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From the Editor's Desk

In Chaos Theory we discuss the interconnectedness of all things. Nowhere is this interconnection better illustrated than in the study of popular culture, which breaks down disciplinary barriers, thus illuminating the multiplicity of ways the sea of popular culture in which we swim influences us and we it, virtual reality almost seamlessly blending with reality.

In variations on this theme, Ken Moser, in his provocative article on Baudrillardian 'Discourse of the Good' and the Film *Wag the Dog*, asks, "have hyper-real representations of war eclipsed the reality of armed struggles?" Are we witnessing the "death of meaning"? In "Revenagers, Redeemed," Robert Johnson focuses on "how adaptation, as a tool, lays bare the power of an audience's cultural grievances and expectations to determine the version of a plot that will please at a given place and time." Melanie Marotta's "The Resurgence of the Cowboy Figure: Raylan's Utopic Quest in *Justified*" explores the hero's evolution in the Myth of the Frontier in preservation of both the Old and New Wests.

Lest we forget, "In I will not apologize," William Nesbit gives the history of anti-establishment Amiri Baraka, his poem "Somebody Blew Up America," and the controversies that surrounded him.

Scholar/musician Daniel Ferreras Savoye explains the staying power of the the Beatles, perhaps the greatest band of all time, in his marvelously informative "On Beatles Time." Not only does he give a history of the Beatles placing them in detailed context in the industry, but explores what keeps them at the top of the universal rock chart, and giving much credit to their sheer artistry "which allowed them to change and evolve, turning pop music into art."

Showing perhaps the greatest staying power is Dante Alighieri who seems to be everywhere in popular culture. Dante scholar, Joseph Ceccio in "(Re-)Popularizing Dante: Dan Brown's *Inferno*" explains how when Dante lives on in everything from video games, graphic novels and over 100 English translations, Brown has managed to add still more to that popularity.

Last we have Nicole White's "Balanced on a Proverbial Cliffhanger: The Methods, Pros and Current Tribulations of How Blind Readers Obtain Books for Leisure Reading", an article I solicited after her brilliant performance in one of my classes. It was a revelation to me and I hope will be to you also.

Felicia

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The Baudrillardian “Discourse of the Good”: Writing a Cinematic Script to Seduce the Masses into Embracing a Simulated War in the Film *Wag the Dog*

By Keith Moser, Mississippi State University

In his provocative essay entitled *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, the highly original and unorthodox French philosopher Jean Baudrillard declares in reference to the virtual reality of the Gulf War carefully filtered through our digital screens, “the day there is a real war you will not even be able to tell the difference” (58-59). Although his ideas were initially dismissed as being exaggerated and perhaps even “anti-American,” Baudrillard’s theories have since been validated by numerous media scholars. Indeed, Baudrillard’s main hypothesis that “signs of war” incessantly disseminated by euphoric news outlets appear to be on the brink of replacing the sinister realities of war itself is supported by recent media pseudo-events (Coulter 31). Given the ubiquity of the manufactured images that endlessly bombard us from all sides in the modern world, do we still know the difference between simulated war and actual military conflict itself? Constantly immersed in the hyper-real through a myriad of electronic devices, has war suffered the same fate as everything else in an informational matrix comprised entirely of symbolic communication? Moreover, what are the dangers of conflating self-referential simulacra of violence with the real thing? In simple terms, have hyper-real representations of war eclipsed the reality of armed struggles?

These disquieting fears conveyed by Baudrillard in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, *The Transparency of Evil*, and *The Intelligence of Evil* form the basis for Barry Levinson’s film *Wag the Dog*. The purpose of this study is to examine Levinson’s film from the lens of Baudrillard’s complex, interdisciplinary philosophy. Although several researchers including Ryan Bishop, Nitzan Ben-Shaul, Jaap Kooijman, and Kay

Kirchmann have noted that it is nearly impossible to watch this movie without speculating about the influence of Baudrillard, these intertextual analyses have been rather superficial in nature. Thus, this investigation seeks to fill a significant research gap by exploring these evident connections in a more systematic fashion.

Released in 1997, *Wag the Dog* was inspired by Larry Beinhart's novel *American Hero* (Stempel 60). Despite the evident humor that is omnipresent throughout the film, *Wag the Dog* is a scathing indictment of the integrated political and social elite. This dark comedic satire which delves into serious subjects also examines the mainstream media's complicity with the hegemonic forces that currently dominate the global landscape. The simple premise of the film is an artistic representation of Baudrillard's hypothesis that the integral reality of simulated war is now upon us.

Specifically, *Wag the Dog* recounts the story of an incumbent presidential candidate that becomes embroiled in a sexual misconduct scandal just days before an election that he is predicted to win. In order to diffuse these allegations temporarily to ensure the president's reelection, a public relations specialist nicknamed "Mr. Fix It" (Robert De Niro) enlists the help of an acclaimed Hollywood director (Dustin Hoffman) to produce a phony conflict with Albania. As Paul Roos explains, "De Niro was the spin doctor for the President and Hoffman was the movie producer from L.A. Together they carefully constructed a fictitious war against Albania, and a serviceman left behind enemy lines before being killed, and returned home" (n.p.). Although this Hollywood "pageant" takes a few unexpected twists and turns, De Niro and Hoffman succeed at deceiving an unquestioning public beyond anyone's wildest imagination. In fact, Stanley Motss (Hoffman) will consider this *court métrage* to be the crowning achievement of his

illustrious career. Motss's sense of pride related to this elaborate hoax will ultimately lead to his untimely demise at the end of the film.

When Conrad Brean (De Niro) reveals his plan to launch simulated attacks on Albanian terrorists through the media, White House staffer Winifred Ames (Anne Heche) is initially skeptical. However, Brean asserts that this idea is not as outlandish as it seems. Highlighting prior precedent from several different wars including the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and the Gulf War, Brean elucidates that images¹ of these political disputes have substituted themselves for reality in the collective memory that frames our perception of these events. In Baudrillardian terms, these bloody struggles have become non-events given the disconnect between their symbolic representation in public consciousness and the real. Brean insists that no one will ever discover the truth because signs of what it means to fight a just and collective war against an enemy depicted as an incarnation of absolute evil stand in for reality long after the cessation of violence.

In *Wag the Dog*, Levinson appears to reach the same disconcerting conclusion as Baudrillard concerning the age of information. The information superhighway is often lauded as the pinnacle of human civilization. However, in spite of the undeniable utility of inventions that allow instantaneous communication from one end of the earth to another, this digital proliferation has resulted in catastrophic consequences. Fully immersed in the hyper-real through a myriad of divergent screens that incessantly transmit the same messages, the modern subject is drowning in an ocean of simulacra. Given that many people spend the vast majority of their time consuming television,

¹ The power of the image will be systematically explored in a later section of this essay.

iPad, iPod, and tablet images, is there any reprieve from the ubiquity of these signs that have been carefully packaged for our consumption?

Reminding the somewhat naïve staffer that the hegemonic tool of proliferation has been used against the public many times in the past, Brean elucidates that our defenses are weak because they are constantly being overloaded by more information that we can efficiently process. In the pervasive realm of simulation that surrounds us from all sides, our capacity for critical reflection is greatly diminished. For this reason, no one questions the validity of the signs that we receive in 'real-time.' Nonetheless, Brean realizes that his fake Albanian war, like all other creative fictions transmitted through hyper-real mediums, hinges upon "the constant flow of war coverage" (Walton 17). The complete artifice of their fictitious conflict will never be exposed as long as its iconic images are continually transmitted everywhere through all possible channels. Yet, Brean is also cognizant that this orchestrated campaign of misinformation can never be silenced or fail to saturate misguided patriotic citizens in their homes, workplaces, or shopping centers.

As Baudrillard underscores in *The Transparency of Evil*, "for it to be 'good' communication it must take place fast-there is no time for silence. Silence is banished from our screens; it has no place in communication. Media images [...] never fall silent: images and messages must follow one upon the other without interruption" (14). In *Wag the Dog*, every metonymical sign mirrors a larger image of a country whose alleged duty it is to defend freedom and human dignity both domestically and abroad. In other words, this endless barrage of misinformation is part of a larger narrative with which the American public identifies. Elucidating that semiotic proliferation always follows a script,

Baudrillard asserts, “all this communication is basically nothing but a rigid script, an uninterrupted fiction designed to free us not only from the void of the television screen but equally from the void of our own mental screen, whose images we wait on with the same fascination” (*The Transparency of Evil* 14). Outside of a “closed system” of representation, the self-referential images created by Levinson have no real meaning (Jordan and Haladyn 269). Nevertheless, these glorious simulations that pit the forces of good against the ‘axis of evil’ (an actual phrase uttered numerous times by George W. Bush) are omnipresent and seductive.² Moreover, the intertwined devices of proliferation and seduction serve to protect the banality of the image in *Wag the Dog*.

In *The Intelligence of Evil*, Baudrillard posits that the integral reality of virtual warfare is inseparable from the greater problem of the destruction of all meaning that plagues contemporary consumer republics.³ Just like anything else, violence has no significance whatsoever in the confines of the hyper-real. As the philosopher maintains,

We are passing into a realm where events no longer truly take place, by dint of their very production and dissemination in ‘real time’-where they become lost in the void of news and information [...] since disinformation comes from the very profusion of information, from its incantation, from its looped repetition, which creates an empty perceptual field [...] It’s a space where everything is pre-neutralized including war. (122-123)

According to Baudrillard, proliferation ensures that artificial paradises conjured in the symbolic realm are never uncovered. Modern warfare merely constitutes an idealized, hyper-real image floating in a larger sea of enticing signs. In a global

² The role of moral propaganda, often based on extreme Manichean logic, used to justify war will be probed further in a later section of this essay.

³ The term ‘consumer republic’ was originally coined by the historian Lizabeth Cohen.

monoculture on the verge of being completely taken over by simulation, it should come as no surprise that it is so easy for the protagonists of *Wag the Dog* to keep the illusion of cinematic reality from being shattered. When the painfully apparent artifice of 'reality TV,' characterized by its manipulated and staged footage, is rarely called into question, perhaps the notion of a simulated war that has no foundation whatsoever in reality is not really far-fetched at all.⁴

Once again basing his arguments on historical precedence, Brean specifies that the President's phony war must appear to be 'clean,' swift, and decisive. If there are too many simulated casualties, then the public will begin to express dissent. Consequently, Motss's pageant is a grandiose vision of American military and technological prowess. Everyone can rally behind a war in which the culpable parties are punished while simultaneously minimizing the toll of human loss. The fact that there can be no real collateral damage in a digitally manufactured war creates the ideal scenario for the President. The aforementioned sex scandal all but disappears as the President's approval rating soars to unprecedented heights.

The model for Brean and Motss's euphoric spectacle appears to be the Gulf War. Due to pervasive images of smart bombs and other forms of state of the art technology, Brean notes that the George H. W. Bush administration was able to control perception of a war by masking human anguish itself. Although it is impossible to engage in a war that does not induce an immeasurable amount of irreversible, human suffering, the media carefully framed the general public's understanding of this conflict. By solely inundating the populace with simulations of military inventions that have minimized the

⁴ For a discussion of 'reality TV' in the context of the philosophy of Baudrillard, see Wright, Christopher. "Welcome to the Jungle of the Real: Simulation, Commoditization, and Survivor." *Journal of American Culture* 29 (2): 170-82.

number of casualties like never before, the mainstream media imposed a filtered (hyper-)reality in which carnage no longer had any place. Any images that contradicted this reductionist, symbolic representation of the Gulf War had to be removed from the official footage before being disseminated to screens all around the world.

Decrying the nefarious effects of the hyper-real fiction that is emblematic of the integral reality of virtual war, Baudrillard laments, “There is a profound scorn in the kind of ‘clean’ war which renders the other powerless without destroying its flesh [...] This idea of a clean war, like that of a clean bomb or an intelligent missile, this whole war conceived as a technological extrapolation of the brain is a sure sign of madness” (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* 40; 43). Noting that simulations of war in real-time are intentionally fabricated to give the chimerical impression that a nation can wage a war in which pain has been nearly entirely taken out of the equation, Baudrillard further explains, “Violence is white-washed, history is whitewashed, all as part of a vast enterprise of cosmetic surgery at whose completion nothing will be left but a society for which, and individuals for whom, all violence, all negativity, are strictly forbidden” (*The Transparency of Evil* 50). For Baudrillard, the refusal to nuance the master narrative that justifies a war is necessary in order to maintain hyper-real representations of a non-event.

Under the weight of ubiquitous simulations, the real collapses and in essence ceases to exist. Realizing that transmitting realistic images of traumatized victims that have been brutally killed or displaced during military operations would undermine the internal logic of the signs of war which continually flash across our screens, the media sweeps away any semblance of stark realism. Whereas nothing could be further from

the heinous realities of armed conflicts, war has become a hyper-realized, idyllic space free from all negativity. This baffling and destructive phenomenon explains why Brean and Motss strive to portray war as a light-hearted pageant or a delightful spectacle. Indeed, what Baudrillard terms the “whitewashing” of violence is perhaps the most disturbing element in the entire film. Trapped inside of a symbolic universe in which all suffering has been removed, why would the modern subject demand that war be considered a desperate, last resort? Who needs diplomatic alternatives to avoid political crises when hyper-real simulations have carefully extracted anguish from warfare? The integral reality of virtual war and its utter denial of negativity have ensured that governments no longer need to provide much of a justification at all to invade any given country. The unbridled fervor of the American public in *Wag the Dog* should be understood in this context. Why ask questions or demand answers when war is now depicted in such a fashion? Instead of being appropriately labeled a crime against humanity that should never be taken lightly, *Wag the Dog* illustrates that war now more closely resembles Baudrillard’s ‘perfect crime’ against reality than a deplorable atrocity.

Brean convinces Motss that their conniving scheme will never be exposed by underscoring that the hegemonic forces which exploit the seductive power of the hyper-real murdered the reality principle a long time ago. As Andrew Doyle notes, “Brean: What’s the thing people remember about the Gulf War? A bomb falling down a chimney. Let me tell you something: I was in the building where we filmed that with a 10-inch model made out of Legos / Motss: Is that true? / Brean: Who the hell’s to say? Brean doesn’t refute these pivotal images, he merely asserts that the appearance of them is more important than their actuality” (4). Given that images stand in for reality in

our current age of information, Brean does not appear to be concerned at all about getting caught. Brean explains to Motss that the hyper-real transcends truth. Moreover, this realm is also beyond moral considerations since simulations create their own version of reality where nothing can be truly deemed true or false. In a symbolic universe of artificial signs, everything ceases to be real. For this reason, Brean asserts, "It doesn't have to prove out, we just have to distract them." As long as their imaginary war looks real on the screen, no one will ever question the façade. The actual reality of war is simply another casualty in a society epitomized by the death of all meaning.

In *The Intelligence of Evil*, Baudrillard elucidates that virtual warfare is an indicator that we have arrived at the final stage of simulation where signs no longer have any referents. Mourning the disappearance of the real buried under an avalanche of insignificant information, the philosopher muses, "Reality continues to exist; it is its principle that is dead. Now, reality without its principle is no longer the same at all. If, for many different reasons, the principle of representation which alone gives it a meaning falters, then the whole of the real falters" (*The Intelligence of Evil* 18).⁵ In *Wag the Dog*, it is evident that our omnipresent systems of representation which are supposed to project meaning upon our lives and the world in which we live have failed miserably. Instead of placing invaluable information at everyone's fingertips, have hyper-real gadgets and the signs that they endlessly transmit ushered in the final phase of simulation? Levinson's film not only seems to have presaged the Lewinsky affair as numerous critics have noted such as Matthew Campora, Jonathan Freedland, and

⁵ In a similar vein, Baudrillard reiterates, "With the very latest Virtual Reality we are entering a final phase of this enterprise of simulation [...] A world so real, hyperreal, operational and programmed that it no longer has any need to be true. Or rather it is true, absolutely true, in the sense that nothing any longer stands opposed to it" (*The Intelligence of Evil* 34).

James Roberts, an event which is eerily similar to the hoax described in *Wag the Dog*, but it also foreshadows the now infamous comments uttered by George W. Bush related to the “reality-based community” (Røyrvik and Brodersen 638). Similar to Bush, Brean implies that there should be no resistance to their simulated war because nearly everyone is a member of the virtual reality community which is quite far removed from the real.

Brean also cites historical precedent concerning the hyper-real representation of the war on terror to convince his original detractors that his plan will work flawlessly. Although the choice of Albania seems to be quite random with the exception that most Americans know nothing about this country or even where to locate it on a map, the symbolic threat of terrorism that lurks around every corner is not arbitrary in the least. Aware that nothing seduces the public or captures their undivided attention like the story of an impoverished, developing nation that wants “to destroy our way of life,” Motss creates a compelling story about Albanian terrorists in Canada that intend to infiltrate a suitcase bomb into the United States. Motss’s artistic decision to simulate the possibility of a terrorist attack on American soil is a tragic reflection of post 9-11 paranoia. Since mainstream news outlets are constantly pumping citizens full of fear with the message that another devastating assault is imminent, the masses will impulsively accept the signs of war at face value. Additionally, people will demand immediate action without hesitation in order to neutralize this threat. The omnipresent mortal danger of terrorism is the ideal cover for the hyper-real fiction skillfully concocted by a spin doctor and a Hollywood director.

Highlighting that it is not by accident that the integral reality of war currently draws its strength from simulations of terrorism, Baudrillard reveals, “The masses have been ‘seduced’ in the modern era by only two great events: the white light of the stars, and the black light of terrorism” (*Seduction* 96). In *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard contends that the “contagiousness of terrorism” knows no bounds (42). Baudrillard’s assertions concerning terrorism explain why indoctrinated citizens swimming in an abyss of auto-referential images cannot seem to consume enough dreadful signs of terrorist violence. Every time that his team encounters a momentary setback that could potentially derail their whole simulated enterprise, Motss calmly states “this is nothing” because manipulating a myopic public with a voracious appetite for consuming images of the global war on terror is almost too easy. Furthermore, Motss is aware that his film will proliferate itself after he leaks it to one channel because of the seductive force of the ideology of terrorism that has spellbound the whole planet. In Baudrillardian terms, Motss understands that the symbolic representation of terrorism supersedes its reality. Hence, terrorism no longer needs to be real at all for it to be an effective hegemonic tool.

Motss’s usage of the media as a medium to release his film to an enthusiastic public also deconstructs the idealistic notion of news outlets representing a type of benevolent fourth estate that protects public interests. Due to the unfortunate realities of corporate ownership and consolidation, the media more closely resembles a prosthetic limb that feeds the integrated political and social elite than a watchdog. The transnational companies that own all of the major networks have a vested interest in protecting the official master narrative that they are spinning because these headlines

reinforce their socioeconomic dominance. It is almost impossible to have any professional integrity when journalists have to answer to powerful CEOs if they are audacious enough to ask probing questions.

Echoing similar fears as Baudrillard, Levinson ponders “the extent to which journalists are willing to challenge the official version of the events” (Hammond 306). Since having the necessary courage to attempt to peel away the thick layers of hyper-reality in an effort to exhume the truth would result in career suicide, journalists incessantly promulgate the same exact signs regardless of the specific network in question. Consequently, Brean knows that he can count on the media to be unreflective cheerleaders⁶ that endlessly disseminate the “constant drizzle of governmental propaganda” that Motss fabricates (Kauffmann 24). In an age of neoliberal globalization governed by transnational behemoths, “Politics and media are interchangeable” (Dawson 3). In stark contrast to being an impartial, independent entity whose main concern is seeking to uncover the truth, the mainstream media is a reflection of a larger hegemonic structure that concretizes the new world order. Instead of denouncing forms of social injustice including the unequal distribution of wealth, the media deliberately attempts to conceal the shaky foundation of the hyper-real from which they derive monetary benefits.

