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From the Editor



Editing *Popular Culture Review* for the last 27 years has been a labor of love. I would like to acknowledge the support of UNLV's College of Liberal Arts and Department of English as well as PCA/ACA and, most recently Policy Studies Organization.

Thank you all,
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From the Editor's Desk

Welcome to the Summer 2010 issue of *Popular Culture Review* which is, I think, one of the best ever. Diversity seems to be our middle name with articles ranging over the centuries, around the world, and across the many areas of popular culture studies.

We begin with Philip Kolin's discovery of a new Tennessee Williams letter and end with Joshua Mason's examination of existential elements in *Fight Club*. In between, Juan Martinez examines Jacques Tournier's *I Walked with a Zombie*, Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*, and the problems and rewards of visible obstacles, while Heather Momyer tackles *Kill Bill*. Bill Ceccio and Diana Reep explore the new "popular Gospel" in *The DaVinci Code*, while Anthony Patricia discusses Ann Rice's shift from Popular Vampire to Popular Christ.

Dancing in seventeenth century Spanish theaters is Tania de Miguel Magro's foray into early Popular Culture, while John Walliss is as contemporary as possible in his research of *Warhammer 40,000* fanfiction. Finally, Mary O'Donnell sees a reforming of Victorian ideology in detective fiction in Mary Russell's *Bleak House*: in essence, Dickens meets Laurie R. King.

PCR is a labor of love and as always my thanks go to Amie Norris and Mindy Hutchings, my trusty Associate Editors, without whose dedication we would never get to press. Amie not only helped bring forth the journal but produced a baby during the summer rush. Thanks also to Laurens Tan for another memorable cover.

We are a little late and I don't want to delay your reading as we hurtle into the fall semester, but do want to remind you to keep your calendars clear for our 23rd Annual Meeting in March which we know will be the best ever. For more details, go to <http://www.farwestpca.blogspot.com>.

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Tricky Dick Nixon, Walter Cronkite, and CBS Television: A New Tennessee Williams Letter

Given his bohemian, peripatetic lifestyle, Tennessee Williams has rarely been tagged as a popular commentator on, or even participant, in American presidential elections. In a brief essay entitled "Facts About Me," Williams asserted that he "had no acquaintance with political and social dialectics. If you ask what my politics are, I am a Humanitarian" (66). In fact, he voted in just one U.S. presidential election, casting his ballot in 1932 for Norman Thomas, the Socialist candidate who was as much of an outcast from center stage politics as were Williams and his disruptive plays. Yet Williams nurtured a contempt for one of America's most vilified presidents—Richard Milhouse Nixon—that extended over four decades. Williams's comments in his correspondence, including a new letter published for the first time later in this article, his interviews, and notebooks helped to contribute to the popular canon of Nixon phobia.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Nixon was a California congressman and then a senator serving on the House Un-American Activities Committee, chaired by Eugene McCarthy, the inquisitorial senator from Wisconsin, he attracted Williams's derision for his role in the Alger Hiss case and, no doubt, for his purging of Williams's friends in the theatre, including his longtime director, Elia Kazan, and fellow playwright, Arthur Miller. In a letter dated August 23, 1952, to Kazan, Williams was outraged that *Time* magazine had put Nixon on their cover: "They are taking the gloves off. The Divine Nixon is on the cover! He looks like the gradeschool bully that used to wait for me behind a broken fence and twist my ear to make me say obscene things . . . Jesus, what's going on?! Nixon has also come out for McCarthy! Will support his candidacy without necessarily endorsing all his views and says Eisenhower will, too. We must get to the States for this election, Brother . . ." (qt. in *Notebooks*, 558). At the time, Kazan and Williams were in Germany preparing for the opening of *Camino Real* (1953), perhaps Williams's most revolutionary play. Needless to say, Williams did not come back to the States to cast his vote against the "Divine Nixon" and the Republican Party. In a letter of October 8, 1952, to Gilbert Maxwell, Williams claimed a standing membership in the "Nix on Nixon Club" (*Selected Letters* 453).

Nixon remained Williams's *bête noir*. After winning a second term for the presidency, Nixon again harassed Williams's correspondence. In a November 10, 1972, letter to his confidante and self-proclaimed executrix, the Countess Maria St. Just, Williams satirically compared Nixon's political tricks and posturing with those of his younger brother Dakin, who at the time was running for a U.S. senate.

Dink has taken to riding a motorcycle about Illinois to improve his political prospects. Which can *only* be improved, even on a motorbike. . . . He sent me a big write-up with a photo of himself wearing a motorbike helmet adorned with the American flag and the name Dakin.—I doubt he suspects that what he is really running for is the title or office of America's biggest eccentric.—Possibly that could be a successful campaign, in view of Tricky Dick's triumph this week. (*Five O'Clock Angel* 277)

Two months later, as Nixon started his second term, Williams again wrote to Maria St. Just proclaiming, "Civilization has really collapsed under Nixon" and pondered "emigrating for an indefinite period. Get that peaceful little farm in Sicily with goats and cheese" (*Five O'Clock Angel* 282). Williams feared for America because of "Tricky Dick" and his ilk. Earlier, in a 1966 interview with Walter Wager, the playwright declared: "There are so many false leaders . . . politicians like Senator Dirksen and Mr. Nixon; and . . . the late Senator McCarthy . . . people like that who are impeding the spirit of American people" (qtd. in Devlin, *Conversations* 132).

Williams's remarks in the 1960s and 1970s about Nixon echoed his fears expressed 40 years earlier in a letter to his friend Joe Hazen that "Some people say we must be Fascists to fight Fascism . . . What will become of us? What will become of our passion for truth in this great Battle of Lies? who can we speak to, who can we write for—what can we say? We have to get out and stay out of this damnable mess" (qtd. in Leverich 377). Williams certainly could not support a Fascist-like government under Tricky Dick. So intense was his animus for the 37th president that in 1972 Williams confided in Jim Gaines, another friend, that he was working on a satiric play—*Babylon Now*—a veiled reference to the U.S. where the whore, who was a "compulsive eater," entertains the plutocratic Dick Nixon (qtd. in Devlin, *Conversations* 218).

A heretofore unpublished Tennessee Williams letter, dated October 3, 1972, and typed on Hotel Elysée (where Williams choked to death on a bottle cap on February 23, 1983) stationery, sheds further light on Williams's contempt for Nixon and for his despicable tactics that were poisoning the American spirit. Included among the Bill Barnes (Williams's agent) papers at the Historic New Orleans Collection (MSS 562.25.3.1), the letter was occasioned by Williams's rancor over the way CBS news, and supposedly anchor Walter Cronkite as well, unflatteringly presented presidential candidate George McGovern, on a broadcast aired on the evening of October 2, as if he were in a state of "lassitude and fatigue" and with Mrs. McGovern looking "pitifully exhausted." Outraged, Williams feared that such biased coverage may well lead to the re-election of Nixon and Agnew, and "their malignant duplicities still with them." Understandably, for Williams, Nixon symbolized the shrewd politician who successfully manipulated the media—national television—to win support. Nixon, Williams surely recalled, had a long history of using television to create

Tricky Dick Nixon, Walter Cronkite, and CBS Television 7

a persona that would whitewash his transgressions in the eyes of the electorate. Accused of taking \$18,000 in campaign funds for his personal use, then vice presidential nominee Nixon delivered his (in)famous "Checkers Speech" in September 1952 to tell his side of the story to the people. Using "Checkers," a cocker spaniel he had received as a gift and whom he could not return because his daughters loved him so, Nixon milked the TV audience for their sympathy and support by painting a picture of himself and his family as anything but corrupt and wealthy. His wife Pat, for instance, wore no furs, only "a respectable Republican cloth coat," and accepting "Checkers," Nixon pleaded, hardly constituted a crime that enriched the Nixons. Tricky Dick invoked "family values" to keep his spot on the Republican presidential ticket for 1952. But Nixon also used his "Checkers Speech" to besmirch his foes for the very crime for which he was accused.

Nixon's strategy of beating his opponents down in any and every way possible clearly relates to the tone and tenor of Williams's letter to CBS for allowing the "lingering" camera shot of the "pitiably exhausted McGoverns." Here follows the previously unpublished letter oozing with Williams's indignation.

Hotel Elysée

60 EAST 54th STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

Oct. 3, 1972

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.
Attention of Mr. Walter Cronkite and Associates

Dear Sirs:

Knowing how little it probably means to you, I feel obliged, however, to protest the subtly and sometimes not so subtly negative fashion in which you are following the campaign of McGovern for the Presidency.

Last night, for instance, the camera shots of the Senator, and more particularly of his wife, could hardly have been accidentally so unfavorable. Mrs. McGovern was pitiably exhausted: the camera lingered unkindly on her tired face, on two unnecessary occasions.

Then the shot of the two of them on the hotel sofa in

West Va.—

The light caught Senator McGovern's full seated figure in a profile shot that emphasized his paunch and again the feeling was one of lassitude and fatigue.

It is perhaps a bit premature for me to assess your attitude in this campaign but what I saw in Mr. Cronkite's hour, yesterday evening, was hardly reassuring.

From the first time that I saw Senator McGovern's face on TV in the early primaries I recognized an honesty in his eyes which is far more important than those understandably sometimes confused moments of mounting a campaign without the vast sums, without the "charisma," without the "hard sell" by those more experienced pitch-men who have come to pass for statesmen in our political life.

Have you reflected upon what will happen to this country if McGovern's opposition, Nixon-Agnew, are placed again at the head of it for four more years, with the full unconfessed and unshriven weight of all their malignant duplicities still with them? Have you thought at all about this?

I am afraid that I have found no indication that you have thought about it in your news coverage of the campaign so far, and this is to me a very deep and bitter disappointment, having been until the last few months a man who could hardly wait for your evening account of the day.

I can't sincerely ask you to excuse my presumption.
Please think if you value this country.
Sincerely,
Tennessee Williams¹

Unlike the demonized Nixon, McGovern was regarded as a statesman of high principles, according to Williams and his friend Gore Vidal, plus actors such as Warren Beatty (who starred in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*) and Paul Newman (who won acclaim in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*). In fact, Newman made Nixon's "enemies list" for his fiery denunciation of Tricky Dick's conduct in office (Nichols). Williams professed his admiration for McGovern in a 1973 *Playboy* interview with C. Robert Jennings: "I think a politician should say only what he believes and not equivocate, as McGovern tried to do" (qtd. in Devlin, *Conversations* 248). In Williams's eyes, Nixon waffled on ending the Vietnam War, which Williams publically spoke out against, while McGovern unequivocally promised to end it. In addition to articulating Williams's political preferences, his letter to CBS reveals a keen-eyed artist-painter who understood the power of the camera in creating personal illusions/personae and in determining elections. Certainly, a tired-looking McGovern shown on CBS TV was politically vulnerable, just as the unshaven, dark, and overwrought Nixon was in the Kennedy-Nixon debates, an image of Tricky Dick responsible, in part, for his defeat in 1959. Finally, Williams intimates that America's most respected anchor at the time, Walter Cronkite, was culpable in CBS's attempt to sabotage McGovern's campaign. The last few lines of Williams's letter drip with accusatory disappointment over Cronkite, who thereby joined the ranks of other deceiving Big Daddys/bullies in Williams's life and canon (Kullman).

Williams's vitriolic letter to CBS about distorting the truth to empower a corrupt politician recalls a similar tactic used by Boss Finley in Williams's *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1957). Demanding that his daughter Heavenly appear in virginal white on camera with him at a political rally instead of running off to a convent, Boss Finley is determined to cover up the fact that he forced her to have an abortion (carrying her lover Chance Wayne's baby) and had instructed his cronies to tell the press that she was in the hospital for an appendectomy. But this excuse is not flying in St. Cloud, the Boss's hometown, as a heckler in the crowd shouts, "Did [Heavenly] put on black in mourning for her appendix?" (53). The Boss's real reason for the cover up is to present his daughter as a model of unsullied femininity to build further momentum in his hate campaign against blacks, whom he attacks as a threat to "white women's chastity." But when Heavenly mocks her father, "Papa you have got an illusion of power," the "false leader" Finley bluntly responds, "I have power, which is not an illusion" (53). Rebuking Heavenly, he explains the power television has to create an illusion to justify his "malignant duplicities":

Now, tonight, I'm addressing the Youth for Tom Finley clubs in the ballroom of the Royal Palms Hotel. My speech is going out over a national TV network, and Missy, you're going to march in the ballroom on my arm. You're going to be wearing the stainless white of a virgin, with a Youth for Tom Finley button on one shoulder and a corsage of lilies on the other.

You're going to be on the speaker's platform with me, you on one side and Tom Junior on the other, to scotch these rumors about your corruption. And you're gonna wear a proud happy smile on your face, you're gonna stare straight out at the crowd in the ballroom with pride and joy in your eyes. Lookin' at you, all in white like a virgin, nobody would dare to speak or believe all the ugly stories about you. I'm relying a great deal on this campaign to bring in young voters for the crusade I'm leading. (53–54)

Like the Nixon described in Williams's letter of October 2, Boss Finley is a "pitchman," "unshriven and unconfessed," who has the savvy to use national television to showcase his united and loving family, really a front to conceal the image of himself and his dangerous political agenda. On the other hand, the ruthless senator in *The Red Devil Battery Sign* (1975) puts his rebellious daughter away, "in a private school for disturbed children, more like an institution" (335). Grown up, the daughter called Woman Downtown confesses, "I never saw him again except on political newscasts" (336). This politician would allow no one, not even his daughter, to tarnish his public image projected on television.

Elsewhere, too, in the Williams canon television is linked to destructive illusions. A television set figures prominently, for instance, in Brick Pollitt's bedroom in *Cat on a Tin Roof* (1955). Trying to escape the mendacity he sees all around him, including the lies he tells himself about his relationship with his dead gay friend Skipper, Brick repeatedly retreats to a "huge console combination of radio-phonograph (hi-fi with three speakers) TV set and liquor cabinet" (*Cat* 6). Commenting on this key prop, Williams claimed: "This piece of furniture, this monument, is a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with . . ." (6). Williams links Brick's corrosive heroic illusions about Skipper to TV. Sealed away in his own world, Brick frequently turns the television on to turn off his family when they start questioning him about Skipper. Unable to play a major football game with his teammate Skipper because of a back injury, Brick watches it intently on TV from a traction bed in Toledo without knowing that "the Dixie Stars lost because Skipper was drunk" (39). Still holding onto the illusion that he and Skipper had a pure friendship, as he watches his friend on television, Brick fails to see that Skipper drank himself to death because Brick rejected his friend's love for him. Zeroing in on Brick's mendacity, Dixie Maggie tells him "you organized the Stars so you [and Skipper] could keep on bein' teammates forever! But something was not right with it." A failed friend, athlete, husband, and son, Brick ironically becomes a television sports announcer sitting in "a glass box watching" games he could not play (76). As a prop and verbal image, then, the television sets in *Cat* symbolize the various illusions Brick hides behind. While not associated with political gambits as in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the use of

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television images in *Cat* nonetheless reinforce Williams's message in his letter to CBS about how TV can create false illusions.

Based upon his experiences recounted in his *Memoirs* (1975), Williams himself had a disparaging view of television and dismissed his interviews on camera as "demeaning exercises" (94). Commenting on his mishaps with TV crews from Germany, Austria, Canada, and the U.S., Williams believed for the most part they were scandalmongers seeking to capitalize on the popular image they perpetuated of him as "the notorious playwright, addicted to dope and all that." When a German crew interviewed Williams on the patio of his house on Dumaine Street in the French Quarter, he recalled:

The commentator sat beneath a spreading banana tree which protected him from the rain while I had to sit out in the open getting drenched and answering all of those innocuous questions and pretending total ignorance of their reason for having come down here, which, of course, the fact that they want to get some footage of the notorious American playwright, the queer one, whose decease will soon give him a moment of prominence in the media. Do you know how people are about things like that? Well, if you don't, I can tell you. They love it. It quickens their blood. It makes them feel immortal. (94)

Similarly, when Harry Rasky and a Canadian TV crew came to New Orleans to interview him, they made Williams walk the streets of the Quarter, where he was "drenched . . . with sweat instead of rain" (*Memoirs* 95). Again, the image of Williams that TV carried was hardly dignified or even writerly. Like George McGovern, whom he defended in his letter of October 3, 1972, to Walter Cronkite and CBS, Williams was frequently stereotyped in the media in the most unflattering poses and places the camera could discover.

However, seeing their opponent George McGovern on camera, with his "paunch" and "lassitude" emphasized, Tricky Dick and his supporters must have gloated in their quest for immortality through another presidential election. But as Tennessee Williams and millions of the American electorate would find out, Nixon would play the innocent one time too many on television. As images of Watergate haunted American households glued to their TVs in 1974, Nixon himself fell victim to his own politics of sullyng reputations.

University of Southern Mississippi

Phillip Kolin

Notes

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Mary Russell's *Bleak House*: Reforming Victorian Ideology in Detective Fiction

Laurie King's contemporary detective series featuring Sherlock Holmes's protégé Mary Russell as its protagonist reveals layers of meaning that allow for interpretation beyond many other detective series. Careful examination of specifically *A Monstrous Regiment of Women* (the second in the Mary Russell series) exposes complicated character, plot, and thematic parallels to Dickens's detective fiction in *Bleak House*. This is partly attributable to the Russell series' preoccupation with improving/defeating all things Victorian, as is repeatedly stated by both author and heroine. The purpose of comparing these texts and teasing out the parallels is to analyze how a modern historical novel's existence can, from a contemporary perspective (though in a 1920s setting), resolve some problems of Victorian ideology and its influence on detective fiction. The result will be to synthesize the two to understand and come to some conclusion on the issues of the significance of truth in revelation, class distinction, and the role of women in society, with special attention to philanthropy. At the same time, some textual parallels (e.g., reverence for the unexplained, or faith, uncharacteristic in detective fiction) between the books serve to underscore ideas originally found in Dickens. Examples of these can be found in minor characters and setting ("London in December opens one's eyes to the bleaker aspects of Dickens," King says, <http://www.laurierking.com/>) and the continued negative influence of foreign, specifically French, culture as well as commentary on cross-generational marriage.

In Mary Russell, King has created a compelling and dynamic character based on a desire to improve the Victorian position on detecting as seen in Doyle and, by extension, Dickens, "intending to make Russell young, female, feminist, 20th century, therefore much the superior of Sherlock Holmes," King explains in an interview with Richard Reynolds (on her website). Russell comes into both her majority and full maturity in *A Monstrous Regiment of Women* (hereafter, *Regiment*). Using early 20th-century England as a setting, *Regiment* attempts to tackle the woes of early feminism, just after the suffragist victory of the vote. Quotations introducing each chapter of the novel feature opinions on women from Tennyson to Susan B. Anthony. Usually negative, these quotations serve to underscore the precarious position of women in the West during the early 20th century despite the rise of modernism and progressiveness, and the legacy of the popularized New Woman, blue stocking, and suffragette.

Russell's character observes the women's issues of her day, though she remains mostly detached from them due to her inheritance and education. In the origins of Mary Russell (*The Beekeeper's Apprentice*) the reader is presented with an adolescent heroine. She is an outsider with few friends whose only hobby is reading on long walks. When she trips over Holmes on one of these

walks, she has met her intellectual match. After a long tutelage on the art and science of detecting, they become friends and bafflingly, despite their large age gap (30-plus years), partners. This is attributable in part to Russell's weighty and age-inappropriate intellect but mostly to her tenacity.

Unlike her *Bleak House* counterpart Esther, Russell is precocious and immodest, challenging Holmes and arguing with anyone who disagrees with her regardless of social standing. Some of this disparity can be viewed through the historical context of a Victorian (*Bleak House*) versus a 1920s (*Regiment*) setting. However, one must assume the presentation of Russell as different from Esther is intentional and aimed at offering a character more palatable to feminists, as King explains. Russell is transparent in her desires and outspoken and active in attaining them, everything that Esther cannot be, with the exception of vital marriage. Similarities between the two protagonists, however, repeatedly arise as the storyline of *Regiment* unfolds.

The most obvious parallel between Esther and Russell (apart from their both being young, British, female narrators) is their status as orphans forced to live with begrudging and psychologically abusive aunts. *Regiment* opens with Russell living in anticipation of the closing of the "last year of [her] aunt's control of what she saw as the family purse" (3). Her justified disdain for her aunt is outlined more explicitly in *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, as her aunt passive-aggressively terrorizes her by refusing her adequate food and clothing, despite the large inheritance in her possession. Esther suffers similar harm at the hands of her original guardian, who she presumes is merely her godmother but in reality is her maternal aunt. Her aunt's disposition is best summarized in her own words to her niece on Esther's birthday, "It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!" (Dickens 30).

This passage also touches on the theme of body image. Much is made of the fact that Esther is small in stature. She is almost obsessively referred to throughout the text as the "little woman." Quite the opposite is true of Russell who is always referred to as tall with long limbs. The difference in their physical presentations given the political significance of women's bodies throughout history cannot be overlooked.

A handy explanation is that this physical distinction extends and reinforces the personality differences highlighted above. Russell is forward and assertive, hence a tall physical presence. Esther plays the part of the traditional naïve girl, hence a "little woman." However, we quickly see that, in Esther's case, some of this is lip service: "[Esther] has the vital quality of truthfulness, and a willingness to observe evidence and to ask questions which equip her to guide us into the story" (Bradbury xxi). So although Esther is as unfamiliar with London and its ins and outs as Russell in *Regiment* (getting lost in the fog daily), neither of them is naïve and both are junior detectives, solving the mysteries into which they've been thrown.

There *are* similarities in their appearance inasmuch as their shared disfigurement. Esther contracts a disease (likely smallpox) during the course of the novel that scars her to the point where her beauty is said to have gone. Russell also undergoes extensive scarring from the childhood car wreck that took her family and in saving Holmes's life. This prevents her from wearing anything but a high neckline. During the course of the novels, both women are injured protecting smaller, weaker characters (the child Jo in the case of Esther and the child-like Margery Childe in Russell's case). These injuries highlight the characters' altruism and the toll this takes on their bodies. This is a far cry from the super-human detective found in many other mysteries and has special relevance given that they are both young, single women.

For Russell, her further investigation into the deaths of women associated with the Temple leaves her (temporarily) a heroin-addicted wreck who "left the remnants of [her] youth in one of [the house's] deserted cellars" (281). When Esther looks at herself in the mirror after her illness and says, "It was all gone now" (572), she is not just talking about her looks but her youth and hopes of marrying Woodcourt, the man she loves.

Instead, Esther settles for engagement to her generous but much older guardian Jarndyce. The dull and ultimately failed May-December marriage of the Dedlocks gives us an idea of what Dickens thought of a marriage across generations. When Esther is freed from the promise to marry her middle-aged guardian, she makes a natural match in the younger Woodcourt.

Regiment's commentary on the extreme of a May-December romance is quite the opposite. Russell marries Holmes to the probable consternation of feminists. (This is possibly the case for the general public as well given King's defensive FAQ response about the age difference on her website and her description of it as "kinky" in the interview with Reynolds.) Esther has similarly contradictory qualities "that feminist critics . . . have found . . . fascinating" (Bradbury xiv). Esther likely agrees to marry her guardian out of a sense of obligation not attraction. Russell's genuine attraction to a man 30-plus years her senior who was once her guardian for all intents and purposes is somewhat disconcerting and Electra-like. King herself married an older man when she was a young woman, but it is highly doubtful the gap was so large, and he had no part in her early tutelage and care as an adolescent.

If the marriage between Russell and Holmes is read through the lens of *Bleak House*, it can be seen as a "folding in" of characters. *Bleak House's* daunting number of minor characters is something that must be dealt with in a contemporary detective fiction because each serves a psychological purpose. Mrs. Bucket is her husband's partner in solving mysteries and assists him in solving the murder. Russell's role via comparison, therefore, may take on marriage to Holmes to psychologically "role in" the character and more equal partner of wife, legitimizing the Russell/Holmes liaison and intellectual partnership in both society's eyes and the reader's.

This is still something of an inadequate response to Esther's Victorian lack of forcefulness. When Russell goes to London to see Holmes and he reacts, ". . . you came to ask me to marry you," (11) she acts every bit as confused and helpless as Esther. Despite that this *is* her reason for coming, she ignores Holmes's entreaty, ". . . you are a great proponent of the emancipation of women; surely you can manage to carry out your intentions in this little matter" (13). The fact that she does not carry out her intentions is in part a reaction to his callousness. A feminist reading of this as set against Esther's actions, though, would only have slightly more positive things to point to.

On the one hand, Holmes is much older than Russell; on the other, she chooses to marry him and makes the first move by coming to see him. Whereas Esther gives up hope of marrying Woodcourt and leaves it to Jarndyce to infer her wishes, Russell takes charge by going to Holmes. Here, however, is one place King's slight discomfiture with feminism (despite being a self-described feminist) is revealed through Russell. Russell runs from Holmes. Her inability to put the question of marriage before him for the entire novel, despite her wishes, is antithetical to the bold character King has heretofore presented. Russell acts precisely as Esther Summerson would.

