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# Popular Culture Review

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Felicia F. Campbell, Editor  
Gina M. Sully, Associate Editor



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## From the Editor's Desk

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Little did I dream thirty years ago when we had the first meeting of Far West Popular Culture that I would still be organizing and chairing the conference and editing Volume 29 of this journal. We will be passing out copies of our first journal at the conference and it can also be seen at our website [fwpca.org](http://fwpca.org). The field has gone through some marvelous shifts but at its heart the dedication to studying and appreciating our vibrant and diverse cultural artifacts has always been there, shining like a beacon, whether the mainstream literary academy recognized the value in what we were doing or not.

This issue is led by Daniel Sayoye's remarkable essay "Into the Wild , Paradox and the Merchandising of Christopher McCandless." In it, he describes how the multiple narratives growing from the experience have turned it upside down, finally presenting the opposite of what Christopher McCandless, or Alexander Supertramp, as he renamed himself, had intended. Sayoye's take on the experience as a kind of capitalistic pilgrimage and perhaps even a minor cult presents a sublime irony with wit and flair.

Carol Poster's "Sylvanas Windrunner of the World of Warcraft, Hillary Clinton, and the Rhetoric of Female Leadership" gives a rhetorical analysis of the online community and its parallels with reality. While I have never played the game, the existence of such a living and breathing social space that mirrors our own definitely resonates with the power of culture to forge realities that teach us something about this one. Our escapes never let us forget entirely where we are now.

This is followed by Tony and Trisha Kemerly's analysis of the seventh season of *Supernatural* as an allegory of the abuse and loss of agency experienced by the person in a fat body, presenting

the ongoing plotline of the season as a nuanced and perhaps progressive look at the systemic cycle of help and degradation offered by a society which values certain physical traits so much more highly than others.

In Seth Vanatta's "Essentialism and the Construction of Gender and Race in Season 2 of Lifetime's *UnREAL*," we see many forms of essentialism in a popular television program. Vanatta explores how the show undermines static notions of gender and its presentation of a nuanced and complex racism, even as concerns intersectionality and white feminism. Perhaps these issues have never been more topical.

On a completely different note, Heather Lusty's colorful look at the world of music and social protest screams to life in "Children of the Grave: Visual Nuclear Rhetoric in Heavy Metal Music." While I can't say that I am intimately familiar with all of the groups and artists working in the medium, Lusty's presentation brings the metal world into a dialogue with social consciousness that illustrates how important and self-aware all art can be. These artists have a voice to reach many people, and they are worth listening to.

In Richard Logsdon's "Where Have All the Vampires Gone? An Examination of Gothic Horror in BBC's *Luther*," the timeless qualities of Gothic horror come to life once again, overlaid on what might be considered a crime detective drama. This rich exploration of the cultural threat of mass shootings, stabbings, bombings, and other public threats, with its subtle Gothic allusions, unveils how ubiquitous some of these fears have been in the human subconscious and in art for centuries.

Graeme John Wilson's look at another acclaimed crime drama, "A Man Must Have a Code": A Contrast of Black and White Masculinity in *The Wire*" takes a much more contemporary look at the potentially toxic masculinity omnipresent in our society, but especially obvious in the "tough guy" detective featured in so many of these shows. With its surprising and sensitive treatment of sexuality and racial stereotypes, *The Wire* fulfills the potential of its genre.

In "The Trajectory of a Comic Celebrity's Career: Robin Williams Does Television," Kathy Merlock Jackson explores the innovative personality of Robin Williams, who lobbied his eccentric charisma in a bit part on television into a memorable and enduring career on both the large and the small screens. He was always destined to make us laugh and cry in his exploration of what it truly means to be a human being, from inside and out.

Todd Moffett's "The Blacksmith" explores one of the archetypal figures that keeps reappearing in myths and stories, perhaps beginning in the Proto-Indian-European tradition and surviving

across a truly staggering panoply of cultures. The prominent place of the artisan, from Weyland to Hephaestus, is well worth considering. Why do some character types and figures seem to spring up everywhere we look?

There are also several reviews in this issue, including looks at Patrick Scott Belk's *Dynamic International Networks of Print Culture*, Daniel Ferreras' *Rediscovering the Pleasure Principle*, H Peter Steeves' *Beautiful, Bright, and Blinding*, Steven Frye's *Understanding Larry McMurtry*, and Andrew J. Friedenthal's *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America*. Given my personal relationship with both Ferreras and Steeves, it is a great pleasure to see their scholarship and work coming to such beautiful and theoretically vital fruition.

So we come to another issue in a huge landmark year for the *Far West Popular Culture Review*. Enjoy the fruits of our culture, and thank you all for making this work so memorable and rewarding.

*FELICIA F. CAMPBELL*



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# Into the Wild Paradox and the Merchandising of Christopher McCandless

By Daniel Ferreras Savoye

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**Abstract:** The story of Christopher McCandless, whose body was found in the back of an abandoned bus on a remote Alaskan trail after he starved to death for 113 days, has generated a great variety of narratives, both textual and cinematographic, which have progressively substituted reality in order to favor spectacularization. This essay retraces the steps of the process by which an alleged rejection of modern consumerism has become itself a consumer product, paradoxically participating in the very lifestyle it was supposed to condemn.

**Keywords:** Christopher McCandless, spectacle, consumer culture, simulacrum, mass media

**Resumen:** La historia de Christopher McCandless, cuyo cuerpo fue encontrado en la parte trasera de un autobús abandonado en un camino remoto en Alaska después de haber sufrido de inanición por 113 días hasta su muerte, ha generado una gran variedad de narrativas, tanto textuales como cinematográficas, que han sustituido progresivamente la realidad para favorecer la espectacularización.

Este ensayo sigue los pasos del proceso mediante el cual un supuesto rechazo del consumismo moderno se ha convertido en un producto de consumo, paradójicamente participando en el estilo de vida que supuestamente condenaba.

**Palabras clave:** Christopher McCandless, espectáculo, cultura del consumo, simulacro, medios masivo

**摘要：**克里斯多夫·麦肯迪尼斯死于饥饿的 113 天后，人们在—辆停靠在阿拉斯加偏僻小径的废弃公交车后部发现了他的尸体。他的故事已催生了众多文本叙事和电影叙事，（然而）这类叙事为促进“景观化”（spectacularization）已逐渐取代了现实。本文追溯了某个过程的各个步骤，在这个过程中，所谓的拒绝现代消费主义却已变成了一种消费产品，自相矛盾地参与与其原本所斥责的生活中。

**关键词：**克里斯多夫·麦肯迪尼斯，景观，消费者文化，假象，大众媒体

The amount and variety of cultural products dedicated to the story of Christopher McCandless is nothing short of remarkable: from a highly imaginative biography (*Into the Wild*, 1996) to a major motion picture by one of Hollywood reputed bad boys, Sean Penn (*Into the Wild*, 2007), from a documentary (*The Call of the Wild*, 2007) to a book of posthumous photographs (*Back to the Wild*, 2011), from a personal memoir (*The Wild Truth*, 2014) to another documentary (*Return to the Wild*, 2014), Christopher McCandless' tragic and somewhat superfluous demise seems to be able to generate all types of narratives, as long as they include the word "wild" in the title. All that appears to be missing is a scholarly analysis of the phenomenon, which has only been considered so far from the very reductive critical perspective of post-colonial studies, as in Lisa Korteweg and Jan Oakley's essay, "Eco-Heroes Out of Place and Relations: Decolonizing the Narratives of *Into the Wild* and *Grizzly Man* Through Land Education," that merges two very different types of narratives, a documentary and a film, and bypasses their obvious differences in term of content and intent in order to promote the ideological concerns of post-colonial theory. The persistence in our collective imagination of what amounts to be in the end little more than yet another morbid tabloid-style news, that of the body of a young man found starved to death in an abandoned bus on an Alaskan trail, is however worth our attention, for it reveals a strange, extreme cultural paradox: if, on the one hand, the success of the diverse accounts of this particular event – the voluntary and ultimately deadly exile of a young man from society – clearly reveals a general, collectively acknowledged and shared rejection of our consumerist culture, it also stands as a perfect example of how the same consumerist culture has appropriated this very rejection in order to transform it into yet another product ready for consumption. Examining the different phases of the fictionalization process which has turned

Christopher McCandless into some type of transcendental hero will give us a unique perspective upon the mechanisms by which the society of spectacle recycles even its own negation.

## Facts

The particulars of the story are well-known: on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1992, 24-year-old Christopher McCandless walked into the Alaskan Stampede trail with little more than a .22 caliber hunting rifle, 400 rounds of ammunition, a ten-pound bag of rice and a dozen paperbacks. He found refuge three days later in an abandoned Fairbanks City Transit bus about forty miles down the trail, where he stayed for the next sixty-seven days, tentatively living off the land until he decided to return to civilization. However, one of the rivers he had crossed on his way to the bus, the Teklanika, has swollen considerably due to rain and snowmelt and proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. Christopher McCandless then returned to the bus where he slowly starved to death for the next forty-six days. At some point, most likely towards the end, he taped a note on the bus' door pleading for help. His body was found on September 6<sup>th</sup>, nineteen days after his death, by no less than three unrelated parties who happened to come across the bus on that particular day – adding a touch of grim irony to the whole affair. All that Christopher McCandless seems to have left behind is an elliptic log of his Alaskan struggle, which is often referred to as a “journal” or “dairy,” but actually amounts to little more than bullet entries of usually one or two words, mainly relating which animal he had killed on that day, and a few rolls of camera films containing a series of self-portraits, many of them showing McCandless posing next to the body of a dead animal.

The exact reason for his death has been the subject of extensive speculation: although Krakauer, the “official” biographer of Christopher McCandless, has insisted in several occasions that McCandless ingested some poisonous indigenous Alaskan wild potato seeds which were not known to be toxic at the time, multiple analyses of the possible alkaloids and amino-acids contained in said seeds have proven highly inconclusive, and if these seeds are indeed not the ideal food for whoever is already going into “rabbit starvation,” their toxicity per se to the human organism has not been scientifically demonstrated. Another factor has come into play recently, in direct relationship with the vast quantity of mushrooms McCandless started to ingest on his eighty-ninth day in the wild. The pictures published in *Back to the Wild* (2011) show several specimens known for their toxicity and psychoactive effects, such as the *Amanita Muscaria*, the potential effects of

which upon an already debilitated organism such as McCandless could go a long way in explaining why he did not actively seek escape from his fatal predicament. After being unable to cross the Teklanika, McCandless did not attempt to follow the river either up or downstream, which would have probably saved his life either way, for the river is braided upstream, allowing for a much safer passage, and there was a rudimentary bridge composed of an aluminum basket and a steel cable erected for the needs of a gauging station established in 1970, still perfectly functional in the summer of 1992, about twenty minutes downstream from where McCandless tried to cross the Teklanika on his way back from the wild. While his return to the bus three days after his failed attempt to escape the wild could be understood as a need to find temporary rest and refuge while he recouped himself and does not necessarily imply suicidal tendencies – as some of his most virulent detractors, mostly Alaskans, often conclude – the fact that he did not attempt to flee again and remained in the bus until his death is indeed puzzling, and his final two self-portraits show a smiling, if very gaunt individual holding a goodbye note: “I have had a happy life and thank the lord. Goodbye and may god bless all!” This strange acceptance and almost welcoming of death contradicts the proud survivalist who poses next to the animals he has just killed in most of his other self-portraits, and one could deduce that the large consumption of psychoactive mushrooms when he was already very severely malnourished may have inhibited most of his elementary survival skills, a well-known effect of hallucinogenic drugs, not to mention his digestive process. If too weak to walk out of the wild by himself, as the note found on the door of the bus seems to indicate, McCandless could have at least signaled his presence to the authorities by lighting a fire, for there was some helicopter activity in the area precisely around the time of his death. The effect of the mushrooms is duly consigned in his log, for the word “dream” appears next to “many mushrooms” on the entry corresponding to his eighty-ninth day in the wild; as Husky points out, the word “dream” is the largest entry in the entire log in terms of font size; we could add that it is also the only entry in the entire log the first letter of which has been darkened, along with the arrows that accompany it. It is followed by the following cryptic, both poetic and disturbing lines: “2 infinity holes 1 at the belt 1 at the foot gives frequency,” which do suggest intoxication more than clarity.

During the summer of 92, while Christopher McCandless lived in the bus, three cabins nearby were vandalized; as stated by the owner of one of them, Will Forsberg, it had never happened before and it has never happened since, and although the park rangers exempted Christopher McCandless from any wrong doing

– after all, charging a corpse with vandalism did not seem very productive – not everybody remains convinced of his innocence, in particular Forsberg, who happened to come across Christopher McCandless’ bag pack, which had apparently been left behind by the police when they initially searched the bus. In McCandless’ pack, as shown by Ron Lamothe in his documentary (*The Call of the Wild*), there was a wallet which contained a driver’s license, a social security card and a birth certificate among other pieces of identification, as well as \$300 in large bills. This naturally clashes with the idea Christopher McCandless forged for himself when he changed his name to Alexander Supertramp and declared his intention of leaving civilization behind in order to “walk into the wild.” It could be said that Christopher McCandless himself very consciously laid the foundation for the fictionalization of his character by pretending to be much more detached from materialistic and administrative realities than he actually was: one who truly wishes “no longer to be poisoned by civilization he flees,” as McCandless carved upon a piece of plywood left in the bus, would most likely not hold on to his birth certificate and even less to his social security card. As to the presence of the three hundred-dollar bills that accompanied such a wealth of “poisonous” pieces of identification, it is in complete contradiction with McCandless recorded statement that he had “burned all his money:” he obviously did not and the amount he kept would have allowed him, in 1992, to fly anywhere in the United States. As he changed his name to become “Alexander Supertramp,” and buried the legal proofs of Christopher McCandless’ existence in the most remote pocket of his back pack, McCandless was already establishing a fundamental binary opposition between what he was and what he wanted to appear to be: he was turning his back to civilization but keeping the return ticket safely tucked away.

The existence of his self-portraits is in itself suspicious, for it implies a constant link to the modern world, not only in terms of technology – the photographs would have to be developed in a lab – but also vis-à-vis the very notion of spectacle, as if McCandless had always been very conscious of the spectacular representation of his adventure, which undermines its fundamental nature: one cannot claim to embrace complete solitude in the wild while taking “selfies.” It has been said that McCandless intended to write a book of his adventures, however, his log and his two notes are written on pages from other books and we are only familiar with his previous journal through Krakauer’s book, *Into the Wild*. It seems that McCandless left very little in writing and obviously did not intend to practice while he was in the wild, although he did represent his attempted survival, emphasizing its most spectacular moments through self-portraits and an elliptical log, the meaning

of which, beyond that of a daily kill record, is left mostly to the imagination of the receptor.

It took the authorities about two weeks to identify the body with certainty and the story was reported by Jon Krakauer in the magazine *Outside*. The piece was so enthusiastically received by the readers of the magazine that Krakauer set out to turn the tragic misadventure of Chris McCandless into a full-length book, *Into the Wild*, which became a best-seller and inspired Sean Penn's eponymous film. By then, we were already into fiction.

## Fictions

McCandless' original story doubtlessly deals with the most primordial issue of human condition – mere, elementary survival – in a more suggestive than explicit manner, which might explain in part its success in the media, for, as we identify almost instantaneously with what appears to be the rejection of an exceedingly structured and merchandised society, we feel free, almost obliged to fill in the blanks. It is exactly what Jon Krakauer does in his monograph, *Into the Wild*, where he chooses to represent a blend of the fictitious Alexander Supertramp and of the real Christopher McCandless, who emerges from his narrative as some type of romantic and profound hero, wise beyond his age, and whose death is only due to a tragic mistake rather than to a series of serious miscalculations and misplaced convictions that simply led to progressive and fatal starvation. Krakauer goes the distance in trying to prove McCandless' innocence regarding the vandalized cabins that summer, arguing that "it's difficult to imagine him destroying the buildings without boasting of the deed in his diary," (134-135) omitting the fact that the aforementioned "diary" is mostly composed of single word entries and does not enlighten us much regarding the activities of McCandless, especially towards the beginning of his stay, when he was apparently still quite mobile. Day 26 states "Climb Mountain!" and day 28, "Vicinity bus moose:" both of these entries imply that McCandless explored the area around the bus, making perfectly plausible that he would have happened to find the cabins that were ransacked. There is simply not enough room in McCandless' so-called "diary," written on the end papers of a book on native Alaskan edible plants, to boast about much: day 11 for instance only states "Disaster," and day 14, "Misery;" following Krakauer's logic, McCandless could have come upon the neighboring cabins on either of these two days and refer to their presence by either "disaster" or "misery," since his declared intent was to be truly alone in the wild, a feat difficult to achieve next

to three winterized cabins full of supplies: the mere proximity of these human constructions would have ruined what he believed to be his experience of total loneliness, and he would have acted accordingly by attempting to destroy them.

Krakauer does show some critical perspective vis-à-vis his hero, however, he tempers it immediately, as shown by the following passage, which relates McCandless' killing of a moose:

Then, on June 9, he bagged the biggest prize of all: "MOOSE!" he recorded in the journal. Overjoyed, the proud hunter took a photograph of himself kneeling over his trophy, rifle thrust triumphantly overhead, his features distorted in a rictus of ecstasy and amazement, like some unemployed genitor who'd gone to Reno and won a million-dollar jackpot.

Although McCandless was enough of a realist to know that hunting game was an unavoidable component of living of the land, he had always been ambivalent about killing animals. This ambivalence turned to remorse soon after he shot the moose. (114)

The manner in which Krakauer presents this self-portrait suggests that it is a fairly exceptional occasion, however, it is preceded by several others that show McCandless smiling broadly next to a dead animal, which makes his alleged "ambivalence about killing animals" quite difficult to support. By the carcasses he exhibits in two of these portraits, we can deduce that they precede his killing of the moose, for they show porcupines and according to his log, McCandless never hunted porcupines after his killing of the moose. One of these self-portraits shows him holding the head of a dead porcupine with one hand and raising his thumb, while the other shows him posing between two dead porcupines on racks, his hands raised in the attitude of a magician having concluded a good trick. McCandless' expressions in these two pictures are much more caricature-like than on the self-portrait to which Krakauer refers and do not seem to indicate any type of ambivalence about killing animals, quite to the contrary: they correspond perfectly to the cliché pose of proud safari hunters, and McCandless flaunts on these a "rictus of ecstasy" much wilder than the one he shows in the moose pictures. As to the "remorse" surrounding the killing of the moose, it is mainly due to McCandless' inability to preserve the meat which fell prey to flies and maggots within a few days. Krakauer treats this episode as a momentary set-back, soon overcome by the powerful and deep consciousness of McCandless who recovers his "contentment."

(115) What he fails to mention, however, is that the moose debacle is followed by seven empty entries – the first to appear on the log – which seems to indicate that McCandless was already losing enthusiasm in his great Alaskan adventure and perhaps also skipping meals. The following entries do not indicate any game of any sort, and seventeen days after having shot and wasted the moose, McCandless sets out to return to civilization, with the failed result that we know. A close-reading of his log tends to indicate that the moose disaster is not just a simple setback, but a decisive sobering blow of reality, which leads to his attempted escape about two weeks later. It appears that McCandless was much less in control of the phenomena that surrounded him than Krakauer would have us believe in order to portray a brave and resolute young man rather than a grown-up child who just got lost in the woods.

Krakauer's treatment of the story betrays a deep identification with his subject, as he turns a marginal, quite incoherent young man into a seeker of almost transcendental proportions, and does his very best to piece together the portrait of a pure soul rebelling against the rigid structures of society. The truth of the matter is that the meanderings of McCandless prior to his expedition to Alaska, as well as his childhood and youth, can only fill about two thirds of *Into the Wild*, the remaining pages being devoted to retrace other famous disappearances in the wilderness prior to that of McCandless, including, and naturally presented last, a risky adventure of the author himself when he was about the same age as his subject. By the end of *Into the Wild*, McCandless' story has become a reason to tell a personal adventure, which, all truth be told, exhibits a superior narrative authority when compared to that of McCandless himself. Krakauer does acknowledge in his preface a certain degree of identification with McCandless; however, there is a far cry between admitting not to be an "impartial biographer" (3) and inserting a detailed, totally unrelated personal adventure into the account of someone else's life. The elliptic, very suggestive data at our disposal concerning McCandless Alaskan adventure is naturally propitious to subjective interpretation and easy to appropriate; the narrative thus becomes the expression of the receiver's concerns along the purest lines of reader's response theory, where the true message of the text depends exclusively upon the recipient and appears by itself deprived of any definite intentionality. The mere textual economy of *Into the Wild*, which dedicates more than a third of its narrative to matters other than McCandless' misadventure, seems to illustrate the vacuity of the subject itself, as if the life and times of Christopher McCandless were simply not enough to fill an entire book and the author felt obliged to supplement the

story with external material, including the detailed account of a personal adventure. More than ever, the original “text” – in this case McCandless’ story and the little evidence he left behind – has become the property of the recipient, Krakauer, who restitutes it along his own concerns and priorities, and transforms McCandless into a true, albeit fictional modern hero, in search of a deeper, transcendental truth and whose untimely death is supposed to convey some profound meaning.

Curiously enough, no one perceived the sharp irony when the account of a supposed rejection of our capitalistic lifestyle became an international best-seller, therefore fully contributing to both capitalism and our lifestyle: Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* stands as a perfect illustration of how readily and effortlessly the society of spectacle is able to recycle its apparent denial into a mere product of consumption.

In 2007, Sean Penn pursued the journey into the wild paradox Krakauer had begun a decade earlier by writing, co-producing and directing the film *Into the Wild*, whose title naturally benefited from the momentum gathered by the eponymous bestseller and which takes the fictionalization of Christopher McCandless to an entire new level, as the character of the lonely, introverted but deep and decided truth seeker created by Krakauer acquires quasi-metaphysical proportions, becoming a Christ-like figure whose profound discourse has the power to inspire the lives of all those who come in contact with him. Logically, many crucial facts from the true story are altered or displaced in order to turn them into functional narrative paradigms, when not simply eliminated – as are McCandless’ triumphant self-portraits next to dead animals. Hence, McCandless’ “diary” becomes the intentional creation of a budding writer, as the protagonist is shown purposely writing in a notebook rather than jotting notes on the back papers of a book on edible plants, which definitely would not have conveyed the same impact. Similarly, McCandless’ goodbye note becomes the last effort of a dying man about to breath his last breath, a total distortion of the truth, amply documented by two self-portraits which show McCandless waving at the camera while holding his final note. McCandless obviously did not write his last words right before dying since he had the time to take not one but two self-portraits, as if he had wanted to make certain that his final picture would reach posterity – yet another irony, since these self-portraits are barely mentioned in Krakauer’s book and disappear entirely from Penn’s movie, as if McCandless’ idea of his own spectacularization did not quite fit that of his biographers. Rather, we are treated in the film to two different shots of Emile Hirsh in a crucifixion position, a much more suitable attitude for the McCandless Penn is attempting to create, for real prophets do not take “selfies.”

