

*Popular
Culture
Review*

Volume 8 Number 2
August 1997

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.

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Expecting the Barbarians

When I attended a Palo Alto, California, grade school during the middle years of the Eisenhower era, questions regarding the greatness of culture heroes like Christopher Columbus never popped up in the Scott-Foresman history textbooks we were required to read. Four decades later, of course, all that has changed, at least for the moment. According to the tenured radicals of academe¹ and other politicized groups of our own time, Thomas Jefferson was an elitist slave-owner, Benjamin Franklin a blatant sexist, and Dwight David Eisenhower a shameless, cowardly foot-dragger on the issue of Civil Rights. As for Columbus himself, he is no longer simply the man who discovered America; he is perceived, rather, as "a butcher of innocents, a cruel and inept conqueror, a symbol of genocide," as Alan Edelstein has written. The list of fallen heroes, Edelstein adds, is seemingly endless:

Since his assassination John Kennedy has been idolized, but...also been vilified to the point where Douglas Brinkley regards some of the attacks on his memory as approaching 'a vendetta.' Albert Einstein, the twentieth century's symbol of intellectual greatness, has been accused of being 'an adulterous, egomaniacal misogynist.' And Walt Disney, who made his reputation by making wholesome films for the whole family to enjoy, was, according to a biography—an 'unauthorized' one, obviously—impotent, anti-Semitic, and an alcoholic.²

Famous American writers have also taken their lumps in recent years. Thus Ernest Hemingway was a ham-witted boasthard and abusive adulterer; William Faulkner a dipsomaniacal obscuratant and closet racist; Ezra Pound a demented fascist hatemonger; and T.S. Eliot an elitist and anti-Semite.

This general depreciatory trend isn't limited to American and European notables: the common man is fair game too. Like the Coney

Island freak shows of an earlier era, TV talk shows of the nineties routinely mock the dignity of their on-stage guests, many of whom are paraded in front of audiences because of their social and physical dysfunctions. Of a recent encounter with talk show host Jerry Springer on a PBS roundtable discussion, the syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington writes:

I handed him a list of local heroes from around the country who turned their own troubled lives around and are now helping others do the same. 'Why don't you put them on your show?' I asked him. 'Not only do they do great work, but they would make great television.'

'Is any one of them sleeping with a llama?' he smirked.³

Springer's cynicism has a curious flip side in the annals of American electronic and print journalism. Dogs who save the lives of their owners by attacking armed burglars, or barking at the onset of house fires, are routinely referred to as heroic in the mass media. (Sometimes the process is reversed, as in the case of a border collie named Rodeo who was "heroically rescued," as an NBC news reporter put it, by helicopter from a rooftop during a recent flood in California's Central Valley.) In the tabloids, even a fish can be a hero:

As flames swept through her home, Sandi Shawn was roused from her sleep by her pet angelfish—which leaped from its tank and landed with a wet smack on her face!

The 27-year-old Detroit mother and her three daughters would have been roasted alive in their beds if the little fish hadn't performed what can only be described as an incredible act of love.

Extra food treats were her reward for her lifesaving act of heroism.⁴

Like heroism in American popular culture, tragedy too has lost its intrinsic value of otherness, or what Douglas J. Stewart calls the absolute sense of a "devastating and equivocal tangency [the Greek gods] were always reputed to have with human destiny."⁵ Indeed, in televised sporting events, where "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" are regularly played out in millions of American living rooms, the "tangency" of tragedy and of triumph often takes strikingly *unequivocal* forms. Consider the phenomenon of Christian and Muslim athletes who often begin TV post-game interviews by giving the credit for their victories to God or Allah. Following an upset victory over Denver in a 1997 American Football Conference divisional playoff, quarterback Mark Brunell of the Jacksonville Jaguars had this to say: "God has been with this team from the beginning—we've got a bunch of guys who love the Lord, and it showed today." Offensive tackle Tony Boselli echoed Brunell's sentiments: "I was sick as a dog [with the flu] before the game, but God healed me and I was able to come out and help defeat the Broncos."

There's no reason to question the sincerity of such expressions of belief. The assumptions behind them do raise questions, however. If God intervenes on the behalf of one football team, does He then conspire to undermine the opponent's chances of victory? Why is it in His interest to influence the outcome of a sporting event? And what of the players on the losing side who might believe in Him as well and who, if they'd won, would probably also have given due credit to the Deity in locker room interviews? On the other hand, in more than three decades of watching football, basketball, and baseball on TV, I don't recall a single instance when an athlete actually *blamed* God for *not* helping him and his teammates win a game. It's as if the idea of a "devastating" Other is simply unacceptable to Americans who participate in sporting rituals.

In Greek tragedy, the house of Atreus was characterized by a series of punishments handed down by the Furies to sons for ghastly crimes committed by their fathers. The fathers, of course, could not foresee that their offspring would suffer the consequences of their malfeasances, and so this vicious cycle was interrupted only when the Furies "put an end to the atrocities which had stained the family of Atreus with blood."⁶

I recent memory, the closest historical analog to this Greek tableau is the case of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt II—the architect of the Agent Orange defoliation policy in Vietnam—and his son, Elmo Zumwalt III. In what newspapers and TV newscasters inaccurately labeled a terrible twist of fate, Elmo III himself was exposed to Agent Orange during his tour of duty in Vietnam, later developing cancer linked directly by physicians to the defoliant. “I am the instrument of my son’s tragedy,” Admiral Zumwalt acknowledged in a television interview in the nineteen eighties.

Remarkable though it is, this unhappy instance underscores a general truism of contemporary popular culture: tragedy is what we do to ourselves, not what the gods do to us. Thus, everyday occurrences like plane crashes, traffic accidents, spousal and child abuse, drug overdoses and drive-by shootings are routinely lumped together in the media as “tragic.” Of course, deaths due to earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, landslides and fires are also described as tragic, and yet, in spite of the anachronistic Acts of God clause in everyone’s insurance policy, these occurrences are commonly accepted as natural, not divine, in origin. If constant media exposure of earthquakes, floods, and fires creates the impression that there’s nothing particularly special about these natural occurrences, then it follows that the unfortunate people who happen to be in the way aren’t particularly special, not to mention heroic, either. Indeed, for most of us these victims are simply nameless statistics; as a rule we aren’t moved to pity and terror by their sufferings.

We may be moved in other, less therapeutic ways, however, by exposure to extreme situations, both natural and man-made. In a poem entitled “Expecting the Barbarians,” the modern Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy depicts a narcissistic culture so bored with its indulgences that it actually *longs for something tragic to happen* :

What are we waiting for, assembled in the public square?

The barbarians are to arrive today.

...Why this sudden unrest and confusion?

(How solemn their faces have become).

Why are the streets and squares clearing quickly,

and all return to their homes, so deep in thought?

Because night is here but the barbarians have not come.
Some people arrived from the frontiers,
and they said that there are no longer any barbarians.

And now what shall become of us without any
barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.⁷

As Kenneth Clark has written of Cavafy's barbarian invasion which never comes, "It would have been better than nothing."⁸ Of course, Clark was applying Cavafy's cultural psychology to the gradual decline of Greco-Roman civilization.

Indeed, Cavafy's idiosyncratic scenario might seem far removed from contemporary American life, were it not for the fact that Don DeLillo, one of the ablest fictional chroniclers of popular culture since the sixties, critiques our own situation in strikingly similar terms.⁹ In the following scene from *White Noise*, "barbarians" have left their grisly calling cards in a nearby town:

That night on TV I saw newsfilm of policemen carrying a body bag out of someone's backyard in Bakersville. The reporter said two bodies had been found, more were believed buried in the same yard. Perhaps many more. Perhaps twenty bodies, thirty bodies—no one knew for sure....

A few nights afterward, however, no more bodies have been found in Bakersville. The chilling similarity of the narrator's reaction to that of the citizens of C.P. Cavafy's antique town requires no comment from me:

The reporter seemed at first apologetic. But as he continued to discuss the absence of mass graves, he grew increasingly forlorn, gesturing at the diggers, shaking his head, almost ready to plead with us for sympathy and understanding.

I tried not to feel disappointed.¹⁰

II.

In early winter of 1967, nineteen years before the space shuttle Challenger accident of January 28, 1986, three astronauts burned to death in their Apollo I space vehicle while it rested on launch pad #34 at Cape Kennedy, now Cape Canaveral. Like the Challenger victims, the men who died in 1967—their names were Edward White II, Virgil Grissom, and Roger Chaffee—were felt by many to possess heroic *arete* in the ancient Greek sense, and it's safe to say that few members of the American public would deny them admittance to the pantheon of contemporary tragic heroes. Once again, however, we should ask what we really mean by these terms.

In the "Freedom Summer" of 1964, three young members of SNCC, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, two whites and one black, drove down to Mississippi to help register black voters for the upcoming fall elections. These men—their names were James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—were murdered in the night by white separatists intent on denying blacks their right to vote. These killings were briefly noted in the national press, which then turned its attention to the upcoming presidential campaigns of Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater.

"We do not know how brave they actually were," Douglas J. Stewart writes of the three SNCC volunteers. "We do know," he continues,

that they were not lionized in life, and that they have been mostly forgotten in death. They were not especially beautiful, not particularly endowed with the frame or the dazzle of an Achilles or an astronaut.

Three decades later, Hollywood finally cashed in on these and other murders committed during the American Civil Rights Movement. *Mississippi Burning*, a film starring Gene Hackman, dramatized the deaths of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner; *Ghosts of Mississippi* reprised the 1963 assassination of NAACP field representative Medgar Evers. These trendy, profit-making ventures are products of the incestuous subcultures of media marketing, political correctness, and porno-violence of present-day America; one could hardly say

that they bear disinterested witness to the outrages perpetrated by racists a generation ago in the state of Mississippi. As for the real Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner back in the summer of 1964, Stewart adds:

Their tragedy does not give testimony to American virtue, excellence or skill. It testifies rather to the moral horror that still afflicts our society. . . . Their deaths were not the price paid to chance and natural forces for a daring search into the unknown; rather they paid the price of daring to look at and question the all-too-familiar lies about our moral selves which we would like to believe are true. Where then is the shrine, and what are the rites to be established for *these men*?¹¹

In spite of the encouraging gains made by blacks and other minorities in the the past thirty years, "lies about our own moral selves" are still being told in the entertainment industry and elsewhere, and Stewart's question has yet to receive the answer it deserves.

From the very beginning of the space program, of course, the adventures of astronauts constituted another form of television entertainment for the American public. For weeks and months, video of the Challenger accident of 1986 was re-played by the major networks, often in slow motion, a practice uncomfortably reminiscent of the instant replays of televised sporting events. The faces of the parents of one of the astronauts were shown again and again as they witnessed the explosion, their eager expressions turning to puzzlement, then shock, then horror, as the magnitude of what was happening before their eyes dawned on them.

If there had been broad public condemnation of this sort of media overkill, perhaps the networks would have seen fit to back off a little; but no such mass condemnation was forthcoming, nor was it deemed necessary. The reason for this, I think, also has to do with television's genius for presenting tragedy as entertainment. As Richard Stivers has written,

The visual images of television and the other mass media represent reality as pleasurable, as a spectacle

to be consumed. This is a purely aesthetical approach to life that leaves us prisoners of the moment. By contrast, reality in all other types of society is experienced as tragic: life involves suffering only occasionally punctuated by periods of happiness, and eventually leads to death. The question all previous societies have faced, beyond that of survival, is the transcendent meaning of suffering and death, as the basis for the meaning of life.¹²

In his novel *Mao II*, Don DeLillo critiques in fictional form the “purely aesthetical approach to life” taken by the contemporary American media. One of the novel’s characters is a photographer who confesses, “No matter what I shot, how much horror, reality, misery, ruined bodies, bloody faces, it was all so fucking pretty in the end.”¹³

This sort of amoral reductionism as inspired by the mass media trivializes the meaning of human dignity and its ties to tragedy in other ways. Every TV watcher of the nineties is exposed on a regular basis to the silliness of the heartbreak of psoriasis, the public humiliation of septic system backup, the horror of gritty fiber laxative, and the embarrassment of male pattern baldness, not to mention the torments of jock itch, static cling, ring around the collar, bitter beer face, doggy bad breath, and detergent haze on the kitchen floor.

It’s tempting to imagine *obiter dicta* the ways in which Madison Avenue might incorporate the works of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and other tragic writers as part of its sales strategies. Oedipus, in the throes of a Maalox moment, raises his hands to the sky and asks to be delivered, not from the net which Zeus has been weaving for him, but from That Queasy Bloated Feeling caused by eating too many spanakopitas; Hamlet curses his birth, not because the time is out of joint, but because the roving salad cart in his favorite restaurant has run out of Pepperidge Farms Croutons; Tolstoy’s functionary Ivan Ilych feels forsaken by Providence because his living room curtains from Sears Safari Collection—the very ones he was hanging when he fell off the ladder and injured himself—have come waterstained from the factory.

The cultural critic Neil Postman has proposed this imaginary TV commercial designed to sell a new California Chardonnay:

Jesus is standing alone in a desert oasis. A gentle breeze flutters the leaves of the stately palms behind him. Soft Mideastern music caresses the air. Jesus holds in his hand a bottle of wine at which he gazes adoringly. Turning toward the camera, he says, 'When I transformed water into wine at Cana, *this* is what I had in mind. Try it today. You'll become a believer.'

Lest one be tempted to dismiss these fanciful scenarios out of hand, Postman also points to the following actual ad which has appeared numerous times on American network television:

[A commercial for Hebrew National Frankfurters] features a dapper-looking Uncle Sam in his traditional red, white, and blue outfit. While Uncle Sam assumes appropriate facial expressions, a voice-over describes the delicious and healthful frankfurters produced by Hebrew National. Toward the end of the commercial, the voice stresses that Hebrew National Frankfurters surpass federal standards for such products. Why? Because, the voice says as the camera shifts our point of view upward toward heaven, 'We have to answer to a Higher Authority.'¹⁴

As Postman correctly argues, the issue here isn't blasphemy but trivialization: the "equivocal tangency" of divine authority has been transubstantiated into one more shoddy means to the end of selling consumer products.

III.

An internationally-known family therapist once said in my presence that the best legacy Depression-era parents could have left their baby-boomer offspring was another Great Depression. Instead, the mainstream American culture has now produced two consecutive

generations of children who have not known what it means to suffer deprivation on a mass scale. And while the sentimental idea that suffering automatically ennoble individuals and cultures is a pernicious fiction, still, as the psychoanalyst Rollo May has written, a sense of the tragic does "make possible the most humane emotions—like pity in the ancient Greek sense, sympathy for one's fellow man, and understanding."¹⁵ For the Greek tragedians (Oedipus: "I would be blind to misery not to pity my people kneeling at my feet"), such emotions were commensurate with heroism.

What are the long-term consequences of living in a culture in collective denial of "the transcendent meaning of suffering and death"? This question has been asked and answered before: by the Roman historian Livy, for example, who concluded: "We have reached the point where our vices and their cures are equally abhorrent." Livy was two generations older than Seneca, who wrote: "To feel pain at the misfortunes of others is a weakness unworthy of the wise man." Two generations before Livy, Cicero asked: "What is the use of being kind to a poor man?"¹⁶ After them, of course, the barbarians.

Cicero, Livy, and Seneca aren't the only Romans who speak to us from two millennia ago. In his book *Civilisation*, Kenneth Clark points to a famous scene in *The Aeneid* of Virgil, when the wandering hero Aeneas is washed ashore in a strange country "which he fears is inhabited by barbarians." Unlike the citizens of C.P. Cavafy's town, however, Aeneas doesn't relish the prospect of their arrival. He isn't spiritually exhausted, only tired and frightened. "Then," Clark adds, "as he looks around he sees some figures carved in relief, and he says: 'These men know the pathos of life, and mortal things touch their hearts.'"¹⁷

Thanks in large part to television, itself the product of the most affluent society in history, public encounters with the pathos of life usually come at second hand; like as not, mortal things are experienced as images on an electronic screen. But TV hasn't simply razed to the ground our cultural constructions of heroism and tragedy; it has also rebuilt them out of the still-smoldering ashes. This has happened in two ways: directly, as a result of actually watching TV, or indirectly, as a result of TV's oft-documented power to erode the attention span of its mass audience. Thus, as Joshua Meyrowitz puts it, our new heroes

are men and women like Lenny Skutnik, who dove into the water—before television cameras—to save an airplane crash survivor, or Reginald Andrews, who saved a blind man's life by pulling him from beneath a New York subway car. Both men were saluted as heroes by the President of the United States. We can admire such isolated heroic acts; the pasts and the futures of such heroes remain comfortably irrelevant and invisible.¹⁸

Why "comfortably"? Because, as forms of entertainment, heroism and tragedy inevitably become boring. When they no longer succeed in diverting us, something else must take their place—another plane crash, another act of terrorism, another daring rescue—only to be replaced by yet another public spectacle. In other words, the staying power of yesterday's heroes and yesterday's tragedies has been virtually annihilated in a culture of "disconnected present moments which jostle each other but never form a continuous (much less logical) progression."¹⁹ Of course, if this sort of temporal cleansing works against the formation of enduring culture-heroes such as we've had in the past, it also helps to erase the memory of culture-villains, whose misdeeds are forgiven because forgotten.

The opposite is also true. If the denigration of the heroes of yesteryear is really a process of selective forgetting, then the same may be said of the tragedies of yesteryear. I began this discussion by mentioning Columbus as the favorite historical whipping boy of multiculturalists in the past three decades. The case against Columbus is summed up for many by David Stannard in his popular book, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, which puts the death toll of native populations at one hundred million in the two centuries after the coming of the Spaniards. That many of these deaths were the result of pandemic diseases like swine influenza which followed the arrivals of Hernan Cortez and Francisco Pizarro cannot diminish the horror of what the Spaniards did to the Indians of North and South America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

For me, however, questions of whether Columbus himself should be held personally responsible for the crimes of the

conquistadors miss the mark. The myopic historical narratives of my elementary school textbooks notwithstanding, the frenzy for "deconstructing Columbus"—the title of one recent college course—obscures the fact that this trend is only one manifestation of that far more ubiquitous and multifaceted habit of mind I've attempted to describe in this essay. What is the connection between the devaluation of historical heroes like Columbus and the devaluation of the concept of tragedy as a cultural paradigm? What happens when the tragedies of the past are used to further the ideological ends of the present?

To pray aloud over the centuries-old corpses of selected native Americans for purely political ends is to conveniently ignore the corpses of other, non-selected native Americans who died just as violently, perhaps even more so, at the hands of their fellows. All too often, when we are told about the "tragic crimes" of Columbus, we aren't informed about the "tragic crimes" perpetrated by the native Americans against each other centuries before the beleaguered Genoan navigator was born. To pretend that the Indians of Meso-America lived in a state of pastoral innocence before the Spaniards showed up in 1519 "denies the humanity of the dead: their sins, their virtues, their efforts, their failures," as Robert Hughes has written. Let me offer a final symposium cushion to Hughes, whose observations are worth quoting at length:

[R]ecent digs and the slow work of deciphering glyphs, particularly at the site of Dos Pilas in Guatemala, indicate that the classic period of the Maya was ruined by a continuous state of war between local rulers that began around 700 A. D. and devoured the whole economy and ecology of the Mayan empire by the 10th century. The Mayans fell by self-induced ecological collapse, caused by a devotion to unwinnable wars which was itself sustained by an obsession with ideology—the ideology of the transcendent god-king, viewed by his limestone-toting helots as the embodiment of the whole universe.

As for Mexico before the coming of Columbus, Hughes concludes:

Aztec culture was messianic and invasive and imperialistic; it had been so ever since the Aztecs came down from the north [and] slaughtered or enslaved the resident people around what is now Mexico City. . . .

It was an evil fate to be enslaved by 16th century Spanish regidores. But it was no joke to be one of the countless thousands whose hearts were ripped out by the Aztec priests of Teotihuacan in order that the sun might rise in the morning. The Spanish burned nearly all the written records of Aztec history, except for a few codices. But the Aztecs, when they conquered central Mexico, also destroyed all the records of the previous societies, so that there could be no history before theirs...²⁰

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Notes

1. The phrase is Roger Kimball's. See *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Higher Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).
2. Alan Edelstein, *Everybody is Sitting on the Curb: How and Why America's Heroes Disappeared* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996), pp. 4-5. Of related interest: Nat Hentoff, *American Heroes: In and Out of School* (New York: Delacort Press, 1987); Harold Lubin, ed., *Heroes and Anti-Heroes* (Scranton: PA; Chandler Publishing Co., 1968); Joe McGinnis, *Heroes* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977); Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985); and Robin M. Williams, Jr., *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).
3. Arianna Huffington, "Put Jenny, Sally, and Jerry Out of Work," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1996, B7.
4. Tom Cassidy, "Guardian Angelfish Saves Family from Fire," *Weekly World News*, June 8, 1993, p. 5.
5. Douglas J. Stewart, "Apollo, the Destroyer," *The New Republic*, February 18, 1967, p. 15.
6. *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), p. 186.
7. C. P. Cavafy, *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, trans. Rae Dalven (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), pp. 18-19.
8. Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 4.
9. Robert Hughes interprets the message of Cavafy's poem, as I do, in the light of contemporary life in America. Hughes, however, puts a political spin on "Expecting the Barbarians": "The favorite all-purpose Barbarians, at present, are called 'multiculturalists.'" (*Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 80).

10. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 64, pp. 222-223.
11. Stewart, p. 15.
12. Richard Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 146.
13. Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991), p. 24, qtd. in Richard Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline*, p. 144.
14. Neil Postman, *Technology: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 164-165.
15. Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1969), pp. 108-109.
16. Livy's famous observation is reproduced in most histories of the Augustan and Silver Ages of ancient Rome. Cicero's and Seneca's remarks are quoted in Herbert J. Muller, *The Uses of the Past: Profiles of Former Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 221.
17. Clark, p. 29, p. 31.
18. Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: the Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 311-12.
19. N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 282.
20. Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint*, pp. 119-120.

Documentary Journalism of the 1930's: Pursuing the Social Fact

American intellectuals and artists of the 1930s experimented with a variety of literary techniques and genres in an effort to understand the social and economic chaos of the decade. In the spirit of the writers of the Progressive generation, the intellectual community of the Thirties held faith in the power of words to elicit social change. According to Richard Pells (1973), the 1920s were dark years for American intellectuals, with many people ignoring the Progressive call for a new ideology, political order, and value system that would correspond to the social and economic changes in society (pp. 151–152). This characterization has been challenged by Roderick Nash (1990), who cited the need to revise the image of 1920s' intellectuals as nihilistic, narcissistic, and anti-American. Nash maintained that a central element in this stereotyped view is that intellectuals of the period turned disgustedly against their nation and its past, seeking to escape the cultural malaise. Nash added that many intellectuals in the Twenties did not discard their ideals, nor were they bitter and disillusioned (pp. 67–68). Either way, the stock market crash of 1929 provided American intellectuals with the national emergency they realized it would take to capture the attention of citizens who appeared content with the status quo. With the belief that art could have a significant impact on social change, Depression-era artists experimented with proletarian novels, plays, poetry, and film (Pells, 1973, pp. 202–219, 252–263, 268–291). As Pells observed, "To bury oneself in one's art at a time of massive social disintegration seemed a selfish luxury which neither the writer nor the country could any longer afford" (p. 154).

The artistic experimentation often led to disillusionment, however, with the writers of the Thirties finding their fictional genres inadequate in expressing the emotional and economic devastation of the Depression. The writers lost confidence in themselves when their art failed to make order out of chaos (p. 195). A number of artists turned to documentary journalism as a creative vehicle for understanding the turmoil of the Thirties. For many of

these writers, the imagination proved insufficient because it could not come close to the harsh realities of the Depression. One did not need to contrive a fictional setting of abject poverty to bring home the larger truth of a self-destructing economy; one only had to look at the long bread lines to discover that truth. Thus, many artists abandoned the isolation of their writing rooms for the cross-country journeys of the documentary journalist (pp. 195–196).

The documentary journalists of the Thirties worshiped at the altar of the social fact. They were concerned with the accumulation of the “pure facts” of daily life through the techniques of observation, detailed description, and straightforward prose. Their works touted a rigorous objectivity, with the writers letting the facts speak for themselves. For the most part, the ideological posturing so evident in the proletarian works was absent. Instead, the documentarians envisioned themselves as human cameras recording life as it is, rather than as it should be. Pells emphasized that because reportage concerns the concrete and specific of life, it enabled the Depression-era writers to gain a sense of order and stability in a time of social chaos and inner turmoil (pp. 196–197).

In their search for the social fact, documentary journalists, particularly those writing book-length accounts, waded knee-deep into the waters of Depression-era reality. The purpose of this article is to examine what they sought to accomplish by employing the techniques of the documentarian, and the sense they made of the America they discovered. Six book-length documentaries of the period are examined: *The American Jitters: A Year of the Slump*, and *Travels in Two Democracies* by Edmund Wilson; *Tragic America* by Theodore Dreiser; *Puzzled America* and *Hometown* by Sherwood Anderson; and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee (photographs by Walker Evans). These books are representative of the writers of the Thirties who perceived fiction as inadequate for conveying the impact of economic and social upheaval. Concoctions of the imagination pale in comparison with the real-life drama of the struggle for survival and the derailment of the American Dream.

Wilson, Dreiser, Anderson, and Agee traveled throughout the country to learn if the long shadow of the Depression has eclipsed the American spirit. While Wilson and Anderson appeared more content to let the readers arrive at their own conclusions, Dreiser expressed righteous indignation over what he observed. Agee, meanwhile,

experimented with an impressionistic documentary, with traditional narration and chronological progression replaced by a circular narrative structure that examined real events from multiple perspectives. Like his fellow documentarians, Agee served as a human camera capturing the nuances of daily life, except his camera observed life through a multiplicity of lenses.

The Writer as Camera: Objectively Recording Daily Life

Objectivity became the watchword for many of the documentary writers of the Thirties. They thought of themselves as human cameras focusing on the people, places, and events of the Depression, dutifully chronicling the smallest detail and the subtlest nuance. "Talking to living people and observing their actual behavior seemed more important, and more honest than creating fictional characters or issues," Pells wrote in explaining the documentarians' commitment to objectivity (p. 196). This faith in objectivity also can be traced to the development of scientific naturalism in the 1930s. Rejecting abstract, *a priori* rationalism, many social scientists sought value-free scientific inquiry that minimized or eliminated the personal factor. The goal of scientific objectivism was to devise methods of collecting and analyzing data that rule out errors due to individual variability in subjective attitude. Many scholars held that building a scientific body of knowledge involves restudying, remanipulating, or remeasuring observable, physical phenomena. By developing and refining objectifying devices and methods, the social scientist could eliminate his or her values and preconceptions (Purcell, 1973, pp. 15-22). According to Edward A. Purcell, Jr., the scientific objectivism of the Thirties was not only intellectually appealing, but socially necessary as well:

After 1929, facing the misery of the Depression on one side and the challenge of Marxism on the other, social scientists embraced their new methodology even more firmly. ...Most believed implicitly or explicitly that their new methods provided a practical way to resolve social problems as well as a convincing answer to the inevitability of Marxian class conflict. The great majority of social scientists confidently ignored the upsurge in Marxist thought and rhetoric because of

their faith in both the social and scientific power of the new methodology. ...Though the fervent adherence to the ideal of complete objectivity declines somewhat under the pressures of economic chaos, the commitment to a scientific analysis of social problems remained unshakable (pp. 29–30).

This striving for value-free inquiry into the social dilemmas of the Depression found its fullest treatment in the documentary journalism of Edmund Wilson, and, to a lesser extent, Sherwood Anderson. In his 1932 book, *The American Jitters*, Wilson chronicled a year in the life of Depression-torn America—October 1930 to October 1931. A patchwork of the common people whom Wilson encountered on a cross-country journey, the book is a testament to the struggle for survival. By writing the book in the present tense and leaving himself out of the narrative except in the role of the reporter asking questions, Wilson placed the reader in a front-row seat as the scenes unfolded. The writer served as camera, and for the most part he reserved judgment on what he documented. If excessive individualism was Wilson's underlying message in the American vignettes he presented, it was a message that he wanted the readers to arrive at based on objective accounts of ordinary people fighting for survival.

A chapter in *The American Jitters* called "A Bad Day in Brooklyn" underscored Wilson's attempt to recount objectively the impact of the Depression on ordinary Americans. In an unembellished, matter-of-fact style, Wilson told of the suicide attempts by three disheartened Brooklyn residents on March 31, 1931. The writer described in painstaking detail what led these three very different people to attempt suicide. The death of the human spirit because of economic desperation and emotional turmoil was what Wilson was after here, but he left it to the readers to decide what psychic connection to make of these suicide attempts. Wilson simply turned on the "camera" and let the readers observe as the gas enveloped the apartment or the trigger was pulled (Wilson, 1932, pp. 121–132).