Russell follows Holmes's lead in many things *and* in this most important question, slightly detracting from King's attempt to create a feminist heroine who is the improved Victorian male detective. Perhaps the intent is to improve the Esther archetype not perfect her, lending credibility to the actions of what a woman would do at the time for the purposes of verisimilitude. However, in their weaker moments Russell and Esther become one: victims and agents of the whims of the men around them, making their internalized and unuttered wishes less significant.

More disconcerting than feminist objections to the actions of the heroines is the apparent acceptance of their men's attraction to women whom they met and cared for as adolescents. Holmes declares after kissing Russell for the first time, "I've wanted to do that since the moment I laid eyes upon you" (328), a romantic statement until you consider that she was 15 and dressed as a boy when they met. Of course, women often married older men at both the time of *Bleak House* and *Regiment*, but it is interesting that the contemporary female author is the one to cast marriage to a much older man in a favorable light.

There is precedence in the literature for marriage between detectives (Christie's Tommy and Tuppence) and even implied partnership in the definition of the mentor-mentee relationship that is psychologically akin to marriage (Palmer 26). However, the extreme age gap combined with Russell's inaction in the face of marriage take away from her large physical presence and assertiveness. Dickens may have created a little woman who lacks forcefulness, but in choosing to marry Holmes (and in wanting to without being able to say so), isn't Russell falling victim to playing her role in a partial patriarchy? Is Russell's friend Veronica's statement reaffirmed in this when she says, "there

must be plenty of . . . older men . . . who mightn't normally expect to marry again . . . Doing their part for England's 'surplus women'," (111)?

Perhaps the presence of a great detective makes this slight feminist transgression more forgivable. In looking at the larger-than-life Holmes, lines have been drawn from him in *Regiment* to Jarndyce as guardian and mentor (and eventually fiancé), but his most obvious counterpart is Inspector Bucket. Although Holmes, "has a foothold in both the amateur and private investigator worlds . . ." (Ball 27) and Bucket is a professional police investigator, there are character links that are irrefutable. Bucket is frequently described as a diviner who seems to pull conclusions out of thin air: "This 'magic lantern' performance is a fitting symbol for . . . Bucket's impressive visualizing powers . . ." (Thomas 131). When first we meet Mr. Bucket, he isn't seen entering and is described as having a "ghostly manner of appearing" (Dickens 355), exemplifying his "almost magical" expertise (Bradbury xxvi).

Holmes's eerie and inherent powers of detection are often referenced in both the original Doyle stories and in King's presentation. Much of the time the context for such praise is in the form of rebuking Watson's narration. For example, in "Silver Blaze" Holmes remarks, "Because I made a blunder, my dear Watson—which is, I am afraid, a more common occurrence than anyone would think who only knew me through your memoirs" (Doyle 84). Mary Russell is immediately impressed with Holmes's magical skills, "Two hundred years ago you would have been burnt. . . a person who achieves knowledge and power . . . a sorcerer" (King *Beekeeper's* 18). In addition to seemingly magical powers of divining, the two characters share an omnipresence that is nearly ethereal for the times: Holmes with his Baker Street Irregulars and disguises that allow him to exercise "his all-seeing gaze" (*Regiment* 75) and Bucket with "his mind an observation tower, his unlimited vision . . ." (Thomas 143).

Much is also made of both of their hands and fingers as powerful and enigmatic personifications of their larger characters. Bucket is always in consult with his forefinger when he's working over a case in his mind and about to have an epiphany. Dickens writes, "He puts [his finger] to his ears, and it whispers information . . . he shakes it before a guilty man, and it charms him to his destruction" (803). Likewise Holmes's fingers are always forming a steeple when he is in deepest concentration. In addition to *Regiment*, numerous King and Doyle stories allude to the power of Holmes's hands as "so clever" and "extraordinary" (King *Letter* 23, 24). His hands are spoken about as having powers inherent to them independent of the man to whom they belong.

Both men's powers are described as not merely uncanny, but otherworldly. This otherworldliness turns out to be on the side of what's just, but not without some ambiguity. Bucket works in concert with Tulkinghorn at first, which is antithetical to a reader's perception that he is an honest character given Tulkinghorn's role (as his name suggests) as a pseudo-villain. However, we eventually discover that Bucket is after the truth out of a sense of duty.

Similarly, Holmes's sketchy past of heroin addiction and affiliation with the criminal world make him a complicated hero (or heroine's partner).

While the power to divine to the shock of others is not an unusual characteristic for the protagonists of detective fiction, Bucket and Holmes share the related feature of cold rationality and a lack of outward expression, despite a disguised, much-referenced, powerful inner passion. These elements seem to arise out of personality very organically. Their relationships with Mrs. Bucket and Esther, and Russell, respectively, are all that seem to make them vulnerable humans who need the help of their juniors to inspire and assist them.

Demonstrably the two are matched in their ability to think in revelations without revealing the slightest change in their appearance. Dickens writes, ". . . Bucket notices things in general, with a face as unchanging as the great mourning ring on his little finger" (358). Holmes also rarely betrays his thought processes. Russell repeatedly remarks on this, ". . . he studied me without a trace of expression . . ." (*King Beekeeper's* 23), and she feels rewarded when she can inspire any reaction from him at all.

It is not, however, the male detectives who take center stage, but the suspicious women in each novel. Lady Dedlock is a source of mystery right up until her demise. Her muddy past clouds her identity for so long that it leads to her being accused of a murder she has not committed. Likewise, Margery Childe's mysterious past and romantic life are *Regiment's* source of consternation for the entire plot, and she too seems to be behind the murders surrounding her Temple.

Tellingly (in terms of future revelations of innocence) both Dedlock and Childe are met by our young heroines in church. Esther unwittingly comes face to face with her own mother in an Anglican Church, and Russell sees Childe speak for the first time in her less stately New Temple in God. Here we meet the resplendent Childe draped in peach and gold silk, despite her subtle lack of refinement and her being, "self-educated since the age of fifteen" (39). Lady Dedlock is also presented as a woman whose clothing literally makes her, "the centre of the fashionable intelligence . . . the best-groomed woman in the whole stud" (22–33). Much is made of both of these ladies' high station in their communities in terms of popularity and wealth, and their luxurious clothing is drawn attention to in both novels to suggest incongruity with their sketchy pasts.

Russell first suspects something is awry with Childe because of her own ". . . visceral aversion to the control [Childe] held over her listeners . . ." (71), several times noting the quality of her dress as an extravagance more appropriate for a false prophet. While this is far from hard evidence, it is similar to the vague warning issued about Dedlock from the other (non-Esther) *Bleak House* narrator. That she has earned her position only by marrying Dedlock is repeatedly emphasized, exemplifying as Childe does humble beginnings and potential disingenuousness.

Elements of plot and theme also draw these two mysterious women together. Both women are undone by secret romantic love. Lady Dedlock dies at

the grave of Captain Hawdon (or Nemo) believing that the world thinks her a murderer and her husband has cast her off as a whore because of her secret liaison. Of course, Bucket and Esther are in pursuit aiming to clear her name and bring her the news that Sir Leicester forgives all. They fail to reach her in time to save her life, but her downfall is also what ensnares Margery Childe. Childe's secret marriage to Claude (who like Hawdon has as many names as identities) is the ruin of her church and good works. He is behind a plot to kill the wealthy members of her parish, forging wills to benefit the church with plans to ultimately kill Childe and inherit it all.

The prominence of wills in both novels is interesting. As in *Regiment*, "forgery, drugs, murder, and blackmail run rampant [in *Bleak House*] . . ." (Roseman). Wills are the fuel for the greed that sparks much of this crime in both novels. Lady Dedlock is involved in the Chancery plot of Jarndyce and Jarndyce because of one of the many wills floating around the confused court proceedings. In addition to the forged wills in *Regiment*, there's the key will that leaves Russell in the rare position of being an independently wealthy young woman, with all the freedom to become a detective out of curiosity rather than necessity like Peter Wimsey (Dorothy Sayers's gentleman detective and minor character in the Russell series).

At the base of these secret love plots is the revelation that both Childe and Dedlock are innocent of the murders the investigators previously thought them guilty. Of course, both women are guilty of concealing reputation-damaging secret liaisons, but by most standards innocent on the whole. Lady Dedlock's name Honoria suggests this innocence all along, as does Childe's. The fact that Lady Dedlock dies for her self-perceived sin is one of many Victorian traditions the Mary Russell series' existence combats.

Here we find the modernization of the detective plot as the answer to a key concept of modern detecting in fiction, as well as class and feminist concerns. The revelation of truth in *Bleak House* unravels homes, lives, and family, leaving only misery in its wake. As Bradbury confirms, ". . . the novel carefully unfolds the damage done in pursuing this history, and contrasts it with the greater good of free pardon" (xv). Life eventually goes on for Esther despite the loss of her mother and friends, but the Dedlocks are, well, dead, as is Tulkinghorn, Hawdon/Nemo, Richard, Jo, and so on. Like the Chancery law suits, little good seems to come out of Bucket and Esther's investigation. Lady Dedlock doesn't live long enough to hear that her name has been cleared and her position with her husband reinstated. Tulkinghorn dies trying to uncover a truth about Lady Dedlock that no one seems to care about save Dedlock herself and her daughter Esther. Dedlock's maid is sent to prison for murdering a man who might've become her benefactor in another capacity had the investigation never been launched. The only thing left to motivate disclosure of the truth from even the minor character Guppy is Bucket's sense of duty to his job, which is hardly an inspiration for all the hardship and trouble suffered by the characters (including Bucket and Mrs. Bucket, but especially Esther).

With the fog (not seen so much in Doyle as in Dickens) that pervades the novel's setting and, figuratively, plot *somewhat* lifted, the audience is still left unsatisfied, understanding well that "the world of *Bleak House* would have been a happier, more contented place, had Lady Dedlock's youthful indiscretion remained hidden" (O'Hara 122). Knowledge is made democratically public, but that "knowledge . . . undermines its own purpose" (Bradbury xxvi). This purpose (like that of the modern detective novel) is to level Justice's scales and put the world right.

Of course, the contemporary detective story is nothing without a truly satisfying revelation. Readers expect a "definite plot and orderly ending . . . a sense of justice" (Ball 3). This, however, is not the only reason that all of *Regiment's* fog (both literal and figurative as in *Bleak House*) is *completely* cleared away by book's end, pointing to a much different conclusion than *Bleak House*. These intentionally different conclusions lead back to the battle with Victorianism present in *Regiment*.

The Russell series constantly references, scorns, and mocks all things Victorian. This is particularly the case in reference to gender: "Holmes tended to recall his Victorian attitudes and my gender at the oddest times . . ." (12). This forces one to draw parallels. These parallels reveal author intentionality to resolve problems related to class and sex prevalent during the heyday of Sherlock Holmes. These problems, recognized mostly from a contemporary perspective, arose from the early Victorian era of *Bleak House*, and they are intertwined with the denouement, or lack thereof, in detective fiction.

Had Holmes and Russell failed to catch up to Childe, as Esther and Bucket failed to reach Dedlock, disaster would not have been prevented. As Childe comes to terms with her husband's guilt, she plans a rendezvous to confront him. Holmes and Russell are in pursuit, and when they discover Claude, he tells all that he has done to fulfill his greed: killing the church members one by one, forging wills that leave their money to Childe's church, and his ultimate plan to kill Childe, his wife, to inherit the blood money. Just as he's about to murder her and get away with everything, Russell and Holmes intercede. If they had failed to stop Claude, he would've successfully gotten away with murdering several innocent women, including Childe, and walked away with the church's money.

Regiment's message is hardly ambiguous: the world would not be a better place if things were left as is. Murders would be left unsolved; a good woman and her works and gifts of motivating others would have been lost, and the guilty party would have gotten away with it all, profiting financially to boot. In *Bleak House*, readers are almost relieved at the death of Tulkinghorn for all his insidious and irrelevant meddling, lording power over everyone he meets. It is in Dickens's presentation that all would have been better left in place that we see the still-present seeds of elitism creep in.

Had Lady Dedlock's position and status as upper class been left as it was (and Richard not learned of the lawsuit that *might* make him rich), none of the tragedy of the book would have come about. Therefore, by implying that the

Bleak House world would have been better off without meddling, Dickens is reinforcing the classism he works in other ways to destroy. By pointing to the classes as an artificial social construct in showing how easy it is to put on and take off the clothes of social status, identity, and privilege/lack thereof (in the actions and personas of characters like Lady Dedlock, Nemo, Richard, Hortense, Guppy, Mr. George, etc.), Dickens shows us a world of irrelevant fabrication. By showing readers that this world of strict classism would have been best left alone by book's end, he's undermining the middle-class, objective, egalitarian ethos he initially sets up.

Regiment shows us that in no way would the world be better off had Holmes and Russell not begun investigating the Temple. In this assurance that disclosure of the truth is the best course of action, and the importance of class destruction and egalitarianism is also revealed and reinforced. Childe's assumption of the role of upper-class woman in her associating with wealthy benefactors and dressing, eating, and drinking in the highest fashion, presumes her guilt. This guilt lies not in her crossing of social boundaries because of her modest upbringing, but in putting on airs as Lady Dedlock, whose "chief quality is pride," does (Arms 91). Her immodest wealth detracts from the good work of her Temple and allows Claude to recognize her as a potential cash cow. The end of *Regiment* is a great leveler of classes. As *Bleak House* retreats into old forms of social strata, *Regiment* meets classism head on and shows its horrible consequences in murder, theft, and corruption of otherwise good charity work.

In charity, *Regiment* again tears down Victorian presumptions of the benefit of, or lack of, women's involvement in the public sphere. Given Mrs. Jellyby's "telescopic philanthropy" and Mrs. Pardiggle's similarly "misdirected philanthropy" (Bradbury xxi), *Bleak Houses*'s stance on charity couldn't be clearer. Women's work in the public sphere is forcefully denigrated in the novel and persuasively so using humor to disparage the women who conduct charity work. Mrs. Jellyby and Pardiggle have miserable families, plagued and neglected by their respective patriarchs' pet causes. Mrs. Pardiggle's boys are forced to donate their allowance to the cause du jour, and Mrs. Jellyby has a house in ruin, a daughter she's turned into a slave to her cause, and a husband whose only mark is left on the wall by his greasy head.

Alternatively, Ada and Esther are the "good" women who don't involve themselves in charity work or the outside world much and end up cleaning up behind Mrs. Pardiggle and Jellyby. (Of course, Esther later becomes ensconced in the mystery plot, but only because of her special knowledge and at the behest of Bucket.) These nonissue characters (Esther and Ada) address the real needs of those around them, rather than taking up a cause for people in a distant land or preaching the Bible to a woman who clearly needs provisions for her sick baby. By casting the charity work of women in a negative light as silly (and potentially damaging to one's family), *Bleak House* reinforces adages surely often used if not created in Victorian England—"a woman's place is in the home" and "charity begins at home."

Once again combating this Victorian misperception, *Regiment* shows us a functioning charity organization: The New Temple in God. While the focus of the Temple is local, it doesn't limit itself to work in the home, as *Bleak House*'s message would imply is right. The relief wing of the church combines elements of Victorian middle-class women's sense of superiority in guiding the unwashed masses and the practicality of actually helping people. As in Gissing's *The Odd Women*, the church's charity trains women for professional roles by teaching literacy and typing, as well as providing food, shelter, legal assistance, and asylum from abusive spouses. *Regiment* effectively combats the reputation of the unattractive busy body, merely using charity as a means of building a personal soapbox.

The effectiveness of renunciation of Victorian attitudes is exemplified in the cynical and circumspect Russell's assumptions. She comes ready to judge (as *Bleak House* would) the "earnest young woman with her Good Works and . . . pasty skin" (30). Her reticence to admit that the women of the church are doing good comes from the historical predisposition to assume they are not. Even the novel's title alludes to John Knox's 1558 tract (" . . . Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women") disparaging Mary Tudor specifically and women in public positions of power generally. It is only when Russell is ensconced in the walls of the church, teaching the women herself, does she change her mind. Her revelatory moment comes when she teaches a poor woman how to read, ". . . her eyes shining with the suddenly comprehended magic of the written word." Here Russell is uncharacteristically effusive, declaring that though the poor woman's "teeth were mostly gums [and] she smelt of unwashed wool . . . for the moment, she was beautiful" (227). Afterward, Russell admits that her charitable friend Veronica who introduced her to the church and its good works "knows what she is about here" (228).

Despite this more modern and impartial interpretation of women in the public sphere through philanthropy, there is the issue of the murder and fraud surrounding the church in *Regiment*. While it's true that the Temple is used as the mechanism with which Claude is able to ply his criminal trade, it is exclusively him that is corrupt, not the church itself or its charitable work. This is the distinctive difference: Dickens does more than imply that it is the women and their activities themselves that are inadvisable. He absolutely points to it as a sign of cultural and moral decline. *Bleak House* does all of this without even getting into the problems of colonialism in Mrs. Jellyby's pet project, the African tribe she supports, which would be the only valid criticism of women's work in philanthropy.

In thinking of Claude, the most corrupt element in *Regiment*, though, there is a similarity between the novels that contributes to theme and setting as the atmosphere of fog does. Claude's Frenchness/foreignness cannot be ignored given the history of Victorian thinking about the negative influence of foreigners. The weak continental morals and their potentially negative impact on the British Empire at large and the individual citizen more particularly is a well-

documented Victorian preoccupation. It is no accident that the culprit is foreign in *Bleak House*. The French maid Hortense is described almost as a mouth-frothing animal. Bucket is presented as “a professional but working-class Englishman assisted by his trustworthy English wife . . . the image of middle-class respectability who captures the foreign force that doesn't know its place . . .” (Thomas 144). What's surprising is that *Regiment* seems to agree with *Bleak House* on the point of foreign influence.

After first suspecting Marie (tellingly, another fiery-tempered French maid) of the crimes of theft and murder, Russell and Holmes discover Claude is behind everything. Marie's Frenchness presumes her guilt and serves the plot as a red herring; however, to then turn to another foreign man as the culprit hardly draws a fresh perspective. The continental influence can still be viewed, as in *Bleak House*, as a non-British, non-middle-class ethic; in other words, the other is represented from a Victorian framework in both novels as toxic and ruthless.

Despite this prejudicial similarity, *Regiment* battles Victorian ideals in a few other ways. King's background as a theological scholar predisposes her to treat religion in a serious manner. Spirituality stands unvanquished at *Regiment's* end because Russell comes to understand the good works of the church and the faith of its leader and fold. As evidence of this faith, we are given a strange event in the text: a miracle. Russell sees that Childe is badly beaten and bruised, and when she returns with help, she has been completely healed. When Russell questions her about the healing in the book's postscript, Childe asserts again that it was real and that “God can touch us” (335). This occurrence is certainly an unusual happening for a work of detective fiction, and the affirmation of the literally transformative powers of faith is telling. Instead of showing us charlatans who use the Bible to prop up their own agendas as *Bleak House* does in Mr. Chadband and Mrs. Pardiggle, *Regiment* gives us miracles for the faithful. While the commentary on religion and spirituality could not be more blatant in the two books (nor more opposed to one another), *Regiment* employs Russell's skepticism once again to guard against criticism. Russell herself perceives Childe to be a charlatan, at first seeing her evident wealth as her real motivation for running the church. Russell is eventually swayed that Childe is the real deal, thereby preempting attacks by naysayers and nonbelievers.

Childe's miraculous healing draws yet another not unrelated parallel to *Bleak House*, however. Dickens's use of spontaneous combustion in the novel was a much-criticized plot point. Defending his belief that it was possible, he stood firm against detractors. This faith-based approach to the unseen and controversial miracle of spontaneous combustion is comparable the healing attributed to a miracle in *Regiment* for being based on nothing but the author's personal and unpopular beliefs. Krook's spontaneous combustion aside, though, *Bleak House* has very little to say that's complimentary about organized religion or charity, potentially due to Dickens's personal experience on the receiving end of religion-based philanthropy as an impoverished child.

Poverty and drug addiction rear their ugly heads repeatedly as thematic elements in *Bleak House* and *Regiment*. Certain characters illustrate connections between the books that speak of ruin in young love because of irresponsible behavior. *Bleak House*'s Richard and Ada directly reflect Miles and Veronica in *Regiment*. Because Richard fails to follow his guardian's advice and find a profession, he ruins his life and that of his betrothed Ada. He dies in the vain hope that Jarndyce and Jarndyce will make him rich, preyed upon by his leech-like lawyer. Leaving his young wife to care for their child, Richard's unwillingness to do the right thing is a didactic tale meant to emphasize the importance of responsibility while showing Chancery's negative effect on society.

Miles and Veronica's engagement in *Regiment* is also negatively influenced by a large and powerful institution: the British government. He is sent to war and returns shell shocked. He turns to heroin to ease his suffering and is portrayed as both a victim of his addiction and an irresponsible cad who leaves Veronica in the lurch. Her lackluster looks and his jilting are cause enough to send her into the realm of the "odd woman." After Holmes is able to clean Miles up, he comes to his senses and marries Veronica. They too have one child before he is sent away with the military again and killed. While both novels portray the young men as having succumbed to the whims of a powerful institution, *Regiment* takes a more sympathetic and modern view of Miles, who is temporarily redeemed and whose addiction is shared by Holmes and Russell at one time or another. *Bleak House* shows that in some sense Richard is a victim of Chancery but gives him ample opportunity to step away and make a regular living. In the end, they both die too young and leave behind the young women who love them and their children.

Far from irrelevant, these minor characters and their struggles serve to underscore the embattlement of the major characters and the plot and thematic elements that set up a dialectic between the contemporary detective novel in *Regiment* and the Victorian detective plot in *Bleak House*. Drawing attention to the parallels between the novels elicited a side result. This highlighted how even a contemporary perspective that attempts to strike out complications brought on by Victorianism cannot escape the influence of some: marriage between unequal sexes/generations and bias against foreign influence. While these clinging influences are far from damning, they are worth noting in looking at the detective stories holistically in terms of their socio-political value.

Apart from these relatively minor elements is a systematic and effective dismantling of some Victorian philosophies by the contemporary historical detective story represented by *Regiment* on issues of women's identity and place in the public sphere, charity, class, and ultimately, the meaning of justice in detective fiction. Extensions of this study could focus on the historical significance of the shift to the fulfilling resolution in detective fiction and away from the more ambiguous conclusions in early detective plots like *Bleak House*. Novel hallmarks of the subgenre's development and harbingers of its ultimate

traditions and well-worn devices could surely be uncovered and explored from this approach.

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***The Da Vinci Code*—Novel into Film: New Popular Gospel**

Introduction

In May 2006, director Ron Howard's film adaptation of Dan Brown's hugely popular novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) opened in theaters worldwide. The novel has sold over 60.5 million copies worldwide, making it one of the most popular books of all time. Moreover, the film grossed \$753 million: domestic was over \$217 million, and foreign was over \$535 million. According to critic Timothy Beal, Brown's novel "is nothing short of a modern-day apocryphal Gospel" (B14).

Key changes between the novel and the film will be examined with the purpose of showing that the film's focus on rediscovering the lost sacred feminine is actually reaching out to the audience with a new popular "gospel." The film translates and even extends the gospel of the novel for the theater audience. The popular gospel presented in the film advocates freedom to discover the self, the value of other people, and the divine. In fact, the film makes a great point of positing that the human is the divine and the divine is human. The film clearly suggests that freedom from the tyranny of the formal, regulated Catholic Church, freedom from the persecution and violence that often accompany protecting that formal church (usually administered by men), and recognition of the sacred feminine is central to Christian belief. Therefore, film presents these issues as more important than formal religious practice following the "one true God," thus creating a new "popular gospel."

To set the stage for the discussion that follows, a brief review of the film's cast is in order. Tom Hanks stars as Robert Langdon, Harvard professor of religious symbology. Ron Howard chose Hanks not only for his box-office appeal but also because the character actor could comfortably play the film's Langdon role—someone who is intelligent, curious, fascinated by the details of life, masculine (but not too sexy), someone with a dry sense of humor, a helpful collaborator, an everyman figure ("A Portrait of Langdon").

French actress Audrey Tautou plays Agent Sophie Neveu. Howard and his team interviewed several French actresses, but eventually chose Tautou as someone who could be strong, yet sensitive and vulnerable at times. She would appear centered and serious, as well as enigmatic and ethereal during her emotional journey in the film ("Who is Sophie Neveu?").

Other supporting members of the international cast include Jean Reno as Captain Bezu Fache; Sir Ian McKellen as Sir Leigh Teabing; Paul Bettany as the monk Silas; and Alfred Molina as Bishop Manuel Aringarosa. Howard is proud to state that he signed all of his first choices for roles in this film ("Unusual Suspects").