As it could be expected, McCandless' death in the film is presented as the result of a minimal error, along the lines of Krakauer's theory, resulting of the confusion between two very similar plants, wild potato and wild sweet pee – incidentally both quite harmless – turning the protagonist into a true tragic hero, victim of his own fatal but inevitable mistake, which is better than presenting a starving and disoriented young man who ingested vast quantities of toxic mushrooms on an empty stomach.

Besides re-administering reality, the script of *Into the Wild* also creates fictitious encounters and situations, demonstrating yet again that the true events surrounding the life and death of Christopher McCandless are not enough by themselves to establish sufficient narrative authority and must be complemented by imaginary anecdotes, just as Krakauer's account had to be complemented with other fearless feats, including his own.

Whether Emile Hirsh, who plays McCandless in the film, is decidedly more handsome than his model, or whether the scenes in the Alaskan wilderness were shot 50 miles South of where the actual "magic bus" is located are not exactly surprising observations: as pointed out by Debord, the society of spectacle implies a falsification of reality, which is transformed through the spectacle in order to comply with capitalistic imperatives – that Hollywood transforms the truth to sell it better is hardly a new discovery. However, the McCandless phenomenon shows how the physical mechanisms of spectacle can properly eliminate the original model, henceforth turning the falsified copy into the only available truth – literally substituting reality with a product. During the making of his documentary, Ron Lamothe attempted to interview several inhabitants from Carthage, the little town in South Dakota where McCandless spent a few weeks over a couple of stays before heading to Alaska, and discovered that they were not legally allowed to speak to him for they had sold the exclusive rights to their life stories to the film production company: the making of the film *Into the Wild* implied therefore not only the actual purchasing of witnesses but their silencing as well. According to Lamothe, these rights are owned by the production company "in perpetuity," which implies that the only true witnesses to McCandless' story have been efficiently and forever eliminated, allowing for the merchandised construction to replace reality.

More than ever, and following Debord's observations, the spectacle not only separates us from reality, it also eliminates any possibility of the real by substituting it. It is significant that the inhabitants of Carthage did not obtain any direct financial retribution for signing away the rights to their life story; their main motivation was to put Carthage, South Dakota, "on the map," that is to situate it within the society of spectacle – whether their own

reality, now owned by the production company, would disappear behind Hollywood's construction does not seem to have been much of a concern when compared to their eagerness to become part of the performance. It did not work and Carthage remains a very quiet town, for McCandless' fans tend to go directly to Healy, Alaska, in order to follow in the footsteps of their idol. However, the inhabitants of Carthage are still deprived from the right of telling the story of their lives.

Between Krakauer's creative portrait and Penn's spectacular biography, the story of Christopher McCandless has become a merchandised fictionalization which directly benefits from its appearance of reality, just like the captions "based on a true story" or "inspired by true events" are present in so many highly imaginative narrations in order to allow for a wider market: it appears that an imaginary parallel dimension sells better when it pretends not to be imaginary, for it demands much less suspension of disbelief and therefore facilitates the identification of the receptor with the narrative universe. The abuse of this marketing device, supported by the formidable machinery of the society of spectacle, contributes to increasingly blur the line between reality and the imaginary, and thus, the personal tragedy of an anti-social grown-up child victim of his own arrogant ignorance has been replaced by the romanticized account of a young visionary involved in a tragic quest – it is much more profitable that way.

McCandless Inc.

"We're hard up for heroes if that's what it takes – some guy who starved to death in a bus."

There exists an entire network devoted to Christopher McCandless, that includes dedicated websites, forums and Facebook pages with thousands of followers worldwide. McCandless' parents have created the Christopher McCandless Memorial Foundation, a charity organization devoted to "helping mothers and children in need," the name of which, "Chris's Purpose," is perfectly at one with the Christ figure Penn constructed in his film, as well as its language. It speaks of the "connective power of Chris's tireless pursuit – experiencing the most remote corners of God's creation" and how he "chose to take the road less travelled altering the lives of those who he came into contact with." The section dedicated to the foundation in [christophermccandless.info](http://christophermccandless.info), arguably the most important website dedicated to Christopher McCandless, clearly drives the point home, stating that "The Chris's Purpose could just as easily be called God's Purpose." The same website introduces Back to

the Wild, the book of photographs by Christopher McCandless published in 2011, with a paragraph written by McCandless' parents and imbued with the same type of religious motifs, suggesting that Chris McCandless, rather than dying, transcended the physical world:

Eighteen years ago our son, Christopher Johnson McCandless, left this world in a remote wilderness location in Alaska in the shadow of Denali. His farewell message gave thanks to the Lord for his happy life and asked for God's blessing to reach each of us. [...] Back to the Wild tells this story through Chris' original photographs and writings until his journey came to an end in Alaska. As it turned out, however, it was only the physical aspect of his journey that ended. Although we could not have imagined it during the grief-stricken weeks and months that followed Chris' death, in the ensuing years his story has reached beyond life and past death to touch millions of readers. (<http://www.christophermccandless.info/backtothewild.html>)

It is as if, according to his parents, McCandless' senseless death had been a necessary rite of passage in order to fulfill a greater purpose: their son "left this world" but "it was only the physical aspect of his journey that ended." We are to deduce that the journey McCandless was pursuing could only have been of a metaphysical nature, and from there to beatification, there is only a very short step.

Besides catering to the sanctification of McCandless' meanderings by turning them into a spiritual quest, [christophermccandless.info](http://christophermccandless.info) also provides information about how to get to the bus where McCandless slowly agonized, as well as some elementary advice for those who decide to undertake the pilgrimage, further legitimizing such endeavor: not only are we informed about the exceptional life and legacy of Christopher McCandless, we are as well invited to meditate upon it on site, an invitation reiterated by Carine McCandless, Christopher's sister, who has made the trip to the bus twice, leaving a notebook each time for visitors to write their thoughts, in which she herself wrote her hopes for "her brother's philosophy of simplicity and honesty to one day be more spread."

Among all parties involved, Carine McCandless has indeed been among the most active in maintaining her brother's ever elusive legacy. On her webpage, her name appears written across the bus where her brother's body was found, next to the bus number, 142, and in the same font and color, as to better merge with her brother's story, which, over the years, has all but become her own – her public Facebook page has always included the words "into the wild" in its very title next to her name, as well as a picture

of the Fairbanks 142 bus. She is the author of *The Wild Truth*, a memoir published in 2014, in which she explains that Christopher McCandless' decision to run into the wild is chiefly to blame upon their dysfunctional familial environment as young children. As she emphatically declares in the PBS documentary, *Return to the Wild*, she considers herself a "survivor," an interesting choice words since "surviving" could be considered as the main theme of her brother's story. By virtue of the mystique that has been created around Chris McCandless' death, his sister has become some type of self-declared authority on the subject of life and living – yet another paradox – and gives lectures bearing powerful titles such as "Your DNA Does Not Define You." Knowingly or unknowingly, Carine McCandless has reached and entertains some type of notoriety due exclusively to the premature death of her brother and has greatly contributed to cement his fame as some type of spiritual guide, who has taught her a great deal and whose words and legacy are to be preserved and promoted. Naturally, the picture of the bus Fairbanks 142 appears on the cover of her memoir as well as a visual aid during her presentations: it has indeed become a "magic bus," for it has carried the undefined spirit of Christopher McCandless along with Krakauer, Penn, his parents and his sister for over two decades through the society of spectacle.

"Inspiration" is a word often associated to McCandless and his misadventure, as well as "soul," "spirit," "courage" and "freedom." As to what exactly is the inspiration one can find in the real story of McCandless, that remains to be determined. Alexander Supertramp was "a free spirit," in the sense that he abandoned his family and never seemed to care deeply about any other human being; however, he did depend on cars and roads to travel; he rejected civilization, nonetheless, he was reading translated Russian novels in paperback, that is consuming on a daily bases pure products of our modern lifestyle; he was set on living off the land and communing with nature, but not without a .22 and 400 rounds of ammunition procured in Fairbanks.

The PBS documentary, *Return to the Wild*, which shows Carine McCandless and her half-sister returning to the bus where Christopher's body was found does not enlighten us regarding McCandless' alleged legacy. In between breathtaking views of the Alaskan wilderness and highly moving shots of her and her half-sister hugging and crying elegantly in front of the bus Fairbanks 142, Carine McCandless speaks abundantly of the quasi-mystical quest of her brother and of the incalculable influence his "philosophy" had upon her life, however, we are never informed upon the particulars of either. We might as well be confused when she affirms that her brother taught her how to become a writer,

for we have no news of Christopher McCandless being a writer himself. All his journals, diaries and notes prior to his walk into the wild are only available through Krakauer, who administers them very sparingly in his biography, and although *Back to the Wild* is publicized as containing “pictures” and “writings” from Christopher McCandless, all it offers, besides the transcription of a few postcards, are captions written by his father and sprinkled with quotes from other authors. If we are to judge by the few released paragraphs of the adventures of Alexander Supertramp written by himself in the third person as they appear in *Into the Wild*, there is no doubt that Christopher McCandless had quite a way to go before considering himself a writer; the meager output from his Alaskan adventure may even suggest that he was already losing interest. As to Carine McCandless being a writer herself, opinions might be divided, for a simple memoir might not be enough to claim literary status, and naturally, the question remains whereas *The Wild Truth* would even have been published at all if her brother’s misadventure had not been previously successfully fictionalized, both in writing and on the screen.

That his family would be so hard at work to preserve the memory of Christopher McCandless is not the least ironic aspect of the entire affair: if nothing else, the story of Chris McCandless is that of a rebellion against a familiar environment and it is now precisely those against whom he rebelled in the first place who are the most interested in remembering his rebellion.

This might simply be because McCandless’ rebellion was never much more than just the spectacle of a rebellion.

### The Business of McCandless

Krakauer’s book has been adopted in many high-schools as required reading and the Internet is flooded with papers and essays from students and admirers, most of which have in common a deep emotional involvement with the subject and a lack of substance in their development, for, so far, no one has been able to clearly explain the significance of Christopher McCandless’ legacy. Nonetheless, this has not prevented hundreds of fans from undertaking the perilous trek to the bus over the years, many of them becoming stranded along the way, often while attempting to cross the Teklanika, the very same river that stranded Christopher McCandless. Although the exact number of casualties directly related to the McCandless phenomenon remains unknown, the case of Claire Ackerman, a 29-year-old Swiss woman who drowned in the Teklanika on her way to the bus with her boyfriend in 2010, is most likely not an isolated incident: in 2013 alone, a dozen people were reported “lost, hurt or stranded by the rising

river.” On the notebooks left in the bus by Carine McCandless, one can read fairly disturbing messages, such as that of a woman who wrote that she had been “a bitch” to her boyfriend right before he fell into the Teklanika and signed off “asking for good luck because it was raining.”

Rather than courage, or “guts,” a word commonly used by his supporters, including Sean Penn, to characterize their hero, Christopher McCandless’ misadventure demonstrated ignorant recklessness, for which he paid the ultimate price, and his irresponsibility and indecisive behavior seem to be his only concrete legacy: the simple question of why starving to death in the back of a derelict bus should be a lesson to us all and an example to follow is still to be answered. There naturally cannot be any McCandless “philosophy” in the strict sense of the word, for the concept of a civilized man returning to nature is an utter epistemological fallacy, about as absurd as the idea of traveling back in time, however entertaining it might be: our very conscience is the product of our time and culture and we do not shed what we are by simply walking into the wild grossly unprepared. If there is an epistemological demonstration in the McCandless story, it only points to the impossibility of blindly denying progress and civilization, which are parts of our very ontological integrity: as McCandless walked into the wild, he also walked into nothingness.

If Christopher McCandless’ so called “philosophy” remains as vague as can be, what appears fairly clear, however, is the direct responsibility of his official promoters, Krakauer, Penn and the McCandless family, whose construction of a fictitious character of metaphysical proportions has lured many into believing they could discover the true meaning of life by putting it at risk undertaking a superfluously dangerous hike. Of course, the trek is reserved to the true fans: the McCandless family, already enlightened, have used helicopters to reach the bus.

The spectacularization and subsequent merchandizing of Christopher McCandless have benefited from factors totally external to its main promoters, starting with the very name of the hero: chances are the story would have flown quite lower had the name of its protagonist been Archibald Higginbotham rather than Christopher McCandless, whose semiotic implications within the Judeo-Christian code are difficult to ignore: not only is Saint Christopher the patron saint of all things related to travel and travelers in the Catholic tradition, but it also includes “Christ” as a prefix, which graphically conveys an undeniable onomastic authority – more so than Archibald. The last name, “McCandless,” establishes as well a subtle semiotic relationship between form and function, for the fictionalized McCandless rejects progress and civilization, pure products of the Enlightenment which could

be symbolized by the notion of “candle,” seeking to embrace the true light of nature by opposition to the false light of progress – that of the candle. That Chris McCandless would be oblivious to the interesting connotations of his name and preferred the pompous “Alexander Supertramp” is yet one more indication of his apparent lack of literary maturity.

The elliptical nature of McCandless’ log, which displays the same underdeveloped literary skills, has also greatly contributed to the construction of his legend. Most of the entries revolve almost solely upon the animals that were killed on that day, i.e., “39 – goose!; 40 – 2 squirrel [sic]; 41 – porcupine; 42 – porcupine ptarmigan,” and the only more detailed entries are those that describe the butchering and the loss of the moose in very direct terms. When added to the 25 entries left blank, this monotonous record seems to indicate that McCandless simply did not have much to say: his life was reduced to its most basic needs, the activity of the cortex and limbic system were severely inhibited and he was existing mostly at the reptilian level by merely attempting – and failing – to survive. Had his log been a real journal, Krakauer could not have appropriated the story so effortlessly, hence the legend of Christopher McCandless is, again paradoxically, a direct result of his inability to write little more than the names of the animals he poached. By picking and choosing among the only solid evidence at our disposal, that is the log and the proud safari hunter self-portraits McCandless left behind which, as a whole, reveal a rather unimaginative and disoriented mind, Krakauer chose to elaborate the much more attractive figure of a deep, courageous and determined young man, victim of a tragic error rather than of his own incoherence.

The rest is not history: it is spectacle.

The McCandless phenomenon is a tabloid fact blown out of proportions due to our eagerness to escape the dreary confines of our modern consumerist existence. We feel both angry and guilty to collaborate implicitly with an increasingly alienating reality with which we do not identify and we instinctively welcome any possibility of its rejection, turning us, paradoxically, into the ideal consumers for one particular brand of narrative. Instead of signifying a rejection of society, the McCandless story shows, on the contrary, how easily it is for the society of spectacle to sell us back our own rejection of its imperative, turning thus rejection itself into yet another spectacle: rather than walking into the wild, we can only fall into the wild paradox.

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# Sylvanas Windrunner of the *World of Warcraft*, Hillary Clinton, and the Rhetoric of Female Leadership

By Carol Poster

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**Abstract:** In 2016, Hillary Clinton was nominated as the first female presidential candidate of a major party in a United States election and Sylvanas Windrunner was appointed as the first female Warchief of the Horde in the fictional land of Azeroth in which the popular MMORPG World of Warcraft is set. This article is a rhetorical analysis of how authority and ethos were constructed by, respectively, Lady Sylvanas and Garrosh Hellscream in the World of Warcraft and Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 United States election. As well as investigating issues of race and gender, it explores how these four figures deploy what Richard Weaver has termed “charismatic” and “ultimate” terms to establish the legitimacy of their actions and positions.

**Keywords:** World of Warcraft, MMO, rhetoric, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Richard Weaver

**Resumen:** En 2016, Hillary Clinton fue nominada como la primera candidata presidencial de un partido principal de los Estados Unidos y Sylvanas Windrunner fue nombrada como la primera jefa de guerra de la Horde en la tierra ficticia de Azeroth que es el escenario del popular juego MMORPG, World of Warcraft. Este artículo es un análisis retórico de cómo la autoridad y el ethos fueron construidos por, respectivamente, Lady Sylvanas y Garrosh Hellscream en World of Warcraft y Hillary Clinton y Donald Trump en la elección de 2016 en Estados Unidos. Investiga los problemas de raza y género y también explora cómo estas cuatro figuras despliegan lo que Richard Weaver llama “carismático” y “último” para establecer la legitimidad de sus acciones y posiciones.

**Palabras clave:** World of Warcraft, MMO, retórica, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Richard Weaver

**摘要：**2016年，希拉里·克林顿被选为美国选举中主要党派（民主党）的首位女性总统候选人，与此同时，在艾泽拉斯土地上，即大型多人在线角色扮演游戏《魔兽世界》的场景设置地，希尔瓦娜斯风行者被任命为部落首位女性酋长。本文用修辞的方式分析了两对人物分别如何建构权威和道德思想，这两对人物是：魔兽世界中的希尔瓦娜斯女士和加尔鲁什·地狱咆哮，以及2016年美国选举中的希拉里·克林顿和唐纳德·特朗普。本文在调查种族和性别问题的同时，还探索了这四人如何运用被理查德·威弗（Richard Weaver）术语化的“领袖魅力”和“重要性”，建立其行为和地位的正当性。

**关键词：**魔兽世界，大型多人在线，修辞，唐纳德·特朗普，希拉里·克林顿，理查德·威弗

Two important milestones in the history of female leadership occurred in 2016, the nomination of Hillary Clinton as the first female major-party presidential candidate in the United States and the appointment of Lady Sylvanas Windrunner to the position of Warchief of the Horde in Azeroth, the fictional land which is the setting for the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (WoW). Both women had long histories of being in positions of power in their respective universes and equally long histories of being demonized, almost functioning as what rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver has called “terms of repulsion” (1953, 223). This article focuses on rhetorical analysis of how the interactions between these two women and various male leaders, especially Garrosh Hellscream (WoW) and Donald Trump (U.S.), exemplify gendered and racialized models of authority and of rhetorical devices used for political legitimation. Such comparisons illuminate the political responses to female leadership in Azeroth and the United States, exemplified by the relationship between the Trump movement and Gamergate, including attitudes, demographics, and the omnipresence of Breitbart as an enabling mouthpiece (see Brehm 2013 for sexism in WoW; Todd 2015 on Gamergate; and Lees 2016 on the parallels between the rise of Trump and Gamergate). The theoretical approach of the article is grounded in the historical tradition of rhetoric as contextualized analysis of persuasive speech, and thus focuses on analyzing speech (and occasionally gesture) as performed by United States politicians and NPCs (non-player characters) in the World of Warcraft.

### Leadership in World of Warcraft

The land of Azeroth, the imaginary planet on which World of Warcraft is set, is divided between two major factions, the Alliance and the Horde (see Moberly 2010 for an analysis of WoW

factions as parallel to the political structures of late capitalism). The Alliance are the traditional “good guys”, including humans, elves, gnomes, and dwarves. This faction tends to have visually appealing races whose lore emphasizes commitment to some form of established moral and social order. The Alliance is led by a hereditary monarch who often exemplifies the “good king/wise prince” trope. The Horde, the opposing faction to which Sylvanas belongs, is in many ways more interesting, consisting of ill-assorted outcast and dispossessed races allied mainly for reasons of convenience. These races include Orcs (traditional villains in the worlds of fantasy and gaming, with a culture valuing hypermasculinity and martial prowess), Trolls (voodoo and Caribbean themed), Undead, Taurens (human-cattle hybrids whose culture is based on Native Americans), Goblins (amoral, acquisitive merchants), and Blood Elves (physically attractive humanoids with an affinity for, and history of corruption by, magic). The Horde is led by a Warchief, appointed by a predecessor and confirmed by acclamation.

As the historical core of the Horde in WoW lore had been a group of orcish clans that unified under a single leader, the position of Warchief was initially held by orcs, all male. Within the actual period of the playable game world, Horde players have served under four successive warchiefs, the orcs Thrall and Garrosh Hellscream, the troll Vol’jin, and the undead Lady Sylvanas Windrunner. Vol’jin was the first warchief who was not an orc. He had been the leader of a troll rebellion against Garrosh Hellscream, a previous orc leader whose own violent and arrogant temperament made him vulnerable to possession by various evil influences. When Vol’jin was dying from a wound received in a battle at the Broken Isles, he proclaimed that he had seen in a vision that Sylvanas Windrunner, the Queen of the Forsaken, a high elf transformed into an undead “banshee” by the evil Arthas, should be the next Warchief of the Horde. Thus as of the August 2016 release of the World of Warcraft Legion expansion, shortly after Hillary Clinton’s nomination as the first female presidential candidate of a major United States political party, Sylvanas Windrunner became the Warchief of the Horde, the first woman and the first character of the undead race to hold that position. Unlike Clinton, a middle-class white woman, Sylvanas bears a double burden of racial and gender marginalization, and her rhetorical construction is located in this intersectionality, a phenomenon defined by Collins as grounded in the “and” linking race and gender (2015). Like Africana and Latina women, she is sexually fetishized, often portrayed on fan sites as a dominatrix, a form of double marginalization that trivializes her as a leader by reshaping her as the object of a predatory male sexual gaze. On

the one hand, the sexualization of Lady Sylvanas and her rhetorical transformation from dominant leader to dominatrix on fan sites can be seen as participating in a generic popular culture trope of the female vampire as sexual predator, but it also can reflect a more general sexualization of minority or subaltern females as a form of “racialized sexuality”, a phenomenon discussed by JanMohamed (1992) and Mendible (2007) and summarized as a gaming trope by Anita Sarkeesian (2017). This sexualization functions as a way of undermining her identity as a powerful leader. The marginalization is reflected in the player experience, in which, during the ordinary course of game play, Sylvanas actually appears quite rarely, and players’ everyday interactions with the leadership in the fight against the demonic Burning Legion are directed by Archmage Khadgar and Illidan Stormrage, who are portrayed visually in game as white men in early middle age. Thus we can see a familiar mechanism in play in which the feminization of Horde leadership brings about a marginalization of the significance of the leader of the Horde. Unlike in earlier expansions, in which players routinely and frequently interacted with Thrall and Garrosh, who were portrayed as strongly charismatic male leaders, veneration of the considerably less prominent “dark lady” is limited to the initial transfer of leadership and a very small number of quest lines, mainly connected with player versus player combat or rewards.