Juxtaposing seemingly disparate people and events was a favorite technique of Wilson in *The American Jitters*. In a chapter titled "Two Protests," Wilson examined a nonviolent protest that was met with deaf ears by the Hoover administration, and another

protest that turned to sudden violence. In the first scenario, members of the People's Lobby in Washington were first promised, then refused an appointment with President Hoover in an effort to convince him to call an extra session of Congress for the appropriation of public works funds. Even an appointment with a presidential aide fell through, forcing group members to leave a written protest with a clerk (pp. 143-149). Wilson paralleled the People's Lobby situation with the protest of sorts waged by Pete Romano, a New York fruit store owner who lost all of his money in the stock market crash. Romano owed his landlord, Antonio Copace, two months' rent, and was being threatened with eviction unless he came up with the money. Romano raised half the rent, but Copace angrily demanded the full amount. In an understated style, Wilson recorded the "protest" staged by Romano: "On June 11 he (Copace) came himself to the Romanos and demanded the money again. He threatened to have the marshal in and put them out that very afternoon. Peter Romano tried to argue with him, and Mrs. Romano went out in a last effort to get together \$52. She didn't succeed, and when she came back, she found a lot of people around and the police in her flat. Peter had shot Mr. Copace and killed him, and was just being taken off to jail" (pp. 149-150). Once again, Wilson reserved judgment and left it to the readers to debate the moral implications of violent or nonviolent protestation in times of national crisis.

Wilson observed that the place to study the causes and consequences of the Depression was not "in the charts of the compilers of statistics, but in one's self and in the people one sees. That is what I have tried to do in this book" (p. 303). For Wilson, the discovery of truth could be found in the faithful observation of daily life in the streets, alleyways, union halls, slum dwellings, migrant shacks, and coal mines. Unemployment statistics in government reports held little or no human significance for Wilson.

In *Travels in Two Democracies*, published in 1936, Wilson recounted another cross-country odyssey from November, 1932 to May, 1934. Again relying on rigorous objectivity and a camera-like eye for detail (although employing more of a first-person narrative than in *The American Jitters*), Wilson continued to record the physical and emotional impact of the Depression. In a chapter titled "Hull-House in 1932," Wilson examined the human drama unfolding in the overflowing shelters and flophouses of Chicago. He offered

disturbing slices of life at the bottom of society in the shelters bitterly labeled "Hoovervilles." One passage depicted in graphic detail how the city dumps provided a food source for hungry Chicago residents:

There is not a garbage-dump in Chicago which is not diligently haunted by the hungry. Last summer in the hot weather when the smell was sickening and the flies were thick, there were a hundred people a day coming to one of the dumps, falling on the heap of refuse as soon as the truck had pulled out and digging in it with sticks and hands. They would devour all the pulp that was left on the old slices of watermelon and cantaloupe till the rinds were as thin as paper; and they would take away and wash and cook discarded onions, turnips and potatoes (Wilson, 1936, p. 30).

Later in *Travels in Two Democracies*, Wilson turned his attention to a tense milk strike being waged by farmers in Oneida County, New York. The farmers maintained that the distributors cheated them by not increasing their share when the price to the consumer was raised. In protest, the farmers went on strike, picketed the dairy plants, and dumped the milk of farmers who tried to deliver. State troopers were brought in to disperse the pickets, leading to a riot situation:

... the troopers assaulted the crowd, shooting gas bombs at them and clubbing them: men and women, old and young, alike. They pursued people into fields and woodsheds, rushed up and beat them over the heads when they got stuck in the barbed-wire fence. I saw many broken heads and bruises. There was one man who had had a gas bomb fired point-blank into his back, injuring him severely and setting his clothes afire (pp. 79-82).

While *Travels in Two Democracies* offered more subjective assessments, the format of the book was similar to *The American Jitters*: an objective account of ordinary people in mundane situations

and extraordinary circumstances. Extensive use of descriptive detail was called upon in a narrative style that was often Spartan and straightforward. Presenting a sense of realism was the goal, although Wilson left it to the readers to figure out the social and ethical implications of that reality.

Like Wilson, Anderson employed a rigorous objectivism in examining the disenfranchised of rural America in the Thirties. In his 1935 book, *Puzzled America* (also published in *The Sherwood Anderson Reader*, 1947), Anderson told of the plight of poor farmers in the hills of Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and northern Alabama. In a lean writing style, Anderson described farmers leaving the hills to find employment in the cities, only to have to return upon finding no jobs available. Anderson related in graphic detail lives of quiet desperation in the hills: little food, no money, farm soil dissipating with every passing year, three or four families living on thirty or forty acres of land (Anderson, 1947, pp. 642-648).

Anderson's style of reportage hinged on being an effective listener. He not only observed America in his travels, but he also listened to his downtrodden subjects as they discussed their lives. This technique found its fullest treatment in a story from *Puzzled America* called "Please Let Me Explain," where Anderson picked up various hitchhikers and listened to their accounts of the Depression experience. A 65-year-old hitchhiker told of once being a successful wheat farmer in the West, only to lose everything when he could not pay his bank debts as the price of wheat fell. With his wife dead and his adopted children living with poor relatives, the hitchhiker said he had become a "common workman" whom no one would hire because of his age (p. 657). Another hitchhiker—a hungry, shabbily dressed young man embittered by his failures in life—told Anderson that the only way out of the Depression was to pass a law compelling the extermination of the poor and unemployed of America. When Anderson reminded the hitchhiker that he would be among the first to be killed, the young man replied: "I know, but you see I haven't succeeded. I don't believe that I ever will succeed. I might as well be put out of the way" (pp. 661-662). What on the surface appeared to be an obscure conversation with one of life's losers became emblematic of the guilt embedded in the national psyche.

Anderson continued to experiment with documentary journalism in his 1940 book, *Hometown*, which was commissioned as part of the "Face of America" series featuring photographs by Farm Security Administration photographers. Here, Anderson paid tribute to the small-town America of the Thirties, utilizing extensive conversations with storekeepers, newspaper editors, neighbors, farmers, judges, sheriffs, schoolteachers, and numerous other characters. Detailed description again came into play in order to paint an accurate picture of small-town life. The material in *Hometown* has a more romantic flavor to it than the gritty realism of *Puzzled America*, but Anderson's depiction of rural poverty pulls few punches:

In every American town ... there is a section beyond the railroad tracks where the poor live. We in the towns also have our slums. In the summer and fall the men who live down there manage to pick up a day's work now and then but in the winter there is nothing doing. There are a half dozen children in the family and the mother tries to keep things going by doing the washing for our well-to-do families. You will see her on bitter cold days hanging out a wash. Her hands are blue with cold. In the houses the children huddle about the one stove in the kitchen, wood and coal to be bought, shoes for the children. It is a long winter for that family. The woman who is hanging out the washed clothes is a proud one. She'll work her arms off, she says, rather than go on relief (Anderson, 1940, pp. 72-73).

The exploitation of small-town factory workers also was examined in some detail in *Hometown*, with Anderson chronicling the debasement of human dignity in the name of increased productivity. At one point, Anderson discussed a speed-up in production that had been ordered by management at a small mill in a North Carolina town. After repeatedly being harassed by an efficiency expert hired to time production speed, the workers turned the mill into a scene of sudden violence: "Men and women, made nervous and half hysterical by the presence of the man with the stopwatch timing all their movements, suddenly picked up stools and sticks. Women with

scissors in their hands and men with their arms full of mill bobbins pursued a frightened efficiency man through the mill yard and through the main street of the town" (p. 134).

Dreiser, meanwhile, assumed the role of reporter as a means of gathering evidence to support his pontifications on the exploitation of American workers by big business. Like Wilson and Anderson, Dreiser took to the highways to observe firsthand the impact of the Depression on ordinary people. In "Present-Day Living Conditions for Many," a chapter of Dreiser's 1931 book, *Tragic America*, the writer recounted how he found "unbelievable misery" during his visit to the strike-torn western Pennsylvania miners' zone. For two weeks' work, miners received \$14 to \$24, yet had to pay \$2 a month for a shabby four-room house. The company store charged inflated prices for goods, "which amounts were deducted from the miner's pay before he received what was left, if any." The result was that many miners remained in debt for years. Studying in detail the miners' living conditions, Dreiser found them having to eat dandelion weeds for food (Dreiser, 1931, p. 14).

Dreiser's investigation into the living conditions in the early Thirties also turned to Passaic, New Jersey, which the writer considered to be representative of most smaller industrial cities. Dreiser described in stark detail the plight of the residents in this mill town: eight to ten people living in one or two rooms; dark, shabby, two-story flats "placed so close together that a driveway or a garage was not to be thought of"; people living in quarters where unpaid utilities have been turned off; and the underfed condition of many unemployed people (pp. 15-16).

To underscore the human impact of the Depression, Dreiser offered portraits of various Passaic residents. For example, he discussed James Golden, a 50-year-old unemployed tinsmith, who went into a bakery and asked for something to eat. As the proprietor reached for a loaf of bread, Golden collapsed to the floor and died. Dreiser concluded: "The Passaic police reported that they had, on several occasions, given him (Golden) a bed in a cell at police headquarters, but nothing more." Dreiser also told of Mrs. O. S., who rented rooms in her house to bring in some money. Mrs. O. S. and her unemployed husband slept in an attic room. Her able-bodied, 62-year-old husband had been discharged without a pension from his mill job of thirty-one years because of his age. Despite renting the

rooms, Mrs. O. S. and her husband were unable to pay their bills, including \$225 owed in annual taxes (pp. 16-17).

Also profiled by Dreiser was Frank Tuma, a painter who had been out of work for five months. Tuma's son needed an operation, but Tuma had no money and owed a \$300 grocery bill. The hospital, however, agreed with Tuma's proposal to work off the cost of his son's operation. Another portrait took only one sentence to write: "Then there was John Pitak, 43, of 183 High Avenue, who committed suicide, leaving a wife and three children because he could not find work" (pp. 16-18). Dreiser let the portraits speak for themselves, although they provided emotional and spiritual impetus for later chapters of *Tragic America* where objective reportage was replaced by searing indictments against the avarice of corporate America (pp. 51-84, 85-112).

The most experimental book of documentary journalism was James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, an examination of the lives of tenant farmers in the deep South in the Thirties. With Agee's impressionistic writing style and Walker Evans' stark photographs of rural poverty, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* stands as a chronicle of social turmoil. Like Wilson, Anderson, and Dreiser, Agee was more intrigued by the use of camera-like observation than in fictional invention. "In a novel," Agee wrote, "a house or person has his meaning, his existence, entirely through me: his true meaning is much huger. It is that he exists, in actual being, as you do and as I do, and as no character of the imagination can possibly exist" (Agee, 1941, p. 12). However, Agee refused to be constrained by the rigorous objectivity that permeated the documentaries of Wilson and Anderson. Instead, Agee infused his reportage with autobiographical passages, philosophical discussions, and social and political observations. He described in detail the impoverished living conditions of the sharecroppers, but he was not content to let the facts speak for themselves. Agee considered it his obligation to reflect honestly and intuitively on the meaning of the social misery he witnessed firsthand. Pells noted that although Agee could not make expatiation for the pain of the tenant farmers, he at least "might preserve his own autonomy while writing of the tenants with honesty, clarity, understanding, and love" (Pells, 1973, p. 249).

In examining the daily living of three tenant families, Agee dispensed with chronological progression. He wanted the structure of

the book to reflect the unpredictability and chaotic nature of life. As in real life, characters in the book appeared, disappeared, and then reemerged later. Various scenes were repeated, and arguments were interrupted and resumed later. The book's structure was circular, with no definable beginning, middle, or end. "The result," Pells observed, "was an expressionistic *tour de force* in which the Reader—no longer a passive recipient of information but a partner in a dialogue with the author—was compelled to see and think about the world in radically new ways" (p. 247).

Convinced that reality is pluralistic and that a documentarian should be aware of multiple perspectives in the search for truth, Agee experimented with novelistic techniques in his narrative. In fact, he disdained the traditional who, what, where, when, why, and how of journalism, citing its preoccupation with facts rather than truth: "Journalism can within its own limits be 'good' or 'bad,' 'true' or 'false,' but it is not the nature of journalism even to approach any less relative degree of truth" (Agee, 1941, p. 234). Instead, by calling upon the fiction writer's tools of imagery, descriptive narration, and multiple frames of reference, Agee sought a larger truth not evident in the mere compilation of facts. Like Wilson, Anderson, and Dreiser, Agee's goal was to come to terms with reality; however, Agee's experimentation with narrative form to achieve that goal was by far the boldest.

For Agee, the language of reality had the creative resonance of music or poetry. He said the works of most naturalistic writers failed on this level by offering detailed descriptions of people and places in language incapable of placing value on what had been discovered. Thus, this language of reality had the capacity of liberating individuals and their settings from their stereotypical roles as societal symbols and metaphors. Agee, of course, examined the societal implications of the plight of the sharecroppers, but he strove to convey the impact of the Depression on individual tenant farmers. He was not interested in depicting the sharecroppers of the Thirties as a social category, or even in labeling them as victims. Instead, by fusing journalism with art—by combining Wilson, Anderson, and Dreiser's fascination with the gathering of social facts with the novelist's experiments with ways of perceiving reality—Agee paid homage to the resiliency of the human spirit in a decade of social disorder.

Interpretations of Depression-Era America

After thousands of miles of travel, extensive use of firsthand observation, and countless conversations with the common people of the Thirties, the documentary writers encountered a wide range of reactions to the Depression. They found bitterness, pride, loneliness, desperation, determination, and a large amount of guilt. Throughout it all, however, the writers found the will to survive to be the common denominator of the Depression experience. Little energy was spent on complaining or fatalistic emotions; it took all of one's energy simply to stay alive. Many of the people interviewed by the documentarians appeared emotionally calloused to the degradation of their poor living conditions. But apathy was far from the case; instead, survival was a day-to-day proposition, with people living from meal to meal rather than concerning themselves with the possibilities of upward mobility.

Wilson, Anderson, Dreiser, and Agee encountered this American propensity for survival, but their interpretations of the Depression experience ran much deeper. In their travels, they employed similar documentary techniques in recording the physical, emotional, and economic impact of the Depression on the average person. However, upon analyzing the information they found, their sense of America in the Thirties took one of two turns: a Marxist, structural perspective or a triumph-of-individualism approach.

For Wilson, his travels revealed an America crumbling beneath the weight of capitalist contradictions. The problem to him did not result from moral or spiritual laziness in the people, but was the inevitable result of a flawed social and economic structure. Utilizing a Marxist, structural analysis of the Depression experience, Wilson cited overproduction, underconsumption, and rampant unemployment as the price that was paid for extolling the virtues of excessive competition. For Wilson, a *laissez-faire*, capitalist system placed the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a very few people. He added: "And we have the final supreme contradiction of a system which can no longer be run at all except in a strongly centralized fashion and for the benefit of everybody, in the possession of private individuals who try to use it for their own enrichment. Competition produced the great organism and now the organism cannot survive without killing competition" (Wilson, 1932, p. 298).

Since World War I, Wilson observed, the United States had immersed itself in mass production and "the game of money-making." The result was a people who had lost sight of the humanistic goals of America:

What we had lost, it seemed, was not merely our way in the economic jungle but our conviction of the value of what we were doing. Money-making and the kind of advantages which a money-making society supplies for money to buy are not enough to satisfy humanity—neither is a social system like our own where everyone is out for himself and devil take the hindmost, with no common purpose and little culture to give life stability and sense (pp. 300–301).

Although Wilson's reportage recorded a general collapse of morale due to the deflation of capitalist ideals, he found many Depression-era Americans clinging to a bourgeois ideology. Still, Wilson expressed hope that the economic emergency of the Thirties would result in a proletarian revolt. The longer hard times continued, he noted, the greater the likelihood of class conflict. Ultimately, the America that unfolded before Wilson was one of Marxist inevitability, with proletarian revolt the catalyst for change. The irony of Wilson's perception of Depression-torn America was that conditions would not improve until they had worsened (pp. 309–311).

To make sense of the America he had discovered in his travels, Dreiser also used a Marxist, structural approach by labeling "decadent" capitalism as the cancer crippling the nation. Like Wilson, Dreiser suggested collectivist solutions to alleviate the maldistribution of wealth and power. "The rich are too rich; the poor are too poor," Dreiser wrote. "And the hour has come when some form of equitable sharing in the means of living—shall not only have to be considered but wisely and truly enforced" (Dreiser, 1931, p. 84).

Dreiser emerged from his cross-country travels convinced that capitalism was a failure. "I mean by that that equity of consumption does not exist here," he said. "America can produce but is unable, for want of money, to buy what it makes. In other words, the people create a wealth which in the field of consumption is denied them" (p. 408). Thus, corporations made large profits by selling goods at high

prices to the small number of people who could afford such purchases. This deprivation of the worker equated with "grinding down the masses to benefit the rich" (p. 409).

The America that Dreiser found was ruled by a Wall Street oligarchy that conducted business by force. The people he encountered had produced and produced for big business, and when the bottom fell out of the economy, they were discarded because their material worth had diminished. In an America that worshipped capitalism and excessive competition, Dreiser emphasized, "money... has always been ... used lawlessly to force the other fellow to do or not to do such things as meant either profit or loss to the one with the most money" (p. 50).

Whereas Wilson and Dreiser contended that individualism was stifled in the Thirties by big business interests, Anderson maintained that individualism flourished during the Depression in rural America. In his travels, Anderson found people who were meeting the demands and sacrifices of the Depression in highly individualistic ways. He did not view them as victims, nor as pawns in the hands of greedy corporate America. Instead, Anderson found Americans coping with social disorder in ways that retained basic human dignity and expressed individuality. Amidst the poverty and desperation, Anderson documented a pervasive American pride and willingness to try to rise above the squalor.

For Anderson, his documentaries stood as a reaffirmation of individualism in time of national crisis. He devoted a number of pages to the eccentricities of small-town residents, reveling in their deviation from the norm. For example, there was Henry Horner, a 45-year-old widower who lost all of his money in a chick food business venture. "Now Henry dresses shabbily and has let his hair grow long," Anderson wrote. "He carries a heavy cane and as he goes through the streets of the town boys crow at him. They imitate the cackle of hens that have been at the business of laying eggs and the clarion cry of the rooster. Henry grows violently angry. He waves his cane about, he swears, he pursues the boys furiously but never catches them" (Anderson, 1940, p. 86).

Then there was the mysterious woman who came to a small town, rented a house on a quiet street, and kept to herself, making no acquaintances. The shades of her house always were drawn, and Anderson said that the town "is convinced that she is a wicked sinful

woman." Rumors about the woman abounded, with one story connecting her with a gang of robbers. Another rumor said she was being kept by a rich man who lived in another city. "To the young boys of the town," Anderson noted, "she has become a symbol of something strange and enticing, out of some mysterious world of sin. It is said that in her house there are luxurious carpets and expensive furniture, that she wears jewels that have cost thousands of dollars. The woman stays for a time and then disappears as mysteriously as she came. She also remains in the town's imagination a figure of romance" (p. 87).

Unlike Wilson and Dreiser, Anderson remained optimistic about the America he discovered. Not only was American individualism able to survive in the social and economic wreckage, but the catastrophe, from Anderson's perspective, had strengthened a sense of community in rural America. Individualism was highly valued in the small towns, but not, Anderson pointed out, at the expense of others. He illustrated this sense of maintaining community order and dignity in a discussion about what it took to survive a long, harsh winter during the Depression:

Winter is, in a curious way, the test time for the people of the towns, the test of men's and women's ability to live together. There is that brother-in-law with whom you had a quarrel. You and he made it up. You have quarrels with other men, even sometimes with the wife. You have to forget it, start over again. It is the only way you can make life livable when you must go on with the same people day after day, during the long winter months (p. 73).

Ultimately, Anderson abhorred the living conditions he discovered in rural America of the Thirties, but he was heartened to find both a commitment to individualistic expression and a sense of community worth. Just as Anderson found small-town Americans to be born romanticists, so too did his reportage reflect a romantic interpretation of America.

Agee's interpretation of the Depression experience also underscored the striving for individualistic expression and maintaining human dignity in time of crisis, but avoided Anderson's

romantic notions of individualism. Agee was more concerned with examining the day-to-day lives of real people who had been left out of the American Dream. Despite his camera-like approach to reportage and reliance on the objective gathering of social facts, there was a quiet rage in Agee's narration. By living with and closely observing the Alabama sharecroppers of his book, Agee came to understand more than the sorrow and dignity of those living on the fringes of the American Dream; he also recognized that the American malady of the twentieth century was complacency. Agee wrote: "...the persistence of what once was insufficiently described as Pride, a mortal sin, can quite as coldly and inevitably damage and wreck the human race as the most total power of 'Greed' ever could: and that socially anyhow, the most dangerous form of pride is neither arrogance nor humility, but its mild, common denominator form, complacency" (Agee, 1941, pp. 249-250).

As a humanist striving to bring a flesh and blood realism to the printed page, Agee recognized the need for the writer to avoid the very complacency plaguing the country. "I 'conceive of' my work as an effort to be faithful to my perceptions," he said. "I am not interested in expressing myself as an individual except when it is suggested that I express someone else." Agee concluded that his responsibilities as a writer and as a human being were identical (p. 357).

Conclusion

Frustrated by what they perceived to be the inadequacies of fiction in analyzing the Depression experience, Edmund Wilson, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and James Agee experimented with book-length documentary journalism. In their search for the social fact, they traveled extensively across the country in the Thirties, observing and talking with common people who lived on the outskirts of the American Dream. The documentarians believed that the most effective way to learn about the Depression was to talk with the factory workers, the unemployed, the farmers, the union members on strike, and the hitchhikers in search of work. In documenting social disorder, Wilson, Anderson, Dreiser, and Agee employed a rigorous objectivity that hinged on detailed descriptions of people, places, and events. If the subject at hand was impoverished living conditions, strike violence, or suicide attempts, the writers

described at length what transpired, but generally without interpretation or opinion. Instead, the goal was for the readers to draw their own conclusions about the significance of the social fact. The artists tried to capture life as it unfolded, utilizing camera-like techniques of observation and description. Extensive conversations also were re-created, letting the subject's words speak for themselves without embellishment from the writers. Although a first-person narrative was used in various passages of their books, Wilson, Anderson, Dreiser, and Agee usually strove for a neutrality that they believed would prevent a skewing of reality. In today's context, notions of "pure" objectivity have come under sharp scrutiny, with a number of sociologists viewing journalists as participants in the social construction of reality. From the sociological perspective, reporters order reality through subjective experience or societal preconceptions (Schudson, 1978; Altheide, 1976).

The travel motif evident in most of these documentaries reflected the writers' quest for the meaning and significance of the Depression years. The journey undertaken in the gathering of social facts—the lonely highways traveled, the hitchhikers picked up, the cafes frequented during rest stops, the drives into hill country and coal mining regions—became a symbolic narrative element. Wilson, Anderson, Dreiser, and Agee searched for an America that no longer made sense to them. Their hope was to regain an understanding of the American experience by viewing it from the perspective of the common person. Wilson and Dreiser found a country ravaged by excessive capitalism and uncontrolled competitiveness. Anderson's reportage, however, lauded individualism and human dignity in a time of social upheaval. Agee, meanwhile, found complacency to human suffering at the heart of the demise of the American Dream.

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Truth as Disease: Psychosis and Knowing in *The Prisoner* and *The X-Files*

I. Of truth and paranoia

A problem arises when talking about any popular phenomenon, in this case television, in terms of a psychoanalytic approach. How is it possible to avoid speaking of the characters as real people and keep from analyzing the scripted action as one would the problem of an analysand seeking to understand her/his symptom in light of what Lacan teaches of the unconscious? One answer is that it isn't possible. That is to say, if we insist on considering the television series as an entity embodying a complex of apparent (and hidden) meanings that seem to be produced by certain drives (read ratings), the trap is already sprung. But there may be another way. If we understand the popularity of some television series as a response to certain propensities of its audience, if we consider the show as fantasy, then the series becomes a sort of template for the desire of the viewer. The focus shifts from show to audience, and to talk about the episodes says nothing about the writer or producer or composer or characters, but may suggest the discourse impressed on the viewing public (and its impact). This essay is not concerned with *The X-Files* and *The Prisoner* as individual products, but rather what the two tell us about ourselves, our alignment in a field of signifiers increasing with the growing number of channels.

II. Killer balloons, space aliens, and secret agent men

The X-Files concerns two FBI agents attempting to uncover the Cause that links a series of unexplained phenomenon such as killer viruses, crazed postal workers, secret government eugenics programs, satanic cults, and the Amish. The main protagonist of the show is Agent Fox Mulder, a rebellious young agent driven by an unshakable belief in extraterrestrial manipulation of the American Government and possibly all human affairs. In Mulder's office there is a poster claiming "I Want to Believe," an irony in that he seems to be in most every sense a true believer. The show's opening credits finish with

the slogan "The Truth is Out There." This is Mulder's credo. Truth is something available, but hidden by forces conspiring to keep him (and us) in the dark.

The nameless protagonist of *The Prisoner* is incarcerated in a government-run installation called The Village on a remote island. Although little is revealed about the protagonist, it is clear that he had been a top-level agent for an unnamed British intelligence agency and that he resigned for unknown reasons. Unlike *The X-Files*, the government is in the position of investigator. At the beginning of each episode, the government's representative, designated Number Two, says "We want information." Through various elaborate manipulations (hypnosis, chemicals, spies, etc.), they attempt to discover the Cause of his leaving, the Truth he must possess about which they know nothing. The Prisoner, too, has a question—"Who is Number One?"—the invisible controller and the initiator of his incarceration and tortures, but the episodes focus on his attempts to escape, not on his attempts to answer this question. Another key difference between the two shows is that nothing in *The Prisoner* is overtly supernatural, but the show does rely on pseudo-scientific technology in which resurrection is possible and balloons can kill.

Although the shows are separated by almost twenty years and their apparent structures seem opposed, they were and continue to be popular. Both began with a relatively small cult following which then grew to merchandising status. Paranoia about government practices prevalent since the sixties may contribute to their popularity. It is interesting to note that *The Prisoner* was aired in the U.S. just prior to Watergate and that there are constant echoes of the scandal in *The X-Files* episodes (including an informant nostalgically named Deep Throat). It is also interesting that the shows were apparently based on fact—Patrick McGoohan based *The Prisoner* on an account of an island where retired British spies were held, and there are supposedly real FBI X-Files devoted to UFO sightings and supernatural occurrences. Whether or not either exists or has existed, both series work with ideas present in popular discourse. Despite apparent structural difference in the shows, their appeal to viewers is quite similar, and this is our focus.

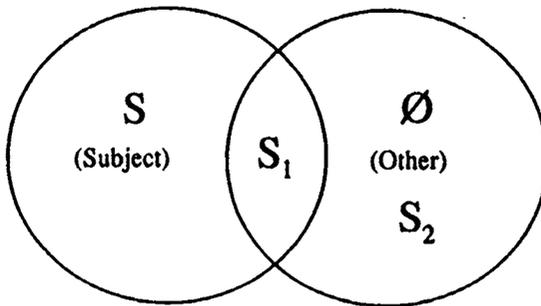
III. The unconscious as we use it— master signifiers and master plans

Lacan defines the unconscious as the discourse of the Other as early as the "Agency of the Letter" essay, and teaches it at greater length in Seminar XI. This unconscious, far from being submerged somewhere in the subject, is the surface through which we experience the Imaginary and Symbolic orders as enjoyment (*jouissance*). The subject's mental state depends on her/his relationship with the Other (as the set of all signifiers), and the overall structure of this relation is something like language. In the case of television, we can consider the medium itself as Other, in the sense that it embodies a rather vast set of signifiers in which we may (not) identify some master signifier for ourselves. But as Other, it must also be viewed as barred, insofar as we do not find ourselves in the position as objects of the *jouissance* of television (shows), that is, television does not desire something from us, but we desire something from the Other as evidence of our connection with that which is more than us (the object *a*). Simply, the commonplace of identification works in the sense that the protagonist of a certain (or any) program may function as the subject's representative in the construct of signifiers.

With regards to the Other, we find two possible positions with which the subject may be aligned—alienation and separation. In the former, the self is alienated from itself as a signifier. The alienated subject chooses a signifier with which to identify (S_1 of Figure 1). Usually, the subject is drawn barred, and the identifying signifier (S_1) functions as the master signifier, as a means with which to align her/himself with regards to the field of the Other. Since we have discussed the Other as barred, the subject remains free to desire, but here chooses a representative from within the barred field to do the desiring. This representative (the S_1 of Figure 1), however, may assume the position of a barred subject, in that the protagonist is a creature of the script. We may not know what will happen next, but we are reasonably certain that our representative will not die. The subject in separation is in a less clearly drawn position, in that (s)he realizes a lack in the Other (see Figure 2) with which to identify. The lack is written as object *a*. This object functions as a place-holder for that for which there is no signifier, for what does not exist in the Real. We find the separated subject where (s)he realizes that something is missing, whether it is the elusive

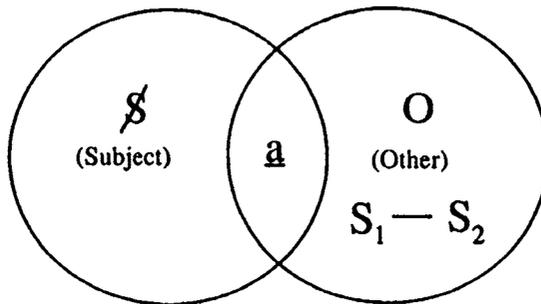
"reason for resigning," the possibility of government cover-ups, or whether the light I saw last night might really be evidence of extraterrestrial visitation.