Discussion

The four elements to be discussed in this novel-versus-film paper are (1) conspiracy, (2) relativism, (3) divinity, and (4) the sacred feminine.

Conspiracy

First, one of the main reasons for the novel's popularity is that "everyone loves a conspiracy," to quote a line that occurs twice in the novel itself (169, 381). In *The Da Vinci Code*, some seek to protect the ancient truth, some seek to destroy the ancient truth, and some seek to expose the ancient truth. Director Ron Howard and screenwriter Akiva Goldsman (with input from executive producer Dan Brown) stay fairly close to the novel as the different conspiracies develop and intersect on screen. Overall, the film tends to streamline the conspiracy storylines. The film gets rather quickly to the Priory of Sion and the "so dark the con of man" motif. The church's conspiracy to destroy the ancient truth and Teabing's determination to reveal the same truth clearly represent the "evil forces" in the film. Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu represent the value of the individual as they both search for personal faith amid the conflicting conspiracies.

Although in the novel, Silas (the monk) is a brutal, unthinking killer who blindly follows his orders from Bishop Aringarosa (the leader of the religious conspiracy), in the film, Silas also illustrates the film's emphasis on each person struggling to find an individual belief in a greater power. Silas kills because he believes he is doing God's work by following orders from the bishop. Paul Bettany projects an innocence in Silas, and at the end of the film, when Silas is shot, he becomes a somewhat sympathetic victim of the conspiracy because he has never had a way to judge what he has been told.

Robert Langdon starts his journey in the film as more skeptical, more claustrophobic, and less sexy than in the novel. On screen, Sophie Neveu's face appears similar to the face shown several times through flashback on the sarcophagus of Mary Magdalene, stressing their common lineage. At Chateau Villette, Sir Leigh Teabing, an expert on Grail history, enthusiastically explains the ancient secret of the Holy Grail through special visual effects, and Langdon voices a good deal of skepticism at Teabing's conclusions. At Rosslyn Chapel, the docent who is also Sophie's brother in the novel becomes just a docent in the film. And while the novel promises a future romantic "date" in Florence for Langdon and Sophie (448-449), the film keeps the pair as friends only. In short, several plot or character changes from novel to film focus the viewer on a somewhat more personal story of journey toward spiritual epiphany for Sophie and Langdon.

Relativism

Second, we turn to the issue of relativism, which the film tends to emphasize even more than does the novel. In Brown's work, the orthodoxy of *Opus Dei* contrasts sharply with the relativism of Sir Leigh Teabing. Yet even within the Church, we find a split between those who uphold the older rules or traditions and those who favor a more liberal approach to faith in modern times.

In Chapter 28, Langdon recalls that by the time of Constantine, “The days of the goddess were over”; in other words, patriarchal Christianity would henceforth dominate (125). Sex would be demonized, and the concept of Hieros Gamos (sacred marriage) with orgasm as a kind of prayer would be lost. Over the centuries, the Church (or certain members of the Church) sought to contain the secret of the Holy Grail; in the modern time of the novel and the film Teabing, Langdon, and Sophie embark on an exciting quest to rediscover the true meaning of the Grail. Studying the Sangreal documents, Teabing notes in Chapter 60, helps one understand “the *other* side of the Christ story”; thus, personal exploration of these issues helps one decide what to believe (256). Toward the end of the novel, Marie Chauvel, Sophie’s newly discovered grandmother, wisely remarks, “there are many ways to see simple things” (447).

In an early scene invented for the film, Langdon promises that his public lecture on symbology will search for “original truth” wherever it leads and whatever surprises it offers. Meanwhile, on his private jet, Bishop Aringarosa upholds orthodoxy when he tells a cleric “we follow doctrine rigorously.” In several flashback sequences, the audience sees the Knights Templar as they quest for the Grail and are finally destroyed by the Church; orthodoxy triumphs over relativistic inquiry. Teabing wants to expose the “dark con” to set people free, to explode the truth on the world. In the film’s penultimate scene, Langdon tells Sophie that all that matters is what you believe; he comfortingly reiterates this relativistic comment with “so I say again. What really matters is what you believe.” This is their last scene together. In sum, the 149-minute film emphasizes relativism of belief and the hero’s acceptance of that theory more than does the 454-page novel, thus making the film’s popular gospel somewhat different from that of the novel.

Divinity

Third, we turn to the divine-versus-human issue as treated in the novel and in the film. Brown raises this topic in various places in his work. Early on, we read about the divine structure of the human body, about the Divine Proportion, and about Leonardo Da Vinci’s important work with these phenomena. In Chapter 20, while still in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre, Langdon’s recollection of these topics coming up in his Harvard “Symbolism in Art” class provides the reader with knowledge about the professor’s keen interest in the goddess, the sacred feminine, and Da Vinci’s fresco *The Last Supper*. As Langdon once told his class, “There are symbols hidden in places you would never imagine” (97). Further on, we read about the Catholic Church’s distortion of Jesus’s true message and his earthly life, about how Sophie’s grandfather was no orthodox Christian, about how Silas has both angelic and evil characteristics, about Jesus’s divinity and his humanity, about how the Holy Grail is really a person, about how Jesus and Mary Magdalene had a female child named Sarah and left a royal bloodline, and about how Sophie and her brother meet at Rosslyn Chapel. Finally, we read about how Langdon and Sophie (Jesus’s descendant) passionately kiss before parting at the end of the novel. As Brown

writes, “Sophie leaned forward and kissed him again, now on the lips. Their bodies came together, softly at first, and then completely. When she pulled away, her eyes were full of promise” (449).

However, the film focuses more on the personal quest of Langdon and Sophie for hidden truth, for the Grail, for meaning in life. Both are rather skeptical about organized religion at the start of their journey. Langdon was raised a Catholic (something new for the film); Sophie does not believe in God, just that sometimes people can be good or kind. After the film’s intense series of thrilling events, Langdon recounts how as a child he fell into a well, how he prayed to Jesus in the well, and that he believes he was saved then (perhaps for a purpose that is being realized as the journey with Sophie concludes). “Maybe human is divine,” remarks Langdon to Sophie in their parting scene. For her part, in the film, Sophie is transformed from a good woman to an even better woman, who perhaps has Jesus’s blood running in her veins. By the end, she understands what her guardian-grandfather Jacques Sauniere did for her. Significantly, Howard’s film modifies the Langdon-Sophie kiss: “He leans in and kisses her on the head and she pushes into him, so hard; he holds her close” (from the illustrated screenplay) (Goldsman 203).

So, as we have pointed out, the film is essentially a close adaptation of the novel in terms of plot and events; however, one important change is the shift in Langdon’s role to that of a skeptic when, at Chateau Villette, Teabing explains the centuries-old conspiracies. Langdon speaks for those in the audience who do not want to accept the story’s premise, and although his initial attitude toward orthodox religion is uncertainty, he has shown faith during his childhood when he fell into a well. His story of falling into the well and—an incident not in the novel—praying to Jesus for rescue suggests that fundamental faith is the right path. In the end, his faith seems to return, and, like a medieval knight, he kneels at the Holy Grail.

The Sacred Feminine

Fourth, we turn to the theme of the sacred feminine as treated in the novel and in the film. The scene in the film that shows Sophie’s ability to calm Langdon’s nerves through her touch while they are riding in the armored truck illustrates the deepening emphasis on the sacred feminine. In the novel, the concept of the sacred feminine is presented early on and frequently, primarily through Langdon’s extensive historical-theological mini-lectures to the other characters.

The novel’s version of the sacred feminine stresses the ancient goddess figure and the subsequent Christian church’s—especially the Catholic Church’s—insistence on suppressing public knowledge of the true story of Mary Magdalene who, in *The Da Vinci Code*, is both the goddess and the secret at the center of Christianity.

Brown inserts the explanations of the sacred feminine into the novel primarily through Langdon’s frequent mini-lectures. At the outset, Langdon is writing a book about symbols of the sacred feminine, and he has already

concluded that Mary Magdalene is actually the Holy Grail. Throughout the novel, Langdon spends much of the time explaining feminine symbols (especially the chalice) to other characters. He explains, “The Grail’s description as a *chalice* is actually an allegory to protect the true nature of the Holy Grail. . . . the Holy Grail represents the sacred feminine and the goddess” (238). Langdon here connects the chalice to the female womb, building the case for the revelation that Mary Magdalene and Jesus had a child.

In the grisly murder scene, Sauniere draws the pentacle on his chest before he dies as a signal for Langdon. Langdon explains to the police that the symbol represents “the female half of all things” (36) or the religious concept of the divine goddess. And he states that in its most specific interpretation, the pentacle represents Venus, goddess of female sexuality, thus creating an early foreshadowing of the “secret” to be revealed.

Langdon and other characters discuss pagan goddesses frequently. Langdon recalls an incident in his college classroom when he referred to Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility, and how he connected her to Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* for the students. Even Disney pictures are brought into the discussion when Langdon explains that the Disney films are full of pagan myth and goddess symbolism—Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty. He describes the Disney film *The Little Mermaid* as full of “blatant symbolic references to the sanctity of Isis, Eve, Pisces the fish goddess, and, repeatedly, Mary Magdalene” (262). The little mermaid’s flowing red hair, as Langdon explains it, is a clear connection to Mary Magdalene.

Langdon sees one of the key conspiracy agencies—the Priory of Sion—as a group with a “reverence for the sacred feminine” and also “guardians of a secret” (113). The Priory resists the Catholic Church’s modern patriarchal structure, but protects the secret of Mary Magdalene, which Langdon has already deduced from evidence he has found. Even poetry strikes Langdon as representing the sacred feminine. Iambic pentameter, he recalls, has five stresses, again representing to Langdon at least “the pentacle of Venus and the sacred feminine” (303).

When Leigh Teabing explains his theory that Mary Magdalene is, in fact, the Holy Grail, he calls her “the lost sacred feminine” (257). In Teabing’s version of history, Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion, fled to France, and later gave birth to a daughter, Sarah. This explanation bolsters the idea of the sacred feminine because the descendants of Jesus come from the feminine line not the masculine line.

Even common playing cards represent the sacred feminine in the novel. Langdon wonders whether card players understand that the cards represent the Holy Grail story: spades are swords (the masculine symbol); diamonds are pentacles (the female symbol); hearts are cups (the chalice); and clubs are scepters (the royal line) (391).

And whenever we hear about a rose—and we hear about them frequently—we are reminded that the rose (anagram: EROS) stands for the Holy Grail on

many levels, specifically secrecy, womanhood, and guidance. At the end of the novel, Langdon follows the rose line in Paris to find the tomb of Mary Magdalene at the Louvre.

Langdon's mini-lectures (sometimes several pages long) on the topic of the sacred feminine obviously did not hurt sales of the novel. However, mini-lectures in films tend to slow the pace and make for restless audiences. Films are called "moving pictures" for a reason. The mini-lectures could not serve the film as they did the novel. In their place, the film relies on special effects and specific visual images that reinforce the theory that Mary Magdalene was the Holy Grail and the lost sacred feminine is the secret behind all the conspiracies.

In the film, Langdon himself does not have the "historical/scientific" certainty that he had in the novel regarding Mary Magdalene and the child she had with Jesus. However, the film (through the visual) strengthens the importance of the sacred feminine. The audience can "see" the evidence in the film while following Langdon's journey to the realization of the secret truth.

Langdon's first appearance in the film is at a Paris lecture where he is discussing the meaning of symbols. As part of his lecture, Langdon shows the audience a photo of a statue of the goddess Isis with her son Horus—a mother and child image very like so many paintings of the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus. This image illustrates the mention of the goddess Isis in the novel. All the images Langdon uses in this scene to explain symbols were created especially for the film, although they are typical images of the topics.

In the film, Langdon's book is already published, and he is signing copies when the police arrive to take him to the Louvre. The audience can see that the title of his book is *Symbols of the Sacred Feminine*, and the cover design is Botticelli's painting, *Birth of Venus*. Venus is not just any goddess; she is the goddess of sexuality.

Later, while on the run (in the film), Langdon and Sophie take temporary refuge in a park where she pays a drug user to give them his space so the two can analyze their situation and decide what to do next. Langdon remarks on the fact that she is not afraid of the drug user, and Sophie agrees, adding that perhaps the drug user will get food with the money she gave him. This scene foreshadows Sophie's connection to Jesus by having Sophie's actions mirror the Bible references to Jesus's contact with the outcasts of society. In his last conversation with Sophie at Rosslyn Chapel, Langdon remembers this moment and remarks that perhaps the drug user will never touch a drug again because she was with him in the park.

The paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci that the novel says reveal the secret of the Holy Grail appear in the film. The audience briefly sees *Mona Lisa* and *Madonna of the Rocks* in the Louvre. Da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper* is an especially important visual image. When the reader gets to Brown's lengthy commentary on the painting in the novel, the reader usually starts to hunt for an art history book or goes online to seek a visual of the painting. The film is able to use special effects to illustrate the "coded" message about the sacred feminine

that Teabing claims is in the Da Vinci painting. By the time Teabing finishes his demonstration of why the figure of John in *The Last Supper* is really Mary Magdalene, most viewers are ready to accept the theory that Da Vinci's painting contains a shocking secret about Jesus and the Holy Grail. Especially persuasive is the moment when Teabing moves the image of "Mary" to the other side of Jesus to show how the images fit together in a domestic or romantic position.

As the scene in the armored truck in the film demonstrates, an even stronger connection with the sacred feminine is made when Sophie and Langdon are fleeing from the bank. Langdon is sweating as a result of nerves triggered by his claustrophobia, and Sophie puts her hands on his temples. Her healing touch reduces his distress. While she is touching him, she tells how her mother did this for her, foreshadowing her strengths based on her ancestry—the healing hands. Healing, the film demonstrates, comes through the women, through the sacred feminine.

Moreover, Mary Magdalene's sarcophagus appears in the film several times. Sophie's face is on the sculptured body atop the sarcophagus. This visual connection between Sophie and the figure on the sarcophagus functions as a kind of visual DNA for film audiences.

The film also uses the image of an alabaster jar to emphasize the sacred feminine. When Langdon and Sophie reach Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, they find only an alabaster jar in the room where the sarcophagus of Mary Magdalene once rested. At the end of the film, an alabaster jar stands next to her sarcophagus far below the Louvre. This image of the jar calls attention to the story in the "Gospel of Matthew" in which an unnamed woman pours perfume on Jesus's head from an alabaster jar. This anonymous woman is often connected to Mary Magdalene, although there is no indication in the gospel that the woman with the jar is Mary Magdalene.

The images of the sarcophagus and the alabaster jar illustrate the power of film to create a suspension of disbelief in an audience. In the novel, the "proof" of the secret about Jesus and Mary Magdalene is buried amid pages and pages of historical and theological information. The camera, however, can focus on a specific element such as the alabaster jar and create a sort of "truth" through showing rather than describing. The visual can persuade the audience.

Two seemingly minor plot shifts already noted are highly significant for the film's emphasis on the sacred feminine. The first plot change is the elimination of Sophie's living brother. In the novel, he is the docent at Rosslyn Chapel, and Sophie is reunited with him. In the film, the docent is merely one of the crowd of protectors who guard the ancient secret. By writing Sophie's brother out of the story, the film eliminates the masculine line of Jesus's descendants and places the historical-religious burden on Sophie, thus strengthening the concept of the sacred feminine. Sophie is the only living descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the film. The matriarchal line or the sacred feminine is the only surviving connection with the beginnings of Christianity.

The second seemingly minor plot shift is the omitting of the clear implication in the novel that Langdon and Sophie are going to have a physical relationship in the future. She invites herself to accompany him to his next lecture in Florence, Italy. She kisses him, “her eyes full of promise” (449). “It’s a date,” Langdon answers. The romantic implication at the novel’s end for many readers will subvert the story’s presentation of Sophie as a descendant of Jesus. In seeking modern, casual romance as Sophie does at the end of the novel, she returns to her character’s initial image—a charming young woman unconnected to goddesses or Christian history.

The film, however, has no such romantic implications in the ending. That story decision obviously helps to reduce potential complaints from the public about mixing religion and sexual connections. In addition, however, when the film establishes a friendship rather than a romantic relationship between Langdon and Sophie, Sophie becomes a much stronger representative of the sacred feminine—the matriarchal line descending from Jesus and Mary Magdalene. In the film, Langdon is clearly saying goodbye to Sophie when he leaves her at Rosslyn Chapel. They make no plans to see each other again. This change in the story keeps the focus on the revelation of Sophie’s ancestors and eliminates the somewhat outlandish idea of “dating” the sacred feminine.

Finally, the film’s resolution is focused on Langdon’s discovery of the secret resting place of Mary Magdalene. In both the novel and the film, he drops to his knees when he reaches the Louvre’s pyramid. But the film’s special effects can show us Mary Magdalene’s sarcophagus by sending the camera down through the glass pyramid to the secret chamber far below. We see Sophie’s face on the sarcophagus again. Langdon is kneeling at the sacred feminine.

Early in the film, in the Louvre restroom, Langdon asks Sophie, “Lady, who are you?” When he finally kneels above Mary Magdalene’s sarcophagus, Langdon knows the answer. To paraphrase Teabing, only the worthy find the Grail, and Langdon has found her.

Conclusion

Overall, the film is a close adaptation of the novel, especially in terms of presenting the plot, the thrilling chases, and the twisting betrayals in the novel. In the introduction to the published script, Akiva Goldsman, the scriptwriter, comments that the novel is “full of talking” (16). Goldsman was able to restructure the flood of information in the novel so that the film script highlights Langdon and his journey from loss of faith to a restored personal belief. This journey and the visuals in the film together create a fresh version of Brown’s popular gospel.

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Anne Rice: From the Popular Vampire to the Popular Christ

Proem

In the spring of 1976, Alfred A. Knopf published *Interview with the Vampire*, the first novel by author Anne Rice. Though the book sold decently, if not spectacularly, in hardcover, it did not become a bona fide bestseller until Ballantine released the mass market paperback edition at roughly the same time the following year. Nevertheless, Rice chose not to return to the erotic, sensuous, and richly detailed vampiric world she had created in *Interview with the Vampire* for nearly a decade after her original foray into its depths. When *The Vampire Lestat* reached the nation's bookstores in 1985, it proved more successful in its first hardback trade edition than its predecessor, and spent several weeks just below the mid-point on the *New York Times's* Bestseller List. The year 1988 witnessed the appearance of yet another sequel to both *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*, entitled *The Queen of the Damned* which, with nearly 400,000 copies sold in hardcover, not only attained the coveted Number 1 spot on the *Times's* Bestseller List, but also outperformed its predecessors in terms of sales by exceptionally wide respective margins. As such, it can be remarked that *The Vampire Chronicles*, as the trio of books had come to be known by this point, had succeeded in seducing the ever-fickle American reading public.

Since 1988, *The Vampire Chronicles* has come to encompass seven additional volumes beyond *The Queen of the Damned*, including: *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992), *Memnoch the Devil* (1995), *The Vampire Armand* (1998), *Merrick* (2000), *Blood and Gold* (2001), *Blackwood Farm* (2002), and, finally, *Blood Canticle* (2003). Arguably, the series's, and Rice's, popularity peaked with the publication of *Memnoch the Devil* in July of 1995, a novel that sold nearly one million copies in hardcover alone, each priced at a full \$25.00 (15 years later, comparable pricing would be \$25.95) before the usual mass-retailer discounts. Yet, despite her success with matters secular, Rice boldly and permanently altered both the shape and the purpose of her career as a popular author with the publication, in the late fall of 2005, of the novel *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, the initial book in a projected series devoted exclusively to the life of Jesus Christ.

In "Anne's Profession of Faith," a brief article on her website, Rice tells us that after losing her faith for a variety of reasons in the 1960s, it was not until 1998 that she returned to the Catholic Church as a wholehearted practicing believer. Four years later, she experienced the following epiphany about Jesus Christ: "I realized that the greatest thing I could do to show my complete love for Him was to consecrate my work to Him—to use any talent I had acquired as a writer, as a storyteller, as a novelist—for Him and for Him alone." Rice

humbly offers *Christ the Lord* not only “to all Christians,” but “to all those who have ever enjoyed or valued my earlier books,” but she cautions that Christians and non-Christians must understand that this work is “fiction . . . fiction that seeks to bring the reader closer to the Lord in whom my life belongs.” In fact, writing about Christ for Rice “is my vocation; this is my life, this is the way in which I hope to render unto God a series of books that honors Him as Our Maker and as Our Savior. I am grateful to all of you who are willing to read these books.” But, for those readers, the dichotomy between vampires and Christ, the Son of God Himself, at first seems very sharp, alienating, and perhaps even irreconcilable. The former creatures must repeatedly take human life by sucking the blood of their victims in order to survive their immortal existence and, thus, embody the most heinous of all worldly evils. The latter entity, meanwhile, stands as nothing less than *the* Savior of mankind; *the* being who sacrificed himself and died on the cross in order to atone for the Original Sin of humanity and, by extension, the sins of all men. But both Rice’s vampires *and* her Christ are also extreme examples of outsider figures, albeit for very different reasons in each case. And the study that follows engages with the notion that Rice’s (re-)turn to Christ in her most recent fiction can be understood as an inevitable outgrowth of the spiritual, religious, philosophical, and theological obsessions woven so deeply, intricately, and skillfully into the fabric of the *Chronicles of the Vampires*.

Christianity and The Vampire Chronicles

The initial premise Rice uses to open *Interview with the Vampire*, a novel she describes in her recent memoir *Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession* as “an obvious lament for my lost faith” in God and His Son, involves the accidental death of Louis de Point du Lac’s beloved younger brother, who had become convinced that he was destined to be an unparalleled spiritual leader in the Catholic Church, and that he needed all of his family’s considerable financial resources in order to fulfill this ordained mission (137). On this point, Louis confides to his interviewer:

I loved my brother . . . and at times I believed him to be a living saint. I encouraged him in his prayer and meditations . . . and I was willing to give him up to the priesthood . . . I was a Catholic; I believed in saints . . . But I didn’t, couldn’t believe my brother . . . Now, why? Because he was my brother. Holy he might be, peculiar most definitely; but Francis of Assisi, no. Not *my* brother. (9)

Mere minutes after Louis repudiates his brother over the absurdity of his visions and the plans they had inspired, “he was dead . . . He simply walked out of the French doors onto the gallery and stood for a moment at the head of the brick stairs. And then he fell. He was dead when I reached the bottom, his neck broken” (9). The guilt Louis experienced on account of this event was immediate and palpable, and later, in a feverish delirium, Louis details all of his

angst in regard to his dead brother to a local priest. This supposedly devout man-of-the-cloth proclaims that, “as for this brother of yours, he was possessed of the devil . . . The devil made the visions . . . The devil was rampant . . . Nothing would have saved my brother but exorcism, prayer, and fasting, men to hold him down while the devil raged in his body and tried to throw him about” (12). But an angry and nearly irrational Louis cannot accept such a paltry explanation of his brother’s mindset and behavior, and almost kills the priest for daring to make an assessment of this nature.

Thus Rice presents us, in the very first of *The Vampire Chronicles*, with a clash between the secular and the religious worlds. Louis, of course, belongs to the former, his brother to the latter. At a fairly young age, in fact, Louis’s brother removed himself as far as possible from the quotidian in order to pray to God in Heaven constantly, and to contemplate incessantly the deeds of those elevated to sainthood. Louis, on the other hand, did little more than sit through mass every Sunday without any *real* belief in God, or Christ, or the saints, despite his words to the contrary. Indeed, he himself tells us, “I saw my life as if I stood apart from it, the vanity, the self-serving, the constant fleeing from one petty annoyance after another, the lip service to God and the Virgin and a host of saints whose names filled my prayer books, none of whom made the slightest difference in a narrow, materialistic, and selfish existence” (14). If he had been a true believer in all of the myriad tenets of Catholic Christianity, he could have—should have, in fact—unquestioningly accepted the idea of his brother having visions of spiritual greatness as well as the related notion of his being one of God’s elect on Earth. But, instead, and because of what he deems his arrogance and condescension, his brother had died. Meanwhile, his rage at the priest for claiming that his brother had been ensnared by the Devil stems from the fact that, while he may not demand the same of himself, he expects a clergyman to recognize the possibility of saintliness in a mortal rather than to dismiss it as no more than demonic possession. Given the specificity of these circumstances, it proves a small wonder that Louis seeks to annihilate himself. Rice describes him as a vampire roaming “in a world without God” and searching “for a meaningful context in vain” (138). That he finds, rather, a horrific and penitential immortality as a vampire forms the grand and Romantic irony of his abject quest.