In light of recent rhetorical shifts in political discourse, it is pertinent to investigate the particular parallels between the rhetorical construction of these two female leaders by, on the one hand, Garrosh Hellscream, the xenophobic, arrogant, and impulsively violent Horde leader and Donald Trump, President of the United States, who demonstrates similar aggressive and impulsive rhetorical habits. The similarities in the verbal and physical conflicts between these two men and Sylvanas Windrunner and Hillary Clinton suggests that much of the dynamics of the resistance to and suspicion of Sylvanas in World of Warcraft and the negative perceptions of Hillary Clinton stem from similar misogynistic frameworks.

### Ultimate, Uncontested, and Charismatic Terms

The academic discipline of rhetoric provides an historical framework for understanding the symbolic and persuasive character of leadership, legitimacy, and authority. Rhetorical theory originated in ancient Greece as a discipline focused on analysis of persuasion with rhetoricians especially concerned about the rise of populism and demagoguery in the Athenian democracy and how certain persuasive techniques could be misleading or unethical. While often focused on informal logic and argumentative validity, rhetoricians since the time of Aristotle

have accepted that in real-world persuasion, emotions, prior beliefs, tribalism, and prejudice also contribute to how audiences evaluate and understand statements and positions. A twentieth-century American rhetorician, Richard Weaver, provides key insights into the rhetorical understanding of belief systems and the ensuing extra-rational ways in which people think about leadership. Weaver argues that in each particular culture there are “charismatic” terms, to which the culture responds viscerally rather than analytically. These can function as ultimate “god” or “devil” terms, embodying beliefs and inclinations of a society so fundamental that they are “uncontested” (1953, 211-232). Writing in the 1950s, he saw “progress” as among one of the uncontested positive or “god” terms and “un-American” as one of the uncontested devil terms. Trump’s “America first” doctrine and the unbridled techno-optimism expressed by many Silicon Valley thought leaders are the twenty-first century equivalents of these positions.

Weaver grounds the existence of devil terms in “the tribal need for a scapegoat ... to take care of those expressions of scorn and hatred to which peoples must give vent” (1953, 222) and argues that:

When another political state is not available to receive the discharge of such emotions, then a class will be chosen, or a race, or a type, or a political faction (1953, 222).

In the World of Warcraft, the undead Scourge, to which Sylvanas and the Forsaken were subjugated before they recovered their free will, held that scapegoat position, and we see an echo of that attitude remaining in attitudes of the other races towards the Forsaken.

When two cultures have different uncontested terms, the problem is that they cannot rationally debate with each other because uncontested terms are not by nature rational conclusions arrived at through a chain of logic but rather the fundamental starting points from which arguments are developed. Weaver describes such “charismatic terms” as “terms of considerable potency whose referents it is virtually impossible to discover” (1953, 227). In the case of Sylvanas and Garrosh, many of their differences ensue from holding different terms as uncontested. For Garrosh, two uncontested god terms are “strength” and “honor”, the latter conceived in the narrow sense of saving face and not backing down in cases of conflict or adversity. For Sylvanas, on the other hand, the uncontested positive term is “survival”, both individual and racial.

Interestingly, this use of “survival” as an uncontested “god” term has a literary history which is connected to themes of death and undeath as can be seen in Margaret Atwood’s seminal 1972 critical study of Canadian literature, *Survival*, in which Atwood identifies survival as the main theme of Canadian literature and the victim as the main protagonist. Two figures Atwood considers emblematic of this Canadian literary tradition of survival are female and like Sylvanas (a ranger) connected with wilderness, namely the sisters Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, who respond to marginalization and hardship with stoicism and determination. Sylvanas shares with these sisters not just gender, victimhood, and survival but also what is, according to Atwood, another major preoccupation of Canadian literature, namely death:

If the central European experience is sex and the central mystery ‘what goes on in the bedroom,’ and the central American experience is killing and the central mystery is ‘what goes on in the forest’ (or in the slum streets), surely the central Canadian experience is death and the central mystery is ‘what goes on in the coffin’ (1972, 222).

Within Atwood’s framework, Garrosh Hellscream would be prototypically American in his preoccupation with military conquest and triumphs in combat, a preoccupation paralleled in Trump’s concern with “winning”. Garrosh’s uncontested terms of “strength” and “honor” are deeply personal, grounded in his own need for saving face and not appearing weak and then generalized or extrapolated to the groups to which he belongs, orcs as a race and the Horde as a faction. Sylvanas’ sense of survival also has a personal sense, as she is a rape and torture survivor concerned with racial survival.

Examining the pairing of Trump and Clinton, we find an opposition similar to that between Sylvanas and Garrosh. Trump’s uncontested term seems to be “winning.” This attitude is expressed in his iconic statement “We gonna [sic] win so much you may even get tired of winning” (Johnson and DelReal 2016). There appears to be little consideration of whether the fights themselves are worth winning or the possibility of a Pyrrhic victory. Clinton’s “god term” is “human rights”, as was most powerfully exhibited in her 1995 Beijing speech in which she eloquently emphasized “human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights” (Clinton 1995). In some ways, Clinton’s assumption of human rights as a self-evident ultimate good echoes the opening of the United States’ Declaration of Independence:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men [sic] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness....

Just as Sylvanas' uncontested terms focus on the right to racial survival, so Clinton's (as those found in the Declaration of Independence) are grounded in the notion of the inalienable right of all sentient beings to certain conditions of flourishing. Both women's positions emphasize the rights of victims and oppressed minorities while the men's position emphasize the authority of the victors, including, in many ways, their freedom to oppress with impunity (including, in the case of Trump, the freedom to "grab 'em by the pussy"). Nonetheless, despite these ideological differences, what Weaver's analysis shows is that the actions and beliefs of these four very different characters, two real and two imaginary, two men and two women, are nonetheless grounded in the same mechanisms of uncontested god and devil terms setting the grounds of debate and differences in uncontested terms precluding rational debate or even effective communication between opposing viewpoints.

Forsaken Leader: The Narrative of Sylvanas Windrunner

The Lady Sylvanas Windrunner has a central position in WoW lore, beginning life as the High Elf Ranger-General, valiantly leading the defense of Silvermoon city from the evil undead Scourge, being captured, enslaved, and turned into an undead "banshee" by Arthas, the evil leader of the Scourge, and eventually breaking free of Arthas' influence to become the leader of the Forsaken, a group of outcast undead hated by the Scourge for their rebellion against Arthas and by everyone else for being undead. In breaking free of the Scourge, Sylvanas exhorts her fellow freed undead:

"The Lich King falters. Your will is your own. Are you to be outcasts now in your own land? Or do we embrace the cruel cards fate has dealt us and retake our place in this world?"

This places Lady Sylvanas within a postcolonial rhetorical situation with respect to her construction of authority. As a female rape survivor and leader of a formerly subjugated race once widely despised and feared, she faces the issue of how to move herself and her community from victimhood to independence. Several aspects of Sylvanas' story are rhetorically significant. First, she exemplifies an immediately recognizable personification of the "rape and revenge" trope, with her hatred of the Scourge and

commitment to the Forsaken being grounded in response to personal trauma. She also participates in a second common trope concerning female characters, of the “bad-ass babe in chain mail lingerie” (as discussed in Sarkeesian 2016), portrayed with prominent breasts and exposed midriff, a model that was updated with her promotion to Warchief by covering her midriff, a choice that provoked considerable debate on the World of Warcraft forums (“Why did they censored [sic] Sylvanas?”, 2016). One interesting feature of her character, unusual among the Horde leadership, is that she is usually depicted as an archer who attacks from a distance using bow and arrow, skilled in tracking, misdirection, and complex strategies and aided by alchemists skilled in biological and chemical warfare, techniques themselves distrusted by her peers. There are strong parallels between Sylvanas, cool, calculating, and pragmatic, and Hillary Clinton, the strategically cautious policy wonk, opposed to similarly parallel characters of Garrosh Hellscream, a melee fighter prone to emotional outbursts and favoring immediate violent action and Trump, proponent of simplistic, viscerally satisfying solutions and prone to angry tweeting.

Most interestingly, though, if the Horde is composed of outcasts, the Forsaken are outcasts among outcasts, constantly threatened with genocide, and due to their inability to reproduce, existing on the verge of extinction. Fiercely loyal to the Forsaken under her protection, Sylvanas plots, strategizes, fights, and sabotages, using any means necessary to ensure racial survival. Her implacability and ruthlessness are expressed in her speech at the annual Burning of the Wickerman celebration of the liberation of the Forsaken from the Scourge:

In life, we suffered unspeakable tragedies. ... We [now] paint our faces with the ash, to send a message to new enemies. ... We are not monsters! We are not the mindless wretches of a ghoulish army! NO! We are a force even more terrifying! ... We are the instruments of an unyielding ire!  
**WE ARE THE FORSAKEN!**

In this statement, Sylvanas, originally an aristocratic ranger of the arrogant and privileged high elves, assumes a new subject position as a leader of the marginalized and downtrodden, standing up against racial discrimination and prejudice. This new role, however, does not represent a complete ideological break with her earlier life. As Ranger General of Silvermoon when alive, Sylvanas decried the insularity and racism of the elves and appointed a human, Nathanos Marris, as the first non-elven member of the Farstriders (an elite elven fighting force) and eventually promoted him to Ranger Lord against the wishes of many of her elven compatriots. Similarly, Hillary Clinton, during

her campaign, had strong connections to the African-American community, voiced support for Black Lives Matter, and generally presented an inclusive and welcoming vision of the United States as a place of racial and gender diversity. In opposition to these inclusive models of leadership, Garrosh Hellscream in Patch 5.4 of World of Warcraft refers to “pitiful” allied races as inferior. His conflicts with allied races lead to a fracturing of the Horde and reformation of a racially pure “true Horde” he describes as “the Orcish Horde, the True Horde” which uses “anger, hatred, and fear” as tools of war; after Garrosh is deposed, the Horde returns to its prior racial diversity. This attitude towards “pitiful” inferior races has parallels to Trump’s descriptions of Mexican immigrants “bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists,” as well as his anti-Islamic policies.

One should note, though, that members of both Horde and Alliance have some legitimate reasons to be concerned about the undead. The Forsaken, as is the case with real world marginalized movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization or the Irish Republican Army, resorted to terrorism. In particular, they are experts in biochemical warfare. In the Battle of Angrathar the Wrathgate (in the Wrath of the Lich King expansion), Forsaken Grand Apothecary Putress unleashes a plague that kills not only the enemy Scourge but many of his living Horde and Alliance allies, proclaiming:

Did you think we had forgotten? Did you think, we had forgiven? Behold now the terrible vengeance of the Forsaken, death to the Scourge! and death to the living!

Professor Putricide, an undead in service of the Scourge, similarly proclaims “Good news, everyone! I think I’ve perfected a plague that will destroy all life on Azeroth!” Although both Putress and Putricide are both opposed to Sylvanas and the more moderate faction of the Forsaken who favor a degree of peaceable co-existence or pragmatic alliance with some of the other races of Azeroth, even among the Forsaken there is considerable resentment against the living, just as extremists within revolutionary movements in the real world may call for the deaths of the entire races or nations that oppress them. In their battle against the worgen (werewolves) in Gilneas during the 2010 Cataclysm expansion, for example, the Forsaken unleash a plague making the land uninhabitable by the living. Responding, perhaps, to the popularity of The Twilight Saga, one particular portion of the Cataclysm expansion creates an historical tradition of enmity between the “worgen” (werewolf) and undead races, with both using racially-tinged epithets to insult each other during combat, echoing issues in the real world where ethnic tensions between minority groups often serve as distractions from oppression by

dominant groups. This tension persisted in later expansions of WoW, and resurfaced in the Stormheim questlines of the 2016 Legion expansion.

Within the Horde, a coalition of various minorities, often outcasts from their own racial homelands and communities, Sylvanas, as leader of the most reviled of minorities, resorts to guerilla tactics, subterfuge, and even some forms of terrorism to ensure racial survival. While Clinton operates within the limits of the law as a skilled politician rather than an outlaw, what both women share in common is an approach based on rationality, strategic thinking, and willingness to compromise in pursuit of an ultimate goal that includes commitment to defending outcasts whose very survival appears threatened, unlike Garrosh and Trump who seem more focused on self-aggrandizement and avenging threats to their self-image and power.

Although Sylvanas with her long history as Ranger General of Silvermoon and Queen of the Forsaken and Hillary Clinton with her experience as Secretary of State and Senator both had strong and obvious qualifications for positions as, respectively, Warchief of the Horde and President of the United States, they both faced the problem that the virtues of “leaders” are what are traditionally viewed as “male” virtues (ambition, ruthlessness, focus, power, strength, etc.) rather than “feminine” characteristics. This causes women in leadership roles to face a “competence-likability tradeoff”, in which the more competent they appear, the less they are perceived as “likeable” and vice versa. The dissonance between traditional views of the feminine and of leadership also leads to a cognitive discomfort, rationalized by the perceiver projecting this interior conflict onto the object causing it and, rather than reflecting on the interior contradictions of gender bias, instead perceiving the female leader rather than the concept of female leadership as inherently untrustworthy.

### The Untrustworthiness of Women

One key feature in discussions of both the Lady Sylvanas Windrunner and Hillary Clinton is perceptions of trustworthiness. Despite Clinton’s having received high ratings for truthfulness by independent fact-checking organizations, her detractors, including Donald Trump, himself the target of innumerable lawsuits for unethical business practices, tended to cite as the strongest evidence of Clinton’s lack of qualification for the presidency untrustworthiness, referring to her as “crooked Hillary” (Nalder et al. 2016). Clinton’s political history displays a cautious and somewhat secretive *modus operandi*, ranging from use of a private e-mail server to reluctance to meet with the press or to make statements without extensive prior deliberation. This

behavior, however, responds to some three decades of being a constant target of attacks from right-wing media and politicians in response to her lack of conformity to traditional female roles. Sylvanas, the ruler of the beleaguered Forsaken, also tends to be guarded, secretive, and operate “in the shadows”, unwilling to trust due to her history of trauma. This contrast between the cool, ironic self-possessed persona of Sylvanas and the brutal directness and violence of Garrosh parallels the respective ethos of Clinton and Trump seen in the 2016 U.S. Presidential debates.

In the 2010 Cataclysm expansion of WoW, Sylvanas summons Garrosh to Silverpine to inform him of how female undead val’kyr can ensure the racial future of the Forsaken. When Garrosh arrives, Sylvanas enthusiastically announces her discovery, a solution to the problem to which she has dedicated her unlife, the survival and freedom of the Forsaken. The following dialogue ensues in a cut scene (short video embedded in the game):

Lady Sylvanas Windrunner: I have solved the plight of the Forsaken! As a race, we Forsaken are unable to procreate. With the aid of the val’kyr, we are now able to take the corpses of the fallen and create new Forsaken. ...

Garrosh Hellscream: What you have done here, Sylvanas ... it goes against the laws of nature. Disgusting is the only word I have to describe it.

Lady Sylvanas Windrunner: Warchief, without these new Forsaken my people would die out ... Our hold upon Gilneas and northern Lordaeron would crumble.

Garrosh Hellscream: Have you given any thought to what this means, Sylvanas? What difference is there between you and the Lich King now?

Lady Sylvanas Windrunner: Isn’t it obvious, Warchief? I serve the Horde.

Garrosh Hellscream: Watch your clever mouth, bitch. [threatens her with ax]

The first interesting feature of the dialogue is that Sylvanas is arguing about policy, making rationale arguments for (1) the val’kyrs as a solution to the problem of the racial survival of her people and (2) the strategic necessity of enhancing the numbers of the Forsaken in terms of its tactical utility to the Horde faction. Garrosh rejects her rational argument in emotional terms, responding with “disgust”, calling her a “bitch”, and threatening her with his ax, exemplifying the “scorn and hatred” that Weaver describes as lying

at the core of our reactions to “terms of repulsion” (1953, 223). Garrosh grounds his own terms of repulsion in his intuiting “laws of nature” rather than in rational arguments based on philosophical or empirical analysis just as Trump, asserting his superiority over news media and experts, claimed in a March 2017 interview with Time that “I’m a very instinctual person, but my instinct turns out to be right.” It is also interesting that this disgust is evoked over the issue of unconventional forms of reproduction which are castigated as “unnatural”; in this Garrosh’s reactions seem to mirror those of Trump and many conservative Republicans to members of the LBGTQ community, as seen in debates over gay marriage and transgender bathroom use.

The rhetorical environment of the conflict between Garrosh and Sylvanas is stylistically similar to that found in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaigns, with Clinton offering detailed policy suggestions and Trump and his supporters reacting with emotionally laden insults and calls for violence, as when Trump at a rally at North Carolina University in Wilmington suggested that if Clinton won the election, “... nothing you can do, folks, ... Although the Second Amendment people — maybe there is, I don’t know” (Corasaniti and Habermanaug, 2016). As the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the one enshrining the people’s right to bear arms and often mentioned by the pro-gun lobby, this appears a thinly veiled suggestion that his followers should assassinate her if she were to be elected. Secondly, just as Garrosh insults Sylvanas and tries to portray her as similar to the Lich King (someone Sylvanas has been stalwartly opposing her entire life and undeath), so Trump attempted to rhetorically assimilate Clinton to an entrenched Washington power elite or “swamp”, bankers, corporate interests and even ISIS. Thirdly, Garrosh’s menacing body language during the cut scene forms a tableau similar to the one in which Trump “lurked” behind Clinton during the second presidential debate, a phenomenon widely analyzed in the media coverage of the debate (see, e.g., Kaufman 2016). Finally, Garrosh’s use of the term “bitch” to denigrate Sylvanas stands in obvious parallel to Donald Trump’s reference to Clinton as “such a nasty woman” (Berenson 2016).

Other Horde leaders display a similar distrust of Sylvanas. Lor’themar Theron, who was Sylvanas’ second-in-command in the defense of Silvermoon when Sylvanas was still alive rather than undead, interacts with the undead Sylvanas at the beginning of the Galakras encounter in the Siege of Orgrimmar raid instance of the 2012 Mists of Pandaria expansion of WoW. Many of Lor’themar’s forces have fallen in the siege, and Sylvanas makes a practical offer to revive them as undead in the following dialogue:

Lady Sylvanas Windrunner: I can raise your dead, Regent-Lord. Your rangers can fight again.

Lor'themar Theron: Sylvanas! You will leave our corpses alone, or I will deal with you here and now.

Again, we see Sylvanas as the practical tactician and Lor'themar as reacting emotionally and out of racial and reproductive prejudice. Although he is delighted to have the aid of Sylvanas' troops, and was once her second-in-command in fighting the Scourge, he is horrified at the notion of his rangers being given a second chance at life (or more properly, perhaps, "unlife") if it means their becoming Forsaken and being revived in a way that he finds somehow repulsive or unnatural. One is reminded here of the people who might claim not to be racist or homophobic but who still would not live in a mixed-race neighborhood, be reluctant to vote for a leader of a different race, and be horrified if a member of their family wanted to marry a member of a different race or same gender.

In Legion, the August 2016 WoW expansion, Sylvanas finally becomes Warchief of the Horde. Rather than this being a moment of unambiguous celebration, vindicating Sylvanas and signaling an end to the prejudice against her and the Forsaken, Vol'jin, on his deathbed, appoints her as Warchief with considerable reluctance, saying:

I have never trusted you. Nor would I have ever imagined...  
in our darkest time... dat you... would be da one to save us.  
Da spirits have granted me clarity. A vision... dey whisper  
a name. Many will not unda'stand. But you must step out  
of da shadows... and lead. You must be... War...chief...

Rather than a ringing endorsement, this perpetuates the trope of the woman as untrustworthy and not fully deserving power. Instead of praising her for surviving the trauma of torture by Arthas, breaking free of his influence, helping other undead achieve freedom, fighting for the Horde, preserving her race, and using elements of guile and strategy to survive against overwhelming odds, Vol'jin simply forwards a message from the spirits in a way that suggests that he himself agrees to their commands with some reluctance, a position that parallels many of the endorsements of Clinton as the "lesser of two evils".

### Authority and Legitimacy

Both rhetorical authority and political legitimacy rely on what rhetoricians call "ethos" or the character of the speaker. Aristotle (Rhetoric, Book I) and subsequent rhetoricians divide ethos into two categories, intrinsic ethos created by word choice and self-presentation during a speech and extrinsic ethos, elements of character existing in the world outside the words of

the speech, such as a speaker's gender, age, family, prior acts, and prior reputation. Often creating intrinsic ethos is a matter of placing a favorable spin on elements of extrinsic ethos, such as Trump's transmutation of inexperience into the claim to be an "outsider" who would "drain the swamp." The other two types of argument within Aristotelian rhetorical theory, those from "pathos" or the emotions of the audience and those from "logos" or reasoning also come into play. In fact, the three types of rhetorical proof can be mapped onto Max Weber's seminal categorizations of the three types of legitimate rule (1958) in the sense that the different types of argument are often used in varying proportions to legitimate different types of authority. Weber characterizes the three main types of legitimate rule as:

**Traditional Authority:** Within this system, authority is grounded in antiquity, with historical tradition conferring legitimacy. This sort of authority is often hereditary, though other methods such as prophetic signs or appointment of a successor by a current leader in front of witnesses can also function to confer legitimacy. Although authority in such systems is personal in the sense of being centered on the person of the leader, in another way it is completely impersonal, as it is rarely dependent on individual characteristics or abilities. A hereditary monarch is legitimate due to having the right parents, not due to intelligence, charm, diligence, or any other particular qualification. The Azeroth of World of Warcraft mirrors many oral-traditional societies in relying heavily on traditional authority (Poster 2016). Rhetorically, this sort of authority is grounded in extrinsic ethos. The Warchief of the Horde, the High Chieftain of the Tauren, the Prince of the Blood Elves, and the other racial leaders within World of Warcraft fall into this category and often reference tradition and antiquity in discussing their positions. The exceptions to this pattern are the goblins, a race of merchants organized into trade cartels, and the Forsaken, who are so new as to be lacking in traditions.

