidity of his works, Poe remains one of the greatest and most beloved authors of all time.

And what makes his stories and poems so great? From a critical perspective, they all have similarities. Namely, they all speak of a word that has great importance on human thought: futility. Echoing Boethius, Poe reasoned that man could no more affect his destiny

than he could change the sky from blue to brown. Poe seemed to be haunted by this; his life was full of dreams and goals that were taken from him at every turn. This seems to be why he came to differ with Boethius in regards to hope. While Boethius believed strongly that, while man was doomed to suffer, he could maintain his contentedness by trusting in God and truth. For Poe, it was not so simple. 'God is cruel', Poe would say. We are all chess pieces in his hateful game. And our destiny is to be discarded when we outlive our usefulness.

"Hear the tolling of the bells-  
Iron bells!  
What a world of solemn thought their monopoly compels!  
In the silence of the night,  
How we shiver with affright  
At the melancholy meaning of the tone!  
For every sound that floats  
From the rust within their throats  
Is a groan."

It cannot be denied that Poe was obsessed with death. Fortune was hardly a merciful maiden but rather a vengeful hag, bent on punishing her children. And while his life was hardly sadder than Boethius, his grim worldview is all the more tragic. Perhaps nothing conveys this better than his short story "Ligeia", and the poem within it, "The Conqueror Worm".

Written in 1838, "Ligeia" concerns a man narrating a story about a mysterious woman he had married who had died. Ligeia, whose last name was never known, was an oddly mystical and perceiving girl who captured the heart of the man. Her mind was powerful, and she seemed to know more than she related. But not long into their marriage, she composed a poem, and asked him to read it to her. The poem, "The Conqueror Worm", deals with much of Poe's views of life, namely, the futility of man's struggle with destiny, and the maddening cruelty with which God laughs at us all. At the end of it, she cries out, and dies.

Filled with sorrow, the man eventually marries again, and yet finds that he has forgotten much of, but cannot forget entirely, the enigmatic Ligeia. Soon, his second wife falls ill and dies. Overcome with grief despite his inability to love this one like Ligeia, the man seems to hallucinate her return to life. Whether hallucinatory or not, however, her corpse rises to life, and her face becomes that of Ligeia.

A terrifying story not to be read late at night, the narrative discusses two major points. The futility of man as described above, and the transcendence of grief into an immortal pain. He cannot forget Ligeia, despite the fact that he never truly knew her. Hinted at being an opium addict, the man questions his senses, failing to see what of his life was real and what was not. Has Ligeia truly come back to life, going beyond and being translated from a cold, wretched memory to a living nightmare of his own making? Or is it all his decaying mind, his subconscious refusal to forget his grief? Either way, it would seem that life is punishing him for his powerlessness to understand.

Out-out are the light-out all!  
And over each quivering form,  
The curtain, a funeral pall,  
Comes down with the rush of a storm,  
And the angels, all pallid and wan,  
Uprising, unveiling, affirm

That the play is the tragedy, "Man"  
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

#### IV.

"We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks in two, and you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a pool but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it..."

It would seem that, from all this talk of fate and destiny, human beings have a grim future set out for them. Whether Fortune is a fickle mistress or a cruel one, human beings seem destined for tragedy. It is observable that people often lead hard lives that have few, if any, rewards.

So, why do we live like we do? Why is there happiness and optimism in the world? The answer is that people have reasons to live. People have loved ones they care about. They have jobs they love. They love life, despite the fact that it can hardly be described as happy. Humans have proved that they can get along even with the bleakest of circumstances because they have faith that, even when things are bad, there are good moments to treasure. Humanity has not always been very grateful, but we are full of passion, and passions are meant to be shared. Contentedness exists even in the darkest of nights. Man finds happiness in his knowledge, and finds comfort in his trusting of that which is beyond him. C.S. Lewis wrote:

"One of the things that distinguishes man from the other animals is that he wants to know things, wants to find out what reality is like, simply for the sake of knowing. When that desire is completely quenched in anyone, I think he has become something less than human."

Whether a man is a Boethius or Poe, he is subject to the vicissitudes of reality. People suffer- they always have. But what makes a man so is that he is able to take the good with the bad, and not lose sight of what he loves. I am not discussing my personal views of either, but I do believe that Boethius was closer to the truth, at least as far as a human being can come to knowing any fundamental truth about the human race as a whole. Knowledge of our morality and wisdom is often what drives us to continue on. We are not always right, but trusting our judgment is part of moving forward in life. In the crushing, grinding gears of the universal motion, we are often seen as just specks caught in between. But we are more than we think we are, and our beings are worth more than can ever be imagined. In the grand scheme of things, we are intelligent and are alone capable of contemplating our own existence and mortality. Fortune's wheel may turn, but the truths of life do not change with her. We are who we are, no matter what happens.



## Works Cited

- Shakespeare, Williams. Julius Caesar.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 53.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 35.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 12 (Watts' Introduction)
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 58.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 58.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 85.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 90.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 91.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 91.
- Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy. Pg. 169.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Conqueror Worm". The Complete Tales and Poems of Poe. Pg. 261.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. "Ligeia". The Complete Works of Poe. Pg. 260.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Bells". The Complete Works of Poe. Pg. 80-81.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Conqueror Worm". The Complete Works of Poe. Pg. 261.
- Lewis, C.S. The Great Divorce. Preface. Pg. 5-6.
- Lewis, C.S. God in the Dock- "Man or Rabbit?". Pg. 108.

# Friend or Foe? Agency of the Female Character in American Theater: David Auburn's *Proof* and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*

>>> Yoshi White

With an ever present question of gender equality in America, and within the theatre community it has become imperative to question what helps and what harms this cause. The following essay examines two Pulitzer Prize winning plays, David Auburn's *Proof* (2001) and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (2009) and their construction of the leading female character. Armed with a definition of agency this essay dissects the behavior of the leading female roles in these works and whether or not they maintain their agency throughout the course of the play. Using the results of this exploration this essay then draws conclusions about whether or not the characters possessed individual agency, and how that affects the larger theatre community. Ending with a call to action for all playwrights, this essay challenges us to remain vigilant in our assessment of the roles we place women in and how it affects the larger goal of gender parity.

## Introduction

Throughout history, it has been the trend in most societies for women to take a subservient role to the men around them in every area of life: from the home to the professional world, theater being no exception. As Americans we have become accustomed to being on the cutting edge of progress, but even after women gained the right to vote in 1920, we have struggled to create the equality our nation is founded on. Fast forward to 2016 and, as women, we are more aware than ever of the societal expectations and obstacles that stand in the way of the parity women seek. Whether it is the wage gap that keeps us earning 80 cents to every man's dollar (Miller), or the complete lack of paid maternity leave mandated by the government (the only developed country to do this by the way) (U.S. Department of Labor), women feel the pressure to achieve equality. The statistics get even worse when you start narrowing down your view to smaller communities. There was not a single new play by a woman produced on Broadway in the 2013-14 season and only 24% of all plays produced across the country were by women (both living and dead) (Evans). The wage gap rears its ugly head here as well (\$25,00-\$39,999 from women playwrights compared to \$40,000-\$59,999 for men) (Crosby 571). Excuses for these discrepancies have ranged from complete denial of their existence to insistence that gender is irrelevant. The problem is, denying the problem is easy when it benefits those whom you typically find in charge: men.

The theater began as an all-boys club. Whether it was *Romeo and Juliet* or *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the characters were exclusively played by men, the plays written by men, the companies managed and produced by men. Colonial sentiments were alive and well centuries later as America modeled their literary and theatre communities by British standards. When American women were granted the right to vote, giving them more leeway in society—slight though it was—they ventured into the theater in search of their own professions. Helen Krich Chinoy extensively explores this birth of women onto the theater scene in her article entitled “Art Versus Business: The Role of Women in American Theatre.” According to Chinoy, “Acting, of course, has been the obvious career for women. If you were pretty but poor, or well-born but hard-up, with no useful skills but your feminine attractions to offer, the stage was always a way to earn a living” (Chinoy 4). Women have been relegated to being the “pretty face” in a production from the very beginning of their involvement, while the men on the stage carried the narrative and entertained the audience. Even Chinoy admits that as actresses they were either content to live “...outside the limits of good society. Or... they could fit themselves to the stereotypes acceptable to the popular audience—the innocent ingénue, the noble wife, the fallen woman” (Chinoy 5). Though countless women have come and gone since those early days, many of them changing the theater world for women as they went, we have a long way to go before we achieve equality. The theater has always been a method of communication that portrays the triumphs and struggles of characters as well as society. This makes the female character a good indication of where women stand in our time. Women are not destined to be relegated to these tropes, and in a study of the agency of female characters in award winning plays I have identified some of the pitfalls that will keep us there. Our female characters need to propel their own stories, not attach themselves to the male roles in order to step out of the past.

In the following pages I will explore two Pulitzer Prize winning plays that have leading female characters. I will demonstrate through the individual analysis of these plays some of the ways that we are still being subjugated by the characterizations of female characters, and how the lack of agency keeps us there. In addition, I have given an alternative example of the ability of a female character to contain all of the self-possession and initiative of her male co-stars without surrendering her femininity. As I conclude with the comparison of the two analyses we will recognize the traits that playwrights should be conscious of within our characters, and just what these portrayals mean for women in the American Theatre community and the agency of the female character.

### **What is agency?**

I thought it prudent to digress for a moment on a discussion of just what agency is before beginning my discussion of these two plays, and what does or does not constitute agency in the leading female characters. The study is rendered useless if I have entered it without a solid idea of what it is I am looking for, after all.

For the purposes of this paper, I am going to be examining the way these plays portray their leading ladies, and whether that is helpful or harmful to the ultimate goal of gender parity within the theatre community. I outlined this definition of agency as it applies to female characters. I took great care to consider what is feasible to portray within the length of a play. I also considered what would make sense for the author to incorporate within the story line, or to leave the audience to simply accept as part of the world that the playwright

has built. In her article “How Ought We to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? Report from the ARS,” Cheryl Geisler explains the conclusions that were made in a discussion at the Fall 2003 meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies. Discussions there were concerned with the “more productive investigation into the consciousness and conditions of agency” (Geisler 9). Citing a paper by Dilip Gaonkar, Geisler explains that the consensus of the gathered societies was that the question of agency itself had arisen from the critique for an “ideology of agency” viewing “the speaker as origin rather than articulation, strategy as intentional, discourse as constitutive of character and community” (Geisler 10). I developed the definition of what I was looking for in these female leads from here. Their behavior must surpass the tendency to fall back on an “ideology,” and instead graduate to the ability to identify the actions that keep them from lending themselves to the fight for equality.

I also felt compelled to consider what Geisler refers to as “fragmentation of agency,” when she discusses “the kind of agency being exercised when a rhetor uses a text such as a “to-do list” to get herself to do something” (Geisler 11). Did a character’s reliance on an outside reminder to act diminish the agency I was looking for? I think not; rather I believe it further affirms a character in this capacity. Not only did she choose to seek a reminder, signaling her desire to be present in that moment, but she then makes a second choice to act on the reminder. I am able to approach these plays with confidence because I have discounted this idea of “fragmented agency” and judged them by the same standard.

I defined agency as follows in order for my assessments to be clear: The ability of a character to act on their own in regards to their decisions, motivations or reactions, without the need for direction or impetus from an outside source, especially another member of the play, as well as their ability to take ownership and responsibility of their actions and defend them within reason.

### **Proof by David Auburn**

David Auburn’s play *Proof*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award in 2001, was regaled by critics as having catapulted the Julliard alumni into the history books right alongside Arthur Miller. As the play unfolds, we meet Catherine, a 25-year-old woman in the wake of her father’s death, her father Robert, Hal his former student, and her estranged sister Claire. The only characters that embody the definition of agency here are Hal and Robert, though they are arguably secondary to the women on the stage.

From the very moment the curtain comes up we are confronted with a woman obviously on edge. We are immediately led to question Catherine’s stability when she is frightened by the appearance of her father, whom we later discover is a ghost. We are presented with the first moment in which she does not grasp the agency available to her almost immediately; “ROBERT: Twenty-five. I can’t believe it. CATHERINE: Neither can I. Should we have it now?” (Auburn 6). It is established later in the scene that Catherine is aware that she is speaking to a ghost, and yet she still asks a question rather than deciding to drink on her own. She not only offers to share the champagne, but remains passive even with a ghost. In examining what Auburn’s probable motive for this character is at this point, with the revelation later in the scene that Robert is in fact dead at this point, he must want us to hone in on Catherine’s fears regarding her similarities to her father. This is evidenced further when it is revealed that her father, once a brilliant mathematician died in a state of dementia. Assuming that this is Auburn’s motivation for this character, I then had to ask myself why a charac-

ter must lack agency in order for the audience to understand their struggle? For all intents and purposes, the fact that he later reveals that Catherine is speaking with Robert's ghost should establish that without much doubt. We also see later in the opening scene, during her conversation with Hal that he blatantly condescends to her saying that she doesn't "have the math" (Auburn 17) to understand the notebooks of her fathers that he has been searching through. He gives her no credit for the months she has spent caring for him before his death or any of the training she may have had in school or from her father. Catherine makes no response other than "It's all junk." After this, Catherine hangs up her phone call to the police and cries even though Hal has blatantly broken her trust by attempting to take a notebook.

Auburn chose to have Catherine lack agency in some crucial emotional moments in the play, even though opening the play with Catherine talking to her dead father, who was also questioning her stability would have had us doing the same. She does not defend her mathematical ability, though she tries to prove it later in the play, and she doesn't follow through on her justified anger with Hal for breaking her trust. Auburn does not use Catherine's lack of agency as a device to demonstrate a change in her character. Instead, as her relationship with Hal develops, her agency deteriorates.

Catherine's older sister Claire arrives before the funeral and is immediately critical of her. She is presented as a person who is highly susceptible to what is trendy, throwing around words like "jojoba," and is intensely wrapped up in what her fiancée Mitch is doing. This isn't necessarily a recipe for a lack of agency, when you discover that he has been the one to set Catherine up with an apartment, and he is the person with the connections that can get them tickets, etc., it's hard to say whether Claire has agency here because we never meet him. When she is able to come into her little sister's life she begins to dictate how things are going to go. This could signal one of two things. Either she is generally this kind of take charge, in control individual, or after working fourteen hour days to support her father and sister she has given up that role in favor of the fiancée who is willing to make the tough decisions Claire is unwilling to make, like moving Catherine and selling their father's home. Considering that she does not safeguard her sister's work when Hal comes to retrieve it after their fight I am inclined to believe the latter. What would possess a sister to betray someone she admits is in a vulnerable place? Someone whom she believes to be unstable? The discretion of a man she doesn't know is hardly motivation in this case, though the reveal of the proof's existence in the first place is just another example of Catherine's lack of agency.