The title character of *The Vampire Lestat*, the second volume of *The Vampire Chronicles*, explains at the outset of “his” novel that the 20th century “had inherited the earth in every sense” and, in doing so, “no small part of this unpredicted miracle was *the curious innocence* of these people in the very midst of their freedom and wealth. The Christian god was as dead as he had been in the 1700s. *And no new mythological religion had arisen to take the place of the old*” (9). The unmistakable echo of Nietzsche aside, Lestat’s observations and statements here form a thematic motif that threads its way throughout his exciting and intricate narrative. As Lestat proceeds to relate the story of his life, which takes us some 200 years back in time from the late 20th century, we learn

that, not too long at all before he was given the Dark Gift of vampirism, he did not much believe in God, just like the majority of his enlightened and aristocratic fellows of 18th century France. Ironically, when Lestat shortly thereafter confronts the fact of his inevitable mortality, this lack of faith in God and Christianity proves a serious liability to his peace of mind. “But do you believe in God? . . . How can you live if you don’t!” he asks his brother Augustin, and of his father he insists, “If you knew you were dying at this very minute, would you expect to see God or darkness’!” (57). As someone who professed no, or very little, belief in God, Lestat’s response to the unalterable fact of death seems, at first, excessive, if not irrational. With further reflection, however, Lestat’s reactions expose the horrific core at the possibility of a corporeal and spiritual existence lacking divinity in the form of an all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-forgiving God. No matter what he does or says to the contrary, Lestat cannot, in fact, live without a belief of some sort in God and His goodness.

The peace Lestat manages to make with this spiritual cum existential dilemma proves both tenuous and ineffectual, especially when he finds himself the terrified captive of a creature named Magnus: “In my mind I was praying fiercely, God help me, the Virgin Mary help me, help me, help me, as I peered up into his face. . . . He wasn’t a living thing. He was a monster. A vampire was what he was, a blood-sucking corpse from the grave” (86). Yet, despite his pleas to God and the Virgin Mary, no means of escape presents itself to Lestat, and the determined and powerful Magnus succeeds in transforming Lestat into a vampire like himself. By then, for Lestat, “If there was a God he did not matter now. He was part of some dull and dreary realm whose secrets had long ago been plundered, whose lights had long ago gone out” (92). Thus we read of the death of God, or the irrelevance of God, in *The Vampire Lestat*, and yet, a palpable sense of sadness and despair that accompanies His loss, or abandonment, lingers throughout the novel.

Rice uses the next volume of *The Vampire Chronicles*, *The Queen of the Damned*, as a broad canvas on which she paints the original and idiosyncratic mythology of her vampires—and it is a legend-history that stretches all the way back to the great dynastic epochs of Ancient Egypt. Grounded so deeply in the pagan milieu, Christianity and its myriad concerns plays a negligible part in this novel. However, the religion of the West emerges as a distinct thematic motif once again in *The Tale of the Body Thief*, the fourth *Vampire Chronicle*. This becomes clear early in the text when David Talbot, Superior General of a paranormal investigative organization known as The Talamasca, as well as a mortal friend of Lestat’s, asks the vampire: “Do you search for God?,” and Lestat too-quickly retorts: “Certainly not . . . I can’t imagine a bigger waste of time, even if one has centuries to waste. I’m finished with all such quests. I look to the world around me now for truths, truths mired in the physical and in the aesthetic, truths I can fully embrace. I care about your vision because you saw it, and you told me, and I love you. But that’s all” (78). Moments later, the older

and wiser David tells Lestat: “You search for God . . . you could never abide evil . . . you were sick of evil from the beginning. You’d give anything to discover what God wants of you and to do what He wants” (78). Significantly, Lestat does not respond to this notion directly, suggesting that he does, indeed, seek some kind of union with, and understanding of, God and what He wants of him.

The fifth and, arguably, the most Christian, of *The Vampire Chronicles*, is *Memnoch the Devil*, a work Rice notes best “reflects my longing for God” out of all of the books in her now formidable oeuvre (*Called Out of Darkness* 170). As this novel opens, the Vampire Lestat is being systematically stalked by a figure that seems to be nothing less than the Devil himself. For Lestat—an immortal and a vampire, no less—who claims no real belief in either the Devil or God, his reactions to being pursued by something he thinks could be, in fact, the literal Devil incarnate, while authentic, are also extreme. Given his supernatural powers and abilities, he ought to have no reason whatsoever to be afraid of the Devil, if that is, indeed, who is chasing him. Yet, clearly, he is most disturbed by this entity, and perhaps more so because of its potential reality than anything else. If, in other words, the Devil does exist—which would mean that God had to exist, too—then Lestat would be forced into the uncomfortable position of reconceiving his commitment to atheism, in addition to facing the even more disconcerting fact of true eternal damnation. Without having the chance to achieve anything resembling a resolution to this dilemma, Lestat returns to his flat in the city of New Orleans one evening only to find his pursuer already there waiting for him. “Lestat’,” this being says to him, “I *am* the Devil. And I need you. I am not here to take you by force to Hell, and you don’t know the slightest thing about Hell anyway. Hell isn’t what you imagine. I am here to ask your help! I’m tired and I need you. And I’m winning the battle, and it’s crucial that I don’t lose” (129–130). In this context, small wonder attaches itself to the fact of Lestat’s momentary speechlessness. Anyone, vampire or not, might find themselves at a temporary loss for words if they, too, had just been informed that they were in the presence of the Devil and that the Devil required their assistance in a battle of some kind, a battle that must not be lost. Though not fully convinced that he is dealing with the literal Christian Devil, Lestat nevertheless decides to hear the whole of Memnoch’s story as a part of his consideration of whether to serve him as his helper or not in the battle—which turns out to be against God.

Memnoch does not simply recount to Lestat his tale, he shows it to him as he speaks and builds his argument about his commitment to being *the* adversary of God. And it is a narrative that begins in Heaven, where Lestat looks up “and in the midst of the flood of light” he sees God Himself, and has to be forcefully removed from Heaven by Memnoch instead of remaining with Him (168). As he continues, Memnoch details, as he witnessed it and understood it himself, the whole of the Creation to Lestat. At the heart of this wondrous narrative is the appearance of matter—a substance capable of living and reproducing

independently of God—and its evolution, over time, into male and female human beings with an inherent essence called a soul that, somehow, survives the physical limitations of the material body. The combination of these developments, which occurred during the course of millions upon millions of years, horrified Memnoch, mostly because of the suffering men and women—chief among the creatures of matter—were allowed to experience as part and parcel of God’s master plan. Indeed, so palpable was his distress, that Memnoch could not remain merely an observer of the unfolding Creation and chose to confront God about the myriad agonies humans suffer:

‘Lord, you may know all but you don’t know every tiny thing! You can’t, or you couldn’t leave these souls languishing in Sheol in agony. And you could not allow the suffering of men and women on Earth to go without context. I don’t believe it! I don’t believe you would do it! I don’t believe it!’ . . .

‘I cast you out, Memnoch!’ He declared [and then] I was forced backwards right out of the gates [of Heaven] and into the whirlwind.

‘You are merciless to your Creations, my Lord!’ I roared as loud as I could. . . . ‘Those men and women made in your own image are right to despise you, for nine-tenths of them would be better off if they had never been born!’ (262–263)

Hence the Devil, Memnoch, receives the first—and, perhaps, the most memorable—of his rewards for daring to challenge the God that created him and all things, and in a form that proves nothing less than a cautionary tale for Rice’s readers, whether familiar with the Bible or not.

After detailing his experiences among men and women following his being cast out of Heaven by God, Memnoch and Lestat stand as witnesses to the horrific spectacle of an exhausted Christ being driven through the filthy streets of Jerusalem toward Golgotha, and His crucifixion, with his heavy cross borne upon his back. As they observe his agonizing progression, a young woman named Veronica appears and, at His request, spreads her veil over His face to clean the blood and the sweat that has gathered there as best she can. Of course, the miracle of His image burned into the fabric of the veil occurs, and then, in an intriguing and unexpected development, Christ gives the veil to Lestat with whispered instructions to hide it and take it with him (284–285). Memnoch, and an utterly distraught Lestat, leave Jerusalem before witnessing the actual crucifixion of Christ. They have, of course, but one place remaining to venture to on their journey: Hell. Memnoch describes Hell as the place “‘where I straighten things out that He [God] has made wrong. . . Hell is where I reintroduce a frame of mind that might have existed had suffering never destroyed it! Hell is where I teach men and women that they can be better than He is’” (306). In itself, the idea of Hell as a school created by the Devil in order

to rehabilitate wayward souls and enable them to forgive their God so that they may enter Heaven, rather than as a place of eternal damnation, seems both logical and believable, if not exactly comforting.

But, in Hell itself moments later, Lestat almost immediately faces horrendous “images of murder, torture, [flashing] before me so hot they burnt my face. Phantoms were dragged to their deaths in pots of boiling pitch, soldiers sank on their knees, eyes wide, a prince of some lost Persian kingdom screamed and leapt into the air, his arms out, his black eyes full of reflected fire” (312). He later explains that, at one point, he “fell forward, my foot striking a rock, and pitching me into the middle of a swarm of soldiers on their hands and knees, weeping as they clutched at one another and the wraithlike phantoms of the conquered, the slain, the starved, all rocking and crying together in one voice” (312–313). Meanwhile, the “heavens opened with another fiery shower of sparks and the clouds burst above, clashing together, the lightning touching down over our heads, and on came a thunderous deluge of cold and chilling rain . . . Oh God, oh, God, oh God!” I cried. “This cannot be your school! God! I say no” (313). Very soon after uttering these words, Memnoch implores Lestat to help him help the souls wallowing in Hell forgive God and to, eventually, enter the Kingdom of Heaven on His terms. Lestat, however, can no longer even countenance such a notion:

‘I can’t do it!’ I cried. ‘I won’t do it!’ Suddenly my fury rose. I felt it obliterate all fear and trembling and doubt; I felt it rush through my veins like molten metal. The old anger, the resolve of Lestat. *‘I will not be part of this, not for you, not for Him, not for them, not for anyone!’*

I staggered backwards, glaring at him. ‘No, not this. Not for a God as blind as He, and not for one who demands what you demand of me. You’re mad, the two of you! I won’t help you. I won’t. I refuse.’ (317–320)

Lestat does manage to escape Hell, but not before Memnoch inadvertently rips Lestat’s left eye out of its socket and allows it to fall at their feet, and the spiteful ghosts of Hell step on it and smear the residue all over the stairs. Despite the loss of his eye, when he plunges into the cold abysmal winter of real world New York City, he and his readers’ sense of relief, though short-lived, is palpable.

By the time he reaches his friends in the Olympic Towers, the vampires David and Armand and the mortal Dora (a beautiful young televangelist he fell in love with earlier in *Memnoch the Devil*) he is on the point of raving madness. After a full 24 hours of sleep, Lestat emerges from his room and begins to tell the tale of his experiences with Memnoch the Devil and God Almighty. As he speaks, it becomes clear that he does not know what to believe about what has happened to him, about God or the Devil, or about the purpose of humanity. David soon comments that they [God and Memnoch] “let you escape, and they

had a purpose” (332). When Lestat shows them the veil—Veronica’s Veil—that purpose begins to reveal itself. All see “His face blasted into the veil. I looked down. God Incarnate staring at me from the most minute detail, burnt into the cloth, not painted or stained, or sewn or drawn, but blasted into the very fibers, His Face, the Face of God in that instant, dripping with blood from His Crown of Thorns” (333). But then Dora takes the veil from an unresisting Lestat, and hurries, in a state of near ecstasy, with it to St. Patrick’s Cathedral. The veil, as it turns out, quickly effects nothing less than a total and, or so it seems, an unstoppable resurgence of belief in God and the renewal of the Christian religion. Days later, in New Orleans, Lestat receives an envelope in which, after he tears it open, he finds the eye that Memnoch had ripped out of his face as he attempted to escape from Hell. He shoves his eye back into its socket then, on the vellum, “written in blood and ink and soot,” he reads the words: “*To My Prince, / My Thanks to you for a job / perfectly done. / with Love, / Memnoch / the Devil*” (349–350). This final twist, not surprisingly perhaps, drives Lestat over the edge and into the realm of insanity. While encased in the chains his vampire elders have placed him in for his own protection, Lestat must come to terms with the idea that not only had God used Memnoch for His purposes—to ignite fresh, fervent, and widespread belief in Him in the late 20th century—but also with the idea that Memnoch knew God was using him for this reason. Acknowledgement of this notion means, of course, that Lestat was either the expendable pawn of both God and the Devil or, like the Devil himself, merely an instrument of God’s to be used at will and without consent.

In the closing pages of *Memnoch the Devil*, the vampire Armand, so affected by seeing the face of Jesus Christ on Veronica’s Veil that Lestat brought back with him from his journey to Heaven, to Jerusalem at the time of Christ, and to Hell, exposes himself to the full light of the morning sun, and bursts into flames as an inevitable consequence. But, in the next volume of *The Vampire Chronicles*, appropriately titled *The Vampire Armand*, we learn that Armand survived his attempt at self-immolation; nearly burnt beyond recognition, but nevertheless as alive as one of the undead can be. While Lestat lies in a virtual catatonic state in New Orleans, Armand tells the story of his life to David. Upon completing his long, long tale, and asked about what it was, exactly, he saw when he looked at Veronica’s Veil, he explains that he “saw Christ” and “He was . . . my brother. . . Yes. That is what He was, my brother, and the symbol of all brothers, and that is why He was the Lord, and that is why His core is simply love” (385). And here, in these passages, we find two of Christ’s most significant messages: that Christianity is nothing more, and nothing less, than a brotherhood among men and women and Himself, and that it is love, simply love, that allows this brotherhood to thrive in His eternal glory. Nevertheless, adventures much less theologically and philosophically informed await readers of *Merrick, Blood and Gold*, and *Blackwood Farm*, the three *Vampire Chronicles* that follow *The Vampire Armand*. However, *Blood*

Canticle, the final volume of the series opens with the following lines that belong to the indomitable vampire Lestat: "I want to be a saint. I want to save souls by the millions. I want to do good far and wide. I want to fight evil" (3). A rollicking tale follows, at the end of which Lestat's thinking comes full circle: he still longs to be a saint, though he knows that he will never be able to fulfill such an ambition. As wholly outlandish as the idea of Lestat as a saint may be, it reminds us, forcefully, of just how linked Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* are, and always have been, with the religion of the West, Christianity.

Rice, in her "Essay on Earlier Works," ties *The Vampire Chronicles* to what she terms a "long tradition of 'dark fiction' which includes some of the most highly prized religious works read in Western culture." She goes on to cite Dante's *Inferno*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations*, Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and the legend of *Faust* as examples of the tradition of dark fiction to which, she argues, *The Vampire Chronicles* and her other novels belong. Indeed, for Rice, all of her earlier books, like the classics just mentioned, "involve a strong moral compass. Evil is never glorified in these books; on the contrary, the continuing battle against evil is the subject of the work. The search for good is the subject of the work." They are not in any way immoral, Satanic, or demonic works, as some, in ignorance, have claimed. What "unites them is the theme of the moral and spiritual quest," and each and every one of them, Rice claims, "reflects a movement towards Jesus Christ." And this movement seems to have found its ultimate fulfillment, and expression, in Rice's *Christ the Lord* series.

Justifying the Ways of God to Men

The narrator of the English epic poem *Paradise Lost*—long-assumed to be John Milton himself—wrote that one of the purposes of this great work was to "justify the ways of God to men" (l.26). In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Anne Rice also attempts to justify the ways of God to men. She writes that the "books transparently reflect a journey through atheism and back to God. It is impossible not to see this. They reflect an attempt to determine what is good and what is evil in an atheistic world. They are about the struggle of brothers and sisters in a world without credible fathers and mothers" and they "reflect an obsession with the possibility of a new and enlightened moral order" (*Called Out of Darkness* 147). Though the novels explore atheism, paganism, superstition, anger, horror, fear, belief and non-belief, good and evil, love and hatred, the traditional and the non-traditional, the theological and the philosophical, and the spiritual and the abject, they are, as we have seen and Rice herself explains, never entirely divorced from Christianity; the religion of the West; our common legacy, whether we embrace it or not. In fact, it seems as if she was trying to get closer and closer to God Himself with each, if not every, book of *The Vampire Chronicles* she wrote. As early as 1994, Rice was contemplating writing about Christ. But it was not until 2002 that she

put aside everything else and decided to focus entirely on answering the questions that had dogged me all my life. The decision came in July of that year . . . I decided that I would give myself utterly to the task of trying to understand Jesus himself and how Christianity emerged. (*Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, "Author's Note," 309)

Significantly, Rice adds that, at this point in time, "I was ready. I was ready to do violence to my career . . . Nothing else mattered . . . I consecrated myself and my work to Christ" (309). A little more than three years later, in the fall of 2005, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* was published in hardcover by Alfred A. Knopf. The phrase "New York Times Bestseller" graces the mass market paperback edition that appeared in 2006, suggesting that the book had succeeded, like *Interview with the Vampire* over thirty years ago, in capturing the popular attention. On March 4, 2008, *The Road to Cana*, the second volume of the *Christ the Lord* series, was published and quickly became a bestselling title, and Rice plans to produce additional volumes.

Most critics in the popular press, almost all of whom discuss Rice's journey from Catholicism to atheism and back as regards the subject matter of her new works, seem to have received *Out of Egypt* and *The Road to Cana* well. Writing in *The New York Times*, Janet Maslin comments that the former has "the slow but inexorable rhythm of an incantation. The restraint and prayerful beauty of [it] is apt to surprise her usual readers and attract new ones" (E1, E9). David Gates, in *Newsweek*, writes that, "in the novel's best scene, a dream in which Jesus meets a bewitchingly handsome Satan—smiling, then weeping, then raging—Rice shows she still has her great gift: to imbue Gothic chills with moral complexity and heartfelt sorrow" (54–55). On the latter, *Library Journal* writes that Rice "once again paints a powerful account of Christ's humanity while staying true to orthodox Christianity" (60). The reviewer adds that "it will inspire readers to see Jesus in a new light" and "is a novel that both religious and secular audiences can appreciate and enjoy" (60). In any case, with the *Christ the Lord* series, the transformation from the popular vampire to the popular Christ Anne Rice has attempted to effect, continues. But whether or not giving a profound, distinctive, and authentic voice to Jesus Christ Himself will prove as effective and powerful a means of trying to justify the ways of God to men on the secular level as *The Vampire Chronicles* were, remains to be seen.

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Girls Go Slash/Boys Go Bang: Gender, Canon and Creativity within *Warhammer 40,000* Fanfiction

Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the gendered nature of fandom, with a number of commentators highlighting how, all things being equal, males and females are both attracted to different types of fandom and engage in different sorts of fan production (if they engage at all). Most, if not all discussions of fanfiction and vidding, for example, have highlighted how both are predominantly practiced by females. Fanfilm production and machinima, in contrast, are typically the preserve of male fans (see, for example, Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Brooker, 2002; Jenkins, 2006:43; Sandvoss, 2005:16; Coppa, 2008, 2009; Pugh, 2005; Long, 2009). Indeed, according to Henry Jenkins (2007), there may also be a gender divide within fan scholarship, with female scholars typically locating themselves and their work as members of fan communities within the discipline of fan studies, while male scholars typically locate themselves within other, broader intellectual fields that have overlapping concerns with fan studies (for a more in-depth discussion, see in particular the recent Gender and Fan Studies debate at <http://community.livejournal.com/fandebate/>).

One area in particular where there would appear to be marked gender differences is in terms of the nature of fan creativity. The consensus again within the fan studies literature is that male fan creativity tends to be more orthodox in focus, whereas female fan creativity tends towards being more transformative. Male fans, in other words, are content to 'colour within the lines' of the particular canon, whereas female fans typically seek to transform, or do 'more with', the source material. Writing over two decades ago, Henry Jenkins (2006 [1988]:44), for example, argued that "the compulsion to expand speculations about characters and story events beyond textual boundaries" is more of a 'feminine' than a 'masculine' interpretive strategy (see also Russo 2009:128). Male fans, he suggested, consequently feel more comfortable talking and writing about "future technologies or military lifestyle" rather than "pondering Vulcan sexuality, McCoy's childhood, or Kirk's love life" (*ibid.*, 43). More recently Bob Rehak (2008:no pagination) has highlighted the "apparent gender split between traditionally female fans who produce work considered to be transformative, and male fans . . . gravitate towards activities that uphold and extend the essence and ideology of the parent text, rather than diverting from it and working 'against the grain'." In particular, echoing Jenkins's point above, he suggests that male fans are drawn more to what he terms 'blueprint culture': an interest in the technical aspects of the canon, such as schematics of the

Millennium Falcon, or producing wikis that seek to catalogue characters, events and locations found within the canon (cf. Penley, 1997:117–8: see, for example, Toten 2008 on the Battlestar Galactica wiki).

A great deal, if not all, studies of fanfiction have focused on the ways in which female fans seek to re-read the canon of various films, TV shows, or novels, refocusing it to better serve or represent their own interests and concerns (Busse & Hellekson, 2006:17). This may take a variety of forms. In some instances, fan-authors have sought to shift the focus of attention away from the main (typically male) characters towards other, less-developed (typically female) characters, such as Nurse Chapel or Lieutenant Uhura in the original *Star Trek* series. In other cases, they have sought to ‘slow the action down’ and focus more on the often-neglected, emotional relationships between lead characters (Jenkins, 1992; 1995; 2006; Pugh, 2005). This has, in many cases, found expression in forms of ‘slash’ literature in which these notionally heterosexual male characters are depicted together in romantic/homosexual relationships. Perhaps not surprisingly, this latter form of fanfiction has generated the most controversy and received the lion’s share of academic discussion (see, for example, Russ, 1985; Lamb & Veith, 1986; Jenkins, 1992: chapter 6; Penley, 1997; Cicioni, 1998; Gwenllian Jones 2002; Busse & Hellekson, eds. 2006; Kustritz, 2003; Scordari, 2003).

My aim in this article is to contribute to this growing debate around gender and fan creativity by examining the largely unexplored area of male fanfiction. Drawing on interviews with male authors of fanfiction based on the Warhammer 40,000 miniature wargame (Games Workshop, 1987–; hereafter W40K), I will explore the different ways in which their work interacts with the W40K canon. In doing so, I will show how for the majority of them the originality of their work lies not so much in the ways that it transforms the canon, but rather through the ways in which it enriches it, by, for example, adding either depth to the W40K universe or by shading in areas of the universe that have not been explored within the canonical literature. Linked with this, I will also explore some reasons for why this is the case, suggesting a confluence of different factors ranging from desire for publication, the wish to avoid social disapproval and gain readers, through to the heavily gendered nature of the W40K universe. To this end, my analysis will be structured in three main sections. In the first, I will briefly introduce readers to W40K fandom, highlighting the nature of the W40K canon and the role that it plays within fan creativity. Following on from this, in the next two sections, I will draw on my interviews with W40K fan-authors to explore a variety of issues around the areas of canonicity, gender and originality.¹

Warhammer 40,000

W40K is a tabletop miniature war-game produced by the UK company Games Workshop (www.gamesworkshop.com) and set in a dystopian Gothic future 38,000 years hence where humanity, represented by the Imperium of Man, stands on the brink of extinction, threatened on all sides by a multitude of

enemies. Within the W40K universe, to use one of the game's slogans, "there is no peace, only war", with each species fighting often just to survive. On earth (Terra), superstition and dogma dominate, the knowledge of science and technology having been lost millennia before, and a God-like Emperor, who has ruled the Imperium for 10,000 years, holds power.

To play W40K, players collect, then paint plastic and metal 28mm-scale miniatures sold by Games Workshop of a particular army/species within the W40K universe (such as, for example, the elite 'Space Marines' of the Imperium, heretical 'Chaos Space Marines', malevolent 'Chaos Daemons', or 'Space Orks').² Once a player has collected and painted their army, they may then engage in wargames with friends, ranging in size and complexity from minor skirmishes with a few miniatures to mass 'Apocalypse' battles involving many hundreds of miniatures and futuristic vehicles using a relatively straightforward rules system developed by the company over the last two decades (Cavatore *et al.*, 2008). Such battles are not necessarily re-enactments of battles that occurred within the W40K narrative universe—in the way that, for example a historical war-gamer might recreate the Battle of Waterloo or Gettysburg—but are, rather, generic battles/missions of the type that might take place in that universe between the different armies/races, such as battles to take and hold objectives, seize ground, or simply to annihilate the enemy. The W40K canon nevertheless provides the background context in which these missions occur, describing both the history of the W40K universe and its inhabitants, as well as offering fictionalised visions of warfare in the 41st Millennium to inspire gameplay.

It is, however, not essential to be thoroughly immersed within the W40K canon to play a game of W40K, and, indeed, players will differ on how loyal they are to the 'fluff', as it is called, when collecting and gaming with their armies. On the one hand, some players will strive to adhere to the 'fluff' for their particular army, making sure that it only contains those characters, units, vehicles, and so on that are canonically accurate. Many will also, like historical wargamers, go to great lengths to paint their armies in the 'correct' liveries and with appropriate insignia. On the other, many 'powergaming' players will, while still staying within the rules of the game, eschew what is canonically accurate in favour of constructing armies filled with high-powered units or weaponry (or 'cheese') in order to increase their chances of winning games.