**Charismatic Authority:** Unlike traditional authority, charismatic authority relies on the personal characteristics of an individual. While many traditional leaders (such as Queen Elizabeth I) or legal/rational leaders (such as Justin Trudeau or John Kennedy) can display personal charisma, that is not essential to their authority, as many traditional and legalistic/rational leaders such as U.S. President Calvin Coolidge, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and the Roman Emperor Claudius were notably uncharismatic. By contrast, the charismatic leader often has no grounds for authority other than intrinsic ethos often bolstered by emotional (pathetic) appeal. Religious prophets such as

Jesus, Muhammad, or Buddha rely on charismatic authority as did Napoleon Bonaparte, Julius Caesar, and Adolf Hitler. Weber himself considered the Athenian demagogues to have been examples of charismatic leadership (1958) although Ober has argued against Weber in favor of a more nuanced legal/rational account of Athenian democracy (1991, 123-124). While the established leadership of Azeroth tends to be traditional, we also encounter charismatic leadership, often acting as a disruptive force. Vol'jin, a troll who leads a revolution, Garrosh, who breaks free of tradition, and Sylvanas who creates the Forsaken ex nihilo, all act as charismatic figures, but both Sylvanas and Vol'jin strive to normalize their leadership within traditional and rational systems. Garrosh, however, moves in the opposite direction, starting out as a traditional figure but then breaking away from that pattern to assert charismatic authority.

**Rational/Legal Authority:** Weber associated rational/legal authority most strongly with the bureaucratic state (1958, 1-3). In this system, authority is not vested in the person per se, but in the office. The corporate manager, the member of a representative assembly, the military officer, or the factory foreman has no claim to authority as an individual person, but rather the position itself has authority and the person holding the position authority *ex officio* in so far as the person legitimately holds the office according to a rule-based set of criteria. Although Azeroth is imagined as a traditional society, Blizzard Entertainment is an American company, and thus part of the same bureaucratic culture in which Trump and Clinton operate. Moreover, although the imaginary universe of Azeroth is a traditional culture, as a player, one's engagement with the world is mediated by the rules of game play and terms of service created by Blizzard. Legalism is the mode under which video games operate and rationalism or *logos* the primary form of argument used to sustain it. The "blue posts" in community forums in which Blizzard staff explain their plans and choices to players tend to make rational arguments rather than simply citing their authority to make choices about the game or appealing to their own personal charisma. Of the two American politicians, Clinton, a trained lawyer, also tended to frame her goals as working for ideals within a system governed by rules and precedent. Trump, on the other hand, although embedded within a legalistic system, often argues as a charismatic leader. For example, not content with having won the Electoral College, something that is the legal basis on which presidents are elected, Trump has continued, even several months into his

presidency, to argue that he actually won the popular vote as well, evincing a concern that speaks to personal charisma rather than legal rule (Blake 2017).

## Conclusion

In the WoW universe, oppressed minorities eventually rebelled against the corrupt Garrosh Hellscream at the end of the Mists of Pandaria expansion, overthrowing him in the Siege of Orgrimmar raid instance, with Vol'jin, a leader of a troll race based on Caribbean lore and traditions, becoming the new Warchief and a woman, Sylvanas, succeeding him. Both represent an accession to power of outcasts and minorities who within the game rise from being oppressed and distrusted to faction leadership. Much of the rhetoric directed against Sylvanas, not only by the opposing Alliance faction but also by male characters of the Horde, resembled criticisms of Clinton in the United States 2016 election, especially in the rhetorical construction of feminine leadership as untrustworthy. What this suggests is that in games and in the real world, racial and gender oppression intersect in similar manners to generate negative perceptions of highly qualified female and minority leadership candidates or leaders. While the Blizzard developers could award Lady Sylvanas the position of Warchief in the imaginary world of Azeroth, and show the effectiveness of her rational pragmatism, Donald Trump, a figure similar to Garrosh Hellscream in rhetorical use of charismatic rather than logical argument, won the 2016 United States Presidential election, albeit not the popular vote. Rhetorical analysis shows that neither the leadership struggles within Azeroth nor in the United States are *sui generis*, but rather that both are grounded in common persuasive strategies that can be brought into focus by comparative analysis. One particularly interesting feature observable in both contexts is a rise of a rhetoric of female leadership specifically grounded in rational or logical argument. Given that women have limited access to traditional leadership except in a few systems of dynastic or hereditary rule, and that charismatic leadership is often grounded in the dynamics of masculinity, rationality may become a key rhetorical underpinning of female and minority leadership both in the United States (notably in the cases of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton) as well as Azeroth. Examining game and political universes in parallel allows exploration of the rhetoric of leadership in a wide range of worlds, both physical and imaginary, revealing common tropes and habits of thought through the ways they are realized across different contexts.

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# A Supernatural Tale of Agency, Othering, and Oppression: The Road So Far

By Tony Kemerly & Trisha Kemerly

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**Abstract:** The seventh season of *Supernatural* is an allegory for the abuse and removal of agency experienced by the person in the fat body. This treatment emphasizes acceptance of societal abuse as the norm. Gaining an awareness of this abuse is the first step toward changing discriminatory behavior perpetrated by those with “normal” bodies.

**Keywords:** *Supernatural*, fat studies, body privilege, agency, fat discrimination

**Resumen:** La séptima temporada de *Supernatural* es una alegoría al abuso y eliminación de poder que sufre la persona en un cuerpo gordo. Este tratamiento se enfoca en la aceptación del abuso social como una norma. El concienciarse sobre este abuso es el primer paso para cambiar el comportamiento discriminatorio perpetrado por los que tienen cuerpos “normales.”

**Palabras clave:** *Supernatural*, estudios de la gordura, privilegio del cuerpo, poder, discriminación contra los gordos

**摘要:** 电视剧《邪恶力量》第七季的内容比喻了肥胖人群所经历的虐待和失去能动性（agency）。这样的对待方式强调了社会虐待被当作准则所接受。要想改变这种由“正常”人（对肥胖者）施加的歧视行为，第一步则是意识到这种虐待（的危害）。

**关键词:** 《邪恶力量》，肥胖研究，身体优势，能动性，肥胖歧视

Werner Cahnman, in his work, *Stigma of Obesity* (287), who, quoting Platonic psychology, stated that the rational function of the mind is represented by the governing classes, the spirited by the military, and the appetitive by the economic. His interpretation — that mind and heart, or intelligence and courage, combine to rule over the big, dumb stomach — lends credence to the metaphor of the fat body as a lesser being in need of being controlled for its own good. This interpretation highlights the perceived need for controlling the fat body and is the basis for the removal of agency, placing the fat body in a position of subordination and in “need” of help. The end result is a systematic and morally inappropriate control of a group of people based on the arbitrary “correctness” of their bodies. Unfortunately for the person in the fat body, an inescapable part of its destiny is its entanglement within a web of events and relations that take place within the world in which that body resides (May 526). When discussing the fat body, its social construction gives it a specific destiny that at best dictates what that person in a fat body will be able to accomplish, and at worst, the missed opportunities as a result of a lack of exposure to these opportunities. One such phenomenon to which the person in the fat body is exposed is the vitriol related to society’s “War on Fat.”

The “War on Fat” — a phrase that has been uttered numerous times in conversations and news reports and written about in papers, magazines, and blogs, has shaped a discourse that has influenced the social standing of the person in the fat body for decades. The created discourse of the fat body includes a powerful connection between the fat body and physical and mental weakness. This discourse creates judgments and assumptions regarding the person in the fat body that are further reinforced through the media’s emphasis on the visual spectacle of the fat body. The Thin Ideology that arises from the spectacle exacerbates the negativity associated with the fat body and makes it susceptible to oppression and a loss of agency. The focus of this paper is on this loss of agency of the fat body and it will be achieved through an allegorical treatment of the seventh season of the television show *Supernatural*.

*Supernatural* is the story of Sam and Dean Winchester, two brothers who traverse the country hunting and killing ghosts, demons, and other assorted monsters, while preventing the apocalypse from occurring in some new way every season. The seventh season of *Supernatural* focuses on the Leviathan, primordial monsters that remove agency from the humans under the guise of self-improvement. They accomplish this through the use of food additives, specifically high fructose corn syrup as a means to take control of the human population so that they may be used as a food source. The removal of agency followed by

the othering and oppression of humans by the Leviathan serve as a powerful allegory for the removal of agency and instituted othering and oppression experienced by the person in the fat body today. The seventh season of *Supernatural* presents the normally subtle nature of the subordination to the viewer in a way that makes it nearly impossible to miss. While the show presents the subordination through the lens of demons and demon hunters, the parallel between the show and reality are not so far apart that it becomes unrecognizable. The show succeeds where other media interventions fail as the subordination is highlighted in a way that is neither pedantic nor accusatory; rather, it is shown in a way that promulgates both critical thought and reflection.

The works of Michel Foucault were used as a theoretical base to frame this discourse analysis. In regards to the body and its power, Foucault stated that the body is a blank page available for inscription, awaiting an imprint. Society has great power to influence the mosaic placed upon the blank page of the fat body, which explains the type of removal of agency, othering, and oppression placed on that body. Bodies acquire their stability from their habits (Crossley 110) and as such, the habitual body provides a foundation upon which the maintenance of agency is based. In the case of the fat body, this statement is problematic because of the habits assumed by society for the person in a fat body. The poor eating habits (gluttony), the lack of exercise (sloth), and the rejection of the societal ideal through doing only what they want instead of what is required (greed) do indeed form a bedrock onto which the negativity ascribed to the fat body is situated. This theoretical base allows for the linkage of the actions of the Leviathan to the discourse regarding agency, othering, and oppression of the fat body. From this point, the interactions were further defined and categorized in order to find underlying themes that supported the problem statement of the paper. When examining the behavior of the Leviathan as well as their interaction with humans and other demons, special attention was given to interpersonal dynamics; physical appearance; initial appearance in the season; environmental and physical placement; and comparison of behavior among Leviathan, demons, and humans.

### Free to be You and Me . . . Agency of the Fat Body

With most media portrayals of the fat body highlight its relationship with food as its biggest failure, it is reasonable to assume that controlling the meaning of food would serve as the basis for the removal of agency of the fat body. Therefore, the removal of agency is accomplished through the manipulation

of the morally tinged message conveyed by the food consumed by the fat body (Jutel 116). Because we consider food to be the bricks and mortar that build the fat body, the weakness that the person in the fat body demonstrates toward it requires those who possess the ideal body to “help” the flawed fat body overcome its gastronomic deviance. The removal of gastronomic and bodily agency is a necessity in the eyes of the concerned populace who are devout subscribers to the dominant, thin body ideology so that they may “help” those unfortunate souls trapped within a fat body. It is here, at the junction of fat bodies and agency that a connection between Supernatural and the fat body in society today is found. In the episode “The Girl with the Dungeons and Dragons Tattoo,” the leader of the Leviathan, Dick Roman, attempts to remove food agency from the humans, by expanding his holdings from Biggerson’s (an amalgam of IHOP, Waffle House, Huddle House, and other similar establishments), to owning “a list of joints 10 pages long.” This insinuates that he is in control of the fast food industry, thereby giving him access to all of America, specifically its fattest citizens, who are, not coincidentally, the favored food source of the Leviathan. Similarly, in the episode “There Will Be Blood,” it is revealed that Dick Roman has purchased controlling interest in a company called Sucrocorp, the world’s leading producer of high fructose corn syrup, which would allow the Leviathan to put their concoction into most foods eaten by Americans, especially those in fat bodies. In essence, human bodies in Supernatural have their food agency removed because they need “help” from the Leviathan in order to become their best (read: tastiest) selves. In a similar vein, today’s fat bodies have their agency removed because they too need “help” becoming their best (read: thin) selves.

This loss of agency is based upon a foundation of a media-supported and -diagnosed fatness epidemic, framed according to a medico-disease state based on the implication of the word epidemic. Epidemic implies an out-of-control disease state that conjures fear-based associations with smallpox, bubonic plague, and influenza from decades and centuries past; the use of the term today is an example of the media’s penchant for misrepresenting the duration and scale of a situation by calling something a crisis that has, in reality, become a fact of life and has been for quite some time (Berlant 760). In essence, the “War on Fat” is against an epidemic that is not so epidemic; it is an epidemic that has become commonplace and accepted by society – except for when it is not. The universal social acceptance of a manufactured evil that exacerbates the deceptive and insidious nature of bodily subordination makes it difficult to detect and therefore to change this unchallenged, and arguably welcomed, removal of agency.

The seminal acts that led to the rise in fatness and the concomitant manufactured outrage against this epidemic that is not an epidemic did not occur last week or last year or even 10 years ago. Rather, the rise in obesity rates can be linked to the 1971 appointment of Earl Butz to the position of Secretary of Agriculture, whose policies resulted in Americans acquiring a taste for salt, sugar, and fat, which put the United States on the road toward corn dependence, thereby leading to today's saturation of the populace and the beginnings of their slow death at the hands of high fructose corn syrup. This institutionalized dependence is much the same that occurs in *Supernatural* with the Leviathan playing the role of today's policy makers and food manufacturers, who are removing the agency of a population in need of "help" to achieve their own ethically dubious goals. The mundanity of accepted policy and the manufacture of predictable situations create an environment that can absorb the ordinary nature of the passage of time. This absorptive environment makes events forgettable and allows people to exhibit an associated alienation, coolness, and detachment that allow one's agency to be easily removed.

#### What Is and What Should Never Be . . . Othering the Fat Body

How does the loss of personal agency lead to othering? How does the placement of a body in the social hierarchy and its constant comparison to all other bodies influence that othering? The answer is found in work focusing on the idea that when a group is othered, their opposite group is marked as superior, which then deems those that have been othered an unequal and subordinate. Furthermore, it allows for a differentiation and demarcation by which a line is drawn between "them and us" and through which social distance is established and maintained (Schwalbe 777). With that understanding, the important aspect of othering to consider in the context of this paper is its ability to create a power dynamic in which the superior group is in control of the identity of the subordinate group. This results in the "others" being reduced to basic stereotypes, making dehumanization easier and identity development difficult, if not impossible. This results in the subordinated group being given a specific identity based on the discourse surrounding their body, rather than allowing them to develop an identity of their own (Jensen 75). This phenomenon is evident in the episode "There Will Be Blood," when Sam and Dean enter a convenience store in search of food that is not tainted by the food additive of the Leviathan. At this point, the forced identity of the fat body becomes apparent as all of the individuals infected by the Leviathan's additive are depicted as slow, stupid, mindless automatons desperately looking for their next meal,

which coincidentally are played by actors who are both fat and unattractive. It is this representation of the person in the fat body, repeated ad nauseum in the entertainment media, that bolsters the stereotype of the fat body, leading to further othering.

Knowledge of a bodily discourse is necessary to gain an understanding of the power inherent in the perception of that body. The foundation of the discourse of the fat body is the naturalized connotation of the fat person as untrustworthy, stupid, awkward, and morally bankrupt. With the media providing visual support to this discourse through its portrayals of the person in the fat body as irreparably flawed, how would the fat body ever have a chance to be accepted as equal? With such a discourse attached to the fat body, the person in the fat body has their power removed before they are able to utter a single syllable. This is reminiscent of Foucault's thoughts that knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of "truth," but also has the power to make itself true (Foucault 134). In this case, the power of the thin body discourse gives those that possess the knowledge of a "bodily truth," i.e. their thin bodies, power over those with fat bodies that are assumed to be void of such knowledge. In this way, those whose bodies do not reflect truth and therefore power are relegated to a position of powerlessness that leads to othering. All of this is indicative of the fact that it is the discourse, not the subject, that is the producer of knowledge (Foucault 93). The application of the thin body as superior discourse, in effect, others the person in the fat body, thereby negating their ability to change their social standing because the knowledge implied by their bodies does not give them a chance to do so, and they are immediately dismissed as inferior. In the episode "Slash Fiction," Bobby, Sam, and Dean attempt to torture a captured Leviathan in the hopes of understanding anything about them. This scene is an excellent example of the idea of the powerful thin body and the irreparably flawed fat body. In the first interaction of the season between the Leviathan and Sam and Dean, it quickly becomes apparent that despite being tied to a chair, the Leviathan, much like the person in the thin body, is the one with the power. He is physically powerful, highly intelligent, cool, attractive, and exuding self-confidence. He exhibits no fear of Sam and Dean and continues to remind them of their weakness, stupidity, powerlessness, and the innumerable reasons why humans are inferior to the Leviathan.

In addition to being a means of removing its agency, the coding of the fat body's relationship to food as its major failure is also one of the more powerful ways of othering the fat body. After losing one's agency, the transition to a place of "other" is achieved by associating the moral qualities of the food the fat body eats with the perceived morality of the person within that

fat body. We know in the sense of Samantha Murray's "knowing" (Murray 367) that the person eating a strawberry poppy seed kale salad is better than the person eating the bacon double cheeseburger with chili cheese fries. How do we "know" this? We know the body eating the clean, healthy, organic kale salad is more successful, healthier, more selective and therefore more intelligent than the person eating the fatty, artificial, unhealthy bacon double cheeseburger and chili cheese fries because we know that person to be unhealthy, gluttonous, and greedy. It is the creation of the perception of an out-of-control obsession with food with the associated lack of body morality that accompanies it that results in the othering of the fat body. In the episode "How to Win Friends and Influence Monsters," Sam, Dean, and Bobby are eating dinner at the Leviathan-owned Biggerson's. While Bobby picks at his "Heart Smart Salad" and Sam all but ignores his soup and salad combo, they discuss their current case, their next moves, and possible perpetrators. While they are doing this, Dean has become enthralled with the sandwich he ordered called the Peppercorn Turducken Slammer. Dean is completely unfocused on anything but his sandwich, concerned only with getting more Peppercorn Turducken Slammers. Dean's "relationship" with his Peppercorn Turducken Slammer, along with Bobby and Sam's disgust with his food focus, provides a potent example of how the perception of an out-of-control food obsession produces a character differentiation that is representative of the othering through food that is experienced by the person in the fat body.

Another related means of othering the person in the fat body is by offering that person the means to having an "ideal" body, typically through late night infomercials, weight loss supplements and pills, and even advertisements for gym memberships. While on the surface these things appear to be a way to help the person in the fat body achieve the bodily acceptance toward which they are pushed, it usually has the opposite effect. The fatal flaw of the "help" given is that it is not based on sound scientific principles. Therefore, it is likely that the fat body will fail at their attempt to become "ideal" because they do not have the personality attributes such as motivation or self-discipline to succeed. The aftermath of this "help" from the healthy lifestyle industry is a further othering of the person in the fat body because the already subordinated fat body has now strengthened the negative stereotypes assigned to their body through their failure to achieve their goals, even with the helping hand given to them.

It is this type of help that is illustrated in the episode "How to Win Friends and Influence Monsters" when the leader of the Leviathan, Dick Roman, states, "America is for go-getters. Those that get off their butts and make it happen. We need you

just as healthy as you can be. This is why we are diving whole hog into making Americans live longer and taste better.” This is an example of the fatally flawed approach mentioned above. No plan. No action steps. No real outline of how to proceed. Just a message of “just be better.” The actions of the Leviathan and their message of self-improvement, which simultaneously sabotages those receiving their message, is similar to a phenomenon found in society today. For example, while most in the health and fitness field would agree that a healthy diet and active lifestyle will result in a healthy body, those in the diet and supplement industry market products to individuals promising an “ideal” body without having to change their lives. However, these products are not as effective as they are purported to be as they only typically work when combined with the very things purported to be unnecessary, namely a healthy diet and exercise program. So when individuals take the supplement and engage in their typical behavior, they gain weight, thus supporting the connotation of personal failure of the fat body. Furthermore, rather than quitting the supplement and starting a proper program, they decide to take more of the supplement, thereby continuing the cycle and strengthening the laziness connotation of the fat body. These contradictory messages create a class of people who are expected to perform an action described as simple and easy to do, but at best they are not given the tools to do it, and at worst are sabotaged at every step. Once they fail, they are metaphorically “eaten alive” by society for their failures in the form of bodily othering, much like the Leviathan literally “eat alive” their fattened herd of humans.

The final aspect of othering arises from the application of the negative connotation of the fat body that occurs as a result of the characteristics society has ascribed to that body. Through its specific use of body logic, namely the failure of the fat body to change in light of the help given to it from multiple sources, society has illustrated why the fat body is lesser than the thin body and thus deserving of being othered. In the season finale “Survival of the Fittest,” Dick Roman reveals the final aspect of his plan and in doing so draws a strong parallel between the Leviathan and their relationship with the humans and the current thin bodied society’s relationship with the person in the fat body. Dick Roman’s strategy to streamline the “human slaughterhouse on every corner” plan is to kill off thin people or those who possess an IQ greater than 150. His stated rationale for this is that he wants all of his food to be big, fat, and dumb, which essentially underscores society’s view of the person in the fat body and highlights the Leviathan’s conviction that they are superior to humans and therefore deserving of having them as a meal. It is this type of binary that is created from society’s thin body discourse that has created a culture where the

thin body cannot exist in the same space as the fat body. Since a literal death as seen in *Supernatural* is not possible, a culture of othering has been created so that the fat body becomes invisible and thus powerless.

Now . . . Agency and Othering as a Means to Oppress the Fat Body

The body is often viewed as a metaphor for an instrument of experience and as a surface of inscription that is given meaning only through its use of decoration (Joyce 141). When the decoration of fatness is inscribed upon a body, it serves as the point of articulation between an interior self and an exterior society, between a physical body and its symbolically transformed social presentation (Joyce 144). Articulations such as these are both powerful and damning because body decoration is a visible sign of a pre-assigned social status. In the case of the fat body, this pre-assigned social status negates the ability of the fat body to navigate society, thereby removing its agency as it relates to the social hierarchy, and therefore leading to the othering of the person in the fat body (Maddox 294). With the fat body placed in a subordinated class as a result of this othering, they are often the targets of oppression.

The oppression faced by the person in the fat body is typically subtle and is not necessarily a result of maliciousness, but a remnant of preexisting mores found in the bedrock of society. The fat body is a powerful visual reminder of someone who has violated at least three of the Seven Deadly Sins, namely gluttony, sloth, and greed, and as a result of this connection the fat body becomes a manifestation of self-indulgence and spiritual imperfection, two major strikes against an individual in a society whose majority espouses Judeo-Christian values. Furthermore, government and medical agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Heart Association, the American Dietetics Association, and the American Medical Association have used the trust and influence they have gained through their association with the medical field to construct obesity as a disease that, while serious, can be corrected or prevented altogether with personal effort. The combination of these attacks on the fat body has resulted in the focus being not on achieving health, but rather on losing weight (Rogge 301). This type of oppression of the person in the fat body is reminiscent of what Rogge calls “civilized oppression.” Civilized oppression involves power-laden relationships that serve to diminish and control the recipient. This recipient, who has little to no input into their bodily discourse as well as the acts of commission or omission that distort their value in the social hierarchy, is disadvantaged in insidious ways that are obscured in routine or daily encounters

(Rogge 304). These characteristics of civilized oppression are faced by the fat body on a day to day basis and each time they occur, more and more of the fat individual's agency is removed, exposing them to further othering, and eventually, oppression. It is civilized oppression that is the foundation of the "War on Fat" in which Western culture is currently embroiled.