Figure 1



Alienation

Figure 2



Separation

There is another possible relationship to the Other, that of the psychotic. For our purposes, psychosis may be seen in a limited sense as an insistence on Oneness. With the psychotic, everything is part and parcel of a single unit which explains the purpose of the positioning of the parts. In paranoia, this becomes evident when some *happening* cannot be sufficiently explained outside of a Master Plan. The psychotic sees everything in terms of the One Truth about the universe, to which (s)he may (not) be privy. It is this insistence on its place in the One of every phenomenon that is the hallmark of the psychotic position in regards to the Other. The Other is subsumed by the psychotic subject ("I am It") or the subject identifies her/himself as holding a place in the Other ("I am lost inside It").

IV. Names, faces, answers, and other missing things or we hear what we're told

We have said that it would not be fruitful to psychoanalyze the characters of a given series. However, it is our hope that certain structures apparent only in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis will explain the appeal of these shows to the viewing public. With this in mind, we may look at the episodes as discourse models illuminated by a psychoanalytic approach.

Agent Mulder and the unnamed Prisoner, both seem to be in the position of separation; they recognize that something is missing in the Other. Agent Mulder refuses to accept the limits imposed on him by his superiors; he is convinced that there is a Truth beyond that to which he is privy. His trauma seems to be the abduction of his sister. He is convinced that as a child he witnessed her kidnapping by Otherworldly Agents for reasons he has dedicated himself to discover. This reason, the missing Cause or Truth behind the abduction, is the object *a*. Likewise, the Prisoner, who refuses the designation Number Six by saying, "I am not an number; I am a free man" (in effect, refuses a signifier with which to orient himself in terms of the Other), is looking for the Cause, or the performer, of his torture, the elusive Number One.

The Truth that each character seeks is concealed from them through government conspiracy. Agent Mulder is denied access to certain files and has evidence taken from him that indicates government involvement in what ultimately could lead to the Truth behind his sister's absence. This motif is evident in the opening

credits when the words "Government Denies Knowledge" flicker on the screen in the style of newspaper headlines. The Prisoner wants to know who Number One is (and wants to discover the one way to escape him). The intricate plots of the government not only indicate attempts at discovering the reason for his resignation, but actively keep him from escaping to freedom. In several episodes, it seems as if he has escaped from The Village—in one he can even hear Big Ben in the background—but in the end he is still on the island and any indications otherwise are part of the particular trick of the episode (the chimes are from a tape recording).

In these programs we also find evidence of psychosis. In "Fallout," the last episode of *The Prisoner*, the protagonist is lauded for his individuality, his refusal to give in to the demands of the Other. He is asked by a faceless, robed jury to take the position of Number One. After seeming to rebel against this final attempt at reappropriation, he forces his way into the secret office of Number One where he finds another masked figure monogrammed with a "1." He unmask his enemy, only to discover his own mad countenance. We may consider this as a psychotic break—the Prisoner recognizes himself in the Other, that he is and has always been a part of the Other, that he *is* the Other. We find more evidence of this in the closing scenes when he approaches his apartment door, apparently free of the island, with the mute butler who always served Number Two. The door opens automatically, as did all of the doors on the island, and we see the number on the door is One.

Unlike *The Prisoner*, *The X-Files* is a series in progress and so we can only speculate as to how it might end. However, there is evidence that it could end similarly, with the psychotic break of Agent Mulder. In an episode concerning government involvement with a particularly virulent virus, Mulder says "I won't be a party to it," to which Cancer Man, the enigmatic representative of an organization which possibly controls the government responds, "You're a party to it already." Later in that same episode, Mulder explains to his partner, ". . . Even if we succeeded in finding the [T]ruth, we'd be discredited as part of it." This statement, coupled with the fact that he is actually an agent of the government himself, indicates that if he were to discover the Truth, the one Cause for all of the X-File cases, he would be subsumed by the Cause, by the Other, by an even greater virus.

V. TV -- Use only as directed

These series in particular illustrate a discourse we might consider structured like the position of separation. But why is this structure appealing to the viewer? An answer might be that, though we find the shows illustrating the separated (and possibly psychotic) subject, their very presentation solidifies the relationship of alienation for the viewer. That is, the shows present possible signifiers with which the viewer may align her/himself in regards to the Other. Thus, the viewer has a representative to be frightened, paranoid, or in danger for her/him. *I don't have to be afraid of the government because television is watching it for me.* We have only to look at the recent proliferation of pseudo-documentary programs discussing UFOs, paranormal activity, and government cover-ups (*Unsolved Mysteries, Sightings, Encounters, etc.*) to see evidence of television asking our most difficult questions for us. Television also gives us a name and image for that which we do not know (space aliens and secret agents). The marketing of paranoia is the marketing of these signifiers, which give the viewers a sense of an inherent order to everything. In other words, we have a signifier for whatever we need.

That the viewer remains in alienation is helpful, because the subject in alienation can be relatively certain that, as in *The X-Files*, "The Truth [the Other] is *out there*," which is good since if it were here, there is the danger of psychosis, a conflagration of subject and Other. We might look at the relationship as that of transference, in that the viewer places the television in the position of knowing (of Other), just as the analysand does the analyst in successful analysis. Even the same problems arise. In analysis, the analysand may begin to enjoy this relationship (it becomes an object of *jouissance*, and so a symptom). Certainly, we know that it is possible to become addicted to watching television, and for much the same reason.

However, this is not to say that television *qua* television forecloses the possibility of psychosis. It may in the position of alienation, in that it keeps the Other separate and the viewer desiring. It seems possible, though, for the viewer to be in separation, for her/him to conceive of something missing in the set of signifiers that television provides. In this sense, it is the realization of the *beyond-the-script* with which the viewer (subject) becomes attached,

and this understanding functions as the object of desire for the subject (object *a*). It is in this position that we find fantasy approaching symptom. We may say that the Other will not give the subject the answer desired (the object *a*). This is fine; the object *a* is, by definition, missing from the Other. However, psychosis may occur when the subject decides the Other cannot relinquish the object because the Other doesn't exist as something distinct from her/him. The viewer might decide that the set of all signifiers simply refers to some giant Truth in which (s)he believes. The Truth is no longer separate, but here around and in the subject. The Other is no longer barred; it actively desires of the subject. A clear example is that of schizophrenia, where the subject somehow receives messages from the television (or from alien broadcast, God, or both).

The Prisoner and *The X-Files* describe a discourse of psychosis, but this structure may preclude psychosis for some viewers. Of course, state of mind cannot be determined simply by how we watch television, but viewing habits may suggest structures inherent in a given society. Television provides signifiers with which we may align and ensures a distinct Other. The possibility of Ultimate Truth, the virus which breeds psychosis, is foreclosed as there are so many truths from which to choose.

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From Rapeman to Mother Superior: The New Woman in Japanese Television Drama

No doubt, television has been used as a high-tech henchman of hegemonies as some writers have suggested (Christian-Smith; Gramsci). However, if not unduly regulated by the dominant groups, television is also a mirror of the tastes and a champion of the aspirations of average people. This latter role can be seen in Japanese television. For example, Sata and Hirahara have presented a strong case arguing that the history of Japanese television is a chronicle of the mass psychology and social conditions of post-war Japan, first reflecting the anger and frustration of the people immediately after the War (1950s), next the dark side of rising industrialization (1960s), and finally the preoccupation with foreign fads and fables in the 1980s, when the country had reached the status of an international economic power.

We may extend Sata and Hirahara's thesis into the 1990s. The present decade has found Japan at the threshold of a new era in gender consciousness. Its young women are defying the tradition of early marriage, causing a "marriage squeeze" for men (Iwao; Hong). They are also entering college in unprecedentedly large numbers, making them more educated than their male counterparts in the same age cohort (Kokusei-Sha Corporation 553). However, this is not to say Japan has achieved a modern womanhood. On the contrary, among the world's most advanced economies, Japan is the slowest in modernizing its relationship between the sexes. As Sumiko Iwao, author of *The Japanese Woman*, has pointed out, many Japanese men today "continue to view women as not fully adult" (18).

The old pattern has been sustained, in part, by the popular culture of the present, which has produced a spate of materials that are blatantly sexist in nature. It runs the gamut from the traditional pornographic "manga" (comics) to the high-tech CD-ROM sex. *Rapeman* (original English title), a high drawing movie/video, is a prime example. In spite of its superior cast and production, it is a

work that has been found to be "queasy" even by admirers of Japanese popular culture (Schodt 9). Many Japanese men, however, must have found it quite entertaining; it is so popular that a sixth installment was released in 1995.

Rapeman is a Superman/Batman-like crime fighter in modern day Tokyo who uses rape as an instrument of justice. In everyday life, he is a Clark Kent lookalike both in appearance and in mannerisms; in uniform, he is Batmanesque without the cape and the pointed ears. However, unlike his counterparts in Metropolis and Gotham City, the Tokyo avenger never beats up the villains with knockout punches -- if they are women. He rapes them. And the show always finds an abundance of female evildoers in the capital of Japan.

Having said that, there is also a body of important works in recent years, especially on television, that are inspirational and empowering for women. These shows cast women in refreshingly different roles, shattering the traditional boundaries. Perhaps, this is a sign of changing times. Even in *Rapeman*, there was a hint of new sensitivity in a recent episode (*Rapeman V* 1995). Rapeman showed signs of repulsion towards his work. In the closing scene, after dispensing justice in the usual way -- sexually assaulting a serial rapist who had impersonated him -- Rapeman looked disgusted and had tears in his eyes. Perhaps, the irony of raping a rapist caused him to reflect on his own actions. Incidentally, the rapist was a woman wearing a dildo. Putting *Rapeman* and its genre aside, let's look at some of the works that represent the more enlightened side of Japanese popular culture -- women's dramas on television. All the teleplays cited here were shown in the 1990s.

Women Understand Women

The Law Office of Seven Women (original English title) is a long-running television series, as well as the name of the law firm in the show. From the very beginning, this program made it clear that it is a feminist story. The first episode dealt with the founding of the firm, and provided the rationale for having an all-female law office. (Actually, there are two males: the father of the founder, who is a retired lawyer, and a young man, who is the office boy running errands for the lawyers.)

In the premier episode, Natsuko, the founding partner, explained why she recruits only women lawyers: "We want to help women, and only women can really understand women." The themes of "women issues" and "women understand women" are sustained throughout the series. A good example of this is an episode involving a custody battle between a birth-mother and a woman who legally adopted her child. The birth-mother recanted and stole the child back. This case caused deep dissention in the law firm and almost broke the group up as the lawyers took sides for one mother or the other. Through the infighting among the lawyers over the relative merits of the birth-parent and the step-parent, the issues of motherhood and adoption were played out from both the legal and personal points of view. In the end, two of the lawyers, one who was adopted and the other who had given up her own child for adoption, were able to change the mind of the group. United once again, the lawyers persuaded the birth-mother to return the child to the step-mother in the best interest of the child.

While the series focuses on issues that are of special interest to women, it also provides a forceful image of women in a profession that is dominated by men. The plots sometimes go to the extreme in dramatizing the special advantage of women lawyers, as in a number of episodes where they accepted the words of female clients without further corroborations on the ground that "women understand women."

Role Model and Reversal

One of the most common non-traditional roles for women on Japanese television in the '90s is in police work. Two of the best police stories are *Murder on Snow Mountain* (Dai Yuki-Yama Satsujin Jiken) and *Murder in Ose Marsh Land* (Ose Shitsugen Satsujin Jiken). In both shows, Ito Kazue, a popular star on Japanese television, plays Midori, a rookie detective in Asahikawa. While the main thrusts of both programs deal with complex murder cases, they also remind the audience that Midori is a role model. Shortly after each show starts, the viewers are told that Midori is 25-year-old, single, does not have boyfriends, and is the only woman detective in Hokkaido, the prefecture where Asahikawa is located. In *Murder in Ose Marsh Land*, Midori also gives herself encouragement in a tough situation by saying, "I must not fail because I am the first woman detective in Hokkaido."

Another police series, *Lullaby Detective* (Rarabi Keiji) has a much lighter touch. It features an assistant section chief in a police department who is a woman. Even though she has the strong backing of her male superior, she has to deal with the adolescent sexist pranks and the run-of-the-mill locker-room talk of her male subordinates. However, at the conclusion of every episode, she always gains the respect and admiration of her detractors.

A number of other programs also feature women in non-traditional roles. *News Woman Tachibana Kiyoko* is a 10-part mini-series featuring a TV anchorwoman's courage and determination in exposing political corruption, in spite of her father's involvement in the scandal. *Lemon Color Clinic* (Shinsatsu-shitsu Remon Iro) is a light-hearted situation comedy focusing on a company that is run by a woman. She ordered the *bucho* (department head) and the *kacho* (section chief) to find a gay doctor for the in-house medical clinic. Both the *bucho* and *kacho* are men and are portrayed as clumsy and incompetent. In explaining her reasons to the *bucho*, the president of the company proclaimed, "Romance is the number one enemy of career women." She believed a gay doctor would prevent possible office dalliance in her almost exclusively female company. Obviously, she did not consider her *bucho* and *kacho* to be "manly" enough to cause trouble.

Career Women (Onna Tachi no Tenkin) tells the stories of three women in the high powered business world. In spite of some initial conflicts with their private lives -- boyfriend, husband and ex-husband problems -- they achieved professional success without sacrificing their personal relationships. In a role reversal, one of the women, a top executive of a large real estate development company, was betrayed by one of her male subordinates. He stole her computer file for a rival company, while charming her with his culinary skills in her apartment.

The most unorthodox television drama of the '90s, however, is *Woman Prosecutor Shimo Yuko* (Onna Kensatsu Shimo Yuko). This show makes reversal of the traditional gender roles the centerpiece. The heroine is married to a Buddhist monk (permissible and common in Japanese Buddhism), a mild mannered, boyish type of man who stays at home, dresses in a kimono, prays at the shrine and takes care of their six-grader son, while she works in a modern government office building and always dresses in contemporary western business

attire. Occasionally, the husband also goes bargain hunting in the market. The harmonious coexistence of modern and traditional, both in adornment and in family roles, is a major attraction of this show. The couple lives happily, showing that there is nothing unusual about their role arrangement.

Even in *Rapeman*, women are cast in unconventional roles, such as an evil doctor, a master criminal, and a corrupted cop. These are also powerful roles, powerful enough to inflict great harm on people, thus inviting the wrath of the avenger.

Strength of the Female Bond

The Famous Deductive Detective Ama San (Ama San Tantei Mei-Suiri) would be a humdrum who-done-it series if it were not that the main character is an Ama San (Buddhist nun) played by the veteran actress Hama Yuko, who also stars in a much stronger crime series *Woman Medical Examiner Muro Akiko* (Onna Kansatsu-i Muro Akiko). Both in physical appearance and in TV persona, Hama Yuko bears close resemblance to Angela Lansbury of *Murder She Wrote*. In the Ama San story, Hama Yuko plays the Mother Superior in a Buddhist temple, who is fond of reading novels written by one of Japan's best known mystery authors, Edogawa Ranbo. The abbess is middle aged, beautiful and brilliant. Through her meticulous deductive reasoning and diligent investigative work, she is able to help the local police in catching the real culprits and exonerating those mistakenly believed to be guilty.

In a way, Mother Superior epitomizes the new Japanese women portrayed in many of the recent dramas. She has the intellect of Akechi Kogoro (Sherlock Holmes' counterpart in Edogawa's novels) and the virtues of an abbess. Mother Superior and her three followers, two ordained nuns and one novitiate, share an immutable bond. Their complete trust in and loyalty to each other are never shaken regardless of the circumstances. The abbess also is immune to romantic impulses, a trait valued in the new Japanese women on television. While her followers are at times distracted by fleeting flirtations and worldly temptations, the abbess never strays. In spite of the fact that she is avidly courted by her detective partner from the police department and by her young, handsome personal physician, Ama San never succumbs to their overtures.

There are other teleplays that are more subtle, but nevertheless strike a new path in redefining women's role. An interesting example is the *3 OL on the Road* (OL San-Nin Ryoko) and *The New 3 OL*. Both series have identical formats but the new one has a younger cast. Both shows deal with murders accidentally discovered by three women while on vacations in some exotic places in Japan and abroad, but the message that comes across most forcefully is the strong bond of friendship among the women. In each episode, at least one of the "OLs" ("office ladies" in Japanese) would be touched by romance with men whom they met on their trips. However, all the men inevitably turned out to be scoundrels. In the end, it is the bond among the women that stands up as true.

By using a travel format, the show also undermines another old social norm. Traditionally, women in Japan were expected to stay home. This norm can be seen in the way married women are addressed in polite conversations. In her book, *Womansword*, Kittredge Cherry explains, when a Japanese addresses another person's wife, the term "Okusan" is used, which can be literally translated as "Mrs. Interior;" men call their own wives, "Kanai" which means "the one who stays home." By putting the three "OLs" on the road, the show spotlights a new path for women. In fact, one of the "OLs," technically speaking, is not an "office lady", a term usually applied to low-level female employees in Japan. The woman is a project engineer in a large construction company, a rare occupation for women in Japan and anywhere.

Return to Matriarchy

"You are already rich. Why do you want more?" asked her lover-confidant. To which Itodai replied, "I really don't know. I guess it is because I'm from a family where for generations women have the money and the power to control men." This is the motive that sets in motion the sibling rivalry which is the main storyline of a 60-episode TV show, *A Family of Matrilineal Descent* (Jokei Kazoku) in 1992.

While the series, dwelling on the fighting over family fortunes among three daughters after the death of their parents, does not showcase women in the best light, it does remind the viewers of Japan's matrilineal past and dramatizes a little publicized form of traditional marriage, *muko-tori kekkon* (literally translated as son-

in-law taking marriage). In a *muko-tori* marriage, still practiced by some in contemporary Japan, a man is married into his wife's household and their children bear the mother's surname.

Two other TV shows also play on the theme of matrilineality. In *Murders in Abundance* (Satsujin ga Ippai), a string of murders is solved with the help of a precocious teenage girl, who proudly tells people that her family has a tradition of female superiority and of marrying men only for reproductive purposes. She has little respect for her womanizing absentee father who is large in body (being a former Olympic hopeful), but insignificant in everything else. *W's Tragedy* (W no Higeiki) is a story of weak men in a proud family, the *Wa Ji* clan. The clan's patriarch was murdered at his birthday party and his grandniece took the blame. In the end, the aunt and the niece showed their unity and declared that they, the women of the clan, would re-establish the good name of *Wa Ji*.

According to Iwao, from ancient times to the middle of the 14th century (Muromachi era), Japan was a matrilineal society where the average women had considerable freedom and power. It is believed that the importance of women in former times was related to Japan's indigenous religion, Shintoism, which holds that the forerunner of all Japanese people is a female deity, the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami. These shows, therefore, are raising the consciousness of the audience to its matriarchal past.

Concluding Remarks

The television dramas examined in this article project an image of Japanese women that is independent and self-confident. They work or act in a capacity that is traditionally in the domain of men. They are bright and talented in what they do. Moreover, they are not afraid to stand up to male authorities. Almost all the women are single (even in *A Family of Matrilineal Descent*, only the second daughter is married). Most of the women on these shows put career and personal fulfillment over marriage. Some also put female friendship over romance with men.

It is noteworthy that a parallel portrayal of characters and lifestyles has been observed on American television. In a study of professional women on TV (such as, Angela Bauer on "Who's the Boss?", DeeDee McCall on "Hunter," and Laura Holt on "Remington Steele"), the researchers remarked that "These women are not

consumed with domestic interests; rather, they concentrate on their careers and are often shown problem solving and decision making ... Often the man is portrayed as an unsophisticated clod or even a dangerous person (Reep and Dam 1987: 380-381). All the women, like their Japanese counterparts, are also single.

However, this trend does not mean that the new Japanese women on television reject all traditional feminine traits. They are shown to be warm, caring, and understanding. (Again, even in *A Family of Matrilineal Descent*, the women are portrayed as having a tender loving side). It is interesting to note that a combination of new and old traits also has been observed in the heroines popular in American romance novels (Radway). Since the largest group of consumers for TV dramas in Japan and for romance novels in America are women, perhaps, there is a message here: In the transition to a new gender order, women across cultures share the same fantasies and aspirations --- gaining the advantages of men without losing the refinements of womanhood.

It is also important to point out that many of the screenplays mentioned in this article are either written by women or based on novels authored by women, such as Miyauchi Futako (*Career Women*), Natsuki Shizuko (*W's Tragedy* and *Woman Prosecutor Shimo Yuko*), Nakajima Suzuko (*Woman Medical Examiner Muro Akiko*), Shikamizu Akiko (*The Famous Deductive Detective Ama San*), and Yama Toyoko (*A Family of Matrilineal Descent*). It has been argued that one of the important signs of moving away from a patriarchal ideology is the rise of women writers (Kuhn). In Japan today, the signs are clear and encouraging. In spite of the fact that television does not necessarily reflect reality, we have good reason to be optimistic about the emergence of a new gender arrangement in Japan, as long as the medium helps to keep its viewers' aspirations alive.

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The author thanks Professor Kazuo Misumi of Kyushu University, Japan, for his comments and suggestions on this work.

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Born on the Fourth of July: A Reflection of Value Transformation In Vietnam Veterans

The Vietnam War was an epochal event in U.S. history, one which continues to haunt society today, more than twenty years after the last American troops returned home. Countless hours of television news broadcasts provided first hand accounts of U.S. casualties in Vietnam. But extensive coverage of the war presented in motion pictures was not always popular. Until the late 1970s, Vietnam War films were usually viewed by major studios as unprofitable and, therefore, were not widely produced. The exception to this trend was the 1968 film, *The Green Berets*, produced primarily as a public relations piece for the U.S. military, starring John Wayne.¹ More recently, however, Vietnam War films have portrayed the war differently. Films directed by Michael Cimino, Stanley Kubrick, Francis Ford Coppola and Oliver Stone have depicted the atrocities of war in ways previously ignored by other Vietnam War films. Their films deviated from the pro-war theme which dominated *The Green Berets*, and raised questions about the American military role in Vietnam. These alternative perspectives caused many Americans to examine the internal conflict they felt as a result of the war. Central to the discussion was the question: How and why do current Vietnam War films differ from earlier films in their depiction of the war? Specifically, critics have celebrated the "realism" of Vietnam created recently on screen by Ron Kovic and Oliver Stone.² This article examines Stone's work in *Born on the Fourth of July* to explore answers to the question of how popular culture forms enable American society to face national tragedies such as the Vietnam War. In addition, how do these films illustrate the struggle between competing value systems implicit in opponents or supporters of the war? To answer those questions, I examine the factors that discouraged production of Vietnam War films prior to the late 1970s,

highlight the important function these films serve, analyze the transformation of values which is depicted in *Born on the Fourth of July*, and finally, consider how the film uniquely reflects the value transformation of some Vietnam veterans for viewing audiences.

The Origin of Contemporary Vietnam War Films

John Wayne's 1968 film *The Green Berets* was designed to convince Americans that our soldiers were needed in Vietnam.³ Produced with the cooperation of the U.S. Defense Department, it depicted a distinctly partisan view of the war. The film's "mania for technology, complete with helicopters, gunships, napalm experts...carries echoes of the missile-gap space race and James Bond crazes," according to film analysts Al Auster and Leonard Quart.⁴ The hawkish approach illustrated U.S. military "might" which dominated early depictions of Vietnam. Following the release of *The Green Berets* the Vietnam War theme was avoided by the major studios, in part out of fear that such films would not sell. Peter McNerney explains the sentiments shared in Hollywood:

A war that traumatized and divided American society was not a logical topic for popular entertainment. How could films succeed which reminded audiences of military stalemate if not outright defeat, generated guilt about suffering inflicted on Vietnamese and Americans, or caused bandaged cultural wounds to bleed afresh?⁵

Americans became desensitized to the graphic violence of war during Vietnam as they viewed nightly television broadcasts of casualty reports. As the war progressed and American sentiment became more anti-war in nature, Hollywood studios hesitated to produce any films about such a controversial topic. The concern over box office success led Auster and Quart to conclude: "The war obviously was too much of a hot potato for an industry which knows that controversy and profits don't mix well."⁶ Beyond the sheer profit orientation of film production, a more fundamental explanation for ignoring Vietnam was posited by Lance Morrow: "During a long period in the 70's, the nation indulged in a remarkable exercise of recoil and denial and amnesia about Vietnam. Americans do not want

to hear about it, to think about it."⁷ Such moral dilemmas, however, are the very issue that must be faced in order to come to terms with the tragedy of Vietnam.

The self-imposed Hollywood quarantine on Vietnam War films was lifted in the late 1970s with the first wave of films which included *Coming Home*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Go Tell the Spartans*, all released in 1978. Francis Ford Coppola's epic film *Apocalypse Now*, released in 1979, is credited as one of the first films to force the unpleasantness of Vietnam upon the American public from the silver screen.⁸ Beginning in 1986, a second wave of films appeared, including *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Born on the Fourth of July*. American society was exposed to a darker, more critical picture of the war.

The Role of Film in American Society

Historically, the "stories" of a culture communicate the myths, or "public dreams" to others. Joseph Campbell suggests that myths are the material of life, which help provide a perspective on life's events.⁹ Campbell further explains that myths serve a sociological function, validating existing social orders. John Hellman concurs in his work, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*: "A myth is our explanation of history that can also serve as a compelling idea for our future."¹⁰ Hellman argues that Vietnam challenged Americans to reconcile the events of the war against the American myth which valued revolutionary ideals and visions of the New Frontier.

The fundamental values held by society are inherent in myths. Walter Fisher illustrates the values found in two perspectives of the American Dream.¹¹ Values of egalitarianism and brotherhood are contrasted with the values of achievement and personal success. The competing value systems within the American Dream are relevant in examining both Vietnam War films and American attitudes toward Vietnam.

In contemporary society, myths are commonly found in a visual medium -- film. Film "stories," like myths, serve the dual purpose of educating and entertaining viewing audiences.¹² In addition, popular films and American society are related by the reciprocal influence they have on one other. Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenz explain that films reflect the values and myths of the existing society. Film also "often dramatizes symptoms of

particular needs of an era," thus creating a social event that attracts society's attention.¹³ Society's attention to the "social event" known as Vietnam is illustrated by the box office success of Vietnam War films such as *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*. Films can also reinforce the changing values found in segments of society. While *The Green Berets* reinforced the pro-war sentiment which dominated the early Vietnam years, films such as *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Born on the Fourth of July* depicted a more critical view of the war, questioning the U.S. role in Southeast Asia.

Entertainment films produced in Hollywood illustrate the interdependent relationship between film and society. The film industry designs films both to reflect the culture and to sell tickets to mass audiences, thus creating a social event. According to Dan Nimmo and James Combs, "The success of a movie depends on the meshing of the fantasy of a small group of people (the moviemakers) with the fantasies of sometimes hundreds of thousands of people (the audience)."¹⁴ However, the purpose of Vietnam War films extends beyond the singular role of ticket sales. These films are significant because they assist Americans in resolving their feelings about the war.

The American Dream was shattered by the events that surrounded U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Gilbert Adair explains the turmoil created when: "the nation found itself denied the reassurance of a broad consensus of opinion; decisions of urgent matter were openly, violently contested--in the streets, on campus."¹⁵ The turbulent 1960s spawned dramatic social changes and led Americans to question many traditional beliefs they had previously taken for granted. Anti-war protests increased, and Americans began to lose confidence in their government. President Richard Nixon's resignation, as a result of the Watergate scandal, further eroded public faith in the American system. Vietnam left America a divided nation incapable of resolving the inner conflict created by the war. James Wilson described America in the early 1980s: "Vietnam remains an open sore on the American national consciousness, a wound that has not healed because Americans have failed to acknowledge it, let alone heal it."¹⁶

Rushing and Frenz argue that social problems may be resolved more effectively through film than through speeches or actions of public officials, because film provides a more "tangible structure to social phenomena."¹⁷ Oliver Stone uses film to call

attention to the dark, brutal side of the war in Vietnam. Stone has been described as "adept at embodying significant issues in the form of slick, briskly paced narratives."¹⁸ *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* serve as grim reminders of Vietnam.

As a director, Stone has been successful in drawing attention to the atrocities of Vietnam, perhaps because of his first-hand experience. Stone served in Vietnam and, like thousands of veterans, he returned home only to face rejection by the American people. Stone also experienced the reluctance of Hollywood studios to support production of Vietnam War films, as he sought financial support for *Born on the Fourth of July*. Three days before production was originally scheduled to begin, financing for the project fell apart. Stone was forced to postpone the project until he completed several other films.¹⁹ Finally, Stone convinced Universal Studios to produce *Born on the Fourth of July*, which was released in late 1989. Thus, even as the Vietnam War became a part of American history rather than a daily event witnessed on the television screen, the film industry hesitated over the mixture of controversy and ticket sales.