As one moves within W40K fandom away from gaming into fanfiction and other areas of fan creativity, the canon begins, however, to exert a stronger influence (see Walliss, forthcoming). Several online repositories for W40K fanfiction, for example, insist that authors only post stories that are true to the canon (*cf.* Pugh, 2005 on the Jane Austin fanfiction site, *The Republic of Pemberley*). To quote the first two rules, for example, of the fanfiction section of the *Astronomican* forum:

1. When creating a story never create a story that go[es] against the fluff, or is a corrupted version of the fluff if you do

not intent [*sic*] to show why the story goes against the fluff. If you are doing it to show people are lied to, that is fine.

2. When introducing a new story make sure that its first; a sound idea and secondly that it is 40k.³

Similarly, the Warhammer 40,000 fanon wiki lists among its rules that contributors should, "Follow the canon", although its owners do, on rare occasions, allow parts of the canon to be 'broken';

The community may occasionally decide to have a fairly large scale event, in which parts of the canon may be broken just for fun's sake. In these cases, several loop holes are exploited to make sure that the smallest amount of canon elements possible are broken.

This emphasis on remaining true to the canon was also shared by the majority of the fan-authors that I interviewed, with many stating that it invariably made a story worse if an author intentionally went against it. When asked whether it made a story better or worse if it 'went against the fluff', 'Steven' for example, replied that it made it 'definitely worse', adding that "I think it's ok to bend the rules regarding fluff but never break them". Likewise, 'Honsou', the author of the previously cited rules on the astronicon forum who defined himself as "a strong proponent of the fluff", argued that "a story is without a doubt worse if it goes against the fluff. Indeed I would argue that it has failed in the task it set out to complete". As he put it later in the interview,

. . . the role of fanfiction is not to attempt to change the nature and parameters of an existing universe within which it is set. . . . While exploring subject matters that have not been touched upon previously is good, indeed to be encouraged, the author must ensure that they remain true to the existing background and the essence of the background, while doing so.

Indeed, a number expressed the view that, aside from any explicit rules such as those outlined above, there was also an implicit pressure within W40K fandom to remain true to the canon. 'Chris', for example, recalled how, in his early fanfiction, he had been "extremely concerned with staying inside the boundaries of Warhammer 40K fluff", adding that "the existing fluff is kind of a Bible of sorts . . . the established fluff is law, and breaking that is to commit some unwritten crime".

For the majority of W40K fan-authors, then, canon provides a clear, often unarticulated, set of parameters for their work; an unambiguous set of lines that delineate both what is W40K from what is not, and the nature of the 40K universe itself. Nevertheless, as is often the case within many different fandoms, within W40K fandom there is some degree of debate about both what should be considered as canonical and the relative degree of canonical authority that

should be accorded to different sources. Will Brooker (2002), for example, has drawn our attention to the debates that take place within *Star Wars* fandom over issues such as whether or not the original or the remastered versions of the original Trilogy should be considered as canonical as well as the status within the canon of a variety of spin-off media such as TV shows, novelisations, radio adaptations or computer games. More recently, Lance Parkin (2007) has outlined similar debates within *Doctor Who* fandom, highlighting, in particular, the difficulties in articulating a central canon within a fictional universe that has been created over several decades by dozens of different authors and producers.

Within W40K fandom, material produced by Games Workshop or one of its subsidiaries is seen to possess canonical authority, with material sanctioned, but not produced directly by Games Workshop seen as having significantly less, if any, authority. At the absolute apex of canonicity, then, are the Official W40K rulebook, the individual rulebook supplements produced for each army (or 'Codexes' as they are known) and any articles published within the company's official monthly magazine, *White Dwarf*. All this material is produced in-house by staff members within its design studio. Elements of this material have changed over time, with each subsequent revision superseding its predecessor. Carrying slightly less canonical authority are books and other material produced by Games Workshop's subsidiaries, Forge World and the Black Library. The latter, Games Workshop's publishing division produces novels set within the W40K universe that 'flesh out' the canonical material found within codexes and the official rule book, such as the series of (currently) eight novels that narrate the story of the great schism within the Imperium of Man 10,000 years prior to the events of the 41st Millennium that provides one of the central *leitmotifs* of the universe. As these, however, are typically written by freelance authors, including, on occasion, fan-authors who have won competitions, rather than being produced in-house by Games Workshop, they are often seen as possessing less canonical authority, particularly if their content is believed to contradict 'higher level' source material. At the opposite end of the scale, one finds material produced by other companies under licence from Games Workshop, such as roleplaying games, comics and graphic novels, and computer games. While much of the content of this material clearly stems from the 'higher level' material, it is typically seen as non-canonical because it is not produced by Games Workshop itself and often contains elements that contradict this material.⁴

In spite of all this material, however, the W40K universe is still nevertheless a largely underdeveloped one, containing numerous areas that have not been explored in any of the canonical sources. Indeed, this indeterminacy is itself one of the W40K universe's central tropes; that much of its history is, as one fan-author put it, "simply unknown or forgotten or deliberately covered up" ('Richard'). As will be explored in the next section, W40K fanfiction authors typically eschew elaborating on existing characters and those parts of the canon that have been explored within official sources. Instead, they set their stories

within the multiplicity of gaps, often exploring the ‘little stories’ typically left unexplored within the canon, whether that be the dying moments of a soldier on the battlefield, letters sent home from the frontline, or even, indeed, life within one of the multitude of hiveworlds within the Imperium. In doing so they believe it is possible to both adhere to the canon and yet still tell original stories that enrich their understanding of the W40K universe.

A Universe “Practically Designed for Fanfiction”

The second dominant theme that came out my interviews with W40K fan-authors was their emphasis on originality. When asked what, for them, were the defining characteristics of good W40K fanfiction, the recurring response was that it used the canon in an innovative way. ‘Steven’ summed this attitude up succinctly: “for me it comes down to good story telling with innovation. I like to see stories exploring stuff that’s never been explored before”. Equally, when asked what they believed were the defining characteristics of bad W40K fanfiction, the majority of them pointed to issues such as lack of originality and derivative plots, alongside more practical concerns such as bad spelling and grammar. Too many W40K fan-authors, they claimed, merely mimicked the style and tone of published stories or produced what was termed ‘bolter-porn’; endless descriptions of bloody battles between common foes with little or no plot, suspense or character development:⁵

Many 40K authors tend to write about a bloodbath battle set in the 40K world using 40K elements, because that’s all that they see, or perhaps all they think needs to be said . . . ‘In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war’: they take the ‘only’ bit too far—they write about war, but forget the character development, the plot twists, the plot itself, and many other things. More than half of the 40K pieces I have read (Black Library or otherwise) have been about some people killing some other people, and then doing something, and then killing more people, and that’s all there is to it (‘Greg’).

The key task for W40K fan-authors, then, is to try and innovate within the definite parameters of the W40K universe; to balance, in other words, the demands of remaining true to the W40K canon with the desire to move beyond derivative story-lines and ‘bolter-porn’ into producing more innovative and original material. They achieve this through two main, overlapping strategies; what I shall refer to as *Filling the Gaps* and *Refocusing the Camera* respectively.

Filling the Gaps

Primarily, W40K fan-authors use their fiction to fill the various gaps within the W40K canon. As noted above, the W40K universe is, to quote ‘Mark’, “so frickin’ huge”; encompassing huge vistas of time and lightyears of space, both of which remain largely unexplored within official sources. To give an example,

the 9,000-year period between 15,000 and 24,000 CE known as the 'Dark Age of Technology' is only briefly sketched out within official source material and, indeed, according to the canon the exact details of what transpired during this period has been either forgotten or censored from official Imperial accounts. Consequently, fans wanting to write a story within this timeframe not only have large vistas of time in which to situate it, but also very little in the way of canonical constraints.⁶ There are also few canonical constraints for fan-authors exploring the far—and, again, often officially unexplored—reaches of the W40K universe. Indeed, it is completely possible for a W40K fan-author to invent their own planetary system and fit it into the overarching canon. As 'Richard' explained:

... what I will say about the Warhammer 40K background is that it is practically designed for fanfiction because it's so enormous and broad in scope you can put in anything from a medieval background to a highly-sophisticated science-fiction culture, you've got the soaring gothic architecture, you've got the rat-infested sewers. You've got everything that you could possibly want; every science-fiction and fantasy trope you could imagine you can find in the 40Kverse.⁷

W40K fan-authors also use their work to both develop the stories of various armies that have been mentioned but are largely ignored within the official sources, and to explore the exploits of their own, invented armies. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of W40K fanfiction in comparison with fanfiction in other genres is its almost complete eschewing of canonically established characters and storylines. Rather than continuing the narrative found within their favourite Black Library novel or writing another story featuring an established character, W40K fan-authors are much more likely to invent a whole new set of characters or to create a whole history about an army/race that was only mentioned in passing in an official source published several decades previously (*cf.* Jenkins, 1992:165–8 on 'refocalization'). 'Paul', described how he had written several stories about the 'Rainbow Warriors', a Space Marine chapter that was covered in one page of the first edition of the W40K rulebook from 1987. Similarly, several authors on the Black Library forum have collaborated to flesh out the history of the Silver Skulls, another Space Marine chapter that has received little attention in official sources. As 'Paul' explained,

A new chapter gives me much more freedom... I'm not going to be 'overruled' by Black Library releasing a Rainbow Warriors novel any time soon I don't think ;-). Also by making it my own I'm essentially allowed to throw out/change whatever I feel like without having to put [in] disclaimers

Indeed, even where fan-authors explore the build-up and/or aftermath of incidents outlined within canonical sources, they invariably do so by placing

their own characters within the narrative. *Cauldron of Fire* by 'exitus_10', for example, tells a story that builds up to the canonical 'Twelfth Black Crusade', but sets the story on the non-canonical planet of Sordin II with a whole cast of invented *dramatis personae*.⁸ Similarly, *The Garras War* by 'Mr_Kibbles' takes place in the aftermath of the canonical Medusa V campaign (an event run by Games Workshop in 2006) its narrative featuring, again, a range of invented characters.⁹

Refocusing the Camera

In addition to seeking to fill gaps within the canon, a great deal of W40K fanfiction also seeks to 'refocus the camera' within the W40K universe by telling the 'little stories' that are, while implicit within the canon, again, never fully explored in official sources. As 'Rene' and 'Lee' respectively explained:

Action is secondary. I mean, sure, you can write about the great victory of the Cadian 7th against Hive Fleet Carcassone, but what really is that battle? It can be, for example, the nightmares of Trooper Enkoli each night after the battle, or Colonel Farragut facing his own conscience and memory—did he or did he not give the order to fire when his own men were still in the targeted area?

Showing HOW the Battle of Maccragge impacted the rest of the Ultramar beyond Maccragge is important. When you see a story in the news about an ongoing war effort, it isn't a re-enactment of the battle or just a casualty report, but how the war is affecting the people in the military and the civilians around which the war is happening. The human interest so to speak

In some cases, then, W40K fan-authors will use their work to explore the human consequences of the endless war of the 41st Millennium. Both 'Brannick' and 'Consadine', for example, have written a series of first-person stories exploring the emotions and experiences of an Imperial Guardsman on the frontline. Writing respectively in their journal or in letters home they shift the attention away from the heroic to the more mundane reality of warfare, such as frequent lack of supplies, falling morale, and the concern felt for those on the frontline by their families.¹⁰ Similarly, in *The Body* by Kammerice, a Guardsman named Johansson discovers the helmet of his friend, Jarton, after a major battle, a sure indication that he is dead. Nevertheless, Johansson clings to the hope that his friend may have survived, a hope that is tragically dashed when, hiding inside a building, he sees through binoculars Jarton's corpse outside:

He let the tears find him. He didn't care who saw him cry, was aware only that Jarton would never cry again. The trooper that

sat in the small room prayed to his Emperor and God that his friend hadn't suffered at his end.¹¹

Moving away from the front line, a number of W40K fan-authors set their stories in one of the millions of hive-cities in which humans/Terrans live throughout the universe, using their stories to explore the often violent existence of life crammed together with up to one billion other souls. In *The Note*, for example, Kentigern narrates the story of a member of the Adeptus Arbites (the Imperial policeforce), who is slowly driven insane after discovering a note at a murder scene from the victim addressed to him. The note tells him of an 'evil conspiracy' hiding within the hive and provides him with its location: 1118 Vernügenstrasse. At the conclusion of the story, he goes to the named location with a strike squad and massacres the cultists and daemons that he finds there only to then regain his sanity and discover that he has in fact killed his own men. The afterword to the story being told from the perspective of the official who investigated both the incident and the arbiter's subsequent suicide.¹²

Despite this emphasis on innovation, however, there are still limits to both the topics that the majority of W40K fan-authors explore within their stories, as well as how far many are prepared to write 'against the grain' of the canon. As 'Richard' explained;

If you take the 40K universe somewhere completely new, then its not the 40K universe anymore. It is the world of flying cathedrals, it is the world of planet-destroying weapons, it is the world of demons who want to feed on your soul, it is the world where your only hope of survival is the worship of a half-dead corpse a million lightyears away. That is the nature of the 40K universe and if you try to write something that means that it is not that—that it is a place where there is forgiveness, respite and something other than war—then its not 40K anymore, its something else . . . Now that's not to say that you cant write stories that go places where the background has never gone before, but they need to be firmly embedded within that whole concept of the background otherwise it would become something else. It wouldn't be fanfiction anymore.

Consequently, while, as discussed above, some stories explore the emotional impact of warfare in the 41st Millennium, these do not, intentionally at least, re-read the canon by, depicting Space Marines experiencing these emotions, for example. A key feature of their background being that their genetic enhancements and training result in them no longer feeling any emotions, least of all fear. Rather, those stories that depict emotional scenes by and large feature characters drawn from the Imperial Guard who, according to the canon, are not similarly enhanced and as 'normal' humans can experience the full emotional upheavals of soldiering.

Similarly, there is also, in contrast to much female-authored fanfiction, a distinct lack of sexual themes, particularly slash, within the mainstream of W40K fanfiction. Indeed, my findings in this regard were remarkably similar to Will Brooker's (2002:129) experiences of interviewing Star Wars fan-authors; most "seem never to have heard of [slash fiction], and those that have tend to keep their distance". This is particularly notable as there are a number of sexual and other adult themes explicit within several areas of the canon:

The 41st millennium is rife with sex, drugs, and violence as the teeming masses of humanity stretch the boundaries of acceptable entertainment. The masses cannot gain all of their sustenance from Imperial religion, so they satisfy their wild urges by smoking obscura or gladstones, grinweed or other such narcotics. They go to the pits to watch mutant clowns disembowel each other with chainswords. They call upon smile-girls (prostitutes) to satisfy their urges. From top to bottom the 41st millennium has just as much depravity as one could imagine exists in the 21st millennium ('Dean').

Likewise, one of the Chaos gods, Slaanesh, for example, is described within the canon as a god of all forms of excess and pleasure, his followers venerating him through indulging "every excess and depravity they can imagine" and "honing their bodies to the limits of blissful endurance" (Thorpe & Cavatore, 2007:39). Indeed, the vile excesses and forms of depravity practiced by the forces of Chaos in general offer themselves easily for the fan-exploration of adult content while staying within the parameters of the canon. Nevertheless, little, if any, of this type of content finds its way into the mainstream of W40K fanfiction.

Discussion and Conclusions

To sum up, male-authored W40K fanfiction is characterised by, on the one hand, the desire to remain true to the canon, with, on the other, the desire to produce stories that are not simply derivative of the canon, but are in some sense innovative. Their aim, as discussed above, is to tell original stories within the parameters of the existing universe, either by filling temporal and spatial gaps within the canon, or by 'refocusing the camera' to explore the multitude of 'little stories' that, while implicit within the canonical material, are never explicitly developed within official sources. Despite this emphasis on innovation, there are still, nevertheless, limits to the topics explored within the mainstream of W40K fanfiction, and, in contrast to much female-authored fanfiction, a distinct lack of slash content.

Several reasons may be given for why this is the case. The first has already been covered and revolves around the desire to avoid potential social disapproval by writing fanfiction that somehow 'breaks the rules'. As 'Mike' noted, "like anything with a cult following, there are always a thousand fans in the woodwork waiting to jump on people who don't 'respect' the fiction . . . people always get fanatical about their passions. They want to see

things in a certain way, the way they grew up with it". The potential fear of negative feedback from beta-readers and the broader W40K fanfiction community was also highlighted as a particularly salient factor by 'Paul':

... if someone has a way out idea that conflicts with the canon, they will get negative feedback over it (should they ask for opinions). I think this constrains some people more than the canon itself, as there's no shortage of opinions on the net... Many writers may not feel comfortable doing something outside the norm.

On one level, then, even where there are not explicit rules regarding the types of stories that can be published, the W40K fanfiction community nevertheless operates for many fan-authors as, to use Mead's term (1934), a form of 'generalised other', determining for them both what types of stories can be written and the respect that should be accorded to the canon (*cf.* Stein & Busse, 2009: 196–8 on fan author/reader communities as 'interpretive communities').

Another implicit pressure felt by some fan-authors was the desire to produce content that could potentially be published by the Black Library. Several, for example, speculated on whether the emphasis on producing innovative work that did not challenge parameters of the canon or push it in a different direction was, to some extent, motivated by authors' desire to have their work eventually published and become, itself, part of the canon. The Black Library has, over the last few years, organised four competitions where the winner's was work published in an anthology with established authors and they received a modest sum of money for their efforts. Indeed, 2009 saw the publication of *Emperor's Mercy*, the first book by Henry Zou, who had come to the Black Library's attention when he had a story published in one of its fan-anthologies. As 'Richard', who had himself had a story published in the same anthology as Zou, observed

... there's loads of Star Wars fanfic but that doesn't really go anywhere because you've got really established writers like Timothy Zahn and Karen Traviss who are already writing the books... Whereas you get someone like the Black Library, they're coming to us, they're coming to the fans and saying 'you write fanfic, here's a competition, here's an open submissions window. Send us your best stuff, maybe we'll publish it. If we publish it, maybe you'll get to become a proper author—more than just a fanfic writer'. I don't think anyone else offers that offers that kind of opportunity.¹³

From this perspective, fan-fiction operated on one, instrumental, level as a form of 'calling card'; demonstrating (potentially) to the Black Library that one not only had a clear grasp of the canon, but could tell original stories within its parameters.

Finally, and I would argue, most importantly, there is the influence of the heavily gendered nature of the canon itself. The W40K universe is, to quote one interviewee, “100% mansauce”; a universe of testosterone-fuelled conflict with little or no room for the emotional complexities or morally grey areas that characterise everyday life. As ‘Dean’ put it;

Generally the readers of Warhammer 40k fiction are male, and looking for scenes of gory action or fast-paced espionage and intricately-detailed combat. They want hard, scarred veteran sergeants instead of mushy-feely characters who want ‘relationships’ . . . The universe that Games Workshop and the Black Library brings us is a dark one, and the fans of it want to keep it that way.

In contrast, then, to female fans engaging with ‘masculine’ popular cultural texts, male W40K fans do not have to ‘transform’ the canon in order to make it address their concerns and fit their interests. As Henry Jenkins (1992), Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) and Sheenagh Pugh (2005) among others have argued, when female fans approach media texts, such as science fiction TV shows, they are invariably faced with ‘masculine’ texts; texts that are largely written by and intended for males. In order to fully enjoy them, to quote Jenkins (2006:44), women (as well as other minority groups) thus have to either “perform a kind of intellectual transvestism—identifying with male characters in opposition to their own cultural experiences”—or re-read the texts to speak to their own concerns and interests. Female-authored fanfiction, as well as other forms of creativity, is thus from this perspective an attempt to refocus ‘masculine’ media texts “around traditional ‘feminine’ and contemporary feminist concerns, around sexuality and gender politics, around religion, family, marriage, and romance” (*ibid.*, 51) Male fans approaching the W40K canon find themselves in a markedly different position; finding by and large a text that, to paraphrase Jenkins, yields them ‘easy pleasures’ and that does not need them to re-read or refocus it to address their desires and concerns. They can instead, as detailed above, expend their creative efforts in celebrating and further exploring the source material, producing both ‘more of’ it and by exploring its various gaps.

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Notes

¹ Twenty fan-authors were interviewed via a combination of telephone and email interviews. During the course of the research, I maintained contact with several authors via email to discuss my findings and gain feedback. I also fed preliminary findings back to the W40K fanfiction community via a dedicated blog, with any comments again feeding into the development of the article. All those interviewed were emailed a draft of the article with an invitation to comment on my findings. Unless they requested otherwise, interviewees will be referred to via pseudonyms.

² For illustration, see <http://www.games-workshop.com/gws/catalog/landing.jsp?catId=>

cat1300033&rootCatGameStyle=wh40k

³ <http://astronomican.com/forums/showthread.php?s=8f4a2b0f7f3d862610b19a5914e0ab5b&t=3322> (accessed January 2010). These rules have subsequently been revised to remove this emphasis on canonicity.

⁴ See, for example, 'A Guide to Fluff' by Honsou (<http://www.astronomican.com/forums/showthread.php?t=16441>).

⁵ The 'boltgun' or 'bolter' is the weapon used by Space Marines. See, for example, http://wh40k.lexicanum.com/mediawiki/images/9/93/MkII_bolter.jpg

⁶ See, for example, the work of 'Nopoet' set during the 20th Millennium: <http://imperial-literature.net/?tag=20k-series>.

⁷ This idea was also explored by Black Library author, Dan Abnett in a recent interview: . . . there are deliberate lacunae in the background mythology of the story. There are gaps there for the players and the fans to exploit. There is a deliberate breathing space within 40k-lore for people to fill in to their own satisfaction (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGrjY4-DQbM&feature=player_embedded)

⁸ 'exitus_10', *Cauldron of Fire*, <http://z6.invisionfree.com/bljunkies/index.php?showtopic=418>

⁹ 'Mr Kibbles', *The Garras War*, <http://z6.invisionfree.com/bljunkies/index.php?showtopic=83>

¹⁰ 'Brannick', *The Imperial Guardsmen's Journal*, <http://www.astronomican.com/forums/showthread.php?t=6902>; 'Consadine', *Letters*, <http://www.astronomican.com/forums/showthread.php?t=7000>

¹¹ Kammerice', *The Body*, <http://incunabulum.co.uk/The%20Body.htm>

¹² Kentigern', *The Note*, <http://z6.invisionfree.com/bljunkies/index.php?showtopic=386>

¹³ See <http://www.blacklibrary.com/Getting-Started/FAQ-Working-For-Black-Library.html#guidelines>

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Up a Backlit Staircase, Casting a Long Shadow: Jacques Torneur's *I Walked with a Zombie*, Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*, and the Problems and Rewards of Visible Obstacles

And I can't decide which one I love the most / The flesh and blood or the pale, smiling ghost

———Robyn Hitchcock, "My Wife and My Dead Wife"

Val Lewton produced *I Walked With a Zombie* (directed by Jacques Torneur) shortly after his success with *Cat People*, though he only grew excited about the former by incorporating elements of his favorite novel into its script. Lewton's favorite novel was Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, a screenplay adaptation of which was—in 1943, the year of *Zombie*'s production—being finalized.

The two films could not have come from more different worlds. 1943's *I Walked With a Zombie* was a low-budget horror quickie—it would end up costing less than \$150,000—for RKO Studios (Viera), where 1944's *Jane Eyre*, budgeted at over \$830,000, would be billed as a prestige picture for 20th Century Fox (Sconce). The poster for *Zombie* promised cheap thrills: a foreshadowed hand reached for the viewer from the darkness. The poster for *Jane* promised a faithful adaptation of a literary classic: underneath the names of the two top-billed actors, Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine, were the names of their characters, Rochester and Jane, and underneath the movie's title was this reassuring imprimatur: "By Charlotte Bronte." Their markets may have been different, but the two films shared far more than their source material or even the cinematic grammar of their time. In choosing to isolate their protagonists in manic, highly expressionist set pieces, the two films share a preoccupation with the externalization of internal mood and thought that, in turn, allowed their heroines to exert the same sort of agency—the same amount of control—permitted to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

I Walked With a Zombie goes further by letting the heroine come into direct and extended contact with the obstacle to her affections. Curiously, in a film whose chief stylistic mode is elision—Lewton famously insisted on letting audiences imagine horror, claiming that it was both more effective and (most importantly) cheaper—the viewer is treated to the nearly ubiquitous presence of the zombie, a comatose bride, from beginning to end. *Zombie*'s plot is simple, its running time short; the movie barely makes it past an hour and fifteen minutes. The heroine is Betsy, a young nurse hired to work in the West Indies. She'll meet Paul Holland, her future employer, in a boat, but he will not reveal his identity until they meet later. Betsy is to take care of Paul's comatose wife,

Jessica, and it will soon be revealed that Wesley, Paul's brother, had also wanted Jessica. Betsy falls for Paul, Wesley still wants Jessica, and Betsy's solution is to attempt to cure Jessica through a voodoo ceremony. The ceremony does not work. Jessica is, it turns out, already under a voodoo spell and—furthermore—she is likely dead and was turned into a zombie at the moment of her passing. (Not that it matters, Paul tells Jessica, as he had long ago stopped caring for his wife who, like Rochester's Bertha, was guilty of indecorous behavior.) Voodoo drums summon Jessica. Wesley opens the gate barring the mansion, so that she can join the ceremony; he follows, holding an arrow. A priest sticks a pin on a doll. Wesley is seen pulling away from his former love, arrow still in hand, the undead bride now definitively, incontestably dead. He carries her into a stormy sea. The movie ends where it begins: a beach in the West Indies, Wesley and Jane drowned. Betsy and Paul can now be together.