Debunking the pervasive myth of the media as a fourth estate, Baudrillard explains,

there is total immersion and the countless images that come to us from this media sphere are not of the order of representation, but of decoding

⁶ In *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Baudrillard notes that “Bluff and information serve as aphrodisiacs for war” (75).

and visual consumption. They do not educate us, they inform us [...] If we understand war for what it is today [...] namely the instrument of a violent acculturation to the world order, then the media and images are part of the Integral Reality of war. They are the subtler instrument of the same homogenization by force (*The Intelligence of Evil* 77).

Baudrillard adamantly maintains that the goal of image saturation is not to encourage critical reflection, but instead to keep the populace in line. Whereas political authorities used to deploy grandiose spectacles of brute military force to eliminate resistance, this simulated violence is no longer necessary to pacify the public. Misinformation transmitted by a corporate media that is continually expanding its sphere of influence is the most effective hegemonic strategy ever created. By destroying meaning and any semblance of dialogue related to complex subjects that should resist reductionist, hyper-real logic if the world of simulation had not invaded every facet of contemporary life, the media ensures that “there is nothing outside of their operational logics” (Abbinnett 69). Given that the real is nowhere to be found in the ubiquitous, symbolic universe of which the media constitutes a vital element, Motss’s task is not that difficult to achieve since the public unknowingly consumes images that are grounded in hyper-reality every waking moment.

The signs that make up the integral reality of war are predicated upon “simplistic moral narratives of good versus evil” based on binary logic (Hammond 313). In order for the public to support his fictitious war on terror, Motss enshrouds the artifice of his Hollywood pageant with thick, hegemonic layers of propaganda. The symbolic importance of Motss’s spectacle transcends the significance of the non-events

themselves. Given the realistic and omnipresent nature of the compelling images that flicker across their screens, American citizens feel as if it is our moral imperative to protect our way of life and to liberate oppressed peoples. In his cinematic script in which the American military apparatus becomes a “global force for good,”⁷ Motss leaves no room for moral ambivalence. Each sign that is carefully “crafted” by Motss in his digital studio is part of a larger patriotic image that must be accepted in its entirety (Doyle 115). Rejecting any portion of these simulacra will result in ostracization and backlash that could forever destroy one’s livelihood. Ethical questions concerning war can never be reduced to such a Manichean paradigm, yet virtual warfare and the informational onslaught that it entails have eradicated any semblance of a balanced dialogue. In addition to destroying the reality principle, have info-wars eroded traditional moral systems? In *Wag the Dog*, this question haunts the viewer throughout the film as we are propelled into a sort of ethical no man’s land where “the discourse of the Good” has substituted itself entirely for actual morality (*The Transparency of Evil* 92). Is it even still possible to talk about evil anymore or can we only consume the seductive logic of what simulations tell us it means to be a virtuous nation dedicated to higher principles? The complex and often paradoxical relationship between ethics and war has never been straightforward, but the very possibility of having a nuanced, well-informed discussion about military operations has been taken away in the final phase of simulation.

Highlighting that signs of war must now be devoured impulsively in modern consumer republics, Baudrillard explains that “even the slightest attempt at interfering with a clear division between good and evil” is condemned by the pervasive code that must be obeyed (*The Intelligence of Evil* 23). Thus, Motss’s patriotic images and the

⁷ This exact expression is a recruiting slogan for the U.S. Navy.

symbolic universe and world order that they represent are accepted in their totality. Moreover, since the public can no longer distinguish between signs of evil and real malevolence, “There is no longer any metaphysical presence of evil nowadays [...] *Our* evil is faceless and imageless. It is present everywhere in homeopathic doses, in the abstract patterns of technology, but it no longer has any mythic presence” (*The Intelligence of Evil* 173). In a realm of floating signifiers where signs have now themselves vanished, Motss exploits the fact that people can no longer tell the difference between true morality and its representational caricatures. By saturating the populace with appealing simulacra that supposedly allow them to see what evil is in real-time, Brean and Motts narrate a heartwarming story of absolute good that always conquers evil in the end. As Baudrillard reveals in *The Intelligence of Evil*,

It is, in fact, no longer exactly a struggle between good and evil. It's a question of transparency. Good is transparent: you can see through it [...] It is only through the distorted, disseminated figures of evil that one can reconstitute, in perspective the figure of good. It is only through the dispersed and falsely symmetrical figures of good that one can reconstitute the paradoxical figure of evil (142).

By giving the false impression that viewers can see everything right in front of their eyes, Motss ensures that virtual transparency facilitates complete blindness in terms of the morality principle itself.

Although the notion of malevolence is in reality a multifaceted abstraction where the lines between right and wrong are often tenuous at best, signs of war impose one pre-packaged interpretation. Motss's viewers know that evil exists because they see it

on their screens. The integral reality of the destruction of the morality principle is confirmed by the disconcerting behavior of the American public in the film *Wag the Dog*. Passively consuming simulations that portray Albania as a “staging ground for terrorism,” the new embodiment of absolute evil in the age of information, American citizens even purchase t-shirts that read “Fuck Albania.” This disquieting comportment is indicative of an integral environment where moral judgments outside of the realm of simulation no longer exist. Baudrillard’s fears about hyper-real representations of the Holocaust and its denial fit into this context. When a sinister ruler with deadly intentions does inevitably rise to power, will we be able to recognize the genuine threat that this person poses to humanity? If such a leader knows how to manipulate codes that signify the hegemony of the good like Brean and Motss in *Wag the Dog*, then why would the legitimacy of his or her actions ever be questioned? Both Levinson and Baudrillard beckon us to ponder whether morality itself is dead. This unsettling phenomenon could explain why the viewer inexplicably identifies with Brean and Motss hoping that they succeed as numerous critics have noted.

The cinematic narrative of good and evil that bares no connection to actual authentic moral discourse produced by Motss is rendered possible by the seductive force of the image. In order to overcome Motss’s initial skepticism concerning the viability of their project, Brean reminds him that the substitution of the image for the real is hardly a new phenomenon. Offering concrete examples, Brean explains in reference to numerous conflicts, “You can’t remember the war, but the image remains. You remember the picture, but you have forgotten the war.” In our “sign soaked culture of simulacra, simulations, and reproductions,” iconic representations of reality often

supersede the real itself (Smith 67). Perhaps the only difference between Motss's crisis and other historical 'events' is that the signifier is void of any meaning whatsoever from the very beginning. From the onset, the integral reality of war assures that we have entered into the symbolic domain of pure fiction from day one. Is this the greatest victory of the simulators of war?

Furthermore, the computer-generated picture is the most powerful type of image ever conceived. Due to their propensity to replicate themselves endlessly in cyber space, computer-generated graphics have no limits. The final product of a cinematic work contains scenes where few traces of the real remain, because modern technology allows directors to meld, distort, and fabricate images in a variety of ways to make them appear authentic. As a master of special effects, Motss knows how to harness this power. As Jennifer Walton underscores, "To produce the illusion of war with Albania much of the technology necessary are computer-generated graphics" (12). Walton further specifies, "The image necessary to launch the war is a young girl, who is running through a burning village in Albania. In actuality, the young girl [...] runs through a sound stage holding a bag of potato chips. Stanley Motss and his assistants digitally add the burning village behind her and replace the bag of potato chips with a kitten" (12). In her Baudrillardian analysis of *Wag the Dog*, Walton reveals the dangers of modern special effects. Given the plethora of digital tools at his disposal, Motss realizes that no one will ever be able to decode the signs of war that he creates due to the veritable sophistication of the technology itself. As a Hollywood director with an intimate knowledge of his craft, Motss has no doubts that his well produced computer-generated images will be indistinguishable from real footage that documents human suffering. In

Wag the Dog, Levinson problematizes the efficacy of artificially generated cinematic images. Although its films entertain billions of satisfied customers across the globe, is the entire culture of Hollywood complicit in the destruction of meaning and reality?⁸ Does Levinson freely confess that one day we will not be able to separate virtual warfare from true violence because of the nefarious effects of bombarding the modern subject with too much Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI)?

For Baudrillard, CGI is clearly one of the main tools responsible for the murder of the real. Elucidating that it is because of CGI that we can no longer even talk about signs of the real anymore, Baudrillard asserts, “The computer-generated image is like this too, a digital image which is entirely fabricated, has no real referent and from which, by contrast with analogue images, the negative itself has disappeared” (*The Intelligence of Evil* 28). The philosopher reiterates, “The ultimate violence done to the image is the violence of the computer-generated image [...] in the process of computer-generation the referent no longer exists and the real itself no longer has cause to come to pass, being produced immediately as Virtual Reality” (*The Intelligence of Evil* 95). While watching *Wag the Dog*, the viewer might initially laugh at the absurdity of an alleged terrorist victim running with a bag of potato chips that is concealed by a superimposed image of a kitten. However, the gravity of the message that Levinson is trying to convey soon destabilizes the spectator. Does CGI create a hyper-reality or a space in which human anguish is trivialized to such epic proportions that the immense suffering of casualties of war is erased from public consciousness? Will CGI and its sterilization of war ensure that the horrors of bloody conflicts are wiped clean from our memory? In

⁸ In *America*, Baudrillard examines the global sociocultural impact of Hollywood stars and music divas.

the light-hearted, ecstatic pageant that Brean and Motss concoct together, negativity has no place. Only computer-generated images of a 'clean war' are filtered to a euphoric global audience.

In *Wag the Dog*, it is apparent how utterly divorced these patriotic simulacra are from reality. In his Manichean plot that pits good against evil, Motss's war hero is the very embodiment of courage, sacrifice, and dignity. In reality, Sergeant William Shumann (Woody Harrelson) is a deranged criminal that was convicted of raping a nun. Given that "Old Shoe," as he is affectionately known by the public, attempts to rape the wife of a farmer near the end of the film, the viewer has little reason to question his guilt. After the husband shoots and kills the potential rapist, Motss is forced to improvise. Instead of coming apart at the seams, the fictitious Albanian War merely takes another cinematic twist. In an indication of just how easy it is to maintain hyper-real fictions through the transmission of images via the media, Schumann receives a grandiose military funeral fit for a national hero. The mainstream media will follow Motss's script to the letter yet again thereby ensuring public trust.

Despite a few momentary setbacks including interference from the Central Intelligence Agency which confronts Brean and Motss with the reality that there is no war, the general public will continue to consume signs of terrorism throughout the film unwaveringly. Providing no facile optimism that the chimerical illusion of virtual warfare will eventually be shattered, we learn at the end of the film that the president wants to return to Albania to "finish the job." Similar to Baudrillard, Levinson appears to suggest that the integral reality of war has arrived whether we like it or not. In a symbolic, self-referential network of signs that "have become unhinged from the signified," reality no

longer matters because meaningless images begin to take on a life of their own (Root 240).

Several researchers such as Tom Stempel, Andrew Doyle, and Jonathon Dawson have noted that the disconnect between Schumman's image and his scandalous real life is an extreme example of how postmodern historiography has also been tainted by insignificant, manufactured simulacra. Motss's script will forever remain the uncontested version of the non-events of the Albanian War given that the cult of "Old Shoe" has been enshrined in the collective memory of American citizens. From a hegemonic perspective, the hyper-real fiction of this simulated war hero is useful to the political elite, because Schumman's saga is emblematic of patriotic virtue which corresponds to a larger nationalistic myth that must be reinforced. In this vein, Andrew Doyle probes the similarities between what we now know about the Gulf War concerning the "rescue and deification of Private Jessica Lynch" which served to "divert attention from the brutal reality of the war" and William Schumann (115). Although historians have little reason to question that Lynch was actually a soldier fighting for her country in comparison to Schumann, the "official version" of her saga collapses into the hyper-real when examined critically (Stempel 63). Both Schumann's fake military exploits and the master narrative of Lynch's ordeal are concrete manifestations of just how pervasive simulations of war heroism truly are. Moreover, these two examples seem to support Baudrillard's aforementioned hypotheses which posit that we have lost the ability to distinguish between signs of what it means to be virtuous and genuine heroism.

Additionally, since we can no longer discriminate between cinematic images and the real thing due to recent technological advances that deceive our senses, Brean and Motss's fictitious conflict will not be the first or last time that war follows a carefully orchestrated script. As Baudrillard highlights in *The Intelligence of Evil* in the context of the Gulf War,

[w]hat we are watching as we sit paralysed in our fold-down seats isn't 'like a film'; it *is* a film. With a script, a screenplay, that has to be followed unswervingly. The casting and the technical and financial resources have all been meticulously scheduled: these are professionals at work. Including control of the distribution channels. In the end, operational war becomes an enormous special effect; cinema becomes the paradigm of warfare, and we imagine it as 'real', whereas it is merely the mirror of its cinematic being (124)

Asserting that cinematic hyper-reality has totally engulfed the real, Baudrillard leaves the reader with the following conclusion: "It's the same with the cinema: the films produced today are merely the visible allegory of the cinematic form that has taken over everything-social and political life, the landscape, war, etc." (*The Intelligence of Evil* 125).

Like reality and morality, the writing of history is now part of the larger framework of the omnipresent universe of simulation. For Baudrillard, not only are we doomed to experience non-events that transpire on a quotidian basis, but we also incessantly relive them in our collective imagination generations later when nothing else remains besides a contrived image. Similar to the protagonist Brean in *Wag the Dog*, Baudrillard realizes

that long after most of the 'historical' details of a given war have been entirely washed away by the proverbial sands of time, iconic images will stand in for reality. Living in a symbolic realm flooded by computer-generated images of violence that are passed off to the public as being real, Baudrillard wonders if we are also witnessing the death of history. Referring to both non-events and what he calls 'ruptural events,' Baudrillard explains that certain hegemonic structures including the media have effectively "put an end to history" (*The Intelligence of Evil* 126). The writing and transmission of history have always been problematic and open to divergent interpretations from an objective standpoint. However, if history is now comprised of signs with no original referents as Baudrillard suggests, can anything be said to have truly happened?

In conclusion, in American history textbooks designed to indoctrinate young minds, representations of Amerindian genocide⁹ were sterilized well before the advent of integral reality with creative euphemisms such as 'Indian removal.' Present and future atrocities face an even more daunting challenge in a society where few individuals are part of the reality-based community. When a cinematic script imposes only one acceptable interpretation of a war, it becomes increasingly difficult to represent or remember crimes against humanity at all. Is it still even possible to engage in a meaningful dialogue about moral transgressions outside of a pre-fabricated script that has interred the real to its culminating state of non-existence? All that people will remember about Motss's Albanian War in *Wag the Dog* is that it was a just and necessary struggle against the axis of evil. Yet, the phony folk song allegedly from the end of the thirties recorded by Johnny Dean (Willie Nelson) which became the patriotic

⁹ Given that Baudrillard is very sensitive to the plight of Amerindians as illustrated in numerous works such as *America*, this particular example is purposeful.

anthem for this simulated conflict is indicative of how cinematic reality completely falsifies history itself. When the Baudrillardian discourse of the good effaces evil outside of a hyper-real caricature disseminated through a ubiquitous screenplay which incessantly assaults our senses with sophisticated graphics, atrocities are white-washed or even ignored entirely. The central thesis of Levinson's film and Baudrillard's philosophical theories about war and its hyper-real representation could be summarized as follows: welcome to the death of meaning, history, violence, and morality. Regardless of the plethora of comical scenes in *Wag the Dog* that hold the viewer's attention, the integral reality of informational warfare is no laughing matter.

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Revenge, Redeemed*

By Robert Johnson, Midwestern State University

Though always a bit of an outlaw genre, the revenge plot, no doubt, has fueled narratives for as long as human communities have experienced unsatisfactory distributions of compensation, or recognition of wrong, and publicly have recited their resulting frustration. Critics may cringe at the genre's perennial vigor, but that's just the point—revenge speaks the forbidden. As a genre, revenge rattles cages. It spotlights forgotten corners within the cultural norm's bright ceremony, most especially when revenge is reinterpreted across cultural boundaries, resulting in normative interference. Witness the multiple lives of *Man on Fire*, as the novel (1980) moves page to screen (1987, 2004, 2005).

Genre and Adaptation

At base, notes Katherine Maus, revenge focuses on a specific desire: someone's "taking matters into his [or her] own hands because the institutions by which criminals are made to pay for their offences are either systematically defective or unable to cope with some particularly difficult situation" (ix). Using simpler terms, Jon Elster defines revenge as "the attempt, at some cost or risk to oneself, to impose suffering upon those who have made one suffer, because they made one suffer." Though cultural norms that might encourage, or discourage, revenge vary, Elster sums, revenge "is a universal phenomenon" (862).

In literature in English, interest in such plots runs back through Beowulf, vendetta, and the pride of warrior clans, but modern engagement has been related by Fredson Bowers and others to a shift in roughly the fourteenth century in England when, as Bowers argues, "the exaction of revenge by an individual began to be considered [. . .

.] a crime against the state” (6). Modern interest in portrayals of revenge, that is, may well be born of concern for losing one’s personal ability to right matters of wrong as one is asked to cede powers to a not altogether trustworthy, but growing, central authority. Bowers sums that, in such times, some “individuals continued to value their own privileges far more than the common weal” (6). Even in the face of religious demands for social and spiritual order, Bowers writes, “it would be grave error to neglect the stubborn, though not always articulate, resistance to reform” (15).

Significantly, Ronald Broude reminds, the tensions Bowers describes are not born of attempts to eliminate revenge, but are induced by society’s making a particular turn: placing the act in others’ hands. In Renaissance England, Broude reflects, as an instance, civil magistrates could be labeled “common revengers,” and Francis Bacon (1625) famously labeled revenge itself a “wild justice” (41). In essence, thus, discussions of revenge balance two concepts of compensation: in one, Broude argues, seeking satisfaction for wrong is considered the responsibility of a family or group related by self-interest; in the other, crime is seen “as an antisocial act” and thought best punished by representatives of society as a whole (43). (Mind, the pattern differs by culture, yet the basic tension (personal vs. social compensation) appears consistent. Kevin Whitmore discusses a remarkable version of social compensation in his elaborating steps through which, in Shogunate Japan, revenge-taking became a bureaucratic procedure, an action that one authorized by seeking written permission through layers of social authority and then, in effect, being assigned as a duty to one’s superiors (7).) As Broude notes, to this demand for trust of social structure add the demands of a presumed religious order (for example, Yahweh’s “To me belongeth

vengeance, and recompense”—Deut 32:35), and the hoped-for right, after wrongdoing, can seem distant (48, 49-51).

In drama, in the West, interest in revenge plots often is argued to have been influenced, as well, by the rediscovery of the works of Roman-era writer Seneca (c. 4 BCE- CE 65). His tragedies set a pattern that long has supported Western revenge plots and that flowers in the English Renaissance (for brief histories, see Maus and Winston). Seneca, critics purport, not only presents stage business to adopt—violence, ghosts, heightened speech, duplicities—but a mood in the on-stage world that supports extra-legal pursuits. Perhaps as a result of his own having risen through the Roman political structure and seen its dishonesties firsthand, Seneca elaborates plots that, as one expert sums, “confront the nature of kingship and tyranny, along with such themes as regal clemency; the adaptability and insecurity of courtiers; the dangers of public life; the inevitable corruption, instability, and evanescence of power; the treachery that surrounds it; the resentment bred of arbitrary rule; the constant possibility of assassination” (J. P. Sullivan qtd. in Winston 37). Jonathan Crew sums that Seneca places on stage a specific kind of reality: “*that* of which the culture at large simply cannot or will not speak [. . .] and which it cannot or will not consistently represent” (100).

In short, revenge plots say to audiences, “This is what we really feel about our ability to receive justice.” Such plots echo modern insecurities regarding the role of the state in righting wrongs. They explain, to some degree, as well, John Kerrigan notes, the health of pop-culture genres like “vigilante movies in America.” That is, revenge plots alarm audiences with the recognition that the impulses debated by Hamlet—to

avenge or not—might be closer than the audience hoped to those debated by, for instance, Charles Bronson’s bloody avenger in the *Death Wish* series (25, 25 n.48).