The seventh season of *Supernatural* serves as a powerful allegory to this type of oppression. The Leviathan, with their attractiveness, brains, and power, represent the dominant thin discourse that exists in today's society. The humans, especially in the later episodes, represent the societal perception of the fat American, one who flounders his or her way through life, oblivious to everything except the next meal. The relationship between the Leviathan and humans, with the skewed power dynamic between the two groups, mimics the relationship between those who accept the idealized body size in society and those who do not, because they are either unwilling or unable to do so. If that were the end of the story, it would not be ideal, but the seventh season of *Supernatural* takes the relationship a step further by asking the question, "What if society were to press the development of a truly othered population within society? Is that possible? What would it look like?"

Foucault (135) stated that the human body has entered a machinery of power that explores, dismantles, and rearranges it. This power defines how one may remove another's agency so that they may do what one wishes with the body perceived to be "lesser". In the episode "The Girl with the Dungeons and Dragons Tattoo," the Leviathan represent the literal manifestation of this statement. The Leviathan have insinuated themselves so deeply into the fabric of human government and control that Dick Roman's plans to build a slaughterhouse disguised as a biotechnology lab that will be used to develop a cure for cancer will go unnoticed, much like the oppression of the person in the fat body. This revelation highlights the ever-increasing power dynamic that exists between the Leviathan and the humans. They want to gain control over the humans, make them a "perfect, docile herd" and have slaughterhouses on every corner while, most importantly, not having to explain their every move. It is this type of insinuation into the bodily lexicon that the thin body discourse has accomplished. The thin body discourse and its distaste for the fat body have now become enmeshed in media representations, medical opinions, and the healthy lifestyle industry, thus becoming so naturalized as to be invisible.

The Leviathan extend their control over the humans by performing their own surveillance in order to achieve their desired goals, thereby circumventing the humans' agency by taking away

their ability to decide what they want to do. While in today's world, the person in the fat body is not in that type of literal danger, it does not negate the sentiment that Foucault was attempting to convey. As an example of the dismantling and rearranging aspects of bodily machinery, the person in the fat body, through constant bombardment of media messages, has been placed in a position of blame for rising insurance costs. Therefore, because they have let society down with their failure, they are considered lesser beings. With the person in the fat body categorized as lesser, those controlling the person in the fat body under the guise of "helping" it do not want to be questioned by those who possess the very bodies they are attempting to fix. Similarly, just as the Leviathan want the humans to willingly be food for them, agents of the thin body discourse want to be able to act with impunity because they possess the knowledge and truth that the fat "obviously" do not; therefore, the fat do not have a right to question them. This phenomenon of "experts as moral guardians," who, because of their authority and knowledge, are able to pass judgment on others, is the seat of oppression of the fat body (Inthorn 89).

In order to have bodies that will abide by the strictures placed upon them by society, the person in the fat body must become docile. The production of docile bodies requires that an uninterrupted coercion be directed toward body activity in order to produce rigid and precise control over a body that cannot be maintained without a minute and relentless surveillance (Foucault 141). While the level of surveillance by the Leviathan on the humans was so unbelievably thorough as to be laughable, the fact remains that a similar scenario does exist in society today for the person in the fat body. The person in the fat body is under surveillance every minute of every day through judgments of their food choice, clothing choice, activity level, television watching, and a variety of other aspects of their day-to-day lives. This constant surveillance is reminiscent of Foucault's Panopticon. When scrutinized further, the comparison to Foucault's Panopticon is apt considering that the fat body is placed in a position that removes their ability to make any choice except the societally appropriate one. If the wrong choice is made, the threat of punishment in the form of scorn, exclusion, or ridicule exists.

The anonymity of the Panopticon and the surveillance that form it are the base of its power. This widely dispersed power leads to the subordination of those with the socially unacceptable body. Attempts to escape from the Panopticon or from social surveillance are seen as deviant, and further marginalization and punishment ensues. As a result, the person in the fat body begins self-policing, making decisions on the basis of what will please those performing the surveillance. This removes the agency from

the fat individual in their bodily Panopticon, as it does not allow for freedom of choice; rather, it only permits the selection of the option that is felt to be most acceptable by those who possess power over their body. With their agency gone, any failure to perform correctly results in othering, which then leads to the inevitable oppression that will occur under the pretext of helping them become more acceptable. So what is the more important question: what must be done to create a body blind society, or is society today even capable of being body blind?

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# Essentialism and the Construction of Gender and Race in Season 2 of Lifetime's *UnREAL*

By Seth Vannatta

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**Abstract:** This article investigates UnREAL's gender and racial discourse and imagery in order to assess its ability to promote a feminist and anti-racist agenda. It proceeds by defining essentialism generally and gender and racial essentialism specifically. Next, it illustrates the way these concepts are depicted on Season 2 of UnREAL. Third, it investigates the UnREAL's ability to undermine static notions of gender, depict the complexity of contemporary racism, and illustrate elements of racism inherent in white feminism. Ultimately, this article argues that in Season 2 UnREAL consciously constructs racial and gender injustices and stereotypes in a successful effort to make the audience reflect on patriarchy and racial injustice in contemporary society. The result of this analysis is that UnREAL constitutes a successful iteration of the feminist project of Lifetime's Broad Focus initiative, one which includes a critique of liberal white feminism's racist elements.

**Keywords:** UnREAL, essentialism in media, racism in feminism, Broad Focus initiative, feminist critique

**Resumen:** Este artículo investiga el discurso e imágenes raciales y de género de UnREAL para evaluar su habilidad de promover una agenda feminista y antirracista. Procede al definir el esencialismo generalmente y el esencialismo de género y racial específicamente. A continuación, ilustra la forma en que estos conceptos son representados en la segunda temporada de UnREAL. En tercera instancia, investiga la habilidad de UnREAL para socavar las nociones estáticas del género, representar la complejidad del racismo contemporáneo e ilustrar elementos del racismo

inherentes en el feminismo blanco. Finalmente, este artículo argumenta que en la segunda temporada de UnREAL se construyen conscientemente injusticias raciales y de género y estereotipos en un esfuerzo exitoso para hacer que la audiencia reflexione acerca de la injusticia patriarcal y racial en la sociedad contemporánea. El resultado de este análisis es que UnREAL constituye una iteración exitosa del proyecto feminista de la iniciativa Broad Focus de Lifetime, una que incluye una crítica de elementos racistas del feminismo blanco liberal.

**Palabras clave:** UnREAL, esencialismo en los medios, racismo en el feminismo, iniciativa Broad Focus, crítica feminista

**摘要:** 本文调查了电视剧《虚幻》中关于性别和种族的论述和意象，用于评估其推动女权主义和反种族歧视议程的能力。接着本文对本质主义给出了一般定义，同时具体定义了性别和种族本质主义。然后，文章阐述了《虚幻》第二季对这些概念的描述方式。其次，本文调查了《虚幻》在逐步削弱关于性别的静态概念、描绘当代种族主义的复杂性、并阐明白人女权主义所固有的种族主义元素时的能力。最后本文主张，《虚幻》第二季有意识地建构了种族不公平、性别不公平和刻板印象，它成功地让观众反省当代社会的父权制和种族不公平。本文分析结果则是，《虚幻》成功地反映了 Lifetime 娱乐公司关于女权主义提出的宽焦点倡议（Broad Focus initiative），该倡议对自由白人女权主义中的种族歧视进行了批判。

**关键词:** 《虚幻》，媒体中的本质主义，女权主义中的种族歧视，Broad Focus initiative，女权主义批判

## Introduction

UnREAL is a critically acclaimed Lifetime program about the chaotic production of a fictional dating competition television program, Everlasting. Two seasons have aired, the third begins in early 2018, and the production of the fourth season began in late 2017. UnREAL functions as part of Lifetime's Broad Focus initiative, which aims to provide opportunities for women to write, direct, and produce programs with female-focused stories. Thus, the real-world context of the program's production is one that aims to undermine patriarchy in the entertainment industry. Further, the program depicts women either vying for control or actually in control of the production of the fictionalized dating competition, Everlasting, which is based not loosely on ABC's The Bachelor. (Its co-creator, Gertrude Shapiro, worked on the set of The Bachelor and found her experience "soul-sucking"). Thus, UnREAL provides a unique set of layered contexts to mine for feminist and, in Season 2, anti-racist liberatory themes. This article focuses on the meta-

character of UnREAL by distinguishing the first order analysis focusing on the drama produced among the contestants and the suitor on Everlasting from the second order analysis focusing on the show's depiction of the production of Everlasting.

The principal female leads on the show are Quinn King (Constance Zimmer) and Rachel Goldberg (Shiri Appleby), both of whom work behind the camera of Everlasting. At the opening of Season 2, the focus of this article, Quinn and Rachel have acquired matching wrist tattoos reading "Money Dick Power." Their slogan simultaneously represents their emancipation from patriarchy and their overt adoption of patriarchal values. Resolved not to be the passive receptacles of, but the active captors of the objects of their desire, Quinn and Rachel both invert a patriarchal hierarchy and reproduce it. Contemporaneous to their joint transformation, Chet (Craig Bierko), with whom Quinn engages in power struggle both romantically and professionally and who has largely stolen Quinn's ideas for the show, is reborn out of self-destructive indulgence into an essentialist, masculinist form of male liberation, which inevitably fuels his competition with the version of feminism proffered by Quinn and Rachel.

UnREAL's play on gender runs parallel to and is inextricable from its provocations with race. The pawns of the show's (Everlasting's) game in Season 2 include Darrius Beck, (B.J. Britt), a famous NFL quarterback and the first black suitor on the show, Romeo (Gentry White), Beck's cousin-turned manager, Ruby Carter (Denée Benton), a Black Lives Matter activist convinced by Rachel that the show can serve as a medium for her cause, a Confederate flag-wearing white contestant from the Deep South, and Chantal (Meagan Tandy), a black southern debutante whose hair politics run counter to Ruby's natural look.

UnREAL's reflection of and commentary on real world politics is both overt and complex. Chet is a Harvey Weinstein-style sexual harassment perp. He uses his power to solicit oral sex from a pig-tailed production assistant, Madison, (Genevieve Buechner). Darrius and Romeo become black victims of white police violence, reminiscent of Walter Scott's lethal shooting in North Carolina. And the politics of hair and norms of beauty in black feminism play out in the background of Everlasting's female contestants. Rachel's character and career arc mirror Shapiro's. Shapiro developed a feminist worldview while studying filmmaking at Sarah Lawrence College, but ended up working on the set of *The Bachelor* manipulating jilted contestants into crying on camera in limousines. Rachel is a gender-studies major who dreams about saving African AIDS babies but ends up deploying her talent for the cruel manipulation of women for entertainment on Everlasting.

This article investigates UnREAL's gender and racial discourse and imagery in order to assess its ability to promote a feminist and anti-racist agenda. It proceeds by defining essentialism generally and gender and racial essentialism specifically. Next, it illustrates the way these concepts are depicted on Season 2 of UnREAL. Third, it investigates the UnREAL's ability to undermine static notions of gender, depict the complexity of contemporary racism, and illustrate elements of racism inherent in white feminism. Ultimately, this article argues that in Season 2 UnREAL consciously constructs racial and gender injustices and stereotypes in a successful effort to make the audience reflect on patriarchy and racial injustice in contemporary society. Quinn, Rachel, and Chet make explicit the constructions, which the audience often implicitly deploys, and shows the viewers the injustices which follow. UnREAL successfully promotes a feminist and anti-racist agenda by undermining gender and racial stereotypes by countering essentialist assumptions of both gender and race. This ability is both confined by the constructed and manipulative mechanism of Everlasting and reality television in general and enabled by the program's unique meta-quality. The institutional logic of the entertainment industry in general and reality TV in particular ultimately subordinates its characters' ability to undermine patriarchy and liberate themselves from patriarchal and racist confines. However, the meta-quality of the show, a fictionalized depiction of the making of a fictional reality show, enables unique discursive capacities. Its unique space allows its characters to, at once, spew sexist and racist slurs, undermine essentialist notions, and, most successfully, illustrate the construction of gender and race in contemporary social and discursive practices. The result forces UnREAL's audience into a provocative and self-reflective posture. The result of this analysis is that UnREAL constitutes a successful iteration of the feminist project of Lifetime's Broad Focus initiative, one which includes a critique of liberal white feminism's racist elements.

### Essentialism 101

Gender essentialism is a function of essentialism in general, which is most often inspired by the philosophy of Aristotle. Aristotelian essentialism is "the doctrine that some of the attributes of a thing (quite independent of the language in which the thing is referred to, if at all) may be essential to the thing and others accidental." Gender essentialism is "the notion that a unitary, 'essential' women's experience can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and other realities of experience." Ordinarily, essentialists hold that there is an unchanging, static core to gender, and this essence is

ordinarily reducible to biology. The essential traits of gender are not difficult to capture in Aristotle's Athenian culture. As Thomas Cahill described: "For the strutting aristoi of the symposia, the nature of life was obvious: you gave it or you got it. [...] It was a militarized society that saw everything in terms of active and passive, swords and wounds, phalloi and gashes." As we will see, one of UnREAL's most central characters, Rachel, is "both a weapon and a wound," and this plays a part in the show's efforts to undermine gender essentialism, if not the hierarchical norms of patriarchy.

Opponents of this essentialist view of gender hold that gender is socially constructed, such that conventional gender categories are in fact "culturally mediated assumptions about gender." For instance, a constructionist does not equate the conventional notion of 'care-giver' or the conventional description of women as 'relational beings' with biological femaleness. Rather, these categories are outcomes of conventional habits of practice and social customs, which change over time and place. The constructionist, however, is not necessarily an anti-realist. A constructionist can hold that there are real differences in the world, but we cut up nature, not at its ontological joints, but according to conceptual categories of our own making, that is, the making of our social contexts and practices. If social institutions and practices, such as those of reality TV and the entertainment industry are sufficiently patriarchal, then the power dynamics of domination and subordination will be inscribed onto gender roles that are interpreted as natural and inevitable by the essentialist.

An example from jurisprudence may be helpful. Catherine MacKinnon argued that the legal concept of equality derived from Aristotle's notion that like things needed to be treated alike and different things differently. But Aristotle's understanding of sameness and difference tacitly relied on something being self-same, that is, men, (male, Athenian citizens) were centered and taken as the norm by which others could be compared as same or different. Thus, women, if not sufficiently the same as the self-same male standard, could not achieve equality. As MacKinnon put it, women "have to first have [equality] before [they] can get it." Rather, she suggested that the opposite of equality was hierarchy—her "dominance theory." What we see in Season 2 is not so much MacKinnon's hopes for a new theory of equality but the realization that women can embrace the dominant role and perform the culturally mediated functions of maleness, including autonomy, stoicism, independence, dominance, and hedonism, even if this means battling the gender roles that others try to force upon them and that they want to be free to embrace when it suits them.

Racial essentialism proffers that there is an unchanging essence to any given race, and, as with gender essentialism, this core is often reduced to biology. The origin of racial essentialism, while traceable to the Aristotelian concept of biological essences, is found in the early modern period of European philosophy, anthropology, ethnology, and the practice of racial classification. Its heyday coincided with the pseudo-science of phrenology, the eugenics movement, and a resulting ideology of Social Darwinism. Racial essentialism can be defined as follows:

There are human races; each race is distinct from all other races in important ways; members of each distinct race have either a general trait that causes all of their other racial characteristics or a set of racial traits that is the “essence” of their racial identities. Racial essences may be limited to physical traits, or, as prevalent over much of modern western intellectual history, include cultural, moral, and aesthetic traits. Furthermore, racial essentialism can be understood as a type of thinking about human difference that labels people in ways that apply to whole persons. For instance, while shortness or thinness are traits understood to co-exist alongside other traits, an essentialist view of a white, black, or Asian person categorizes the entire human being.

The culmination of the early modern expression of racial essentialism comes from Immanuel Kant, who wrote, “The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents [...] So fundamental is the difference [between Negroes and Whites] and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.”

Social Darwinism built on essentialist notions by proposing a biological explanation of fitness for the social and economic success of some races and the unfitness of others. Social Darwinism dismissed governmental intervention into the economy in the form of wealth redistribution and economic regulation as unjustified meddling with the laws of nature. The eugenics movement promoted the advancement of racial purity and the active elimination of heritable unfit traits among unfit races. Gregor Mendel’s work on genetics found renewed interest in the early twentieth century, and inferences were made by scientists that psychological traits, such as imbecility, feeble-mindedness, or criminality, were heritable. Sterilization laws, including a Virginia statute for the sterilization of inmates of state institutions deemed to have heritable insanity or imbecility, made manifest this program, wherein Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. cast his infamous Supreme Court dictum, “three generations of imbeciles are enough.” Eugenics made its most devastating mark in the Nazi Final Solution and the Holocaust.

The problem with racial essentialism, as with gender essentialism, is that it “naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic.” The diremption of the signifier “black” from its cultural and historical context ultimately enhances the foundations of racism. While racial essentialism in its pure early modern expression and the tragic policy consequences of the eugenics movement are widely considered patently racist and immoral today, the phenomenon of racial essentialism looms in subtler ways, and popular culture artifacts, including UnREAL, provide one way to disclose its legacy.

In a way similar to gender essentialism, the opponents of racial essentialism think race is a socially constructed concept. The category of race, for instance, did not operate as it does in contemporary American culture, in ancient Mediterranean cultures. Further, historians can identify times when race is legislated into being, including after Bacon’s Rebellion, such that race displaces status as a fundamental category. That said, the social constructionist finds herself in a new bind. If race is a mere construction and merely nominal, not a real universal category, to what concept are anti-racists referring when they advocate for racial justice? One way out of this bind is to demonstrate the functional reality of race by recourse to C.S. Peirce’s pragmatic maxim, such that the meaning of any concept is found in its practical consequences, and there are functional consequences to being categorized as black, for better or worse. These can be empirically disclosed and popular culture artifacts can help highlight this consequential reality. Or as Tommy Curry wrote, “To say that gender or race functions historically in some particular way—that our category is historical—is to suggest that the idea has empirical substance, and in the case of categories like race, class, or gender, a peculiar realness needing our immediate philosophical attention.” Darrius Beck, the first black suitor on *Everlasting*, knows the effects of race too well. Episode 1 reveals that his mother raised him “to always know the rules would always be different for me. Couldn’t walk down the street with my hoodie on. Didn’t want people to get the wrong idea.” These functional consequences of the historically mediated concept of blackness demonstrate the reality of the socially constructed concept.

### Gender Essentialism in Season 2 of UnREAL

Gender essentialism shows itself early in Season 2 of UnREAL. The most obvious instance, interestingly, is Chet’s rehabilitative program, which relies on the notion of an unchanging and natural male essence. Having returned from a wilderness retreat to reclaim his television empire from Quinn, he iterates

gender essentialism when he states: "A man isn't a man unless he's got a purpose, Quinn. I got soft last year....I forced you to play the male role. That wasn't fair; it wasn't natural. Women are made to nurture. Be adored. Guys gotta do things." This comment reduces women to their biology claiming that the essence of nurturing is a biologically determined, central feature of womanhood. Correlatively, he attributes purposiveness to males' natures and claims the role reversal was "unnatural." Even if Quinn finds this laughable, she does have to deal with the socially constructed reality of male power. Chet finds a way to undo temporarily much of Quinn's work in controlling the show, because he is friends with the network president, Gary (Christopher Cousins), showing that "the good ol' boys club is alive and well." Amid Chet's rejected essentialist premise that "guys gotta do things," Quinn finds a way to undermine him, by a playful bending of genders:

Chet: Let the best man win.

Quinn: She usually does.

Further, the boys club resurfaces when Gary gives Coleman Wasserman (Michael Rady) the job Rachel surreptitiously tried to steal from Quinn after she became convinced that Quinn gave up on her previous desire to turn it over to her.

Essentialist notions of female roles, Chet's male activism notwithstanding, are more difficult to detect, as they are framed within Quinn's and Rachel's quest for control, independence, and autonomy, attempts which undermine essentialist notions. Further, conventional female roles are literally constructed within the production of the fictional reality show, *Everlasting*. Such an overt display of gender construction is a feminist anti-essentialist move by the show's creators. Early in the season, when Chet and Quinn are battling for control of the show with widely differing visions for it, Chet tries to brand the show as a frat party booze fest with bikini girls as eye candy for Darrius's entourage's male gaze. Quinn tries to frame a traditional love story, both of which rely on conventional gender roles albeit in different ways. Watching the producers, such as Quinn, demand the contestants are properly groomed and show cleavage gives the audience an insight into literal gender construction and its undermining of gender essentialism.

Viewing the two main female characters' 'real life' dips into and out of conventional roles offers an enticing parallel. For example, Rachel plays the role of a wounded woman in need of a knight in shining armor to save her, whether it be Coleman or Adam, upon his brief return to the show. Rachel is also beaten up by Jeremy and plays the role of the silent victim. Quinn appears

to be in earnest about her loving relationship with John Booth (Ioan Gruffudd) and her attempt to have a child with him. Her one moment of weakness reveals that she chose her career over motherhood, that she wanted a choice to become a mother, and gives the audience pause to consider whether she unnaturally abandoned her biological destiny for motherhood, as the essentialists would have it.

### Racial Essentialism in Season 2 of UnREAL

The most pronounced iteration of racial essentialism in Season 2 resides in the background racist assumption regarding the suitor, Darrius Beck, a black man. Beck is an NFL quarterback, and the professional sports such as the NFL often perpetuate one of the most significant racist and essentialist tropes of chattel slavery in the United States. Beck, qua black man, is the physically superior, mentally inferior, athlete, who is managed by the physically inferior, mentally superior head coach or general manager. NFL players such as Darrius are well-paid instruments for team profit, while plantation owners used physically superior, unpaid black slaves for profit. The producers of *Everlasting* have convinced Darrius that starring as its suitor will rehabilitate his image, which was damaged because he said, “Bitch, please” to a female reporter in a post-game interview, an instance that evokes the image of Seattle Seahawks’ Richard Sherman frightening Erin Andrews in a rant during postgame interview. On the show, Darrius is directed and manipulated by a white show-runner, Rachel, and a white producer, Quinn. That his overlords are white women is a reminder of the fact that white women were implicated in the practice of the lynching of black men by perpetuating the myth of white purity, the myth of the black rapist, and the idea that miscegenation manifested the taboo against the desecration of such purity.