The story told in *Born on the Fourth of July* was first published in 1976. Authored by Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic, the novel chronicles the saga of his tour of duty, beginning with the exchange of gunfire which left Kovic permanently paralyzed. In contrast to the film version, which uses a chronological order of events, the novel interweaves the events of his recovery and return to America with flashbacks of his childhood.

The film version of *Born on the Fourth of July* was a collaborative effort between Stone and Kovic, telling Kovic's story through a collage of American pop culture experiences.²⁰ Growing up in the Long Island area of New York, Kovic watches the movie *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, and is surrounded by the music of "Soldier Boy," "Moon River," and "The Times They Are A-Changing." A child of the 1960s, Kovic watches John Kennedy's inaugural address on television, while his mother dreams of the day that her son will be famous. Strong religious values and patriotism guide Kovic's family life. His belief in duty to one's country leads him to join the Marines. Tragedy strikes during Kovic's second tour of duty when he is involved in a raid on a village of innocent women and children. In the confusion of this battle, Kovic kills a fellow U.S. soldier. Later, Kovic falls victim to enemy fire, a scene which is shown in a powerful

slow-motion sequence. The remainder of the film focuses on his return to the United States and his personal struggle with his role in the war.

Value Systems of the American Public

An analysis of *Born on the Fourth of July* will illuminate the narrative strategies which depict an example of the changing social value structure of anti-war veterans. The social value model of analysis developed by Rushing and Frenz provides the framework to examine societal values: beginning with the symbolic conflict between competing values which leads to value re-orientation, and how film involves the audience in this value re-orientation.

Rushing and Frenz argue that the fundamental values which guide society exist in "a fragile pattern of dialectical opposition--a state of tension."²¹ The delicate balance between two sets of values normally remains stable until society faces a serious challenge to the reigning belief system. When the prevailing myth or value cluster fails to solve a social problem within a culture, a re-orientation of values is inevitable. The situation facing Americans during the Vietnam war presented just such a conflict. Americans widely believed in the superiority of democracy over communism. However, they were less sure about the U.S. role in forcing American-style democracy on other nations.

Rushing and Frenz describe two types of value re-orientation which occur due to these symbolic conflicts.²² A dialectical transformation may occur, which replaces one set of values with another. Transformation is marked by competition between systems, one of which ultimately wins out over the other. Although one system is dominant in this type of change, the value system which has been replaced remains in the background, ready to re-surface. A second, less common alternative is the integration of new values into the currently held set of values, known as dialectical synthesis. Synthesis is a more complex process, which requires the individuals or groups to preserve all elements of the existing value system. Rather than privileging one value system over another, the values are merged to form a new value system. By preserving the essential elements of each system, neither value system is rejected, thus, there are no "losers" in dialectical synthesis.

The dualistic nature of competing values may be problematic for some scholars because of the limitations inherent in any dichotomous perspective. However, the value systems based in materialism and moralism are not the only ones available to human beings. Rushing and Frenz observe that society's "collective consciousness" includes "broad clusters of values."²³ They cite as an example the dialectical tension which exists in the fundamental differences between the "utopian" vision and the "tragic" vision of a culture. Rushing and Frenz's work is a useful tool to examine competing sets of values, and *Born on the Fourth of July* provides a text through which we can examine the intersection and changes in value systems.

Born on the Fourth of July reflects the dialectical tension between two myths of the American Dream. Walter Fisher describes these myths in his work on the 1972 Presidential campaign. Both myths are based in traditional American religious values. The competing myths reflect a dichotomy of values distinguishing between materialism and moralism. The materialistic myth:

...is grounded on the puritan work ethic and relates to the values of effort, persistence, 'playing the game,' initiative, self-reliance, achievement, and success. It undergirds competition as the way of determining personal worth, the free enterprise system, and the notion of freedom, defined as the freedom from controls, regulations, or constraints.²⁴

In contrast to materialism, moralism is based on the premise of equality, and the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness found in the Declaration of Independence. The basic tenets of tolerance, charity, compassion, and a regard for human dignity and worth are values inherent in moralism. Fisher explains that in this myth, "governments are instituted to secure these rights," and they derive power from the consent of those they govern.²⁵ From the moralistic point of view, government exists to serve the people, but ultimately, the disabled Vietnam veterans featured in *Born on the Fourth of July* eventually challenge the government's authority.

The tension between moralism and materialism emerges in the rationale for military involvement in Vietnam. U.S. action in

Vietnam was often justified on the premise that replacing communism with a free and democratic system would accomplish the goals of a moralistic system. Freedom is a value shared by both the materialistic and moralistic myths, although it serves different purposes in each system. In a *moralistic* sense, freedom exists in the ability to enact social and political change. This is consistent with the initial justification of the war: the need to contain communism. From the *materialistic* perspective, freedom was valued because it would enable the Vietnamese people to escape the economic constraints of communism. While the distinction between the two systems seen here may seem irrelevant, ultimately materialistic values began to dominate the rhetoric about Vietnam. U.S. officials described death counts in terms of "the ratio of casualties between Government and Viet Cong forces, the ratio of arms captured or lost."²⁶ Emphasis on materialism also appeared in anti-war rhetoric which characterized the war as a "commodity in advanced consumer capitalism....mass-marketed and sold to a consumer society conditioned to consume the latest fashions, whether automobiles or wars."²⁷

In writing about Vietnam, many authors also recognized the conflicting values which existed in justifications for the war. For example, author Norman Mailer described the tension between "Christianity" (moralism) and "the corporation" (materialism) that dominated American culture in his Pulitzer prize winning novel, *The Armies of the Night*.²⁸ The ever-changing, sometimes conflicting explanations for the war compounded the problem of American soldiers who struggled to understand their purpose in Vietnam. This conflict is represented in Ron Kovic's character in *Born on the Fourth of July*.

The materialistic myth is exemplified in young Ron Kovic's life. Early in the film his competitive spirit and athletic ability are highlighted, when he becomes the baseball team's hero by hitting a game-winning home run. Later, as a high school wrestler, he is driven by hard work, competition and the need for success. Even upon his return from Vietnam Kovic embraces the value of hard work as he struggles to walk, after doctors conclude that he will be permanently paralyzed.

Values of moralism also guide Kovic's early life. Patriotism and loyalty to one's country are depicted in a Fourth of July parade

which opens the film. Crowds wave the American flag and cheer as veterans pass by. The soldiers are praised for their commitment to the values of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Later, the romantic idealism of the military is evident in a Marine recruiter's speech. The recruiter, played by Tom Berenger, challenges an auditorium filled with young men to join the proud tradition of the Marines. Later, Kovic and his friends consider their options for the future. While some plan for college or business careers, Kovic accepts his patriotic duty and enlists in the Marines.

Elements of religion also play a major role in Kovic's family life. When he prays that he is making the right decision to enlist, Kovic's mother replies that it is "God's will that you go."²⁹ This scene establishes a dialectical opposition between the religious belief in the sanctity of life and the reality that war entails taking human lives. This tension is elevated when U.S. soldiers raid a Vietnamese village, only to find that they have slaughtered a hut full of defenseless women and children.

The painful conflict between human life and killing humans in battle is exacerbated by another tragic event. When Kovic kills a fellow soldier in the confusion of a battle, he violates both God's law and the soldier's code. Following the incident, Kovic approaches his commanding officer, and in a scene symbolizing a priest hearing a confession, he admits to killing the soldier. The officer absolves Kovic's guilt, saying that in times of war, it is often difficult to determine what is happening. The guilt does not subside however, and "Each night before he slept he prayed to his god, begging for some understanding of why the thing had happened, why he had been made into a murderer with one shot...What kind of god, he thought, would do this to him."³⁰

A dialectical tension between moral principles and the soldier's duty creates a situation in which, "Kovic must struggle with an experiential reality that contradicts the assumptions behind [John] Kennedy's vision," of a world free from communism.³¹ The war is no longer a simple battle between good (democracy) and evil (communism), as Kovic fully recognizes when he faces life as a paraplegic.

The experience of disabled Vietnam veterans highlights the "naked form" of materialism which is "compassionless" and, taken to

its extreme, becomes exploitative.³² Scenes in the V.A. hospital depict a callous disregard for the lives and commitment of Vietnam veterans. Nurses explain that doctors are "too busy" to adequately care for the patients, a response that symbolizes the attitude both inside and outside the V.A. hospital walls. The materialistic myth fails Kovic, for despite his commitment to being a "good soldier," he is rewarded with life in a wheelchair. The myth loses its persuasive ability, and is often subverted when individuals recognize that in real-life situations, the myth gives way to greed and corruption.³³

After he returns home, Kovic and a high school friend reflect on the number of local men who died in Vietnam and recount the stories of their injuries to one another. Kovic rationalizes his injuries, explaining that he "failed" in Vietnam, as if to accept blame for his "sins" (the death of innocent people). In a moving statement which foreshadows his transformation, Kovic tells his friend, "I would give all my values just to be whole again."³⁴

The value conflict is also portrayed in opening scenes which highlight the traditional values of family, religion and love of country, and in later scenes where the veterans reject both these values and the materialistic myth. Kovic struggles with the religious beliefs which go to the very core of his being--his Catholicism. In a heated exchange with his mother, a drunken Kovic "rails against the very things he once believed in--God, Mother and Country."³⁵ He rejects religion, blaming God for abandoning him while he was defending his country. Faced with the harsh reality that his sexuality has also been a casualty of the war, in a heart-wrenching scene with his father, Kovic cries out, "Who's going to love me?"³⁶

Faced with the internal battle between competing value systems, Kovic begins a journey which leads him to discard the materialistic elements of the American Dream. He visits a Mexican resort area filled with embittered Vietnam veterans who vow never to return to the United States. At Villa Dulce, the veterans retreat into lives of alcohol abuse and debauchery, frequenting houses of prostitution in search of women who can make them feel whole again. Villa Dulce is an escape from the failure of the American Dream.

Here Kovic meets Charlie, an angry paraplegic veteran, played by Willem DaFoe. When Charlie attacks a prostitute who rejects him because of his physical limitations, the two veterans are

thrown out of the bar. Later, after an argument with a taxicab driver, they are left stranded in the desert. Charlie begins a venomous tirade against the government, President Nixon and the Vietnam war. He verbally assaults Kovic, suggesting that his "soul" was never invested in the war. The confrontation becomes a shouting match over who killed more babies. Their exchange escalates into a shoving match, and the two end up lying alongside a deserted road, their wheelchairs left standing as the only evidence of their presence.

Lying at the base of a hill symbolizes the depth of despair Kovic has reached. In mythic terms, Campbell explains that "at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light."³⁷ Kovic's value transformation begins in this scene, where he longs for the "things that made sense," the things you could "count on...before we all got so lost."³⁸ Kovic's experience with Charlie at Villa Dulce is the catalyst for the transformation described by Campbell. He begins to confront the anger he feels: toward his situation--being paralyzed for life; toward the government which deceived and then abandoned him; and toward the value system which has not rewarded him for playing by the rules.

The first step in his transformation to a moralistic value system is to admit his guilt to the family of the soldier he killed while in Vietnam. When he faces the soldier's family to explain the circumstances of the young man's death, Kovic is overwhelmed with grief. As he leaves the family's home, the song "When Johnny comes marching home" plays in the background. This symbolically foreshadows Kovic's return home, where he is guided by a different value system. Kovic's values are transformed, from embracing both the myths of materialism and moralism, to an affirmation of moralism and subversion of materialism. He no longer assumes that hard-work and persistence will always be rewarded. Vietnam demonstrated to Kovic that success in life is not always within one's own control. Kovic recognizes the priority of restoring human dignity and self worth, which were taken from the soldiers who were permanently disabled in Vietnam.

Changes in the Myth of the Soldier

The romantic view of the soldier was rejected by many Americans following the Vietnam war. The film *Born on the Fourth of July* illustrates this shift of public opinion. The mythic view depicts soldiers as strong figures who see the world in Manichean terms of right and wrong, good and evil. This heroic image, a common element of earlier war films, was undermined by images of American soldiers involved in the slaughter of Vietnamese citizens at My Lai.³⁹ The infallibility of soldiers was also brought into question by the "friendly fire" deaths of American soldiers.

The aftermath of war is portrayed in grisly scenes from the V.A. hospital where wounded soldiers suffer in hideous facilities which are unsanitary, understaffed, and under-equipped. But the final proof that the romantic vision of the American soldier has changed is found in the contrasting reactions of the public who turn out to greet the returning soldiers. The Fourth of July parade which opens the film is filled with respect for veterans of previous wars. This is juxtaposed against a later parade which welcomes home Vietnam veterans. Kovic and his fellow veterans are greeted by silence, stares, and even angry hecklers. The patriotic image of the American soldier has become a nightmare for the American people.

The public response to Vietnam veterans exemplifies the failure of moralism which occurs when society is unable to accept responsibility or guilt for their actions. In this case, Americans were unable to admit responsibility for the prolonged war in Vietnam and the deaths of innocent civilians. Vietnam veterans served as a reminder of that guilt.

The shift away from the romantic image of soldiers is also illustrated when Kovic attends an anti-war rally with his high school sweetheart, Donna. At the rally, a Vietnam veteran rejects his participation in the war. In a symbolic gesture, the soldier removes a medal of honor from his chest, and throws it into a crowd of young people, who cheer him on.

The eagerness of American soldiers to defend their country turns to anger when they recognize that their government has betrayed them. Fisher contends that the materialistic myth is subverted when "those who have tried to live by it" discover that "it is flawed by favoritism and corruption."⁴⁰ Thus, while Kovic's transformation does not stem from entirely altruistic motives, he is

moved by a sense of guilt over society's failure to act in keeping with our moral nature. Kovic rejects the materialistic myth when he understands that "He had never been anything but a thing to them, a thing to put a uniform on and train to kill, a young thing to run through the meat-grinder, a cheap small nothing thing to make mincemeat out of."⁴¹ The materialistic code is rejected when he acknowledges the corrupt system that sent young men to Vietnam. Military and political leaders are criticized as "small men with small ideas, gamblers and hustlers who had gambled with his life and hustled him off to the war."⁴²

The disabled veterans recognize they are the victims of corruption, the result of a failed value system. Their heightened awareness of the conflicting value systems leads them to seek both an individual and a cultural shift in values. The success of this transformation requires that the power elite be educated "to the necessity of change through some sort of symbolic confrontation."⁴³ This confrontation occurs when anti-war veterans question the government's decision to send young American soldiers to fight for what they believe is an unjustified cause. This is the impetus for the "Last Patrol," in which anti-war veterans journey across the United States to the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami, Florida.

Upon arrival in Miami, the veterans seek access to the convention hall. Once inside, on the floor of the convention, Kovic gains the attention of a television reporter and pleads for:

...just a moment of your compassion for the people who are suffering in this war...I'm here to say that this war is wrong, that this society lied to me and lied to my brothers...[they] tricked them into going thirteen thousand miles to fight a war against a poor, peasant people, who have a proud history of resistance....I can't find the words to express how the leadership of this government sickens me.⁴⁴

Kovic discredits the U.S. government rationale for involvement in Vietnam and argues that the war is morally wrong. He characterizes American leaders as corrupt thieves, rapists and robbers. Speaking out against the war inside the halls of the Republican National

Convention represents a symbolic confrontation between the disenfranchised and the powerful, a conflict often at work in the dialectical opposition between moralism and materialism. Through this confrontation the oppressed can focus the attention of those in power on social problems. For agents of change to succeed in this symbolic confrontation they must "proceed through unfocused alienation to increased psychological awareness."⁴⁵ Kovic's role as an agent of change begins with his alienation from society as a disabled Vietnam veteran. He ultimately reaches psychological awareness which enables him to fight for the human dignity he and other veterans deserve.

Reaching the front of the convention hall as Richard Nixon accepts the Republican Presidential nomination, Kovic's moving final statement illustrates his rejection of the government which was responsible for Vietnam:

People say if you don't love America, then get the hell out. Well, I love America...We are here to say that we don't have to take it anymore...They are killing our brothers in Vietnam. We want them to hear the truth tonight. This wheelchair, this steel, our steel, is your Memorial Day on wheels....We are your Yankee Doodle Dandy come home....The truth is they have sacrificed a whole generation of young men.⁴⁶

The veterans' protests both outside and inside the Convention Hall demonstrated their opposition to the government's decision to send more troops to Vietnam. They have rejected the government's authority to lead. Vietnam veterans who joined the anti-war protests became part of a movement which sought a fundamental political change in U.S. military policy. These former soldiers begin by acknowledging their participation in the war. Fisher argues that moral appeals succeed only if individuals are able to accept responsibility for their actions.⁴⁷ Thus, the soldiers have taken a step that is necessary to affirm the moralistic myth.

Four years later, Kovic appears at the 1976 Democratic convention, which completes his transformation. He recalls his childhood and his mother's dream that someday he would be a famous speaker. The peace of mind that comes from Kovic's

transformation is clear when he tells a reporter, "Just lately I've felt like I'm home."⁴⁸ Kovic successfully reaffirms his belief in moralism by confronting his role in the deaths of innocent people and by participating in anti-war protests. His actions call attention to a key element of moralism: that the government's responsibility should be to act with benevolence and fairness.

Role of the Audience

The final element of the social value model emphasizes the audience members who observe the value transformation. Audience responses to this value shift may range from an intensified awareness to active participation.⁴⁹ Intensified awareness stems from the recognition that the current value system is unable to fulfill their needs. At the other end of the continuum is active participation, which occurs when a film spurs the audience to react to the events on screen.

It is important to note that the complexity of films such as *Born on the Fourth of July* do not lend themselves to a simplistic either/or reaction from audiences. A careful examination of potential viewers illustrates the diversity of public opinion and subsequent reaction to the film's subject matter. Americans experienced a wide range of emotions toward both the war and the soldiers who fought in it. The depiction of soldiers ranged from the social misfits found in *Taxi Driver* and the highly trained ex-combat soldier in *Rambo*, to the emotionally devastated Vietnam veterans portrayed in *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Coming Home*. Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud conclude that: "unlike the fairly stable filmic characterizations of veterans that followed World War II, the image of the soldier returning from Vietnam has swung back and forth as American film attempted to negotiate the ideological shifts of the times."⁵⁰ The ambivalence toward Vietnam veterans created by film characters is consistent with the emotions created by moralistic values. Americans may have felt guilty, perhaps even threatened, by the rage of anti-war veterans.

Opponents of the war, identified as "doves," may have viewed the film as a vindication of their opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Their opposition to the war was, in part, based on the philosophy that U.S. military involvement was not the solution to the Vietnam conflict. They may have experienced a

yearning for the type of change that is illustrated in Kovic's value transformation. Viewers who supported the military role in Vietnam, known as "hawks," were aware of the circumstances surrounding the Vietnam conflict and thus, would be less inclined to experience an intensified awareness of a value conflict. However, even some supporters of Vietnam shifted their positions on Vietnam, when they realized the war was unwinnable. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, once an advocate of the war, has now publicly acknowledged his change of heart.⁵¹

A privately commissioned study completed in 1977 for Francis Ford Coppola examined film audiences' opinions regarding the war.⁵² The results indicated that many audience members characterized Vietnam as a negative experience, though they were interested in understanding the reasons for the war. The American public recognized the tragic cost of Vietnam in terms of American lives lost, but also in the destruction of Vietnam and its people. Public interest may have been stimulated by the Vietnam films of the 1970s. The success of Vietnam War films released in the 1980s suggests that this interest continues to exist. In the post-Vietnam era, Americans came to understand that the cost of the war came in other forms as well: "For Americans, the legacy of the Vietnam War is a legacy of lies, errors, and impotence. It is a legacy of futile sacrifice and glaring inequalities, of deals coming up short against reality, and of defeat that is so unacceptable that it cannot be named."⁵³ Viewers who were seeking answers to their questions about Vietnam may have experienced an increased awareness of the events depicted in Vietnam war films.

The question arises, whether active participation could be expected from viewers in a film which was released in 1989, more than fifteen years after U.S. troops withdrew from Vietnam. Although some viewers may have been directly involved in the war, either as military personnel or anti-war protesters, viewers could no longer actively participate in either the war or anti-war protests. In any case, the personal experiences of viewing audiences would influence the perspectives which they brought to the movie theater, and their reactions to the film.

Ron Kovic's value re-orientation may parallel the changes that echoed throughout parts of the American populace during Vietnam. Like the innocent young man who willingly accepted the

task placed before him by his country, early on, the American people also accepted the government's explanation for U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. Eventually, the wheelchair-bound Kovic realizes that he has lost both his innocence and his chance at achieving the American Dream. Many Americans faced a similar loss of innocence as the saga of Vietnam unfolded nightly on their television screens.

Viewers share in Kovic's experience, the veteran who tries to make sense of his Vietnam experience, which eventually "became the metaphoric representation for American society trying to do the same."⁵⁴ Consequently, viewing audiences reacted to the events on screen with agonizing guilt and discomfort. *Born on the Fourth of July* presented viewers with unpleasant scenes from Vietnam ranging from the slaughter of innocent villagers, and the friendly fire death of a soldier, to the repulsive scenes of a V.A. hospital.⁵⁵ These events led some audiences to the conclusion also reached by Kovic that the U.S. role in Vietnam was unjustified.

Unique Successes of *Born on the Fourth of July*

Prior to the 1986 Academy Award winner, *Platoon*, film critics dismissed most Vietnam films as unrealistic. Criticism also came from those who argued that incidents such as the Russian roulette scene depicted in *The Deer Hunter* were never documented by U.S. Armed Services in Vietnam. Others suggested that Hollywood had "derailed the war by packaging and selling a simplistic, sentimental, soap opera version of America in Vietnam."⁵⁶ *Coming Home*, the 1978 film starring John Voight as a handicapped Vietnam veteran, is a sentimental version of the war which focused more on a love story rather than the war itself.

Oliver Stone's films have depicted the Vietnam war with a different perspective than that offered by earlier Vietnam War films. Film critics Auster and Quart heralded *Platoon* as the "first cinematic step taken by Hollywood in coming to terms with the truth about Vietnam."⁵⁷ *Platoon* succeeded in presenting a view of Vietnam through the eyes of a soldier. Critics praised the film's cinematography, describing it as "war at ground zero."⁵⁸ The rite of passage story is told by a naive recruit, Chris Taylor, portrayed by Charlie Sheen. *Platoon's* success is due to its realistic depiction of how Vietnam truly felt to American soldiers.⁵⁹ However, the film

does not emphasize anti-war sentiments held by some soldiers. The only semblance of anti-war sentiments are expressed by Sergeant Elias. Elias, played by Willem DaFoe voices his skepticism about the purpose of U.S. military presence in Vietnam to Chris, and worries that the U.S. is losing the war.

Born on the Fourth of July allows us to take another step toward exorcising the traumatic memories of Vietnam. Stone continues to use a soldier's perspective to tell his tale. We see the world through the eyes of an eager Marine recruit who, over time, is transformed to an angry, paraplegic anti-war protester. *Born on the Fourth of July* presents an alternative view of the political and social issues surrounding the Vietnam War. Critic Duane Byrge described the intensity of emotion that emanated from the screen as:

...screenwriters Oliver Stone and Ron Kovic probe unflinchingly into one man's tormented psyche, and by extension dig deeply into the country's constitution as well. It's a deep-cutting incision that splatters unsparingly in a barrage of unnerving scenes.⁶⁰

This emotional assault may begin to lay to rest the ghost of Vietnam which has haunted the American psyche since the war ended.

What makes *Born on the Fourth of July* unique in terms of the Vietnam film genre is its ability to depict the value transformation which many Vietnam veterans experienced. Prior to *Born on the Fourth of July*, most Vietnam films focused on the war itself and did not include the anti-war activism of veterans. By focusing attention on the anti-war efforts of Vietnam veterans, Stone portrayed the Vietnam veterans' rejection of the materialistic myth and their affirmation of moralism.

The success of *Born on the Fourth of July* in reaching new heights in the Vietnam film genre is found in Stuart Klawans' review:

...the film wants to shout down the de-sentimentalization of the Vietnam War, the sweet-talk about national healing, most all the current pieties about the war's veterans. This is perhaps the first I-was-there picture (including Stone's own

Platoon) to vent full-blast the self-doubt and self-pity and justifiable rage so many veterans have felt.⁶¹

Born on the Fourth of July leads the way for films which depict society's struggle over controversial issues which force a re-evaluation of existing value systems.

Conclusion

Popular films serve an important function in American culture, influencing society by shaping the way we view historical events, particularly significant political events. In a reciprocal manner, society influences studio choices of what is deemed acceptable subject matter. This relationship was particularly important in Vietnam War films, because it was the perception of public opposition toward Vietnam which originally discouraged Hollywood studios from producing war films. The success of *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* illustrates the need for Americans to resolve the complex set of the events found in the Vietnam War. Many film critics argue that these films break new ground in facing the collective guilt that Americans felt following Vietnam.

Born on the Fourth of July illustrates some of the conflicting values held by Americans. Kovic first appears as the stereotypic All-American boy, ready and willing to serve his country. He reflects both the moralistic and materialistic myths of the American Dream. When he recognizes that the materialistic code has not only failed him, but even exploited him, Kovic's transformation begins. He becomes an outspoken opponent of the war, criticizing the corrupt and deceitful actions of political and military leaders. He fights for the dignity and worth of disabled Vietnam veterans, finally bringing their story to the American people at both Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

The transformation which led many Vietnam veterans to embrace moralistic values also guided the social movements of the 1960s: the New Left, the Civil Rights movement and the Women's Liberation movement. Each of these movements rejected the primary elements of materialism, instead emphasizing the values of human dignity, equality and freedom.

Analyzing *Born on the Fourth of July* is only one step in moving beyond the lost crusade known as Vietnam. The myths of the

American Dream as they are depicted in other Vietnam War films are important issues that should be explored further. In particular, other work such as Oliver Stone's *Platoon* should be examined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the myth of American soldiers.

U.S. military involvement in the 1991 Gulf War also raises questions for scholars. For example, will motion picture films portray the Gulf War in ways that resemble the recent wave of Vietnam films? The box-office hit *Courage Under Fire* is, to date, the most notable release with a Gulf War theme. Future research could compare and contrast its thematic approach against the most recent Vietnam War films discussed here.

One additional question to consider is whether the public assessment of the Gulf War will eventually resemble the anti-war sentiments found in *Born on the Fourth of July*. Two factors may have a significant effect on public opinion regarding the Gulf War: the short duration of the Gulf War and the relative "success" of the military mission. Analysis of public opinion polls conducted before, during and after the Gulf War indicate that "from the standpoint of American public opinion, as well as of world history perhaps, the war was really quite a minor event."⁶² Nevertheless, scholars may use the social value theory of Rushing and Frenz and its application presented here to study the response of Gulf War veterans and the long-term assessment by American society.

The Vietnam War shattered the American myth of invincibility, leaving society to struggle with the events in Southeast Asia. Popular culture forms were a useful tool in helping society to understand the complexity of the war. *Born on the Fourth of July* illustrates the shift in values that can occur when the dominant myth fails to resolve social problems. The American military presence in Vietnam presented one such problem.

Re-making myths is a process which requires understanding the past in a way that prepares us to face the future. John Hellman speculates, "Americans can seek, through the mental rehearsal of art, a meaningful structure for the narrative of actual experience they will make their future."⁶³ *Born on the Fourth of July* moves us closer to facing that future.

Notes

1. The Johnson administration was approached by John Wayne after he learned that the film rights to *The Green Berets* were still available. The novel, written by Robin Moore, chronicled the activities of the Special Forces in Vietnam. Although Moore's book was criticized by some military officials, Wayne used the story as a means to tell the story of fighting men in Vietnam. Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1978) 221-230.
2. Duane Byrge, "Born on the Fourth of July," *The Hollywood Reporter* 15 Dec. 1986: 1, 23; Stuart Kalwans, "Film." *The Nation* 1 Jan., 1990: 28.
3. Suid, 221-222.
4. Al Auster and Leonard Quart, *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger Pub., 1988) 31.
5. Peter McInerney, "Apocalypse Then: Hollywood looks back at Vietnam," *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1979-80): 22.
6. Al Auster and Leonard Quart, "Hollywood and Vietnam: The Triumph of the Will," *Cineaste* 9 (Spring 1979): 4.
7. Lance Morrow, "A Bloody Rite of Passage," *Time* 15 April 1985:23.
8. Gilbert Adair, *Vietnam on Film: From the Green Berets to Apocalypse Now* (New York: Proteus Books, 1981) 151.
9. The concepts of myths and dreams are found in many of Campbell's works. For example: *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (New York: Bollingen Series XCII, Pantheon Books, 1949); *The Power of Myth*, with Bill Moyers, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988).
10. John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia UP 1986) ix.
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12. I.C. Jarvie, *Movies as Social Criticism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1978) x.
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18. Harold Schechter and Jonna G. Semeiks, "Leatherstocking in 'Nam: Rambo, Platoon, and the American Frontier Myth," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 24.4 (Spring 1991): 19.
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20. David Ansen, "Bringing it all Back Home," *Newsweek* 25 Dec. 1989: 74; Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) 193-4.
21. Rushing and Frenz 67.
22. Rushing and Frenz 70.
23. Rushing and Frenz 67.
24. Fisher 161.
25. Fisher 161.
26. *Congressional Record* 18 July 1967: 19119.
27. Wilson 74.