Scene 4 opens with the stereotypical morning-after awkwardness after Catherine sleeps with Hal the night of her father's funeral. They share some uncomfortable back and forth, the *Hal* is the one to admit what they are both feeling; that they would like to spend more time together. It is his reassurance that their attraction and desire are mutual that prompts her relief. Though he has yet to give her intelligence the same consideration, it also prompts her next action. Here the stage directions read "*They kiss. After a moment Catherine breaks off. She hesitates, making a decision,*" (Auburn 35) and then gives Hal the key to unlock the proof she has hidden in her father's desk. Many of the questions I asked myself here all led me back to Catherine's complete and utter lack of agency. Why is it only after their sexual encounter and his reassurance that it wasn't a one-night stand—rather than of his confidence in her intelligence—that she can share her work? The story that Catherine shares about Sophie Germaine, a capable female mathematician who publishes under a male name to gain respect, makes it difficult for us to share in Hal's doubt. We can see that she

needs Hal's intimacy and reassurance before she can show him something of value to her, and then does not even tell him what he is walking into when she does by examining this moment through the definition of agency. If she wanted to share her work with him, then why would she not have told him it was her work he would find, or gotten it herself? At this moment Catherine is presented as a flighty girl without the maturity to regulate her emotions after sex, or the discretion to share something of hers without some guise of mystery (that only results in more doubt). Auburn even uses the scene before this exchange for a flashback so that we understand that Catherine's attraction to Hal was long established. After Hal expresses his disbelief, and is backed up by Claire, Catherine then lacks the ability to even sufficiently defend herself. She instead sinks into a depressive state, sleeping for days while Claire arranges to completely upheave her life and move her to New York.

In the end, we meet with the defining moment that relegates Catherine to forever lack agency as a female lead character. Act 2 Scene 5 opens with an image of Catherine as a subdued character. She compliments the coffee that Claire has prepared and seems resigned to her fate as the loony little sister being shipped off to New York. She sits preparing to leave for New York when Hal enters the stage, even though both Hal and Claire have betrayed her multiple times. He admits to her that he believes her, "I have been over it, twice, with two different sets of guys, old geeks and young geeks. It is weird. I don't know where the techniques came from. Some of the moves are very hard to follow. But we can't find anything wrong with it! There might be something wrong with it but we can't find it. I have not slept. It works. I thought you might want to know" (Auburn 67). He presents this information as though it is a gift and not the insult to her work that it is, and yet she is defeated. She simply says that she is leaving. She seems resolved in this course of action, telling him to simply publish the work under her father's name or even his. She doesn't care. She becomes petulant after he tells her that he thinks that it really is her work, giving reasons not to believe her as though she is testing him. She even has a brilliant moment in which she firmly grasps agency: "HAL: Come on, Catherine. I'm trying to correct things. CATHERINE: You CAN'T. Do you hear me?" (Auburn 69). She succumbs to Hal's reassurance that while she may be like her father, she is not the same person instead of maintaining her resolve. The play ends with her completely stripping that moment of what agency she has by explaining her proof to him. She has been vindicated, has absolutely no reason to trust the man in front of her, and yet divulges her methods and reasoning to him. Why? Having been confirmed and supported as the author, why not publish herself and move on with her life? Why does she need Hal's approval or acceptance? It is in this moment that she clearly demonstrates to the audience that she lacks the ability to take ownership of herself and her actions without Hal's presence and support. She gives up her agency to the only remaining man in her life even with his support. Needless to say, it was an ending that left more than one question in my mind.

### ***Ruined* by Lynn Nottage**

In 2009 the Pulitzer Prize went to Lynn Nottage for her play *Ruined*. First produced in Chicago, and then at the Manhattan Theatre Club, it never made its way into Broadway proper, but is no less acclaimed for its brutally honest portrayal and the realities of a war-torn African country. We meet Mama Nadi, the owner and operator of a bar and brothel in the heart of a political conflict as the play opens. We meet Christian, her supplier of both women and goods, some of the girls she cares for, and the soldiers she caters to from opposing sides. Through it all

Mama maintains that her establishment is a neutral territory, she and her girls catering only to the dollar in a man's pocket. We can see a demonstration of agency in our leading female character through Mama and the girls that work for her even though her position within the story is one with less power than the men around her.

We are greeted with Christian enjoying a cold soda after a long drive to get there as the play opens, while Mama herself enjoys a cold beer with him. She insists on holding him accountable to her even as she smiles at him flirtatiously:

MAMA. And where the hell have you been?

CHRISTIAN. It was no easy task getting here.

MAMA. I've been expecting you for the last three weeks.

How am I supposed to do business? No soap, no cigarettes, no condoms. Not even a half liter of petrol for the generator (Nottage 5-6).

As with any playwright, Nottage must begin establishing her characters within the first moments of their presence on the stage. Mama is a woman running a business in rural Africa in the middle of a warzone, and could have been presented in a couple of ways. Nottage chose to write her first words as a challenge to a male character, someone who delivers her supplies, holding him responsible for the commitment that he made to her. This immediately ensures that we as the audience immediately perceive her strength and ability to act independently. Mama could have also been a woman who constantly capitulated to the people around her, only ever playing the role of subservient, constantly sacrificing her own standards in order to cater to those around her. Nottage chose to give Mama agency as a character when she refused to accept any kind of excuse from Christian. She sets the audience up with the expectation that she will be a woman who stands her ground and makes decisions based on her own perceptions, without pushes from other cast members. Even when Christian attempts to give Mama two girls, both Salima and Sophie instead of the one that she asks for, she refuses to be sold without honesty. It isn't until he is honest, saying that Sophie has been shamed because she was ruined by soldiers and he wants Mama to keep her safe that Mama begins to soften:

MAMA....(*Sophie shifts with discomfort. Her body aches, tears escape her eyes. Mama uses the cloth from her skirt to wipe Sophie's eyes.*) Did they hurt you badly?

SOPHIE. (*Whispered.*) ... Yes. MAMA. I bet they did.

(*Mama studies Sophie. Considers, and then decides.*)

(Nottage 12).

Again we are presented with a moment in which Mama could have gone against her better judgement and accepted Christian's offer, assuming it was generosity, or even simply agreeing to do him a favor after he reminds her of what he has done for her in the past. She doesn't. Mama holds true to the definition of agency and requires her own evaluation of the situation before she agrees to accept Christian's bribe of chocolate to take on Sophie as a ward. This interaction serves as a good example of agency because it clarifies that a character is capable of accepting outside influences that can change their actions, but that it is not done on anything but their own terms. Mama is also able to maintain her agency here in a moment when she shows kindness and a softening of emotion that enhances her femininity rather than needing to reject any emotion and make a strictly business decision.



Mama's business offers female companionship to the men who enter, and other than Sophie we meet Salima and Josephine. Through their interactions we can see that these women have all been "ruined" in some way, though Sophie is the one that carries the label after being raped with a bayonet. It is their stories that really demonstrates the ravages of war to the audience. Even after everything they have been through, these women are taking their lives into their own hands and making decisions that are best for them. After being brutally raped and kidnapped as soldiers killed her baby, Salima was then spurned and cursed by her family and her husband. Josephine, a chief's daughter, was sacrificed to soldiers by her father's second wife and then ignored by her village after being brutalized. Horrifying stories that have so obviously shaped who these women are could have stolen every ounce of agency that they possessed, and it would have made perfect sense within the space of the play. Instead Nottage allows them to hold fast through the end.

Josephine is antagonistic to the other women, but wholeheartedly embraces her role as a whore, spending extra time and energy on the wealthy businessman Mr. Harari. For her this is a calculated move because she is dependent on him keeping his promise to take her to the city someday. While she may be terrible to the women she shares a trade with she is calculated in that too. Josephine offers us another excellent clarification for our study of agency in female characters. The fact that these women maintain their agency and ownership of their decisions does not mean that they are automatically likable. At the beginning of Act 2 Nottage even gives Josephine a moment of genuine vulnerability while Mama and Sophie sing:

*(The drum beats a furious rhythm. Josephine answers with a dance, which begins playfully, seductively, then slowly becomes increasingly frenzied. She releases her anger, her pain...everything. The men cheer her on, a mob growing louder and more demanding. Josephine desperately grabs at the air as if trying to hold on to something. Her dance becomes uglier, more frantic. She abruptly stops, overwhelmed. Sophie goes to her aid.)* (Nottage 43)

She does not become more likeable for it, nor does she give up her agency to gain this release, though we understand Josephine's pain and her motivation for the nastiness that she displays toward Salima and Sophie.

Mama requires the soldier who enter to disarm their weapons and unload them, having chosen to create a neutral space inside her bar. It is this policy that creates a particular moment of tension for the audience when the leader of the government army, Osembenga comes into her establishment.

MAMA. *Monsieur*, I must ask you to leave your bullets at the bar, otherwise you don't come in.

OSEMBENGA. And if I choose not to. *(Mama holds the cold beer in her hand.)*

MAMA. Then you don't get served. I don't want any mischief in here. Is that clear? *(Osembenga is charmed by her tenacity. He laughs with the robust authority of a man in charge.)*

OSEMBENGA. Do you know who I am?



MAMA. I'm afraid you'll have to edify me. And then forgive me, if it makes absolutely no difference. Once you step through my door, then you're in my house. And I make the rules here. (*Osembenga laughs again.*) (Nottage 29)

Within this exchange, we see two times at which Osembenga attempts to intimidate Mama out of her request for the removal of their ammunition. First, Nottage leaves the inflection of a question off of his reply, wondering what would happen if he didn't do as he was asked. A woman in a war-torn country, addressing an officer would have more than enough reasons to back down from her policy. Mama does not. She remains calm, insists that he will not be served if he remains armed and keeps the beer he has requested in her hand. The second moment comes when he has given a hearty robust masculine laugh before asking if she knows who he is, yet Mama responds telling him that it doesn't really matter. Rather than bending to the will of the man before her, Mama stands her ground and hold true to her standards even though she has no real way to enforce them given the status of the man before her. This is another moment in which the audience would have been understanding had Mama needed to accommodate the officers, especially after hearing the stories of the women in her care, but Nottage resists this path. Mama has enough agency to judge whether or not this is a moment when she is able to stand her ground. Later in the play there are moments when she chooses to appease the men in some way, but it is never because she has not chosen that as the best course of action. She ultimately maintains culpability for everything that happens within her establishment.

At the end of the play Mama makes the decision to try and provide a better life for Sophie by entrusting her care, and the money from the sale of the diamond she has kept as an insurance policy, to Mr. Harari. He is in a rush to leave the area as the conflict is being waged in an ever increasing proximity to Mama's bar. Mr. Harari's ride arrives before Sophie is ready to leave, and rather than miss his chance of escape he takes the diamond and leaves without her. Mama is not even given enough time to react when Mama discovers this betrayal. Osembenga and Salima's husband Fortune burst in to raid the bar attempting to locate the leader of the rebel army. In a moment of desperation Salima comes out to end the chaos. In the first glimpse Fortune has of her she is covered in blood from a self-inflicted wound. Her last words, spoken from Fortune's arms, are a declaration: "You will not fight your battles on my body anymore" (Nottage 63). Salima refuses to give up her own agency, her own bodily autonomy, and takes her own life. Mr. Harari is not heard from again.

Mama and the girls are left to pick up the pieces of their lives and attempt to return to their normal routine in the wake of this devastation. The play ends with Christian coming into the bar in a new suit, prepared to ask Mama for the final time to marry him. Christian does not allow himself to be deterred by Mama's tough exterior and persists in challenging her until she allows him past her defenses and they kiss. Christian asks her again with a poem to be with him, and Nottage makes a choice here that allows Mama to develop as a character without losing her agency. "*(He holds his hand out to Mama. A long moment. Finally she takes his hand and he pulls her into his arms. They begin to dance. At first she's a bit stiff and resistant, but slowly gives in...)*" (Nottage 68). Mama does not immediately crumble to the man offering her some relief from the burden she has been carrying. She doesn't even tell him that she will marry him. Instead the two share a dance and we can see that there will be

more to come for all of the characters. Mama's immediate acceptance of Christian's advances would have seemed disingenuous in the face of the tragic events that the audience just witnessed. She could not have given up the fight for her agency and the safety of herself and her wards in favor of the protection that Christian offers. She is right to be skeptical after Harari's betrayal and Salima's suicide, and stays true to her character and her conviction in the end.

## Conclusion

*Proof* and *Ruined* are both plays with leading female characters that won the Pulitzer Prize, but they do not serve the theatre community, or the quest for gender parity within it, in the same way. Through this exploration of the agency of the female character I have demonstrated that the ability of a character to act on their own in regards to their decisions, motivations or reactions to other characters, without the need for direction or impetus from an outside source, specifically another member of the play, as well as their ability to take ownership and responsibility of their actions and defend them within reason is vital to the perception of women within the space of a production. Since historically, women were thought to be best suited to the role of actress, and are still struggling to break out of the confines of that expectation, the way female characters are written has an important role in this fight for equality.

In *Proof's* leading female, Catherine, we are immediately confronted with a woman who lacks the vital characteristic of agency, while in *Ruined*, Mama presents her opposite as a personification of the definition we have outlined. From the beginning of these two plays both David Auburn and Lynn Nottage have sculpted their protagonists to be soldiers in the ever present battle for equality that exists within the theatre community. For Catherine, a woman who needs the push of the characters around her in order to make decisions, uniform of the foe has been donned. Mama, a woman who stands in the face of the opposition around her and maintains her standards regardless of the obstacles she faces, the friendly forces find their champion. With equality for women far from being achieved anywhere, the theatre being no exception, these women become the warnings and aspirations for playwrights to heed and seek as they approach the task of writing their leading ladies.