Further, that at least one of Beck’s puppeteers, Rachel, considers herself a feminist, indicates *UnREAL*’s subtle critique of white feminism’s racist elements. White feminists are not immune from participating in the subordination of black people. Tommy Curry points out that Catherine MacKinnon refuses to admit that white women were complicit in anti-black racism in her piece discussed below, “From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?” Currie and others, such as Angela Harris, claim that the piece itself is racist. Rachel, the white feminist show-runner, is complicit as well. She consciously puts Darrius’s career at risk by directing one of the contestants to viciously tackle him when he was not expecting it. Then she entices him to take an epidural, stifling his pain but putting him at even greater risk. Here the white feminist actually plays the role of the white NFL managerial

coach or general manager who risks black players' safety to win at all costs, or profit at all costs. This subtle critique reflects the recent #metoo movement, which has been criticized because its recent public attention to sexual violence has disproportionately benefited white victims whose voices are privileged racially.

Darrius's black body is as commodified as any black body in popular culture. Aisha Harris wrote, "That even surface-level 'admiration' for black culture on the part of white people can give way to insidious interactions that are, at best, a persistent annoyance black people must learn to laugh off, and, at worst, the kind of fetishization that only conceals deadlier preconceptions." Darrius is fetishized as thoroughly as his contestants are when they are dressed in skimpy outfits playing a football game, a move which places the cheerleading eye-candy from the margins of the game to its center. Darrius is secretly filmed having sex with Ruby, all for gaze of the voyeuristic audience. And during the run of the show, Darrius, like so many black Americans, has to distinguish between the comments of well-meaning, ignorant white people, the more nefarious racist intentions of others, and the ways the former can devolve into the latter. Well-meaning ignorance, such as Beth Ann's belief that wearing the Confederate flag will earn Darrius's admiration of her bravery and the fetishizing of Darrius's dark body can and do devolve into quite deadly preconceptions on Everlasting.

### Women Embracing Dominance Theory

Quinn and Rachel grapple with their quest for power in a show that operates along patriarchal lines, and they know it. Quinn rants: "If I was a man, they wouldn't be doing this to me. I'd be wearing sweatpants, scratching my nuts, and boning 22-year-olds." Later referring to Jeremy, Quinn snipes, "When I see him I'm going to rip off his balls, deep-fry them, and force him to eat them." But both Rachel and Quinn choose to occupy the male space in an entertainment world governed by patriarchy. Rachel repeatedly forgoes her feminism in order to do so, and Quinn is a different beast altogether. As Basti n, writes, "Quinn isn't a feminist. She isn't trying to dismantle or change the sexist system. She only wants to benefit from it. She wants to gain power, then control the men that have misused their own." For example, Quinn performs masculinity when she grabs her crotch and says, "I'm so hard right now." She uses gendered discourse to dominate Coleman when she asks, "Have your balls even dropped yet, or do we still have that to look forward to?"

Rachel occupies the male space when she is tempted to fire Jeremy, her ex-boyfriend, after he describes one of the contestants as "Hot Rachel." He says to her: "She's the one who kind of looks

like you. But hot and not crazy and actually takes showers from time to time.” She knows she cannot fire Jeremy because a sexual harassment suit would likely follow, so she gets revenge by firing one of his important crewmembers. Rachel’s and Quinn’s quest for money, dick, and power governs the arc of the season. As Bastián puts it, “The show lets women be monsters.” While Quinn and Rachel do occupy a male space of power, they use feminine wisdom to their advantage. Their dominance is not mere gender-bending, but also an example that women, qua women, can dominate in unique ways. As Bastián writes, “[Quinn’s] understanding of people’s emotional weaknesses is culled from years of learning how to navigate a world that, as a woman, seeks to keep her powerless.” Quinn’s and Rachel’s pursuit embraces hierarchy and dominance theory, as effortlessly as Chet does in his conventional desire for money, women, and power—even if his efforts are couched in the ridiculous pathological masculinity sustained by essentialist notions.

#### The Construction of Race and Gender

The producers’ construction of conventional categories of gender cannot be decoupled from their construction of race. For example, Rachel attempts to brand Ruby as the “angry black woman” wearing an “I Can’t Breathe” tee shirt and manipulates Beth Ann into putting on her Confederate flag bikini. Ruby is depicted as torn between being true to her intelligence and social activism and donning the markers of totemic femininity, including fake eye lashes and a pretty red dress. This is problematic in that it does insinuate that these are mutually exclusive options, such that Ruby cannot have the autonomy to make her fashion statements in line with the norms of white beauty and be a genuine social activist for the black cause. In Episode 1 the show-runners also attempt to persuade the Pakistani contestant, London (Sunita Prasad), to wear a headscarf, but she refuses to participate in the producers’ racist agenda.

Rachel and Quinn think having the first black male suitor is a progressive move, and on some level this is plausible. But given that these women are after money, dick, and power—in that order—the goal of this move is improved ratings. What drives these ratings is the expected titillation ensuing from the violation of same-race dating norms, such that the viewers get to participate vicariously in all of the racist tropes the show-runners attempt to highlight. This is the white, liberal, feminist racism made manifest. Rachel wants Beth Ann’s father to be appalled at the idea of his pure, white daughter having sex with a hypersexualized black man, though her hopes go unfulfilled. Rachel wants race to be a part of the contestants battle for Darrius, such that the black contestants manifest an historical

resentment against black men who date or marry white women, where such resentment includes a political battle against historically inscribed white norms of beauty. These hopes are more fulfilled. In Episode 8, Darrius does say, ““Black women all around America will hate me if I cut Chantal for Tiffany.”

Chet participates in the same construction playing on racist fears of miscegenation. He entices Tiffany (Kim Matula), the daughter of an NFL team owner who wants to be her own woman, to hook-up with Romeo. What greater fear than the plantation owner’s pure white daughter defiling herself with the black help, or in this case, the black help of the black help? Rachel uses Tiffany in another racial construction. She indicates that Darrius needs her as his partner: “The girl is blonde, beautiful, rich, and white. If a girl like that forgives you, America forgives you.” The forgiveness of a beautiful, white, blond woman carries more weight than forgiveness from others. This is the myth of white female purity taken to a spiritual level.

The show even reveals the complexity and contradictions inherent to racism, as the Southern Bell, Beth Ann, can fall for a black man, and even her Southern parents can embrace him. Their attitude is a potential reflection of Pino’s in *Do the Right Thing*. In one scene he rants, “You gold teeth, gold chain wearing, fried chicken and biscuit eating, monkey, ape, baboon, big thigh, fast running, high jumping, spear chucking, three-hundred-and-sixty degree basketball dunking, titsun, spade, Moulan yan.” In another exchange with Mookie, he tries to explain his opinion, “It’s different. Magic, Eddie, Prince, they’re not niggers. I mean, they’re not black. I mean, let me explain myself. They’re not really black. I mean, they’re black, but they’re not really black. They’re more than black. It’s different.” Darrius might embody, for Beth Ann and her parents, the black, but not black, identity of a famous NFL star. And because of this nuance, the producers’ hopes for a racist clash between Beth Ann’s parents and Darrius are frustrated.

UnREAL illustrates the entertainment industry’s construction of racial roles in an original way. Interestingly, both shows, UnREAL and *Everlasting*, participate in the construction of race and the exploitation, commodification, and fetishizing of black bodies and images. One hopes that an audience can see the irony herein and interpret the message the irony aims to deliver. Rachel has sex with Romeo early in the season, and this embodies the constructed image of a white woman depicted by Mackinnon in her response to Angela Harris’s charge of essentialism and the accusation that her brand of feminism falsely universalizes the experiences of straight, middle class, white women to speak for all women, ignoring or marginalizing race, sexual preference, and

class in her analysis. In the response article, MacKinnon attempts to claim that the white woman constructed by black feminists is a chimera who never was. She writes:

This creature is not poor, not battered, not raped (not really), not molested as a child, not pregnant as a teenager, not prostituted, not coerced into pornography, not a welfare mother, and not economically exploited. She doesn't work. She is either the white man's image of her—effete, pampered, privileged, protected, flighty, and self-indulgent—or the Black man's image of her—all that, plus “pretty white girl” (meaning ugly a sin but regarded as the ultimate in beauty because she is white). She is Miss Anne of the kitchen, she puts Frederick Douglas to the lash, she cries rape when Emmett Till looks at her sideways, she manipulates white men's very real power with the lifting of her very well-manicured little finger. [...] She flings her hair, feels beautiful all the time, complains about the colored help, tips badly, can't do anything, doesn't do anything, doesn't know anything, and alternates fantasizing about fucking Black men with accusing them of raping her. [...] On top of all this, out of impudence, imitateness, pique, and a simple lack of anything meaningful to do, she thinks she needs to be liberated.

This depiction by MacKinnon is meant to be a caricature, but if it is instead a composite of real white women, Rachel's actions in Season 2 provide a piece of the composition. Rachel fulfills her sexual fantasy with Romeo, but is willing to put him in the line of fire of white police when it might advance her career. MacKinnon claims that this white woman is just another constructed myth used as a tool of male dominance in its mode of divide and conquer. Despite contributing to the MacKinnon's caricature/composite, Rachel does invert the patriarchal use of women for sex and gets one of her three tattoo desires embodying a traditionally patriarchal sexual mode. Everlasting also attempts to construct MacKinnon's archetype in Tiffany, the acceptable—read white, blonde, and rich—bride, who wants to be, of all things, liberated. UnREAL takes Ruby out of Everlasting in a potential effort to critique the devaluing of black women who wear their hair natural and refuse to perform the norms of white beauty. But Bastián reads this as otherwise. For instance, she writes that UnREAL shortchanges a story line ripe for deeper exploration to gain short-term drama: “Maybe Ruby will come back. Maybe Darius will realize his mistake. Maybe the show will say something new and even revolutionary about blackness. Until then, the racial

dynamics the series reckons with feel half-hearted.” They appear half-hearted if Basti3n is writing about Everlasting. But her reading is hard to justify once the critic retreats outside of Everlasting and interprets UnREAL. Once the cold-hearted producers demonstrate they are willing to risk Darrius’s football career by potentially paralyzing him and willing to put Darrius and Romeo in the line of fire of white police officers, it is difficult to avoid reading UnREAL’s depiction of Everlasting’s participation in the exploitation of black bodies and lives as a mirror to the actual injustices to black lives in contemporary society. Rachel’s call to the police to report a stolen car in Episode 7, after Darrius, Romeo, Yael, and Tiffany take the Bentley for a joy ride, is a racist means for professional gain. That a liberal white feminist is making the call is a powerful way to get the audience to reflect upon the hypocrisy and racism often built into the white feminist project, which is just what Curry and Harris claim MacKinnon’s project is guilty of. Basti3n argues that this move in the show is exploitive. Of course it is because it is a reflection of the exploitive nature of reality television and the entertainment industry.

Everlasting keeps Jameson (Karissa Tynes), a black cop contestant in the background, much like the reality shows it is imitating and critiquing. Rachel portrays the racist white liberal, who despite her empty desires to revolutionize television by featuring the first black suitor, uses racist schemes to do so and undermines her supposed goal by exploiting black characters’ pain for personal, professional achievement. That said, UnREAL does fail to follow up on some of its potential. For instance, in the episode following Romeo’s shooting, the audience is deprived of an update on his health and any insight into the Darrius’s feelings about the tragedy and injustice his friend has suffered at the hands of the producers. However, one must decide to read Darrius’s mistreatment at the hands of his producers as a function of the injustice of Everlasting or of UnREAL. If the latter, the entire show participates in the exploitation of black bodies alongside profit-driven professional sports, such as the NFL. If the former, then UnREAL can be read as a critique of such unjust exploitation. Critics who take the first horn of the dilemma should be writing critically about a season of *The Bachelor* instead. Basti3n claims that the show fails to illustrate the interior lives of people of color. But is this not because the UnREAL is itself a criticism of reality TV, which exploits gender and racial essentialist stereotypes for profit?

Even Basti3n’s criticism of Season 2 of Everlasting, which she couches as a critique of UnREAL, falls short because her hopes that Ruby will win the show are actually realized. To the surprise of most of the producers, Ruby does return, and Darrius jilts two fooled potential brides at the altar.

## Conclusion

This article's charitable interpretation of Season 2 of UnREAL hinges on its meta-quality, the fictionalized depiction of the making of a fictional reality show. Bastián's criticism of Season 2 is that it ultimately fails to illustrate the interior lives of the contestants and the suitor, which she interprets to be the success of Season 1. It took the archetypes of the slut and the wifey and showed there was more to them. The success of Season 2 is not that it does a noteworthy job of illustrating the interior lives of black characters or depicts successful feminist characters undermining patriarchy. Rather UnREAL's characters depict the dominance theory pervasive in the entertainment industry, the exploitation of black bodies and the devaluing of black lives therein, and the laughable male essentialism of Chet's outdated and toxic masculinity. These representations are feminist and anti-essentialist decisions by the makers of UnREAL. Bastián's analysis conflates UnREAL and Everlasting. She seemed to be hope for the happy ending that only the Bachelor pretends to offer, and which Everlasting actually did offer. Season 2's success is its depiction of the institutional logic of the entertainment industry and reality TV that hem in every character's decision making.

But the most important relationship on the show, its central drama, is between Rachel and Quinn. Bastián actually hopes Rachel will be saved. But both Quinn and Rachel show they do not want money, love, and power. As women, they demonstrate that they can embody male roles for better or worse, while using their gendered and situated experiences to do so, to get what their tattoos actually say they are after. UnREAL, in Season 2, provokes the audience to reflect on the construction of gender roles, the norms of patriarchy, and the exploitation of black bodies, in a way unique to its meta-qualities.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the present analysis is that Lifetime's UnREAL represents a successful iteration of its Broad Focus initiative. This is not only because a Shapiro, a feminist formerly working on the set of a feminist-unfriendly program, The Bachelor, has co-produced her own program. UnREAL counts as a success in this way only if it can be read as advancing a feminist agenda. Everlasting is not a feminist program, and this article reads UnREAL as a program that highlights Everlasting's portrayal of the ills of patriarchy and racism by virtue of its trafficking in the legacy of essentialist notions of gender and race and its conscious construction of gender and race for profit. Watching the production of Everlasting from behind the camera gives the audience insight into the institutional logic of patriarchy and racism in an original and insightful way.

While this article reads UnREAL as a legitimate feminist artwork, it also contends that it offers a critique of white, liberal feminism's racism. This raises the question, given that its co-creator is a white feminist, of whether or not Shapiro's feminist project is mired in the racism she aims to criticize. That third order analysis of the women behind the camera of UnREAL, not those, Rachel and Quinn, behind the camera shooting *Everlasting*, is presently unanswered and at least two seasons of UnREAL will give the audience more material to address that question.

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# Children of the Grave: Visual Nuclear Rhetoric in Heavy Metal Music

By Heather Lusty

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**Abstract:** In this review, the author explores a new text that investigates and connects multi-dimensional aspects of print culture on the cusp of the technological age. Strengths of the text, namely meticulous research, copious primary sources and images, and compelling arguments regarding the interconnectivity of print media, leisure publishing, politics, journalism, technology, and imperial expansion, are supported with engaging visuals and rigorous scholarship in multiple disciplines. The author notes the increasing value of broad, multi-field studies like this, particularly in the current era of multi-media news platforms, to enhance our understanding of the myriad influences daily political and cultural life exerts on our literary consumption.

**Keywords:** adventure fiction, publication networks, history of publishing, serialization, literature of empire, early twentieth-century journalism, technology and publishing, Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells, Conan Doyle, John Buchan

**Resumen:** En esta reseña el autor explora un nuevo texto que investiga y conecta aspectos multidimensionales de la cultura impresa en la cúspide de la era de la tecnología. Los puntos fuertes del texto, específicamente la investigación meticulosa, abundantes fuentes primarias e imágenes y argumentos convincentes que tienen que ver con la interconectividad de los medios impresos, las publicaciones de ocio, la política, el periodismo, la tecnología y la expansión imperial están sustentados con imágenes interesantes y una escolaridad rigurosa en varias disciplinas. El autor comenta acerca del creciente valor de estudios amplios y multi sector

como este, particularmente en la era presente era de plataformas de noticias multimedia para mejorar nuestra comprensión de la variedad de influencias que la vida política y cultural cotidiana ejerce sobre nuestro consumo literario.

**Palabras clave:** ficción de aventura, redes de publicación, historia de la publicación, serialización, literatura de imperio, periodismo de principios del siglo veinte, publicación y tecnología, Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells, Conan Doyle, John Buchan

**摘要:** 本文作者探索了一项新的文本，这种文本调查了正处于技术时代尖端的印刷文化的多重维度，同时将这些维度连接起来。该文本的优势——即细致的研究、丰富的原始资料和图片、说服力强的论点（关于印刷媒体、娱乐出版、政治、新闻业、技术和帝国扩张之间的互联互通）——都通过有趣的视觉图片和严谨的多学科学术予以呈现。作者特别留意了这种多领域研究的价值正在不断上涨的情况（该情况在当今多媒体新闻平台时代更是如此），进而帮助我们理解每日政治和文化生活对文学消费产生的众多影响。

**关键词:** 冒险小说，出版网络，出版史，长篇连载，帝国文学，20世纪早期新闻业，技术和出版，约瑟夫·康拉德，赫伯特·乔治·威尔斯，柯南·道尔，约翰·巴肯

Social protest has a long history, particularly in rock and roll – one only need think of Credence Clearwater revival or the Rolling Stones in the 1960s, directly addressing foreign wars and protest movements through their lyrics. Black Sabbath’s seminal protest song War Pigs – an anthem that first appeared on their 1970’s album Paranoid, which has been recorded over two dozen times (to date) by other musicians. Musicians from all heavy metal genres acknowledge the importance and influence of Black Sabbath’s reshaping approach to rock and roll in the 1970s. In many ways, Sabbath’s cavalier<sup>1</sup> anti-war song is the prototype for subsequent generations of bands who address political subject matter. While political engagement and the rhetoric of protest has been a mainstay of the rock and metal scene during the last several decades, there has also been a resurgence of nuclear rhetoric in contemporary music videos on the global stage. This essay highlights recent videos that express a steadfast anxiety about Cold War politics and atomic destruction.

1 Originally titled “Walpurgis,” for witches’ night – the record company worried it was too satanic sounding, according to lyricist Geezer Butler; the band changed the title, but none of the lyrics. Wiederhorn, John. “Black Sabbath Bassist Geezer Butler Gets ‘Paranoid.’” Noisecreep. 30 July 2010. Retrieved 15 February 2017. <http://noisecreep.com/black-sabbath-bassist-geezer-butler-gets-paranoid/>.

A bit of background on the methodological approaches to visual culture studies: Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies*, first published in 2001, is an early sketch of approaches to what social scientists termed "visual culture," and articulates the various approaches to studying (what were then) non-traditional texts. The modalities Rose articulates comprise the technological, compositional, and social, but I'm particularly interested in the social, which refers to the range of social, economic, and political relations, institutions, and practices that surround an image and through which an image is viewed and used.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Rose consigns film, television and video into the "compositional" interpretation, citing Monaco's vocabulary framework for describing spatial and temporal organization of moving images, distinguishing between *mise-en-scene* and *montage* (48). I want to springboard from this last category – *montage* – and discuss the way musicians enhance their songs through the incorporation of nuclear imagery, and to underscore the heightened anxiety and fear of annihilation that presently haunts the social commentary of these artists.

The music of the late 1960s and early 1970s engaged the Vietnam War. In the early 1980s, the Cold War's apex had countries on edge anticipating nuclear holocaust. Nena's 1983 smash hit "99 Luftballons" is a prime example of the anxiety reflected in popular music; Rush's "Distant Early Warning," and Iron Maiden's "Two Minutes to Midnight" appeared the following year, highlighting the ongoing social anxiety of the arms race and its potential to annihilate Western world. The social apprehension of nuclear devastation is directly reflected in the music of the time, so it struck me as odd last summer when I saw several videos from new albums that engage in a similar anxiety – 35 odd years later. In an age of global terrorism, separatist groups acquiring nukes on the black market, and a rapid deterioration in international relations, particularly between the West and the East, Middle East, and Asia, respectively, it is easy to understand this resurgent anxiety.

I've chosen several recent videos that play on this anxiety, although there are more recent videos that make use of this same imagery (as well as the post-apocalyptic landscape) to trumpet warnings about the dangers of technology and globalization. I'll provide minimal background on each band's country of origin in connection to their individualized concerns, outline lyrics from each example,<sup>3</sup> and include a representative screenshot from

<sup>2</sup> Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching Visual Materials*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. SAGE Publications, 2016. p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Because of the complicated and restrictive process of securing permission to reprint song lyrics, I'll discuss the tone and content of the lyrics without quoting them here, and link to the full lyrics available online.

each video. And as a side note: While most music videos tend to be performance (and nowadays, dance) centric, European bands tend to have film directors make mini-movies to go along with big releases; the videos I'm discussing here definitely reflect that school of production, enabling bands to develop narrative layers to their songs in ways that the audio tracks alone would lack.

First up is Finnish Goth-rock band The 69 Eyes. Last year they released their eleventh album, *Universal Monsters*; "Jet Fighter Plane" was the first single from the album. This is unusual fare for this particular band – it is their only political song, in an oeuvre otherwise fairly narrow and personal. The lyrics are openly critical of the destructive policies of the Cold War era. While we in the West tend to relegate memories of the Cold War and the bomb shelter drills of our youth to "the distant past," international tensions are again at the forefront of Eastern European countries. Yet the decline of the Cold War in the West has been mirrored by a military resurgence of Russian Federation forces all over Eastern Europe, particularly in the last decade. Nordic and Baltic states keep a wary eye on Russian military exercises and games, and on Russia's support of separatist movements (i.e., Crimea, Ukraine).