Adaptation, with its own laying bare—that all texts speak of other texts—usefully explicates the appeal and permutation of revenge plots. For, as Julie Saunders reminds (*Adaptation and Appropriation* 2006), adaptation not only translates information between genres, but offers “commentary” on sources by, in effect, filtering them through the aesthetic demands of subsequent presentations (18). Such aesthetics, in turn, defer to surrounding cultural environments. Each generation, adage reminds, creates its own Shakespeare (in the ‘Sixties, his lovers tossed Frisbees). Adaption works as if cultural blotting paper, absorbing—and revealing the stain of—the environment in which it is compiled.

Revenge on Stage

An interesting case in point is offered by adaptations of A. J. Quinnell’s novel *Man on Fire* (1980). The source text will not be known by many US readers, but millions of viewers worldwide have witnessed Denzel Washington’s performance in the 2004 film rendition. Two other film adaptations, however, also exist, and offer viewers quite different experiences, even as each evokes its own reading of the source material. Imagining adaptations more askew in mood might be difficult. Yet all three films no doubt provide a version of revenge an intended market was thought to crave.

Quinnell, author of the root novel, himself performed a bit of adaptation. He was born in England, his actual name Philip Nicholson. The pen name under which he published the novel is a combination: last name taken from a prominent Welsh rugby player; the “A. J.” part, apparently, the initials of the son of a bar tender at the

establishment where Nicholson coined the moniker (Massa, “Phillip Nicholson”). An epilogue of sorts printed at the back of the novel explains his having chosen to publish under a false name: the author “wishes to remain anonymous because his future books will detail intrigues between nations and cultures and will move freely over international boundaries. He desires the same freedom for himself.” On Gozo, an island immediately north of Malta—where he lived, and where, in 2005, he passed—Nicholson apparently was a well-known figure, though.

The story of *Man on Fire*, Quinnell told interviewers, was inspired by political kidnappings in Italy and Singapore, as well as information gathered while living, he claimed, with Mafia families in Sicily (Massa; see also “A. J. Quinnell / Biography” and “Phillip Nicholson”). The initial tale inspired a total of five novels, published 1980 through the mid-1990s, all featuring the exploits of a burned-out ex-mercenary soldier and former member of the French Foreign Legion, called Creasy. Online sources record that the books did well in Japan, where Creasy was read as a Western *ronin*, or samurai without a lord (“A. J. Quinnell / Biography”; see also “Phillip Nicholson”).

Man on Fire, original novel in the series, lays out a direct, though highly episodic, plot. Mentally exhausted and disheartened by his years of facing and administering violence, especially by a recent stretch in Africa, Creasy has lost his will to live. “The truth was,” the novel’s narrator intones, Creasy “had reached the point where he was unable to generate even a slight enthusiasm for a new morning” (51). He wanders through his life, drinking too much, mentally and physically wasting. A friend and former fellow Legionnaire, named Guido—he with a past tied into the Italian underworld and also a broken man, having lost his beloved wife—finds Creasy a job in Milan, as a

bodyguard for Pinta, the daughter of a wealthy businessman in the textiles industry. Actually, Creasy is being hired as a “premium” guard, not expected to be perfectly fit but in place to reduce insurance costs (50).

Creasy comes to love the girl; caring for her teaches him to want to live again (indeed, the child, for him, “made” love “possible,” he explains in the book, 255); yet, she is kidnapped, held for ransom. Creasy, wounded in the kidnapping and lying in hospital, learns that the girl has been found, choked to death on her gag. Evidence shows she had been abused sexually. The descriptions in the book are brutally terse (e.g., 143-44).

Creasy, who owes her his desire to live, will take revenge on a system that allows for such corruption that the girl’s suffering would seem inevitable—a system exposed as venal and evil by the narration’s Dickensian subplots involving Mafia intrigue and police lethargy. First, however, Creasy must rebuild himself as a warrior. He travels to Gozo, where, through a sort of pastoral interlude after hospital surgery, he regains strength through farm work, swimming, eating well, and falling for a local woman. She becomes pregnant, and the avenger must leave her behind as he rains death on everyone who he can discover had anything to do with Pinta’s suffering. Creasy shoots, explodes, even parachutes in to slaughter, the Mafia chain of command. In process, he is again sorely wounded and is given a public funeral. A final short chapter, though, describes a mysterious limping figure’s being delivered back to Gozo and into the waiting arms of a woman who looks “bulky” and “heavy” in her coat (370).

In sum, here readers engage, full panoply, the revenger’s tale. A broken man, facing a corrupt system, skirts its limits and dares to right wrongs violently, and, having

learned from a young girl to live again, (presumably) is delivered into the arms of his pregnant new love. Instead of being called to revenge by, say, a ghost, he is called by the spirit of the lost girl, who, in effect, drives him, during his exile, again fully to become a man. Revenger is redeemed. In the novel, when word leaks out to the popular press of what Creasy is doing and why, and of Mafiosi dropping like flies, civilians caught up and enthused by his courage sport stickers in their car windows: “GO—CREASY!” (334).

The first attempt to move this plot to screen was made in 1987. Creasy becomes an ex-CIA agent, played by Scott Glenn. The director was originally to have been then-newcomer Tony Scott (who directed the 2004 version), but the studio backed off (see Laura). As a result, the Glenn film is delivered to French director Élie Chouraqui, whose version, set in Italy, generally is dismissed by critics as visually interesting but difficult to understand. The narration is delivered by Glenn, as Creasy, speaking, oddly enough, in retrospect, from a body bag. Editing is attacked by critics as creating a film altogether too clever (Klady) and whose montage seems “arbitrary” in its connections, making passages “incomprehensible” (Ryan). For Desmond Ryan of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the film seems suspended between urges to present “existential meditation and conventional vengeance drama.” Caryn James of *The New York Times* dismisses the pose as silly, the film confused and “about to slip into unconsciousness.” Highlights for critics seem to be Glenn’s brooding presence as a guidepost, Danny Aiello’s portrait of a whinging hood, and Joe Pesci’s donning the Guido role—a performance capped with his accompanying himself on guitar through a frenzied rendition of Chuck Berry’s

“Johnny Be Good.” (“Go-Creasy,” perhaps, becoming “Go, Johnny, Go”?) Lloyd Sacks sums the movie, at its best, a sort of “fever dream.”

In this version, as in the book, Creasy’s demise is portrayed as a ruse, but the girl, called “Sam” and played by Louis Malle’s daughter Jade, is found by Creasy and lives. Dark, brooding (some scenes so dark they are difficult to watch on older video screens not adept at separating blacks and browns), the film seems more naturalistic than realistic, Creasy’s pilgrimage through the underworld watched over by enormous, sinister forces beyond his immediate comprehension. During some scenes, the shadows are so strong, one almost forgets the film has been shot in color. Most importantly, the film seems more about Creasy’s ordeal than the actual revenge taken *en route*. Glenn’s Creasy simply assumes the world cannot be fixed, and his *is* a fever dream: he speaks as a dead man, overcome by this world’s sickness. But he saves the girl. His reward—and the audience’s—is seeing her alive.

The 2004 rendition of the tale, Washington’s star piece, moves the story to Mexico and was received by critics more favorably, though again with tempered enthusiasm for what revengers do. Roger Ebert’s qualified summary nicely captures the critical mood: “Tony Scott’s ‘Man on Fire’ employs superb craftsmanship and a powerful [. . .] Washington performance in an attempt to elevate genre material above its natural level, but it fails. The underlying story isn’t worth the effort.” Viewers identify with the characters, Ebert admits, but are exhausted, as it were, by the extended celebration of action and violence, even as they are off-put by the film’s, in effect, double ending. In this version, the father collaborates with the kidnappers, trying to extort funds and cover his tracks using the crime as guise, and in the end, the father must die even as Creasy

must kill everyone involved in the actual snatch and botched pay-off attempt— even the exchange, corrupt. *Pinta* (the word in Spanish identifiable with “painted woman”—see IMDB’s “*Man on Fire* (2004) / Trivia” for the film) becomes *Pita* (from *Lupita*), played ably, critics generally feel, by Dakota Fanning, and, as in 1987, she is saved. But here, importantly, only through the sacrifice of Creasy, who volunteers to die in her stead, having truncated his quest for revenge. The film, a visually powerful wash of grainy colors and quick cuts and explosions’ dazzle, becomes a sort of psychedelic, secular passion play, Creasy dying for the sins world. As Creasy’s buddy Rayburn (the Guido figure in this version, played with assurance by Christopher Walkin) allegorizes the gore, Creasy is painting his masterpiece of bloodshed, all the victims sacrificed so that the revenger can again be pure, at least in his intent. (Interestingly, Kerrigan’s thorough study of revenge tragedy notes that the Renaissance revenger, as well, is seen as a kind of artist, assembling a plot that achieves his desires—see 17, 19.) As close as this Creasy comes to joining a waiting lover as reward is his winning the respect of Pita’s mother, once she sees he is on the side of the angels.

This sacrificial mood is picked up by many critics. David Ng in *The Village Voice* labels the violence “Christian Retribution.” Stephany Zacharek, though quarreling with the film’s message, writes that Scott has intended a moral film. Even the website of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops notes the weight of religious iconography (“crucifixes, votive candles, and Madonnas”) and the film’s sacrificial allegory based in Creasy’s “last-minute redemption” (“*Man on Fire*” oldusccb.org)

Paul Davies, writing in a collection delving evil portrayed in the arts, offers an extended theological interpretation of the film, rooting his explication in a section from

Romans 12:21 in which St. Paul teaches humans are to “be not overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” Davies notes an exchange in the film in which a religious sister advises Creasy “Be not overcome by evil,” and Creasy replies with the rest of the line but adds, “I’m the sheep that got lost” (214). Davies plots Creasy’s spirit redemption with care, paralleling Biblical passages, and seeing even in Creasy’s favorite pop song, “Blue Bayou” sung by Linda Ronstadt, a suggestion of Creasy’s need to “go home” to a better place than here (216). In another extended and convincing essay, Dennis Cutchins relates the Scott film back to George Steven’s 1953 film *Shane* (181), arguing that both pieces end in redeeming violence. In a link back to the original novel, Cutchins notes that Shane enjoys a passage of “pastoral” life before returning to violence forced upon him (182, 185). Importantly, Cutchins points out that the added religious layer of imagery and theme moves the Scott film away from Quinnell’s effort. The novel’s Creasy has no truck with religion, cannot see God’s protective presence anywhere in the world he has helped to paint with blood (186). Cutchins also notes that Creasy curtails revenge to save the girl (185) and that on one version of the DVD of Scott’s film, screenwriter Brian Helgeland and producer Lucas Foster argue they “made a film” about “sacrifice and redemption,” not revenge (190). Cutchins concludes that the two did make a revenge film, but an influence perhaps from *Shane* shaped the film’s closing mood (190-91), that influence, in turn, imbued by post-war conversations regarding the re-entering of civilian life by returning soldiers. Soldiers, of course, serve; Creasy does so to the end.

Thus, the 2004 film emphasizes not so much that this world is dark and inscrutable, as that any redemption of its hero lies outside this world, which must be cleansed with sacrificial blood. Oddly, then, the revenger becomes spiritual icon.

For many Western viewers probably the sharpest effects of adaptation will be noticed in the most recent filming of Quinnell's story—the 2005 *masala* version out of India, called *Ek Ajnabee* (Hindi title translated on disk as “A Stranger”). *Masala*-style films, sometimes popularly generalized as “Bollywood” films, are named for a spice mix and, traditionally, meld moods and narrative techniques—straight acted scenes, for example, mixing with song and dance. In the West, viewers often identify such amalgam with the so-called “musical,” which has been rooted in C18 popularity of opera and, often more specifically, in English, in John Gay's (1728) parodic *The Beggar's Opera*. However, India's *masala* films have been traced back to ancient dramatic practices, recorded as early as the second century CE, which celebrate, one critic notes, mixes of narrative forms—“dramatic action, song, dance, conflict, and a happy ending”—a *mélange* that, in turn, allows the spectator “the joyful consciousness” experienced when witnessing” conflict that is “resolved” with harmony (Shedde 25; or see Mooij 30).

Scholars document that sound first was added to film in India in 1931, song and dance routines quickly becoming common fare (see, e.g., Kabir 41, Shedde 25; for background, see, Mooij). Such “interruptions,” as they are seen by some Western eyes, are essential parts of the narrative flow in *masala* films, though, writes Sangita Shresthova (91). They break up what has been called “linear trajectory” to allow changes in mood or to create intervals at which, for instance, the narrative can be reshaped. They are a kind of narrative grammar (93). Thus, according to Shresthova, in

evaluating any one dance, the viewer must ask “why the dance happens, what motivates specific characters to dance, and what [. . .] the dance achieve[s] in the broader narrative context” (94). The breaks also carry on folk traditions of inviting audience reaction to staged performance or such performances’ own speaking to audience-related “topical” matters (Shedde 25). The dances, as well, notes another critic, offer chances for women dancing to display something of their emotional selves, without transcending conventional limits for female expression (see Nijhawan)—in some contexts, they even can “stand in for sex scenes,” writes yet another (Virdi 19). Deepening the connection of ancient practice and recent norms, the maintaining of *masala* rhythms in contemporary films has been read as a *carnavalesque* expression (Shandilya 113), and this playfulness has been examined by critics in a series of “chutneyed,” or *masala*, revampings of Western hits, from *Dead Poets Society*, *Indecent Proposal*, and *Sleepless in Seattle*, to *Taxi Driver* (see Nayar).

As is seen in such remakes in general, *Ek Ajnabee* imbues the transformed story with *masala*-influenced ludic shifting moods. Colors tend to be brighter than in the two earlier films. The grainy texture of Scott’s version is gone, Thailand, where this version plays out, shining under bright sun. And while cutting is used to create occasional staccato narrative pacing, or to echo musical passages, most of the film’s story flows smoothly and is built of stagey, set scenes. Revenge-taking is graphic and ugly, but the whole business is laid out to seem at times more parodic of the source (here, the 2004 film, not the novel) than it is an evocation. Interviewed, one of the supporting actors claims that the film is not a Bollywood “remake,” but is “setting new standards” (see Chhabra.)

Creasy becomes a battle worn ex-Indian military officer named Surya, who, after the killing of a child in a gunfight with terrorists, has succumbed to drink and sloth, horrified that the likes of him cannot be forgiven by God. With the help of an ex-military mate, Shekhar, he secures a bodyguard position, watching after a young rich girl, named here Anamika. He comes to love her, trains her in swimming. She is kidnapped, feared slain, and Surya, feeling responsible, pledges revenge.

In a redoubling of the Scott film's conclusion, not only the father of the child and his lawyer have been involved in the crime, Surya learns, but Shekhar, too, proves a traitor. And, after an initial round of shooting and killing off bad guys, the two old military buddies have it out to the death. At first, they grab pistols, then lay them down to engage a manlier fistfight, but finally reclaim their guns, and, as one might have guessed, the traitor is slain. The fight, though, reads more as a dance than a convincing round of fisticuffs. Surya clearly is way too old for this match, and the stylized blows the men administer are carefully choreographed, hardly believable. After the traitor falls, the released young girl (as in all the films, she lives), her mother, and a comic sidekick Surya has adopted along the way come rushing across the frame for hugs and tears. The film closes on a flash forward to a time fifteen years distant, Surya still Anamika's coach (she, now grown and beautiful), a flashy young hunk now her bodyguard. The trio link arms and walk into the camera, surrogate father and daughter gushing joy.

After Washington's groveling in the dirt of Mexico, Glenn's in the murderous shadows of a peeling and rank Italy, Surya's heavily stylized revenge may prove difficult for some Western audiences to appreciate. Their discomfort, though, is understandable: Western audiences will have been awakened to the constructed nature of the genre

itself—not noticed in the previous adaptations because familiar. As everyone is reminded in college surveys, no one expects Oedipus to come out unscathed. Surya might fight clumsily, but, in the end, he wins—he has to.

Importantly, Surya is played by Indian star Amitabh Bachchan, an actor whose career runs back into roles in the 1970s identified with a so-called “Angry Young Man” era in Indian film and then through a series of turns as avenging “subaltern superhero” in the 1980s. Later he rekindles a slowed career with a series of fatherly characters (for a history, see Chute). His films span not only decades but a spectrum of traditional masculine life-roles. Simply by stepping into the frame, Bachchan demands a kind of reverence—he brings those other roles with him, for many Asian viewers. David Chute reminds that in the late 1990s, Bachchan was acclaimed “the most popular movie star of all time in an online [BBC] poll” (54). “The Big B,” as he is called (see, e.g., Chhabra, Chute, and Vijayan), is surrounded with hot young males and sexy young women in *Ek Ajnabee*, allowing them the more active roles while he concentrates on presenting the self-redeeming avenger.

One key scene that demonstrates his focus occurs as his revenge killing begins: at a dance club where Surya and Shekhar trail a key gangster, Surya, apparently, wades through the dark and among the throbbing bodies to locate their prey, but Shekhar joins in a riotous, hip-thrusting, rock-video-quality, semi-hip-hop dance routine, surrounded by scantily-clad young women and men dressed as cartoon thugs. Though the film title evokes a “stranger,” as outsider, whom the police knowingly allow to cleanse the local underworld, the song behind the dance scene is translated onscreen as evoking a stranger that comes to steal the heart. At dance’s end, Shekhar tears his

shirt off to display his shining, tattooed, vital young torso, and women lean in, as if he were a glistening sweet.

The dance, thus, clearly associates Shekhar with the gangster world though he feigns loyalty to Surya, who does not dance, but brood. As the deception around the aged warrior shows, he has reason.

The Narrative Path

In essence, the film adaptations of Quinnell's story offer three versions of the personal/public poise of revenge plots. Their dissonant norms lay bare how adaptation always is re-seeing. What is more, critical reactions reveal the tensions born as each film reaches for its appropriate audience, while dragging through immediately local values motifs that run back centuries. The first adaptation accepts the world as flawed, saves the girl, redeems the revenger through a faked death, presumably assisted by way of Creasy's past connections in government-sponsored violence. The revenger is a dangerous, though in extreme moments, useful bit of Cold-War debris, and for US viewers of a certain age the film no doubt conjures memories of conspiracies from Tonquin Gulf to Dealey Plaza, to Nicaragua and Iran-Contra. But remembering is not always a comfort. Critics bristle at the film's sullen energy. The second film accepts the world's flaws, saves the girl, but allows escape for Creasy only through dying, in the kidnappers' car, volcano as backdrop, Creasy draped with a St. Christopher medal given him by Pita. Wherever Blue Bayou might be, viewers probably hope he's gone there. Creasy becomes expendable as the film celebrates sacrifice and becomes more about gangs and fear than about any ghosts of foreign policy past. Though thanked in the credits for being a "special place," Mexico here evokes an understanding that, in

contemporary life, evil festers in every darkened corner and haunts the shadows around the flicker of holy candles. Aspirations for ascension, however, yet smolder, as does the heart of Mexico City's overlooking volcano, poised behind Creasy's dying. Critics celebrate Washington's power on screen, but seem reluctant to admire the film's audience appeal. At the pundit level, intellectual bias is not quite ready to embrace this Creasy's message. In the third film, revenge, in effect, becomes choreography, everyone rises from the grime and is smiling at close—at least everyone alive is. The medal, by the way, becomes Hindu. Anamika grows up, rises from a pool as if she were a beauty-queen missing only her sash. Critics gaze in awe, proclaim that, as an avenger, Big B “rocks” (see Vijayan). Thus, the power of genre accepted as such.

Most of all, the trio of films exposes how adaptation, as a tool, lays bare the power of an audience's cultural grievances and expectations to determine the version of a plot that will please at a given location and time. Structuralists suggest that audiences spend their lives receiving *sjuzet* and chasing *fabula* (see, e.g., Prince 30, 87). As seen from *Man on Fire's* incarnations, adaptation reveals some of the paths audiences run, trying to make the connection.