Catherine is constantly looking to the male characters in order for her to make decisions. This is true when she asks the ghost of her dead father whether she should open the champagne, as well as when she doesn't tell Hal that she is showing him her notebook after he reassures her that he doesn't want their sexual encounter to be a one-night stand, or when she succumbs to his profession of allegiance after he has gone over her proof and is convinced that it is her work. Though we have taken into account that Auburn wanted us to question Catherine's sanity given her father's condition, these instances are not explained by that desire. Catherine acknowledges that she is talking to a ghost so why would she feel the need to ask if they should open the champagne? The question of her sanity is already raised in the fact that she is conversing with her dead father. In the instance of her reveal of the notebook, what purpose did withholding the information about her authorship serve? We might even argue that it would have been easier to question her sanity in the situation had she been eager to claim it as her own and been accused of lying. Yet this still doesn't explain to us why she didn't reveal her work to Hal on one of the many other occasions he had been there searching through her father's notebooks, and instead only made the decision after he wants to continue their relationship. The audience's ability to question her sanity would not have been impeded if she had been assertive in her ownership, especially if it had been in

a moment that didn't immediately follow physical intimacy. Here it feels as though Auburn has played with the typical female trope of emotional attachment following sex. To have Hal then come back to her and claim that he believes her only after he has been through her work with a bunch of other men, is simply insulting. It may be easy here to assume that we are inserting the gender question where it doesn't necessarily belong, but Auburn himself posed the gender question. When Catherine tells Hal the story of Sophie Germaine, a female mathematician who had to hide her identity in order to be respected in the math community, we are given a glimpse into a possible motivation for her to keep her work to herself, at least until she chooses to share it, and then to explain it even after he has betrayed her trust on multiple occasions. We could have continued to question Catherine's sanity in any of these situations without Auburn completely robbing her of her own agency.

Nottage on the other hand introduces Mama in a moment when she is holding the man that she holds a flirtatious friendship with, Christian, accountable for being late for a delivery of product. As we become acquainted with the world that Mama inhabits, we can see that it would arguably be easier if she were to allow the whims of her customers to dictate her actions, but instead Mama is a character that holds her standards high and requires adherence from her patrons. Christian is not given leeway because he is her friend, especially when he tries to get her to take Sophie on as a ward. It would have played well into the trope of the emotional female to accept her when Christian reveals that it is his niece and he promised to find a place she would be safe, but she doesn't give in and instead establishes her own reasons for allowing the girl to stay. Even when Mama is challenged by men with a considerable amount of power in their world, she will not bend her rules. The leader of the government army even bends to her will and disarms in her bar in order to be served. When he attempts to push back against her determination, Nottage again has an opportunity to remove some of Mama's agency in a way that the audience would have been understanding of, but instead she allows Mama's character to assess the situation as one that she can safely stand her ground. Later, after she has been betrayed by Harari, and Osembenga and his men have raided her establishment, Christian returns with a final proposal for her, hoping that she will agree to settle down with him. It is not until Christian matches Mama's agency with a determination of his own that she takes his hand and they share a dance. Here we see that Mama responds to Christian's proposal within reason, but does not give up her agency and fall blindly into his arms dependent on his protection and support. She stays true to herself and allows the growth that comes after times of hardship.

We have seen in these two plays many examples of why playwrights should be especially conscious of the ways their female characters interact in the space of their plays. Whether the character is dealing with a female or male character, though especially when she is dealing with a male, it is vitally important to maintain the character's individual agency if we are to create an environment within the theatre community in which women are considered equally as capable as men, not just as actors, but as directors, playwrights, managers, dramaturgs and any other role. If we do not exercise a conscious effort to maintain the agency of the female character while we achieve our narrative vision as playwrights, then we are relegating ourselves and our plays to being enemies of the quest for gender parity in the theatre and in the world. As we work we must ask ourselves: To the female character, to the goal of gender equality, are we friend or foe?

**Works Cited**

- Auburn, David. *Proof*. Dramatists Play Service INC. 2001.
- Chinoy, Helen Krich. "Art versus Business: The Role of Women in American Theatre." *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 24, Issue 2, 1980. p. 3-10
- Crosby, Julie. "It's All About You: The March Toward Parity in the American Theatre." *Theatre Journal*, Volume 62, Issue 4, 2010. p. 571-574
- Evans, Suzy. "Women Push For Equality On and Off Stage." *American Theatre*. Theatre Communications Group, 17 September, 2014. Web. 22 November, 2016.
- Geisler, Cheryl. "How Ought We to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? Report from the ARS." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. Vol. 34, Issue 3, 2004. p. 9-17
- Miller, Kevin. "The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap (Fall 2016)." *AAUW*. The American Association of University Women. Fall 2016. Web. 1 December, 2016.
- Nottage, Lynn. *Ruined*. Dramatists Play Service INC. 2010.
- U.S. Department of Labor. "Paid Leave." *Department of Labor*. U.S. Department of Labor. Web. 1 December, 2016.

# And tho' we've no Voice: The Political Effects of Women's Writings and Publications in the American Revolution

>>> Emma van Hasselt

## I. Introduction

The American Revolution has gone down in history as a movement by the people for the people, in which the ordinary man could be part of establishing a fair and equal government. The role of women in the peoples' movements, however, has been woefully overlooked. Yet, since the beginning of settlement in the British colonies, the role of women as mothers, sisters, and wives had begun to shift. Women were now frequently acting as leaders of the home if their husband was absent, what Carol Berkin calls a "deputy or surrogate husband."<sup>1</sup> With the rising tensions between the colonies and Britain, this new role allowed women to exert some amount of power outside of the home. Later, during the war, women interacted with their friends and family members about military and political developments. Their interest and participation did not go unnoticed- many observed how active women suddenly were not only in discussing but also in supporting current politics.

Beginning with the end of the French and Indian war, when Britain had passed a series of taxes against the colonies, women, acting as homemakers and hostesses who were large consumers of tea, came together and threw their support behind the boycott on British goods. Through their correspondence and the operation of printing businesses, women and their writings played a valuable and integral part in the development and success of the boycott of British goods. These activities through the press had an effect on the political climate, not only spreading revolutionary ideology but also opening up a new political world for women.

## II. Farewell the Tea Board: The Boycott of British Goods

Making up a significant portion of consumers, middle- to upper-class colonial women formed a large part of the boycott effort after the passage of the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts, both British attempts to raise revenue and maintain British loyalty in the colonies. From Boston to North Carolina women were organizing and signing agreements to oppose the purchase of British goods, especially tea, and they urged their fellow colonists to do the same. Their support of the boycott added political power to the colonies, and across the colonies women realized how important the boycotts were for the colonists. They treated the boycotts as seriously as any other patriot treated a political movement against perceived tyranny.

On January 31, 1770, over 300 women signed an agreement against drinking tea until the Revenue Acts, the first of the Townshend acts that placed duties on goods imported to the colonies, was repealed. A copy of the agreement was published in the February 12<sup>th</sup> Boston Evening Post and in the February 15th editions of the Boston Weekly News-letter and the Massachusetts Gazette; "At a time when our invaluable rights and privileges are attacked in an constituted and most alarming manner, and as we find we are reproached for not being so ready as could be desired...we join with the very respectable body of merchants and other inhabitants of this town...totally to abstain from the use of tea."<sup>2</sup> This agreement not only legitimized the merchants' boycott, but it also allowed the 300 women who signed it to play a part in the political process. It was a decision the women seemed to have made without the influence of their husbands, for they write, "This Agreement we cheerfully come into, as we believe the very distressed situation of our country requires it; and we do hereby oblige ourselves religiously to observe it, till the late Revenue Acts are repealed."<sup>3</sup> Without any political representation, colonial women mobilized and used what power they did have to support the boycott, doing so in groups not unlike the political groups colonial men would establish.

These efforts helped support the boycotts, and their influence spread throughout most of the British colonies. Americans thought up ways to replace British goods, spinning their own cloth and drinking other drinks than tea. In a letter to a friend named Patience dated from 1775, D. Champion writes of being offered "hyperion," a tea made of raspberry leaves.<sup>4</sup> Women's roles, in these boycotts, especially the success of the textile boycott due to American women making homespun clothes, did not go unremarked. In a July 1776 edition of the Connecticut Gazette, a notice informs the public of a wedding in which the bride's family all wore clothes made from homespun cloth. The notice goes on to say, "What may serve to encourage the manufacturers of this country, is, that the entertainment, though served up with good wine, and other spirituous liquors, was the production of their fields and fruit gardens... The bride and two of her sisters appeared in very genteel-like gowns... entirely of their own manufacture."<sup>5</sup>

Men took note of their wives' sudden political interest, and soldiers even commented on it. In a letter to John Adams from July 1780, Benjamin Rush wrote, "The women of America have at last become principles in the glorious American controversy."<sup>6</sup> Even the British noted their importance- in a letter to his friend from May 1781, a British officer wrote "Even in their dresses the females seem to bid us defiance; the gay toys which are imported here they despised they wear their own homespun manufactures... An officer told Cornwallis not long ago, that he believed if he had destroyed all the men in North America, we should have enough to do to conquer the women."<sup>7</sup> Galvanized by the boycott, women were such an instrumental part of it that even the British took note. This opportunity for women to enter and actively participate in a political system would go on to have a long-reaching impact that lasts to this day.

### III. You Inquire for Intelligence: Correspondence

Women did not regulate themselves to using the press to further the boycotts, however. They also used their writings and use of the press to interact with the political and military aspects of the war, both publically and privately. They shared their observations, troop movements, and the shifting allegiances of the war with friends and family throughout

the colonies and in Europe. While some of this might have been connected to the frequency of women's husbands serving in the Continental or British armies, the extent to which women discussed political and military movements suggests there was a personal interest as well. Abigail Adams provides perhaps one of the better known examples of political correspondence, but women from all over the colonies frequently used private letters to discuss the ongoing revolution.

A close friend of Abigail and John Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, another well-known woman from New England, authored many well-known political satires. The position of her husband James Warren, who was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, allowed her the freedom to voice her political beliefs. In February 1774, in a letter to Abigail Adams, Warren enclosed her work *Poem on the Boston Tea Party*.

However, Abigail was only one of Warren's correspondents. During the war Warren maintained contact with her husband, an officer in the continental army, as well as Abigail's husband John Adams. In her letters to James, Warren gives her opinion on troop movements and political goings-on. In the letters between Warren and John Adams, the same topics are discussed- as well as discussions on the nature of government and politics. In one such letter, dated March 10, 1776, Warren wrote to give Adams an answer to a question he had asked her that January on the form of government preferred by the people. Warren replied, "I have long been an admirer of a republican government, and was convinced, even before I saw the advantaged delineated in so clear and concise a manner by your pen;- that if established in the genuine principles of equal liberty,- it was a *form* productive of many excellent qualities, and heroic virtue on human nature- which often lie formant for want of opportunities for exertion."<sup>8</sup> In a time when it was not common for a woman to be corresponding with anyone other than a female friend or a family member, Warren engaged in discussions and debates on political philosophy with the self-confidence of one who believes in her political legitimacy.

In the May of 1775, with tensions rising between the British and the Colonists, Warren wrote to Abigail Adams, "I lament with you the infatuation of Britain, the Commotions of America and the Dangers to Which the Best of men and the truest Friends to Virtue, Liberty and the British Constitution are Exposed. And though I feel A painful Concern for their safty I acknowledge I feel some kind of pride in being so Closely Connected with persons who dare to act so Noble a part."<sup>9</sup> Here Warren again asserts her own political views, disclosing them to a friend who she knew was as deeply involved in politics as she was. What was highly indicative about the letters between Adams and Warren, however, was the pseudonyms they used for themselves and their friends. Warren adopted the name Marcia, while Adams used the name Portia. These were more than codenames or a joke between friends- Warren and Adams, by adopting the names of women from the Roman Republic, were purposefully aligning themselves with republican ideals. Not only were women discussing and debating politics through their writings, but they were also identifying themselves as firm republicans.

Women also used this new space in the political sphere to make sure that, in a time when they were not able to vote, their political opinions were still heard. A well-known example of this is Abigail Adams' letter to her husband, in which she requests: "by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands."<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Wheatley, the



famous American poet, also utilized her writing to appeal to George Washington. Wheatley sent Washington a letter with an enclosed poem. While the poem, encouraging Washington to seize Boston from the British, seems to praise the general's military skill, the poem should also be read as a challenge.<sup>11</sup> Wheatley, a Boston refugee, used her writing and correspondence, to encourage a man with a great amount of political and martial power to follow through on issues that personally affected her- such as asking for Washington to liberate Boston from the British forces and allow refugees like Wheatley to return home. However, Wheatley was a unique case within the world of womens' writings. She was sold into slavery and taught to read and write by her owner before she was freed. Most women who were able to write to each other or their local newspapers were educated white women, and their political views reflected that. While letters were a useful system for corresponding with friends, family, and acquaintances, they did not, however, have the far-reaching effects of the press.

#### IV. For the Publick Good: The Press

During the American Revolution, the importance of the press is not to be overlooked: local newspapers advertised meetings of patriots, reported news from other colonies, and published pro-independence essays. Women also began to take advantage of the evolving news culture during this time, though they commonly did so anonymously. This began as early as 1768, when a poem entitled *The Female Patriots* was anonymously published as a protest against the American Revenue act. The author of the poem explicitly calls out the lack of political voice, writing "Let the Daughters of Liberty, nobly arise, / And tho' we've no Voice, but a negative here. / The use of the Taxables, let us forebear..."<sup>12</sup> This poem was one of the first printed references to the Daughters of Liberty, a group that helped organize women to boycott British textiles and tea, even arranging spinning bees among women to produce American textiles that could be used instead of imported British textiles. After their published acknowledgement of a group of politically-minded women, more and more groups like the Daughters of Liberty began to emerge. One of these groups numbered fifty-one women from Edenton, South Carolina, who signed a public declaration in which promised they would act in the public good. The Edenton Resolves, as they were called, were circulated widely throughout 1774 and 1775.<sup>13</sup> These fifty-one women recognized the importance of the press in disseminating information, and they used it to publicly align themselves with a political belief.

The published calls to action weren't just by or for groups of women- individual women also used their newfound power of the press to support the revolutionary cause. Mercy Otis Warren published a series of satirical plays about loyalist officials such as Governor Thomas Hutchinson and Attorney General Jonathan Sewell.<sup>14</sup> This continued until well after the beginning of the fighting between the British and Colonial forces, and these later calls to action were not openly about the boycott of British goods. Women would write to their local newspaper, calling upon women to let their husbands fight in the colonial army. One such letter, from Anne Terrel and was in the September 21<sup>st</sup> 1776 edition of the *Virginia Gazette*: "I am not only willing to bear the absence of my dear husband for a short time, but I am almost ready to start up with sword in hand to fight by his side in so glorious a cause. But let us support ourselves under the absence of our husbands as well we can, and as we



are not well able to help them fight, let us pay our attentions to another branch of American politics, which comes more immediately under our province, namely, in frugality and industry..."<sup>15</sup> Terrel understood her call for women to let their husbands fight and to help the war effort through "frugality and industry," as a part of American politics, an early example of the popular phrase "the personal is political." Throughout the war, women and their writing proved that they were just as much a part of the struggle as the men of the country, and that even from the home they could have just as much impact.