28. Wilson, 99.
29. *Born on the Fourth of July*, dir. Oliver Stone, Universal Pictures, 1989.
30. Kovic 195.
31. Eben Muse, *The Land of Nam: The Vietnam War in American Film* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995) 149.
32. Fisher 161.
33. Fisher 161.
34. *Born on the Fourth of July*.
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47. Fisher 162.
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49. Rushing and Frenz 71.
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52. Richard Turner, "The Worst Years of Our Lives," *New Times* 20 March 1978: 57.
53. Dittmar and Michaud 6.
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57. Auster and Quart, *War Remembered*, 137.
58. Sheila Benson, "'Platoon': It's War at Ground Zero," *Los Angeles Times* 19 Dec. 1986: 1, 23.
59. Benson, 1; Richard Corliss, "A Document Written in Blood," *Time* 15 Dec. 1986: 83.
60. Byrge, 123.
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63. Hellman 220.

Supermarket Ethnicity in Pocatello, Idaho

This is what the label says on the back of the Ragu Garden Style Spaghetti sauce in my refrigerator: "Which Ragu Tonight? Try Chunky Garden Style loaded with chunks of select garden vegetables. Or try these other delicious Ragu sauces: Old World Style, Slow-cooked Home style, Thick and Hearty, Fine Italian Brand." So, the makers of Ragu have apparently invested their products with character, richness, quality and even family values. The label also lets us know that this character and richness can be microwaved by removing the plastic cap and heating on high for six minutes. In America today ethnicity is microwaveable and "Old World Style" is essentially a marketing strategy to get us to buy the sauce, eat it quickly, and buy some more.

"Ethnic" foods, as presented in the supermarkets, appeal to a romantic fantasy about cultural richness and integrity. Such foods are really about *American* culture -- they reflect our drive for self-transformation, a Madison Avenue-backed desire to visit exotic locations and become more than we already are. The plastic-wrapped burritos, spaghetti sauce, falafel mix and Ramen noodles found in supermarkets have surprisingly little to do with Mexico, Italy, Egypt, and China--but this is hardly the point of their appeal.

In Pocatello, Idaho, where I purchased the spaghetti sauce, few citizens have a significant attachment to an immigrant heritage, and ethnic activity is limited. There is a very small but noticeable Latino and Native American population, a smattering of ethnic culture such as the yearly Greek fair and Africa Night sponsored by students at Idaho State University. And as one would expect in a city of about 50,000 people, there are also a handful of Italian, Mexican and Chinese restaurants that serve fairly Americanized dishes.¹ On the whole, ethnicity is not a major part of life here; Pocatellans are apt to refer to themselves as "from Idaho" before claiming a connection to immigrant ancestors. In addition, members of the large Mormon community usually link themselves with a pioneer, rather

than a specifically ethnic ancestry. For most Pocatellans, immigrant connections are too distant and foggy to have any real bearing.

In cities like Pocatello, ethnicity doesn't even have a traditionally "symbolic" function as Herbert Gans described it.² Cultural festivals, the occasional Old World phrase sprinkled among family conversations, the ethnic dish added to a holiday meal are rather rare.³ Nevertheless, because the more concrete aspects of ethnicity (language, neighborhood, dress) are largely absent, the abstract (and very powerful) associations of ethnicity remain and have been capitalized on by the supermarket chains in Pocatello--as they have throughout the United States.

Four years ago the trade journal *Food Technology* anticipated the emergence of a wider array of ethnic food in the supermarkets, an expansion beyond the familiar frozen burrito and jarred spaghetti sauce. The journal asserted in its breezy, market-oriented way that "Indian foods may be best poised to make the leap....Hispanics are being targeted by some of the industry giants already....Greek foods are starting to get big play" (Sloan74). A casual inspection of the food aisles at Pocatello supermarkets will attest to this cosmopolitan flourishing of ethnic food. At the same time most shopping carts reveal that the American diet still leans heavily on red meat and starches and such familiar staples as frozen french fries, corn dogs and frozen mixed vegetables. Nevertheless, given the vast array of ethnic foods one finds in the supermarkets of Pocatello, ethnicity must have something to add to the eating experiences of local residents, but what can explain the appeal?

One explanation is that supermarket ethnicity offers an extravaganza of cross-cultural harmony. Prego, Manischewitz and Kikkoman stand by side. Moreover, ethnic foods are attractive because they imply what we like to think is best about America -- the possibilities for people of diverse backgrounds to share adjacent space and realize their fullest potential. The combined effect of the ethnic food aisle creates the wondrous aura of American diversity -- a low-key version of the ethnic vibrancy one might find at, say, Quincy Market in Boston, the Inner Harbor in Baltimore or at any summer food festival in a town with a significant ethnic population. Eating ethnic food is pleasurable because it confirms our democratic outlook -- gastronomic openness is a sign of social tolerance.⁴

Ethnic foods also provide an escape from the ordinary. A trip to Albertson's or Waremart or Smith's food stores is not just a trip across town, but a journey to the Mediterranean or the Orient or Arabia. What makes this fantasy even more appealing is that consumers do not have to give up the security of familiar tastes -- ethnic food is often tailored to match mainstream eating preferences.⁵

Supermarket ethnic foods sometimes appear to soften the most vulgar and uniform qualities of mass culture. Food manufacturers are aware of consumers' concern with time and efficiency, their nagging, guilt-ridden interest in healthy eating, and even their possible disdain for vacuous consumer culture. The chain supermarket can be a cold and anonymous place; ethnic foods promise to restore integrity and distinctiveness to one's diet. Why make another batch of mundane Betty Crocker brownies, for example, when one can instead purchase Manischewitz's Chocolate Brownie Mix: "Uncle Max's Favorite Nosh." This product, which features a picture of a kindly, gray-haired man about to bite into a brownie, is Kosher for Passover but available year round in Pocatello, a city with a negligible Jewish population.

Supermarkets associate ethnicity with wholesomeness and the integrity of family--counterpoints to the assembly line quality of egg cartons, frozen corn and Wonder bread.⁶ In addition, some ethnic food, even in its prepackaged forms, offers a more highbrow contrast to ordinary eating and it often does so quickly and efficiently. A Taste of Thai's Chili Pepper Soup Mix, for instance, only requires a few minutes of boiling.

Supermarket ethnic foods can also lend legitimacy to what might otherwise be considered a faddish and narcissistic obsession with dieting. Recently, ethnic foods have found their place in the ongoing concern with weight reduction and more particularly the preoccupation with low-fat eating. To the delight of food manufacturers some "Old World" foods have revealed themselves to be low in fat. Bagels, matzah, pasta, and refried beans are low fat--or can be made to be. Here we have the best of both worlds and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. To eat a low-fat food is to be health conscious in the best way; according to current wisdom eating low fat is sensible, easy and often "the answer" to the problem of a few (or more) extra pounds. When this new world health

consciousness is combined with the nurturing wholesomeness of "Old World European" eating or the curative powers of "traditional" Asian foods or the high brow distinctiveness of "exotic" ethnicities, the result is deep satisfaction and dollars spent.

The recent interest in low-fat dieting has caught on partly because of its simplicity, after so many years when diets had elaborate "systems" of calorie counting. Also, low-fat eating doesn't require any painful denial of pleasurable eating or jarring changes in the national diet. The potential downside of the low-fat movement, however, is its very singularity and compulsive quality. In other words, the richness and pleasure of eating are undercut by focusing on a single element of nutrition. Many Americans are very concerned with losing weight, but they don't want to feel like they are obsessed or vain.

Enter ethnicity. Supermarket ethnic foods reconstitute the blandness and narrowness of a diet focused on low fat. When low fat becomes ethnic, nutrition is less clinical and more about nurturance. Furthermore, the FDA's newly required "Nutrition Facts" inevitably calls attention to the "ethnic" food's health value. Of course nutritional information doesn't necessarily reflect the health qualities of traditional foods since many ethnic foods, particularly from Northern and Western Europe, are extremely high in fat. The low-fat ethnic foods draw on a different sense of ethnicity, however. Ethnic nutrition conjures up images of the stalwart mother who fusses over every bodily ailment of her family and has dozens of time-worn treatments for every one of them. Ethnic nutrition can also imply a sun-drenched vitality, a swarthy, passionate zest for life or a refined sense of harmony and spiritual, physical equilibrium. All of these associations are a far cry from the "You Can Never be Too Rich or Too Thin" mentality which, as talk shows and tabloids moralistically point out, leads to self destructive behavior.

Fantastic Foods' "Rice and Beans" is an illuminating example of the healthy, powerful, and malleable appeal of ethnicity. This microwaveable, just-add-water mix of precooked brown rice, red and white beans and dehydrated vegetables (tomatoes, onions red and green bell peppers, garlic and beets) is "all natural," "low in fat" (although quite high in sodium) and ready to eat in its own container. The peel-back lid cover informs us that "Ethnic foods around the world combine rice and beans for a hearty, nutritious lunch. Savory

aromas of tomatoes and garlic evoke warm Roman nights in this satisfying dish. Cooked with plenty of *amore!*" Such a claim tends to imagine that, say, a lonely, overworked administrative assistant with only ten minutes to spare for lunch might eat 2.2 ounces of rehydrated rice and beans and be transported to the dark, love-filled climes of Italy's ancient city. And despite the fact that the beans will launch one to Rome, the label also tells us that this dish is "Northern Italian." Apparently, the makers of Fantastic Foods want its consumers to know that their rice and beans is not the stuff of crass, mass-marketed "southern" Italian food.

Fantastic Foods' notion of ethnicity is wholly transferable. The company also markets, for example, "Cajun" rice and beans. The ingredients, including the vegetables, are very similar, and of course so is the product's claim that "Ethnic cuisines around the world combine rice and beans for a hearty, nutritious lunch." This "Cajun" variation, however, "served in a creole-style sauce turns every bite into Mardi Gras." Fantastic Foods is marketing a fantasy of course, a fantasy that draws on perceptions of ethnic zest and bounty; both the "Cajun" and "Northern Italian" styles' packages depict the same rich harvest of garden vegetables.

Supermarket ethnicity banks on a universalized sense of ethnicity, one that exists outside of time and geography. Like the Fantastic Foods products, Sahara Natural Foods' "Couscous Pilaf" offers a low-fat item that embodies a very slippery notion of "Morocco"--the couscous is "an authentic Moroccan pilaf." The product's logo is a drooping palm tree with two vague peasant forms crouching over a fire, their camel next to them. This image evokes simplicity, nature, and serenity -- the antithesis to the hurried quality of American eating. The package invites us to "Discover the delicious pilafs of the Mediterranean world with Casbah. We use only the finest ingredients to re-create the flavor of our Timeless Cuisine. Couscous Pilaf is ready in minutes and makes even ordinary meals special." The rest of the "Casbah" series includes "Falafel," "Spanish Pilaf," "Gyro," and "Basmati Rice" (the Mediterranean apparently extends to India). Furthermore, the Casbah series takes some liberties with time as well as geography; the box informs us that couscous is a "timeless cuisine" and--miraculously--it is also ready to eat in minutes.

As these products point out with some absurdity, ethnic "authenticity" is hard to quantify, in part because marketers ascribe very generalized characteristics to ethnic foods. Supermarket ethnicity is largely a projection of a mainstream perception of ethnicity. The Latino Food section at Albertson's in Pocatello, provides an extreme example. This small section is clearly designed to serve the Latino community in Pocatello. Some of the foods are labeled in Spanish only and many of the products fall clearly outside of the familiar mainstream food preferences. One of the most striking food products, however, is remarkably similar to a standard American product: Maizoro's "Sugar Frosted Flakes," clearly labeled as a product of Mexico, is a minor variation on Kellogg's "Frosted Flakes" -- the cereal box has a picture of a smiling cartoon zebra, which could easily be a cousin of Tony the Tiger.

Of course, there is something deeply ironic and even troubling about "Latino" authenticity being little more than a pale imitation of "cheap" American consumerism. Given the increasingly transnational marketplace, however, it is often difficult to find the center of a particular cultural tradition. One could argue that the Sugar Frosted Flakes belong with the rest of the American breakfast cereals, a few aisles over, but in Pocatello, at least, this was identified as a "Latino" product--a taste of home.

It is easy to dismiss this cereal as a reminder of the cultural insensitivity of corporate culture. By contrast, many enlightened consumers want to hold on to a standard of taste, an aesthetic of "the real thing." Some Americans are disturbed by the free and easy blending of cultural traditions, both in the supermarkets and in restaurants. Food critic Regina Shrambling, for example, condemns the "mongrelization" (12) of ethnic food. Shrambling writes, "Americans are raised to revere the notion of the melting pot. But to quote the late French journalist and gastronome Curnosky's first lesson of serious cooking, 'Cuisine is when things taste like themselves.' The trend today is to mix and match until you get a mish-mash. . . . Maybe we're gaining a new global awareness, but we're losing respect for cultural differences" (12).

Shrambling links respect for diversity to the preservation of gastronomic purity. But why does she condemn the "frenzied phenomenon" of "fusion food" (12) in the United States when Asian and European foods have always been affected by trade, migrations,

and other sources of cultural blending? What does it mean for something to "taste like itself"? Wouldn't such an expectation actually limit the possibility of cultural differences--particularity the differences that exist within a particular ethnic culture.

For many of those who have lived in areas with major immigrant and ethnic populations, the supermarket is just about the last place to look for ethnic "authenticity" -- unless of course we were really pressed for time. Rather "authenticity" might be found in the neighborhood Italian or Chinese grocery that stocks ethnic staples in simple packaging labeled in the Old World language, the Jewish delicatessen where the waitstaff speaks with Yiddish inflection, the Vietnamese restaurant whose clientele is largely Vietnamese and whose menu is not fully translatable. We might, therefore, scoff--with an air of self-congratulation -- at the very idea of purchasing "Oriental Stir Fry Sauce" or a package of "Taco Seasoning." True connoisseurs of ethnic food, if left with no alternative to the supermarket, might instead head for the aisle adjacent to the produce section to purchase a jar of imported Greek olives -- "the real thing." But what if what we identify as "the real thing" is at heart an idea, a vibrant energy, rather than actual spices, seasonings and cooking methods? What makes ethnic food truly "ethnic" anyway?

Purists like Shrambling want to preserve the cultural integrity and taste of ethnic food by protecting it from corrupting influences. What Shrambling calls "mongrelization," however, does not represent the loss of ethnicity but ethnicity itself. After all, ethnicity doesn't exist in vacuum; an immigrant culture gains a sense of itself through internal differences, contact and interaction with other groups and with the "mainstream" culture.⁷

When food manufacturers run fast and loose with ethnic traditions, they are simply playing with the fantasies that lie behind the attraction of any ethnic food to an outsider. Furthermore, producers and advertisers do not merely entrap consumers in their own desires; supermarket ethnicity is not just evidence for a "hegemonic" culture.⁸ Consumers remain free to choose how they use these products and can use them creatively.⁹ What's more, supermarket ethnic foods are often extremely versatile and can lead to many interesting cross-cultural combinations.¹⁰ This is not to say that there is something deeply troubling about the profusion of

supermarket ethnic food, but the problem doesn't have to do with a loss of authenticity.

One of the real problems with supermarket ethnic food is that, like "mainstream" fast foods, they encourage a quick-meal mentality. Most families today are pressed for time, and a few microwaved burritos--or for that matter, an ostensibly healthier pre-packaged Oriental Stir Fry mix--might provide some relief to an overburdened day and even allow for more time spent together at the dinner table--- but at what cost? The best family meals, I would argue, are not an event but a process: conversations woven among chopping and washing, pauses to taste for seasoning, a swirl of aromas, the comfort and pleasure of "family-iar" tastes.

Supermarket ethnic foods contribute to a hurried eating experience that lacks dynamic human interaction, nuance and sensuality. Furthermore, supermarket ethnic foods in Pocatello and elsewhere often compel consumers' desires for the exotic, passionate and nurturing by offering them a "taste effect" rather than a layered, differentiation of tastes. In "Hygiene and Repression," Octavio Paz has described both the bland uniformity and the absence of erotic pleasure in U.S. eating--except for what he calls the "pregenital" (75) satisfaction of such indulgences as ice cream. Americans are concerned not with sensuality, but with "health, not correspondence between savors, but the satisfaction of a need" (76). Rather than truly encouraging diversity -- the pleasures of difference -- "nutritional," "low-fat" supermarket ethnic food perpetuates a narrow notion of what it means to eat well.

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Notes

1. Drawing on a study of Chinese restaurants in Athens, Georgia, Shun Lu and Gary Allen Fine have described how those restaurants with largely white, middle class patrons alter their dishes, such as Mongolian Beef and Chow Mein, to meet more mild mainstream American tastes. Lu and Fine's analysis could easily describe restaurants in Pocatello.
2. Herbert Gans explains that since many white ethnic Americans are fully integrated into the mainstream, ethnic identity amounts to "feeling ethnic" rather than carrying on cultural traditions. Since concrete ethnic connections are fading over time, ethnic Americans maintain "symbolic" attachments to immigrant roots, such as attending an ethnic festival or occasionally serving an Old World dish at a holiday meal.

3. Richard Alba has traced the way the eating of ethnic foods tends to dissipate as each generation moves further away from its immigrant heritage. Families of mixed heritage are even less likely to eat ethnic food. He also observes that ethnic fare for the younger generations tends to become "diluted and Americanized in taste" (93).
4. In her discussion of the symbolic functions of ethnic food, Susan Kalick asserts that "Americans must eat the foods of all their ethnic groups, Americanizing them in some ways, because by this act we perform the sense of our national identity" (61).
5. Sociologist Stephen Steinberg reports on a series of interviews conducted with delicatessen owners whose pastrami was considered to come closest to Old World authenticity: "Owners of delicatessens were most enlightening about the changing public tastes to which they feel they must adapt. Among the most frequent complaints are that pastrami is too spicy and corned beef too salty (as a result, seasonings are toned down in the direction of blandness), or too fatty (resulting in dry lean meat with little flavor) or that sandwiches are not neat enough (by which is meant that strips of meat hang over bread edges, or that slices are not wide, thin and uniform." (65)
6. T.J. Jackson Lears has characterized the way advertisers promote their product by playing up its alleged naturalness: "The advertiser defined the 'natural' as good, implied that modern life was full of artificial imitations, and promised salvation through his product" (23). This is the essential formula of much of contemporary supermarket ethnic foods.
7. As Werner Sollors has observed in a somewhat different context, "...authenticity' is achieved not by some purist, archival, or preservationist attitude toward a fixed past but by a remarkable openness toward the ability of a specific idiom to interact with 'outside' signals and incorporate them" (xv).
8. In his fascinating description of the growth of ethnic fast food, Warren Belasco asserts that the "corporate response to the ethnic revival highlights what some culture analysts call the hegemonic process--the subtle way in which dominant forces within a society are able to withstand, absorb and incorporate insurgent strivings" (3). Belasco explains how manufacturers cashed in on the "alternative" aura and touristic appeal of ethnic eating--without actually varying from standard American tastes.
9. John Fiske has argued that consumers of popular culture use "popular discrimination" to determine the usefulness and relevance of a particular product of consumer culture. For Fiske popular culture is not merely the "consumption of images, but... a productive process" (142). Although, consumers of mass-marketed ethnic food are not in a position to revolutionize the dominant culture's value system--which includes a denigrating, romantic vision of ethnic groups--they are not bound by those values when they purchase the product.
10. One of my favorite quick meals is an Idaho potato topped with Rosarita Zesty Salsa Low-Fat Refried Beans and smothered with spiced Italian peppers.

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All American Red Heads Professional Basketball: Femininity As Adaptation To Marginality

This paper analyzes the reasons for the financial success of the All American Red Heads, a professional women's basketball team that barnstormed throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Philippines from 1936 to 1986. The Red Heads competed only against men's teams and averaged over 200 games a season. The regular season ran from October through May. They usually played a game a night and often two on Sunday. At the height of their popularity, the Red Heads were not just one team, but three separate barnstorming teams.¹

Over the years the All American Red Heads received national and international publicity. Feature articles on the Red Heads appeared in magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, *Collier's*, *Sporting News*, *Sporting Life* and *Sports Illustrated*. Various Red Head teams appeared on TV programs such as Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town*, *To Tell the Truth*, *I've Got a Secret*, Art Linkletter's *House Party*, and on an NBC 60 Minutes Special. In 1974, the Red Heads were featured in an National Basketball Association (NBA) play-off half-time show.

For fifty years, 1936-1986, the All American Red Heads were a popular and financially successful operation. And they were popular at a time when sports were considered a male domain and the female role epitomized the antithesis of masculinity and athleticism. Women who competed in masculine sports such as basketball were not only seen as unfeminine, but often stigmatized as being masculine or lesbian. Even as late as 1980, prominent sport sociologists Don Sabo and Ross Runfola stated that "sport and masculinity are virtually synonymous in American culture" and that "a primary function of sport is the dissemination and reinforcement of such traditional American values as male superiority, competition, work, and success."²

In light of this cultural history, why were the Red Heads so successful? This is an especially interesting question since there has never been a successful women's basketball league in the United States. The newly launched American Basketball League which played its first game in October 1996 and the Women's National Basketball League which begins play June 1997 follow in the wake of three previous attempts that ended in failure.

It is postulated that the major reason for the Red Heads' popularity and financial success was that the owners, C.M. Olson, 1936-1954, and Orwell Moore, 1955-1986, capitalized on the inherent role conflict between being female and being athletic. They did this without challenging the dominant ideology of male superiority or traditional definitions of male/female gender roles. The owners accomplished this in two ways: one, by having the women play only against men's teams in the "battle of the sexes" and two, by having the women appear very feminine.

The Battle of the Sexes

The owners had the Red Heads play only against men's teams, so that the games could be publicized as the "battle of the sexes." For marketing purposes, the sensationalism of having the "weaker sex" take on men was a good gate draw. Much like vaudeville shows or the traveling circus, Red Heads' games were a major event in small towns throughout the United States. This was true even after the advent of television.

To make sure that the women never challenged the dominant ideology that sports are a male domain and that men are physically superior, the owners billed the games as entertaining basketball shows. By calling the games shows, the contests were placed outside the realm of "true" professional sport and into the realm of entertainment. Showmanship then became as important as athleticism. Publicity emphasized the Red Heads comedy routines, their half-time show of basketball wizardry, and their attractiveness.

The Red Heads played primarily against local teams made up of amateur or semi-pro basketball players. On two occasions, they played against National Football League (NFL) players. The San Francisco 49ers and the Kansas City Chiefs players' basketball skills were no match for the Red Heads. The football players size and

strength may have put them at disadvantage, since "real men" don't rough up ladies. The "weaker sex" defeating men was a good publicity ploy. The superiority of professional men's basketball was never challenged, since the women never played National Basketball Association (NBA) calibre players. Media coverage could play up the angle of the "battle of the sexes" and the fact that these women were pioneers establishing new firsts.

Even though the women played by men's rules, the seriousness of their play was undermined by their clowning on the court. Each Red Heads team had a designated comedienne who was responsible for comedy routines. The Red Heads often scored during these routines or when the men were distracted by their antics. Red Heads' scoring ploys such as the "piggy back" shot would have been disallowed in a regulation game. Consequently, even though the Red Heads won most of their games, their skills were discounted. The women were caught in a "Catch 22" situation. The emphasis on femininity and showmanship facilitated their acceptance, but it undermined the professionalism of their play.

Femininity

The second successful marketing strategy the Red Heads' owners used was to emphasize the femininity of the players. This accented gender differences and reinforced stereotypes. It also meant that professional women's basketball would pose no threat to traditional gender roles.

The promoters knew how important it was for the women to appear feminine. In American culture, sport and masculinity have been intricately tied. Women who dared to excel in traditional male sports were often characterized by the press and others as masculine, lesbian, freaks, or muscle molls.

Until fairly recently the dominant stereotype of the woman in sports was someone who was biologically female, but unattractive and without any feminine social graces. Feminist Naomi Wolf claims that men use images of female beauty as a political weapon to keep women in their place. In Victorian times, a feminist was often referred to in the press as "a big masculine woman, wearing boots, smoking a cigar, swearing like a trooper."³ Just as the caricature of the "ugly feminist" has dogged the women's liberation movement, so it has plagued women athletes.

References to Babe Didrikson, one of the greatest women athletes of all time, illustrate this type of gender stereotyping. In 1938 sportswriter Paul Gallico referred to Babe Didrikson, 1932 two gold medal Olympian, as "the muscle moll to end all muscle molls." He described her as "a tomboy who never wore make-up, who shingled her hair until it was as short as a boy's and never bothered to comb it, who didn't care about clothes and who despised silk underthings as being sissy. She had a boy's body, slim, straight curveless....She hated women....Her lips were thin and bloodless, with down showing on the upper one, and she had a prominent Adam's apple." He then suggested that the reason that she became a top athlete was "because she would not or could not compete with women at their own best game--man-snatching. It was an escape, a compensation." Gallico concluded that Didrikson may have been successful as an athlete, but she was a failure as a woman.⁴

Gallico especially condemned women ball players, wrestlers and boxers. He said they are: "The freaks....A pitiful crew, the female boxers, wrestlers, ball-players. Most of them are toughies and exhibitionists. For the most part they have ugly bodies, hard faces, cheap minds...."⁵

Based on these perceptions of women athletes, the Red Heads' owners knew that images of masculine or lesbian women would not have been acceptable to the public. In the owners' minds, their Red Heads players had to personify femininity. In appearance and manner, on and off the court, the players were to be seen as ladies. All the women were required to have flaming red hair -- the team trademark. Of course, not all of them were natural red heads. Even some of the natural red heads dyed their hair a brighter red, so that their hair would look more spectacular under the lights. All were required to wear blue eye shadow and bright red lipstick. Patriotic red, white and blue uniforms were designed to signify that the women were wholesome all American girls. The public was not to think of them as cheap sexy showgirls.

Carefully posed publicity pictures emphasized the women's femininity and set them apart from men. Images of beauty were more important than athleticism. The photos were of glamorous redheads in stunning poses spinning basketballs on their fingers or with regulation sized basketballs palmed in each hand. Attractive satin uniforms with short shorts accented their long legs and feminine

bodies. Flaming red hair, blue eye shadow, and bright red lipstick added to the allure of feminine glamour.

Even their arrival in town was carefully orchestrated. On arrival, these striking redheads paraded through the downtown area, in their red, white and blue All American Red Heads warm up uniforms. Glamour, patriotism, athleticism, all rolled into one. What could be more American?

Feminine redheads weren't going to be perceived as a threat to the status quo in basketball or to gender relations. Unfortunately, the emphasis on femininity served the function of camouflaging the women's superb athletic skills. It meant, in the long run, that sports history would ignore their accomplishments.

In actuality, these women were highly skilled players. Many were Amateur Athletic Association (AAU) basketball All Americans. These women were in peak athletic form. During the seven month season, all they did was travel and play basketball. To stay in shape they often did road work by running alongside the car on their way to their next engagement. They constantly worked on their quick maneuvers, fancy ball handling, and trick shots in order to dazzle the crowds during the game and at the half-time show.

For the Red Heads owners, the financial bottom line, not women's liberation, was their major concern. The owners exploited the image of traditional femininity to appeal to the crowds and to make professional women's basketball a commercial success. However, the women never felt exploited, demeaned or co-opted. As one player proudly stated at the Red Heads' Reunion in 1996, "I remember some of the members of one of the men's teams we were playing saying that we looked like cheerleaders not basketball players." She repeated the comment, because she thought the statement was a great compliment to the attractiveness of the Red Heads. She seemed to accept the stereotype of women athletes as unfeminine and unattractive. To her images of the Red Heads as attractive and feminine were positive attributes.

For Red Heads players, femininity and professionalism were intricately entwined. To them being attractive and athletic were both desirable characteristics. To be paid to play basketball was a dream come true. Most of the recruits were young women just out of high school who had never traveled outside of their small town or rural community. For them, traveling across the country, playing

basketball was exciting and status conferring. Most of the Red Heads players planned on playing a few years and then getting married. Products of their socio-cultural times, these were traditional women who were socially conditioned to accept the feminine roles of housewife and mother.

Publicity Images

The Red Heads' owners believed that to get bookings, it was more important for publicity to focus on the women's appearance than on their athleticism. Consequently, past basketball experience and current game statistics were largely ignored in press releases and game programs. The owner's instead focused on four publicity images (beautiful women, exciting games, patriotism, dollar signs). These images were carefully constructed and integrated.

Beautiful Women and Excitement

The following quotes from the 1970-1971 program illustrate how the owners carefully merged beauty and athleticism to project an image of beautiful women playing exciting basketball. "The RED HEADS will prove basketball can be beautiful, as well as exciting." "The All American Red Heads are not only champion athletes, but each girl is a Superlative in her own right."