Finland just celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an independent nation – governed by Sweden from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it became a Grand Duchy in the Russia Empire following the Finnish War (Feb. 1808 – Sept. 1809); in Nov. 1917, when the Bolsheviks declared the right of self-determination for the peoples of Russia, the Finnish Parliament immediately issued a declaration of independence, voted on and approved by parliament less than a month later. In recent years, the anxiety over Russia's frequently aggressive foreign policy has encouraged the Baltics and Finland to ramp up their defenses; in January 2017, 4,500 U.S. soldiers arrived in Poland as part of a NATO operation to reassure its Eastern European allies. In March 2017, the Swedish government decided to reintroduce military conscription—4,000 men and women will be called up for service starting January first, 2018 (BBC). Citing "[t]he Russian illegal annexation of Crimea [in 2014], the conflict in Ukraine and the increased military activity in our neighborhood" as some of the reasons for the return to conscription, a Swedish government report on defense priorities notes the need to boost Swedish military capabilities, including "the deteriorating security situation in Europe, particularly in light of the Russian aggression against Ukraine." Sweden and Finland are not in NATO, but cooperate closely with the alliance (Nordic neighbors Norway and Denmark are in NATO).<sup>4</sup> The U.K. sent the first of 800 troops to

4 Most of the 28 EU member states abolished military conscription; France and the UK have made their armed forces fully professional. Germany suspended conscription in 2011, but a constitutional provision remains; there is a current debate taking place about reintroducing some form of national service there. Finland requires all men from the age

Estonia last month to deter Russian aggression, so these concerns are contemporary and ongoing (BBC).

In this context, it's perhaps not so fascinating that a Goth-rock band would choose, on their eleventh album, to suddenly write a political song. Rock musicians are historically more dialed in to contemporary events – more informed, aware, and engaged in various types of social and political protest than are pop, country, and rap (generally). The lyrics to “Jet Fighter Plan” reflect this awareness, referring to Cold War policies resulting in abuses of power. The refrain echoes the political “we’re making war to ensure peace” rhetoric of the Cold War; stanzas chronicle the history of government leaders trumpeting fear to justify their warmongering (echoing the influential tone of Black Sabbath’s “War Pigs”).<sup>5</sup> In an interview with heavy music web site Blabbermouth.net, regarding “Jet Fighter Plane,” Jyrki said: “The song has a dark early ‘80s kind of vibe. I wrote the lyrics with those Cold War-era times in my mind. Strangely, the world has totally returned into those dark days again after recording the song.”<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 1: The 69 Eyes. “Jet Fighter Plane” promo photo. 2016. Photo by Ville Juurikkala.*

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of 18 to serve up to 347 days in the armed forces; they are later counted as reserves and can be required to take military refresher courses. Russia requires all men to spend a year in the armed forces between the ages of 18-27. Ukraine brought back conscription in 2014. BBC News. “Sweden brings back military conscription amid Baltic tensions.” 2 March 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39140100>.

5 The 69 Eyes. “Jet Fighter Plane.” AZ Lyrics, 2016, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/69eyes/jetfighterplane.html>.

6 Blabbermouth. “THE 69 EYES: Video for new single ‘Jet Fighter Plane.’” 15 January 2016. Retrieved March 15, 2017. <http://archive.blabbermouth.net/news/the-69-eyes-video-for-new-single-jet-fighter-plane.html#pTJZ664zKp0XACp.99>.

The publicity photo (Figure 1) is quite pointed: Jyrki 69, the singer, reads from a history book appropriately titled *The Cold War* (John Lewis Gaddis, 2006). In his book, Gaddis, a distinguished historian of postwar geopolitics, examines the principles of two antithetical political systems struggling for global dominance, each with the power to end life on the planet.

The promo is an interesting visual; while including the band’s trademark “goth’n’leather” look, it centers Jyrki, the singer, in a pensive pose. The book title is unmistakably clear to the viewer, angled in such a way that the full cover is visible. The book is chosen specifically to reflect the influence of history, war, and anxiety on the lyrics of the album’s first single. Not every single released has a photo shoot to accompany it; in fact, there are scant few examples of this. Thus, the band carefully orchestrated this visual, as well as the video, to create a supplementary narrative to the song.

The video for “Jet Fighter Plane,” directed by Finnish photographer and director Ville Juurikkala, juxtaposes the band playing the song with spliced footage from military exercises and stills of refugees and shattered domestic scenes.<sup>7</sup> In fact, there are clearly two narratives in video – the song (the band performing the music and lyrics), and the visual accompaniment. One narrative overlays the other. As the outlined, ghostly figures of the band perform, the background shows another story simultaneously. The song and video start out with the “national emergency” broadcast notice, as the camera pans the faces of women and children refugees. As the lyrics begin, bombed out homes are overlaid with images of the individual band members (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Screenshots from *The 69 Eyes’ “Jet Fighter Plane,”* directed by Ville Juurikkala. 2016.

The overall narrative tone of the video is suitably grim, and the images of destruction and displacement highlight the pointed criticism of the lyrics.

7 The 69 Eyes, “Jet Fighter Plane,” official music video, directed by Ville Juurikkala, 2016. Nuclear Blast Records.

Singer Jyrki 69 says of the video's conceptualization:

As I first heard the instrumental demo of the song, it immediately sounded for me like a song from the early 80's new wave/post punk days. You know, like when the music was heavily inspired by David Bowie's dark visions, the Cold War, the threat of nuclear war and "1984" kind of the future. So I wrote such lyrics from the past – and all of a sudden, the history started to repeat itself and the Cold War winds started to blow again! It was very strange – all of a sudden THE 69 EYES have a song which is very "today" and even political, longing back the days of peace [...] We also wanted the video to be artistic and visually capturing the vibe and theme of the song. There is hope but also darkness, violence and innocence. And it's only goth'n'roll.<sup>8</sup>

My next example is from Draconian, a doom metal band from Sweden. The first single from their latest album, *Sovran*, was "Stellar Tombs," accompanied by an epic 8-minute movie filmed in Iceland (with fantastic drone footage). In this example, the lyrics of the song are fairly ambiguous; without the accompanying film, they would not really call to mind any specific imagery.<sup>9</sup> The context of the visual language, however, projects a fairly ominous tone over the lyrics; they clearly project a haunting, "humanity-is-destroying-itself" narrative. Beginning with footage of volcanic eruptions, cellular divisions under a microscope, time-lapse plants



Figure 3: Screenshots from Draconian's "Stellar Tombs," official video, written and directed by Bowen Stains. 2015.

bursting from the earth, and so forth, the center of the video takes a fairly noticeable turn, incorporating an interesting montage of twentieth-century war footage interrupting the overarching "fighting couple" narrative framework of the

8 Vandala, "The 69 Eyes Release First Single and Music Video for 'Jet Fighter Plane.'" *Vandala Magazine*. 16 January 2016. Retrieved 30 December 2017. <https://vandalamagazine.com/2016/01/20/the-69-eyes-release-first-single-and-music-video-for-jet-fighter-plane/>  
9 Draconian, "Stellar Tombs," *Dark Lyrics*. 2015. <http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/draconian/sovrans.html#4>



Figure 4: Screenshots from Draconian's "Stellar Tombs," official video, written and directed by Bowen Stains. 2015.

video.<sup>10</sup> I'll highlight the center-lude examples here.

As the musical interlude begins, images from World War II flash rapid-fire on the screen. Footage of bomb testing in Los Alamos, New Mexico, melting through prop homes, destroyers launching missiles, marshaling Nazis (Figure 3), Russian

troops parading (Figure 5), American soldiers marching towards an A-bomb explosion all appear quickly (Figure 4). The narrative is one of man's destructive power - not directed at a particular government, but rather at all governments. Also included are scenes of social protest (Figure 6).

Part of the effectiveness of this narrative is the bombardment of images. One must watch the video over and over to distinguish all the footage and events included. Together, they overwhelm the viewer with the totality of violence and the brutal history of twentieth-century man. Bombers swarm the sky in other parts of the video, overshadowing the male character who is lost in the desolate, post-apocalyptic landscape of remote Iceland. The ruins of a city flicker

in and out of the frames like a ghost. This visual imagery is fairly indicative of the gloomy undercurrents of the album, all centering on loss, destruction, desolation. The montage of historical footage here, which overlays the two human figures of



Figure 5: Screenshots from Draconian's "Stellar Tombs," official video, written and directed by Bowen Stains. 2015.

10 Draconian, "Stellar Tombs," official music video, written and directed by Bowen Stains, 2015. Nuclear Blast Records.



Figure 6: Screenshots from Draconian's "Stellar Tombs," official video, written and directed by Bowen Stains. 2015.

the video, provides a fantastic, overarching perspective of the sudden, often violent technological and political surges of human production.

Much of this footage looks like it is part of the material filmed by the U.S. government during testing and wartime deployment of weapons, as well as

from archival footage of the blasts. As a general rule, government documentation cannot be copyrighted, and is available for private use; the Department of Energy has publically released approximately 100 military films to date. Two recent atomic documentaries, *Countdown to Zero* and *Nuclear Tipping Point* also use archival images, arguing that the proliferation of atomic terrorism is on the rise. The result of the open access to this footage is a surge in fiery images on television and movie screens.

My next example is from one of America's most outspoken metal bands, Megadeth. Their 2016 album *Dystopia* is acclaimed as their greatest album in a decade. The singer/lyricist Dave Mustaine has often come across as a conservative, anti-globalization alarmist, so this next example serves as a counterbalance to the previous videos, and the visual narrative might be interpreted as a "nuke-them-first" call to arms. The first two singles/videos are essentially Part 1 and Part 2 of an animated film, visual renderings of the anxieties and fears of contemporary politics (Figures 7 & 8). "The Threat is Real" and "Dystopia"<sup>11</sup> present a post-apocalyptic New York suffering under the encroaching threat of terrorism –



Figure 7: Screenshots from Megadeth's "The Threat Is Real," official video, UMG Recordings, 2016.

essentially Part 1 and Part 2 of an animated film, visual renderings of the anxieties and fears of contemporary politics (Figures 7 & 8). "The Threat is Real" and "Dystopia"<sup>11</sup> present a post-apocalyptic New York suffering under the encroaching threat of terrorism –

11 Megadeth, "The Threat Is Real," "Dystopia," official videos, 2016, directed by Blair Underwood.

in fact, a heavy metal Lady Liberty, fighting for America's freedom, is kidnapped and beheaded in front of Rattlehead, the band mascot, who goes on a rampage to bring her killer to justice (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Screenshots from Megadeth's "The Threat Is Real," official video, UMG Recordings, 2016.

The racially specific terrorist depicted here, clearly of Middle-Eastern origin (Figure 8), is on a nefarious mission to kill Lady Liberty herself, which he rather graphically does via the style of ISIS's frequently filmed beheadings. The

overall sense of these videos is not just of impending nuclear doom, but also the post-apocalyptic landscape of an America without liberty and freedom. This is not limited to "homegrown terrorism," per say; the video alludes to a heavily armed police state, in which drones hunt and kill, tanks roll through the streets, body-armored police execute pedestrians with explosive headshots. Mustaine notes of the virtual reality animated videos:

I'm really excited about this. I don't know anybody else who has done virtual reality performances in metal . . . I thought it would be really cool to show this, where you don't have a particular antagonist. You don't have somebody to be the bad guy just because he's a bad guy, but somebody who could be so innocuous that he could be anything. He could be an arms dealer. He could be a human trafficker. He's the bad guy. And Vic [Rattlehead] and this person, he's the person who is gonna be the cyborg who is on the cover [of the album] with the metal Mohawk. That's Vic's sidekick who ends up fighting through the videos.<sup>12</sup>

Several critics have noted that Mustaine's lyrics are offensively xenophobic;<sup>13</sup> Mustaine, meanwhile, shirks the responsibility of the political mantle on this album, saying:

12 Childers, Chad, "Megadeth Continue 'The Threat is Real' Story with 'Dystopia' Video," Loudwire, 21 January 2016. Retrieved 20 December 2017. <http://loudwire.com/megadeth-dystopia-video/>.

13 Aspray, Benjamin, "Megadeth: Dystopia, Slant Magazine, 22 January 2016. Retrieved December 22, 2017. <https://www.slantmagazine.com/music/review/megadeth-dystopia>.

It's funny that you bring this up because it became clear to me several years ago that when you start talking about politics, you immediately divide your audience in half. And what in the beginning was, you know, quite tongue-in-cheek, kind of one-liner stuff started to, unfortunately, define me as a songwriter, and now people think that I'm a political songwriter, which I'm not. In fact, we write about all kinds of different things, but looking at the landscape right now, these are really, really crazy [times]. Look at, like you said, the natural disasters — everything that's going on, the inability for anyone just about anywhere to get along, and it just makes you wonder, "How did we become so devolved?" It's like the Decline of Western Civilization part three.<sup>14</sup>

A brief sweep of the track listing, however, betrays a heavy interest in contemporary politics: "The Threat Is Real," "Dystopia," "Post American World," and "Foreign Policy" (a cover originally written by the band Fear) are a few more overt examples of the heavy influence of current events on the album. It's undeniable that the animated film videos to accompany the first released tracks are charged with political sentiment, staunchly fear-mongering warnings of the threats to liberty and democracy.

I begin and end with Black Sabbath, who just wrapped up their final tour, cleverly titled "The End," which circled the globe twice over the last two plus years. While they've been playing "War Pigs" pretty consistently for 35 years, there has never been an accompanying video — the song is obviously pre-MTV era. However, since technology has developed significantly since their 1970 Paris concert, which is the only real video widely available of them performing "War Pigs," they now use film footage as a backdrop to their performance (as many bands do). Given that this particular song, more than any other of their many hits, has taken on a life of its own, it's fitting to look at "War Pigs" as the ultimate anti-war anthem. The lyrics are fairly general, and easily applicable to any government, any war, any era — and in all fairness, mankind has not developed a stronger sense of humanity over the last four decades. Our smart bombs, drones, and guided missile systems still make mistakes; superpowers still maintain armaments and threaten peace on a regular basis.

Throughout the song, footage of atomic bomb detonations features in tandem with live camera feeds from the show. The footage looks like it comes from the atomic testing done during

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14 Full Metal Jackie, "Megadeth's Dave Mustaine Not a Political Songwriter: 'We Write About All Kinds of Different Things,'" 20 October 2017. Loudwire. Retrieved 04 December 2017. <http://loudwire.com/megadeth-dave-mustaine-not-political-songwriter/>.

WWII. Below are a few samples (Figures 9 & 10):



Figure 9: Screenshots from Black Sabbath's The End tour, "War Pigs," 2017, Eagle Rock Film Productions. Directed by Dick Carruthers.



Figure 10: Screenshots from Black Sabbath's The End tour, "War Pigs," 2017, Eagle Rock Film Productions.

On the enormous screen backdrop, video footage of total destruction, a visual end-of-days apocalyptic message, overshadows the performance. This now-regular visual narrative (the visual supplement to this song has been used for over a decade by the band during live performances) is both the standard for social-protest movement rock music, and obviously has a fairly

large influence on contemporary music, particularly for rock and metal bands who engage with global events, criticize government policies, and use their music to promote awareness of the dangers of complacency.

Interest in the terrible potential of nuclear power has never abated. Physicist Gregg Springs, at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), is leading an initiative to collect, declassify, scan, and assess America's nuclear history; the records of more than 200 atmospheric tests, shot from various angles, resulted in nearly 10,000 films. So far, more than 4,000 have been digitally scanned, and Spriggs' team has analyzed almost 500 of them.<sup>15</sup> They hope to provide more accurate information about the effects of nuclear weapons than the often inaccurate data collected during the tests 50 years ago. Just 750 of these films have been declassified so far, but they are being made available to the public for the first time. It's likely that we'll see a lot more of this government footage, as well as other contemporaneous news footage, appearing in visual rhetoric in the future.

The importance of real life visual film footage is integral to bands who engage in political conversations. Beyond the bomb, for example, 2017 has been an explosive year politically, with the general population more engaged with politics and dissent than in the past. Several bands have made similar use of the spirit of protest in recently released videos. Ministry released the first single, "Antifa," from the upcoming album *AmeriKKKant* (due out March 2018). The accompanying official video incorporates footage from numerous protests from the current year.<sup>16</sup> Frontman Al Jourgensen says of the song:

I do believe that people should stand up for themselves and not be a party to this bullshit we've been fed [ . . . ] I think Antifa is a state of mind. It's, like, "We're not going to take this shit anymore, because we've been sold a bad bill of goods here by you people." [ . . . ] I relish the attitude of Antifa; I think that some of the tactics they take actually hurt the cause or the thought process more than it helps, but I do enjoy the "Enough!" aspect of it, and that's what this song is about.<sup>17</sup>

The album artwork reflects the political commentary as well – Lady Liberty, distressed, hangs her head in shame and covers her eyes. Jourgensen notes that the song "Antifa" and the forthcoming album, *AmeriKKKant* are meant to stand up to the political chaos

15 O'Brian, Nolan. "Physicist declassifies rescued nuclear test films." Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. 14 March 2017. <https://www.llnl.gov/news/physicist-declassifies-rescued-nuclear-test-films>

16 Ministry, "Antifa," official music video, 2017, Nuclear Blast Records.

17 Ministry, "Deconstructing the song 'Antifa'" (Official Trailer), 2017, Nuclear Blast Records.

that is currently going on in America.<sup>18</sup>

Another example of contemporary news reels contributing to the visual narrative of a band's music is the recent fracas between Power Trip and Fox News; the band issued a "Cease and Desist" notice to the news station (who played a clip of their song "Executioner's Tax (Swinging of the Axe)," and the group objected to the usage. During Power Trip's performance at the 2017 Loudwire Awards, they inter-spliced footage of various conflicts around the world with the (now) infamous video of white nationalist Richard Spencer begin punched during an interview. They note of the inclusion of that particular footage, "We weren't just attacking the right [...] It was kind of an all-encompassing 'shit is fucked' kind of situation," said lyricist Riley Gale. Drummer Chris Ulsh added, "But also, fuck that dude," to which Gale replied, "Yeah, fuck that dude [Richard Spencer]. That guy deserved to get punched."<sup>19</sup>

In an increasingly visual world, in which our news consists largely of video reporting, it's only natural that visual narratives be appropriated to help band's create a second layer of storytelling that illustrates their overt meaning (whether or not their lyrics are specific and political or general and apolitical). The visual content of music videos is shifting increasingly away from performance videos, traditional concert or created content that simply film bands singing the song, occasionally in a fictitious scenario, to direct appropriation of real footage from contemporaneous events to which the band is responding or engaging with.

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# Where Have All the Vampires Gone? An Examination of Gothic Horror in BBC's *Luther*

By Richard Logsdon

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**Abstract:** Gothic horror has found a home in several recent European crime dramas. One of these dramas is BBC's four-season series *Luther*. Episode after episode, London "copper" John Luther tracks down a sociopathic killer whose monstrous actions are easily the equivalent of those committed by the creatures of traditional Gothic horror. Just as significantly, Luther's encounters with the evil represented by these killers taps into those anxieties that currently grip a European continent that has experienced mass shootings, mass stabbings, suicide bombings, baby trafficking, sex trafficking, and killings related to the smuggling of drugs and diamonds. This essay thus represents a unique contribution to the existing body of scholarship devoted to the study of the merging of Gothic horror and contemporary European crime drama.

**Keywords:** European crime drama, Gothic horror, cultural anxieties

**Resumen:** El horror gótico ha encontrado un hogar en varios dramas de crimen europeos recientes. Uno de esos dramas es la serie de cuatro temporadas de la BBC, *Luther*. Episodio tras episodio, el "cooper" de Londres John Luther le sigue la pista a un asesino sociópata cuyas acciones monstruosas equivalen fácilmente a las que cometen las criaturas del horror gótico tradicional. Igual de importantes son los encuentros de Luther con la maldad que representan estos asesinos que utilizan las ansiedades que actualmente dominan un continente europeo que ha

sido víctima de tiroteos masivos, apuñalamientos masivos, bombas suicidas, tráfico de bebés, tráfico sexual y asesinatos relacionados con el contrabando de drogas y diamantes. Este ensayo representa entonces una contribución única al cuerpo existente de investigación que está dedicado al estudio de la mezcla entre el horror gótico y el drama de crimen europeo contemporáneo.

**Palabras clave:** drama europeo de crimen, horror gótico, ansiedades culturales

**摘要:** 哥特小说情节近期在好几个欧洲罪案类电视剧中都有所体现。英国广播公司推出的电视剧《路德》（共四季）便是其中之一。在一集又一集剧情中，伦敦“警察”约翰·路德追赶一名反社会杀手，后者的恶行如同传统哥特小说中的生物所为。同样重要的是，路德与杀手所代表的邪恶势力的交锋，正是利用了当今欧洲所面临的一系列焦虑。欧洲已经历了大规模枪击事件、持刀伤人事件、自杀式爆炸、婴儿贩卖、性贩卖、以及由走私毒品和钻石而造成的杀人事件。本文因此为现有学术作出了独特贡献，后者致力研究哥特小说与当代欧洲罪案片的融合。

**关键词:** 欧洲罪案片，哥特小说，文化焦虑

In his recent *The Twilight of the Gothic?*, Robert Crawford argues that the traditional vampire-based gothic narrative has all but vanished, adding that in the contemporary world conditions for the thriving of the vampire-Gothic narrative no longer exist. Citing *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *The Twilight Series* as examples, he observes that the trend in current vampire movies and TV series has been to humanize and therefore de-demonize vampires without completely removing their thirst for blood. Crawford finds support for his position from Fred Botting, who comments that “[v]ampires have become commodities...[,] offer[ing] mirrors of contemporary identity and sympathetic identification” (Gothic 287). In agreement with Botting and Crawford, Peter Hutchins makes the point in his book *The Horror Film* that traditional vampires are being replaced by sociopathic killers whose atrocities match those committed by the monsters of old (48-54).

Several recent European TV crime dramas bear out Hutchins’ assertion. In these series, the use of elements traditionally associated with the vampire-based narrative—plus the incorporation of a variety of horror tropes—leave the viewer with the impression that the contemporary European landscape in which these dramas are played out has become a nightmare

of Gothic proportions. In fact, several of these dramas—The Fall from Ireland, The Break from Belgium, Bordertown from Finland, Trapped from Iceland, and Luther from England among them—contain episodes that are clearly intended to awaken in the viewer that level of terror once considered the sole domain of Gothic horror. Of these, Luther may be the most significant. Series’ writer Neil Cross has effectively captured, in both Luther the novel and Luther the TV series, a level of cultural anxiety that has traditionally found expression in both Gothic literature and cinematic horror and that has moved readers, and now viewers, to seek in these writers’ works a psychological and spiritual refuge from terror-inducing events of the real world. It is this cultural anxiety that Cross touches upon through London detective John Luther’s encounters with deranged killers, the series’ monsters, who often lurk in the shadows of old condemned buildings in the seedier parts of London. Indeed, the success of the Luther TV series depends upon the skillful use of elements associated with traditional Gothic and contemporary horror.