## V. Conclusion

Before and during the American Revolution, women played an important part in the fight against the British- from helping organize and participating in the boycott against British goods to debating political theory in their letters and the press. Through their use of the press, their published writings, and private correspondence, women not only came to be an important part in the struggle against Great Britain, but also to establish their own political legitimacy.

In the current political climate, with political protests of all kinds happening across the world, it is even more important to remember the beginnings of the press as a political tool. Women's writings, both published and private, allowed them to enter and interact with a new political sphere. This political sphere remained, in some part, throughout the history of the United States. In today's world it has morphed- fewer women engage in correspondence through email or snail mail, but the amount of online feminist bloggers and news sites, such as Jessica Valenti and Vox.com, has exploded, and they frequently participate in online protests and boycotts.

Going forward, these findings will add a depth to any further research on the Revolutionary War. Of course, they mainly focus on the writing by white women, save for Phyllis Wheatley, meaning that any activity by Indian or Black women, the lack thereof caused by the high illiteracy rates of those groups, wasn't taken into account. By taking into account the importance of women and their writings during the war, a new meaning to the words "by the people, for the people" emerges.

## Primary Sources

"Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March 1776." *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Last modified October 5, 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0241>.

Berkin, Carol and Horowitz, Leslie. *Women's Voices, Women's Lives: Documents in Early America History*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998.

*Boston Gazette*. Boston, MA. February 1770.

"Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, 15 May 1775." *Founders Online*, National Archives. Last modified October 5, 2016. <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0134>.

*Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*. Ed. Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.

Moore, Frank. *The Diary of the American Revolution 1775-1781* Ed. John Anthony Scott. New York: Washington Square Press.

*The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*. Ed. Julian D. Mason, Jr. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966.

"To the Ladies whose husbands are in the continental army." *Virginia Gazette*. Williamsburg, VA, September 21, 1776.

*Women's Letters: America from the Revolutionary War to the Present*. Ed. Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler. New York: The Dial Press, 2005.

### Works Cited

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

### Works Consulted

Hicks, Philip. "Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770-1800." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 62, no. 2 (2005): 265-94. doi:10.2307/3491602.

### Endnotes

- 1 Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 11.
- 2 *Boston Gazette* (Boston, MA), February 1770.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Women's Letters: America from the Revolutionary War to the Present*, ed. Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler (New York: The Dial Press, 2005), 27.
- 5 Frank Moore, *The Diary of the American Revolution 1775-1781*, ed. John Anthony Scott (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), 129.
- 6 *Women's Voices, Women's Lives: Documents in Early American History*, ed. Carol Berkin and Leslie Horowitz (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 183.
- 7 *Diary of the American Revolution*, 506.
- 8 *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 69.
- 9 "Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, 15 May 1775," Founders Online, National Archives, last modified October 5, 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0134>.
- 10 "Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified October 5, 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0241>
- 11 *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, ed. Julian D. Mason, Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 166.
- 12 *Women's Voices, Women's Lives*, 177.
- 13 Ibid, 180.
- 14 *Revolutionary Mothers*, 16.
- 15 "To the Ladies whose husbands are in the continental army," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, VA), September 21, 1776.

# The Life of the One and Only Frida Kahlo

>>> Vinnie Galizio

There are people who complain about their life every day. It may be something extravagant or something minor, but it is negative nonetheless. They allow their others throughout the day to overpower them. (The other or others being the individuals or things distinct from or different from them.) However, they do not know real torment and sorrow like Frida Kahlo. She lived a challenging and grim life. She had many others she had to overcome and live with. As a result, she was a rather original and unique person. She had a persona that signified power and strength. On the other hand, she had a depressed and darker side to her individuality. Frida Kahlo's life was solely her own, but it was her others who made her life what it was. The success and life of Frida Kahlo was shaped and molded by her others she encountered from childhood to death.

Frida lived an intriguing childhood and this is what molded her into the person she was. She was born in Mexico on July 6, 1907, and named Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderon (Souter 11). As a child, her father was her other. He was the first man in her life, and he pushed her to be great and be a woman who knew her place in the world. In addition, he was the one who introduced her to art via photography. When she was 15, she enrolled into a free National Preparatory School in San Ildefonso (Souter 11). This allowed her to receive an above average education for the time. To one, it may appear Frida's life was fine and she was spoiled; however, it was not perfect at all. "At age 13, Frida had been felled by a bout of polio that withered her right leg leaving it shorter than her left. Neighborhood children taunted her with shouts of, 'pata de palo' or 'peg leg'" (Souter 12). These others bullied her and are what helped shape and mold the Frida Kahlo known today. It was the start of all the others she would experience throughout her life. The act of bullying did not cause her to become weak. Instead, it inspired her to stand up and be courageous by creating herself as art. Frida's childhood had its ups and downs, but her childhood experiences created the aura she let off in her future.

Frida Kahlo went through a tragic accident at the age of 18, and this helped her realize who she wanted to be. It was absolutely horrendous what happened to her and her body. She was riding a bus one day and it was crushed into a street corner by a streetcar. Talking about the accident Frida said, "It was a strange crash, not violent, but dull and slow, and it injured everyone, me much more seriously..." (Kahlo 21). The accident most definitely affected Frida in a more serious manner. However, it did not break her spirit. She continued to live her life with her art and accepted what happened anatomically after the accident. To have a better understanding of all her injuries, here is a written report of her clinical history prior to the accident.

"Accident causes fractures of third and fourth lumbar vertebrae, three fractures of pelvis (11) fractures of the right foot, dislocation of the left elbow, penetrating abdominal wound caused by an iron hand rail entering

the left hip, exiting through the vagina and tearing left lip. Acute peritonitis. Cystitis with catheterization for many days. Three months bed rest in hospital. Spinal fracture not recognized by doctors until Dr. Ortiz Tirado ordered immobilization with plaster corset for nine months... From then on has had sensation of constant fatigue and at times pain in her backbone and right leg, which now never leaves her" (Tibol 13).

Imagine having to live with all those others. Even after she was released from the hospital, she still had many medical complications. She spent many days in a cast and in the company of doctors. Many people would rather die than live with all the pain and agony. However, Kahlo believed she still had something to live for. She knew she was meant to be a painter. After being stuck in the hospital for months, it is hard to believe Frida was ready to begin her career as an artist. At first, she was planning on earning a career in medicine. Unfortunately, she had too many physical limitations that would not allow her to be successful in that field. The main result of her accident was that she finally realized she was destined to be a painter. In fact, it is safe to say that this curse was a blessing to Frida. She became a successful and highly praised artist during this time despite her others. Frida Kahlo had to deal with pain for most of her life, but one can see that the pain is what resulted in her brilliant works of art.

Although Frida had many others in her time, Diego was the greatest other of her life. Diego was an atheist, Communist, divorced twice, 20 years older than Frida, and a famous painter with money (Souter 35). In addition, he had much respect from the government. It is comical to think about how Diego and Frida actually met due to the fact they both were known to embellish stories and make them more extravagant than they actually were. Yet, this man was the first to fight for her as a lover after her accident. Frida's parents tried to convince him otherwise; however, the famous and talented painter would not listen. After he made up his mind and Frida obviously made hers, they were wed on August 21, 1929 (Souter 39). Frida was now officially Diego's. She was an excellent wife to him even though he was a pig and a poor suitor for her. Due to this, Frida began painting much less. She was too busy caring for Diego and doing what she was brought up to be: a good wife. Frida had an outstanding impact on Diego's painting style, but Diego had a harmful impact on Frida's life. He was having an affair with one of his female assistants, and Frida found this out shortly after having a miscarriage (Souter 43). This is now the second horrible other to occur in her life. First, she had her bus accident and then her own husband and lover deceived her while she was pregnant. As their relationship continued, Diego continued his cheating ways and Frida became more ill and physically frail. One can see how this can be much to handle for anyone. The heartbreak of both of these events could be enough for anyone to give up on life, but not Frida Kahlo. After the divorce, she still lived her life and painted magnificent works of art for many. However, one of her most significant works of art is *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Diego, Me, and Senor Xolotl* (1949). The central focus of this artwork is Diego, being held in Frida's arms. She is acting as his nurturer and caregiver, which traces back to Lacan's theories in "The Mirror Stage" (Lacan). Lacan says that a child will only recognize his or her other once in front of a mirror alone. Since they see only themselves, they will wonder where their other is. In reality, they will wonder where their mother is (Lacan). The mother is a young child's first other, and Frida believes that she is Diego's other in his life. With her painting, she is saying that Diego cannot live without her. In addition, she expresses how much she cares for him and wants to be his unconditional lover.

Diego is her inspiration and ultimate goal in life. She misses her “son” and her soul mate, which is why this is the most brilliant painting ever. There are so many intricate brush strokes and designs in the work. Its awe and magnificence is further demonstrated by its strong personal meaning to the artist. One can only imagine how much time and effort Frida put into this work to make it perfect. After all, it was for the love of her life. Sadly, no matter what Frida did, she could not gain back her most significant other. Diego may have been Frida’s most noteworthy and negative other, but he is the reason she was able to create some many breathtaking paintings.

After all the pain and catastrophe Frida went through, all she could turn to and rely on was her art. She used her artwork as an outlet for all of her grief and sorrows. In many of her paintings, one can see the hurt and distress she feels within her. There are many gruesome and grotesque paintings throughout her diary, which have their own story and meaning. It is unbelievable that she was able to do all of those amazing works of art. She used her paintings to support herself and only herself. She said she would not take money from a man for the rest of her life after her divorce with Diego (Souter 125). It goes to show the incredible impact Diego had on her life. In addition, it cannot be easy to support oneself financially by only making an income off of paintings and portraits. Frida was living a life truly on her own and for herself. A piece of artwork that shows how hard she had to work on them was *Self-Portrait With Thorny Necklace*.

“Her Self-Portrait With Thorny Necklace mirrors this period. A dead hummingbird – when portrayed alive it is a symbol worn to bring luck – dangles from a thorny necklace that spreads down across her shoulders as naked vines cover a trellis. The necklace pierces her neck with thorns, drawing blood in a Christ-like martyr’s pose. She wears blameless white before a tangle of exquisitely veined jungle leaves. One of her monkeys, Caimito de Guayabal, thoughtfully examines the necklace while a black cat crouching behind her left shoulder takes the measure of the viewer. Frida herself seems exhausted in her self-mortification. Her exaggerated eyebrows above drooping eyelids match the arc of the hummingbird’s dead wings” (Souter 131).

Imagine attempting to paint something so intricate and catching to the eye. In addition, adding the attention to detail and hidden meanings within. These details were the result and combination off all her others. This truly could not have been an easy feat for any artist; however, she knew how to create the most elegant art pleasing to the eye. Frida Kahlo was a true artist and found her time well spent with her artwork.

Frida Kahlo was an astounding artist, but she must express thanks to her others for allowing her to be inspired and driven to create such brilliant works of art. Her childhood was the other that allowed her to deal with pain and suffering. She used this to express it in her artwork. This is the reason she is so famous today. Although her accident was awfully tragic, it was her first experience with a bigger other than herself, which is what drove her to be a painter. Diego Rivera was Frida’s blessing in disguise. He was a horrible husband to her, but he is the reason she was able to create such breathtaking forms of art. Her paintings reflected her life and her sorrows, but also showed her abilities to cope with pain, suffering, losses, and deformities. Frida Kahlo is not only one of the best painters the world has ever seen, but also one of the strongest women the world was lucky enough to have known.

**Works Cited**

- Kahlo, F. (1995). *Letters of Frida Kahlo*. (Martha Zamora, Trans.). San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
- Kahlo, F. (1995). *The diary of Frida Kahlo: An intimate self-portrait*. (Barbara C. de Toledo & R. Pohlenz, Trans.). New York, NY: Abrams.
- Lacan, J. (2006). The mirror stage as formative of the *I* function as revealed in psychoanalytic experience. *Ecrits: The first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Trans., pp.75-81). New York, NY: W.W. Norton. (Original work published 1949)
- Souter, G. (2011). *Frida Kahlo: Beneath the mirror*. New York, NY: Parkstone International. *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost)*.
- Tibol, R. (1993). *Frida Kahlo: An open life*. (Elinor Randall, Trans.). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

# Beyond The Exhibition: Curatorial Intentions of Three Columbus-Area Museums

>>> Catherine Gallagher

While many people go to art exhibitions to view the installed artwork, it requires a deeper understanding of the show's curatorial choices to fully interpret the artwork itself. Museums and galleries bring in millions of visitors each year, which allows the public audience to interact with museum-gallery staff and develop their personal beliefs regarding art. Usually, an exhibition has an accompanying pamphlet or textbook written by a curator for that specific show. This writing describes the style of art on display and presents an intellectual analysis that the common visitor may not have made themselves. Therefore, it is important to not only consider the physical installations of pieces in an environment, but to consider that specific institution's purpose, mission, and targeted audience, including how these challenges are met. This essay is a comparative critique of three current shows in the greater Columbus area: *On Being Gandhi: The Art and Politics of Seeing*, Frank Museum of Art; *Cuba Forever Revisited*, Pizzuti Collection; and *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957*, Wexner Center.

At Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, the Frank Museum of Art has continually strived to make connections between its exhibitions and the university's Integrative Studies (INST) Program. According to the Otterbein University website, "The [INST] Program, begun in 1969, is at the heart of Otterbein's commitment to liberal learning and is the largest component of general education at the University. It (...) is committed to the premise that one's learning should serve and shape one's chosen responsibilities in and to the world."<sup>1</sup> This approach enables the twenty-first century student to make interdisciplinary connections outside of their major, which aids them in assimilating to the 'real world' after graduation. The goal for each exhibition at Otterbein should reflect at least one of the five core learning goals of the INST program.

Otterbein itself has a strong mission statement that supports this attitude. On the university's *About Otterbein University* webpage, it describes, "Our mission is to prepare graduates to think deeply and broadly, to engage locally and globally, and to advance their professions and communities (...) [through] the intentional blending of the liberal arts."<sup>2</sup> With its close ties to Westerville schools and city programs, Otterbein offers a unique, hands-on education that one may not find as deeply satisfying at a larger university, such as The Ohio State University. The main audience for the Frank Museum are students, staff/faculty of Otterbein, and members of the surrounding community.