Whatever the differences in narrative might be, all three versions of Jane have a great degree of agency. They are all fully engaged participants in their own romances.

That both the movies and the novel allow for an active Jane is not necessarily surprising. Nor is the degree of agency terribly dramatic. In all three, after all, the story hinges on a woman who will marry her employer, so the heroines' agency extends only as far as their capacity to deal with grievances and overcome obstacles to this end. The most significant obstacle in all three texts is the presence of a previous wife—mad and locked up in two texts, catatonic and possibly undead in the other. What becomes increasingly more interesting, however, is the tangled relationship between agency, obstacle, and film grammar in *I Walked With a Zombie* and *Jane Eyre*, particularly since it is Lewton and Tourneur's vision, in *I Walked With a Zombie*, that allows for a greater range of actions while engaging the heroine in what Gilbert and Gubar see as the central preoccupation of 19th-century women writers, whose "novelists and poets . . . are often both literally and figuratively concerned with disease, as if to emphasize the effort with which health and wholeness were won from the infectious 'vapors' of despair and fragmentation" (2033).

It helps that the heroine of *I Walked With a Zombie* is no longer a governess but a nurse—hence professionally concerned with disease—and that she is in charge of caring for Jessica, this version's "Madwoman in the Attic." Other differences abound, but given the radically divergent markets of these two film versions—as well as the radically different set of circumstances surrounding both films—it's equally intriguing to find so many similarities embedded in the fabric of these texts.

The most striking immediate similarity between Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked With a Zombie* and Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* is the wealth of staircases and shadows to be found in both. Both films will introduce their heroines these shadowy, angular new spaces via long tracking shots in which most of the interiors are hidden from view. These interior spaces are crossed by highly dramatic, and highly angular, shafts of light that serve to suggest both the

shape of the architecture as well as the presence—via absence and suggestion—of other rooms, other spaces, and other participants. The viewer fills in these gaps with his or her own information. In doing so, anyone watching becomes an active participant in the creation of the cinematic landscape.

This approach was actually common to many movies of the period, though it is closely associated with Tourneur himself, who at Lewton's insistence famously used many of the same techniques in *Cat People* to suggest (without having to depict) a monster, and who would use it to even greater effect in his 1947 film noir *Out of The Past*. But Tourneur was not alone. Orson Welles's 1941 *Citizen Kane* serves as a normative template for this approach. And Welles stars as Rochester in the 1944 version of *Jane Eyre*, though it's widely suspected—if never definitely proven—that he also had a hand in the directorial vision of the film. All the same, the stamp of *Kane* can be felt in *Jane*. Enough critics have noted the similarity between the treatment of space in both films (Campbell), and at least one has noted that Stevenson never again used the same uniquely Wellesian combination of techniques: "forced perspectives, exaggerated camera angles and meticulous attention to sound" (Kehr). Welles himself never took credit for the movie's style, and he need not have. In fact, it's possible to see the tone and vision of this film as being far more guided by the film grammar of the time as well as by the exigencies of the story. *Jane Eyre*, regardless of who adapts it, may indeed demand forced perspectives and exaggerated angles.

These stylistic choices overstress the Gothic elements of Charlotte Brontë's original and neglect other tensions inherent in the novel. Those who find flaws in the 1944 version of *Jane Eyre* will often do so in those terms, accusing Stevenson and his three screenwriters (Aldous Huxley among them) of erasing the novel's feminist concerns: Elizabeth Atkins will call the film "a complete disaster," noting that "even to the last the screenwriters rob Jane of her independence. Not only is Jane monetarily dependent after they are married, but the movie takes away Rochester's physical dependence on Jane" (60). The critic's major concern, throughout her essay, is that the removal of key pieces of information reduces the 1944 *Jane Eyre* to a romance. Nudd will go further, noting "how systematically the filmmakers have edited out the adult Jane Eyre's feminism in this scene [Jane and Rochester's first meeting] and chosen instead to highlight only the Gothic romance" (142). While Michael Riley will also find some flaws in the absences that populate this adaptation, it's important to note that he will also deem the movie's expressionist touches its highest success. Riley will find Jane and Rochester's first meeting "cinematically effective," but he too will lament that the movie reduces the moment to pure melodrama (151). He will argue that a rather dull 1971 Delbert Mann version of the story is a superior adaptation—a better work of art—because what "it loses in atmosphere, it makes up in dramatic realism and thematic richness. It is a more successful adaptation precisely because its vision embraces more of Brontë's than does that of the Stevenson film" (158–159). While Riley's observation is certainly valid,

it undermines the tremendous importance that cinematic atmospherics play in bulwarking character psychology. The way a movie looks—when handled skillfully—will often reflect how characters feel.

This relation will be seen all through *I Walked With a Zombie*, where the angular play of light and shadow will underscore Betsy's emotional state—she knows that there are vast patches of missing information, and that it is her responsibility to fill them—but the same approach and the same technique also permeates Stevenson's 1944 *Jane Eyre*, much to the same effect. Moreover, these stylistic choices are being made precisely because they fit the spirit of Charlotte Brontë's prose. Atkins and Riley find that Stevenson is substituting cinematic style for thematic heft, but it's entirely possible to argue that style is in fact underpinning theme (that, in Vladimir Nabokov's famous phrase, matter *is* style). Movies cannot convey the shifts and turns of thought through prose; instead, these shifts and turns find their signifiers in spatial and temporal arrangements. This is all a very convoluted way of saying that, in movies, what matters most—what conveys not just the most information but also the most important information—is movement.

Gardner Campbell, in an essay attempting to make a case for Welles as the co-director of the film, points to the significance of *mise en scene* throughout the 1944 *Jane Eyre*. Campbell notes that Welles "loves to frame his shots with one figure on one side of the frame in the extreme foreground, one figure on the other side of the frame in the middle ground, and one figure in the center in the background, all in focus." It doesn't really matter, for the purposes at hand, whether it's Welles or Stevenson who is responsible for these arrangements. What matters is that Campbell is right in suggesting that when we see Jane in the extreme foreground we are in fact imbuing her with a "double authority as character and narrative creator." It's even more striking to find how this particular *mise en scene* makes its way to the scene that Atkins notes but fails to see repeated—that of Jane meeting Rochester in the moors for the first time. Atkins, who fails to see in the Stevenson version a strong or "faithful" rendition of Jane, does commend the film for the following: "Jane causes the fall, foreshadowing her impact upon him . . . but by making Jane the immediate cause of the incident, Stevenson's film emphasizes that it is Jane, her particular qualities and character, which put an end to Rochester's headlong flight through life" (151). Stevenson's Jane will often find herself in the exact same position in the frame, and so will both create an echo of this scene and also reinforce our sense of the heroine as both narrator and as an active—and compositionally resistant¹—part of the narrative and cinematic frame.

The measure to which Jane/Betsy participates in her own narrative can be measured by the two movies' most overt nod to the novel: in both *Jane Eyre* and *I Walked With a Zombie*, the heroine *tells* her story, interprets it and assigns meaning and value to its particular parts, through voiceover. *Jane* seemingly goes farther by opening with pages from the book, and with Jane reading from them, though it should be noted that what Jane reads cannot be found in the

Bronte novel. The “book” of the movie does not use the words of the actual book. Instead, the voiceover allows the screenwriters to telescope the action and to direct our attention to a particular interpretation of what the viewer will see. This information appears at the very beginning, right after the credits roll and before anyone appears, “My name is Jane Eyre . . . I was born in 1820, a harsh time of change in England. Money and position seemed all that mattered. Charity was a cold and disagreeable word. Religion too often wore a mask of bigotry and cruelty. There was no proper place for the poor or the unfortunate. I had no father or mother, brother or sister. As a child I lived with my aunt, Mrs. Reed at Gateshead Hall. I do not remember that she ever spoke one kind word to me.” Jane’s narration will set the tone for the action that follows, with the viewer much more kindly disposed to the girl behind the locked door. The viewer knows not just that Jane is the subject of the story but, more importantly, that it is Jane herself who directs the eyes and ears of the audience. There is ample visual evidence for this direction, though the first indication is a close-up of a hand and a candle at the heart of the darkened frame. The hand and candle are a child’s height—roughly the same angle at which Jane herself will be revealed in a moment. The image, and the preceding text and voiceover, all bond us to Jane’s perspective, though the chief controlling factor remains Jane’s voice, as well as the retrospective nature of the narration. Because Jane is reminiscing—because the entire film, like the novel, is being retrospectively imagined—the images are understood to be filtered through the consciousness of the narrator.

Betsy will do the same. As the title credits roll over a sunny empty beach, her voiceover tells us that she “walked with a zombie.” She’ll laugh, then concede that “It does seem an odd thing to say. Had anyone said that to me a year ago, I’m not at all sure I would have known what a zombie was. I might have had some notion—that they were strange and frightening, and perhaps a little funny. But I have walked with a zombie . . .” Betsy’s narration undercuts the expected terror promised by the title. She will not just repeat the full title twice, but she’ll do so in a way that suggests that our expectations for her experience (that it was frightening) will be undercut by her own retrospective take on the events. This filtering mechanism unsettles. The viewer may be willing to laugh at anyone claiming to have walked with a zombie, but we’re not sure what to do when someone laughs *while* making that claim—is she kidding? Is she laughing because it isn’t true? Or because she can afford to, now that she’s safely out of danger? The viewer, as with Stevenson’s Jane, is forced to submit to Betsy’s experience. Betsy is telling us her story. The images presented are Betsy’s.

The images themselves, Edna Aizenberg will assert, betray an anxiety over a particular brand of hybridity—the fear of miscegenation—though she is careful in pointing out that race is for the most part sensitively handled in *I Walk With a Zombie*. She is particularly incisive in noting that Hollywood persists in shifting the race and gender of the voodoo victim: in the movies she’s always

white, and she's nearly always a she (463). Her point is well taken, particularly when Torneur presents, as one of the great shocks late into the film, the image of two pale women in their nightgowns, walking through a cornfield, to be stopped dead cold by the figure of a tall blind black man. Later, Wesley will carry Jessica away from the same man and into the sea. Aizenberg also argues that later appropriations of Torneur—she includes Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* among them—will complicate the racial, colonial, and postcolonial concerns of the source material (466).

The problem, as Aizenberg sees it, is that Tourneur's vision of the West Indies hinges to a great regard on "the highly complex nature of cultural relations, especially unequal cultural relations" (462). The women at the heart of *Jane Eyre* and *I Walked With a Zombie* are, to some degree, complicit in the colonial side of these cultural relations because they reassert the primacy—the rightness—of these power structures: their vulnerability to the colonized legitimates the rights of the colonizer. See, for example, Creole Bertha's threatening of Jane in Stevenson. See, too, the stark black figure presiding blankly over Jane and Betsy in *Zombie*, and later the even more dramatic voodoo ceremony in which a young black man summons, with a colonial-era ceremonial sword no less, a Barbie-like doll which, in turns, draws Jessica into the jungle. The madwoman is drawn deeper into her madness.

Where the two movies differ most dramatically is in their treatment of their madwomen. The first effects her presence by suggestion, the second by silence.

Jane wants Rochester, but is impeded by the shadowy presence of Bertha. We hardly see Bertha—we hear her laughter, and we are witness to interrupted moments of her madness, but the closest we get to actually seeing her is a shock of hair and a (very zombie-like) hand grasping at Jane from the darkness, just before the door is shut. What's more, Jane is for the most part unaware of her ghostly rival. She knows something is off, she just doesn't quite know what. When Bertha makes her presence known, it is only through sound and, like a ghost, through the aftereffects of her actions, like the fire she sets in Rochester's bedroom.

Jessica, on the other hand, will make her presence known visually. Betsy will catch a glimpse of Jessica, then will freeze when the latter makes her way at her. Jessica will be mostly visible. Her eyes will be blank, but she will move at a leisurely pace, and she will not—not quite—be threatening. This scene, this moment of first contact, is strange not simply because it subverts Val Lewton's own rules for suspense (never show the presence or cause of fear, merely suggest it), or even because it strays so far from his source material (Charlotte Bronte). Both are worth noting, but what I find immeasurably stranger still is that it brings to the surface the central tension at the heart of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

At the heart of the novel—at the heart of every novel, for that matter, and at the heart of every fairy tale and any television script—lies an insurmountable obstacle that the protagonist must surmount. Rey Chow, in creating a morphology of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, points to Bertha as such, since she is

The spectral other woman, the first wife. In order for the story to proceed, there has to be an obstacle or an enemy, a threat to the well-being of the main characters. In *Jane Eyre*, this obstacle is provided by Bertha Mason, the foreign, beastly woman-object who stands in the way of the harmony of the present society. With the presence of Bertha, the representation of 'woman' is split into two. Femininity is polarized into love, understanding, and a capacity to listen to the powerful man who perceives himself as a victim, on the one hand, and uncontrolled sexuality, madness and a refusal to cooperate with the (white) patriarchal order, on the other. (145)

Jessica is a problematic Bertha: unlike Bronte's Bertha, Jessica is not a foreigner, and she is not—when we first meet her—a crazed sexual being. She is anything but. She's barely a presence, catatonic and hovering, her biggest threat being proximity. Later Paul will insist that Jessica was, in fact all of the things we expect of our Berthas. He will say that was selfish, empty, and dead, and that he was never happy with her. He'll even come uncomfortably close to Chow's description of Bertha as a "woman-object" when he describes Jessica as "a possession, a beautiful possession to own and hold." In that same scene, he offsets Jessica's qualities by contrasting them with Betsy's. By calling Betsy "clean, decent thinking," he implies that Jessica was the opposite: dirty, and dirty minded. Like Bertha.

Despite these similarities, one major difference haunts these texts. In Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and in the 1944 Robertson version, Bertha is largely missing. She haunts by suggestion and by absence. Not so with Jessica: Jessica is very much there. She may be dead—it's never entirely settled whether she is or not—but for all her supernatural echoes she refuses to leave the frame. Jessica and Betsy share a great deal of screen time, though the latter is supposedly the creature haunting the former. Betsy is the zombie Jessica walked with (which they do, when Betsy takes the catatonic wife through the jungle and into the failed voodoo ceremony). This familiarity with the uncanny may explain the narrator's oddly serene tone in her voiceover. Betsy can identify, will try to fix, zombie-Jessica.

More troubling still is that Betsy is forced to confront and care for the person standing in her way of Paul. Jessica is in every way imaginable Chow's "spectral wife, the other woman," though her specter is solid and incontestable. In every other version of *Jane Eyre*, the narrator/protagonist is allowed to desire a married man because she doesn't know that he is married. Every Rochester withholds this key bit of information from every Jane. Betsy, on the other hand, is aware of the situation: she is there precisely because it is her duty to care for the ailing wife. *I Walked With a Zombie* allows its protagonist to solve this impossible problem through a complicated moral calculus.

This calculus is not unique to *Zombie*, nor is it the only issue that problematizes any coherent understanding of Lewton's adaptation of the *Eyre* story. That same year, producer David O. Selznick was hard at work trying to figure out how people would react to Charlotte Brontë's heroine, and many of the choices in the final version of Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* reflect this preoccupation (Sconce, 53–54). Selznick had instructed his writers to punch up everything that would draw audiences into the story, and to remove anything that would repel them; extensive tests were conducted even before filming began, and Selznick even investigated how often the novel was checked out of public libraries (54). The producer's obsession points to an important aspect of adapting a work for the screen:

Hollywood adaptations of canonical novels such as *Jane Eyre*, therefore, were not inferior imitations of individual, literary masterworks, but elite inflections on an audience's shared more of contemporary cinematic narrativity. As with a Cary Grant or a Joan Crawford, the cultural stature of *Jane Eyre* provided an added incentive for an audience to once again engage themselves with Hollywood's familiar narrative machinery, and as with any other star invested with a social identity, *Jane Eyre* was expected to follow an implicit set of conventions during the film's unfolding. The primary work of adaptation, then, was not so much matching material to medium and medium to material, but involved adapting an audience to the material through the socially negotiated signifying conventions of the medium. (59–60)

The desired end result of these machinations, Sconce points out, has little to do with fidelity to the movie's source or with anything other than drawing an audience. And if Selznick was concerned, so was Lewton. One could afford a failure or two, the other could not. The same concern for audience reception, then, should be kept in mind when running through the complicated moral entanglements that *I Walked With a Zombie*'s heroine is faced with. To acquire the object of her affection, it would at first seem as though Betsy would have to behave—and even be allowed to think—in ways that may antagonize her to an audience. Lewton introduces a number of ameliorating factors.

Jessica never loved Paul. Besides, she had it coming: she was cold and indecent and she wanted Paul's drunken brother Wesley. Paul, the film reminds us, no longer loved Jessica. Add to this equation Jessica's upcoming electroshock treatment, which will likely kill—not cure—her, and the exigencies of narrative allow for the protagonist's victory.

None of these conditions would matter if Betsy, the protagonist, were to throw herself at Paul. If she did, she'd be no better than Jessica or Bertha. Instead, Betsy attempts to save Jessica, though she must resort to a native, colonized resource. This resource—voodoo—was the original cause of Jessica's

catatonic state, so in surrendering Jessica to her final fate—again, another more final death by voodoo—she is merely allowing a kind of nature to take its course. In the eyes of the narrative, Betsy is not facilitating Jessica's death. Betsy is merely standing by while larger forces work their way through. The problem, as always, is that present or not Jessica is as mute as her fellow madwomen. She can say nothing. Her story belongs to Betsy.

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Notes

¹ This is a very clumsy way of saying that any figure placed on the extreme foreground immediately makes the viewer—or me at least—very uncomfortable, particularly when we can only see the back of his or her head. It creates tension, partly because the figure is resisting our impulse to *look*: we are not to look at him or at her. We're not watching him or her. We're watching through that figure *at* what that figure is interested in. But there's a certain creepiness—a definite sense of the uncanny—in doing so. Campbell brings up the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich as an example, but an even better one—or a better one at explaining why this tension works so well—might lie in two fairly common film tropes: there's always a moment in a David Lynch movie where a character will lean in and whisper something at another character, but the audience is not allowed access to the information imparted; there is also, in nearly every Japanese and Korean horror movie ever made, a moment where a spooky, blurred figure will approach but not actually engage the protagonist—will often not even look at him or her, will have his or her back turned—and the *mise en scene* here will also mirror Welles's, Stevenson's, and others: the viewer sees the back of the protagonist's head, and the protagonist will also be approaching a disengaged figure, one whose back is often also turned.

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Dancing in the Theaters of Seventeenth Century Spain

Theater was the most popular spectacle of seventeenth century Spain. Nearly every day in big cities such as Madrid, there were theatrical representations attended by members of all classes, who supported theater with the money they paid for their tickets. The spectacle included not just a play, but several short comic intermissions, dances, and music. Authors, directors, and actors knew that their economic survival depended on whether their largely illiterate audience liked or disliked what they saw. Lope de Vega, the most famous playwright of his time, wrote a poetics of theater called *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (*The New Art of Making Comedies in These Times*) in which he explains why he eschews the classical rules of drama in favor of giving the audience what they want. He writes:

y escribo por el arte que inventaron
los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron
porque como las paga el vulgo, es justo
hablarle en necio para darle gusto. (lines 45–48)

(I write by the art that was invented
by those who pretend the vulgar applause,
because the masses pay,
it is fair to talk to them in ignorant to please them.) (lines 45–48)

The pieces written by Lope de Vega and those others who followed his style did indeed please the masses, but they were also the target of attacks by censors, moralists, and the church. Many viewed theater as sinful, a social scourge that needed to be eradicated from Spain. There were a number of laws trying to regulate the morality of the plays, the ambience of the theaters, and the public life of the actors. There were even several serious attempts to eliminate the theaters altogether. Slanderers of theater were vocal, producing well-known treatises against the spectacle, such as *Tratado contra los juegos públicos* by Father Juan de Mariana, but they did not manage to achieve any major changes, and the theaters continued to operate. The majority of the people supported the existence of theaters. Theaters were very profitable and because they were administered either by the city or by religious guilds, all the proceeds went to support hospitals or other charitable institutions. Even if the theater was immoral, it was all for a good cause. People from all classes (the royal family included) loved the theater and many thought it was in fact teaching good values.

Modern interpretations also show this dichotomy in the attitudes towards the moral message of seventeenth century theater. Prominent scholars such as

José Antonio Maravall and José María Díez Borque argue that the theater promoted traditional values and that it acted as propaganda for the élites; while many others, particularly in the American academy, saw the theater as a transgressive spectacle that sided with women and other oppressed groups for which the theater provided a space to confront the norms of society.

In order to please a very diverse audience, the theatrical spectacle offered a *mélange* of several pieces with different tones and themes. The main feature was a serious play that was accompanied by several comic shorter pieces, one of which was a dance performance. In this essay I analyze how dances relate to the ideology and conventions of the main play, using as an example three dances by Agustín Moreto: *Baile del Conde Claros* (*Dance of Count Claros*), *Baile de Lucrecia y Tarquino* (*Dance of Lucretia and Tarquin*), and *Baile entremesado del Rey Rodrigo y La Cava* (*Interlude-like Dance of King Rodrigo and La Cava*).

A dance was a brief show in which the actors presented a very simple comical story that always included a dance. Gaspar Merino Quijano explains that a dance frequently consisted of four elements: reciting, music, singing, and dancing (51). The dancing part could be a traditional dance or a dance specifically choreographed for the event. The popularity of the dances was such that when they were prohibited, the clientele of the theaters decreased dramatically, to the point that some companies required that contracts include a special clause specifying that they receive compensation if the dances were forbidden at any period by the authorities. Of all the parts that comprised a theatrical event, the dance was the one that concerned moralists the most.

The variety presented in a spectacle by the inclusion of different genres and tones assured the success of the spectacle and increased the audience by providing something for everyone. The theatrical events required variety to achieve economic success, therefore the co-presence of a dance and a long serious piece responds not only to ideological and artistic reasons but also (and maybe mainly) to economic ones. John J. Allen studied the accounting and organization of the public theaters of Madrid and concluded that even though all classes were present in the audience and all paid different prices for their seat, the only ones that had a significant influence were on one side the administration and very high nobility and on the other the lower masses. The Consejo de Castilla censored the content of the plays and the guilds and the town hall managed the business, but the money came primarily from the cheapest tickets, that is, those sold to the lowest classes. Although the upper and middle classes paid significantly more money for their seats, in total, the biggest contributors were the lower classes, who were more numerous.

Now that the importance of the economical factor has been established, I turn now to the close analysis of three dances to show their relations with the long serious plays. Whether one agrees with the interpretation of theater as promoter of traditional Catholic and aristocratic values, or on the contrary, sees it as the voice of rebellion against those same values, what cannot be negated is

that dances portray a burlesque inversion of the topics and conventions presented by the long plays. The big themes of the serious plays (honor, love, family, virtue, religion, heroism, patriotism) become in the short ones just a joke. Dances made fun of the content but also the form of long plays. Many dances are meta-theatrical and meta-literary pieces that expose, subvert, and ridicule the stereotypes and conventions of the genre. Actually, in the dances analyzed here, the main source of comedy comes from the inter-textual connection with the long plays and other literary genres popular at the time.

The three dances I will use as an example are literary parodies of both the long plays and the traditional ballads. James Castañeda (111), translating the words of Rafael Balbín in “Tres piezas menores de Moreto, inéditas,” explains how a parodic dance is constructed by the juxtaposition of two parallel elements: a historical or legendary event known by the audience and the burlesque staging of the event. Because the audience is familiar with these story lines that were widely transmitted through popular ballads, the dances do not need to fully develop them and can instead focus on the comical elements and the amusing transformation of plot and characters. The dances refer to a ballad but totally modify it, with various adaptive techniques (Balbin [84–85] and Casteneda [111]) such as: a change of epoch and setting, transposition to a low social level, exaggeration, degradation of the motives and psychic processes of the characters, and transformation of the tragic historical event into a comic piece.