Feminine beauty rather than athleticism is used as the major drawing card to attract fans. In a whole page of photos of team captain, Pat Overman, there is not one game action shot or statistic. Instead there are four pictures that highlight her good looks, charm and femininity. The first picture shows Overman in her red, white and blue uniform with a beauty crown on her head and a cape wrapped around her shoulders. The caption reads, "Crown Princess of Girls Professional Basketball." The impression left is that the game is more of a beauty pageant than an athletic event. The second picture shows her talking on the telephone while looking in a mirror applying her lipstick. The caption reads, "Miss Basketball -Fone'n and Fixin." This plays into the stereotype that women are more concerned with appearance and chatting on the phone with their "girl friends" than with being serious athletes and reinforces the belief that women are basically frivolous creatures. The third picture is a portrait shot of Overman's head framed in a basketball net. The last photo shows Overman in a Ziegfeld Follies or Radio

City Music Hall Rockettes pose. In top hat, holding a cane with toe pointed, she looks as if she is about to dance across the stage. The photo seems to scream out "show girl." But in case there is any doubt, the final publicity line on the page reads, "So make a date to see America's greatest Show Girl in Basketball...." It doesn't say, "Come out to see Pat Overman, the top scoring women's basketball player." A men's team using similar publicity would have been the laughing stock of the sports world.

Patriotism

The third image portrayed is that of patriotism. This is symbolized by the red, white and blue uniforms and by the team's name, the All American Red Heads. The term All American was added to the Red Heads name in 1937 when Ole Olson, the originator of the Red Heads, hired his first Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) All American basketball player. Over the years the term All American became identified with Americanism and was used in reference to images of the All American Girl and the All American Team. Statements such as "The ALL AMERICAN RED HEADS team...is as American as apple pie" and reference to the women as the "All Americans" reinforce this patriotic/nationalistic image.

Dollar Signs

Alone, these three images (beauty, excitement, and patriotism) would not have been enough to assure bookings. The final image was that of "dollar signs." The question that dominated most organizers' minds was: "Will the Red Heads attract crowds and make money?" Statements such as the following assured organizers of the Red Heads' drawing power. "The famous girls...will be performing before thousands of clamoring fans and all in a good cause as the local sponsors will be swelling their cash balances...."⁶ Even the money angle lacked crassness, since the games were usually staged as charity events to raise money for deserving causes. What could be more humanitarian than wholesome All American girls playing basketball for charity? As the owner, Orville Moore, liked to say, "Do you have any idea how much good the Red Heads have done for America? Bringin' good clean family fun to every state in the union, except Hawaii, and helpin' in any number of good causes, charities for blind people and poor Indian children and the like."⁷

Basketball Shows

The All American Red Heads' games were advertised as exciting basketball shows in which beautiful ladies displayed their brand of basketball wizardry against men's teams. By calling these games basketball shows the major emphasis became entertainment rather than a serious athletic contest. The dominant ideology that sports were a male domain and that men were physically superior to women went unchallenged. Images of beautiful, young ladies epitomized traditional femininity and heightened the suspense of the weaker sex competing against the dominant one.

Although the women defeated the men the majority of the time, the power structure was not threatened. This was because the women employed trick shots and comedy routines that would have been disallowed in a regulation men's game. Public acceptance and the financial success of the Red Heads can be attributed to their marginal adaptation to the hegemonic male world of sports.

Male Egos and Athletic Superiority

Still, these basketball exhibitions threatened some male egos. Even if these games were entertainment, some men found it demoralizing to be beaten by women. Sam Toperoff, who was stationed with the Army at Fort Devens in Massachusetts, recalls playing against the Red Heads in the 1950s. He remembers the commander telling them that "he wanted us to put on a good show, but he also didn't want his team to be humiliated by a bunch of glandular redheads."⁸

There is no doubt that the men who played against the Red Heads wanted to win. If they lost, their male friends would tease them unmercifully. The men also often found themselves in a "Catch 22" situation. If they played aggressive, physical basketball against the women and won, they would be accused of unsportsmanlike conduct. If they didn't go along with the antics of the women on the court, they would be seen as not having a sense of humor. If they lost, they really couldn't say anything. Excuses or negative comments would have been construed as poor sportsmanship by men with wounded egos. There were definite social constraints on their playing.

The men, however, could use back handed compliments to undermine the significance of the women's skills. For example, they

could say the women were excellent players for women but no match for professional men's basketball players, thus setting the record straight as to male athletic superiority. The Red Heads' statistic of having beaten most of the men's teams also could be called into question. Comments could be made that these games revolved more around entertainment than sports competition, or that the men were just good sports and let them win. There was no need to stigmatize these women as masculine, freaks, or lesbians, because they posed no threat to the traditional gender role hierarchy of male superiority. The women were "feminine," glamorous, humorous, and just happened to be able to play basketball. How could these beautiful, feminine ladies of charity basketball be construed as threatening the male basketball establishment or male athletic superiority?

The Game

When the women first came out on the court, the men on the opposing teams usually didn't take them seriously. This was a big mistake and often allowed the women to score a few quick points that put them in the lead. Many of the men started out cocky, arrogant, and over-confident. It was for this reason that during the first quarter of the game the women played serious basketball and didn't use any tricks or gimmicks. They wanted first to gain the respect of the men and the fans. The women's playing left no doubt in the minds of their opponents that they were serious contenders. Sheryl Wood Borgman, a player in the 1970's, recalls the typical men's reaction: "They thought that they could easily beat us. However after about five minutes of play, they realized they were in trouble. Most men were good sports and were very respectful." Another 1970's player, Gretchen Pinz Hyink, remembers, "[W]e usually earned their respect, [but] some had wounded egos."⁹

After the first quarter, the game really became exciting especially if the women were winning. Then they combined fancy dribbling, spectacular passes and trick shots with standard play. The men's play looked very ordinary in contrast. At half time, the women put on a dazzling show of basketball tricks -- spinning basketballs on one finger, dribbling between their legs, juggling basketballs, and doing trick shots such as making baskets from behind their backs or off their heads. During the second half of the game, the women performed staged comedy routines on the court. These

routines played on the humor of male/female role reversal and role conflict.

Comedy Routines

Comedy routines exploited the differences between the sexes and flirted with sexuality. At some point in the game, one of the women players would stop playing and yell to the ref: "Hey ref, he's committed a personal foul -- a very personal foul." Eventually, as play came to a standstill, the ref would inquire, "What did he do?" and the woman would repeat, "A very, very personal foul, ref. He pinched me." The accused male player would look perplexed, because he hadn't done anything. And the fans loved it. Another play was to have one of the taller Red Heads players lean over and plant a kiss on the bald head of one of the refs -- sexual harrassment in reverse. Another crowd pleaser occurred when one of the men slipped on the court. A Red Heads player would quickly grab his arm and help him up. This was a nice reversal of the traditional role of manly strength and feminine frailty. Other pranks were also used to keep the male players off balance. A Red Heads player might run up behind one of the men and just scream. Lynn Holst, a guard who played in 1972-73, recalls doing this: "I used to sneak up behind men and scream. One man was so scared he just fell to the floor."¹⁰ Often while the men were distracted a Red Head would score a basket.

"Entertainment was the primary objective in every game," according to Dolores Clack Peterson, who played in the 1950's. Pat Overman, whose career spanned ten years in the 1960's and '70's, stated: "Our goal was to out-smart the men -- we couldn't out-run them, but we could outshoot them."¹¹

Coach Charlene Ammons, a former player turned coach, stressed to the players that some of the men might be stronger and able to jump higher, but the key to winning was strategy. She used to say, "You have to outsmart 'em to beat 'em." And the Red Heads did just that, winning about 80% of their games and, on a good night, scoring as many as one hundred points.¹² For fifty seasons, the key to the Red Heads' popularity and financial success was their emphasis on showmanship and femininity. This form of marginal adaptation made them acceptable to the male sports establishment. The emphasis on showmanship and femininity was also the reason for

their demise in 1986. Ironically, equal opportunity for women in sports would make them defunct.

Women's Liberation Leads to Demise of Red Heads

The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960's led to changing definitions of women's roles and to new laws to protect women's rights. The passage by Congress of Title IX in 1972 opened the door for women to participate on an equal basis with men in any educational program or activity receiving federal funds. In 1974 the male bastion of Little League baseball succumbed to a Supreme Court ruling stating that girls had to be permitted to play.

Title IX was also a catalyst for traditional men's Ivy Colleges such as Yale and Harvard to become co-educational and for colleges and universities nationwide to grant athletic scholarships to women. All over America attitudes about women in sports were changing.

It was only a matter of time before the public's interest in the Red Heads would vanish. The "battle of the sexes" would no longer sell tickets and comedy sexist routines would become anathema. In 1986 the Red Heads disbanded after fifty years on the road.

Cultural constraints on definitions of femininity and sport had forced the Red Heads to appear feminine and to play comedy basketball against men in order to gain public acceptance. If they had played serious basketball in a women's league, no one would have taken them seriously or paid to see them play. Times have changed. The success or failure of the two new women's professional basketball leagues, the ABL and the WNBA, will determine if women's basketball has finally come of age. In any event, the times of the Red Heads has past.

Iona College

Gai Ingham Berlage

Notes

1. Material in this paper is derived from Red Heads Programs, memorabilia, and questionnaires/interviews with former Red Heads players.
2. Don Sabo, Jr. and Ross Runfola, *Jock: Sports & Male Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, A Spectrum Book, 1980; x-xi.
3. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1992; 10, 18.
4. Paul Gallico, *Farewell to Sport*. N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938; 239.
5. Gallico, 236.

6. Excerpts taken from *Alaska - Top of the World Tour: World Champion Girls' Basketball Team Program*, 1970-1971 season.
7. William Johnson and Nancy Williamson, "All Red, So Help Them Henna," *Sports Illustrated*, 6 May 1974: 79.
8. Sam Toperoff, "About Men: Faked Out by Zethel," *The New York Times*, 11 June 1989: Sec. 8, 22.
9. Based on responses of forty-four former Red Heads players to questionnaires handed out by author at Red Heads Reunion, Caraway, Arkansas, July 26-28, 1996.
10. Comment on questionnaire handed out by author at Red Heads Reunion, Caraway, Arkansas, July 26-28, 1996.
11. The quotes are from questionnaires that the author handed out at Red Heads Reunion, Caraway, Arkansas, July 26-28, 1996.
12. Catherine Watson, "Basketball's Red-Haired Heroines," *Minneapolis Tribune Picture Magazine*, Sunday, 15 December 1974: 29.

***Doctor Who* Fans Rewrite Their Program: Mini-UNIT Minstrels as Creative Consumers of Media**

Doctor Who, the longest-running science-fiction program in the history of television, is not well known in the United States. In Great Britain, where the program was made between 1963 and 1989, *Doctor Who* is an institution, a show everyone knows about even if there are few die-hard fans. Frequent references in print and on television parallel the *Star Trek* phenomenon in the United States. Though there have been critical studies of British and Australian *Doctor Who* fans (notably John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado's *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*), little has been done on American fans' consumption of this British science-fiction children's program. How and why do American fans engage with *Doctor Who*?

To answer these questions, I interviewed members of a now-defunct *Doctor Who* fan club in Minneapolis, Minnesota, unique because they engaged with their program by performing an activity that receives little critical attention: they made their own original *Doctor Who*-based videos. The video-making fans were all members of Mini-UNIT, a Twin Cities-based fan club. The name is a combination of "Mini," for Minnesota, and UNIT, a *Doctor Who* in-joke referring to the imaginary United Nations Intelligence Taskforce, where the Doctor was an unpaid scientific advisor during his exile on Earth. Some Mini-UNIT members formed a small, cliquy in-group dubbed MUM, short for Mini-UNIT Minstrels. MUM members, who at MUM's inception consisted of about 20 people ranging in age from 14 to 40 and from all walks of life, wrote, produced, acted in, taped, and edited eight video stories between 1986 and 1990. Many MUM members were in high school, some not old enough to drive, when the group started; some were college or vocational-school students; some were professionals and others laborers. The group was split evenly between men and women; all MUM members were white. Most had a long-standing interest in not only *Doctor Who* but also other British science-fiction television:

Blake's 7, the Monty Python series and movies, *Blackadder*, *The Prisoner*, and later *Red Dwarf*. (Many of these programs have fannish followings of their own.) Though MUM has ceased producing videos, they completed nine between 1986 (when rumblings about *Doctor Who* cancellation began) and 1990.

A Brief History of *Doctor Who*

Doctor Who, which aired its first episode, "An Unearthly Child," in 1963, owes its longevity to its clever writing and low-budget camp. The show did not take off in Britain until its second story, "The Daleks" (December 1963-February 1964) introduced its most famous villainous aliens: the emotionless Daleks. This episode "turned *Doctor Who* into an overnight success [in Britain] with over 8 million viewers" (Lofficier, *The Programmes* 16). *Doctor Who's* premise is simple: a renegade Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey, the Doctor, travels in time and space in his time machine, the TARDIS (an acronym for "Time and Relative Dimensions in Space"), often accompanied by several companions. When injured, Time Lords have the ability to regenerate into a new form, which has resulted in seven actors having played the title role for television. The program has traditionally relied on clever writing and superior actors; sites such as tunnels, corridors, and quarries have become clichés on this program, as have men in tacky monster suits. Because the TARDIS can move in time and space, topics of stories are literally endless: there are historical and contemporary episodes set on Earth, far-flung future empire episodes, take-offs of mythological stories, tales of political intrigue, invasion stories, and simple monster stories. The tone ranges from deadly seriousness to slapstick humor. The show, shot mostly on videotape with much use of outdoor locations, is made to be shown in half-hour segments that end in a cliffhanger, with anywhere from four to six to eight half-hour segments making up a complete story. In the United States, the program tends to be shown on PBS, though the Sci-Fi Channel aired it briefly; for American audiences, the half-hour episodes are often edited into one long "movie."

The program ceased production as a regular television program in 1989. However, the program was granted a temporary reprieve. An American-British television consortium stepped in to save the program in a different format. Universal Television, Fox

Television, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) shot a made-for-TV movie in Vancouver; it was shown in the United States in May 1996 and several weeks later in the United Kingdom ("The Doctor Is In" 8-9; "Eighth Doctor Announced!" 16). Paul McGann, previously unaffiliated with the program, starred as the Doctor. The show was written to please two audiences: the fans and those completely new to the program. Despite a hefty special effects budget, the ratings were dismal and the rumor mill has passed sentence: no more *Doctor Who*.

Doctor Who in America

The Universal/Fox/BBC consortium's attempt to manufacture a British product for American consumption raises this question: Why do some American fans prefer British imports? Most MUM members were fans of other British programs but not necessarily more than casual watchers of American cult favorites such as *Star Trek* or *Babylon 5*. Many MUM members admit that they prefer British humor, finding it more sophisticated and intellectual than American humor. However, intelligent treatment of material was also cited by MUM members as an important reason they preferred British programs. John Tulloch, who interviewed Australian fans about *Doctor Who*, felt that *Doctor Who* was superior to American science fiction because, as one fan says, the Doctor "doesn't go in for the three things that you find in all American heroes: (a) they are very, very macho, (b) they are usually interested in women and gambling, and (c) they all have a slant towards hardware and action. The Doctor breaks all of those boundaries, and he rarely resorts to violence" (Tulloch and Jenkins 165). British, Australian, and American fans agree that *Doctor Who* is a program of ideas.

Perhaps because it is hard to find the source program being aired, American interest in the program is waning after a boom in the 1980s. Despite an Internet presence and some regional PBS stations that faithfully air the program, the program attracts few new American fans. In the mid-1980s, 230 PBS stations showed *Doctor Who*; that number had dropped to about 30 in 1995 (Martin 6), perhaps in part because the show is no longer being made.

In 1986, before *Doctor Who* was officially canceled, MUM made their first video, *The Two Companions* (1986), an adaptation of a British stage play. *Doctor Who* story references intertwine with a

plot revolving around *Doctor Who* movers and shakers such as John Nathan-Turner, then the producer of the program. MUM videos, poorly produced and amateurishly acted, parody the low-budget camp of the source program. The videos recreate the TARDIS console by using a spinning turntable topped with Dixie cups. The TARDIS roundels are made of paper plates stuck to the wall. Silly jokes and ridiculous costumes abound. Still, MUM members found themselves minor celebrities after their videos were shown at science-fiction conventions and, later, on public-access cable.

MUM's interpretive activity is typical of fan groups, though instead of writing fanzines or editing together new stories out of existing clips of the original program (activities Camille Bacon-Smith outlines in her analysis of media fandom), they create new texts by donning *Doctor Who* costumes and, as actors, becoming the characters they represent. By appropriating an original text, MUM members "remake programs in their own image. Fandom is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups . . . to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations; fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests, a way of transforming mass culture into popular culture" (Jenkins, *Star Trek* 174). By including *Doctor Who* producers, comptrollers, critics, and other people connected with the show in capacities other than actors, MUM rewrites a program that has a fannish reputation for ignoring the voices of its fans.

Making Videos to Valorize the Fan Experience

Making original videos with fan actors is not a particularly common fan activity, though I know of at least two other groups who have made *Doctor Who* fan videos, most notably members of a Chicago fan group, The Federation, who distributed their regular productions as "vidzines." Videos are a valid way of expressing appreciation for the fans' chosen media program because they valorize the fan experience and require fannish information to decode. Because all the MUM members have a common interest--*Doctor Who*, and, to a lesser extent, other British television programs--much of the humor in MUM videos relies on coded knowledge that only a *Doctor Who* fan would have. This in turn necessarily limits the audience, but it simultaneously draws MUM members closer by reinforcing the fannish learning experience and

excluding outsiders. MUM's videos have more freedom than fan videos culled from the source material (for instance, Bacon-Smith's "songtapes," which cut together bits of the primary source to tell a new story). MUM's productions can have two actors who never appeared together on the original program appear in the same scene; they can also add references to sources other than *Doctor Who*, most notably *The Prisoner* and various Monty Python sources, as well as references to current events in the *Doctor Who* production world.

The process of learning about *Doctor Who*, and, to a lesser extent, the other sources drawn on for the videos, comes from watching all the original *Doctor Who* programs and engaging with other fans of the show. MUM members all recall vividly their initial engagement with the program, an important time used to build knowledge. This intense learning phase, guided by other fans, repeated viewing of the source program, and reading magazines and books about *Doctor Who*, creates an encyclopedic information base that MUM then works with when creating videos. MUM member Tom Keenan says of his early fan experience, "I was going through my crazy *Doctor Who* fandom phase, where anything associated with *Doctor Who*--let's learn more, let's know the ins, the outs, and everything else." Sue Bartholomew theorizes that fans of things in general, from television programs to sports, begin with this intense learning phase: "These are people who like the show and want to know everything about the show, the ideas, the sport, no matter what it is. They want to know everything about it. Then you move up." This knowledge does have its practical applications: Dave Weides admits that it takes only minor effort for him to organize a pile of *Doctor Who* Target paperback novelizations into the order aired, which is helpful when assisting at conventions.

Because of this learning phase, fans end up with a large base of common information. The learning phase of *Doctor Who* is particularly lengthy, as trivia from as far back as 1963 must be memorized and contextualized. The rarity of American broadcast of early *Doctor Who* episodes, not to mention the BBC's own problems with destroying or misplacing archive tapes, compounds the problems of the learning process. MUM assumes that the fans have gone through this memorization phase and will recognize the situations and characters it re-creates. Occasional watchers of the program would not have enough knowledge to decode MUM's videos, as they

deliberately leave behind audience members who know little or nothing about *Doctor Who*, thus reinforcing the learning phase and linking the "real" fans into a cohesive unit.

When I asked MUM members about the videos' audience, responses were similar. Mark Rollie says, "Some people have accused us of shooting them for ourselves," a response echoed by other MUM members. Alex Rollie says the videos were made for the fannish convention audience; she notes, "[t]he people who watched it on cable access probably don't know what was going on anyway. . . . Unless they're *Doctor Who* fans, they wouldn't understand. . . . You have to know something about *Doctor Who* in order to understand a lot of the jokes." Matt Alexander responds with "No one." When pressed, Alexander adds, "Well, the first one we had an audience. We were trying to shoot for the fandom audience. . . . But after that, it was just a case of it was fun to do. If people watched them, fine. . . . You know--who cares." In every case, their responses to my question referred to the specialized knowledge required to understand the video and acknowledge the incomprehensibility of the product to the average viewer.

Alexander's response goes a step further by implying that MUM produced later videos with no intention of consumption, implying recursiveness in the members' mastering and transmitting fannish knowledge. The later videos were made to fuel the group's closeness and exclusivity. Tom Keenan in particular remembers the extreme difficulty he had getting into MUM and finding the acceptance of his fellow MUM members. The group took the learning phase a step further: instead of just mastering the source program, members had to master the content of the past videos and--much to Keenan's distress--the unstated content of the videos as expressed through in-jokes based on common MUM experiences such as flubbed lines. Not surprisingly, the later videos rely heavily on in-jokes and references to earlier videos. MUM gives a nod to the videos' drawing the group together by following the credits of each video with outtakes and taping mishaps.

Power Co-opted by the Fans

Despite the escalating use of self-referentiality and exclusive in-group jokes, MUM's videos generally have a narrative

that can be deciphered by anyone who cares to pay attention. MUM videos also play with *Doctor Who* characters by placing them in situations unrelated to the program itself, as when MUM's Doctor Six finds herself in the world of *The Prisoner*. However, the context, particularly of the earlier videos, relies heavily on knowledge of *Doctor Who* and its situations and characters. Such scenes are familiar to any moderately educated fan. The following cutting from a dialogue from "Genesis of the Daleks" (1975), a *Doctor Who* episode where the Doctor is given the means to kill all Daleks before they can become the scourge of the universe, shows the Doctor's moral dilemma. As the Doctor holds together two wires that will trigger an explosive device, his companion, Sarah Jane Smith, begs him not to hesitate.

The Doctor: Listen: if someone who knew the future pointed out a child to you and told you that that child would grow up totally evil, to be a ruthless dictator who would destroy millions of lives, could you then kill that child?

Sarah Jane Smith: We're talking about the Daleks, the most evil creatures ever invented. You must destroy them; you must complete your mission for the Time Lords!

The Doctor: Do I have the right? Simply touch one wire against the other, and that's it. The Daleks cease to exist. Hundreds of millions of people, thousands of generations, could live without fear, in peace, and never even know the world Dalek.

MUM parodies this scene in *The Two Companions*. Michael "Mikey" Grade (then on staff at the BBC as *Doctor Who*'s comptroller) wants to axe *Doctor Who*. Doctor Four has to make a decision. John Nathan-Turner hands her two wires and tells her that if she intervenes, *Doctor Who*--indeed, all of television--will be saved:

Doctor Four: Listen: if somebody who knew the future pointed out a child to you, and told you that child would grow up to be totally evil, to be a ruthless

Comptroller who would destroy many great TV programs, could you destroy that child?

Sarah Jane: It's Michael Grade we're talking about--the most evil person ever created. You must destroy him. You must complete your mission for the producer!

Doctor Four: Have I that right? Thousands of generations could live without fear, in peace, and never know the name of Grade. . . .

Here, MUM parallels the ruthless Grade with the alien Daleks. The writers based the entire situation on an actual *Doctor Who* episode that any literate Who fan would know about, but full understanding of the humor is impossible unless the fan also knows that Grade was responsible for attempting to cancel the program in 1985. This kind of humor repays the close attention fans pay not only to every episode, but also to inside information about the politics behind the program gleaned from magazines such as *Doctor Who Monthly* and *Starlog*.

Instead of denouncing Grade directly, *The Two Companions* writes him into the context of the program he is attempting to cancel. MUM emancipates itself from the primary text here, a departure from typical fan activity involving video images. According to Bacon-Smith, fandom encourages strict adherence to the source program. For instance, fans consider the songtapes Bacon-Smith describes invalid if it uses a clip outside the source program. MUM's videos move outside these tacit rules in three ways: by using live actors and re-creating scenes; by mixing fictive characters with real people; and by alluding to programs other than *Doctor Who*.

MUM's desire to speak only to a knowledgeable group and exclude everyone else provides them with control over the program. John Tulloch argues that *Doctor Who* fans

are, in effect, situated as a privileged group with few powers--a powerless elite with little control over the floating voter [non-fan *Doctor Who* watchers who determine whether the show will remain on the air] on one side, the producers of the show on the other. Consequently their explanation and evaluation of any one episode is strongly determined by this positioning

as experts who have little control over either the conditions of production or reception of 'their' show. (Tulloch and Jenkins 145)

Though Tulloch is not referring to American fans, his analysis regarding the fans' powerlessness rings true: American fans have even less say in the program's continuation than British fans and are further at the mercy of regional PBS schedules and budgets. The BBC does not care if a program is popular abroad; when renewing programs, they look only at the ratings in Great Britain. Keith Heiberg summarizes the BBC's position on the cancellation of *Doctor Who* as, "No show, no fans to bug us about the show" (Heiberg 6).

MUM seizes power by recontextualizing the program to bring about a preferred result. MUM moves beyond simple acceptance of a primary text. The Doctor/Sarah Jane Smith dialogue quoted above, for instance, shows the Doctor wrestling with a decision to kill "Mikey" Grade. This approach uses this primary text to suggest that within the purview of MUM's own creation, Grade will get what he deserves. MUM creates preferred interpretations of events, using the broadcast episodes of *Doctor Who* as only the loosest guide. By doing this, MUM expresses its desire to control the means of production, which it articulates in two ways. First, of course, is the making of the video itself. Second is the inclusion of *Doctor Who* behind-the-scenes players, notably producer John Nathan-Turner, script editor Eric Saward (played by a puppet in MUM videos), and comptroller Michael Grade. Also appearing in many videos as an ominous figure was Mary Whitehouse, of the British children's television watchdog group National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, a group unaffiliated with the BBC. Whitehouse's protests about excessive violence in children's television programming turned *Doctor Who* to comedy—temporarily, as it turned out. These people, responsible for the program's direction and ultimately for its demise, appear in most MUM videos. MUM wants to control the controller and does so by rewriting the source program and inserting those who really do control the production and direction of *Doctor Who*, which allows them to be manipulated by fans.

Some MUM members, however, see the inclusion of this kind of specialized information as a drawback. Tom Keenan remarks of the audience,

They could recognize the actual *Doctor Who* characters. The subplots of Mikey Grade and Mary Whitehouse and all that kind of stuff--unless they understood or someone had it explained to them, they didn't understand the humor. If they had not watched *The Prisoner*, it wouldn't have been [understandable]. I mean, I had no idea. "The Village"? It was a drawback. If we had done something that was more identifiable, I think we would have gone over more.

However, MUM has no desire to appeal to a broad audience. MUM wishes to valorize the specialized information only fans have; they wish to exclude viewers not in the know and reward informed viewers, which in turn maintains and perpetuates the fan status quo and the transmission and perpetuation of fannish knowledge. Snide attacks on BBC personnel provide emotional satisfaction, humor, and fannish exclusivity.

Where is MUM Now?

Though MUM has not made videos since 1990, one video, *Without a Who*, remains unfinished. Sue Bartholomew notes that it needs only a day of shooting plus editing to complete, but argues that MUM had grown "too political." She refuses to complete it. After Mini-UNIT declared defeat in 1992 and disbanded due to shrinking membership and general inertia, most MUM members moved on; Bartholomew, for instance, has taken up competitive fencing. Of all the MUM members, Dave Weides is the only one who maintains an active and visible interest in the program; he edits a World Wide Web page devoted to *Doctor Who* called "Matrix Mutterings." The members remain in touch but seem to be drifting apart. And though interest in *Doctor Who* still exists, with many fan groups still operating and an Internet newsgroup presence, not to mention the occasional convention, the heyday of *Doctor Who* fandom appears over now that the source program is no longer being made.

Conclusion

Henry Jenkins remarks of fans in general that "[w]ithin the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors" (Jenkins, *Poachers* 27). By straddling the line between consumer and producer, as well as blurring the distance between creation and creators, MUM members rewrite the texts to their own liking. In MUM's world, *Doctor Who* comptroller Michael Grade and producer John Nathan-Turner get what they deserve for "sabotaging" *Doctor Who*. MUM members seize control of their commodity, thus becoming proprietors by making a final product and by valorizing their ownership of knowledge, their engagement with the fan experience, and their perpetuation the group itself.

Though MUM members cite social activity as their prime reason for making videos, most show a keen awareness of audience and an understanding of MUM's exclusiveness. MUM members' responses to my questions focused on social activity, teamwork, the hard work that goes into making a video, and in-jokes. Though I have analyzed MUM's video-making activity here in terms of a disenfranchised group appropriating power, I feel a textual study of MUM's videos would be useful. The images used--for instance, Mikey Grade carrying an axe; Eric Seward appearing as a puppet--have much to offer, as does an analysis of the choices of secondary television programs used to complement *Doctor Who*--many, like *The Prisoner* and any number of Monty Python sources, with significant cult followings of their own.

In addition, studies of American fan-based video-making groups other than MUM should also be undertaken, as analysis of this kind of creative activity lags far behind the study of fanzines or artifacts made from cuttings from the source program itself. Fan-written and -acted videos that comment on American programs would provide a useful contrast to this study; however, I have seen no such videos.

American fan reactions to British programs seem to differ from fan reactions to American shows, where respecting the integrity of the source program and its continuity are important. Perhaps it is the very powerlessness of American fans to impact British productions that results in personal attacks against *Doctor Who*'s production staff and drastic rewritings of the source text. However, MUM's fannish activities are a genuine form of American popular

culture, as MUM rewrites an established British mass-culture artifact in order to control it.