Over time, the university has opened three art galleries, two of which are located on campus, the Miller Gallery in the Arts and Communications Building and the Fisher Gallery in Roush Hall. As well as being two blocks walking-distance from campus, the Frank Museum has an interesting history. Before it was converted into a museum, it was an Evan-

gelical church that was converted into Lillian Frank's home, an Otterbein professor. When she passed away, the space was converted to house artwork brought back from student-missionaries in the 1900s. The main source of funding for the museum is the Friends of the Frank Museum of Art Fund, which helps maintain the general up-keep of the building and its expanding art collection. Due to its previous use as a religious site, the museum is on the smaller side. This affects the number of employees—only two people, one of whom is part-time—because larger institutions have multiple departments where the workload is distributed evenly. In the Frank Museum's case, handling general administrative work and art installations may increase employee stress.

However, the number of employees does not stop the museum from curating powerful exhibitions, such as *On Being Gandhi: The Art and Politics of Seeing*. The theme of this exhibition, installed on the first floor of the Frank Museum, was to promote the long-lasting positive influences of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on the Indian community, even though he has been dead for more than half a century. The show features photographer Cop Shiva (Shivaraju B.S.), who documents a man that dresses up as Gandhi, complete with silver body paint, and travels from city to city. In his artist statement, Shiva writes, "With my documentation of his performance, I attempt to bring [Bagadehalli Basavaraj's] questions and issues of sustained Gandhism to a wider audience and also to present it in a contemporary global context."<sup>3</sup> This fits well with Otterbein's mission statement to provide students with engaging exhibitions that develop critical thinking skills about their roles in the world. Cop Shiva photographs Basavaraj's typical day, from getting dressed in a robe and spraying himself with paint, to sitting at the loom, teaching children, and standing motionless on top of a mountain. The images also highlight the public's mystified attraction to him—whether they want to look or not, children to elders find themselves drawn to his representation of Gandhi and the life he leads. These works are installed on the museum walls and on monoliths, so the viewer can walk around the pieces and fully interpret them. Also, there are seven placards throughout the exhibition with Indian phrases that relate to pieces in the show and explain parts of Indian culture.

The major strengths of the show were the amount of works available to view in a small space and the curator's intention to expose Gandhi's philosophies in a contemporary context. Without the use of the placards mentioned above, the overall theme of this show would have been lost in the compelling subjects of the photos. Also, the idea of presenting this show—especially during political unrest in the U.S.—reminds us that we should always look on the bright side of things, as Gandhi did, so as not to get sucked into the negativity that is often around us.

The Pizzuti Collection, located in downtown Columbus, also has a wide collection of contemporary art. As stated on the Pizzuti Collection's website, "The Pizzuti Collection is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization presenting temporary exhibitions of contemporary art from the collection of Ron and Ann Pizzuti. What started as a personal passion for the art itself has grown into a lifetime commitment of the Pizzuti's to bring world-class art and artists to Columbus."<sup>4</sup> This demonstrates the Pizzuti family's desire to share their art with those who may not have access to it otherwise. Size-wise, the Pizzuti Collection is in an historical building in the Short North, a hot area of Columbus arts and entertainment, and is divided into three galleries. There are several employees, such as the Interim Curator and Registrar, which creates a balanced work environment. Also, there are multiple funding sources for the Pizzuti



Collection, including grants from the Greater Columbus Arts Council and the city of Columbus, and membership donations from the Salon Society. (The name ‘Salon Society’ is an ode to the French art salons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.) There are eight levels of membership, with each level costing more to join. The audience most likely to purchase these memberships are adults because they have established careers and the saved funds to purchase these memberships, whereas the general audience for the Pizzuti Collection ranges from elementary school-aged children to senior citizens. They host programs for families and display some children’s artwork on the second floor. The Collection also has an admission fee, which most likely is another source of funding.

In the Pizzuti Collection’s current exhibition, *Cuba Forever Revisited*, the show fits well within their mission statement. The theme of this exhibition, installed throughout all three floors of the Pizzuti Collection, was to showcase Cuban artists during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially concerning the radicalization of Cuba in the 1950s under the reign of Fidel Castro. Artists such as Raul Martinez and members of Los Diez Pintores Concretos (Ten Concrete Painters) both had separated gallery space dedicated to their works. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Cuban artists were inspired by Western styles of art, such as the Renaissance and Impressionism periods (for example, *New Bicycle (The Elian Experience)* by Raul Cordero). However, as artists began to defy Castro’s dictatorship through their personal works, other movements such as Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art became popular. Interestingly, Martinez’s Pop Art style was different than the Pop Art of America (think Roy Liechtenstein) because “(...) [he] turned not to products and celebrities for subject matter but found inspiration in the common everyday man and the great Cuban political thinkers.”<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates the great influence of Westernization on Cuba and these artists’ desires to portray everyday life how they see fit. On the second and third floors, various artists were featured, and there did not seem to be a group statement about the artworks.

The major strengths of the show were the curator’s ability to expand the viewer’s knowledge about Cuba, and their ability to bring multiple pieces of art—varying in style—into the same space. This clash of contemporary art, such as Rene Francisco’s *Fabrica de utopias* (2014), and past styles of art, such as the featured abstract geometric art by members of Los Diez Pintores Concretos, showcases the modern artist’s shift of political and religious views throughout time. Also, it suggests the theory that history often repeats itself, since some of the modern artwork throughout this exhibition are concerned with political unrest. An example of this is Francisco’s work mentioned above, which features women dressed in military uniforms weaving together this suggested ‘utopia’ by sewing machine. This is a nod to 1940s America when women made weapons for the U.S. military to use during World War II, while still being expected to take care of the home. Nevertheless, *Cuba Forever Revisited* allows one to visit the past while being fully aware of the future.

Thirdly, the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, has both visual and performing arts exhibitions. Since November 1989, the Wexner Center has been “The Ohio State University’s multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art. In its programs, the Wexner Center balances a commitment to experimentation with a commitment to traditions of innovation and affirms the university’s mission of education, research, and community service.”<sup>6</sup> This mission statement highlights the inclusiveness of the Wexner Center itself, because not only does it cater to the contemporary artist’s needs, it caters to the general public who are interested in learning about *all*

types of art (dance, sculpture) and experiencing more than just an 'ordinary visit to a museum' that is commonly thought of when one wants to view art. The building is named after Harry L. Wexner.<sup>7</sup> Also, the outside of the Center is quite unusual since the Wexner Center was designed by two architects and a landscaper. This differs from both the Frank Museum of Art and the Pizzuti Collection because those buildings are historical, whereas the design for the Wexner Center was literally built from the ground-up. The Wexner Center has the biggest square footage of the three spaces mentioned in this essay, with four galleries and an auditorium. Since it is such a large institution, it is necessary to have several department heads and employees in order for the presented artwork to be shown successfully. Funding for the Wexner Center is provided by the Greater Columbus Arts Council, Ohio Arts Council, The Columbus Foundation, and the Nationwide Foundation, along with "[p]rivate contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations."<sup>viii</sup> This allows the Wexner Center to put on shows and exhibitions for its large audience of college students, families, and senior citizens.

Of course, the current exhibition at the Wexner Center, *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957*, has drawn in thousands of viewers. The theme of this exhibition, which was installed in the Center's four galleries, was to display the artwork made by students and professors who attended or taught at Black Mountain College. The subtext of the show is the teaching ideology at the college—a liberal arts perspective—which combined the arts with music, dance, and philosophy. Since the college did not have a private source of funding, students and faculty lived, cooked, and cleaned together in the dorms; as much learning took place inside the classroom as it did outside.

Each gallery featured a different message for the audience. The first gallery displayed artwork by Josef Albers and Anni Albers, a married German-immigrant couple who taught at the college together. Along with dabbling in two-dimensional art, Josef enjoyed furniture design and taught classes on color theory. Anni worked in jewelry and the arts and crafts, specifically textile, bringing a new concept to the phrase 'reduce, reuse, recycle'. She crafted necklaces out of drain covers, paperclips, and chains, which is important to note since America was in great recession during World War II.

The second gallery introduced a timeline of the college's opening (1933) until its closing in 1957. This timeline highlighted impactful moments of Black Mountain's history, including the establishment of summer institutes in 1944. In this space, both student and professor artworks were displayed, including Elaine de Koonings' *Untitled #16*. It was refreshing to see the connections between Josef Albers' teaching philosophy and the interpretive artwork produced because of it.

The third and fourth galleries were dedicated to the music and dance taught at the college. Framed music scores hung on the walls, besides professors' recordings of recited poetry and dance films. In the fourth gallery, which contained Anni Albers' sewing machine and a grand piano, a dance floor was set up for live-dance interpretations put on by the Wexner Center.

The major strengths of the show were the amount of two- and three-dimensional works featured and the connections made between student and teacher over the course of the school's opening. The bonds that formed are visible in the produced art and the peaceful nature of photographs taken throughout the campus. While it is evident that Josef and Anni Alber had a great impact on the college, the timeline in the second gallery is misplaced. It would have been more impactful in the first gallery because this gives the audience the

chance to glimpse an overview of the college's history, rather than Josef and Anni's life story. Also, it was not until the third gallery's music installation that the viewer discovers the music playing throughout the entire exhibition in speakers was the music taught at Black Mountain College. It would have been helpful if there was a plaque on one of the walls in the first gallery indicating this. Lastly, two sections of the second and third floor galleries were painted, which may distract from the art.

Overall, the three exhibitions at the Frank Museum of Art, the Pizzuti Collection, and the Wexner Center provide greater insight into different cultures that one may not be exposed to in their daily life. For the Frank Museum of Art at Otterbein, it could better meet its institutional objectives by providing more exhibitions like *Being Gandhi: The Art and Politics of Seeing* in the university's two other gallery spaces, since these spaces are more frequented by students/faculty because of their proximity to campus. Many current students do not know that the Frank Museum exists or are unsure of parking since it is in the middle of a neighborhood. Promoting exhibitions on social media like Facebook and Twitter may help to increase the museum's foot traffic. Furthermore, it would be great to continue to see exhibitions featuring artists of different cultures, because these artists' viewpoints ignite conversations outside of the classroom and bring awareness to issues around the world. Possibly, current students in the art department could assist in discovering artists to show in exhibitions to build student involvement with the museum.

For the Pizzuti Collection, it could better meet its mission by interacting with the public on more of an educational basis, as they want to "foster cultural understanding." If weekly programs were implemented across schools in Columbus about art and the types of works that the Collection has in total, this would foster the next generation's interest in the arts and how important it is to our society. I am not sure how often there are guest speakers or events like films or readings hosted at the Pizzuti Collection, but it would be interesting to see these events centered around exhibitions throughout the installation period, rather than at the beginning of the exhibition. Also, it is important that the artwork in these shows continues to expand around Ron and Ann Pizzuti's personal collection, rather than relying solely on this couple's repertoire.

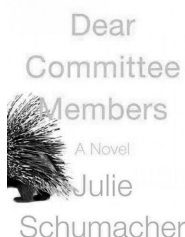
Lastly, for the Wexner Center, it could better meet its mission by continuing to combine art and performance art in exhibitions, as can be seen in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957*. Having this type of experience allows the viewers to be exposed to the exhibition through different mediums, which further enhances the audience's desire to learn more about the exhibition and view the artwork. Furthermore, the Wexner Center could partner with The Ohio State University in class activities like Otterbein's INST events: where students get class credit for going to art-related events. If all three of these institutions adopt these suggestions, there is no doubt that they will meet their institutional objectives for years to come.

## Bibliography

- Otterbein University. n.d. *About Otterbein*. Accessed December 05, 2016. <http://www.otterbein.edu/public/About/AboutOtterbein.aspx>.
- . n.d. *Art Galleries and Collections*. Accessed December 05, 2016. <http://www.otterbein.edu/public/Academics/Departments/Art/GalleriesCollections.aspx>.
- . n.d. *Integrative Studies*. Accessed 12 05, 2016. <http://www.otterbein.edu/public/Academics/SchoolsUniversityPrograms/UniversityPrograms/integrativestudies.aspx>.
- Pizzuti Collection. n.d. *About*. Accessed December 29, 2016. <https://pizzuticollection.org/about/>.
- . n.d. "Raul Martinez."
- Shiva, Cop. n.d. *Being Gandhi*. Accessed December 05, 2016. <http://copshiva.com/gandhi.html>.
- The Wexner Center. n.d. *Architecture*. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://wexarts.org/architecture>.
- . n.d. *Facilities and Rentals*. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://wexarts.org/about/facilities-and-rentals>.
- . n.d. *Governance and Support*. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://wexarts.org/about/governance-and-support>.
- . n.d. *History*. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://wexarts.org/about/history>.
- . n.d. *Senior Staff*. Accessed December 29, 2016. <http://wexarts.org/about/wexner-center-senior-staff>.

## Endnotes

- 1 Otterbein University. "Integrative Studies." Otterbein.edu.
- 2 Otterbein University, "About." Otterbein.edu.
- 3 Cop Shiva, "Being Gandhi." Copshiva.com.
- 4 Pizzuti Collection, "About." Pizzuticollection.org.
- 5 Pizzuti Collection, "Raul Martinez."
- 6 Wexner Center for the Arts, "About." Wexarts.org.
- 7 Wexner Center for the Arts, "History." Wexarts.org.



Book Review &gt;&gt;&gt; Viola Constable

## Dear Committee Members

Author: Julie Schumacher

Publisher: Penguin Random House, 2014

Julie Schumacher's *Dear Committee Members* is a clever, scathing look at the ins and outs of academic bureaucracy. Though accessible to a general audience, but will particularly appeal to anyone in academia. University faculty may recognize themselves in the over-worked, underwhelmed Professor Jason Fitger, whose eternally underfunded department grows more dismal by the day. Students may recognize themselves, potentially shamefacedly, in the motley crew of undergrads chasing after Fitger for a letter of recommendation.

*Dear Committee Members* centers on the fact that Fitger is renowned for his letters of recommendation, and is called upon frequently to provide them. Some request letters after a few semesters of class, while others cajole or demand them after ten minutes of acquaintance, but all are granted, though not without editorialization on Fitger's part. Though swamped with requests, he is more than happy to share his opinions on the matters at hand, as well as matters that aren't. Fitger shares his feelings on everything from the power dynamics in his university to the programs for which his students apply and the character of the programs' organizers. He breaks from descriptions of students' capacities to rant about the online forms through which he must communicate. Though his recommendations may bend the truth or contain extraneous information, they are all sincere.