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The Resurgence of the Cowboy Figure: Raylan's Utopic Quest in *Justified*

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In nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, the cowboy construct was often associated with images of freedom, of justice, and of the wilderness. In various media, the cowboy also appears in the role of lawmaker, as peacemaker in his community; this figure ensures that the moral code of his community is upheld as is personal freedom. Richard W. Etulain, for instance, cites both Owen Wister's *Virginian* and James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking* as "cowboy protagonist[s]" that "confront dangerous foes and dutifully carry out dangerous tasks assigned . . ." (*Telling* 68). Over time, the cowboy figure was and must continue to be adapted in order to suit his changing environment as he has entered what Rickard Slotkin terms "post-Frontier America" (194). Even though he does change to suit this contemporary space, this character's persona still encompasses the traits of the Myth of the Frontier, revealing that he is not only unable to escape his past (the Old West), he also exists as a product of it.

FX's series, *Justified*, revolves around Elmore Leonard's cowboy/Deputy US Marshal Raylan Givens. A minor character created by Leonard for his short story collection, *Fire in the Hole*, Raylan takes center-stage as *Justified*'s protagonist, one who spends his time battling his personal demons, which mainly appear in the form of his former community. Notably, Raylan's popularity motivated Leonard to write a novel (published in 2012) that features Raylan as the protagonist and is titled after this key character. Described as "one cool character" (Hinds), Raylan comes from Harlan County in rural Kentucky, a place where remnants of his family and friends still live. In an effort to separate himself from the criminal element in which he has matured, Raylan leaves Harlan and becomes a US Marshal. According to Slotkin, the hero figure is central to the Myth of the Frontier and that he felt it was his duty to institute a frontier code of conduct, but that the motivation for doing so may not have been for the good of the public and was in accordance with his own desires (14). In effect, since Raylan witnesses his father, Arlo, involved in various criminal enterprises during his childhood, and Harlan County was revered by his deceased mother, whom Arlo repeatedly assaulted, it stands to reason that Raylan would be emotionally invested in the welfare of the place and its residents. In order to ward off the criminal element encroaching on his and his community's personal freedom, the contemporary construct of the American cowboy appears. Etulain, again citing Wister's classic novel, observes that "the hero serves as lawbringer and civilizer" (*Telling* 70). In an analysis of both government sanctioned violence and the protection of settlers in the nineteenth-century West, Michael A. Bellesiles comments on the duties of the marshals, noting that their tasks included both enforcing the law and ensuring that this space belonged to the Western newcomers ("Western Violence"). While critics relate conflicting views about the amount of violence present in the nineteenth-century West, there is agreement with regard to the behavior of the lawman. Etulain documents this figure's appearance in the nineteenth-century, connecting him to the metamorphosis which was occurring on the frontier (*Badges* xii). He asserts that because of the rapid alterations to the frontier that ensued after the 1820s, many with economic means hired enforcers who could protect their interests and ensure a peaceful environment (xii). Both the cowboy and the

lawman appear in history as the Western spectacle: notably, fame and a reputation accompany each figure as it does Raylan. In his pursuance of order, Raylan is willing to cross boundaries, to behave immorally, to ensure a momentary stop to the criminal behavior in his community, thereby returning it to its former utopic condition. When the series opens, Raylan appears to have parted ways with Harlan County; however, this separation is short-lived.

In 1.1, Raylan is introduced as a seventeen-year veteran of the US Marshal service currently located in Miami, Florida. According to Slotkin, the Old West was no longer considered an existing space but rather only an influential concept after 1890 (4). As Etulain discusses the popularity of the Western, indicating its various representations in media (the novel, the film, etc.), he also acknowledges that interest in the Western waned briefly in the late 1960s and 1970s before increasing with the appearance of *Dances with Wolves* in 1990 (*Telling* 95; Introduction x). As with other New West writers, Leonard has recreated a version of the Old West in “Fire in the Hole”, thereby updating it to reflect twenty-first century concerns. Reporter Julie Hinds of the *Detroit Free Press* calls Raylan “a hero with a hint of John Wayne” (Leonard, “‘Justified’ character”). In reference to the frontier, in the case of *Justified*, this term is used to designate a space without defined borders in which a threat to the “standard of living”—one’s freedom—expressly exists and must be defeated by the figure of the cowboy (Hine and Faragher 223). In order for the Old West concept to resonate with contemporary viewers, and as a writer of crime noir, Leonard creates a protagonist modelled after the Old West figures; as an avid reader of the Western, it may even be determined that Leonard utilized the illustrious Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok as his models for Raylan (Hoppenstand 194; Leonard, “A Conversation”). By opening the series with the embodiment of the myth, Raylan, striding into the contemporary world, the Miami hotel, the effect on the viewer is striking. The viewer is confronted by these two distinct images, which appear unable to mix—a fact apparent as the series continues.

When Slotkin discusses the aforementioned frontier concept, he also reveals that it is used to categorize a set of behaviors: “most of the time the assumptions of value inherent in a culture’s ideology are tacitly accepted as ‘givens’” (5). As his surname suggests, the character of Raylan Givens exists as a construct of frontier “‘givens’” (Slotkin 5). When Raylan first appears, the viewer’s gaze is directed towards his appearance, which is a composite of the lawman figure. Physically, Olyphant’s body type resembles that of John Wayne, an actor famed for playing the cowboy character on film (Etulain, “Broncho Billy” 6). Throughout the existing five seasons, he is dressed in jeans, a suit jacket, cowboy boots, and a beige colored Stetson. Raylan also has his marshal’s badge affixed prominently to his waistband, which he reveals in times of need. Repeatedly, since the beginning of the series, various characters comment on the presence of the hat, noting that they are in Kentucky, not in Texas; therefore, the hat is not supposed to hold any connotation other than to make Raylan appear foolish, or eccentric. In reference to the silent Western film plotline, Etulain writes that traditionally the characters sporting the white hats are the heroes and those in the black hats are the villains (“Broncho Billy” 19). Here, both the color of the hat and the hat itself become iconic symbols of the traditional, romanticized West. In response to reporter Alexandra

Alter's statement regarding the significance of the hat to Raylan's character, Leonard says that the size of the hat utilized in the series is not what he envisioned for Raylan's character, that he preferred the businessman's Stetson over the larger hat selected (Leonard, "Why He Writes"). In the series, the imposing size of the hat makes the West a dominant part of the viewers' gaze, a blatant reminder that the Old West remains part of the New West. Its tarnished color—from white to beige—represents the alteration of the cowboy image from one of purity to that of imperfection. In *Justified*, Raylan's appearance, in particular the hat, illustrates Raylan's connection to the marshal's service—his duty—and to the frontier myth. In an interview with Olyphant before the start of the sixth season, Dan Reilly asks him about the impending end to the series, in particular if he has an emotional attachment to the hat his character is rarely seen without. When Olyphant responds, he hints at the loss of the hat in the final episode (Olyphant).¹⁰ Olyphant's statement is telling, as it is the hat as much as it is the badge that identifies this character as a lawman. Raylan's appearance has been adapted in order for him to physically become the contemporary cowboy as has one of the most iconic scenes in Western films, the shootout.

Even though many historians have debunked the popularity of the street shootout, it remains a distinctive element of the Western. At the start of the pilot, Raylan walks across the rooftop of a Miami hotel, looking for a member of a Miami cartel. Raylan seats himself at a table under a cabana with Tommy Bucks and tells him that, if he immediately departs, he can make it to the airport. Previously, Raylan has informed Bucks that if he does not remove himself from Miami by 2:15pm he will, in no uncertain terms, be shot. The protagonist's mission in the post-World War II Western film is to triumph over the oppressor in order to "empower the 'decent folks' who bring progress to the Frontier" (Slotkin 379). Bucks is one of a powerful organization associated with extreme cases of violence and narcotics trafficking: Bucks tortured and blew up a man in Nicaragua, a murder that Raylan witnessed while searching for a fugitive money launderer. Once again, similarities to a famed historical figure appear. Hickok was a deputy US Marshal from 1867 to 1871, dealing with bootleggers, counterfeiters, and various other government offenses (Rosa 44). When he locates Bucks in Miami, Raylan is continuing a quest initiated by both his loyalty to the badge and his desire for justice. It is telling that instead of arresting Bucks for murder, Raylan has elected to offer him a deal which, in the eyes of the cowboy, appears rational. To the cartel member, Raylan's request is ridiculous and impossible: he tells Raylan that he has told others of Raylan's ultimatum and they thought he was being facetious ("Fire in the Hole"). Throughout the series many criminals inform Raylan that because of his position as a US Marshal, his threats of violence are not to be feared, that because he is a lawman he cannot commit acts of violence against them. Raylan, like the gunfighter figure, has his own code of conduct, one that he attempts to merge with that of the US Marshal service.

In an act which will result in the protagonist righting society's wrongs, Raylan has given Bucks twenty-four hours to leave Miami; he clearly believes the offer he has made is more than fair under the circumstances (Slotkin 379). In effect, because Bucks does

¹⁰ In the finale, there is a shootout between Boon, a hired gun, and Raylan; Boon shoots Raylan's hat and Raylan replaces it with Boon's smaller black hat after he kills Boon.

not murder Raylan in Nicaragua, he is willing to allow Bucks to keep his life, as long as he departs Raylan's jurisdiction. Slotkin continues his discussion of the post-World War II Western, noting two types that were developed during this period, one of which he calls the "gunfighter' Western"; here, "professionalism in the arts of violence is the hero's defining characteristic (379). Raylan has given Bucks the opportunity to handle their dispute privately and honorably. In his manner of thinking, once Bucks leaves Miami, the community will be safe; significantly, this protective behavior continues once he reaches Kentucky. Since Bucks refuses, Raylan now turns to the ability which makes him and the gunfighter figure famous.

Joseph G. Rosa asserts that the "old-time gunfighter" figure is constructed by the media as an individual who represent good in the fight against evil (*With Badges* 38). According to Slotkin, "A single element of the Western is isolated from its original context and made the subject of exaggerated attention and concern, even to the point of fetishization . . . The new figure of the 'gunfighter' similarly exaggerates a skill that had been merely one of the standard attributes of all cowboy heroes" (380). The ability to which Slotkin refers is marksmanship (380). Throughout the series, Raylan's extraordinary shooting ability is repeatedly emphasized. In fact, Raylan was a firearms instructor at Glynco, which is where he met his future supervisor, Chief Deputy US Marshal Art Mullen. It is also this aptness in marksmanship that is a point of contention for Art and Raylan and results in many characters commenting that it will one day lead to Raylan's demise.

By opening the series with the famed Western shootout, Raylan immediately solidifies his place as the gunfighter. Bucks, in an attempt to best Raylan, draws his gun first. Joseph G. Rosa comments, "Hickok, regarded by many as the archetypal gunfighter, earned a reputation as one who always 'has got his man'" (38). As the gunfighter, Raylan is a crack shot; he shoots Bucks three times and survives the encounter both victorious and righteous. Raylan firmly asserts that the ultimatum and its subsequent results were necessary for the good of the community. Rosa continues his discussion of Hickok as gunfighter noting that Hickok and other lawmen were mainly concerned with the transgression of laws rather than "morals", unless the two intersected (38). The issue is that Raylan resides in contemporary society and he appears much like the Old West gunfighter (Rosa 38): during his questioning after the incident, his supervisor in Miami, Chief Deputy US Marshal Dan Grant, tells him, "You do know that we're not allowed to shoot people on sight anymore and haven't been for, oh I don't know, maybe a hundred years" ("Fire in the Hole"). For many years, execution in American and England were public events, appearing not only as warnings, but also as entertainment. Contained within the Renaissance tragedy play is the notion that violence in the form of revenge is acceptable as long as it is for the good of the community. Despite some similarities, *Justified* cannot be categorized as the "revenger Western" (Slotkin 381). While Raylan does seek revenge on occasion, this is not his primary motivation. While revenge does drive some of Raylan's actions, it is the desire for good that reigns supreme over Raylan. The issue is that what Raylan believes is just, does not necessarily coincide with conventional societal beliefs.

In reference to episode one's shootout, the public display of violence is problematic, even disastrous for the historic, heroic image of the US Marshal service. While the Marshal service has been able to conform to contemporary society, Raylan is a remnant of the Old West. As Rosa states, once he completes his mission, "The gunfighter then rides off into the sunset to face a new challenge" (38). After the last shot is fired, the camera's gaze captures Raylan with the gun in his hand as female screams pierce the air. To Hinds, Charles Rzepka, who wrote a book about Leonard's body of work, identifies Raylan as having "a somewhat ruthless, cold-blooded streak" (Leonard, "'Justified' character"). When Raylan walks into the proverbial sunset, he presents himself as one who is at ease with his actions, as one whose ultimate purpose has now been accomplished (Rosa 38). In his explanation to Grant, Raylan shows that the title of the series is apt, that his actions on the rooftop are "justified" ("Fire in the Hole"). Later this episode, Raylan also utilizes this term to explain to Art his rationalization for his behavior, which is essentially his desire for good to defeat evil. While Raylan considers violence as an act which will rid his community of immorality, Grant is more concerned with the public spectacle, thereby voicing his concern that Raylan's act may be reported by the media. It is after this point that Raylan undergoes a Department of Justice inquiry regarding the shooting.

As an amalgamation of the frontier cowboy/gunfighter and contemporary marshal, Raylan first sees reason and then uses force (Slotkin 438-9) as the only options available to him. While Grant and the representatives of the DOJ converse, Raylan interrupts: "Well, let's just keep it simple, huh? He pulled first. I shot him" ("Fire in the Hole"). To Raylan, his act is not merely a show of power, but exists as a method of asserting morality in a space that has been temporarily affected by corruption (Slotkin 438-9). Slotkin describes the early gunfighter as originating in the Old West, as a figure who possesses great "skill and bravery", but whose presence becomes no longer necessary over time (439). The DOJ does not see the honorable gunslinger as Raylan attempts to justify his actions. After Raylan speaks, the duo appears shocked while Raylan verbally asserts his belief in his successful defense of his actions. Grant, however, disagrees and in an acknowledgement of Raylan as the gunslinger, Grant informs Raylan, "I'm getting' you out of Dodge" ("Fire in the Hole"). Because Raylan's behavior does not suit contemporary Miami society, Raylan is transferred to the Lexington office in eastern Kentucky. Raylan now symbolically returns to a contemporary representation of the Frontier.

Because Raylan is unable to conform to the behavioral ideology of contemporary Miami, he must leave. Grant tells Raylan that this is his only option unless he has other abilities besides discharging his weapon. Raylan is next pictured, unhappily, in the Lexington airport. While Raylan's behavior is suited for the Western city, it results in his expulsion from the modern East. Significantly, when he arrives at the Lexington Marshals' office, Art greets him with the statement, "A bit of a comedown from the Miami office, I'd expect" ("Fire in the Hole"). Even though Raylan has moved from one space to another, his values do not alter although the body count does rise considerably once he reaches Kentucky. Raylan's world now consists of the following spaces: the outside world (that which exists apart from Kentucky); the progressive, modern Frontier (Lexington); and "'the wilderness'", the untamed Frontier (Harlan County), where

corruption and the criminal element run amok (Slotkin 11). In his discussion of the Myth of the Frontier, Slotkin documents the prevalence of violence in the Myth of the Frontier and its connection to societal advancement (11). Societal advancement is central to the myth, in that according to Slotkin the Myth existed to, first, defend the colonization of America and then, second, “the Myth was called on to account for our rapid economic growth, our emergence as a powerful nation-state, and our distinctively American approach to the socially and culturally disruptive processes of modernization” (10-11). On the surface, while it may appear Raylan is a remnant of the Frontier long past, he is in actuality an amalgamation of the Old/New West cowboy. While he does not conform to the ideals in Miami—he does not fit in with the image of the Miami marshal so he is quickly sent away—he is accepted in the Lexington office for his skill as a shooter while simultaneously being chastised for his actions.

While Raylan’s behavior is publically commented on as unacceptable by his colleagues, privately they revere him. For example, in an encounter with the antagonist, Boyd Crowder, a former friend of Raylan’s, Boyd draws on Raylan and Raylan proceeds to shoot him. In 1.2, Art informs Raylan that AUSA David Vasquez is examining Boyd’s shooting. Incidentally, Raylan gives his reason for shooting Boyd as the same as before: “What’s there to talk about? He [Boyd] pulled first—there was a witness” (“Riverbrook”). This behavior is indicative of the gunfighter figure as seen in an interview with Buffalo Bill Cody (Rosa 40). Regarding Hickok’s performance, Cody notes that it is not his shooting ability that makes him stand out from others, it is his tendency to remain calm (Rosa 40). While publically Raylan’s behavior is not approved by some members of the marshal’s service, there are those that privately applaud him for his heroism. In 1.8, when a convicted murderer takes hostages in the US Marshal’s office, it is Art who informs Vasquez that Raylan is to shoot the criminal, Cal Wallace, if he has the opportunity, that his action has been approved. While there are those that chastise Raylan for his acts of violence, like the Myth of the Frontier, Raylan’s use of violence ensures that the way is paved for “modernization” (Slotkin 10-11). The community in turmoil must be returned to its previous utopic state, and Raylan’s methods, if not publically approved, are privately honored by others for being effective, so much so that other deputies ask for his help on cases.

The series’ central issue is Raylan’s behavior and its origin. It is frequently contrasted to that of the antagonist, Boyd. According to Slotkin, “the Myth represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or ‘natural’ state, and *regeneration through violence*” (12). Slotkin observes that “repeated cycles of *separation* and *regression* were necessary preludes to an improvement in life and fortune” (11). In order for Raylan to achieve a utopic state for his community, he must undergo these “cycles”, these moments of “regression” to his former state of being (Slotkin 11-12). In 1.1, as Raylan and Art become reacquainted, Art delves into Raylan’s past. Here, Art begins by asking about Raylan’s place of birth, then about his father, who is a criminal in Harlan, and about Boyd. In response to Art’s query about Boyd, Raylan identifies their past connection, that they worked together in the coal mines in their youth. As stated by Art in the office and later while seated at a bar, the AUSA is interested in Boyd and his criminal activities. It is indicative of Raylan’s behavior to note

that when Art asks Raylan if Boyd is any different, Raylan implies that other than his Boyd's neo-Nazi attitude, he has not changed. Whereas Boyd embraces his criminal heredity, Raylan has attempted to distance himself from his past, so much so that he has become a lawman rather than following in his father's footsteps and taking on the role of criminal. Chamberlain documents Patrick Lloyd Garrett's transformation from criminal to lawman (53-60). Even though Garrett once was a member of Billy the Kid's gang and continued to be Billy's friend until his death, he eventually tracked Billy down and killed him (Chamberlain 59-60).

Unfortunately for Raylan, the chaos in and from Harlan County draws him back to his former home. For example, in between Raylan's conversation with Art appears a scene in which Boyd takes a rocket launcher and blows up an African American church run by a drug dealer. Boyd then proceeds to murder another member of the Patriot movement, Jerod Hale, thinking he is an undercover police officer. As previously noted, Raylan and *Justified* encompass aspects of the Myth of the Frontier, however, an updated version of the Myth. Slotkin writes, "Conflict with the Indians defined one boundary of American identity: though we were people of 'the wilderness,' we were *not* savages" (11). In *Justified*, the Native American presence is non-existent, however, that of the Harlan County resident is central to the plot and the subsequent conflict. In reference to Owen Wister's quintessential early twentieth-century Western *The Virginian*, Etutain reveals that while Native Americans appear as the principal antagonists in late nineteenth-century popular culture, after the turn of the century this fact alters and they are eventually removed from this position and, in some cases, from the texts entirely (*Telling* 71). Harlan County is the contemporary representation of the frontier and its inhabitants the "savages", the villains of the series (Slotkin 11).