The dance does not just change a ballad to a theatrical format, but rather modifies its plot to maximize humor. The stories of the ballads commonly served as inspiration for long serious plays, but the process of adaptation was very different in the dances. In a dance the main objective was to create a comical effect, not to tell the story. *The Dance of Count Claros*, for example, parodies the love affair between the Count Claros and the Princess Claraniña, which took place in Paris during the reign of Charlemagne. The story had been transmitted mainly through the traditional ballad that starts “Media noche era por filo / los gallos querían cantar” (“At the stroke of midnight / the roosters wanted to sing”) According to the ballad, Count Claros was in love with Princess Claraniña and one morning, seduced her under a tree. A hunter, who was passing by, saw them and told the King about their sinful relation. The King imprisoned the Count, but Clariña interceded for the Count, obtained a pardon, and married him.

The dance starts with exactly the same words as the ballad: “Media noche era por filo / los gallos querían cantar” (377); and then keeps quoting parts of the ballad until verse 16. From that moment on, the dialogue becomes pretty much illogical and is mostly made up of lines taken from other ballads that have little or no connection with the plot line. In fact, for someone not familiar with the original ballad of Count Claros, the dance will make no sense, because the story line jumps from one place to another and eliminates many necessary scenes. In this dance, like in the other two I will analyze, the spectator needs to put together the pieces in his mind which is only possible if he already knows what

it is supposed to be happening. In the dance, Claraniña and the Count are in a garden when a female servant (not a hunter) surprises them. The Count tries to bribe her, but he has no money, so she denounces them to the King. The King arrives to the garden where the two lovers are and tries to figure out what is happening. First, the Counts tells him that the only thing happening is that “Hoy lunes la hablé cortés / y me convidó a salchichas” (“Today, Monday, I courteously talked to her / and she invited me to sausages”) (380). He latter admits to his actions but argues that he should not be punished because he is not the first to have sex with the Princess. The King covers the head of the Count with a hood and sends him to be beheaded. He dies offstage, but returns after his death. The dance concludes with Charlemagne, the Princess and the beheaded Count (holding in his hands his own head) singing and dancing all together.

The modifications of the plot are more obvious in *The Dance of Lucretia and Tarquin*. This piece recreates a Roman legend that was first collected by Titus Livy in *Ab Urbe Condita* I, (59). Most of the audience will be familiar with the story not through Livy’s account, but by having heard the popular ballad starting “Aquel rey de los romanos / que Tarquino se llamaba” (“That king of the Romans / called Tarquin”) (362). The dance follows the version of the ballad and uses the name “Colatino” for Lucretia’s husband, instead of the name “Lucius Junius Brutus” that appears in *Ab Urbe Condita*. In the ballad, Tarquin falls in love with Lucretia and, while her husband is out, he is hosted at her house. In the middle of the night, he enters her room, puts his sword on her chest, and asks her to accept him as a lover (and therefore become rich) or to die. When she refuses, Tarquin threatens to rape her, kill her, and then put the dead body of a black servant in the bed, so everyone will think that she had been sleeping with the servant. When faced with such a destiny, Lucretia has no choice but to give in. The next day, Lucretia tells her husband about the rape and immediately commits suicide with a dagger. Colatino, with the help of the Roman people, goes to the palace of Tarquin and kills him.

The Lucretia of the dance is far from being the virtuous woman of the legend. The dance opens with Tarquin chasing Lucretia by the sea. A female servant appears and Tarquin asks her for advice to seduce Lucretia. The servant tells him that money can buy everything, which gives Tarquin the idea of offering Lucretia a bag with half a *real* (a ridiculously small amount of money). Lucretia starts to feel that she will not be able to resist such an offer, but eventually decides to preserve her honor. At that moment, Tarquin kisses her hand and notices that it is dirty. She feels bad because after having been taken advantage of, now Tarquin is disgusted by her hand. She feels so dishonored that she kills herself with his dagger. Notice that, as in the legend, Lucretia commits suicide, although in the dance there is no actual rape, but a kissing of the hand, a perfectly acceptable practice at the time. When Lucretia is about to die, she asks people to dance for her. Immediately afterward, Colatino appears swearing vengeance, when justice brings Tarquin to his presence. Even though Tarquin refuses to confess his crime, all the characters in the stage stab him to

death. Once he dies, Colatino exhorts Tarquin to marry Lucretia in the afterlife, to repair her honor.

Interlude-like Dance of King Rodrigo and La Cava, although the shortest of the three dances, is probably the most interesting. According to the Spanish legend, the invasion of Spain by Muslims in 711 was caused by a sin committed by the King Rodrigo. La Cava was a young lady who was sent to the Royal Palace of King Rodrigo by her father Don Julian, governor of Ceuta, a Spanish city on the north coast of Africa. The King raped La Cava, and Don Julian, in revenge, convinced the Moors to invade Spain. Therefore, the legend depicted the invasion as a divine punishment for the moral degeneration of a king and his nation. The legend appeared in many historical accounts, plays, and popular ballads, some of which had a comic tone. Others focused on the most sensationalist parts, like the punishment of the King, who, after his crime, was trapped in a cave with a giant snake, which constantly bit him in the part of his body he had used to commit the rape. The legendary story of La Cava was a tragic one, and it was originally portrayed as such, but it also became the source of humorous pieces. But by the second half of the seventeenth century the Moors had been out of Spain for almost two centuries and religious unification under Catholicism had been achieved. It was possible to make fun of the event in a public theater because the Muslims were not a danger anymore.

In Moreto's version of the story, the King Rodrigo is madly in love with La Cava, to the point of placing his crown and scepter at her feet. He does not rape her, but, as it happens in the *Dance of Lucretia and Tarquin*, just kisses her hand. After suffering such a "horrible" offense, she wonders what future books and stories will tell about the rape, to which the King answers that probably they will justify him by imagining that the event took place on a warm St. John's Eve. The King immediately gets tired of his new "lover" and she feels hurt. Don Julian finds his daughter very sad and asks her the reason. She explains that the King has taken advantage of her and then not given her any money. The father sides with the King. Thereafter, for no apparent reason, Moors appear on the stage and start dancing. The invasion of Spain is thus substituted by a happy dance of the all the characters and the Moors.

During the analysis of the transformation of the plots it has already been pointed out that the dances also showed a shift in the portrayal of morality and values in relation to the long plays. The characters of the dances react differently from their counterparts in the ballads when they get dishonored. Honor was probably the number one theme of the long serious plays. Honor concerned both morality and social relations. Characters were expected to act honorably, which meant accordingly with their place in society and with the moral codes. Although there are countless variations of the topic of honor, several situations appear repeatedly. For example, many plays present situations in which characters have to choose between personal interest and honor. Many of them deal with the protection of the virginity of a lady and many others talk about the consequences of a rape and how to reestablish honor. Other texts deal with the

social aspect of honor and the relation between the individual and the king. Through these and other situations, the long plays present a very rigid code of honor, which makes very clear what is acceptable and what is not. The world portrayed by the long plays was strict in its rules.

The idea of honor is still present in the aforementioned three dances; in fact, all of them are about dishonored women. The dances ridicule the same code of honor that constituted the ideological base of the long plays. They expose the irrationality of the code by exaggerating its rules or presenting characters that totally ignore them. Take as an example the case presented in *Dance of Lucretia and Tarquin*: one sees how Lucretia, instead of the prototypical virtuous noblewoman of the long plays, is a greedy person that considers giving away her honor for a coin, disregarding her obligations. Immediately after that, she overreacts and kills herself because someone kisses her hand. Her husband is also used to make fun of the conventions of the code of honor. According to this code, when a woman was raped there were only two ways of repairing the damage: killing her and her lover or marrying them. Obviously, the two things could not happen at once, but they nevertheless coincide in this dance. The husband kills the lover and then asks him to marry his wife Lucretia in the afterlife to repair the family honor.

In the *Interlude-like Dance of King Rodrigo and La Cava* the scene of a woman who reacts to a kiss as if it had been a consummated rape is repeated. Although here it seems that what really concerns La Cava is not the damage to her moral character, but the fact that the King did not give her any money in exchange for her sexual services. The incongruence of the overly strict honor code is revealed by the also ridiculous actions of La Cava, who is at the same time a protector of her reputation and a prostitute. As Lucretia, La Cava runs to her male protector after her rape to beg for revenge, and, as in the previous case, his response is ridiculously inappropriate. When La Cava tells her father Don Julián that “Gozome el rey, y de vos / hizo burla este hombrecillo,” (“The King enjoyed me and the little man ridiculed you”) (354) Don Julián answers “Anduvo en eso muy cuerdo” (“He was very sensible in that matter”) (354). The dance retains the negative portrayal of the morality of the characters that appeared in the other accounts of the event, but eliminates the tragic component. In the legend, the King was a rapist, La Cava an easy woman, and Don Julian a traitor to his country, but in the dance they are not evil people, just ridiculous figures that make the audience laugh.

Parallel to the plot modification there is a shift in the conceptualization of the characters that can be mainly described as an elimination of differences in the behavior of members of different classes. While the long pieces presented a clearly stratified society, in which each character acted and talked as corresponded to his or her class, the exact opposite can be said about the dances. Whatever the social class of the characters is in a dance, they all act and speak as if they were from the low classes. What they say and the way they say it is a marker of their class. They all use a slang known as “germanía,” the sociolect of

delinquents that is almost unintelligible to the modern Spanish reader. In the dances, all characters are also very funny, something that in the long comedies is reserved for the servants. Unlike what can be found in the dances, in the long comedies only the servants tell jokes, make jokes, or suffer the jokes of others.

Another way the characters reflected their social status in the long plays that disappears in the dances was through their different desires and expectations. These desires and expectations were class-coded in the long plays, but not in the dances. The long plays presented status divisions as natural, therefore it was logical that members of different groups felt and wanted different things in different ways. Nobility (except villains) experienced ideal and platonic love and disregarded material wealth, while servants were mainly concerned with sex, food, alcohol, and money. The higher classes had high pursuits and wanted to nourish their minds and hearts; the lower classes wanted to indulge their bodies. In the three dances by Moreto, the noble characters care mainly about their corporeal needs. A good example of this can be found in the *Dance of Lucretia and Tarquin*. When Lucretia is about to die after having stabbed herself, a woman offers to call a friar (for confession, we might assume), but Lucretia tells her: “No, amigas, hacedme un baile / como es costumbre en las fiestas” (“No, my friends, dance for me, / as it is habitual in the celebrations”) (367). Thus Lucretia renounces salvation in order to have fun during the last moments of her life; her priorities are the ones typical of a servant in a long play, not of a noblewoman. It is precisely the impropriety of these reactions that make the audience laugh. One needs to be familiar with the expectations of the long plays in order to find the actions of the characters in the dance funny.

The staging of the dances was also conceived as a caricature of the conventions of the staging of the long dramas. Even though it is very difficult for the modern scholar to imagine how the actors acted and declaimed, we know that the techniques used in the short pieces were more exaggerated than the ones used in the long plays. Something similar happens with the dress codes. By no means could one say that the costumes and decorations used in the dramas were realistic. Anachronisms both in the staging and in the plays themselves were very common. When, for example, an actress came on stage representing the Queen Isabel la Católica, her attire probably had no resemblance to anything the Queen would have ever worn, but it reflected what was considered suitable clothing for a queen. Spanish actors wore regular clothes (in a very broad sense of the term), not deliberate costumes as they did in other theatrical traditions like *Commedia dell'Arte*. Clothing was nevertheless conventionally coded, certain pieces had certain meanings, and the audience was able to decipher the code. For example, when a man was carrying a torch the public understood it was night time, when someone was wearing a cape it meant they were on a trip, and so on. In the dances, the actors used real costumes, that is, clothing that was deliberately unrealistic and that portrayed them as carnival figures and jesters. The clothing in itself was intended to be comical and ridiculous. In this manner, the dances and other short pieces distance themselves from the main plays

through exaggerated costumes. The referential code was maintained but also mocked. For example, the figure of the king would, as in the long plays, wear a crown, but it would be a ridiculous crown and the rest of his outfit would not match that of a king, thus making fun of the dress conventions. The stage direction that appears in *Interlude-Like Dance of King Rodrigo and La Cava* explaining the attire of the King is brief but clear: “Sale el rey con corona y cetro, gracioso” (“The King enters with crown and scepter, funny”) (349).

In addition to the content and the staging, the dances also parody the style and structure of the dramas (or of serious literature as a whole, for that matter). Even though the quality varied greatly from piece to piece, in general terms, the long plays were well-constructed texts with a clear plot and focus. In the first few scenes, they presented one or two problems that were developed throughout the play and were resolved in the last minutes. Except for some passages in which the servants told irrelevant jokes, usually everything was logical and well connected. However, when one reads any of the three analyzed dances for the first time, the impression is that of total chaos. For the most part, there is no relation between questions and answers and the basic rules of logic are suspended. For example, as discussed above, some characters talk, sing, and dance after they are dead with those who are alive.

The dialogs flow in an irrational manner because they are composed as “centones de romances.” This means that large parts of the script are direct quotes from popular ballads known by the audience. And not just quotes from the ballad that tells the story of the dance, but from many different ballads that have no connection whatsoever to the story line or the specific conversation that is taking place. Dances are constructed as a pastiche of verses from ballads, which becomes a parody of the act of composing in itself. Quoting and referencing other texts was a common practice of literature at the time, and the dances exaggerate this practice creating senseless texts. The quoted passages are so random, that sometimes they include proper names so the characters refer to each other not by their real names but by the name of some other character from a ballad. In *Interlude-like Dance of King Rodrigo and La Cava*, which only has 144 verses, there are direct quotes from at least 16 different popular ballads, eight literary pieces from other authors of the same period, and two traditional lyric songs. In total, a minimum of 71 of the 144 are taken from other sources, and except for a few verses at the beginning that proceed from one of the ballads about King Rodrigo and La Cava, the rest of them are totally unrelated to the story. Take just one example of the effect achieved in this dance. Passages in quotation marks are those taken from other texts.

REY	Estoy tal que por ti el pecho se ahila.
CAVA	“De las mudanzas de Gila, ¡qué enfermo que anda Pascual!”
REY	De tu hermosura y tu talle, Quiero hacer mi paraíso.

CAVA	“Mira, Zaide, que te aviso Que no pases por mi calle.”
REY	Esto manda mi afición Y a obedecerla me obligo.
CAVA	“Mandadero sois, amigo, Non tenedes culpa, non.”
REY	Pues crüel, ¿de mí haces asco? (350–1)
(KING	I am in such state that for you my heart is staggering.
CAVA	“Because of Gila’s ficklenesses, how sick is Pascual!”
KING	From your beauty and figure I want to make my paradise.
CAVA	“Look, Zaide, I advise you not to pass by my street.”
KING	This orders my fondness and I oblige myself to obey it.
CAVA	“Messenger you are, my friend, you are not guilty, not.”
KING	So, cruel, do you turn up your nose at me?) (350–1)

Conclusion

What is the ultimate intention of these parodies? Are they an attempt to subvert and question the values (whatever they are) supported by the long plays or are they just a source of entertainment or are they both things? Answering this question would be like trying to explain the real meaning of carnival, which goes beyond the scope of this article. Some scholars, such as Rafael de Balbín (“Notas” 604–5), believe that in a society like that of seventeenth century Spain, in which social stratification was so rigid, the comic elements could only be connected to the lower social classes. According to this author, the errors committed by the low people are funny because its consequences are always irrelevant to the society as a whole. The audience could then find funny that a servant cheats on her husband because, after all, her honor is not that important, and the legitimacy of a servant’s son inconsequential to others. That same situation, transferred to a queen, is not a joke, but a national problem. Although this is true in many cases and literary genres, these three dances of Moreto show that the opposite is also possible; the audience can find the comical side of historical situations that had tragic consequences.

In all these dances, the tragic stories become an excuse for the comedy. Both the characters’ names and the main story line are retained, but they become so grotesquely transformed that they cease to be connected to the real, original event. The characters are so transformed that it is difficult to see in them a king or a nobleman, they are just clowns dressed up. I do not think the dances parody nobility, traditional norms of monarchy, because their point of reference is not

reality, but fiction. They do not make fun of honor, but the theatrical conventional representation of honor. This is supported by all the techniques mentioned before, such as the use of costumes. The costume of a king in a dance does not refer to the clothes of an actual king, but to the actors and the clothes uses for the carnival. The dances eliminate the suspension of disbelief and the audience is made aware that what is represented on stage is a show, not a reflection of reality.

Theatrical plays were very popular and extremely archetypal which facilitated the creation of short pieces that mock them in every aspect. There were a limited number of codes that could be easily inverted and parodied. The same audience that enjoys the adventures of the lovers and the tragedies provoked by the honor system in the long plays, laughs with the mockery of those plays.

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Momyer, Genre, Identity, and Ethnic Representation in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*

After watching Quentin Tarantino's double-volume *Kill Bill*, I found myself in the same predicament I usually am in after watching a Tarantino movie. On the one hand, I'm a fan. I am drawn into the film through the action, the wit of the dialogue, the composition of the frame, the soundtrack, and the violence, or rather, through the sense of aesthetic in which the violence is presented. In terms of the form of the film, I'm in love. On the other hand, I also feel a deep sense of hypocrisy when I say that I am a Tarantino fan and that is because I would also say immediately that I am a feminist and I am very aware of the personal and political implications of representation. In the case of *Kill Bill*, I am stuck with the question: How can I reconcile my response to the visual nature of the film, a visual aesthetic that places violence into the realm of art, with my concern for the film's portrayal of women and cultural ethnicity. Or, how can I justify my appreciation of a film in which the white blond female character murders everyone except the woman who is most like her, another white blond?

The narrative structure of Tarantino's *Kill Bill* is a divided and fragmented sequence of chapters while the content focuses on the divided and fragmented nature of identity. Each character plays multiple roles, designated by multiple names and code names. The main character, Beatrix Kiddo, AKA The Bride, AKA Black Mamba, AKA Mommy, carries the most names and in the film the notion of a lack of central identity begins to be established. Already, identity lies in its multiplicity.

For this reason, I am tempted to begin by suggesting that the question of ethnicity is not a central issue to this film. In many ways, *Kill Bill* supports the arguments made by some critics such as William Boelhower and W. Lawrence Hogue who argue that ethnicity is constructed and therefore fictional. For Boelhower, there is only the ethnic sign and performance, which he refers to as *ethnic semiosis* and defines as "a way of thinking differently by thinking the difference, and in the postmodern American framework, this may be all the difference there is: a particular form of discourse, of evaluating the agency of the subject, of holding one's ground against the map of national circulation" (Boelhower 143). In other words, ethnicity can only refer to the momentary privileging of differential national origins and cultural traditions over all other aspects of identity. While signifying difference, the ethnic identity presented does not suggest essence, authenticity, or the real identity since these are impossibilities. Rather, the concept of ethnicity is a part of an undefinable, constantly changing whole.

However, while Boelhower and Hogue argue for the constructed nature of culture and impose this concept onto ethnic identity in a manner that is similar to the way that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. views blackness as a metaphor, the question

of the ethnic body remains. The physical differences of the Asian, African American, and Hispanic bodies alone signal difference and ethnicity before any cultural distinctions are even addressed. How can I, a white suburban girl, then reconcile the massacre and mutilation of 88 Asian bodies, whom I view as different from me, by a single blond-haired American woman? The simple answer might be: through the conventions of genre.

Kill Bill consists of the story of a former assassin who was shot on the day of her wedding rehearsal by her former lover and former boss, Bill. The entire wedding party is massacred and the fate of her unborn child is unknown until the last chapter of the film. After waking from a four-year coma, Beatrix Kiddo (AKA Black Mamba, AKA The Bride) plans her revenge—the murder of the members of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad who participated in the wedding chapel massacre. She begins with Oren Ishii (AKA Cottonmouth), Queen of the Tokyo Crime World.

The planning and killing of Oren Ishii is the central plot/action of *Volume 1* in this two-part series. Oren is half Chinese-American, half Japanese-American. In terms of cinematic form, she is also closely aligned with film genres that are identified as originating in Japan—the Japanese Samurai film and Japanese animation. Because of the close association between these genres and a Japanese ethnic identity, it might be suggested that *Kill Bill* associates ethnicity with its aesthetic value. For example, Tarantino has historically argued that his use of violence in films is a result of his aesthetic taste and claims that his only responsibility lies in his artistic integrity. Moral and political issues are not his concerns. He uses violence because it looks cool. If this is our logic then, we could argue that the nature of visually exciting violence in relation to ethnicity is closely related to genre. In *Volume 1*, the primary genres and forms are Japanese Samurai and animation, both violent and related to Asian ethnicity as well as to an Asian body, Oren Ishii. Following this logic, the Asian body and Asian ethnicity are only matters of aesthetic or surface value.

According to Shinobu Price and Annalee Newitz, Japanese animation comes in multiple genres in Japan, ranging from comic romance to pornography to science fiction and so forth. However, some of the most popular *anime* in the United States is the ultra-violent kind where a beautiful and powerful female heroine is not uncommon. When Oren is introduced in this context, she is defined in Japanese terms that are most popular among American audiences. She becomes a hybrid aesthetic. While this form of animation stems from the land body of Japan, it is quickly being consumed by an American audience.

There are several things to be said about these scenes: 1) The unrealistic nature of violence explains the possibility of the killing a mob of Japanese sword fighters (The Crazy 88s) and is only associated with genres that include such a lack of realism. 2) The nature of the genre prescripts such massacres. 3) The focus on the origins of Oren develops her character into another protagonist in a genre where the death of the protagonist is not uncommon. 4) Oren's origins

question the entire nature of ethnicity as a possible form of identity despite the associations with an “ethnic” genre.

For example, the multitudes of dead Japanese are scripted into the Samurai plot that orders the protagonist, Beatrix Kiddo, to be capable of surviving a mass attack. She must be able to get through in order to face her legitimate and worthy enemy. It is also essential to note that this form of extremely unrealistic violence that includes bodily mutilations and the severing of several arms and heads is only associated with the genre of Oren. Blood spewing only takes place in Japan.

Aside from the unrealistic violence, *Kill Bill* adheres to the conventions of the Samurai code and a genre where death of the protagonist is not always avoidable. In this case, there are two protagonists: Beatrix Kiddo and Oren Ishii. For the film, the Bride is the leading protagonist. But for the chapters three and five, Oren is developed into a leading character. From chapter three, the audience learns of the death of her parents and she quickly elicits our sympathy. Though she may be one of the best female assassins in the world by the age of 20, we feel that we have an understanding of her. Oren, like a Samurai, has developed her own moral code. And while death is impending on one of the two women, they maintain mutual respect for each other. They are worthy opponents who live by their own codes. But in the genre of the Samurai, the protagonist is not always the victor because life does not always work that way. This notion of realism may seem to contradict the presentation of violence in the film, but as Price argues, the notion of the real is important in themes such as death and emotions. The means for obtaining the entry into the discussion of these topics remains open.

One may then respond that of my two so-called protagonists, the white woman survives while the Asian woman does not. And to this concern, I can only say that the Asian woman is not as Asian as she may physically appear, and the film constantly reminds us of this fact. In other words, the issue stems mostly from Oren’s appearance as ethnic, yet the film reminds us that she is very American.

Oren’s American nature shows through in several telling ways. Her birth and nationality are quickly acknowledged and several of her mannerisms suggest a level of cross-nationalism and ethnicity that complicates any simple statement that could be made regarding presentation of ethnicity in *Kill Bill*. While she aligns herself with a Japanese identity and the film’s genres align her with a Japanese aesthetic, other characters, particularly Boss Tanaka, question her rightful place within the Japanese crime council due to her questionable ethnic and national identity. He refers to her presence as head of the council as “a perversion” and Oren quickly responds by running atop the table at which they are seated to Tanaka’s seat where she stands over him and decapitates him with her sword. While the form, or genre, of the film may use ethnicity as an aesthetic construct, the content of the narrative addresses more political

concerns. To those such as Boss Tanaka, the concept of an authentic national and ethnic identity suggests some form of credibility and reality. Being Japanese has a referent point, an inherent and definable identity that brings credibility and authority to the crime council. Because Oren does not fit his construction, she is deemed unworthy of her position as Queen of the Crime Council. Oren's response, on the other hand, suggests that Tanaka's feelings are threatening and unnecessary at the same time. The quick and gory beheading suits Japanese genre, while the language of Oren's statement afterward claims ethnicity is not a concern. "I promise you right here and now, no subject will ever be taboo," she states. "Except, of course, the subject that was just under discussion. The price you pay for bringing up either my Chinese or American heritage as a negative is—I collect your fucking head." Not only does Oren acknowledge the significance of the perceived ethnic and national associations as she disputes the very concept, but she further rebels against the notion of authenticity and privilege by speaking in English with a Japanese translator.