Protagonist Jason Fitger knows that his own life is a bit of a dead-end. Tenure-track positions are few and far between, and his department seems to be last on the list when it comes to the priorities of Payne University, the small liberal arts school where he teaches. His once-promising literary career has tanked, taking his love life down with it (partly due to his tendency to combine the two in ways his partners didn't appreciate). His own admittedly cantankerous temperament has not helped his standing with any of the colleagues, friends, or former flames with whom he communicates. Through his most common missive, the letter of recommendation, he tries to get others the future they desire or deserve, for better or for worse. Though most of the above is played for humor, Fitger lends the novel its fair share of heartfelt moments, as with his unending quest to secure appropriate funding and space for his promising protégé to finish a first novel of his own.

A typical element of epistolary novels is their shifting points of view. Characters' voices and stances are directly conveyed through their correspondence. In *Dear Committee Members*, however, this is not the case. Unusual for its form, *Dear Committee Members* is one-sided: all characters and events are framed through the letters sent by Fitger, Schumacher's protagonist, to other members of the faculty and staff, former flames, grad school classmates, and countless employers and program directors. We read the recommendations, commentaries, bargains, demands, and pleas of Professor Fitger, without ever hearing

another's response. Schumacher frequently allows readers to infer the existence, content, and tone of any responses Fitger receives through his further communications with all other characters. Though Fitger is not always completely forthcoming at first blush, by piecing together the varying accounts and opinions he offers, readers can come as close as anyone to the truth of things.

Though the author herself is a professor of creative writing in the english department of the University of Minnesota, a relatively large school, she is a graduate of both Cornell University and Oberlin College, the latter of which is a small school not unlike Payne. However humorous, passages which detail the economic disparity in Payne University's academic departments all-too-frequently ring true for many universities. Payne's underutilized and unglamorous departments consolidate or disappear. Upstairs, the economics department is being renovated and upgraded; downstairs, members of the english department dodge drips and falling plaster. Through it all, Fitger's wry notes relate the deteriorating state of things.

At only 180 pages, *Dear Committee Members* is a relatively quick read. Whether or not you're a seasoned scholar, you're sure to enjoy the wit and hope underlying this most recent novel from Julie Schumacher.

CITY  
SQUARES

Eighteen Writers  
on the Spirit and  
Significance of  
Squares Around  
the World

With 31 Photographs

Catie  
Marron



## Book Review >>> Emma van Hasselt

# *City Squares: Eighteen Writers on the Spirit and Significance of Squares Around the World*

Author: Catie Marron

Publisher: HarperCollins, 2016

“Squares have stood the test of time. After all, squares are all about, and for, people.”  
– Catie Marron

In the collection of essays that Catie Marron has curated, eighteen writers come together to look at all aspects of humanity and culture through a part of a city normally not thought of as having a deeper political and cultural importance: the city square. Photos by a variety of distinguished photographers, brief introductions, and brilliantly written essays focused on specific squares around the world come together to show just how important public spaces are to civilization. By organizing the essays into three broad topics, culture, geopolitics, and history, *City Squares* connects stories, cities, and people together across time and location, drawing the reader into the squares that shape the world. The eighteen essays contained within *City Squares*, though all focusing on a different location and theme, ask the reader to consider the symbiotic relationship between physical space, culture, and politics throughout world history.

*City Squares* opens with a section on the cultural power of squares, with five essays focused on cities from Paris to Kabul to Marrakech. This section examines how the development of city squares reflects a city’s culture, such as the failed Maidan-e-Pompa in Kabul, and how that square in turn allows members of the community to come together and create culture through interacting with each other. The essays in this section are written by a variety of authors, from residents of the cities they’re writing about to transplants, and even simple visitors reflecting on the nature of the squares they experienced. One particular essay that highlights this section’s overarching theme is in the essay on Djemaa el-Fnaa, Marrakech, written by David Adjaye, OBE. Adjaye introduces the idea of a kinetic city, originally proposed by Rahul Mehrotra, “a vision of the city that is rooted not in static symbols but in the constant motion of its inhabitants, in their cultural practices and daily habits that flood various spaces and give them their character,” (Adjaye 88).

The second section in the book deals with the Geopolitics of city squares, with an introduction by David Remnick, who reflects on the square as a public battle ground in the fight for political changes. Following that is five articles on squares who have been changed by the violence and resistance they have seen- Tahrir Square in Cairo, Tiananmen Square in Beijing, among others. In his introduction, David Remnick reflects that city squares are at once points

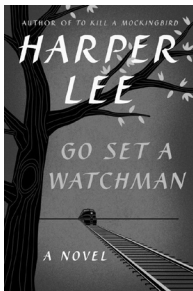
of military and political display as well as the cites of major upheaval and important players in political revolutions. As in the first section of the book, these essays deal with square and events across time and location, and are written by the same diverse spectrum of authors. The essays in this section, although focusing on five very unique political situations, highlight the city square and its unique role in both political regimes and revolutions.

The book finishes off with a section on the city square and its importance through history, both of the world and of the city in which they're located. The importance of this section and its connection to the two sections preceding it become apparent in the introduction, titled "Influence on Humanity," by George Packer. Packer goes back to the very beginning of city squares, in Ancient Greece and Rome, highlighting the importance of the agora and the forum as a place for people to meet, exchange ideas, and host public disputes. The essays in this section, which vary from a focus on the Grand Parade in Cape Town to "Hacker Square", on the Facebook Company's campus in San Francisco, all continue to engage with the idea of a square as not only a place where events happen, but as an observer of a country's history.

The thing that sets this book apart is the strong common thread running through the book, not only on subject matter but also the themes of the essays themselves. Any essay in one section could conceivably be read in one of the other two sections, which goes to highlight how history, politics, and culture go hand in hand. In her introduction, editor Catie Marron explains the story behind the collection, how she wanted to set out to examine how squares represent themes in history, geopolitics, and culture.

For anyone who has an interest in travel, cities, politics, or history, *City Squares* is an excellent and thought-provoking look into how, from ancient times to the modern day, people will naturally come together when given the space to do so. Whether it be a forum, an agora, or a city square, there will be far-reaching outcomes that in turn affect future generations in a cycle of cause and effect. *City Squares* also uses a common factor in cities across the world to illustrate how similar people and history can look and act alike, no matter if they're in Marrakech or Paris or Boston. Catie Marron, along with the eighteen writers she collected, offer a valuable and inspiring look into how a single open space can affect the entire world.





## Book Review >>> Riley Smith

# Go Set a Watchman

Author: Harper Lee

Publisher: HarperCollins, 2015

When it comes to sequels of either books or movies, there are usually two outcomes: it turns out somewhat okay, but is never as good as the first, as in the case of *Marvel's Avengers: Age of Ultron*; or it completely tanks and no one ever speaks of it again, like *Ghostbusters 2*. But what if the original novel, now so beloved by all, was never supposed to happen, and the sequel was actually going to be the original? This is the case for Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), the supposed sequel to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, written over 50 years ago.

An overnight classic, *Mockingbird* came out in 1960 and was made into a movie two years later, receiving eight Academy Award nominations and winning three. However, what most people don't know is that *Watchman* was actually what Lee first sent to a publisher in the late 1950's, but after getting rejected, she went to work and came back with *Mockingbird*. The two novels are similar; both feature Jean Louise "Scout" Finch as the main character, and both tell variations on the coming-of-age story. This, of course, begs some questions. Do I treat *Watchman* as a sequel or a stand-alone novel? Is it okay to read *Watchman* in the context of *Mockingbird*? The short answer: it's complicated. *Watchman* should be read as its own work, but considering it a sequel of sorts may serve to strengthen its message.

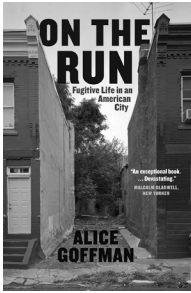
*Watchman* is centered around Jean Louise, 26, from the small town of Maycomb, Alabama. Now living in New York City, she makes annual trips home to visit her aging father Atticus, who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, and her aunt Alexandra, who moved in to help take care of him. While there, she is courted by a childhood friend, Henry "Hank" Clinton, whom Atticus has taken on as an apprentice to one day become a lawyer. When Atticus and Hank go to a town hall meeting, Jean Louise secretly follows them to the court house, only to discover that her angel has fallen from heaven: Atticus, her most worshipped figure who defended an innocent black man in court now seems tied up with the KKK. Jean Louise's world is shattered, and her family tries to convince her that everything is going to be okay, even though she feels so physically ill that she actually throws up several times. Her uncle Dr. Finch tries to explain to her that men like Atticus can be good and defend people of color in court but still be racist. It's a coming-of-age story in the fact that in order to continue looking her father in the eye Jean Louise must tear down her biggest idol, bringing her father back down to earth and off of the pedestal on which she placed him.

While this is initially shocking, it is only so because most audiences have read its predecessor, *Mockingbird*. The scene which inspired that novel is only a short flashback in *Watchman*. Here, it is difficult to separate the books, and I believe this is where much of the

shock and outrage surrounding *Watchman* comes from. We as readers thought we knew Atticus, and in this way, we are just like Scout. He has been idolized by audiences ever since Gregory Peck portrayed him on the big screen. In this sense, having read *Mockingbird* reinforces the main theme of the new novel: our idols are not perfect and we shouldn't revere them because we will be crushed when we discover their flaws. Jean Louise (and the audience) are devastated when Atticus is seen at this racist town hall meeting, but it wouldn't come as so much of a shock without all of the love and respect created for him as a result of reading *Mockingbird*.

That being said, this brings up another important theme which the book tackles really well. Especially in these troubled times, it has become pretty difficult for Republicans and Democrats to understand one another. Both sides make claims about the other which aren't always true. Jean Louise can't possibly comprehend how her dad could be racist; he even defended a black man in the case of a raped white woman. However, *Watchman* aptly points out that we can't know everything about a person's life or situation, and a person can still be fundamentally good (like Atticus) and racist. The two aren't mutually exclusive. At the end of the day, all Atticus cares about is justice: he defended the black man not because he was black but because he was innocent. Now, the NAACP is jumping down the throats of white people in Maycomb, blaming white people for anything bad that happens to a black person, even if the white person is totally innocent. At least, that's how Atticus sees it, and this enrages him, not for racist reasons, but because he literally cannot stand such injustice, regardless of race. This comes off as racist to a young liberal Jean Louise, but from Atticus's point of view, it's not.

Having read both novels now and realizing that it's difficult to extract the influence one might have on the other, there are some cases where the continuity from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman* just doesn't make sense. For example, it's revealed early on that her brother Jem dies very young, simply dropping dead one day, and Lee seems to gloss over this in the story. Despite how well readers get to know Jem in *Mockingbird* – I would consider him a main character – Lee never spends as much time on his death as I think she should in *Watchman*. It feels like an afterthought. I believe this wouldn't be such an issue if I hadn't read *Mockingbird* first. All in all, I truly liked this book. Whether or not you take it as a sequel, it was a good read, and a well-done coming-of-age story. It should be read with a grain of salt, but it's an enjoyable book for all audiences, heartbreaking and yet so relatable. Whether you've read *To Kill a Mockingbird* or not, give *Go Set a Watchman* a try anyway, Scout.



Book Review >>> Bethany Blinsky

## *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*

Author: Alice Goffman

Publisher: University of Chicago Press, 2014

“On quiet afternoons, Chuck would sometimes pass the time by teaching his twelve-year-old brother, Tim, how to run from the police. They’d sit side by side on the iron black porch steps of their two story home, facing the shared concrete alley that connects the small fenced in backyards of their block to those of the houses on the next.

‘What are you going to do when you hear the sirens?’ Chuck asked.

‘I’m out,’ his little brother replied,” (Goffman pg. 9).

Alice Goffman initially began her book *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* her sophomore year of undergrad at the University of Pennsylvania (Goffman, pg. xiv). Though, at the time, she had no idea what her thesis project would be turning into. Goffman’s relationship with the subjects of her book began while she was tutoring a high school student named Aisha in a low income, predominantly black neighborhood, near the University of Pennsylvania’s campus (Goffman, pg. xiv). Due to the amount of time Goffman spent at Aisha’s she developed close relationships with Aisha’s family, and other people who lived in the neighborhood (Goffman, pg. xiv). She even ended up moving in down the street from Aisha after her lease was up, at the suggestion of Aisha’s Mother (Goffman, pg. xiv).

Through Aisha and her family, Goffman ended up meeting Mike, Alex, and Chuck. All are young black men who lived in the same neighborhood and were best friends with one another (Goffman, pg. xiv). From spending time with them Goffman came to witness some of the hardships that they regularly experienced. Poverty, parole, racism, incarceration, and arrest were themes throughout their lives. Growing up white and affluent, Goffman was shocked by the lives Mike, Alex, and Chuck lived (Goffman, pg. xvi). Thus, she decided to do an ethnographic study of the neighborhood and people within it, and approached the young men to see if it was okay if she wrote about them (Goffman, pg. xvi). They agreed, only requesting that their anonymity was maintained in her book. Even once Goffman left the University of Pennsylvania, to attend graduate school at Princeton, she continued to live in the neighborhood and write about everything she heard, witnessed, and experienced while spending time with Mike, Alex, and Chuck.

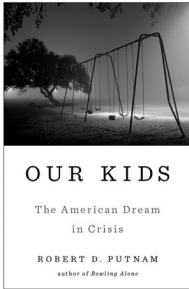
*On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* has many themes running within it. Goffman illustrates how the War on Drugs incarcerated black people exponentially, how hard it is for the people caught within the criminal justice system to escape, the turmoil and injustice of parole, how cops unjustly arrest black men, and ultimately the pain that comes with being a poor black person in America. She explains, “Together, the chapters make the case that historically high imprisonment rates and the intensive policing and surveillance

that have accompanied them are transforming poor Black neighborhoods into communities of suspects and fugitives.” (Goffman, pg. 8). For example, in one instance Alex got beat up so badly his jaw was broken (Goffman, pg. xi). But he couldn’t go to the hospital for help, as cops wait around in emergency rooms for the chance to run the names of the Black men who enter, and he was on parole. If he went to the hospital he would be locked up again. The two years of parole he had served would be for naught (Goffman, pg. x). Goffman continues, “Alex’s attack occurred over ten years ago. He still finds it difficult to breathe through his nose and speaks with a muffled lisp. His eyes don’t appear at quite the same level in his face. But he didn’t go back to prison,” (Goffman, pg. xi).