The majority of the characters from *Justified* are criminals involved in drug distribution ("hillbilly heroin", methamphetamine, and marijuana) and murder. While Raylan is in Lexington watching his ex-wife, Winonna, working as a court reporter, he receives a call. This call, presumably from Art, brings Raylan to the bridge into Harlan County, the bridge upon which Boyd has committed his first murder of the series. Symbolically, this is the bridge—the in-between space—that joins contemporary society to that which is wild. While Raylan acts as part of the marshal service while on the bridge, he is slowly but surely getting dragged back to his past, hence "regression" (Slotkin 12). As Raylan drives through the tunnel to arrive in the bridge he gives a small smile suggesting his pleasure as this "regression" to a former state of being (Slotkin 12). As Art and Raylan talk about the murder and Boyd's connection to it, Art informs Raylan that a cap from a rocket launcher has been found in the car, and that a church has been blown up using that weapon the previous night. Notably, the church is located in Lexington, showing that the criminal element has migrated from Harlan and invaded the contemporary space. When Boyd blows up the church for impeding on the marijuana business he shouts, "Fire in the hole", a reference to an expression that he used in their mining days ("Fire in the Hole"). As the episode continues, the violent incidences increase until Raylan must return to Harlan County. During the mounting investigations, it is discovered that Ava Crowder, Raylan's soon-to-be-lover, has shot and killed Bowman, Boyd's brother, for repeated physical assaults.

It is this killing and the fact that only Raylan is able to locate Ava's house that leads Raylan deeper into Harlan County and does so by himself. When Ava opens the door, the pair converse and she kisses Raylan deeply declaring her former school-girl crush. Raylan has now experienced "separation" from Lexington and also his colleagues and "regression" (Slotkin 12). After she finishes explaining about Bowman's abuse and her method of killing him, Ava verbally asserts to Raylan that she feels comforted by his presence. The duo, even though she is under suspicion for the death of her husband and he is a representative of the law, proceed to have an illicit affair, much to the chagrin of Art. Slowly but surely Raylan becomes embroiled in the tragedies that repeatedly rock Harlan County, including his own attempted murder by the sheriff of Harlan, Hunter Mosley, in "Blind Spot". According to Slotkin in a discussion of the "savage war", "Native resistance to European settlement . . . takes the form of a fight for survival; and because of the 'savage' and bloodthirsty propensity of the natives, such struggles inevitably become 'wars of extermination'" (12). In seasons one through four, there is a villain and group which inevitably face off with Raylan and the marshals. The culmination of events lead to each season's finale when a "war of extermination" where the villain and his or her crew tend to die a horribly violent death (Slotkin 12). In season one, the villain is the cartel, the same cartel for whom Bucks and Sheriff Mosley worked.

Many of the villains in the series are from outside of Harlan—the Detroit mob, Mags Bennett, and the cartel—but due to their connections to Harlan and their suspected offenses against the US justice system, Raylan must become involved. Slotkin observes that Native Americans become a symbol for the European settler, one which represents a barrier to their desired utopic space (13). In order for this space to revert to its former utopic state, an obliteration of the criminal element occurs at the close of each season of *Justified* (Slotkin 13). Because rehabilitation of the criminal element through imprisonment is unsuccessful, Raylan turns to death as his only option. Criminals like Boyd, his father Bo Crowder, and Dickie Bennett are repeatedly released from prison, thereby allowed to create havoc in Raylan's utopia once more; in order to ensure that they are no longer a threat to his community, they must die. This behavior is reminiscent of that of the frontier lawmen, who tended to kill the offending element in their community. These acts were repeatedly heralded by the public, including newspaper reporters. The hero's beliefs are reduced to what can be considered "personal motive" (Slotkin 14). In season one, Bo is responsible for the protection of the criminal element for a price; once released from prison he also becomes involved in the production of meth. Not only must the cartel be stopped, but also Bo, who elects to have Ava killed and hire Raylan's father, Arlo. During the season one finale, Bo and the cartel face off against Raylan, Boyd, and Ava, only to be killed in the illustrious Western shootout. In 1.13 and 2.1, the threat is neutralized (Slotkin 12). Bo and most of his men have been killed as has one of the members of the cartel; a deal is then struck with the head of the cartel, Geo, and Raylan for peace. Because Raylan blames himself for bringing the cartel to Harlan and endangering his companions, it is Raylan who ensures their removal, so that this space may be utopic once more.

Throughout the series, Raylan repeatedly navigates through frontier and contemporary societies; the communities in each accept and reject him on the basis of

his behavior (his reputation). In reference to the process of “*regeneration through violence*”, Slotkin observes that “The heroes of this myth-historical quest must therefore be ‘men (or women) who know Indians’—characters whose experiences, sympathies, and even allegiances fall on both sides of the Frontier” (14). When it serves their interests, Raylan and Boyd do fight alongside one another. When he personally needs assistance and when he has been asked by his fellow marshals to do so, Raylan approaches the people of Harlan County. Even though his behavior may bring varied repercussions for Raylan himself, it ensures a momentary stop to the criminal behavior in his community. Regardless of his personal losses, Raylan has sworn to protect his community and return it to its utopic state. In an early review of *Justified*, Nancy Franklin emphasizes Raylan’s focus on the past: “Givens is known everywhere he goes, and his laconic, direct wit seems to draw on the constant pain of understanding that he can’t escape his past and the people in it.” Raylan’s character exists as a product of the Western past as indicated by Leonard himself. In an interview with his longtime researcher, Gregg Sutter, Leonard attests to the fact that he utilizes the Western past as a basis for his body of work (xi). In his early days as a writer while he was teaching himself to write, Leonard immersed himself in the genre, thereby learning to write what he personally favored and what was popular (xi-xii). In an interview with T.V. LoCicero, Leonard elaborates on the creation of his characters, noting that “the best kind of a character to have is one who goes both ways, one who is trying to be good, or is trying not to commit a crime and go back to prison, but there is a possibility that he will” (kindle file). In an effort to offer protection to those in need, to preserve the good in society, Raylan crosses physical and behavioral boundaries, thereby ensuring the preservation of both the Old and New Wests.

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“I Will Not Apologize”: Amiri Baraka, “Somebody Blew Up America,” and American Poetry Since 1945

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Amiri Baraka established his career through anti-establishment writing with which he exposes and dismantles the various inequalities and hypocrisies of America. His experiences with racism, his military service, and the censorship of his work—these three areas often overlapping—all contribute to his radical and ever-developing aesthetic that, at its core, seeks to identify and oppose oppressive systems. In *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, he states that “we saw ‘the man in the grey flannel suit’ as an enemy, an agent of Dwight Eisenhower whose baby-food mentality we made fun of” (222).

His curriculum vitae suits both an academic and a revolutionary: Four college scholarships (Baraka, *Auto* 95) and flunkouts/dropouts from Rutgers University (99) and Howard University (137);¹¹ obtains the rank of sergeant in the United States Air Force in 1954, but is “undesirably” discharged in 1957 (Chronology xxxi); achieves full professor at SUNY, Stony Brook in 1984, but is denied tenure at Rutgers University in 1990 (Chronology xxxii, xxxiii); and, most recently, after being named the poet laureate of New Jersey, the state abolishes the post after Baraka reads “Somebody Blew Up America,” at the Dodge Poetry Festival in September 2002.¹²

In a 1964 interview, Baraka presciently says, “American is not a white middle-class country in toto and that’s why we are getting ready to be blown up” (*Conversations* 11). Although his frustrations with America find voice in numerous works, one of the most thorough examples is his extended poem “Somebody Blew Up America” in response to 9/11 and other, more distant atrocities sometimes global and sometimes specific to America. In this poem, the speaker conducts an interrogation mostly constructed of questions that begin with who. One of the many significant questions the poem raises is just *whom* is *who*.

¹¹ Various Internet sources claim he also attended Columbia and The New School for Social Research. These sources include “10 Things You May Not Know About Amiri Baraka,” “Finding Aid for the Imamu Amiri Baraka Papers, 1958-1966” at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library online, his listing at poetryfoundation.org, and his biography at amiribaraka.com. Some sources say he did not earn a degree. Other sources say he earned degrees including an unspecified BA from Howard, an MA in philosophy, and an MA in German literature.

Other examples of biographical inconsistency can be found regarding tenure and even the process regarding the identification change from “LeRoi Jones” to “Amiri Baraka.”

For biographic information, this study relies on *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (restored version 1997), *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*, and *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*. In a 1991 interview, Baraka clarifies that “I did not graduate from Howard in 1954 or any other year” and “I spent one year at Rutgers University” (*Conversations* 239).

¹² In act of solidarity with Baraka, The school board named him the Poet Laureate of Newark Public Schools (Jacobs).

Before examining the poem, let us review some key experiences and events in Baraka's life leading up to and informing the poem beginning with his early involvement in and witnessing of conflict. Baraka pushed against authority even as a child. He recounts, "I had some terrible confrontations in the classroom I can remember. Around discipline and whatnot" (Baraka, *Auto* 13). Despite these brushes with institutional authority Baraka enlists in the Air Force. He explains that "it was something I could grasp at some level. It was escape" (138). Although there is a much larger section that expounds upon his military entry, service, and eventual discharge,¹³ Baraka summarizes his experience in a 1991 interview as "a cultural and intellectual vacuum," "a horrible experience" (*Conversations* 248). He was accused of being a communist and dishonorably discharged. Amongst the evidence against him, was his possession of the *Partisan Review*. Indignant over both the charges and the resulting discharge, Baraka assesses, "if they wanted to accuse me of finding military service a racist, degrading and intellectually paralyzing experience, I would have pleaded guilty on the spot" (249). His experience in the military would serve as an introduction to larger clashes with the American power structure.

One of the greatest instances of violence and conflict with the system he saw came ten years later with the 1967 Newark riots.¹⁴ Historians locate the cause of the riots in the arrest of black cabdriver John Weerd Smith who was arrested for improperly passing a police cruiser with two white policemen. Smith was beaten and dragged into the police station. Upset over years of disenfranchisement and mistreatment by the city powers—the real reasons for the riot—citizens formed a demonstration that quickly turned into a riot, or as Baraka clarifies, "it was no riot, it was a rebellion" (Baraka, *Auto* 371). Baraka rushed to join the action. Later, when leaving a friend's house, he and his fellow riders were pulled out of their van by the police. Baraka was beaten with the barrel of a .38 and a nightstick until he was covered in blood. As he says, "they were beating me to death" (370).¹⁵ While sitting in a wheelchair he had been handcuffed to after receiving multiple stiches, Baraka felt "this was it, the real America, the America of slavery and lynching" (374).

Charged with the possession of two .32 revolvers and released on \$25,000 bail, Baraka then received thirty days for contempt of court when he protested being judged by an all-white jury (373, 378, and 379). Sentenced to three years without parole, Baraka eventually gained an appeal and subsequent acquittal (380, 383). However, his difficulties with the police neither began nor ended with this episode.

¹³ For the full account of Baraka's military time see pages 138-178 ("Error Farce") of *The Autobiography of Leroi Jones*.

¹⁴ He also recalls that "in the eighth grade we had a race riot. Not in the eighth grade but in Newark. And in them days race riot meant that black and white 'citizens' fought each other" (Baraka, *Auto* 14). However, this race riot was a mere prelude to the larger Newark riots of 1967.

¹⁵ Other elaboration of his arrest may be found in the interviews of *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*, pages 26-28, 201-202, and 253. For the most part, the narratives overlap. There are a few details forgotten, remembered, amended, but the basic core of the narrative remains the same.

For example, earlier in his autobiography Baraka remembers “one Sunday we had scheduled a poetry reading down at the loft and the police sent word that if we tried to hold the reading, we would be arrested” (Baraka, *Auto* 347). These instances of police-enforced censorship would continue. Baraka references “the tiny play *The Eighth Ditch*, which I put into the *Dante* book and had gotten me busted [. . .] It opened on St. Marks Place in a place called the Poet’s Theater, but the police closed it after a few performances” (275). In a 1979 interview Baraka discusses “censorship problems with issue 9 of *Floating Bear*” (*Conversations* 148). He says, “we got busted; I got arrested. They came to my house about 3 or 4 in the morning, and I was locked up for distributing obscene materials through the mail” (149).¹⁶ Later in the same interview he shares other encounters with censorship:

Dutchman encountered sporadic censorship problems, and *The Toilet* encountered problems in Los Angeles—first it played, then they closed it, then they let it run again.

Back in 1964, there were two plays of mine, one called *The Baptism*, and one called *Dante* [. . .] which were closed by the police and later re-opened. 149

Baraka’s theory is that “as long as you are marginalized, as long as you’re kept away from the mass audiences, you are harmless” (258). However, “what might seem provocative to an intellectual audience might impress a bureaucrat as seditious” (259). Thus, censorship is not just about the work but also about the audience. Work can be challenging and this may be tolerated—unless it finds a broad audience. Then, such work must be suppressed since it stands a chance of actually effecting change on a larger scale. Here are the implied equations of what we might call the Baraka Equation: challenging work plus limited audience equals no problem. Work that upholds the status quo plus broad audience equals no problem. Challenging work plus broad audience equals a problem, a threat.

In some ways, “Somebody Blew Up America” parallels Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, another challenging and censored poem. Decades before writing “Somebody,” *Howl* inspired Baraka. He describes encountering the poem in the 50s¹⁷ and recalls, “I was moved by this poem so much because it talked about a world I could identify with and relate to” (Baraka, *Auto* 219). He continues, “I thought *Howl* was something special. It was a breakthrough for me” (219). Discussing the poem further and his similarity with the Beats—“colleagues of the spirit,” as he describes them—Baraka identifies “the open and implied rebellion—of form and content. Aesthetic as well as social and political” as that which “somewhat resembled myself” (230).¹⁸ In a 1980 interview he states that “when I saw Allen Ginsberg I was gratified that I saw poetry that was stronger, open,

¹⁶ A more detailed account of the arrest is available in a 1991 interview, page 254 of *Conversations*.

¹⁷ More specifically, Baraka says, “I think I saw *Howl* some time in ’57 (*Conversations* 169).

¹⁸ Baraka was uncomfortable with applying the Beat label to himself and his work. As he explains in a 1979 interview: “I thought the press put a handle on Beat because then it made it packable, marketable and more easily put-downable. So Beat meant nothing to me” (151).

talked about things I could relate to” (*Conversations* 169). *Howl* expanded Baraka’s sense of what was possible to express through poetry.

His early Beat/Village years would fall behind him as moved into The Black Arts Movement and, later, Marxism. However, those early years would always exert an influence. Baraka would downplay that influence in years to come with statements such as “the only aspect I could say of O’Hara and Ginsberg that I could have possibly appropriated was the kind of openness that I always got from them” (*Conversations* 170). As far as Baraka was concerned, he had moved beyond those reference points no later than 1965, the year of publication for “*The System of Dante’s Hell*. That’s when I consciously stopped trying to write like people whose work I was around, people like Charles Olson and Allen Ginsberg” (100).

However, while he would de-emphasize those early years, he could never entirely eliminate their influence; they became one (albeit a powerful one) among many influences that informed but never dominated his work. The Beats, for Baraka, represented suggestions and possibilities, available avenues but not absolute directives. Nonetheless, an examination of the two poems demonstrates a connection and an influence but not a direct copying.¹⁹ Both poems are fairly long. *Howl* (parts one, two, and three) is approximately 3,000 words long (about 2,957) and “Somebody” finishes at well over a thousand words (around 1,179). As first glance, *Howl* appears to be the shorter poem but that is because of the extremely long lines that the poem favors as opposed to the shorter lines of “Somebody.” Both poems are indictments of the larger status quo of each of their author’s respective environments. Both poems begin by using the rhetorical device of anaphora (literally “carrying back”) which features the repeated use of a word or phrase in an initial position in a line of poetry.

Whereas Ginsberg begins almost every line with *who* in part one, the largest of the poem’s three sections, to describe the people negatively affected by their environments, Baraka starts the majority of the lines of “Somebody” with *who* and uses it throughout the poem’s entirety to ask who is responsible for these negative actions. For example, *Howl* states “who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz” (9). There seems to be an invisible name or names that Ginsberg has removed from the front of *who*. In contrast, “Somebody” asks the identity of the person or persons responsible for the following actions:

Who own what ain’t even known to be owned
Who owns the owners that ain’t the real owners
Who own the suburbs

¹⁹ Ginsberg had a number of influences for *Howl* that he listed in his 1986 collection of *Howl* materials. In the “Model Texts: Inspirations Precursor to HOWL,” Ginsberg lists works by Christopher Smart, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Guillaume Apollinaire, Kurt Schwitters, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Antonin Atraud, Federico Garcia Lorca, Hart Crane, and William Carlos Williams (175-188). His debt to Walt Whitman is well-known and well-documented. Rather than list a specific text, Ginsberg opts to acknowledge “Whitman as innovator of many of these breaths and visions,” “a mountain too vast to be seen” (176).

Who owns the cities
Who make the laws
Who made Bush president
Who believe the confederate flag need to be flying
Who talk about democracy and be lying
WHO/ WHO/ WHOWHO/. 45

The point of “Somebody Blew Up America” besides drawing attention to various atrocities, is to answer the question of who. In his autobiography, Baraka addresses the topic of questions. He says that “different questions come up at different states and stages. We answer them in motion, casually, with our actions, no matter what comes out of our mouths” (Baraka, *Auto* 101). So perhaps the answers are not fixed. The questions in the poem may stay the same, but perhaps there is not a single answer, or at least an identifiable person or group, for all of the poem’s questions. Baraka was called a number of things and many different attacks were leveled at him. Maragalit Fox summarizes them and says that “over six decades, Mr. Baraka’s writings — his work also included essays and music criticism — were periodically accused of being anti-Semitic, misogynist, homophobic, racist, isolationist and dangerously militant”. Thus, how you read him and whom you think he identifies as “who” depends on what title you assign him. The closest we might come is to say the ruling class; those with power and money are responsible for the actions and atrocities that the poem lists (and this is the same group that would take issue with the poem later).²⁰ Consider such lines as “who want the world to be ruled by imperialism and / national oppression and / terror / violence, and hunger and poverty” (“Somebody” 50). Another strong possibility is America, center of capitalism, war, and bloat. Both answers would also be in keeping with Baraka’s last phase, his Marxist stage.²¹ He could mean white people.

Others, however, would be content with neither this poem nor this reading. To understand the reaction, let us revisit some of the early history of *Howl*. On October 13, 1955 Ginsberg read the first part of *Howl* at the Six Gallery in San Francisco. The response was overwhelming enthusiastic with some audience members such as Kenneth Rexroth brought to tears (Watson 187). Ginsberg’s reading concluded with a “roaring ovation” (187). “*Howl and Other Poems* was published in August 1956,” by City Lights and “on “May 21, 1957” Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the publisher, and Shigeyoshi Murao, the bookstore manager, of City Lights were arrested on charges of obscenity (252). “On October 3rd, 1957 Judge Horn declared” them “not guilty” (253). Thus, in line

²⁰ After a reading of “Somebody Blew Up America” on March 31, 2003 at Florida State University an audience member asked him who is the who in the poem. Baraka, having previously advised the students to form their own weekly study groups to tackle big issues and important questions replied, “that’s what your study groups are for.”

²¹ In the Editor’s Note to *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader* William J. Harris explains, “I have arranged his work chronologically, and broken it up into four periods: The Beat Period (1957-1962), The Transitional Period (1963-1965), the Black Nationalist Period (1965-1974), and the Third World Marxist Period (1974-)” (xv).

with the Baraka Equation, as long the poem was being read to a small, local audience, it was not a problem. Once it reached the publication phase and a larger audience, however, it became a problem. Unfortunately, the powers that be never see dialogue and discussion as the solution to the “problem.” Instead, they retaliate with censorship and litigation.