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A version of this paper was presented in October 1995 at the Great Plains Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association regional meeting in Sioux City, Iowa.

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Perspectives on Generation X: The Role of Play in the Formation of Male Personalities

Generation X is the age group born between 1965 and 1980 (Porter 1996). The name, that of a punkish band in the 1980's, was popularized by Doug Coupland in 1991 and often attributed to him (Rushkoff 1994). The generation of "baby boomers" preceding Generation X currently holds much of the economic power and privilege in the United States. This controlling generation has branded Generation X a "lost" generation, lacking in direction, having no focus, and full of cynicism. The "invisible" generation is often characterized as "slackers" and misfits, unambitious and non-participatory. These "baby busters" have inherited the cultural and economic burden left them by the boomers, who consider them illiterate, unmotivated, apathetic couch potatoes and whiners (Rushkoff 1994, 3-4).

But contrary to the stereotypes of their predecessors, Generation X voted heavily in the recent national election. With certain other key demographic categories, including women, blacks, Latinos, and Jews, Generation X favored Clinton by 53% over 35% for Dole (compared to an overall national profile of 49.2% for Clinton and 40.8% for Dole). Although portrayed as uninvolved, about two-thirds of Generation Xers volunteer to help others (Potter 1996). While skeptical of slogans, causes, and established organizations, they are much more involved with the community than was previously thought, rating family and community as some of their highest concerns.

What, then, characterizes Generation X, if not the stereotypes of the baby boomers? While members of Generation X differ, as do those of any generation, certain patterns can be ascertained.

Generation Xers have little faith in the older generations. Often from families of divorce and the first latchkey children, they feel they cannot depend on their elders. Exposed to the avarice and political scandals of the 1980's, they get little reassurance concerning

the dependability or altruism of their government. According to Rushkoff (1994), "The 'uninvolved' status of our nation's young people is a direct result of our leadership's fear to do its real business in public." The betrayal of parents and government combined with the blatant consumerism and public relations strategies of our politicians has given Generation Xers the impression that they are on their own. As a result, they have developed resistance to commercial manipulation, the ability to reflect upon themselves and their circumstances, and a reluctance to affiliate with any established group, including political parties. Instead, they prefer to forge their own path, reviewing propoganda with skepticism and acquiring information through alternative channels developed by their peers (such as on-line chat rooms and 'zines). Their focus is on issues and the perceived ability of each candidate to enact favorable policies, rather than on political allegiance or "character". After all, how can a generation which has witnessed Watergate and the savings and loan scandals put much faith in the character of our political and economic elite? Few bother to read a newspaper or watch the news. And much to the horror of business concerns, Generation X throws out its junk mail without reading it!

Witness to the many warnings concerning global warming and pollution, they fear for the fate of our environment. Growing up during an economic "downturn," Generation Xers are often either unemployed or underemployed, with little security and even less faith in the future. The uncertainty of their situation in so many respects has led to the prevalence of their characteristic word and its accompanying feeling, "whatever" (Saltveit 1994, 52).

All of these influences and more in our society today have created a self-reflective generation that can "find the heroic in the mundane and the glimmer of success in even the most disastrous failures." (Rushkoff 1994, 106)

While the foregoing discussion is based on generalities gleaned from various other scholars, the authors have personally witnessed the development of these characteristics as participants in youth groups during the 1980's in Los Angeles. The senior author is an anthropologist and youth group leader; the two junior authors are her twentysomething sons and members of Generation X. Armin Martin is currently a student and intern in psychology at Northern Arizona University; Kai Martin has considerable and long-standing expertise

in the area of computer games. All of us were involved in the observation and analysis of the play of young boys in Los Angeles during the mid to late 1980's and now reflect on its significance for the formation of twentysomething male personalities.

Play and Its Significance

First, let us look at circumstances surrounding the play of young boys in Los Angeles during the 1980's and explore some of the factors determining characteristics of Generation X.

Although the senior author worked full time during this period, she managed to arrange her schedule to pick up her sons after school. Arriving at the playground, she invariably found other children anxious and some crying. They were not sure if their mothers would be able, unable, or even forget to pick them up. Each day the same scene was reenacted, even though three different private elementary schools were involved during this period. Children's uncertainty began then, and lasted until the next school day. Families were constantly changing. One child remarked that if he called for help, he could count on no one, but might elicit responses from some fifty men connected with his mother!

For some children, no one would pick them up. They were to keep silent about this, walk home, lock the door, and not answer the phone or even respond to a knock on the door. For these kids, the world was full of certain dangers just waiting to happen. The scenario was not unrealistic in the neighborhoods in question.

Knowing someone was always home after school, many children began hanging out at our house, some returning home with us, others arriving on their own. One boy aged four was locked out of his house even when his parents were there; he would arrive at our home for a glass of water or a band-aid. Some children would still be waiting for their parents at our dinner time and would eat at the house; not infrequently, a few would spend the night. The effects on these children ranged widely. One interesting phenomenon we observed was the lack of focus, direction, and even rhythms manifested by some. At the very least, these children did not observe their parents involved in activities, and therefore remained without knowledge, discipline, perseverance, and focus. In extreme cases where children were left at home to make their own food and monitor their own activities, they lacked even the societal sleep and hunger

cycles. One boy in particular will serve as an unfortunate example. He loved to stay at our house because we had hot meals and so many new objects and activities. But we would find him at all hours of the night up engaged in some type of play, or rummaging in the refrigerator for food. At first we thought he was ill. Yet he seemed to think that everything was normal in this pattern of alternating sleep with play and eating. Now that Generation X has entered college, one sees these same habits in students who suddenly get up to stretch, look out the window, or leave the room as if the teacher is merely a background TV lecture against which to enact the business of living.

While in popular belief children's play may be seen as "natural" in its extent, form and content, research over the past several decades has demonstrated the interrelationship of play and the totality of its context. Children may play anywhere, but they will do so differently according to circumstances, and may play more rarely when under stress, whether that stress refers to time pressure or to conditions of extreme poverty, fear, uncertainty, or abuse. The study of play in different societies reveals both common themes and cultural variation.

Recent decades of behavioral science research in the United States have focused particularly on the value of play in training the young for adult life. Child's play is often viewed as a serious collection of activities that involve both safety issues and inculcation of social values (Westland and Knight 1982, 2). Every year around Christmastime, popular magazines and television shows suggest toys for parents to buy for their children. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission in Washington, D.C. publishes a Consumer's Guide for selecting suitable toys called *Which Toy for Which Child?*

Children's play differs in the presence of adults compared to the forms it takes during their absence. Adult-structured play has been more thoroughly studied (for example in laboratories, schools, playgrounds) than child-structured play (Schwartzman 1983, 209-210). Even when using the formal rules in adult structured play, children may redefine or reinterpret these rules when adults are not present. Elsewhere the role of play in stimulating creativity has been explored by the senior author (see Read-Martin and also Martin). Here the focus is on the analysis of play activities as they reflect and create social norms, cultural values and personal

aspirations. The spontaneous child-structured play of boys approximately 7 to 12 years of age living in the Los Angeles area was observed in the 1980's.

Play in Human Culture

In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*, Huizinga discussed "play as a distinct and highly important factor in the world's life and doings. For many years the conviction has grown upon me that civilization arises and unfolds in and as play" (Foreword to the 1960 printing). Play is a significant function, "which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action" (1960, 1). Play involves intensity and absorption, tension, mirth and fun; "the *fun* of playing, resists all analysis, all logical interpretation" (*ibid.*, 3). Play is a social construction (p. 4), a voluntary activity (p. 7), done at leisure (p. 8). Play is freedom and it is not "ordinary" or "real" life, but pretending.

The interrelationship of play activities and culture was emphasized in Roberts, Arth, and Bush's 1959 "Games in Culture," and elaborated in Sutton-Smith's *Toys as Culture* (1986). Roberts and Sutton-Smith's (1962) "Child Training and Game Involvement" distinguished three game types. Games involving physical contests occurred particularly in the more egalitarian societies, training young boys in physical skills and independence. Games of chance were more common in socio-culturally and technologically complex cultures, especially "in the presence of environmental, individual, and social uncertainty" (*ibid.*, 434). Games of strategy were especially prevalent in highly complex and socially stratified cultures. Later Sutton-Smith (1972) argued that cultures could be divided into two types: ascriptive game cultures manifested hierarchical play; whereas achievement game cultures focused less on ritual, formalized hierarchies and less on physical aggression. This last distinction has particular significance when comparing the popularity of various coexisting games or forms of play in Los Angeles.

In *Toys and Games of Children of the World*, Chanan and Francis (1984, 13) state that "in each culture the sayings that accompany the game tell of what is safe and what is harmful, of what is permitted and what is forbidden." Play is intimately involved with religion, social life, and child-rearing practices. Toys

and games preserve aspects of traditional culture and cultural identity (*ibid.*, 27).

Aliens, Evil, and Warfare: The Decade of the 80's

Beginning in the mid-1980's, we observed and participated in the play of boys aged 7 to 12 in a variety of contexts. These children became immersed in the TV series *Transformers*. Most boys purchased Transformer action figures and carried them around, establishing a playfield anywhere--in a supermarket, at church, or in a doctor's waiting room.

Transformers involved shiny, machine-like figures originally developed in Japan. These had more than one mode. A humanoid robot could, with dextrous manipulation, change into a powerful machine, such as a jet. Some were "triple-changers." Transformers appealed to boys for a number of reasons: their futuristic appearance and technological sophistication; the expertise required to transform them--which boys learned fast, but adults rarely acquired; and their power compared to ordinary humans.

Good and evil never overlapped in the Transformer world. Each figure had its counterpart in a parallel world. Battles involved extensive firepower and destruction. The outcome of each combat episode was predetermined, based on the unalterable collective power of the capacities of members of each robot team.

Transformers reinforced stereotypical gender roles. Physical power was masculine. Three light-colored female Transformers eventually appeared for sale. Nurturing but with little power, they never caught on with either boys or girls and were sometimes offered free with the purchase of a male figure.

Humans were essentially powerless in the face a continual battle between good and evil, featured on the television show as small figures running and screaming before the great battling machines approaching earth. Only one boy, a computer "geek," was ever able to influence a battle.

At first, Transformers were primarily egalitarian--similar in size and price, except for the large, expensive leader, Megatron. An elaborate gradation in size was introduced. Children who could afford the bigger, more powerful Transformers automatically won engagements with more indigent opponents.

Although shiny and impressive, Transformers represented toys of display more than use, adding a new category to those of Sutton-Smith mentioned earlier. Play was imitative of the show, reflecting little imagination. Any meeting between boys had a clear outcome in terms of ranking; mock battles had a foregone conclusion. Children participated by watching the program daily, sharing comics, and admiring one another's machines. Eventually, Transformers were placed on shelves, repacked in boxes, traded, or trashed. Their attraction as objects of game play was clearly limited.

Traditional American values involving strategizing, individual achievement, team-work, favoring the underdog, and equality of opportunity were not reflected in these games. Rather, much emphasis was placed on the acquisition of power and wealth, just as it was in adult society and the media during this time in Los Angeles.

Return to Traditional American Values: G.I. Joe

When initially issued, G.I. Joes were large male doll-figures. These toys went out of fashion, partly because of their resemblance to "dolls." But because of a fundamental appeal to core American values, the G.I. Joe comics and television show remained popular and finally a new, small action figure was produced. When tired of Transformers, children returned to G.I. Joe characters, allowing for more creative play with less predictability of outcome. A child playing with G.I. Joes could strategize and cooperate to create more imaginative ways to outwit enemies. G.I. Joes fostered socially interactive and imaginative play, albeit aggressive. Figures were used with other toys-- such as trains, arts and crafts materials--to create new scenarios. Play involved two types of games distinguished by Avedon and Sutton-Smith: strategy and physical interaction, as boys ran, jumped and wrestled in concert with their action figures.

Role Playing Games in Adolescence

After the age of eleven or twelve, children change markedly in their intellectual orientation, relationships with peers and adults, and vision of the world. They enter Piaget's formal operational period. Power, of course, remains a focus, as does problem solving through individual and team initiative. A more elaborate fantasy

world is created, which may include role-playing games (see Opie and Opie 1969). For boys, this often tends to involve science fiction worlds, and games such as Dungeons and Dragons or Battletech.

Boys formed a club of eleven members, the Dragonlords, which met regularly for several years to play these games. A difficult decision involved selecting the Dungeonmaster for Dungeons and Dragons. Boys were chosen for their knowledge, creativity, and fairness to others in the game. Each boy devised elaborate strategies and recounted lengthy tales of wandering and adventure. Creative problem solving was encouraged; a boy who was unimaginative, illogical, or a poor strategist was helped by others, but encouraged to think ideas through in advance. Social interactions were normally peaceful, with voices raised very seldom. Although players recognized the authority of rules published in the Handbooks, they often found them silly or irrelevant and chose to ignore them.

Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1962) divided games into two types: psychogenic and sociogenic. Role games seem to belong to both, promoting psychological development of individuals and the development and strengthening of social bonds. These games--especially Dungeons and Dragons--were played by males in Los Angeles into their twenties, even as college students.

Aside from their cooperative game play, adolescent boys in Los Angeles have enjoyed computer and electronic games for over a decade. These games occupy much of the time of many adolescent boys and are important for the development of computer skills.

As the boys grew into their late teens and twenties, team sports and group outings increasingly became the focus of their world. Defining oneself in contrast to the adult world became increasingly important.

A Decade Later

A decade later in the early to mid 1990's, children watched and enacted the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (TMNT) games. These allowed creativity, strategizing, and a feeling of individual power. As these children aged, they developed an intense involvement with the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers (MMPR), a television series with accompanying action figures. In December, 1994, *The New York Times* quoted Michael Goldstein, chief executive of the Toys "R" Us chain, as stating: "This appears to be the biggest phenomenon we

have ever seen in the toy business" (Collins 1994, D3). The Power Rangers combine many elements important to American children of different age groups and both genders, emphasizing traditional American values. The show involves transformations, fantasy creatures with machine and animal characteristics. Powerful Zords are formed by calling upon animal familiars unique to each Power Ranger; these combine into Megazords under particularly challenging conditions. Yet on the show, power is invested not merely in monster creatures, but also in children themselves. Teen-agers are given power to triumph over evil and save adults, including their parents. Many issues affecting children, including how they feel after divorce, and ways to deal with aggression and gossip, are treated. In keeping with the socialization of American children, good behavior brings a reward of recognition or friendship; evil is punished. Power Rangers must sometimes act on their own, but are also encouraged to work together as a team.

Involving fantasy, humor, real-life drama, advice without preachiness, and empowered children, the MMPR had great appeal. Today the MMPR's, in turn, are becoming less popular. But what legacy will they and the TMNT have left to the new generation? In a few years, perhaps we will know.

As a child grows, his/her interests and opportunities change. Children below approximately the age of seven engage in different forms of play from those seven and older. Thus, for instance, the TMNT craze appealed primarily to young children. Here once again, values favoring the underdog, individual initiative, friendship and cooperation were highlighted. The program featured mutant creatures and focused on power in defense against evil--a more concrete evil found here on earth. Conversations involving popular slang, such as "dude," were liberally sprinkled throughout the shows. It is easy to see why these "ugly" turtles became so important in the lives of young children--to the degree that adults were frightened by the potential for increased violence, identity confusion, and self-delusion among children involved in this trend.

Conclusions

By exploring the world of child and adolescent play and games, researchers can learn much about the fundamental values and

beliefs of a culture, what motivates people, and their frustrations and aspirations. The youth of Generation X were exposed to crass consumerism in the marketing of expensive action figures; preestablished hierarchies; machine culture; and an emphasis on masculine characteristics, aggression, the importance of power and wealth, and human powerlessness. The boys were not merely passive recipients of these messages, however, but learned to manipulate and reject them. They chose to return to games more reflective of traditional American values. As adolescents, they reacquired some of their power and creativity as human beings through their role games, played among themselves with rules manipulated by them and a Dungeonmaster chosen by them.

These members of Generation X, then, were exposed to the uncertainties of family life and economics; the preestablished power hierarchy of the wealthy; and their own powerlessness. But they learned to reject or reframe these forces--partly through their play--and to find their own way using their own initiative and the support of their peers. Instead of being powerless, members of Generation X have become bricoleurs, able to find the treasures among the garbage, making the most of their lot, and volunteering to help save our world and its people.

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Live Coverage of War: Electronic Media's Most Important Contribution to Popular Culture

Radio's and television's contributions to popular culture are numerous, but no element has a more immediate and far-reaching impact than news and public affairs. It is difficult to question the significance of such matters as mass destruction, life and death situations, impending doom or the fall of entire countries and civilizations. Cable News Network (CNN) calls itself the world's most important network, and the events of the Persian Gulf War did nothing to reduce that claim.

Real time or live coverage of war is not new; radio coverage of war began in 1936 in the Spanish Civil War. But television is another matter. CNN was the first American-based news organization to broadcast live from a city under attack from the United States. In the time span from 1936 to 1991 broadcast news has created its niche as Americans' primary source for news information. This article will examine the historical context of live war reporting, discuss some of the objections to such coverage, and list the tangible and intangible contributions of electronic journalism to popular culture.

On September 3, 1936, Hans von Kaltenborn was the reporter of the world's first broadcast of a battle. He was actually sitting on French territory which jutted into Spain near the small city of Irun. His broadcast included the following descriptions:

Directly in front of me as I look through the dark of the midsummer night is a bright line of fire rising from the most important single factory in the city. . . . Late this afternoon, we watched a Rebel airplane circling overhead and dropping bombs. One struck directly into the center of the match factory which began to burn and which has since been blazing brightly so that the

evening sky is lit up for a great distance all around.
(Fang, 29-30)

World War II provided many opportunities for real time coverage of war events. The reporter who rose to fame with his live reports was Edward R. Murrow, who worked in tandem with Kaltenborn during the Munich appeasement crisis of 1938. In March of that year Murrow and William Shirer arranged for live reports from five European cities. In New York, Kaltenborn was serving as what would now be called an anchorman. At that time he was billed as the chief CBS radio commentator. Using a two-way radio (a switch has to be flipped one way to transmit, another way to receive), he would frequently cue reports by saying, "Calling Edward Murrow, come in, Ed Murrow." (Fang, 309)

From September 12 to September 30 of 1938, Kaltenborn made 85 broadcasts about the Czechoslovakian crisis, along with 14 news roundups. Murrow made 35 reports and arranged for 116 others from 18 points in Europe. This set the pattern for what is now the typical newscast with a principal anchorman, usually in New York, and correspondents giving reports from throughout the world, frequently on a 24-hour basis during crises. The cost of the radio coverage for the 1938 series of events was \$200,000--a very large sum for that time. Though these were not live broadcasts of war, they were obvious precursors for the battle coverage which was soon to follow. On August 24, 1940, the Battle of Britain began. Murrow did a live report from the entrance of an air-raid shelter. The sirens were screaming, people's footsteps were heard as they walked into the shelter, and anti-aircraft guns were exploding in the background. Such reports were to become frequent elements of radio newscasts during World War II. Murrow's eloquent descriptions, coupled with the sounds of battle, were to set the standards for real time coverage of war. An aerial dogfight over the white cliffs of Dover was recorded by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and broadcast in the United States despite a continuing restriction placed upon recordings in network newscasts. There was a fear of staged events. This is ironic, given the 1990s controversy concerning live coverage, which was Murrow's primary means of reporting in radio's earliest days of war coverage.

On September 22, 1940, Murrow reported from the top of BBC Broadcasting House as the Luftwaffe conducted yet another bombing attack on London: "Off to my left, far away in the distance, I can see just that faint, angry snap of anti-aircraft bursts against the steel-blue sky" (Sperber, 174). The next night he described another air raid: "Out of one window there waves something that looks like a white bedsheet, a . . . curtain swinging in this night breeze. It looks as if it were being shaken by a ghost. . . There's a three quarter moon riding high. There was one burst of shellfire almost straight in the Little Dipper" (Sperber, 174).

Other networks soon followed suit by placing their correspondents on rooftops for live reports, but it was Murrow who reaped the glory for being the first. On October 15, 1941, seven people were killed at Broadcasting House in a bombing raid. The BBC eventually built a complete underground studio operation after all 20 of its above-ground studios were damaged.

In 1942, a United States government survey revealed that radio had become the main source for news for most Americans. In the same year broadcasting was established as an essential occupation by the Selective Service System. On October 20, 1944, General Douglas MacArthur broadcast from a Signal Corps ship to inform the Filipinos that he was returning. General Dwight Eisenhower broadcast a world-wide announcement of the surrender of Italy. The radio networks pooled their coverage for reports during the D-Day invasion and the Japanese surrender aboard the battleship Missouri. The August 20, 1945 issue of *Broadcasting* magazine reported that the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, James Lawrence, had commented that "broadcasters have done a whale of a job in keeping us informed on war news" (Beatty, 17).

The Korean conflict was not a site of extensive live broadcasts for several reasons, chiefly a lack of communications facilities plus a stricter military censorship. There were notable instances of important radio coverage, such as the retreat of the U.S. and South Korean forces to the Pusan perimeter, or ABC's Lou Cioffi, who was wounded in action and awarded the Purple Heart. Murrow did a few radio broadcasts from Korea, but no real-time coverage of battle. Once again he set a standard, this time for television, as he produced documentary film projects for the CBS series "See It Now."

Reporters labelled the Korean conflict as censorship with no war, and then called Viet Nam the war with no censorship. Film was the primary medium of coverage in these battles, which was known to the public as "the living room war." The carnage was brought into America's homes on the evening television newscasts, which became the public's primary source of information in the mid 1960s. Although these full color depictions of war and its accompanying gore were quite graphic, they were delayed by at least 24 hours for technical and transportation reasons.

It was not until the recent Persian Gulf hostilities that the horrors of war were brought in real time to over 100 countries and millions of viewers, and this war has brought more unprecedented events into American homes. The first two reports of intense aerial activity came from ABC radio's Jon Bascom in Saudi Arabia and ABC-TV's Gary Shepard in Baghdad. The reporters were, in effect, declaring the war had begun. *The Christian Science Monitor* editorialized about the technological advancement of February 1, 1991:

Thanks to advances in telecommunications, never has a war been covered so exhaustively by the news media, and never have people outside the war zone witnessed or learned about the conduct of a war so close in time to the actual events....This is a wholly news experience: the home front experiencing war in real time. (20)

Television commentator Jeff Greenfield noted his opinions in *TV Guide* on February 16, 1991: "But there has never been anything like the way that television has colored, shadowed, illuminated and distorted the war in the Persian Gulf" (Greenfield, 4). Other media observers noted a new dimension to war reporting. The *Los Angeles Times* TV critic Howard Rosenberg wrote: "Television is so powerful [that it has] almost become part of the war" (*Broadcasting*, January 21, 1991, 25). The Cable News Network grew in journalistic stature by being the world's live link with events in Baghdad. Not only were the citizenry of America being informed by CNN, so were heads of state, military officials, other journalists and millions of viewers worldwide. U.S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Colin Powell both referred to the coverage

by CNN as a principal source of their information. The German weekly, *Die Zeit*, reported that President George Bush had ended a press conference by noting that he was going to call Turkish President Turgut Ozal. When the call went through, Ozal himself answered. He did not have to be called to the phone; he had been watching CNN. The director of CNN International, Peter Vesey, states that his network's feed is available to 103 countries and 12 million subscribers outside the U.S. and Canada, including nine million homes in Europe. Vesey also estimates that CNN is viewed regularly by such officials as John Major of Great Britain, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Moammar Gadhafi of Libya, King Hussein of Jordan, and Saddam Hussein of Iraq, among others.

Because of the worldwide nature of the event, foreigners had a chance to see the United States' method of reporting, and vice versa. For instance, American Public Radio stations carried BBC radio newscasts hourly. Another measurable impact was that Americans bought short wave radios in record numbers to hear other countries' versions of events. The 7,000 outlets of the Radio Shack company reported a sellout of all shortwave units during the Persian Gulf crisis, quadrupling the amount of similar radios sold in the same time period a year earlier. The largest catalog store for shortwave equipment in America, the Electronic Equipment Bank, reported sales increases in the 500 to 1,000 percent range.

Many of those who watched the television coverage were practically hypnotized. A survey by the Times-Mirror media company revealed that half of Americans could not turn off the TV. People watched into the wee hours of the morning, caught a quick nap, then began viewing immediately when they woke up. This phenomenon became known as the CNN syndrome. For the first time a cable network had higher ratings than any of the big three commercial broadcast networks.

The wall-to-wall coverage by radio and television networks had a huge price tag. By the time the cease-fire was announced, the three broadcast networks and CNN put their collective costs at \$145 million. National Public Radio estimated its costs to be \$1.4 million. CNN spent \$12 million during the Gulf buildup alone. Of all the media in the Persian Gulf, none profited more than CNN. The all-news network increased its Nielsen ratings by three to four times what they were before the war. Some reports had CNN's ad rates

increasing by an even bigger margin, to five times their margins. CNN spokesperson Steve Haworth confirmed the tone, if not the exact figures, of those reports in a *Quill* magazine article: "CNN is extremely profitable. We have a cushion that some others may not have." (Avis, 19) The parent company of CNN, Turner Broadcasting, reported an operating profit of \$201 million for the first quarter of 1991.

Those were some of the facts and figures. Many of the contributions to popular culture were more intangible. All who watched had images etched into their memory banks that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Worldwide, viewers shared in the fear for the CNN reporters in Baghdad, not knowing if the next bomb would bring annihilation. John Holliman—one of the "Boys from Baghdad," as they came to be known—compared their location to the center of hell. Other memories that endure include the TV footage from ABC which showed the eerie anti-aircraft fire failing to hit the American planes, the scores of Iraqi soldiers surrendering to a helicopter and the Patriot anti-missiles attempting to intercept the Iraqi scud missiles.

Then there were the criticisms. There was no shortage of negative opinions, particularly concerning the live television coverage. The accusations ranged from distortions to stupidity, from lack of background to absence of patriotism. One large category was security, though one must wonder whether national security was not confused with job security. There were many whose livelihoods were directly affected by the television coverage. These included politicians, dictators, military personnel, munitions suppliers, diplomats and journalists. If the real time coverage portrayed any of these persons in an unfavorable manner, the electronic journalists were the primary recipients of cheap shots, right or wrong. Peter Arnett of CNN was slammed by Presidential Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater for distributing misinformation, and he was called a sympathizer by Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming. This tide of criticism resulted from Arnett's reporting from the Iraqi side of the fence for most of the short-lived war. While 700 or 800 journalists were infighting for their pool coverage tidbits, Arnett locked up the Baghdad coverage for himself. His loyalty and sanity were questioned, but his biggest crime was being beyond the control of the American administration. When Arnett reported from a bombing site

that the Iraqis claimed was a baby formula factory, he was sharply criticized by the Americans and their allied military, who said the building was a chemical weapons facility. Arnett reported only what he could see, hear and smell. He did not speculate. Some of his critics had vested interests.

Accusations by politicians and soldiers were almost understandable, if not forgivable. The criticisms which make the least sense are the seemingly endless opinions emanating from the print segment of the press. These journalistic cheap shots become easier to put into perspective by going back to the first radio world news roundup in 1938. Alexander Kendrick's biography of Murrow, *Prime Time*, explained the significance of live reporting:

...Murrow and his colleagues had established three clear advantages for radio over newspapers. They were ahead of the newspapers by hours. They reached millions of Americans in small towns who were not otherwise exposed to foreign news in their local papers. They "wrote their own headlines" by the selection of material, and the fact that there was no editor or other intermediary between them and their listeners. (Kendrick, 168)

If these reporters didn't need an editor or intermediary between them and the public, what did this portend for these occupations? If newspapers were behind by hours, or even days, what did this mean for their competitive survival? This assessment of Murrow from Robert Landry of *Scribner's* magazine in the winter of 1938 elaborated:

He has more influence upon America's reaction than a shipful of newspapermen...network reporters and Murrow in particular, both as bureau head and prototype of the new breed: a power in his own right, a newsman who could address a nationwide audience directly -- no editors, no rewriters, no headlines shoved over his copy...a rising national figure with direct access to the vast American public that was beyond the

reach of the great metropolitan dailies. (Sperber, 131-132).

Subsequent events have revealed that radio, then television, became the primary sources of news for Americans. Newspaper circulation surprisingly increased during the Persian Gulf War. Why? One newspaper analyst, John Morton, gave this explanation in the March 1991 issue of the *Washington Journalism Review*: "The most obvious reason is that people like to read in detail about what they have seen on television" (56). Nonetheless there is a prevalent opinion among print journalists that TV has killed off newspapers. It is largely this resentful and revengeful mentality which prompts print journalists to point out electronic media's journalistic shortcomings. How often does one read a scathing review of a particular newspaper's work in the criticism section of another paper, even a competing paper? The makers of buggy whips could certainly have slammed automobile manufacturers, but their criticisms could not have stopped the flow of progress. We have seen another journalistic threshold crossed, and it does not bode well for print media. The day after the first aerial attacks on Baghdad, *USA Today's* entire front page was given to recounting the television coverage of the night before.