Goffman’s book is of critical importance. It comes during a time when the United States is finally witnessing some of police violence Black people experience via smartphones, when Black Lives Matter has been brought up during Presidential debates, when riots and protests occur after the cops who murder black men are not indicted. Moreover, I believe that the target audience of this book is someone who is unaware of the issues facing Black Americans. Goffman’s explanations of the policies that hurt Black people is clear, concise, and cutting. And if that isn’t enough to convince the reader of injustice, her first-hand accounts of the brutality she witnessed is enough to shock anybody to their core. Anyone who reads *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* will gain knowledge of the injustice that Black people experience in America.

Goffman reasons that the policing on urban communities is unjust. Explaining that instead of eliminating the problem of crime, murder, and drugs, this level of intense policing just creates more criminals. As many people in these communities’ resort to crime in order to generate enough income to survive (Goffman, pg. 202). She furthers, “Thus, the great paradox of a highly punitive approach to crime control is that it winds up criminalizing so much of daily life as to foster widespread illegality as people work to circumvent it” (Goffman, pg. 202).

In conclusion, the overall point of *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* is to clearly illustrate the systematic marginalization poor Black people experience in urban communities. Goffman’s work sheds light on a world that most privileged, white people know nothing about. Furthermore, the book works as a call for justice. Asking the reader to acknowledge and work against the violence that these people face every day of their lives. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* is a powerful piece of literature that works to leave its reader forever changed.



Book Review >>> Jaden Lunger

## *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*

Author: Robert D. Putnam

Publisher: Simon & Schuster, 2015

An ideology originally coined by James Truslow Adams in the 20th century, a short phrase known as the “American Dream,” is the motivation that pushes countless Americans towards the pursuit of success and achievement today. The “American Dream” promotes a life that is fulfilling and rich, one that provides equal opportunities for each and every American citizen, but is this dream still a reality for all of those individuals? In his book, *Our Kids*, Robert D. Putnam argues that the “American Dream” is something that has only been possible for a certain set of individuals within American society, and may, in fact, be a dying dream. Each chapter in *Our Kids* is dedicated to providing an analysis of crucial factors that may be responsible for the disappearance of a middle class and the “American Dream.” *Our Kids* uses the personal experiences of real Americans to analyze the ways in which the structure of American families, parenting, schooling, and community are all culpable for the growing class gap among citizens in the United States.

The first chapter of *Our Kids* is dedicated to addressing the myths and realities associated with the “American Dream.” Putnam reflects on the experiences that he and his old schoolmates had growing up in Port Clinton, Ohio in the 1950’s and compares their experiences to those of individuals that are currently living there. The opening chapter suggests that it is evident that changes in social mobility have occurred. People growing up in Port Clinton in the 1950’s, regardless of their backgrounds, whether they were farmers or even African Americans, had the chance to work as hard as they could in order to climb up the socioeconomic ladder and comfortably provide for themselves and their families. Now, increases in the levels of inequality in income and wealth and in opportunity and social mobility are some of the core factors for the socioeconomic disparity found between the two generations detailed in Port Clinton. Putnam argues that these types of inequalities are found throughout all of American society, and as a result, we find that America is splitting into two separate classes, a lower-class and an upper-class, with no in-between. The introductory chapter concludes that as the class gap expands and as the lack of opportunity grows for poor Americans, rich Americans have less to think about, or as Putnam states, “...class segregation means that members of the upper middle class are less likely to have firsthand knowledge of the lives of poor kids and thus are unable even to recognize the growing opportunity gap,” (41).

The remaining chapters go on to analyze the facets of American society that play a hand in furthering the class gap. The roles of family, parenting, schooling, and community support are discussed and their relationship to the growing socioeconomic gap are ex-

plained. Children who are raised within a home that is run by a single-mother, statistically, tend to grow up with a much different experience than those who have a two-parent experience, “Children who grow up without their biological fathers perform worse on standardized tests, earn lower grades, and stay in school for fewer years, regardless of race and class,” which means that these children are less likely to become successful in the future and close the class gap (78). Parents who are already stressed constantly due to their life situation raise and teach their kids how to act in very different ways, which can result in low self-esteem, making it harder for them to believe in themselves, let alone the “American Dream.” Interestingly, schools don’t seem to play a huge role in expanding the class gap between the rich and the poor, and were described simply as sites for perpetuating the growing gap. *Our Kids* explains that what impoverished kids deal with outside of school (gang life, domestic violence, etc.) is sometimes brought into school, affecting other students and the teachers, and in turn, damaging the success of everyone in the school facility. As for communal support, *Our Kids*, explains that activities and organizations provided by communities varies depending on whether a certain community is affluent or impoverished. If affluent, the community runs into almost no problems donating to and providing organizations that aid their children’s success. If poverty-stricken, then the exact opposite can be seen within the community, meaning that these kids, who are already dealing with stress at home and at school, have very little opportunities to escape these hells, and if there are any, they may be too expensive to participate in.

Ultimately, *Our Kids* critically analyzes and explains all sorts of life situations like the ones above and does well to describe the correlation between those situations and the growing divide between the rich and the poor. Although the explanations are detailed and come off as somewhat complex, Putnam does well to make the information understandable and easy to mentally digest for most educated readers. Also, in perhaps the most important chapter, Chapter 6, Putnam concludes the book by summarizing all of the connections made throughout the text, and, in addition, he shares with the reader what he believes should be done to move forward and reverse the split in American society.

*Our Kids* is packed with enough information to make any American reader reevaluate their place in society. The targeted audience for this novel is likely for those who are in the upper- or lower-classes. Robert Putnam’s aim is to educate all Americans on what is happening economically throughout the states. The statistics and data found in *Our Kids* can be used to arm the less-fortunate with knowledge needed to fight against the disparity in America, or it can be used as a source of awakening and empathy for those who find themselves in the top tier of American society.



## Book Review >>> Soon Wai Yee

# *The Sympathizer*

Author: Viet Thanh Nguyen

Publisher: Grove/Atlantic, 2015

The *Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen begins with a confession from the protagonist, when he was detained for confession on the part he has in the war. He confessed,

“I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces.

Perhaps not surprisingly, I am also a man of two minds... able to see any issue from both sides. Sometimes I flatter myself that this is a talent, I wonder if what I have should even be called talent. After all, a talent is something you use, not something that uses you. The talent you cannot not use, the talent that possesses you — that is a hazard, I must confess” (Nguyen 1).

This opening wants us to begin by considering the idea of who we are, of us vs. them, on why being a person of two worlds, of a dual identity, is not desirable. Rather, it is a hazard when we know more than one side of the story to be able to blend with the other side. The *Sympathizer* starts by confronting our constant attention to duality, to the binary of us against them. Note how the us vs them binary affects the protagonist in the novel.

From confession in the isolation cell, the story then progresses to the time when the protagonist was working as an aide-de-camp for the General. As the situation in Saigon deteriorated, the General got the protagonist to contact Claude, a CIA staff to bribe their way through an escape from the impending fall of Saigon. The protagonist, an unnamed spy planted by the Communist into the anti-Communist side, then seeks an escape route for the General and his aides. He looks at a list of aides, and selects those who merited some good previously. He also included his blood brother, Bon and family. Bon and Man are the protagonist's blood brothers when they were teenagers. It is intriguing how their friendship pans out because Bon does not know that the protagonist and Man works for the Communist. As the protagonist secures the exit of ninety-two people, including Bon's family, they looked to leave when time comes. Then, the protagonist hesitates about leaving because he feels that he can't leave Man in the lurch, to fight the war alone. Man persuades the protagonist to leave because he would be tasked to update about the General when they arrive in America. Man told the protagonist to communicate via his aunt in Paris, so as to avoid suspicion of being in cahoots with the Communist. After some time in the refugee camp, the Vietnamese refugees seeks sponsorship to establish their lives in America, to try to move away from the shadow of the war. The protagonist then found a job as the assistant of a professor, and then met a Japanese-American woman, with whom he sleeps with. The General then grew suspicious

of someone within the refugee circle working as a mole. To avoid suspicion, the protagonist pointed his finger at the major.

As he and Bon sets out to murder the major, the protagonist starts feeling guilty if he is doing the right thing. He is guilt stricken for suggesting the major because he knows full well that the major is innocent. Bon had to talk him round by saying that in life, we often have to choose between right and right. Ultimately, what is right is not important. It is how we survive this game of survival. After the major's death, the protagonist got on with his life. He then met an Auteur. The Auteur wanted to shot a film, and consulted the protagonist for comments to give his film a human touch of authenticity, since the protagonist is a Vietnamese.

The General then assembles a makeshift army within the refugees, funded by the Americans, the protagonist is once again torn about what he should do. Bon joins the army and wants to fight the Communists. The protagonist knows that Bon will be killed and he wants to save his blood brother. Eventually, as everything unfolds in circles, the protagonist comes to the realization that wars does not end. The price of betrayal and revolution is worth nothing, not freedom or independence, just selfish gains for those in power.

The Sympathizer demonstrates how does it feel to be conflicted, to be split both internally and externally. It touches on why society is so concern about the binary of us vs them. Nguyen's references to many historical occurrences not only direct us to question what happened in history, but he seeks to reclaim the voice of the voiceless, and to speak for the side that was not understood and listened to because of their perceived inferiority of being the Orient; who could not grasp the English language (the assumed de facto language of communication) without an accent, and thus being "othered" in the binary of us and them. Often, histories are heard from the victor's side, or simply the side that is "good." In this case, as with other wars against communism, the good side is the side fighting against communism. Nguyen also raised the poignant question of if there is really a good side in war, because no matter who "wins" the war, the devastation and aftermath is detrimental to civilians and villages, not just by displacing people, destroying their homelands, and breaking up families, but also the legacy of war on generations, like the harmful effects of Agent Orange. Nguyen referenced Agent Orange with Orange County, a vital link given how America polices other countries on world affairs. Nguyen provided social commentary of that self-perceived goodness through the protagonist's arrival in America as a refugee. He pointed out that despite their self-perceived goodness, corruption is inherently present through power grab, greed, and the never-ending war. Nguyen also addressed the problem of taking away people's voices through the introduction of the Auteur. The Sympathizer is an excellent read for history buffs, and those keen on postcolonial literature.



A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER  
 ARLIE RUSSELL  
 HOCHSCHILD  
 STRANGERS  
 IN THEIR  
 OWN LAND



ANGER AND HOUSING ON THE AMERICAN RIGHT  
 A Journey to the Heart of the Political Divide

Book Review >>> Brenna Helm

## *Strangers in Their Own Land*

Author: Arlie Russel Hochschild

Publisher: The New Press, 2016

*"We shoehorn new information into ways we already think. We settle for knowing our opposite numbers from the outside. But it is possible, without changing our beliefs, to know other from the inside, to see reality through their eyes, to understand the links between life, feeling and politics; that is, to cross the empathy wall? I thought it was."*

(Hochschild, 5)

The American people and culture has been heavily impacted by this recent campaign season, and has found itself as divisive as ever. While the two-party system has caused difficulties throughout history, increasingly pushing supporters of each party against each other- the recent election has led to a climax of hostility and tension. Arlie Russell Hochschild, a notable sociologist and professor at the University of California, Berkeley- embarked on an ethnographic project spanning approximately five years to research and understand the ideologies of the conservative voter or more specifically, the Tea Party. Hochschild sets out to understand what she refers to as the "great paradox"- as politically red states, from the liberal perspective, tend to vote for what would be considered counterproductive to issues those states face. Statistically, red states tend to be poorer, have higher rates of teen pregnancy, and a life expectancy that is an average of five years shorter than blue states (8). Keeping these statistics in mind, Hochschild travels to Louisiana- which is ranked forty-ninth out of the fifty states on the Social Science Research Council Human Development rankings. To emphasize her research on the great paradox, Hochschild focuses on the Tea Party and their stance on environmental issues; Louisiana is ranked last for health but, as Hochschild states, there is "great pollution and great resistance to regulating polluters" as oil is a large part of their economy (21). *Strangers In Their Own Land* uses an organization strategy that both teaches and explores the Tea Party within the same novel. Hochschild opens readers up to looking beyond the political lens of statistics and policy, she gives readers the room to understand the Tea Party perspective by using empathy and analyzing the experience of these people to humanize their ideals rather than villainize them; and portrays them as people who are striving to achieve the American dream the best way they know how.

*Strangers In Their Own Land* delves into patterns of motivation for the anti-federal government position that the Tea Party takes. These motivations are divided into three sub-groups: the church, a hatred of taxes, and what many perceive to be the loss of honor. Concerns of the Tea Party and the numerous individuals Hochschild interviews are built upon a foundation of extensive historical relevance. Hochschild notes the importance of "emotional grooves carved into the minds and hearts of the people [she] came to know through the

lives of their ancestors" (208). The moral emphasis on being "churched", having a job, not accepting help from the federal government and being able to stand on your own two feet, are pervasive cultural expectations- and is where these patterns of belief for the Tea Party are born. In order to relate more clearly to these strong moral motivations, she consistently uses and revisits the analogy of waiting in line- for financial stability, success, and the overall "american dream".

It is this history of waiting in line that intersects a history of privilege in the south, in which the 1960s and 1970s plays a major role in the development of Tea Party frustrations. Hochschild explores the ways in which the civil rights, women's movement, and the LGBTQ-IA+ movements interacted with Tea Party notions of being forgotten. Individuals that Hochschild spoke to shared feelings of being cut in line, and while they waited in line struggling and working to avoid federal help- they consistently saw more and more people jumping in line ahead of them. What many may view as individual values or motivations are actually a way of life for this community, and thus discrepancies arise when approaching intersectional issues of social and economic status. This is especially relevant in terms of racial equality, feminism and welfare as many Tea Party members feel that the left is attacking them by calling them racist, sexist and ignorant; however, many many view their frustration as simply being stuck in a line for years, and being cut in line consistently by groups who have gained more freedoms rather than joining the back of the line. Essentially, they feel that they've been waiting longer and without help from the government, and they feel ignored. These individuals feel as though it is not their political ideologies under attack, but the moral code they based their love for America off of and have used to face their own adversity surrounding the environmental and health crisis they face; as the title insinuates, they quite literally feel like strangers in their own land.