The film itself also undermines its genre associations between Oren and Japan by including a soundtrack that often resorts to music that is other than Japanese. While the soundtrack that accompanies her scenes includes several songs by Japanese artists with Japanese lyrics and instruments, other music choices blend the cultural and ethnic boundaries by using music that is strongly associated with other racial or cultural music aesthetics. For example, the introduction to Oren is accompanied by Wu-Tang Clan member The RZA's "Ode to Oren Ishii." Beatrix's entrance into Tokyo and her subsequent trailing of Oren's inner circle, shortly following the animation sequence, is accompanied by American comic anthem "The Green Hornet" by Al Hirt. The Japanese band The 5.6.7.8's perform Japanese surf rock in the House of Blue Leaves suggesting that not even *authentic* Japanese music is ethnically authentic, pure, or unaffected by outside aesthetics. And in Oren's final scene where she wears a traditional Japanese kimono with white sandals, her hair is pulled up and snow lies on the ground; she begins her final fight with Beatrix Kiddo. In terms of cinematic visuality as well as Oren's recognition of Beatrix as a worthy and respectable opponent, it is perhaps the most Samurai-like moment of the film. Yet, it opens with a Latin version of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" by Santa Esmeralda. While *Kill Bill* remains mostly faithful to the plot/action of the genres it uses, the soundtrack remains open ground for other interpretations, due, no doubt, to Tarantino's own sense of aesthetic and personal definition of genre fidelity.

Beatrix's character is also an ethnic hybrid and perhaps this, too, will help diffuse some of the concerns regarding the murders of non-white women. While Beatrix is on some level aligned with Japanese culture due to her proficiency in the Japanese language and her skill with the Samurai sword tradition, she is even more closely aligned with the Chinese Kung Fu warrior, particularly in *Volume 2*. As Stuart Kaminsky argues, the Kung Fu genre often includes a working class

warrior who must avenge the death and destruction of his family, usually caused by an employer or father figure. In Beatrix's case, her vengeance is toward a former boss and former lover, Bill (AKA Snake Charmer). Bill also plays the role of father figure as he is responsible for her training and acts the role of her father to her unsuspecting husband-to-be during the wedding rehearsal. After the Twin Pines Wedding Chapel Massacre, after the shot to Beatrix's head by Bill, Beatrix wakes after a four-year coma with the memories of a dead groom, dead wedding party, and the belief that her unborn child has also been killed.

Aside from a somewhat typical Kung Fu plot, *Kill Bill* follows the cinematic conventions of the Kung Fu genre during the scenes in China with Pai Mei. Pai Mei is the Kung Fu master with a long white beard that he flicks with his hand to signal disgust or intrigue. His eyebrows are large white fluffy things and the camera quickly zooms in and out on his face, Kung Fu style. Magically, he sits in a seated lotus position elevated several inches above ground.

The martial arts and violence related to Kung Fu are very different from the Japanese animation and Samurai traditions. There is no gore or severed limbs or outrageous amounts of blood, though the violence is equally unrealistic. Instead of witnessing the visual effects of violence, the audience is only aware that violence has been performed. The results are frequently internal and mystical. With the exception of the plucking of Elle Driver's (AKA Black Mountain Snake's) eye from her head during her training session with Pai Mei, all other forms of violence against humans are internal. Even the Kung Fu Master is killed through internal wounds. His skill is beyond a level that he could be attacked and not defend himself, but instead, he is killed through betrayal and the poisoning of his body. Elle, the only white woman on Kiddo's Death List and the only survivor, poisons his fish heads during her training.

Again, looking at the film through a lens that is both ethnic and political, the escape of Elle Driver may at first seem problematic. In many ways, she parallels the protagonist, Beatrix. They are the only two Caucasian women in the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad. Their actions on screen are frequently paralleled. While Beatrix lies in the hospital in a coma, her face is projected on the left side of the screen. A line divides the screen in half and Elle is seen on the other side walking through the hospital in a phony nurse's uniform as she gets ready to perform another poisoning—the poisoning of Beatrix's unconscious body, which Bill calls off.

This same technique is used again while the two face off in a trailer. At times both women are seen at the same time in separate sections of the trailer. But they each have equal screen space with a line dividing the screen in half. During other parts of the fight scene where the screen is unified into one frame, the women mirror each other's actions with kicks to the other's head. Both women fall with their entire bodies against the ground simultaneously.

Yet, while Elle and Beatrix are paralleled in many ways, the two are nemeses, and there is more hatred between these two women than there is

between Beatrix and any other person on her Death List. Ultimately, this is due to the opposite paths each has chosen. Beatrix chose to align herself with the Chinese Kung Fu tradition, while Elle chose to assert her own selfish agenda. As Pai Mei might have suggested, Beatrix took the path of the human and Elle took the path of the dog since he compares each woman to a dog at different points. For Beatrix, Pai Mei states that he will treat her like a dog if she cannot understand or communicate in Cantonese. She will be trained like an animal. He refers to her as a dog a second time when her hand is so crippled from training that she is unable to use her chopsticks in order to eat. After deciding to put the chopsticks aside and eat with her hands, Pai Mei reprimands her by throwing her rice aside, stating that if she wishes to eat like a dog, she will live and sleep outside like a dog. However, if she wishes to eat and sleep like a human, she will eat like a human and use the chopsticks. He is thus visibly impressed when she picks up the chopsticks attempting to eat despite the pain.

Elle, however, does not behave like a human during her training with the Kung Fu master. She verbally insults him by calling him a “miserable old fool” and she pays the price as he plucks out one of her eyes. But the scene does not stop here. Elle has already proved that she does not have the obligatory respect for her master. She plans further revenge by poisoning the old man’s fish heads and as he lies dying, he tells her that she is “a treacherous dog.” And here lies the divide between the two white women. Not only do the two women react differently under their tutelage of Pai Mei, but the murder of the Kung Fu master also adds another personal element to their dispute. So while some members of the audience may find themselves concerned with the fact that Asian- and African-American women are killed while a blond-haired woman with an eye the same shade of green as the protagonist’s lives, I must argue that Elle’s character is the most defiant of authority. She is the character who lacks respect for her training and for the warrior art forms of others. And under most Asian cinematic genres including Kung Fu and Samurai where death by a worthy and respectable enemy is considered an honorable death, Elle falls short. Her betrayal not only makes her an unworthy opponent, but also makes her unworthy of the honor that would come from death. Instead, she is destined to live out her shame, which in some Asian cinematic traditions is deemed worse than death. Beatrix’s subsequent removal of Elle’s other eye, leaving her blind and living, is the ultimate punishment. Her body will remain marked as shamed and honorless.

Another aspect of identity that the film addresses is that of motherhood. While it does not relate directly to genre, the conversations around motherhood can be tied to concepts of ethnic identity. Beatrix’s own pregnancy was the issue that began the film’s timeline. While the film’s content may not make any direct claims on the nature of ethnicity, it clearly makes claims on the value of motherhood as recognized by all women, despite any ethnic differences. However, *Kill Bill* does not suggest that motherhood forms any sort of defining

characteristic or identity of women. Like the ethnic body, the mother's body is signaled as different, but motherhood as an identity, like ethnicity, is negotiated. It is not defining and cannot be definable as all mothers in the film maintain all other identities that they hold at the same time. Beatrix Kiddo, AKA The Bride, AKA Black Mamba, AKA Mommy, maintains her separate fragmented sense of self at all moments in one body. While she privileges her status of Mommy, it is an emotional privilege, and not a privileging that suggests this is her one true authentic self or identity. She always remains the assassin.

While the film consistently argues for a concept of multiple identities that are negotiated depending upon context, the content of the film also provides the counter-argument through Bill. Bill asserts that these identities are merely masks and there must only be one authentic identity underneath. He recognizes that Beatrix's life as a bride to a record store owner could never have worked because she is no Arlene Machiavelli, another one of her pseudonyms, "a worker bee trying to blend into the hive." No, he states that she is "a renegade killer bee." "You would have been a wonderful mother," he says. "But you are a killer." Beatrix herself consents that life as Arlene would never have worked, but not because she can only be the assassin at her center. She disproves the very idea by readily accepting the role of Mommy and moving into this new construct of herself. Bill, on the other hand, is only capable of seeing himself in one term, that of "a murdering bastard." Consequently, he is only capable of seeing others in a single construct that relates directly to that one vision of himself. While he loves Beatrix, he can only see her as an assassin. Her projection of anything else is seen as a personal betrayal and a falsification.

However, what I have intended to argue until this point was that the presentation of ethnicity in this film could be considered under the lens of genre. Naturally, this privileges genre as being capable and authorized to dictate such presentations regardless of political impact. This argument is weak for two reasons: 1) *Kill Bill* challenges the individual genres by negotiating fidelity to conventions. It usually strays through soundtrack, and of course, through a blond-haired Caucasian protagonist. 2) By authorizing a genre to speak for the representation of an ethnic group simply because it is affiliated with a national or regional aesthetic completely undermines any concept of identity that has been established through the film. Ethnic identity, like motherhood, is constantly negotiated among multiple senses of self. It can never be simplified to fit genre convention or cultural expectations, regardless of national citizenship or biological make-up.

Here, I am at a loss in finding a means to justify *Kill Bill's* presentation of ethnicity, particularly when that presentation is often violent. Ethnicity as a conceptual identity may be negotiated, but the ethnic body remains and the difference that is signaled by the dead ethnic bodies is reinforced when juxtaposed against the sameness of the one living body, Elle Driver. I may argue, as Julia Kristeva points out, that we are all foreigners, even to ourselves,

and the concept of ethnicity as designated as difference is essentially meaningless. As the foreign is everything that is “not I,” and I do not even know myself, everything is foreign and the concept is thus void. Or, I can argue the complications between genre and ethnicity consistently invert and subvert themselves to the point at which meaning is nonexistent. There is only meaningless intertextuality and surface connections. I may cite Ezra Pound with a simple “I cannot make it cohere.” But these all seem like cop outs.

What I can say is that the murders of dozens of Japanese sword fighters, Oren Ishii, her mother, her father, Boss Tanaka, Vernita Green, Budd, Pai Mei, a groom-to-be, three friends of the wedding couple, a Texan reverend and his wife, a piano player, one hospital worker named Buck “who is here to Fuck,” his one client, and Bill are graphic, violent, and painful. Yet, death, particularly when administered by the hands of Beatrix Kiddo, is usually associated with honor and obligation. And for those enemies who are most worthy, there is regret, loss, and mourning. Their deaths are never meaningless.

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Soap for Sartre: Cleansing the Existential Dilemma in *Fight Club*

*The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club.
The second rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club.*

Tyler Durden certainly would not be pleased with all the attention *Fight Club* has received since becoming a pop culture phenomenon. In fact, few literary works in recent memory have been met with as much polarizing criticism as Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. Yet, as we pass the tenth anniversary since the release of David Fincher's film adaptation, *Fight Club* continues to transcend contemporary literary criticism, drawing comparisons to a wealth of canonical existentialists, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Jean-Paul Sartre. Although, Palahniuk's postmodern style has been viewed as "closer to the margins than the center of existentialist tradition" (Bennett 77), a structural analysis of the text reveals that *Fight Club*, at its core, develops the very same notions as Sartre's Existentialism. Combined with its ease of transition into film and therefore into popular culture, *Fight Club* proves that a postmodern approach can and, in fact, does produce an existentialist work worthy of scholarly attention.

In two of his works, the quintessential existentialist novel *Nausea* and the lesser-known short story "Childhood of a Leader," Sartre imbues his protagonists, Antoine Roquentin and Lucien Fleurier, respectively, with the defining characteristics of his philosophy. Together, their stories encompass the entire timeline of Sartre's prototypical existentialist, capturing Lucien's evolution from childhood to manhood and continuing with Roquentin's journey from midlife and beyond. Structurally *Fight Club*'s protagonist lies somewhere between the two, filled with Roquentin's *nausea*, yet still a "30 year old boy" at heart, as we find Lucien.

As *Fight Club* begins, the protagonist's dilemma materializes in the form of sleep-deprivation: "Three weeks and I hadn't slept. Three weeks without sleep, and everything becomes an out-of-body experience. My doctor said, 'Insomnia is just the symptom of something larger. Find out what's actually wrong.' [. . .] I just wanted to sleep" (19). The protagonist's initial need for sleep parallels that of Roquentin in his first undated journal entry of *Nausea*: "I have such a desire to sleep and am so much behind in my sleep. A good night, one good night and all this nonsense will be swept away" (3). As Roquentin's lack of sleep is a precursor to his *nausea* that follows, so too is the protagonist's insomnia "the symptom of something larger" (19). In *Fight Club*, the protagonist's consumer-driven lifestyle only compounds his insomnia and masks his angst. Sleepless and lonely, he finds a false sense of solace in surrounding himself with the comforts of IKEA and its Swedish modernist furniture. Andrew Hock Soon Ng reads this

as a feminization of the protagonist “most effectively depicted in his intimate relationship with his apartment where he attains a certain existential stability through purchasing the latest cutlery, shelves, furniture and sofa” (126). In the same way that Roquentin masks his existential dilemma in his historical endeavor, the protagonist of *Fight Club* hides his angst under “Njurunda coffee tables in the shape of a lime green yin and an orange yang” and “Johanneshov armchair[s] in the Strinne green stripe pattern” (43). The protagonist, however, is not completely oblivious to his own entrapment, explaining “Then you’re trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you” (44). Despite the awareness of his own predicament, the protagonist is unable to escape his “nest” and its vicious cycle, because, to this point in the narration, there is *nowhere else* to which he can. Thus, the seeds of a Fight Club are sown deep within the protagonist as an escape to his world of “Swedish furniture” and “clever art” (46).

Besides his IKEA nest, the only other space the protagonist occupies is found in his workplace, where his existential dilemma is only further compounded and his sense of inadequacy further pronounced. As a recall campaign coordinator for an insurance company, his job is simply to “apply the formula”:

You take the population of vehicles in the field (*A*) and multiply it by the probate rate of failure (*B*), then multiply the result by the average cost of our out-of-court settlement (*C*). *A* times *B* times *C* equals *X*. This is what it will cost if we don’t initiate a recall. If *X* is greater than the cost of a recall, we recall the cars and no one gets hurt. If *X* is less than the cost of a recall, then we don’t recall. (30)

The dehumanizing effects of this formula—turning human beings into statistics—perpetuate the protagonist’s detachment from the world around him. Moreover, his detachment can more explicitly be seen through his continual presence on an airplane. Because he must constantly travel, the protagonist finds himself detached from his world, both literally and figuratively: “You wake up at Air Harbor International [. . .] at O’Hare [. . .] at LaGuardia [. . .]” (25). In Sartre’s *Nausea*, this notion of detachment is carried out through the imagery of the roots of the chestnut tree under which sits Roquentin in the *Jardin public*: “The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench (126) [. . .] Still detached from it—since I was conscious of it—yet lost in it, nothing but it” (131). Seated beneath this looming monstrosity, Roquentin finds himself envious of the tree’s attachment to its world, while he, on the other hand, is merely floating through his, failing to find his own attachment. In “Childhood of a Leader,” Sartre infuses this same detachment in Lucien from the beginning. As a child, Lucien convinces himself that everyone around him is merely an actor playing his or her role, even wondering if his parents are real:

"Maybe one night in the tunnel, robbers came and took papa and mama and put those two in their place" (86). The lack of a real attachment, even one as basic as parent-son, will define Lucien, whom we later find "acting" in his own roles, throughout the entire narrative structure. Like Roquentin and Lucien, the protagonist of *Fight Club* struggles to find something to which to be attached, thereby exacerbating his existential dilemma. As Sartre later writes in *Being and Nothingness*, "the self [. . .] is in a perpetual mode of detachment from what is" (72–73). Moreover, the ephemeral nature of his cross-country trips leads to a microstructure of "single-serving" friends and "tiny friendships," which ironically ends with one "single-use friend" saying: "I hope you make your connection" (31). The choice of the word "connection" is *a propos* as it not only connects him back to his reality vis-à-vis his job but also to an attachment, which he eventually finds in Tyler Durden.

In attempting to find solutions to the problems that characterize his existential dilemma, the protagonist first turns to support groups. The first of these, Remaining Men Together (a group in a "church basement full of men" suffering or recovering from testicular cancer), provides the framework upon which the later Fight Club is built (16). By surrounding himself with "real pain," as his doctor suggests, the protagonist is able to revert back to a child-like euphoria, namely, in the enormous bosom of Bob, a former "juicer" whose breasts have swollen to gargantuan proportions "the way we think of God's as big" (16). Nestled between Bob's maternalistic breasts, the protagonist finds his release, launching him into an infantile state of crying and sleeping. In these support groups, the protagonist is able to find a freedom previously unbeknownst to him: "This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn't say anything, people in a group assumed the worst. They cried harder. I cried harder. Look up into the stars and you're gone" (22). With this realization, the protagonist again echoes the sentiments of Sartre, who writes in *Being and Nothingness*, "Freedom is the human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness" (64). In addition, people in the support groups contrast heavily with those the protagonist met during his flights. Unlike the commodified, "single-serving" attention experienced on the way to LAX or LaGuardia, people in support groups "gave you their full attention [. . .] really saw you. Everything else [. . .] went out the window. People listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak" (107). In "Childhood of a Leader," Lucien finds a similar "all-ears" support system in Bergère, a homosexual acquaintance who "listened without a word, watching him closely and Lucien found it delicious to be understood" (108). Although Lucien ultimately rejects his sexual advances due in part to his merely "acting the part" of a homosexual, Bergère parallels Bob's presence in Remaining Men Together, both of whom engender feminine qualities, providing the protagonist with maternalistic support. Semiotically this makes sense: *bergère* in French means *shepherdess*, while Bob physically has the bust of a woman. Together, the two nurture the protagonists

during the height of their respective existential dilemmas; yet in both cases, the two support systems merely temporarily mask the protagonists' angst, largely because they are only "tourists."

As a result, despite the early promise that the support groups provide the protagonist, they, too, are short-lasting. As he states in the beginning, "the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer" (14). And it's precisely Marla's presence at the support group meetings that give rise to the protagonist's own lies and eventual relapse into insomnia. He must now look elsewhere for the mental and emotional respite that Bob and the support groups briefly provided him. Enter Tyler Durden. The protagonist's first encounter with Tyler occurs after waking up on the beach, which, unlike the "single-serving" friends he had previously met while in the air, directly connects him to the ground. This encounter brings him back down to Earth, both literally and figuratively. As the protagonist wakes up,

Tyler was pulling driftwood logs out of the surf and dragging them up the beach. [. . .] There were four logs, and when I woke up, I watched Tyler pull a fifth log up the beach. Tyler dug a hole under one end of the log, then lifted the other end until the log slid into the hole and stood there at a slight angle. (32)

Tyler's *chef-d'œuvre*, which creates the shadow of a giant hand "perfect for only one minute" (33), further reinforces the protagonist's attachment, providing an intriguing parallel to Sartre's chestnut tree in *Nausea*. In both cases, the protagonists find themselves in front of an arboreal mass, which eventually leads to a redefinition of their existence.

His condo in flames, the protagonist eventually goes to live with Tyler in a dilapidated building on Paper Street, on one condition as Tyler says, "I want you to hit me as hard as you can" (46). The initial blows that the two trade give way to the creation of Fight Club, a different type of support group whose release is not crying but fighting. Fight Club reinforces the loss of self and anonymity that the protagonist first encounters at the support groups. At Remaining Men Together, for instance, the protagonist describes seeing the impression of his face on Bob's shirt: "[W]hen I stepped away from his soft chest, the front of Bob's shirt was a wet mask of how I looked crying" (22). Similarly, at Fight Club: "[M]y eye was swollen shut and was bleeding, and after I said, stop, I could look down and there was a print of half my face in blood on the floor" (51).

The creation of such an exclusive club or movement is certainly not new to existentialism, as many existentialists, Sartre included, have advocated a total self-commitment—*l'engagement total* in Sartre's native tongue—to alleviate existential angst. As Sartre outlines in *Existentialism is a Humanism*: "What matters is the total commitment, but there is no one particular situation or action

that fully commits you, one way or the other. [. . .] [T]he only thing that allows [one] to live is action. Consequently, we are dealing with a morality of action and commitment” (39–40). Where the support groups failed, due in large part to a lack of the protagonist’s true self-commitment, Fight Club succeeds: “You aren’t alive anywhere like you’re alive at fight club. [. . .] Fight club isn’t about words” (51). Naturally, Fight Club is about *action*. The protagonist’s commitment to Fight Club parallels that of another of Sartre’s protagonists, Lucien, who appears in his short story “Childhood of a Leader.” Lucien, who more closely resembles *Fight Club*’s protagonist both in age and overall demeanor, joins an ultra-conservative group of young men, filled with the idea of revolutionizing France’s youth:

Lucien was captivated by the camaraderies of the young *camelots* [. . .] He soon knew Lemordant’s “gang,” about 20 students almost all of whom wore velvet berets. [. . .] Lemordant himself smiled without dropping an authority which no one would have dared question. Lucien was more often silent, his look wandering over these boisterous, muscular young people. ‘This is strength,’ he thought. (132)

Similarly, as Fight Club grows in popularity, the protagonist quickly becomes surrounded by a group of “boisterous, muscular young people”—history’s “middle children”—who eventually move from Fight Club to Project Mayhem (166). Commitment, once again, is the driving force behind Project Mayhem. “Applicants” can only begin their training after surviving a three-day waiting period: “You tell the applicant to go away, and if his resolve is so strong that he waits at the entrance without food or shelter or encouragement for three days, then and only then can he enter and begin the training” (129).

Once accepted, members of Project Mayhem espouse a lifestyle replete with existentialist philosophy—all action, no words and most of all, a refusal of all essences, as Tyler proclaims, “You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile” (134). As Project Mayhem evolves, splitting into four subcommittees (Arson, Assault, Mischief and Misinformation), the entire operation becomes known as the *Paper Street Soap Company*, whose principal product are bars of soap. Semiotically speaking, the choice of soap as the main product is important. Soap underscores the notion that members of Fight Club and Project Mayhem undergo a cleansing process, whereby each member sheds his former material self and commits himself fully to an action, as Tyler states, “Soap and human sacrifice go hand in hand” (75). Structurally, this process can be seen as a microcosm of the protagonist’s progression throughout the entire novel. From the support groups to Fight Club to the eventual rise and fall of Project Mayhem, the protagonist is constantly in search of a way to cleanse his

existential angst. Likewise, those who join Fight Club and graduate to Project Mayhem ultimately undergo the same existential cleansing process.

What's more is the process by which the soap is made. The most important ingredient is human fat, "liposuctioned fat sucked out of the richest thighs in America. The richest, fattest thighs in the world" (150). After a tedious process of boiling and skimming, the finished product materializes into soap, sold at twenty dollars a bar for the Paper Street Soap Company. The fact that this soap made from human fat can also represent the idea that the solution to existential angst is already found within oneself. Everything that the protagonist needs in order to get over his problem is already within him vis-à-vis his own self-commitment and action. Following his excruciating encounter with lye (a chemical burn), the protagonist carries around a constant reminder of the importance of soap in the form of a kiss-shaped scar on his hand. Again, as Tyler puts it, "Soap and human sacrifice go *hand in hand*" (75).

With their soap production at its height, the Paper Street Soap Company becomes the financial driving force behind Project Mayhem. And for their big climax—blowing up civilization to create something better—soap again is at the core. With a re-writing of history in his plans, Tyler proclaims, "With enough soap you could blow up the whole world" (73). This überdestructive vision for soap reveals the breadth of its reach within the narration. In order to "blow up the world" and start anew, soap is the catalyst. It's precisely this imagery facing the protagonist as he breaks away from his now realized *Doppelgänger* in Tyler, effectively blowing up his own world. This *coup de grace* of sorts marks a new beginning, which parallels the conclusion of "Childhood of a Leader": "A clock struck noon; Lucien rose. The metamorphosis was complete: a graceful, uncertain adolescent had entered this café one hour earlier; now a man left, a leader among the French" (144). Just as the clock strikes noon for Lucien, *Fight Club's* protagonist finds himself at the midway point of his own life.

From his insomnia and IKEA lifestyle to the support groups to the eventual rise and fall of his commitment in Fight Club and Project Mayhem, the protagonist undergoes the typical Sartrean existentialist journey: angst followed by a quest for meaning, and action and commitment followed by a new sense of self and purpose. This syntagmatic parallel reveals that despite the drastic differences in the paradigms—instead of the public park and chestnut trees found in *Nausea*, there is a dilapidated building on Paper Street and homemade soap—Palahniuk's underlying philosophy echoes that of Sartre's existentialism. And so, like Lucien Fleurier and Antoine Roquentin who preceded him, *Fight Club's* protagonist will live on in existential lore, freshly scrubbed with Paper Street soap.

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Popular Culture Review

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Studies in Popular Culture, the journal of the Popular Culture Association in the South and the American Culture Association in the South, publishes articles on popular culture and American culture however mediated: through film, literature, radio, television, music, graphics, print, practices, conditions of life. Its contributors from the United States, Canada, France, Israel, and Australia include distinguished anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers, ethnomusicologists, historians, and scholars in mass communications, philosophy, literature, and religion.

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