Another form of disapproval was listed by Greenfield, that of knowledge overload: "... there may simply be more information available than most of us can possibly deal with without succumbing to an overwhelming sense of stress and confusion and frustration and exhaustion" (Greenfield, 7). It could be my own broadcast journalism background causing my reaction, or it could be a Jeffersonian mindset. My own preference is for all the information possible without the aid of an intermediary, however well-meaning his or her motives. Let me decide what is important to my well-being and that of my fellow citizens. A lack of data can cause me to be even more stressed, confused, frustrated, and exhausted. This response is similar to one expressed by Murrow in 1939:

I have an old-fashioned belief that Americans like to make up their own minds on the basis of all available information. The conclusions you draw are your own affair. I have no desire to influence them and shall

leave such efforts to those who have more confidence in their own judgement than I have in mine. (Sperber, 141)

This is not to say there are no valid concerns about live coverage. There are legitimate dangers, and we saw examples of them in the Persian Gulf War. One risk is giving the viewer misinformation and rumor, such as the gas bombs which did not strike Israel, but were reported. There is the danger of being used, as in telecasting an interview with a fanatic who may be jeopardizing the lives of hostages or news reporters. A newsperson may overreact or exaggerate, even unintentionally, to unfolding events such as an incoming missile attack. Real time reports may be one dimensional, showing only one side of a story. Correspondents and anchor people should qualify their reports as much as possible, explaining that theirs are individual perspectives of a story which has a larger context. As long as there are different methods of reporting, real time coverage can be an important, unique means of providing information. We need more facts, not fewer, in time of armed conflict.

The biggest danger to live coverage is that such reporting can get someone killed. One CNN reporter from the Persian Gulf War, Charles Jaco, said in a personal interview that reporters who are stationed near troops have their own lives at stake, as well as those of the soldiers. Jaco added that relations between military personnel in the field and correspondents were cordial. The friction developed because of orders issued from such distant locations as the Pentagon. As for misinformation, what about the reports of a U.S. amphibious attack? Jaco said that reporters knew this was a false report, but they did not divulge any secrets. Jaco has a positive viewpoint of real time coverage: "I think live reporting is exceptionally valuable, because people want it, people expect it now, which has been the good thing about this. They want to see the raw thing itself, unvarnished, and make up their own minds. And that's the thing about live reporting: if you don't have time for interpretation or reflection, maybe that's not always such a bad thing. The audience can do it for itself. So I find there's a good deal of value to it." (Jaco, April 5, 1994)

We must consider information involving military personnel from several nations, even opposing armies. Is news "foreign" now

that technology has rendered useless such former obstacles as borders, geographic barriers and governmental edicts? A CNN spokesperson, Steve Haworth, explained his company's viewpoint in a personal correspondence:

CNN is an independent news network which must make its own judgement about whether to report information which we have gathered and which one government or another may claim is endangering to troops or personnel. The international public's right to know and a government's obligation to protect the lives of troops and other personnel occasionally clash. The difficult, sometimes painful, decision lies with us, as do the consequences of our decision. (Haworth, March 2, 1992.)

Rather than calling for an end to real time news coverage, this writer is requesting media observers to structure their comments to a more meaningful end and curtail the cheap shots and infighting. For instance, what should be the guidelines for international war coverage? If there is a worldwide code of journalism, is it only viable until the first challenge from a power hungry tyrant? In the turmoil of armed conflict, can reporting be perfectly packaged?

Below are listed some of the many contributions of live coverage of war to popular culture:

- (1) One of the more important rewards is surveillance of the environment. This is what the three CNN reporters did so well on the first night of the bombing raids in Baghdad.
- (2) Since the reports could be received throughout the Middle East, the descriptions of the attacks took on the added significance of providing information to an audience potentially at risk.
- (3) Real time coverage has a unifying effect--the whole world's watching. CNN's coverage had global viewing, compared to American viewing or listening in previous wars.
- (4) Such reporting can actually have a comforting element. It takes away the unknown and substitutes a sense of normalcy. Viewers can watch an unsettling event, war, in the context of a familiar setting, a newscast.
- (5) With the immediacy, there is heightened awareness. When the normal viewing schedules are preempted, viewers can sense the

importance of live coverage and realize the talking stage, for better or worse, is over. War is here, now.

(6) The public gets more knowledge and information. Democracy demands a well-informed citizenry. With the deletion of censors and editors, citizens get an unvarnished view of events as they occur.

(7) Censorship by other countries (Iraq, China) does as much to reinforce our sense of freedom as anything we see on TV. War coverage affects us all, and depriving us of such reporting raises the question: What are they trying to hide?

(8) Censorship by U.S. sources should provoke a healthy debate on the nature of such restraint, good or bad.

(9) Repeated news coverage allows citizens to make their own interpretations of events, facts, statistics, restrictions, etc. Seeing the flow of information through various press settings--war zone press conferences, Pentagon statements, British news coverages, State Department briefings, White House interviews--permits citizens to weigh analyses or "spins" by various agencies versus what the citizens may have witnessed on live TV.

(10) Directly affected groups can get direct results: relatives of soldiers can have their fears calmed or increased, military branches can see their preparations achieve or fail to achieve results, historians can view the first draft of history, commentators can have their preconceptions confirmed or denied.

(11) Viewers can see the evolution of military technology and its impact on strategy and the outcomes of battles. The Patriot anti-missile was seen on TV worldwide as it attempted to intercept scud missiles, another first for the military and popular culture.

(12) The average citizen can see history in the making in an unprecedented fashion.

(13) Affected countries' citizens can see their own futures unfolding as battles rage.

This is not to trivialize the differences between being in one's living room watching TV versus being in a zone of conflict. As an illustration of the shrinking of the global village, the story of an Israeli-born TV producer is perfect. The woman lives and works in Los Angeles but her family lives in Tel Aviv. As she watched the CNN coverage of the Persian Gulf War, she was horrified to see a scud missile launched toward Tel Aviv. She rushed to the phone and called her mother's apartment, where it was the middle of the night.

After the producer made her mother understand the purpose of the call, she listened as her mother dropped the phone and awakened the rest of the family. The mother returned to the phone and assured her daughter that they were on their way to the safe room. It was only later that the family heard the blare of the Tel Aviv air raid sirens.

Such stories and such coverage can lock us into an exciting part of our culture in a way adults frequently forget. Kids believe everything is happening as they see it and they are totally captivated and caught up in the events. Live reporting creates this same excitement in grownups, as in the CNN syndrome. Anything might happen and the element of live coverage increases the tension and drama of the moment and the anticipation of what might happen next. It is a unique part of our culture and it is a threshold we have irreversibly crossed.

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A Use of Humor in William Faulkner

Literature of serious purpose often uses humor. In Elizabethan tragedy, for example, William Shakespeare uses humor in the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet* and the porter scene in *Macbeth*, and Christopher Marlowe uses humor in the clown scenes of *Doctor Faustus*. Within the tragedies in which they appear, such comic scenes appear to have a very definite purpose and have led to an elaborate theory of comic relief, a theory based on the belief that intense emotional states cannot long be sustained and that comedy can serve to reduce the intensity of emotion so that it can later be raised again, perhaps to an even more intense level.

The theory of comic relief provides one way of justifying a mixture of comic and serious matter as long as the comic does not detract from the theme of the serious. Since Elizabethan times, at least, comic relief has served as an acceptable justification for the mixture of the comic with the serious or tragic. The question of whether there can be other justifications for mixing the comic with the serious remains largely unexamined.

Yet, many of the works of William Faulkner suggest that Faulkner knew of another justification and exploited it in much of his best work.

Walter Slatoff's *Quest for Failure* suggests the possibility of such a use. According to Slatoff, Faulkner uses many techniques to prevent resolution in his novels. Among these techniques Slatoff includes antithesis and oxymoron.¹ Slatoff believes that through the use of such techniques Faulkner produces a sense of emptiness or blankness in the minds of his readers, a blankness that, as a Zen koan is intended to do, empties the emotional and logical content of the mind so that it is later capable of paying more attention. Humor, according to its earliest theoreticians, including Aristotle, depends on the incongruous for its effects. The incongruous is that which is out of keeping or place, inappropriate, inconstant or lacking harmony of parts. Antithesis and oxymoron, which are techniques depending on opposition or contradiction represent, of course, the extreme of

incongruity. If Faulkner could use antithesis and oxymoron to prevent or delay resolution, it seems reasonable to ask whether he also used humor for the same purpose.

Both Max Eastman and Henri Bergson, two respected theoreticians of humor, present ideas that seem to confirm that it is, indeed, possible to use humor to prevent or delay resolution. Bergson states, unfortunately without elaboration, that a lack of feeling always accompanies laughter² Slatoff, of course, suggests that oxymoron and antithesis also lead to a lack of feeling. Comedy, like the two other techniques, may seem to offer resolution, only to jerk it away and substitute nothing. Eastman suggests something similar when he repeats Kant's statement that comedy is "The sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing."³ Eastman claims that comedy is "the holding out of a meaning and snatching it away, as when Groucho Marx says, 'When I came to this country I hadn't a nickel in my pocket--now I have a nickel in my pocket.'"⁴ Eastman's definition adds to Bergson's by asserting that humor can be used not only to block emotional resolution, but to block the resolution of meaning and reason as well.

What about Faulkner's novels, then? Do they use humor as a way of preventing or delaying resolution, and, if so, how do they do it?

First, it is easy to see that not all of Faulkner's novels use this technique as a way of delaying or preventing resolution. In many of the novels, humor is of little or no importance. In others, such as *Mosquitoes*, the humor is largely satiric and works to develop a meaning, and *The Reivers* is so overwhelmingly comic that it cannot be examined as a mixture of the comic and the non-comic.

The "Quentin" section of *The Sound and the Fury*, like Elizabethan tragedy, does combine humor and seriousness, and in such a way as to invite an examination of the purpose of the humor. The spectacle of a young man, determined to commit suicide for the sake of love and honor, but who, at the same time, is unable to get rid of a little girl who follows him through some of the poorer sections of the Boston area is comic. Similarly, the suspicion of the girl's relatives and even of Quentin's rescuers is also comic, especially when juxtaposed with his reasons for committing suicide.

The simple mixture of tragic and comic elements, of course, is not new, but the presentation of the humor differs in two ways from

that of the porter scene in *Macbeth* or the clown scenes in *Doctor Faustus*. First, the humor of the "Quentin" section deals with Quentin himself; he is both the object of the comedy and the subject of the serious matter. In contrast, *Macbeth* and *Faustus* are never laughed at. Clowns, porters and gravediggers are apart from the serious subjects of tragedy; they may be made funny for emotional relief, but the comedy does not touch the main characters. Second, in Elizabethan tragedy, the comic and the serious are usually kept separate, each has its own compartment. The porter scene in *Macbeth* is comic, but all the comedy is kept inside that scene, and the serious barely intrudes. Faulkner, unlike Shakespeare, presents the comic and the tragic contrapuntally; the elements of tragedy and comedy become much more thoroughly mixed than in *Doctor Faustus*, *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*.

The mixture of humor and seriousness in the "Quentin" section is less important than the incongruities presented by the humor itself. Quentin, for example, is shown tragically as the protector of womanhood and comically as the defiler of womanhood. Of course, Quentin is thought of as a defiler only by mistake, but that mistake contributes to the irresolution of the section by raising questions about Quentin's perception of the relationship between his sister and Dalton Ames. If a mistake can be made about Quentin, then what perceptions can be trusted? If Quentin, of all people, can be thought of as a possible rapist, then it is possible that Quentin is mistaken in his perception of Dalton Ames as the defiler of Caddy. This issue is never resolved.

Instead, after Quentin's rescue by Mrs. Bland and the others, the humor continues. Although Shreve and Spoade realize how ridiculous the idea is, to the other characters, especially to Mrs. Bland, Quentin remains the young man who tried to entice a young foreign girl into a sordid relationship. The humor, as Spoade and Shreve realize, lies in the incongruity of the real Quentin and the imagined Quentin of Mrs. Bland and the girl's brother.

Before he leaves Mrs. Bland, Quentin resumes the protective role by attacking Gerald and asking if he ever had a sister.⁵

The entire section is pervaded by a clear incongruity. Is Quentin defined by his own perception of himself or by others? Why should he continue to protect the purity of womanhood when he intends to die soon? Why should he worry about the purity of

womanhood when relationships are as unclear as they were between himself and the foreign girl? What difference does his death make?

The "Jason" section offers more resolution than Quentin's, but incongruity, oxymoron and antithesis are still present. The incongruity arises from the presentation of Jason as both a rapacious and efficient monster, able to embezzle money that rightfully belongs either to Caddy or to her daughter, and his simultaneous presentation as a bumbler and a victim, failing in all his efforts to discipline his niece, Quentin, or to accumulate any money except by stealing it from his mother or from Quentin or Caddy.

The combination of the concept of a monster of efficiency with that of a bumbling victim prevents the simple acceptance of Jason as a mere villain and aids in the prevention or delay of resolution, the combined elements lack the complete antagonism of the "Quentin" section. It is possible to think of Jason as an efficient monster at some times and as a bumbling victim at others. He is primarily monstrous and efficient regarding money that others have entrusted to him. He is monstrous and inefficient in his desire to discipline Quentin. He is neither monstrous nor efficient in his attempt to follow Quentin and, later, to bring her back. In his attempts to make a killing on the cotton market, he appears as a bumbling victim. Nevertheless, the complex and apparently contradictory portrayal of Jason certainly helps to delay resolution in the novel.

Like the "Quentin" and "Jason" sections of *The Sound and the Fury*, parts of *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August* use humor to delay and prevent resolution. In general it would seem that the critical opinion of *As I Lay Dying* is aware of the lack of resolution imposed by the incongruity of the humor, but that of *Light in August* apparently fails to take the irresolution into account.

Olga Vickery's critique of *As I Lay Dying* is astute in its treatment of the intermingling of humor and horror in the novel. Vickery says that the intermingling:

. . . issues out of the Bundrens' convictions that their actions are eminently reasonable and out of the spectator's conviction that the Bundrens and their coffin have long since passed beyond the realm of reason, logic, or even common sense. The juxtaposition of

the two views gives rise to a complicated and ambivalent feeling of hilarity and despair. . . .

The interplay of seriousness which reaches toward tragedy and of humor which is practically farce is part of the complex success of *As I Lay Dying*. In a sense, it reinforces the theme of the separation of words and acts. . . . At the same time it precludes any easy generalizations about the funeral journey itself. Any event or series of events elicits various and, at times, contradictory responses.⁶

Though there are other humorous effects in the novel, Vickery explains most of the humor of *As I Lay Dying* when she says that it derives primarily from the combination of the antagonistic views of the Bundrens and their observers. The two views, that the Bundrens' actions are rational and that they are not rational are not easily resolvable and serve to prevent any easy generalizations about the novel. They serve to prevent resolution.

One of the contradictions between what the Bundrens believe and what their neighbors believe is seen in Vardaman's statement "But my mother is a fish. Vernon seen it. He was there".⁷ As we know, Vernon has not seen it. The contradiction is not important in one sense, for the reader already knows that Addie Bundren is not a fish; but the fact that Vardaman must use Vernon as evidence casts doubt on his own conviction of his mother's metamorphosis.

As far as the funeral procession is concerned, one of the strongest statements of disapproval is made by Samson. When Samson tries to persuade the Bundrens to sleep inside, and they refuse in order to be with the corpse, he tells us of his thoughts and actions. "'She's been dead long enough to get over that foolishness,' I says. Because I got just as much respect for the dead as ere a man, but you got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box for four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can" (*AILD*, 419). Here, Faulkner has combined two antagonistic views of what constitutes respect, and there can be no certainty of whose view is the correct one.

Further humor in the novel comes from the juxtaposition of the Bundrens' overt and secret reasons for taking the body to Jefferson. The reader can never be sure of the real reason why any one of most of

the Bundrens makes the trip. Is Anse respecting the wishes of his wife, or does he merely want a chance to buy a set of false teeth? Other members may go to Jefferson out of respect for their mother or for such diverse reasons as wanting to see an electric train in a store window (Vardaman), wanting to procure an abortion (Dewey Dell) or wanting to buy a new phonograph (Cash).

Light in August uses some of the same comic techniques that *As I Lay Dying* uses. The general critical opinion of the work, however, does not take full account of these similarities. Edmond L. Volpe, for example, writes that the Lena-Byron idyll is thematically important because it "illumines by contrast the significance of the Hightower, Christmas and Burden stories, the key contrast is in the differing responses to life. Lena accepts life; the others resist it."⁸ Here, Volpe expresses a variant of the usual opinion that the opening and closing episodes, both of which deal with Lena Grove, provide a positive frame for a negative novel, that *Light in August* is a negative enclosed by two positives.

The validity of such a view is at least obscured by the humor of the two idyllic sections, a humor that is similar to the humor of *As I Lay Dying*. If, in *As I Lay Dying*, the outside observers provide humor by interpreting and coming to their own conclusions about the Bundrens' journey, so in *Light in August*, similar observers (one of whom might be the same character) interpret and come to conclusions about Lena's journey; the conclusions and interpretations vary incongruously and humorously from those of Lena. The observers feel that Lena's actions are foolish and irrational, not simply idyllic, and the opinions of the observers fail to emphasize Lena's acceptance of life.

Armstid is the first of Lena's observers. He says, "She'll have company before she goes much further."⁹ His statement typifies the attitude of Lena's observers. They accept only the physical fact of her pregnancy and the consequent irrationality of her journey. Unlike Lena, they are unable to accept her pregnancy itself as a reason for her journey.

Later Lena accepts a ride in Armstid's wagon and remarks, "It's a strange thing." Armstid replies, "How folks can look at a strange young girl walking the road in your shape and know that her husband has left her?" (*LIA*, 11). Aside from the obvious sarcasm of Armstid's question, its humor also arises from Armstid's refusal to see

anything that might possibly be idyllic concerning Lena's situation. Armstid's question again emphasizes Lena's physical condition and, by implication, the irrationality of her journey.

Later, Armstid's wife, Martha, repeats his earlier joke, "She's going to quit being alone a good while before she sees Alabama again," and then says to Lena, "You keep off your feet now, and you'll keep off your back a while longer may be" (*LIA*, 14, 15). Martha's statements, like those of her husband, emphasize the physical fact of Lena's pregnancy and they conflict with Lena's optimistic expectation of finding Lucas Burch in Jefferson.

Lena's conversation with the driver who takes her to Jefferson demonstrates a similar conflict. The driver is pessimistic and concerned solely with Lena's physical condition; Lena is optimistic about finding Lucas and unconcerned with her physical condition.

The tale told by the Tennessee furniture dealer at the end of the novel also concentrates on the physical condition of Lena, now a nursing mother. The story emphasizes the frustration of Byron Bunch and de-emphasizes Lena's serenity. Certainly, the final episode of the novel is not considered idyllic by anyone but Lena, if even she considers it so. Perhaps the furniture dealer does attempt to go beyond the merely physical in his telling of the story, but he is always recalled to the physical by the questions of his wife, "Then what? What did she do then?" (*LIA*, 433), "What was it he aimed to do?" (*LIA*, 436) "Found out what? What it was he wanted to do?" (*LIA*, 438) All of her questions emphasize physical action rather than the quiescent serenity that the Lena sections are said to represent.

As in *Light in August* and *As I Lay Dying*, much of the humor of *Sanctuary* derives from the contrast between the observer and the observed and leads to the avoidance or delay of resolution. Most of the comic episodes of *Sanctuary* show Miss Reba or some member of her world observing Temple Drake. The observer never understands Temple or her dilemma.

For instance, when Temple says of the dress which she wore at the Old Frenchman's place, "I can't wear it again." Miss Reba sees her statement as an economic one and answers "No more you'll have to, if you don't want. . . . And tomorrow the stores'll be open and me and you'll go shopping like he said for us to."¹⁰ Temple certainly had not thought of the economics of replacing the dress. Similarly Reba

denies her moral responsibility for Temple, saying to Horace, "I got nuttin to do with it. . ." (*Sanctuary*, 119).

Since at least some of her humor derives from her status as another of Faulkner's observers whose opinions conflict with those of the actors being observed, Reba helps to preclude easy generalizations about Temple, and to delay the resolution of *Sanctuary*.

Unlike the works already discussed, Faulkner's Snopes trilogy depends heavily on the comic story, a common form in both folk culture and popular culture. *The Hamlet*, the first novel of the trilogy, uses the comic story more often than any of Faulkner's earlier novels. One of the best known of such stories in *The Hamlet* is "Spotted Horses," a story, clearly related to many folk and popular culture stories of horse trading, in which much of the humor arises from the combination of conflicting concepts.

First, the "Spotted Horses" episode conflicts with much of the rest of the novel, especially with the section dealing with Mink which almost immediately precedes and follows this episode. Immediately before the beginning of "Spotted Horses" the Mink section had built to an anticipation of a climax in Mink's trial. Instead, the story of Mink is interrupted by the comic "Spotted Horses" story. The climax of Mink's story, which was expected to be the beginning of his trial, becomes the anti-climax of "Spotted Horses," "There was another trial then."¹¹

The episode conflicts with our expectations of Flem's return from his honeymoon in Texas. The earlier novel had suggested only three ways for Flem to return. He could return openly, with the intention, at least, of trying to rescue Mink; he could return secretly without mentioning Mink and of trying to hide until the end of the trial; or he could wait until after the trial and then return. Any of the three choices would continue Faulkner's serious treatment of the problem of Mink, and would continue to focus the attention of the reader and of the citizens of the hamlet on Mink and on Flem's relationship with Mink.

As it is, Flem's entrance serves to distract the other characters and the reader from Mink and his problem. From the beginning of the section, which follows almost immediately the conversation of Quick, Tull, Bookwright and Ratliff, a conversation which shows the attention of Frenchman's Bend remains focused on

Mink, it is as if the entire hamlet and the reader had forgotten about Mink.

Certainly the horses themselves are enough to take the attention of the reader and the characters, but if there is any attentive capacity left, it is taken by the Texan, an apparent stereotype out of American popular culture but with a love of gingersnaps. The Texan is filled with bravado and an ill-founded optimism that the horses can be gentled. The Texan's bravado and optimism is seen in his wonderful speeches in which he describes what the readers have already perceived as the largely fictitious good qualities of the horses.

The combination of Flem and the Texan as owners or as owner and agent is incongruous. If the Texan represents one figure out of popular culture, Flem may represent another, the silent, but scheming financial trickster. The Texan is talkative, Flem is silent; the Texan appears to have a sense of humanity, Flem lacks such a sense; the Texan claims ownership of the horses, and Flem does not; yet, it is Flem who probably owns them, but the question of ownership is left unanswered. Flem's trial only emphasizes the lack of certainty; it clarifies nothing.

Like the porter scene in *Macbeth*, the "Spotted Horses" story conflicts in mood with the tragedy that surrounds it, but the "Spotted Horses" episode, unlike the porter scene, combines the comic with the pathetic. Most of the early parts of the story and most of the later chase are comic, but the episodes that deal with Henry Armstid and his wife are pathetic, as are some others, and the reader wonders whether to laugh at the antics of the horses and their buyers or to feel sorry for Armstid and his wife.

The "Spotted Horses" episode clearly acts to prevent resolution in three ways. First, Faulkner refocuses the attention of his reader from Mink to the horses, only returning to Mink as an anticlimax. Second, the story itself is unresolved because of the uncertainty regarding responsibility. Finally, even the mood of the story is unclear.

In the version of "Barn-Burning" that appears in *The Hamlet*, Faulkner combines the comic story with the conflict between observer and actor that he used in *Light in August*, *As I Lay Dying*, and other novels. The original version of "Barn-Burning," by contrast, is told by an omniscient narrator, is not told as a primarily comic tale,

and does not emphasize the contrast between observer and actor. The original version has a few comic incidents, *The Hamlet's* version is rich in humor and is told by Ratliff to Jody Varner with the intention of frightening Jody. Ratliff apparently received much of his information from people who had observed the events. The observations of several characters are filtered through the consciousness of Ratliff and presented either to the reader or to the characters Ratliff tells stories, a change and refinement of the earlier technique.

The Town is the second novel of the trilogy. It also makes use of the comic story. The most important and most intriguing of the comic stories in *The Town* severely stretches the definition of comic story. It ends with the death and burial of Eula Varner Snopes and with her epitaph, "A Virtuous Wife is a Crown to Her Husband, Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed."¹²

In a sense, the story of Eula's infidelity, death and burial is a tragic story with a comic form. The incidents are tragic, Eula's death cannot be taken any other way, but the story ends with a punch line, and like other good comic stories, this story builds up to this punch line which, like many good punch lines, nevertheless comes as a surprise.

The humor of the punch line derives, like much of Faulkner's humor, from the combination of conflicting elements. The punch line adds to the story of an unfaithful wife the statement that she was virtuous. Of course, everyone in the town realizes that Eula was not virtuous in the normal sense of the word, but the epitaph confuses the reaction of both the reader and the observers within the novel by raising the questions of whether virtue and faithfulness are, in fact, synonymous, and whether ordinary standards of virtue apply to Eula.

The stories of Gavin's love for Eula and Linda contain several examples of humor, most of which derive from Gavin's simultaneous and contradictory desires. He would like to have sexual intercourse with Eula (later Linda), but he also desires to continue to think of them as undefiled. His ambivalent attitudes are confusing not only to himself, but also to many of Faulkner's readers.

Faulkner continues to create comic conflict in *The Mansion*. In the introduction to *The Mansion* Faulkner acknowledges changes from the earlier two novels. He attributes the changes to "motion," his additional knowledge of the human heart and of the characters,¹³

and some of the changes can be logically explained by a sense of increased awareness. For example, in *The Town* Flem wanted Monk convicted of bootlegging rather than of pornographic distribution because he believed bootlegging was a more respectable crime. In *The Mansion*, we discover that Flem wanted Monk to convince Mink to try to escape so that more years would be added to his sentence. The story of Mink and Houston, on the other hand, presents real contradictions. Why change the pound fee? Why change Houston's first name? Whatever the reason for the contradictions, as contradictions they lead to the lack of feeling or denial of reason and logic that accompanies them.

Similarly, the humor involved in the humiliation of Clarence Snopes seems to imply a contradiction. Clarence Snopes, a stereotypical southern politician, and his political machine are set up as invulnerable. Yet, they are finally defeated, not only defeated, but easily defeated. Then what was all the fuss about? Clarence's defeat and that question serve as models for the entire trilogy. What was all the fuss about? The question is a comic one, because there was a lot of fuss, and it is also a question that like a Zen koan leaves us puzzled and blank, but ready to reexamine the novels.

Finally, it is a question that invites an examination of the purpose of this kind of humor in the work of Faulkner, this mind-numbing, blankness-inducing form of humor.

One explanation suggests itself. Faulkner's humor is related to that of the Theater of the Absurd and the Black Humorists. The contradictions and absurdities of Faulkner's humor mirror those of an absurd and contradictory universe. The only response to such absurdity is laughter.

Such an explanation has much validity. Faulkner was admired by many existentialists and his work demonstrated many affinities with their absurdist views, but a complete explanation of this kind of humor in Faulkner must go beyond its mimesis of an absurd universe.

Similarly, a complete explanation must go beyond the old theory of comic relief which claims that an audience's emotions cannot be sustained at a high pitch for long periods of time. Consequently, the porter scene, for example reduces the pitch of emotion temporarily so that it can later be built higher. It would seem to follow that the further the pitch can be reduced, the higher

it can later be raised. The relief is necessary for the sake of even higher excitement later.

Faulkner, however, goes beyond comic relief to what might be called comic erasure. He reduces the level of emotional excitement and of logical meaning to zero. At the point of zero, the reader's mind is empty and ready for anything, and ready to work at obtaining it. Mink's trial eventually reaches higher emotional peaks because it follows the "Spotted Horses" episode, because, for a time, it had been completely forgotten. Quentin's suicide becomes an act of total desperation and is completely meaningless because the comic episode with the foreign girl and the fight with Gerald Bland have reduced both the emotion and the meaning to zero.

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Notes

1. Walter J. Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* (Ithaca, 1962) p. 53
2. Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York, 1937) p. 4.
3. Max Eastman, *The Enjoyment of Laughter* (New York, 1939), p. 9.
4. Eastman, 10.
5. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1946), p. 182. Hereafter identified in the text as *SF*.
6. Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge, 1959), p. 65. Hereafter identified in the text as Vickery.
7. William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1946), p. 409. Hereafter identified in the text as *ALLD*
8. Edmond Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York, 1964), p. 153.
9. William Faulkner, *Light in August*, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1950), p. 9.
10. William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, Signet edition (New York, 1961), p. 82. Hereafter identified in the text as *Sanctuary*.
11. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, Vintage edition (New York, 1964), P. 336.
12. William Faulkner, *The Town*, Vintage edition (New York, 1957), p. 355. Hereafter identified in the text as *Town*.
13. William Faulkner, *The Mansion*, Vintage edition (New York, 1959), p. xi.

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Studies in Popular Culture

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Popular Culture Review gratefully acknowledges the contributions made to this journal by the UNLV College of Liberal Arts, the UNLV Department of English, and Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne of the Popular Culture and American Culture Associations.

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ISSN 1060-8125