Baraka faced a similar situation except that he was never vindicated or cleared in court. “In Postscript: No Black Ink in Fax” he says that on October 1, 2001 he wrote the poem and circulated it on the Internet (52). In April 2002, he was named Poet Laureate in New Jersey and thereafter read at the Dodge Poetry Festival in September (53). Shortly thereafter, the Anti-Defamation League issued a press release that the poem was “Anti-Semitic” (53).²² The five lines that triggered that accusation are “Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get / bombed / Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers / to stay home that day / Why did Sharon stay away?”²³ (“Somebody” 40). The poem has another two lines that ask “who know why Five Israelis was filming the explosion / And cracking they sides at the notion” (46). The argument is that when the poem says “Israel” and “Israeli,” it really means “Jew.” While the two terms are related, they are not synonymous. Furthermore, although the majority of Israelis are Jewish, not all Israelis are Jewish. Roughly three-fourths of Israel is Jewish just as roughly three-fourths of America is Christian. However, “America” is not code for “Christian” and vice versa.

However, both Baraka and the poem distinguish between Israel and Jew. Baraka makes the distinction clear in a 1981 interview in which he says, “the State of Israel and Jews are two separate entities” (*Conversations* 197). In fact, he says “I think that it’s a great cover story for somebody who may jump on Israel, for you to say you’re attacking Jews generally, and you have to shut up” (197). Furthermore, the poem makes a clear distinction between Jewish and Israeli by employing the terms Jew and Israeli. The poem asks, “who killed the most Jews” and “who put the Jews in ovens, / and who helped them do it / Who said “America First” / and ok’d the yellow stars” (“Somebody” 44, 48). Baraka defends himself and says that “my actual ‘crime’ was that I said that Israel and the US KNEW (so did Germany, France, Russia, England) about the eminent ‘terrorist’ attack on the World Trade Center. And that the Bush criminal did nothing to

²² Baraka maintains, of course, that the poem is not anti-Semitic. There are a variety of materials related to this. For example, one might also read his “Confessions of a Former Anti-Semite” (1980), which he claims was his editor’s title. His title was “A Personal View of Anti-Semitism” (*Conversations* 196). There is also an interview from 1981 in which he tries to clarify his position in regards to Zionism the Israelis, and the Jews (*Conversations* 196-198). Baraka further clarifies his views in “The ADL Smear Campaign Against Me” (2002) and an October 2, 2002 he placed on his website titled “I WILL NOT APOLOGIZE, I WILL NOT RESIGN” (from which this paper draws its final two words). The ADL, in turn, has an article, “Amiri Baraka: In His Own Words,” (2003) compiling various statements by Baraka that they regard as anti-Semitic.

²³ Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for small minds to seize on small portion of big poems to push their own agendas. While no one has ever admitted to it, the line, while not the only potentially objectionable one, that got *Howl* banned is probably “who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists and screamed with joy” (13).

stop it” (“Postscript” 54). Baraka is also perhaps guilty of perpetuating what many regard as an unsubstantiated conspiracy theory that Israel, among other countries, knew beforehand about the impending attack.

James E. McGreevey, New Jersey’s governor, asked him to step down—ironically (McCullough and Broek). His request was ironic because he delayed his own resignation that resulted from the discovery of his adulterous affair with an Israeli he had previously appointed as a homeland security advisor and, with credentials similar to Baraka’s, was both a published poet and a former officer in the Israeli Defense Forces (Kocieniewski, Kohen). Ain’t that something? In any event, Baraka refused to move aside. His exact response was “I will not apologize. I will not resign (“Postscript” 55). The state constitution had no provision for removing him from the post, so instead the New Jersey General Assembly abolished it (McCullough and Broek). Baraka persisted and sued. However, in 2007, the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit ruled that New Jersey officials were immune from his suit; later that year, the United States Supreme Court declined to review the case (McCullough and Broek). It is unfortunate that Amiri died a few months before his son Ras Baraka was elected Major of Newark.

For the poem and his defense of it, Amiri Baraka was condemned by many and championed by few.²⁴ However, that response characterizes the general reaction about anyone, the few, during that time who dared to question or speak critically of America. When the poem first appeared it had, still has, the potential to be the *Howl* for this generation. What’s most disturbing is not what the poem says or what was said about the poem; it’s that as a whole, we care so little about the poem and the context/controversy surrounding it. “Somebody Blew Up America” asks important questions about the nature of the material of this world’s fabric. And we virtually ignored it. The poem says “all night, all day if you listen, Like an Owl / Exploding in fire. We hear the questions rise / In terrible flame like the whistle of a crazy dog” (“Somebody” 50). Rather than answer the questions, the majority feigns deafness and tries to cut off the poet’s tongue, burn his ears, and blind his eyes. Let’s assume for a moment, that those few lines singled out from a larger majority are indeed anti-Semitic. That does not, should not, negate the rest of the poem.

If we follow the example of the *Howl* trial,²⁵ we remember two key points. First, to select a few examples from a larger majority of something—in this case a handful of lines from a poem—and then assign those qualities to the majority is one of the essentialist behaviors of stereotyping. As the *Howl* decision explains, the work “must be

²⁴ One wonders what Ginsberg would have made of the poem. First, we don’t know if he would have identified anti- Semitic content within the poem. Perhaps he would have appreciated the poem’s effects (i.e., stirring up the larger populace) either way.

In a 1996 interview with Gloria G. Brame, Ginsberg says that “I wish I could write a *Howl* II, covering the present” and “I’d like to write something that addressed the increasing strangulation of liberty in America, and the corruptions of the government in violating the soul.” Perhaps he would have seen “Somebody Blew Up America” as a latter-day *Howl*, an essential updating thereof.

²⁵ Remember, also that while everything done is response to “Somebody Blew Up America” is legal, the poem was never the subject of a court hearing with a prosecutor and a defender. The poem and its author received neither a trial nor due process.

construed as a whole” (The People 173). Second, the real issue is not whether the poem is anti-Semitic or classist or racist. The real question we must decide is “if the material has the slightest redeeming social importance” (174). A 2002 article from *The Star-Ledger* gets the point. Laura McCullough and Michael Broek write “if anything, Baraka’s poem is about questioning authority, not about assigning blame, and this act of questioning, which is falling of out fashion [. . .] needs to be strengthened, not subverted by calls to censor the poem.”

As Baraka urges us, “POET ON!”

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On Beatles Time

By Daniel Ferreras Savoye, West Virginia University

11 Years a Decade

The August 1999 issue of Great Britain's well-known and highly respected music magazine, *Mojo*, was dedicated to Queen and featured on the cover a picture of the group at their most flamboyant, along with a caption that read: "The *second* greatest band of all time?" That is to say, at the dawn of the New Century, no one was even thinking about questioning the supremacy of the truly number one rock band of all times, whose name did not even need mentioning – The Beatles, of course.

A decade and a half later, the Beatles remain just as present in our culture as they were at the turn of the century, and their staying power is starting to appear quite uncanny. It is a perplexing fact for one that George Martin, the long time producer of the band, would chose to crown his long and important career with a trip down memory lane, *In My Life* (1998), a collection of Beatles covers executed by an array of artists with very disparate musical talents, as can be Phil Collins, Jeff Beck or Bonnie Pink but also Sean Connery²⁶, Jim Carrey, Robin Williams or Goldie Hawn²⁷. For a producer who has worked with musicians of the stature of ground-breaking jazz guitar pioneer John McLaughlin, this choice is highly significant: when all was said and done, George Martin opted to celebrate his career going back to the Beatles, as if he acknowledged implicitly that his tenure with the Fab Four had simply been the most meaningful work he had ever done – quite a statement.²⁸

When it comes to sheer numbers, Beatles manager Brian Epstein's well-known prediction has indeed come true and the Beatles are today more popular than Elvis Presley, not to mention incomparably more present in our musical landscape. The album *1*, a compilation of 27 Beatles songs released in the year 2000, became the world best selling record of the first decade of the 21st Century, which, for a band that had been gone for thirty years was not only unheard of but also a bit disturbing, for it suggested that nothing better than the Beatles had been created in pop music in the past three decades, a very sobering observation in regard to the state of the pop music industry today. On the textual front, the book *Anthology*, a lavish recompilation of all the Beatles interviews chronologically organized, adorned with rare photographs from their

²⁶ Sean Connery cannot sing, as demonstrated early on in his career in his first appearance as James Bond 007 in *Dr. No* (1962), when he attempts to carry the tune ("Under the Mango Tree") that Honey Rider (Ursula Andress) is humming as she emerges from the water, with the same mitigated results as him from a strictly musical point of view.

²⁷ In all fairness, it should be mentioned that Goldie Hawn's retro-jazz version of "A Hard Day's Night" is probably the most musically convincing of all the actors' performances on the album, although lacking the energy and freshness of the original.

²⁸ The title of George Martin's autobiography, *All You Need Is Ears*, speaks for itself, just as that of *In My Life*.

very own and personal friends' collections, published in 2000, went straight to number one on the *New-York Times* bestsellers list, as if the words themselves of the Fab Four still held an almost mystical hold upon our culture, three decades after the band has ceased to exist.

The natural, easy comparison between Elvis and the Beatles is both indicative and fallacious. If on the one hand, both are determining figures of twentieth century popular music and culture and represent, from a purely financial point of view, alternate versions of the hen with the golden eggs, their respective importance in the development of both popular music and its industry are very much far apart. Whereas Elvis represents the pinnacle of an era and incarnates its soundtrack, mostly centered around the pentatonic developments of Blues, Rock and Country with the occasional Gospel outing, the Beatles, on the other hand, ushered the future of pop music, that which we are still living today, on Beatles' Time, "eight days a week." Whereas Elvis, his music, his persona and his sound are enclosed in very specific musical and cultural contexts which never included much change beyond their initial inception²⁹, the Beatles' music, on the contrary, is a forever open structure which is still inspiring and influencing musicians everywhere: Elvis spawns static impersonators and generates imitations – the Beatles stimulate inspiration.³⁰

The Beatles' influence is today taken for granted – just as their spot at the top of the universal rock chart – and proves more or less inescapable, whether it is explicitly claimed, as it were by Peter Dinklage from The Jam and Style Council in the 80ies and by Oasis in the 90ies, or openly rejected, as it was by the punk movement in the late 70ies. However, if the members of the Sex Pistols could enthusiastically voice their disdain towards the "old dinosaurs" such as the Rolling Stones, the Who, and of course, the Beatles, what they could not do was to avoid being a band of four individuals playing their own songs – just like the Beatles.

Beyond these mere structural observations, the question remains, apparently much simpler than its possible answer: how can this be? How to explain both the importance of the Beatles and their uncanny staying power after the many changes undertaken by the music industry over the last three decades? The usual, and probably most convincing response, is that the Beatles were there first: they are the original real rock band of the modern era and have subsequently invented everything, from writing their own songs to envisioning a collection of songs as a concept album. However, for all its historical certainty, this answer can only be partial, for if indeed the Beatles were the first great rock band of all time, they do not necessarily have to be also the last... Or perhaps, yes. As we will see, the enduring success of the Beatles and their regularly

²⁹ Elvis Presley's role in helping bridging the racial gap between Blacks and Whites in his time should not be overlooked, neither should his suggestive, sexually charged moves, which definitely gave rock'n'roll a new look and a more convincing presence; and he remains a determining influence for the Beatles themselves, as stated by Lennon himself. (*Anthology* 10)

³⁰ There are of course numerous impersonators of the Beatles as well, represented by "tribute bands" such as The Fab Four, The Beans from Japan or Los Escarabajos, from Spain, reflecting a deplorable tendency towards cultural fetishism, however, they are far from being as common place as Elvis impersonators.

renewed importance in our musical landscape are due to a very specific artistic and cultural context which created a privileged connection between sender and receiver, the evolution of which over the past three decades tends to indicate that the Fab Four will remain forever the number one rock band – the only one which was ever allowed to express true art in popular music, free from the constraints of a brave new music industry that ironically was born out of and consolidated through Beatlemania.

The Art in Pop

After a long up-hill canonical battle in the music academic circles, and as the distinction between culture and popular culture becomes a little hazier everyday, The Beatles have indisputably achieved the status of true artists, for their work possesses the two characteristics we all instinctively admit as sure signs of worthwhile artistic endeavors: originality and endurance. Both notions are naturally related to each other, and one could argue that it is precisely their originality which allowed the Beatles to offer a polysemic enough message to resist the passing of time and effortlessly connect with new generations. However, beyond Lennon, McCartney and Harrison's undeniable talent as song writers and musicians, which for a Beatles expert such as Kim Monday bears more weight upon the Beatles' trajectory than the generally accepted notion of being the first modern rock band³¹, this originality is also the result of the utter freedom the Beatles enjoyed and which allowed them to established a connection with their public which was not yet filtered and administered by pre-existing structures of commercialization and distribution.

Such a status, that of the first pop musical act to be considered artistically significant enough to be eligible for canonization, has naturally spawned a great deal of bibliography ranging from fan literature to more academically oriented inquiries, the sheer amount of which is enough to discourage any well-intentioned cultural scholar. However, when considered along the lines of the three main paradigms that compose the universal axis of communication, i.e., sender/message/receiver, we observe that the vast majority of the textual production devoted to The Beatles usually revolves around only one of the three aforementioned paradigms, and in particular around that of the sender, which seems to have inspired most critics at all levels, as the story of the Fab Four's lightning rise to fame is told over and over again, from Nicholas Shaffner's now classic *Beatles Forever* to the recent issue of *People* that celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Beatlemania (*People Special*, 4/2/14). It is indeed not a coincidence if Mark Lewisohn, author of *The Complete Beatles Chronicles*, and considered by many as the foremost authority on the subject, is precisely a cultural historian, hard at work retracing the most minute details of the band's career from the very beginning to the end.³² More recent inquiries, such as those included in *Reading the Beatles* (Womak ,

³¹ Kim Monday points out that other bands were already functioning more or less along the same model before The Beatles came along, both in the Great Britain and in the U.S. – they were just not as good, nor as artsy. (Interview on 11/13/14)

³² Marc Lewisohn's latest endeavor is a comprehensive biography of the band in three imposing volumes, entitled *The Beatles: All These Years*, the first of which retraces the very early steps of the

Kenneth and Todd F. Davis, eds.) tend to focus more either upon the message or upon the recipient: on the message side, John Covach's essay, "From Craft to Art," provides an insightful breakdown of several song patterns that shows how The Beatles altered and thus transcended traditional forms into their own original structures, while Walter Everett's "Painting Their Room in a Colorful Way" analyses the highly creative timbre explorations of the Beatles, especially with and after *Revolver*. Ian Marshall's "I am He as You Are He as You Are Me and We Are All Together: Bakhtin and The Beatles" applies the Bakhtinian concept of "dialogics," that is the constant possibility of multiple dialogs within a literary universe to The Beatles in order to underline the remarkable level of communication within the members of the band and how their music reflects constant and multiple dialogs between the instruments and the voices, and later, the lyrics themselves. It could be argued that Marshall's use of Bakhtinian theory, rather than clarifying matters, further separates us from the nature of our object of study and proves more rhetorical than explanatory for, after all, a good band is supposed to play "together," i.e., each member must be in constant dialog with the others in order to create an orchestral effect, a characteristic which is taken for granted in all formations, regardless of the type of music involved, and which is far from exclusive to The Beatles: the very basic blues and jazz forms of call and response are indeed already based upon the structure of a dialog. If The Beatles were indeed as "tight" as a band can get, and hence did not play as individuals but rather as parts of a greater whole, such quality could apply as well to The Rolling Stones, The Police, and of course, Queen. In spite of representing a valuable effort to apply literary theory to a popular culture corpus, this particular essay does not enlighten us much about what made – and still makes – The Beatles different from any other good band.

From the angle of the receiver, James M. Decker's "Baby You're a Rich Man: The Beatles, Ideology and the Cultural Moment," John Kimsey's "Spinning the Historical Record: Lennon, McCartney and Museum Politics" and William M. Northcutt's "The Spectacle of Alienation: Death, Loss and the Crowd in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band*" all make valid points, if sometimes a bit opinionated, regarding context, public perception and manipulation of The Beatles as a cultural phenomenon. However, all things considered, we are still at a loss to clearly explain the uncanny success The Beatles still enjoy to this day, and neither extreme commercialization nor clever merchandizing, nor Paul McCartney's well-known business savvy can account for the interest and the respect The Beatles command over a vast majority of musicians and music lovers from all horizons³³.

Considering all three actors of the universal axis of communication at the same time as a dialectical structure, a move which has not yet been made by Beatles scholars, seems to shed some light upon why The Beatles became artists within a medium which was all but destined to produce art – popular music for popular consumption. It is indeed the highly privileged communication The Beatles had

Beatles up to 1962, that is before their first record. (Marc Lewisohn. *Tune In. The Beatles: All These Years, Vol. 1*. New York: Crown Archetype, 2013.)

³³ Highly praised contemporary jazz guitar players, such as Stanley Jordan and Bill Frisell have played and recorded jazz versions of several Beatles' songs.

established with their receiver that allowed them to paradoxically elude the constraints imposed by the public and to enjoy an unprecedented and unrepeated freedom in their artistic endeavors.

It is precisely when they stop touring and began working in the studio, creating musical pieces that could not be played live by the four of them, that The Beatles created the masterworks we still listen and enjoy today, for it is as well a given that any song from *Sgt. Pepper's* is more interesting than "I Want to Hold Your Hand", their first number one hit in the U.S. and the beginning of international Beatlemania. In other words, it is when they broke off from direct contact with the public that the Beatles felt entitled to adventure into uncharted territories, well beyond the three minutes and a half catchy tune. We all accept, in very basic and general terms that true art must be original and thought-provoking – in the words of nineteenth Century French poet, Charles Baudelaire: "*Le beau est toujours bizarre.*" ("The beautiful is always strange.")³⁴ Once The Beatles were assured of the unconditional love and support of their countless fans, they simply stopped worrying about them and pursued music for music's sake, a position very few, if any, popular musicians have ever enjoyed, and which allowed them to produce true art outside and above the basic economic structures of the music industry; The Beatles never depended on the market, for they were the market, a market that was in the process of structuring itself as they played.

The record that perhaps best embodies The Beatles' self-indulgence – self-indulgence seen here are the necessary quality any good artist must possess in order to indulge in his or her artistic vision – is that known as the *White Album*. Simply entitled *The Beatles*, this double record, looked upon by critics and fans alike as too long and somewhat inconsistent³⁵, can be seen as a direct binary opposition to *Sgt. Pepper's*: the colorful cover has been replaced by neutral white and the unifying concept of the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band has given place to an implosion of personalities, as each song reflects his author and his author only, accompanied by three other musicians. The entire record in itself seems to thrive towards dissemination, by including such different numbers as can be McCartney carefully crafted "Blackbird," Harrison's meticulously composed "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" and Lennon's sonic collage, "Revolution #9" or McCartney highly repetitive "Why Don't We Do it in the Road?". Without the need to apply any value judgment, one can see that, if anything, those songs do not have much in common and do not reflect the sound of a band, but rather different incursions by curious musicians into strange sonic lands. The production and most of all the release of such an album would be by today's standards absolutely unthinkable, as the public's attention and love cannot be taken for granted to the extent The Beatles did. Again paradoxically, what could be perceived as arrogance – this apparent disdain for public acceptance – is what allowed The Beatles to truly be artists rather than craft-men; it could be said that The Beatles always sold enough to avoid having to sell out. Even to this days, whereas the Rolling Stones have integrated an

³⁴ (*Salon de 1846*, as introduction to three of his poems.)

³⁵ In spite of the favorable judgment posterity has passed upon *The White Album*, George Martin as well as Kim Monday believe that the record would have been much stronger had it been condensed in a single album.

endless amount of cinematographic soundtracks, The Beatles' catalog is still untouchable and no original version of their songs can ever be heard in any film.