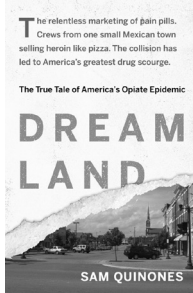
It is this extensive history and development of resentment over time that has created the great paradox surrounding the environment and regulations of polluters. Within this section, Hochschild focuses on four types of people: the team loyalist, the worshipper, the cowboy, and the rebel. These categories of political and moral ideologies are telling, as each type or person has priorities built upon the way they view the world and respond differently to opposing ideals. The team loyalist is committed to the republican and conservative cause, as well as the oil industry for it's job opportunities- because it allows people to work rather than ask for government assistance. The worshipper, on the other hand, puts God above the power of a President or politician, and finds that those who are patient and restrain personal desires are rewarded in time. The cowboy is an especially interesting profile, as it is exemplified in the acceptance of risk for reward, and that perfection limits progress and hinders innovation. One interview is quoted saying,

*"That's how they split the atom- risk. That's how they made vaccines- risk. They were daring. A lot of good things happen because people dare to take risks. With all these environmental regulations, we're being too cautious. We're avoiding bad instead of maximizing good" (186).*

Bravery and risk taking is honorable to the cowboy, facing adversity rather than what is perceived to be a "culture of victimhood". Last of the four profiles is the rebel. The rebel is sick of waiting in line and when it comes to regulation, they may believe that regulators are not trustworthy, despite potentially having more faith in the federal government to handle environmental issues. While there is a theme of cultural amnesia among these profiles,

Hochschild labels the rebel as a “rememberer” who does not trust government or the left to handle the environment appropriately so takes measures into his own hands.

All in all, *Strangers In Their Own Land* does not attempt to change political ideals or perceptions of the ideologies that the Tea Party holds, but it does allow for a new lens to look at the people who support the Tea Party rather than the policies they support. Hochschild starts the five year journey hoping to understand where these people come from, and ends by developing relationships that are based on a mutual respect in spite of political and ideological differences. Throughout *Strangers In Their Own Land*, Hochschild makes sporadic mention of Donald Trump’s rise to power, and while the book came out before the elections results, she is able to analyze and understand why he came to such fame. Given the current political terrain, one could potentially see how climbing the empathy wall and forming a mutual understanding gives way for progress more so than opposition and hostility. Arlie Russell Hochschild managed to do what many find quite difficult, she climbed the empathy wall and made strides in understanding the great paradox so many struggle to grasp. As a country, if there was ever a time we needed to work to understand where one another was coming from, a time to climb the empathy wall- the time would be now.



## Book Review >>> Madelyn Chennells *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*

Author: Sam Quinones

Publisher: Bloomsbury, 2015

*Dreamland*. It is the pool where Portsmouth teenagers hang out (Quinones 1). It is the pair of Levi jeans Mexican immigrants are seeing for the first time upon arriving in America (48). It is the time before the drug epidemic. In *Dreamland*, Sam Quinones traces the problem of drugs in America and specifically the problem of opiate based drugs. He shows how drugs are being trafficked across borders from Nayarit, Mexico to America, especially affecting poorer, more rural places (1-353). Beginning in the 1980's, the problems persist to our current day (IX-X). In Appalachian areas, like Portsmouth, Ohio and South Shore, Kentucky, the American Dream dies just as it is replaced by a nightmare.

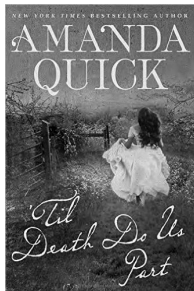
For many Americans, Appalachia is the epitome of white trash. They do not want to remember that the United States was at one point almost entirely agricultural or that this region in particular holds a key part of our history. America cannot fully see the role it plays in the underdevelopment of rural areas. Drugs follow many places, but they affect Appalachia dramatically. While our inclination is to blame the region for its disillusionment, we fail to recognize the bigger picture and our complicity in the problem.

After all, for a time many drugs we would now consider addictive were used to treat pain. In part then, to blame, was the medical field, in which, during the late twentieth century, "A new attitude was taking hold in American medicine at the time. The patient, it held, was always right, particularly when it came to pain" (25). David Procter, a Canadian, Porsche-driving physician, was heavy-handed when it came to prescribing medicine for patients, making him responsible for much of the drug phenomenon in South Shore, Kentucky and Portsmouth, Ohio (25). Eventually arrested for his involvement in the Appalachian drug epidemic, Procter still never experienced the nasty effects of it quite like his rural counterparts did (341). After all, he was able to reap the financial benefits while avoiding the problem of addiction (153). In fact, until celebrity Phillip Seymour Hoffman's death, people were relatively unaware of the opiate issue (306). It was as if the poor Appalachians were invisible to the rest of society. Therefore, sophisticated, conniving doctors, like Procter, could take advantage of their backwardness, as well as the lack of leisure activities in these areas; yet still the people and not the system, were to blame.

"With that, the boy who had never had more than two threadbare pairs of pants now had his first new, tough dark-blue 501's" (48). In *Dreamland*, a clear parallel emerges between the poor Appalachians and the poor Mexican immigrants. While it would be easy to label the Mexican drug dealers as the perpetrators, both the Mexicans and the Appalachians are victims in this scenario. Both originate out of a country that does not look out for them. As in the above quote, most Mexicans had never seen a pair of Levi jeans before coming to America, and

the drug industry opened up a whole new world to them, a world where they could provide for their families, as well as offering them some of the finer things in life (51). In the case of the Appalachian people, they are scapegoats of the Civil War, still seen as uneducated and close-minded generations later. Both groups of people envision an American Dream, and both operate as outsiders in America. While usually these would be considered two of the most opposed groups, Quinones brings them together in *Dreamland* in quite a remarkable way.

*Dreamland* is a call to action. *Dreamland* is a future America. In this America, everyone feels they belong and can contribute to society. No group or region is left to fend for themselves. *Dreamland* is revolutionary in its research, exposing America's sins and acknowledging the voices that have so long been drowned out by what society deems more important concerns. As the drug phenomenon is especially attractive to rural teenagers, the future of America is at stake. How will new generations fair? Will Appalachia eventually die out, disappearing as quickly as the many nameless victims of drug abuse that are not offered justice? According to Quinones, "Two Portsmouths exist today. One is a town of abandoned buildings at the edge of the Ohio River. The other resides in the memories of thousands in the town's diaspora who grew up during its better years and return to the actual Portsmouth rarely, if at all" (4). Here we see an entire city and culture has been destroyed because of the increasing drug use in our society. This should be our concern. This is our America.



## Book Review >>> Zack Triscari

### *'Til Death Do Us Part*

Author: Amanda Quick

Publisher: Penguin Random House, 2016

*'Til Death Do Us Part* by Amanda Quick is a work that simply cannot be classified into one specific genre of literature. Not only is the novel a mystery thriller and a romance novel simultaneously, but it also speaks on social issues relevant to the present day, specifically feminism. As a reader of this novel I am in a unique position to state my reaction. My life experiences aren't mysterious or thrilling and I've never been in a serious or romantic relationship. However I may still claim this narrative is relatable, as I am a proud feminist. I can with no shame admit that some of Quick's rhetoric had me at times jumping up and down and verbally celebrating or even protesting. I can also confidently say *'Til Death Do Us Part* is worth your time.

The narrative is set in London, during the Victorian Era. Not the most progressive of times. And although Quick does a beautiful job of encompassing the expectations of the period, she also creates characters that display morals and mindsets much superior to that of the 1800's. The protagonist is an unmarried woman, Calista Langley, who runs a business out of her home, an inherited home. Although certain critics mock her business, she upholds her dignity and defends her intentions. As Calista's past unfolds before our eyes, we begin to understand why she might be so strong-willed, cautious in her actions, and perhaps damaged. Not to fret, she is not alone.

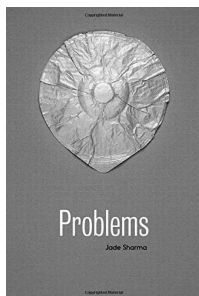
Amanda Quick proves herself a genius in the field of mystery. Calista finds herself in a state of panic when gifts begin to appear inside her house. But not normal gifts, a black mirror, a funeral wreath, a ring set with black jet stone, the deepest mourning gifts, all the her initials on them. A dark shade of death lingers over Calista's house and business. In the early chapters of this book, Quick drops clues left and right in regards to Calista's mysterious gifts. Although this work is somewhat predictable, intentionally I presume, suspense assisted me in remaining invested in each of the characters and their fates. The density of the plotline evolves with every new chapter. An example of this would be when we as readers discover whom Calista's tormentor is halfway through the story. Quick prompts us to be invested in the tormentor's story, peeking into his future and his intentions. This book is not for the faint-hearted. There are many dark and twisted scenes along with horrid fates for some characters. Be prepared to embrace the darkness, for it makes *'Til Death Do Us Part* that much more intriguing.

Calista's love interest, Mr. Trent Hastings, is introduced to readers as the overprotective, overbearing brother of one of Calista's clients, Eudora. Although Mr. Hastings leaves quite a sour impression on Calista, Quick subtly hints of a romantic fate between the two characters. Immediately it is apparent that Mr. Hastings has an insecurity, the scars that

travel the left side of his body. Calista's reaction was nothing more than unaffected. She states, "Everyone has scars, Mr. Hastings. Some are more visible than others, but that need not present any great problem." (19) This unlikely romantic journey blooms with attempts of the two solving Calista's mystery. Mr. Hastings is a mystery novelist, so he feels he has the expertise to help Calista investigate her potentially dangerous situation. As the story progresses the chemistry of Calista and Mr. Hastings is undeniable.

Amanda Quick has created an interesting interaction between setting and character. Calista Langley is a strong independent woman who is well ahead of her time. As the protagonist Calista runs an introduction agency with the help of her younger brother Andrew. Her business is unique in that extensive background checks are performed for every client in order to solidify the safety of everyone involved. In the novel, Quick places heavy emphasis on money-seeking men, attempting to wed women of great inheritance. In fact, Calista almost married a man of this very kind by the name of Nestor Kettering. When he realized Calista dwells in a beautiful home but does not actually sit on any surplus of money, he was gone like the wind. Her history explains her tough exterior and edge. Throughout the solving the mystery Calista proves herself to be as tough as her counterpart Mr. Hastings even though he is constantly belittling her by asking her to stay behind. Mr. Hastings not only acts superior to Calista but also to his sister Eudora. They end up saving each other's lives on multiple occasions. In being observant of the time period, readers aren't necessarily supposed to dislike Mr. Hastings because of these flaws. His words and actions simply speak to the feminist undertones. They end up saving each other's lives on multiple occasions. It is also significant to mention that protagonist Calista is also impressively poised and articulate. Calista represents many aspects of feminism that Quick stands for throughout this work.

The many components that are the DNA of *'Til Death Do Us Part* contribute to my reaction after divulging this work of art. The unpredictable mystery combined with the sexy romance provided the entertainment to us. Amanda Quick did not merely seek to entertain her audience, she wanted to educate us as well. The beautiful work of art that is *'Til Death Do Us Part* is well worth the read.



## Book Review >>> Catherine Gallagher

# *Problems*

Author: Jade Sharma

Publisher: Coffee House Press, 2016

In today's world, the heroin epidemic is at an all-time high. Major cities like Columbus are struggling to combat the addiction, but it is not without grievances. Maya, the protagonist of Jade Sharma's debut novel, *Problems*, exposes us to the gritty, humorous, yet all-consuming lifestyle of drug addiction, and just how hard it is to get out.

At the beginning of the novel, Maya is a graduate student working at a small bookstore in New York City. She is unhappily married to Peter, an alcoholic who she thinks is gay, and has just ended her affair with her English professor, Ogden. Her mother is suffering from MS, but they are not close.

Outside of her relationship struggles, Maya is also dealing with an eating disorder. She is on a "starvation diet"—no more than 800 calories a day—which mainly consists of Greek yogurt, a nod to the photograph of a yogurt tub on the book's cover (Sharma 10). For Thanksgiving, her and Peter go to his parents' house, but it is not without drama. Maya has decided to take this weekend to withdrawal by using the drug Suboxone, which gives her a high but not to the same extent that heroin does. She feels like the odd one out because she has to hide her cigarettes and withdrawal symptoms, and is also jealous of Peter's successful relationships.

The tension between her and Peter worsens when they return from the holiday. Peter, upset with Maya's unwillingness to quit using, moves out. Soon after, she is fired from her job at the bookstore and quickly—almost comfortably—falls back into her old habit of using heroin 24/7. She repeatedly tries to lean on Ogden as an emotional crutch, but he does not want anything to do with her, either. While the novel is not separated into 'normal' chapters, there are multiple quotes from famous writers, such as Lorrie Moore, that relate to what Maya is going through at that particular time in the book. This is a refreshing take since it pairs well with her being an English graduate student.

As the novel goes on, Maya delves deeper into her addiction while trying to re-discover herself: who she is, what she wants, and what she thinks she deserves. This results in her living with strangers, blowing off most of her money on drugs. However, money does not grow on trees in this part of New York City, so she starts meeting "johns" on websites such as Craigslist to earn money for performing sexual favors.

The main themes of the book are drug abuse, self-esteem/beauty, and the relationship between the two. In Maya's world, it seems like one cannot exist without the other: Either you are using drugs and selling yourself, or not using drugs and still having a bad outlook on life. She constantly argues with herself about ending her addiction, and often describes



her physical appearance negatively, which did not make her very personable. Her self-esteem is mostly wrapped up in the way men perceive her body, and if they are not attracted to her, then she feels like less of a person. Using drugs allows her to be more “open,” as in, she does not have as many cares in the world. It seems like the higher she gets, the easier it is to go through life and pretend like she does not have any problems (hence the title).

This book also deals with morality because Maya is not afraid to die from overdosing. In fact, towards the middle of the book, Sharma uses the second-person point-of-view (“you”), which is initially a bit distracting and unnecessary. However, this allows us into Maya’s world, as if we are in her shoes, trying to survive.

The conclusion felt a bit rushed and confusing. Maya decides once again to stop using, and the last few major scenes of the book are in second-person, as if Maya is just there to narrate the scene and what “you” are seeing. The author has a very brittle and humorous take on the themes in the book; the writing is often crass, the sentences heated and short, like Maya wrote this herself while she was high.

The message of the novel is to spread drug-addiction awareness and the consequences it can have on oneself, their family and friends, and their career opportunities. Maya often avoids her problems instead of confronting them, which made the book sometimes hard to follow, especially if you stopped reading it for a few days. Maya often has a bleak outlook on life and has explicit, detailed opinions on sex, which is why this may not be appropriate for a general audience. I would recommend it for young adults (18+) for the sexual content and descriptive drug-usage scenes.

This was mainly written for people interested in learning about the drug/alcohol-abuse culture, and also those who have relatives/friends who abuse drugs. People who read *Problems* get a better sense of how addictive drugs really are, their corruption to the body and mind, and how quickly someone can spiral down.