Another striking example of The Beatles' boundless freedom is the B side of their very last album, *Abbey Road*, which includes a long medley unfit for radio playing by any stretch of the imagination, as if it being played therefore promoted by the radio did not matter anymore. By then, The Beatles' privileged relationship with their recipient was such an accepted fact that it was no longer an issue, a luxury that no artist in the music business could afford today: suffice to remember the desperate efforts Miley Cyrus did during the 2013 MTV Video Music Awards in order to solicit public attention, where, scantily dressed in a latex bikini, she simulated a copulation with a male singer on stage, to feel the pressure of today's laws of spectacle. By opposition, one can think of the John Lennon and Yoko Ono album entitled *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*, the cover of which showed both artists in their birthday suits – the album was at the time sold under wrapping paper to prevent further scandal. Whereas Lennon and Ono's move was purely personal, a bit *avant-garde* and furthermore contained no sexual innuendo of any kind, that of Cyrus is purely provocative and highly sexualized, very much functioning along the semiotic codes of mere publicity, as the artist is irremediably spectacularized. On the contrary, once they had achieved success and recognition, fairly early on in their careers, The Beatles, as senders, never had to struggle to establish a positive, stimulating relationship with their recipient, nor to work at maintaining it, and that is what allowed them to create freely and to grow as artists, not only musically but lyrically as well. One of their later songs, "Get Back," is perhaps one of the best illustration of this lyrical freedom, for it openly tackles very touchy subjects such as marijuana and especially transexualism, a long time before Lou Reed:

"Jojo left his home in Tucson Arizona for some California Grass (...)
Sweet Loretta Martin thought she was a woman, but she was another
man."

The coda added in one of the studio versions after a false ending is more provocative yet:

"Get back Loretta,
Your mommy waiting for you,
Wearing her high heel shoes,
And her low neck sweater,
Get back home Loretta..." ("Get Back")

Much before sexual fluidity was in the air – not mentioning the legalization of cannabis – The Beatles were already evoking themes that would become major issues in the decades to come, as true artists often do, and the receiver welcomed this new message without expecting any other effort or intention from the senders other than that of pleasing themselves – again, as true artists.

The one to the last project of The Beatles, the would-be live, down to earth film and record *Let it Be* (originally entitled *Get Back*) shows as well how The Beatles

followed their whims and instincts without any regards towards the possible appreciation of the receiver, as they had done in 1967 releasing *Magical Mystery Tour*, their first non-successful commercial venture, which did not seem to discourage them at all since it was followed by the highly problematic “*White Album*”. The sonic part of the production of *Let it Be* proved so disastrous that the tapes were eventually entrusted to producer Phil Spector, who was asked to make them presentable and who is still criticized to this day for having imposed his own very personal brand of “walls of sound” to what turned out to be the last commercialized real album by The Beatles. Nonetheless, the mere existence of a *Let it Be* as a project shows The Beatles’ very personal and independent perception of their art, which does not take the public into account, but rather relies upon a pre-established privileged relationship with their sender: whereas the public is fickle and easily manipulated, the receiver of the work of art on the contrary appreciates and enjoys the artistic message independently of fashion, trends and commercial structures at large.

This privileged relationship between sender and receiver still holds, as demonstrated by the hunger with which the public consumes Beatles’ artifacts, including the three double *Anthology* CDs of past masters and discarded takes that were published throughout the second half of the nineties, the artistic value of which remains quite debatable since they were after all composed with nothing more than the leftovers of The Beatles’ original recording sessions. Still, and in spite of all the attempts to generate supplementary revenue out of The Beatles on the part of the distributing powers that be, the Fab Four somehow elude objectification and retain their status as the most important artistic rock band that ever was – and probably that ever will be.

Time and Pressure

The Beatles benefited from an industry – the music business as we know it – which was still in the process of formation and which in turn used their success to further structure itself. For instance, the demand for the single of “I Want to Hold Your Hand” was so overwhelming that Capitol records had to sub-contract his competitors, RCA and Columbia Records, in order to produce enough pressings to satisfy the demand. The unexpected success of The Beatles took everybody by surprise and forced the industry to react instinctively in order to channelize what suddenly had become big business almost overnight – pop music.

As the circuits of distribution grew and rock music became a globalized, highly lucrative enterprise, the truly original tendencies of the artists became increasingly mediated and eventually determined by the imperatives of distribution. The very conditions of production in the music industry today necessarily stifle any attempt to be actually artistic by forcing the commercial imperative above artistic expression, hardly a new discovery but that acquires all its meaning when applied to The Beatles, for they became the reason to exist for the Brand New Music Business World while escaping its imperatives, simply because it did not exist yet when they came along. The Beatles were not only the first to function as a true rock band, to write their own songs and to imagine a concept album, they also created, indirectly and certainly most unwillingly, the abusive commercial practices that structure the music business today by generating

such an unfathomable amount of revenue. Having established very early on what appears today as a purer, more honest relationship with their receiver, backed up by a monumental financial success, The Beatles were allowed to grow and change without having to fight for visibility or exposure but rather, on the contrary, taking their distance vis-à-vis the public, and it is when they ceased direct contact with their audience, that is when they stopped touring, that they produced their most artistic works. They existed in function of an ideal recipient rather than the public, without caring neither about fame nor sales, and, just as real artists do, they developed and they changed. Change is no longer welcome in the music industry, which cares only about the public and despises the recipient, as shown by English singer and songwriter George Michael's legal misadventures with Sony that cost him three years of his career³⁶ and established once and for all the All Mighty Power of the executive branch of the music industry over its creative part.

Conceiving the public as a space allows us to distinguish it from the notion of recipient and to better perceive its implications and limits in terms of communication – grammar itself comes to our rescue, for we do commonly say “in public,” or “in the public eye.” As a space, the public is no longer an informed or discerning receiver but rather an environment the music industry needs in order to gross capital gain; logically, the artist becomes a simple commodity and is increasingly easily substitutable – chances are that Lady Gaga' or Miley Cyrus' respective fames will not last as long as Madonna's did, in spite of all their efforts to obtain visibility by all means necessary. The public as a space is constantly rearranged by the music industry in order to create new and more exciting needs, and so, naturally, the thought-provoking qualities and originality of any work of art immediately raise suspicions; if nothing else, its polysemic qualities might ensure many a listening, which naturally goes against the very notion of consumption. This type of public, this environment of consumption promoted and ruled by the music industry did not exist when The Beatles began to play, for the good and simple reason that it did not appear yet to be a financially viable enterprise – it all began with The Beatles, financially as well; and hence, if The Beatles were able to establish a meaningful connection with their audience, which included to possibility of change and growth – exactly what was refused to George Michael some twenty years later – this possibility is long gone today, as the music industry is still learning how to better manufacture and package musical artists for public consumption.

The Beatles seems to be the only band – along with the Rolling Stones – that did not fall victim of the financial monster it helped create; and definitely the only rock band – unlike the Rolling Stones – who thrived to change and evolve, turning pop music into art, if for a limited time only. Incidentally, Queen was one of the few to slide in between the rain drops³⁷ and pursue a truly artistic path: the only say the executives had when

³⁶ After the poor sales in the U.S. of his 1990 opus, appropriately entitled *Listen Without Prejudices, Vol. 1*, more lyrically insightful than his previous work, the artist begin a long and bitter legal battle against Sony in order to free himself from his contract, claiming that not only his latest album had not been promoted correctly in the U.S., which explained why it did not sail as well as his previous smash hit, *Faith* but that he had lost creative control over his work – he eventually lost his case.

³⁷ Along with David Bowie, Pink Floyd, Supertramp and The Police, and consequently Sting, and a few others, who belonged to the generations that immediately followed Beatlemania and who were able

the band presented them with the single “Bohemian Rhapsody” – a very much anti-radio song nearly six minutes long – was “yes” or “no.” They said “yes.” But we are left wondering what they might say today.

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to establish a meaningful as well as financially satisfactory relationship with their recipient without having to negotiate their artistic vision nor integrity.

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(Re-) Popularizing Dante: Dan Brown's *Inferno*

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Dan Brown's 2013 novel *Inferno*, featuring Harvard art historian and symbologist Robert Langdon, incorporates a fascinating approach for the reader of popular literature to Dante Alighieri's classic epic poem. Written in the early 1300s, *Inferno* is the first of three separate but inter-related allegorical poems (*Commedia* or the *Divine Comedy*) about man's descent into hell, his journey through purgatory, and ascent to the glories of paradise. *Inferno*'s first wave of popularity occurred within 25 years after it was written because of a constellation of intrinsic and extrinsic factors surrounding its creation. Its popularity had a renaissance during the 18th and 19th centuries when it was rediscovered by the Romantics for its lyricism and purity of language. In the US, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's translation of *Inferno* was published by Ticknor and Fields in 1867, thereby attracting a large number of Americans to Dante at a time when Greek and Latin formed the sacred skeleton of classical education (Phillips, 202-203). Amazingly, since 1800, there have been over 100 English translations of Dante's works, including 20 or so over the past 25 years.

Numerous citations, allusions, and references to Dante's work have been catalogued in contemporary literature, art, popular culture (including film, graphic novels and electronic games), and names of restaurants, bars, and clubs. *The Dante Club*, a 2003 mystery by Matthew Pearl, ingeniously embeds the circumstances of the murder of a fictional Chief Justice with a club of poets (including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russel Lowell) who are working to translate Dante into English. Within this background, just how does Dan Brown re-popularize an already popular classical work? This article will discuss briefly Dante's background but focus on key symbols, ideas, or concepts from Dante's life which then became part of the structure and "playbook" of Brown's novel. Brown's treatment of Dante reinforces, in a popular way, T. S. Eliot's pronouncement that "Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them: and Dante's half of the world enlarges every year" (Watkins viii). Indeed, Brown's *Inferno* is all about Dante and his ever expanding legacy to ideas, technology, genetic engineering, and a possible modern apocalypse of overpopulation.

Conceptualizing *Inferno*. The title of Brown's novel certainly applies to the references he incorporates into the contemporary novel from Dante's first book of the *Divine Comedy*. But "Inferno" is also the name of the dangerous, rogue virus created by Bertrand Zobrist, a reclusive Transhumanist scientist who schemes against modern government agencies, including the World Health Organization, to fight the global population explosion (i.e., the doomsday prophecy as proposed by 18th century mathematician Thomas Malthus). "Inferno" clearly refers to the modern-day vision of an unsustainable, over-populated earth in which no one with any responsibility for the future of society will accept accountability to make profound changes to save mankind. Within Zobrist's (or Brown's) framework, *Inferno* as a genetically engineered virus was created by man to avoid hell and self-destruction, whereas Dante's *Inferno* was the prescribed pathway of sinners leading themselves into hell.

Brown also expands upon Dante's loss of order created by individuals who have "gone astray" to the requisite loss of order created by modern social organizations. Dante's journey reflects a "sense of divine order in a world seemingly bereft of symbolic retribution, purgation, or reward . . ." (Phillips 202). Sin must be accompanied by counterpoise, the appropriate punishment to balance (offset) its effect. Thus, society's sin of overpopulation must be counterbalanced by scientific advances to reduce the birthrate, just as the Plague did so naturally in the 13th and 14th centuries. In Brown's *Inferno*, the focus is on the sins of the social order and not on Dante's version of personal and individual sin.

Dante's Influence. As a framework for understanding the initial—and ongoing—popularity of Dante's work, we need to begin with a brief overview of his life's experiences—many of which contributed to his popularity and that of his work. Living in Florence, one of the most vibrant, influential, and political of the city states of the Middle Ages, Dante experienced the classic, romantic, and obsessive "love at first sight" of Beatrice Portinari when he was only 9 years old. Although it has been widely reported that Dante never even spoke to Beatrice, she became his life-long muse and inspiration—the epitome of divine love in his *Inferno*, taking a prominent role in the poem as she called for Virgil to guide Dante through the final descent into the nine circles of hell. (It is not until the third part of the poem, *The Paradiso*, that Beatrice becomes Dante's guide.) Second, the *Divine Comedy*, of which *The Inferno* is the first poem, is the first work written in Tuscan or rustic Italian—in contrast to Latin which was, of course, used for all scholarly and literary works. The use of the popular, vernacular language was the means to reach the people, especially since Dante used the overlapping terza rima (third rhyme—that is, aba, bcb, cdc) melodiously moving forward the art and the drama of the work. A third element that so contributed to the rather immediate popularity of *Inferno* was the description of the descent through the nine circles of hell with dramatic, graphic, three-dimensional representations of sinners, monsters, and environmental abysses. Dante's visions and descriptions of the descent to hell were based on the "high culture" of the age (writers from the Greek and Roman classics, mythology, and medieval interpretations of sin) and "low culture" (popular views held about punishments for transgressors). Although many characters in the poem were readily identifiable and well-known classical figures, Dante also incorporated references to 13th century Florentine politicians, increasing the widespread popular appeal of those who heard his dramatic episodes.

Mass Appeal of Brown's Work. Although Dan Brown's *Inferno* incorporates novelistic tactics beyond the framework of Dante's work, the connection with Dante is obvious, visible, and overrides other topics. In effect, Brown's *Inferno* is a prime example of literary popular culture. The mass attraction of the work is evidenced by its being the best-selling book of 2013 (*USA Today*, January 6, 2014). According to Doubleday, 4 million copies of the book were printed in advance of its publication in May 2013. Interestingly, Amazon sold more e-books than print copies of the novel, so the digital version helped to catapult the work to first place for the year in number of sold copies. To increase appeal and prevent pirating before publication, the book was shipped only via securely identified FedEx trucks. Translations were produced only in a secured area with all manuscripts and transcriptions locked up overnight.

Published reviews of *Inferno* were generally negative. One reviewer wrote, “It is hard to explain his [Brown’s] record-breaking popularity,” citing *New Yorker* comments about “dead” dialog and writing without distinction (Bush 36). Other reviewers acknowledged the success of the techniques that Brown uses to package a popular novel. He continuously “peels the onion,” presenting pieces of the puzzle, clues, or brief bits of information to engage the readers. Chapters are short (3-4 pages, 750- 1000 words). This disclosure of “novelistic nanobytes,” tweets, and verbal emoticons can occasionally lead to a significant leap in the number of clues or actions, while plot development becomes tighter as more clues are released. In effect, the clues and the plot have a symbiotic relationship—the plot cannot develop without being shored up by numerous static and actionable clues.

Repetition is a key tactic that Brown uses to move along the story. For Brown’s *Inferno* is a story with a moral, similar to that of Dante’s *Inferno* which is comprised of cascading stories with specific, detailed morality lessons culminating in a single moral outcome—Satan at the bottom of the descent, but with a sanctioned pathway to redemption and salvation. Traditional oral narratives use repetition of phrases, themes, or dialog so that the listener comprehends the account to create a credible whole—a shared understanding of the “rest of the story.” Repetition is characteristic of the oral tradition, but its continuous use in Brown’s *Inferno* reflects internal comments by Robert Langdon and other characters that add little to the novel’s pace. Often these comments lead to or are a part of “cliffhangers” that skip from chapter to chapter.

Character or Plot? Amazingly, what often attracts people to popular literature is a defined protagonist whose characterization is well developed. But in the Robert Langdon series, that development is not possible because the focus is on solving a modern mystery in atmospheric, medieval settings—in a highly compressed period of time. At first, Langdon is not even sure what he is being pressed to solve, but the power of the chase overrides any psychological development. The little that we know about Langdon (claustrophobic, loves his Harris tweeds and antique Mickey Mouse watch) comes from cinematic portrayals of a likeable, approachable, erudite but practical professor who has enough freedom to fit in brief mysterious academic escapades while still teaching at a prestigious school. Instead, the reader is immediately drawn into dramatic descriptions of medieval Italian art, history, and culture (which he or she should know, but does not) that create a backdrop for a brilliant and mysterious female assistant, diabolical stormtrooper-like assassins and henchmen, chase scenes, and shadowy underworld characters. The art, history, architecture, and travels from Florence to Venice to Istanbul create a vivid, detailed travelogue. However, the repetition of the technique can slow the plot’s movement, even though some of the background provides critical clues.

An interesting twist on the scarcity of character development surrounds Zobrist, the eccentric, villainous, visionary scientist who embraced Dante’s works to become the proposed salvation for earth’s Malthusian apocalypse. From a developmental perspective, the character most closely associated with *Inferno* is Zobrist since he seldom appears without making reference to the poem (Parker and Parker 178).

Genre. Brown's *Inferno* blends three popular genres—suspense, mystery, and detective fiction—with a solid dose of travel writing. (Interestingly, the publisher also lists the book's genres as “fact fiction,” conspiracy fiction, and thriller.) The mystery-detective fiction format is updated with contemporary techniques to solve several Dante-related codes. For example, after Langdon opens what appears to be a small biohazard container, he finds a miniature medieval bone cylinder outfitted with a high-tech laser projector. When the projector is illuminated, a modified version of Botticelli's Map is displayed. This Map of Hell (also known as The Abyss of Hell) is one of the earliest representations of Dante's highly visual representation of hell. Additional clues—and recollections of lectures he has given at Harvard and to the Dante Society—help Langdon realize that the traditional Map of Hell has been digitally modified. In addition, the letters CATROVACER have been added to each ditch of the Malebolge, Dante's eighth circle of hell. (This eighth circle, with ten different ditches for the categories of those who have committed the sin of fraud, plays an important role in Brown's work.) But because the map has been altered, the letters really spell CERCA TROVA (“seek and find”). This revelation propels Langdon and his Mensa-talented doctor assistant to search for a painting in the Vasari Corridor, an above-ground walkway linking two major palaces in Florence. So the Dante-linked codes and clues, the use of technology, and the travel-guide approach to Florence's art and architecture catapult Langdon and Dr. Sienna Brooks into an intense “cat and mouse” chase through Florence's famous Palazzo Vecchio.

Dante Connections. Brown does not try to follow the order and path of *Inferno* from Canto I to Canto XXXIV. Instead, Parker and Parker contend that *Inferno* provides a “conceptual model for the central action of the novel” (177). References to Dante, his poems (primarily *Inferno*), classical works inspired by the author, and influences by Dante are integrated throughout Brown's novel. Some references are instructional or explanatory: (1) a review of Dante's life and background from a student lecture; (2) a lecture for the Viennese Dante Society incorporating the poet's influence on Italian artists Michaelangelo, Botticelli, and Dore; and (3) quotations attributed to him or from verses in *Inferno*. Early in Brown's novel, Langdon reminisces about the close ties between Dante and Florence, simultaneously reflecting on Florence's architecture and the 10 ditches of the poet's Malebolge. Langdon provides an elementary review of Dante's life, his portraits by various artists (some quite soon after his death), and a summary of the contributions the great author made to art, literature, and culture. While the purpose of this instruction is to inform the members of a learned society about Dante, we have to suspend disbelief that such academics would not know the basics about Dante. However, Langdon's comments are essential to help us, as readers, know what we should know (but never knew or remembered, at least in the detail required for the plot) about the immortal poet, including the role of his guide, Virgil, the eighth circle of hell, and the three-headed Satan's consumption of three people in the 9th circle of hell.

Langdon's remembered lectures or presentations are essential to understanding the Dante-related clues and references that are incorporated throughout the novel. Some of these references include:

- One of Dante’s shades, the soulless entities that inhabit *The Inferno*, initiates Brown’s prologue with the pronouncement of “I am the Shade.” Other Dante-related references include the sinners in *Inferno* (“the lustful bodies writhing in fiery rain, the gluttonous souls floating in excrement, the treacherous villains frozen in Satan’s icy grasp”), the guide Virgil, and the abyss.
- The division of the *Divine Comedy* into 100 cantos, with the first 34 in *Inferno*.
- The quotation “Abandon all hope ye who enter here,” referring to the entrance to the Gates of Hell (Canto III, verse 9).
- The opening lines of Canto I. The scheming scientist Zobrist refers to these lines to acknowledge Dante’s help in finding his “path” to save humanity.
 - “Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
for the straightforward path had been lost”
- “The path to paradise passes directly though hell. Dante taught us that.”
- The references to Dante’s Nine Rings of Hell and to overpopulation. Malthusian mathematics propels the reader to the first ring.
- A quotation “derived” from Dante, canto 3, verses 35-42. According to several sources, this quotation appears to have been attributed to President John F. Kennedy. It appears at least twice in the novel—first in the preface and second as a message and threat from the reclusive scientist Zobrist to Dr. Elizabeth Sinskey, Director of the World Health Organization.
 - “The darkest places in hell
are reserved for those
who maintain their neutrality
in times of moral crisis.”
- As Langdon and Dr. Sienna Brooks are being pursued through the interior maze of secret chambers and passageways in the Palazzo Vecchio, Langdon decides that they need to climb up a closed staircase to be able to descend. He tells Sienna to “remember Satan’s navel.” Langdon then recounts that “in order to escape hell, Dante has to climb down the hairy stomach of the massive Satan and when he reaches Satan’s navel—the alleged center of the earth—the earth’s gravity suddenly changes directions and Dante, in order to continue climbing down to purgatory . . . suddenly has to start climbing up” (Canto 34). The reader has to suspend disbelief, as he/she often has to do, when Brown writes about fast-paced action requiring that the reader stop to consider the analogy with the measured pace of that of the classic author.

Dante’s Death Mask. This artifact plays a prominent role as a major clue and structural support in *Inferno*. Marta, a curator at the Museum of the Palazzo Vecchio, explains the history and background of Dante’s death mask—that it was common for well-known artists to have a mask made of the face immediately upon passing. Normally, Langdon would assume this role of instructor, but the didactic reversal is due to his continuing episodes of retrograde amnesia from a blow to the head that occurred at the beginning of the novel along with the denouement of the series of clues that support the plot. When the cabinet containing the death mask is found empty, video recordings reveal

that Langdon had taken the mask the previous night, placing it in a Ziploc bag and giving it to the Museum Director. Both of them were intrigued by markings on the back of the mask. Curiously, Zobrist, the owner of the mask and brilliant underground biochemist who conducted research in germ-line manipulation, had given them permission to take the mask from the museum. Through the discussion of Dante's death mask and what we learn of Zobrist's scientific interests, Dante becomes associated with the economics and overpopulation of the Plague, a topic introduced earlier in the novel. More clues from the dying museum Director tell Langdon that what he needs is "safely hidden" but Langdon must hurry to open the gates. The director's dying words about *Paradise 25* points Langdon to Dante's desire to return to his baptismal font at the Bapistry of San Giovanni, with the breathtaking 10-paneled freeze of the Gates of Paradise designed by artist Lorenzo Ghiberti.

"By then with other voice, with other fleece
I shall return as poet and put on
At my baptismal font, the laurel crown." (*Paradise 25*, verses 7-9)

After the death mask is located, Langdon uncovers a 9-level spiral symmetrical text (Brown 255) that starts "almost verbatim" with the first stanza from Dante. By now, Langdon realizes that this coded text has been deliberately placed on the back of the mask to lead him to the discovery of the mystery.

O you possessed of sturdy intellect,
Observe the teaching that is hidden here . . .
Beneath the veil of verses so obscure.
Seek the treacherous doge of Venice
Who severed the heads from horses . . .
And plucked up the bones of the blind.
Kneel within the holy museum of holy wisdom,
And place thine ear to the ground,
Listening for the sounds of trickling water.
Follow deep into the sunken palace . . .
For here, in the darkness
The chthonic monster waits submerged in the bloodred waters
Of the lagoon that reflects no stars.

Clues in this inscription (*doges*, lagoon) point Langdon to Venice and foreshadow Dante's chthonic monsters, sunken palace, and a starless lagoon that move the chase to Istanbul. The citation to "place thine ear to the ground/Listening for the sounds of trickling water" refers to the stream descending from the hollow in the rocks (Canto 34) that leads Dante and Virgil out of hell and into the earth's sky with heavenly stars. In what we later learn to be Zobrist's inscription on the back of the death mask, the lagoon has no visible stars, thus void of hope and reinforcing the theme of "Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here."

Dante, Hell, and Overpopulation. For eccentric scientist-madman-villain Bertrand Zobrist, the modern version of Dante’s hell is global overpopulation. Zobrist contends that the Black Death or the Plague—which actually occurred in Florence and Venice about 25 years after Dante died—is the touchstone for the world’s contemporary apocalypse. Acting and writing as though he has been driven by Dante, an anonymous person begins his DVD-recorded suicide message in Brown’s prologue with “I am the Shade, through the dolent city I flee, Through the eternal woe I take flight.” This verse references the shades as bodiless souls of Dante’s *Inferno* and the need to flee the city, just as Dante fled from Florence due to political strife in the late 13th century.

Initially, Zobrist’s identify and background are unknown to Langdon—and to the reader. As the architecture of the novel is revealed, through an uploaded DVD we are led to the interior of a cave with red hues and an underwater plaque inscribed with the following:

“IN THIS PLACE, ON THIS DATE
THE WORLD CHANGED FOREVER.”

This same clue appears at least five times throughout the novel, reinforcing Brown’s use of repetition to foreshadow the unraveling of the mystery while increasing the suspense of the denouement. Later, the Director of the World Health Organization recalls the unnamed Zobrist pointing to images of masked and dying persons, inspired by Dante, as he gives a presentation to officials at the organization. Referring to a Malthusian-inspired population graph, he speaks passionately and desperately about the key drivers of an environmental Armageddon that will soon destroy the world.

With singular purpose and in the framework of the “transhumanist philosophy,” Zobrist uses his intellectual and financial resources to develop an airborne vector virus that will cause infertility to a third of the world’s population. Dante-related codes and clues lead to its presumed location, supposedly in a dissolvable bag in a columned underground cistern just a block away from Istanbul’s iconic Hagia Sophia. Dante-inspired codes, the atmosphere of the large underground cistern, and music provide an eerie atmosphere complementing that of *Inferno*. Zobrist has organized the implantation of his virus *Inferno* in the waters of the cistern accompanied by a multi-night concert of Liszt’s *Dante Symphony*. As the chase to stop the spread of the virus moves ahead frenetically, Langdon hears the orchestra choir of the Istanbul State Symphony chant “Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here.” The irony is that Zobrist’s actions of unleashing the virus occurred well before he committed suicide, thus creating unnecessary heroic actions by Langdon and company.

The (re-) popularization of Dante in Brown’s *Inferno* begins with the work’s title and the novel’s book jacket with the great poet’s classic image. Brown achieves popular success by connecting Dante’s graphic, joyless, effluvium of hell from transgressors, monsters, and environmental extremes—to the possible catastrophe the world could experience through overpopulation. Probably nothing has been written better than Dante’s *Inferno* that so effectively portrays the physical nature of hell. But the

geography of chasms, abysses, mountains, ice, and storms is accompanied by significant moral and emotional consequences, even if one survives Inferno to progress through Purgatory to Paradise. Along this path to Dante's hell, conceptualized in the novel as global anarchy through untreated, ignored, and unresolved overpopulation, the (re-) popularization of key verses, historical and political contexts, and the classic art and architecture, is viewed within a 21st century lens—technology, digital humanities, environmental apocalypticism, global politics, and compressed time.

Although Brown has significantly contributed to the (re-) popularization of Dante, it is also important to recognize that the great author has become more alive and more popular through academic web sites, "Digital Dante" projects, and new translations of his epic work. One could argue that his increased familiarity and popularity has been shared by both academics and popular culture enthusiasts. In fact, the last acknowledgment that Dan Brown makes in the acknowledgements is to "the superb online resources of the Princeton Dante Project, Digital Dante at Columbia University, and the World of Dante." (Brown x).

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Manchester Digital Dante project (www.alc.manchester.ac.uk)

The Dartmouth Dante Project (<http://dante.dartmouth.edu>)

The Dartmouth Dante Project: List of Commentaries
(<http://dante.dartmouth.edu/commentaries.php>)

The Princeton Dante Project (<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/index.html>)

Notable *Inferno* Translations

1867	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
1891-92	Charles Eliot Norton
1949-62	Dorothy Leigh Sayers
1954	John Ciardi
1980-84	Allen Mendelbaum—available on line as part of the Digital Dante project
1995	Robert Pinsky

***Inferno* Translations since 2000**

2000—2007	Robert and Jean Hollander—available on line as part of the Princeton Dante project
2002—2004	Anthony M. Esolen
2006—2007	Robin Kirkpatrick

2010	Burton Rafael
2012	J. Gordon Nichols
2012	Mary Jo Bang
2013	Clive James

Balanced on a Proverbial Cliffhanger: The Methods, Pros, and Current Tribulations of How Blind Readers Obtain Books for Leisure Reading

By Nicole White, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

There is nothing quite like the torment of knowing that you will have to wait an entire year to learn how the large or small cliffhanger an author has masterfully woven into the last third of a story will be resolved. Though we try not to dwell on it, bibliophiles can't entirely ignore the agony of such suspense, partly due to living in a time where suspense lasts a week at worst. In an age where entertainment is obtained by the push of a button, we tend to gnash our teeth when our computer buffers in the middle of binge-watching on Netflix, sigh when we can't fast-forward through the commercials, or inwardly groan at the prospect of sitting through previews at the theater.

Fortunately, while one author may have consigned us to resting on the proverbial cliff, new books are just as easy to acquire as visual fun: Amazon will bring them to your door, \$2.99 or less eBook sales happen every day, audible.com allows you to listen or read-while-you-listen to your purchase after waiting less than five minutes for it to download, some libraries have digital checkouts, and there's always the guarantee that if you go to a brick and mortar book provider it will either have what you want or be able to order it in for you. It's the blessing and curse of the digital age, as authors craft higher stakes and more stomach-churning cliffhangers to keep up with a public that is consuming entertainment as quickly as it wants; yet the only thing standing in the way of a reader's yearning to know what the next story will bring are finances and the days between publication dates. If you're sighted, that is.

The blind community--specifically those that do not have enough vision to read print--only have three ways to indulge their love of literature: bookshare.org, audible.com, and bard.com. If you're unfamiliar with the first and last providers, Bookshare is the world's largest accessible non-profit online library for people with print disabilities, and BARD is the national library service that provides braille and volunteer-narrated audio downloads. If you think a second resource that provides audiobooks excessive with Audible in the lineup, the frank truth is that if you're a blind person who just doesn't comprehend/enjoy audiobooks, between BARD's severely limited braille collection and the substantial difference between the likelihood of acquiring a braille book versus an audiobook, you cut off over half of your providers by forgoing narration.

Even with the above resources, we blind book lovers have far too much experience with anticipating an upcoming release only to learn that a braille or audio version won't be available on a publication date; unlike with pre-order options, there isn't a list to inform us of accessible releases. In all honesty, our resolution to a cliffhanger may last anywhere from a month to four years--and counting--after the satisfaction sighted fans experience, so if someone with a white cane or a dog in a harness scoffs at your disappointment upon having to wait for a novel, please try to excuse their rudeness.

THE DARK DAYS



To give credit where it's due, I should explain that things aren't as bad as they used to be for blind and visually impaired Braille readers. The image on the left is what the majority of physical Braille books, known as hardcopy Braille, look like, and as late as the early 2000s these were the only way blind people could obtain the literature we desired. Not only is something that thick rather difficult to read in bed, but because of the limited amount of text you can fit onto Braille paper (it's thicker than regular paper so the dots can't get rubbed out so easily), even when both sides were utilized (which they almost always were), novels had to be spread out over several volumes. To put this in perspective, those eleven lovely tomes in the photo comprise a 764-page book--try bringing those to the beach for a bit of light summer reading.

And as you may have guessed, these books weren't available in stores. You had to order them from the Library of Congress, who understandably took some time transcribing the latest releases into Braille, binding the books, and then making enough copies of select titles to ship to everyone who pre-ordered. So unless you hopped on the audiobook wagon when, say, Harry Potter mania came to a height (thanks for buying me all those tapes, Mom), you were stuck waiting for months while your sighted friends devoured chapters, and avoiding those friends if you cared about getting spoiled.



Photos courtesy of <http://www.humanware.com/en->

For the modern blind bibliophile, hardcopy Braille, the blind equivalent to hardcopy print, vanishes from your life once you've used it to master the alphabet (yay!) Thanks to whoever invented electronic Braille--utilized on the devices pictured above--and the generous and tech-savvy people at bookshare.org, which distributes electronic Braille editions, books are now comparatively more portable and literally at our fingertips--goodbye eleven volumes that equal one print book, hello electronic print for the blind and our version of Kindles, Tablets, etc. My earliest memory of reading a book from such a device--though it had its bugs, so I wasn't giving up those Harry Potter tapes--is around 2002, so yes, that does mean that blind people got cool tech gadgets years before Apple and the like began making things for sighted consumers. In case you were getting the impression I was spinning you a sob story, we had our perks.

Even though the Library of Congress created BARD before Bookshare came into being, for years Bookshare was our main source for reading because of its much larger collection. Only recently have BARD become a helpmate, in part due to manufacturing audiobook sequels for series whose professional recordings did not garner enough money to warrant producing future installments. And whenever these disability-specific resources fall behind, there's Audible. If you're wondering where the problem is, we're getting there.

PROS of the DISABILITY-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

A Bookshare membership with unlimited downloads is free to all students and \$50 a year for non-students. Begun in 2002, its library was maintained for five years by volunteers who scanned personally purchased books (members choose whether to download the book in braille or any other options, as the site services all print disabilities and methods of accessing them, since computers are not equipped to read braille documents), and uploaded said files to the site. It has grown exponentially since 2007, both due to the combination of these individuals efforts and a substantial library grant that led to agreements with various publishers to send eBooks. Those agreements now make it possible for a blind person to jump online and enjoy the luxury of getting a book on its release date. Consequently, it also cuts down on having to send emails to volunteers, asking if they'll pretty please spend their hard-earned money on books for the benefit of blind fans. These requests were often necessary on account of either a volunteer becoming disenchanted with an author/series, or an author's works being abandoned partway for no discernible reason.

BARD is volunteer based, with nonprofessional narrators offering their time, and the site runners using things like best-seller lists and less obvious means to broaden their stock (utilizing the same scanning and uploading techniques as Bookshare for the much smaller braille database). It's free once you've verified your disability, and you can choose either digital downloads, or buy a device to access these "daisy files"--an audio file with the ability to search and navigate by paragraphs, headings, like the flexibility in print files, that is playable on a computer with free downloadable software, or a blind-specific portable device such as a Bookport. (BARD does provide their preferred player on request--Bookports are available from the same companies that sell those electronic braille devices--but that's getting into personal preference and usability territory.) Since a Bookport or computer works for Audible too, it's a win win--unless the narrator's bad, then you're in trouble (and if your device only plays daisy files, then it's one more thing you're yoked to while you have another device for Audible, but again, personal preference).



HERE'S THE PROBLEM

The day Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* came out, a book by Jackson Pearce hit shelves. If you're a blind Pearce fan, you know she's a mid-list YA author and therefore doesn't have many audiobooks, professional or otherwise, so there's no reason to check Audible or BARD. Bookshare would be your most likely provider, especially as it has all eight of her prior works. Lee's hyped novel was on Bookshare the day it came out in July; blind Pearce fans are still waiting for her spy thriller five months later.

There are times when this sort of thing doesn't happen: BARD or Audible might get books months ahead of Bookshare, or if all three are on the ball, you would have the luxury of choosing between reading braille, or listening to two different narrators. When the title you've been craving never becomes available on any of these sites, or you can't afford Audible's membership when a title appears solely in a professionally recorded format--a far too common reality--well ... that's the end of the story. Unless you want to beg/bribe sighted family members/friends to read a print copy to you.

And now you're probably asking, "But can't you contact these providers and tell them about the books you want?" We could, but if for whatever financial or interest-based reason a book didn't warrant a studio's favor, all the asking in the world won't get you an audiobook. BARD doesn't really allow reader requests; you can let your regional librarian know what you would like, but it's a fifty-fifty chance as to whether or not you'll get it. Also, there's no consistency in whether a book will be brailled or recorded, meaning one may encounter the private irritation of reading the majority of an author's work, only to find the last volume is solely available in, either poorly performed or disliked, audio. (The reverse may also occur for audiobook lovers, and either way is a prime example of why it is necessary to utilize all three resources, as implied in the opening paragraphs.) It would be tremendously useful if BARD were to provide some form of "coming soon" list, yet if someone has suggested this notion, they have yet to incorporate or imply that it is a possibility.

Bookshare used to have a glorious response time of three months when it came to uploading requested titles (and I say that in earnest), but it's becoming increasingly unlikely any request will be granted, usually because people don't understand that (1) even if the books are produced by a publisher Bookshare works with, older books are pretty much a no-go, and (2) there are publishers that don't work with the site. Publishers will not provide copies of older releases (unless they're turned into eBooks, and even then it's only if the author has garnered name recognition), and volunteers either do not have the money or inclination to purchase copies and devote a large chunk of time and manpower into scanning them. So, those fan pretty-please emails I mentioned earlier never entirely abate, now replete with assurances that this time will *really* be appreciated. There are volunteers who understand that second dilemma and are willing to take care of the books published by non-contracted companies, as well as outsourcing, but thanks to a specific person leaving their position, the request list has gotten so backed up that these decent souls can only do so much.

We're at the mercy of publishers' whims (who don't take requests from the site),

and if their author's book isn't supplied on release day, they'll usually find it in their hearts, months and months after the author has stopped talking about it, to give over said author's "latest." Furthermore if that book has already been uploaded by a pitying volunteer, it can get taken down once publishers deign to supply their version, due to agreed-upon conditions. Exceptions are made if the volunteer-provided copy is better proof read or contains vital image descriptions, but the act of replacing someone's contribution has lately resulted in offending and alienating some who have worked with the site since its infancy. As a Bookshare user, taking a side is pointless; volunteers have a right to be upset, yet rejecting the quantity of titles publishers provide the site is nonsensical.

Personally, all of this results in a knee-jerk reaction of wondering whether I'll even be able to get a title when it sparks my interest. I love when the wondering is unfounded, though it makes those moments when I'm forced to endure prolonged curiosity or suspense all the more memorable and infuriating. A good book can be emotional enough on its own, and the gratitude for the advances in accessibility that have occurred in the past twenty years is always present and a show of how much progress has been made. Having to combine this enjoyment and thankfulness with dismay that the fifty-fifty chance difficulty of obtaining books is a reality that probably won't be changing soon is a bittersweet reminder of how progress could be made even better.

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Robert Johnson teaches literature and composition at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. Academic interests include composition, Victorians, Modernism, adaptation, and the short story, his latest two placements stories in *Short Story* and *Kestrel*.

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Keith Moser is Associate Professor of French at Mississippi State University. He has published four books since 2008. Moser has also contributed numerous essays to peer-reviewed publications, such as *The French Review*, *The International Journal of Francophone Studies*, *Dalhousie French Studies*, *French Cultural Studies*, and *Forum for Modern Language Studies*.

William Nesbit teaches English and literature at Beacon College where he is the Chair of Interdisciplinary Studies. I have published critical and creative work in *The Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, *The Southeast Review*, *Route 7 Review*, and *Kudzu Quarterly*. He has presented on the Beats at SCMLA, ASLE, the Annual Conference of the Marxist Reading Group at UF, The PCA/ACA National Conference, SAMLA, the Burroughs Century, Whitman and the Beats, and the International Film and Literature Conference at FSU, among others. He has also presented at MLA.

Blind since birth due to Retinopathy of Prematurity, **Nicole White** lives in Las Vegas Nevada, holds a BA in English from UNLV, and is pursuing graduate studies in Creative Writing. An avid reader, writer, singer, theatergoer, and traveler, she can often be found analyzing and memorizing lyrics and book passages.

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One need not be a member to submit an article for consideration, but must join the organization on acceptance. Queries about membership and articles for consideration should be sent to felicia.campbell@unlv.edu.

The journal invites articles on all aspects of popular culture worldwide and as well as on American culture.

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Now accepting papers on all aspects of Popular Culture worldwide and American Culture. Send abstracts of 50 to 75 words to felicia.campbell@unlv.edu before December 15, 2015. Please include your affiliation, if any, and a postal mailing address. We encourage early submissions. Visit us at fwpca.org.