### The Story

BBC’s four-series crime drama (2010-2015) holds viewers’ attention with Luther’s seemingly endless encounters with sociopathic killers, counterparts of the monsters of traditional gothic horror. Judith B. Weist, authority on media and culture, addresses society’s enduring fascination with monsters that take the form of killers who fail to repress their bestial, demonic, and psychotic impulses behind the mask of civilized humanity:

Monsters in various forms have held a place in every culture throughout history... and they have figured prominently into Western film and literature for centuries.... These monsters take many forms, from demons, ghouls, and evil spirits; to vampires, werewolves, witches, and zombies; to mythic creatures such as Big Foot, the Abominable Snowman, the Mummy, Godzilla, and the Loch Ness Monster. But, despite differences in form and period of popularity, the representations of various “cultural monsters” have remained relatively consistent, including elements of insanity or possession, depravity, and wickedness. These monsters frequently take human form but are depicted with animalistic characteristics—emotionally void, predatory, and savage. They live on through cultural stories (fiction and nonfiction) and reinforce cultural values, beliefs, and norms.... More than that, stories about monsters are linked to social, political, and economic factors.... (330)

The killers of the novel and the series surely fascinate and terrify the immediate European and American audiences.

The novel tells the story of John Luther's attempts to bring to justice a "monster" whose kidnappings and brutal murders reveal a propensity for evil equivalent to those committed by any creature from the archives of Gothic horror. In the novel, Luther uses the information provided by the London police department's computer base to track down Henry Madsen, a wolfish predator who has ties to a baby-smuggling ring out of Eastern Europe. Madsen has recently murdered Tom and Sarah Lambert, an attractive middle-class couple, and ripped from Sarah's womb the fetus that she has been carrying for several months. Luther's description of the murder seems intended to elicit the horror that one feels upon learning of similar real-life atrocities: "Whoever did this, they let themselves into the house while Tom and Sarah were sleeping. They cut off Tom's genitals and choked him with them. They cut open Sarah's belly and they took the baby" (Cross 26). While Luther and his assistants do discover the identity of the killer, they cannot prevent the death of the fetus, to whom Madsen has given the name Ellen, nor can they act quickly enough to prevent Madsen and his step-son from butchering most of the Daltons, another attractive, well-to-do English family, in order to kidnap nine-year old daughter Mia, whom Madsen plans to use for reproductive purposes. In the novel's final scene, repeated in the first TV episode, Luther corners Madsen in an abandoned industrial park warehouse. As Madsen charges Luther, the floor caves in, and the killer finds himself dangling by his fingers from a section of board with a long drop below. Enraged by this killer's monstrous deeds, Luther gives into his own usually repressed dark impulses and steps on Madsen's fingers to ensure that this creature falls to his death. Having acted against his conviction that all human life is worth saving, Luther suffers a minor breakdown and takes a leave of absence from the London Police Department.

### Settings, Hauntings, and Scary Sounds

The London of the Luther novel and TV series becomes a microcosm of the cities and towns that constitute the settings for the recent European crime dramas that depend for their effectiveness upon elements from traditional Gothic horror. Indeed, the London of John Luther proves to be as hostile a setting as most any conceived by writers of who have worked within this subgenre. In both the novel and the TV episodes, the gloomy landscapes of Anne Radcliffe and Edgar Allan Poe give way to "derelict London" (Tailing), a collection of darkened and dilapidated buildings that serve as counterparts to the ruins found of more traditional Gothic narratives (Stevens 54) and that, in

Cross's series, provide hiding places for the killers. For instance, episode one of series two focuses upon a young woman who, walking home late at night, takes a London side street, its dark and seemingly lifeless buildings intensifying the uncanny sense of a hidden, stalking presence. Sensing that she is not alone, the woman turns to discover that a man wearing the punch mask made famous by the *Scream* movies has been following her. Wielding a large knife, the man seizes the moment and brutally murders the woman.

In the novel and the series, the dread inspired by setting is often intensified by creating the sense of a haunting, a device long associated with Gothic horror (Hutchings 14). As Jerold Hogle comments, "These hauntings can take many forms, but they frequently assume the feature of ghosts, specters, or monsters . . . that arise from within the antiquated space" (3). Accordingly, in several episodes, the action takes place in derelict dwellings that, as they harbor the killer awaiting the victim, recall the haunted houses that have become one of the "visual codes" of Gothic horror (Hogle 2). The second episode from series three provides an example. Here, a lone woman returns to her flat, thinks that she senses another presence, and brushes off the uncanny sensation of a haunting as a product of her imagination. Of course, the monster is hiding in-wait for her. In fact, the director positions the camera under the woman's bed to create the killer's perspective and to reveal to the viewer where this monster is located. Thus, from the perspective of the killer, whose foot fetish drives him to rape and kill, the viewer watches as the woman removes her shoes and reveals her bare feet. She finds her fears confirmed but only after she closes her eyes and presumably falls asleep. That's when the killer, head first and lying on his back, slides out from under the woman's bed, his movement evoking the impression of something monstrous and inhuman. She opens her eyes to find the killer lurking over her in semi-darkness.

In many Gothic horror narratives, the dread inspired by setting is amplified by sounds that intensify the sense of a haunting and the presence of a monstrous evil (Hutchings 126-134). A striking example of the use of sound to inspire a sense of dread occurs at the beginning of the fourth episode of series three. In this episode, a single housewife, awaiting the arrival of her late-working husband, goes through the house searching for the source of a strange sound: she finds, much to her relief, that a pigeon has been trapped in one of the rooms. Any fear that danger awaits is seemingly put to rest after she receives a couple of texts, supposedly from her husband, one telling her that he is on his way and the second informing her that he's stopping by the store to pick up that night's dinner. The caller arrives at the house

and seats himself in the darkened hallway just off the entryway as the woman, her back to him, finishes up an art project. She turns to greet her husband and finds herself facing a strange man wearing black-framed glasses. When she gasps, "Who are you?" the intruder brings out a large knife and slowly stands. The rest is left to the imagination of the viewer, who later learns that this monster has cannibalized his victim.

### Gothic Horror and the Demonic

Setting is a vital element in Gothic horror, but the ingredient that most effectively evokes a sense of dread is the presence of the demonic. According to E. J. Clery, the author who includes the supernatural in his or her narrative intends "to leave the reader in the most horrible reality" (157) and to awaken, in turn, "an indiscriminate paranoia" (164) that has been inspired by actual events beyond the script and that has kept the Western world on edge.

In Luther, Cross uses allusion to imply the presence of the demonic. For instance, in the novel, the killer Henry Madsen identifies himself during a London talk-radio show as "Pete Black," a common-enough sounding name, but one that represents a violent, even demonic identity that has replaced the real one that was erased early in Madsen's life, likely by severe parental abuse. In a station scene midway through the novel, Luther's partner Howe provides an explanation for Madsen's pseudonym, adding that the name is simply a reversal of "Black Pete":

"In the Netherlands, 'Zwarte Piet,' meaning Black Pete, is a servant of Sinterklaas. He delivers presents on the fifth of December and.... He takes naughty kids away in the empty bags....in some stories, the Zwarte Piets themselves were kidnapped as kids, and the kidnapped kids make up the next generation of Zwarte Piets." (133)

Howe's further explanation makes it clear that "Black Pete" is a demonic archetype: "There's El Hombre de la Bosa, meaning the Sack Man. In Armenia and Georgia it's the Bag Man. In Bulgaria, it's Torbalan. In Hungary, it's zakos ember [sic], 'the person with the sac'" (133). Again, in the third episode of season one, artist and writer Lucien Burgess identifies with the infamous Aleistair Crowley. Crowley's history reveals that he vowed early in life to commit every transgression mentioned in the Bible, later made a study of the "dark arts" to satisfy his enormous sexual appetite, and finally took upon himself the name of the Beast of Revelation as well as the number 666. A self-appointed disciple of Crowley, Lucien—possibly a variation upon Lucifer—gains entrance into the house of a young woman by claiming to be a policeman. Once

inside the house, front door closed, Burgess performs an action that links him with both Crowley and the serpent in the Garden of Eden: he flicks his tongue at the woman—an action modeled after what Crowley termed the “serpent’s kiss” and an invitation to a form of violent “sex magic.” Following Crowley’s lead, Lucien goes on to lick the woman. When Luther and his partner Justin Ripley enter the crime scene, they find the entry hall covered with sentences taken from Crowley’s manuscripts, with which Luther seems well acquainted, and written in the blood of one of Lucien’s past victim. Luther later learns that the motive behind Lucien’s sanguinary habits is the belief—again expressed in Crowley’s writings—that the drinking of bodily fluids is necessary to sustain one’s existence and to enable one to perform violent sexual acts, which Crowley believed brought him into contact with demonic spirits (Aleister Crowley--The Wickedest Man in the World).

Influenced by traditions of Gothic horror, Cross has created characters whose personal identity has been annihilated at some point in their lives and who view their own murderous actions within a context that is clearly demonic, a realm whose existence has long been a matter of debate among writers of both Gothic and non-Gothic fiction (Clery 53-60). According to Professor of German literature Irena Kuznetsova,

The demonic is a tricky and heterogeneous concept. In the most general terms, [the demonic] can be identified with an irrational and mysterious force or energy that thinkers, artists, and theologians from antiquity to the modern day have sought to comprehend and locate either within or outside of individuals, while personifying it in the figures of demons (devils) or in demon-like characters. (246)

Thus, in the novel and TV series, whether the demonic has its source in the subconscious or supernatural realm is immaterial. What is most significant in this series is that the demonic has contributed greatly to shaping the killers’ personalities. Indeed, the series focuses upon killers whose diabolical savagery is intended to evoke the level of horror/ terror that late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British Gothic novelist Anne Radcliffe had in mind in her essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” when she wrote, “[T]error expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life,’ whereas horror ‘contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them.’” As it evokes terror and horror, Cross’s series creates the impression of an almost tangible paranoia that may have become a “perfectly rational fear” (Kavka 227) among current residents of large European cities (like London) haunted by human beings whose monstrous actions are inspired by the

demonic Other. According to Steven Bruhm, the bases for this fear are the “anxieties about the aggressions of the outside world” (Kavka 212) and a “fear of foreign otherness and monstrous invasion” (260). These “aggressions,” at least in Cross’ novel and TV series, include mass shootings, mass stabbings, suicide bombers, possible foreign aggression, child-sex trafficking, drug smuggling, and the growing presence of the Russian mafia.

### The Terrible Darkness of John Luther

Any discussion of the novel and series must include the characterization of John Luther, whose dark, monstrous side begins to surface by the end of the second episode of season four. Indeed, while Cross acknowledges his debt to mystery writers Raymond Chandler and Sir Arthur Canon Doyle (“Neil Cross”), the characterization of John Luther goes far beyond a mixture of Marlow and Holmes. It involves the creation of a man who, in the tradition of the ancient hero, must journey through the darkened underworld of “derelict London” in his pursuit of the latest killer and who—like Aeneas, Jesus, and Beowulf—must return to the land of the living in one piece. In addition to events that link him to the heroes of old are parallels that connect John Luther to Lord Byron’s Manfred. For instance, both Manfred and Luther indulge in an excessive brooding that alienates them from those around them. Both habitually transgress established codes and norms—in Luther’s case, this often involves side-stepping department policy with the intent of stopping the killer. Additionally, both characters suffer a haunting of sorts, Manfred by the spirits/demons that he summons throughout the play and Luther by the memories of those who have been murdered because of their connection with him. The guilt that consumes both characters certainly contributes to their hauntings. Manfred’s guilt and his concomitant wish to die constitute a reaction to his belief that he caused the death of a former lover to whom he refers as Astarte. Luther’s guilt stems not only from his inability to prevent the murders of several other characters in the script but from a failure, committed early in his career, to fulfill the promise, made to fake-clairvoyant Meghan Cantor, that he would arrest a young female, the prostitute Stacey Bell, whose bullying of several girls in high school contributed to their mental disorders (season four, episodes one and two). Finally, Luther and Manfred share a preoccupation with death. For Manfred, this obsession can be understood within the larger context of the English and German Romantic periods’ tendency to idealize death. In Luther’s case, thoughts of suicide often follow his taking of—or of his attempt to take—a human life. After Luther’s attempt to kill Henry Madsen, Detective Ian Reed finds his partner and friend standing on the

edge of a high rise and pondering taking a leap. In the first episode of series two, after Alice Morgan executes detective Ian Reed for murdering Luther's wife, the viewer finds Luther sitting alone, on the sofa of his apartment, putting one bullet into the chamber of his gun, spinning the chamber, putting the weapon to his head, and pulling the trigger. Luther's thoughts of suicide reveal an intense self-loathing that likely springs from his fear that he may be very much like the sociopathic killers that he must track down. Indeed, Luther shares with Manfred a terrible darkness that suggests the presence of the demonic.

In his on-going battle with his own terrible darkness, John Luther feels compelled to repeat a behavior—tracking down yet another sociopathic killer—that has become almost pathological. In a psychological thriller that contains element of Gothic horror, Luther's motivation to stop yet another killer from taking yet another life surely springs from a lingering obsession that is fueled, quite possibly, by his guilt over a past failure; by the terrible darkness that often verges on consuming him; and by a seemingly unending supply of sociopathic killers that arise to terrify the average citizen. Indeed, Luther's almost obsessive reenactment of this behavior is clearly in accord with traditions that link Gothic literature to horror cinema and suggests the existence of buried memories that have become Luther's own personal demons. As Steven Bruhm has observed, "What becomes most marked in contemporary Gothic—and what distinguishes it from its ancestors—is the [protagonist's] and the viewers' compulsive return to certain fixations, obsessions and blockages" (260). Thus, caught in what Freud termed "a repetition compulsion" (Bruhm 272), Luther tracks down the killer again and again, purging society of yet another homicidal sociopath but bringing only a temporary restoration of order not only to the world around him but to his own troubled psyche. Not surprisingly, the obsession exacts a tremendous price by the end of the yet-to-be-finished series: Following the murders of his wife, his partner Justin Ripley and his girlfriend Alice, John Luther verges on becoming a monstrous creature himself whose only thought is to avenge the death of Alice Morgan, a brilliant but sociopathic killer with whom Luther develops a powerful romantic bond.

The Shadow Self, the Monstrous Feminine and Alice Morgan

To the viewer, Luther's confrontations with some the most monstrous elements of humanity certainly suggest a heightening of cultural and social anxieties that have a basis in the oft-terrifying world beyond the script. This is a level of anxiety evoked by a series that, at first glance, seems to lack unity. But closer examination reveals that what holds this series together

is Luther's developing romance with physicist Alice Morgan, who murders her mother, father, and family dog before episode one even begins. It is a romance that finds a parallel in the relationships between Jane Eyre and Rochester in Charlotte Bronte's novel, between Heathcliff and Catherine in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and between vampires and their human lovers in several contemporary, somewhat domesticated versions of the vampire narrative.

Thus, during his initial interrogation of Alice at the police station, Luther deduces what Alice has done and yet refuses to make an arrest, thus providing a window for the growth of a dark and dangerous bond between the two lead characters. In fact, by the time he encounters Alice, Luther has already attempted to murder Henry Madsen and so has acted upon the rage that finds a parallel in whatever pushed Alice to take her parents' lives. In turn, the parallel provides a foundation that allows Luther and Alice to connect. Indeed, in the second episode of the first series, Alice remarks to Luther that their difference is one of degree, not category. Her observation receives validation in the first episode of the first season when, interrogating Alice about the murder of her parents, Luther intuitively senses within her the presence of a "dark matter", a phrase synonymous with the "dark energy" that theoretically is destabilizing the universe (NASA) and that, by extension, surely contributes to Alice's occasional bursts of madness. Sensing the same element in Luther, Alice later reminds the London copper that in attempting to kill Henry Madsen, he simply gave in to his true nature. Luther does not deny this observation, even after Alice, posing as a doctor, stands by Madsen's hospital bed after setting a part of the hospital on fire and suffocates the killer whose confession would result in Luther's removal from the police force and a sentence in prison.

In fact, in several scenes, Alice's actions clearly express the repressed but certainly monstrous desires with which Luther struggles through the series. The murder of Henry Madsen is only one of several scenes. Episode three of series one provides another example. Sensing Luther's pain and outrage over his wife Zoe's decision to replace him with the far more sensitive and less neurotic Mark North, Alice hires a gang of girls to beat up Zoe's new boyfriend in an act of vengeance of which Luther seems to disapprove. Again, in episode six from series one, Alice acts out Luther's own desire for vengeance against the man and former friend who killed his wife Zoe as she uses a short-barreled shotgun to execute detective Ian Reed on an abandoned train platform. And while Luther discourages her from pulling the trigger, it is quite clear that Alice is fulfilling Luther's own wish in committing a murder for which she is arrested and sent to a

hospital for the criminally insane. In short, Alice's actions often reflect John Luther's shadow-self, a dark and dangerous side that Luther shares with the series' sociopathic monsters. In fact, as Alice intuits and acts upon Luther's shadowy desires, she creates a "moral dilemma" (Jung quoted in Hoyt) for Luther. Indeed, Alice's acting-out of Luther's hidden and "monstrous" desires "challenges [Luther's] whole ego-personality." Because of Alice Morgan, he is forced "[T]o become conscious" of the "the dark aspects of [his] personality as present and real" (Jung qtd. in Hoyt). In short, Alice's behavior often reflects "the thing [that John Luther] ... has no wish to be" (Jung qtd. In Hoyt). She reveals to Luther his own monstrous side.

Additionally, Alice is a borderline representation of the "monstrous feminine"—of an "overpowering femininity" (Hogle 11) that represents a threat to the long-established English patriarchy. Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed apply this label to women who, alienated and abject, find a familiar place in works of horror. Certainly, Creed's summary of Kristeva's position concerning the connection between abjection and horror in the "monstrous feminine" is applicable to a discussion of Alice Morgan:

...Although [Kristeva's] study is concerned with psychoanalysis and literature, it nevertheless suggests a way of situating the monstrous-feminine in the horror film in relation to the maternal figure and what Kristeva terms 'abjection,' that which does not respect borders, position, rules,' that which 'disturbs identity, system, order...'" (8)

Kristeva and Creed agree that this "abjection" (clearly manifest in Alice's defiance of rules and borders) is most often realized in those who have been discarded by a generally patriarchal community built around strict moral requirements that are perhaps best exemplified by religious laws intended purify (Creed 9; Kristeva 15-17, 67-68). In the words of Kristeva, Alice also borders on being "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (4), her "overpowering femininity" (Hogle 11) manifest in the rage created by being forcefully cast off, in this case by her own parents, and resulting in homicidal retribution. Abject, monstrous, Alice is also a version of the "castrating female" (Creed 1-7), another Gothic horror archetype that has for one of its sources the legends surrounding the Greek sorceress Medea. This female archetype has as one of her driving motivation the desire to disempower or emasculate the male. Barbara Creed associates the castrating female with the "toothed" vagina that threatens to devour (105) and points out that victims of castration "die agonizing deaths. Flesh is cut, bodies violated, limbs torn asunder... Where the monster is a psychopath,

victims are cut, dismembered, decapitated. Instruments of death are usually knives or other sharp instruments” (Creed 107). While Alice never goes so far as to dismember somebody, her actions reveal that she is fully capable of assuming the role of castrating female. To begin, she has murdered her father before the series begins. Again, in a scene from the series’ first episode, Luther steals from Alice’s flat the urn that holds the ashes of her parents. To recover the urn, which also contains a piece of the gun she used to kill her parents, Alice pursues Luther onto a bridge spanning the Thames, kitchen-knife in hand. Perhaps, the most notable example occurs in the last episode from series three. Here, Alice saves herself, and possibly Luther, from being executed by Tom Marwood, a vigilante-killer consumed by rage over his wife’s rape and murder. The loss has spurred Marwood to execute other males who prey mainly on women and children and, finally, to punish those females, Alice and Mary, who have befriended his nemesis John Luther. Thus, in a scene from the fourth episode of season three, the viewer finds Marwood, armed with a short-barrel shotgun, standing on a roof top behind Alice and Mary. His monstrous side emerges as he demands that Luther select which woman to execute, and Luther chooses Alice. Before Marwood has the chance to pull the trigger, Mary turns, grabs his weapon, and points it away from Alice. In a split second, Alice turns and drives a nail (the archetypal sharp object) into Marwood’s neck, completely disempowering/emasculating the killer.

At this point, the viewer must bear in mind that, when she disables Marwood, Luther probably still fears Alice Morgan. And there may be much to fear, for in episode two of series four, the sociopathic clairvoyant Meghan Cantor warns Luther that if Alice hadn’t killed Luther, Luther would have killed Alice. If this is so, then Luther’s giving up of Alice is motivated by his desire to be rid of a woman intent on making him her own and to exorcise from himself the monstrous, demonic darkness that has consumed Alice and that, throughout the series, has threatened to consume Luther. In fact, Luther’s failure to rid himself of his own terrifying darkness results in the deepening of his relationship with Alice, and in the first episode of season four, the viewer finds that Luther has taken a leave of absence from the force and taken up residence in a cottage on the coast to wait for the return of Alice Morgan, who has gone abroad to “hock” some stolen diamonds for a bundle of money that will allow her to retire with Luther in Brazil. When Luther learns that Alice has been murdered, his monstrous, demonic rage returns as he threatens to “come for”—to kill—Meghan Cantor, who has apparently played a part in Alice’s murder.

## Conclusion

BBC's *Luther* represents a recently emerging subgenre of European crime drama that depends for its success upon the inclusion of elements found in traditional Gothic literature and cinematic horror: a dark and dreary setting, hauntings and strange sounds, a Byronic hero, an implied demonic presence, a host of monsters, and a monstrous female. In episode after episode, *Luther* ventures into dreary "derelict London" to confront the sociopathic killers, their atrocities intended to inspire the terror that precedes a bloodcurdling event, the horror that constitutes our reaction to the atrocities, and an anxiety stirred by the fears that have gripped a European culture faced with its own continued dissolution.

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# “A Man Must Have a Code”: A Contrast of Black and White Masculinity in *The Wire*

By Graeme Wilson

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**Abstract:** *The Wire*, which aired on premium channel cable HBO from 2002 to 2008, is one of the most acclaimed series ever produced for the medium of television. Set in Baltimore, *The Wire* examines American bureaucracy and ruminates on the shortcomings of public institutions. Notably, more than half of *The Wire*'s ensemble is African American, and while this accurately reflects Baltimore's racial demographics, such diversity remains a rarity in American dramatic television. Thus, *The Wire* provides a unique opportunity for scholarly research on cultural representations of race and gender in popular media, particularly regarding how they intersect. The goal of this critical studies essay is to determine if *The Wire* perpetuates or challenges popular notions of hegemonic masculinity, and how they differ across racial representations. This is especially important given the prominent role that popular media plays in influencing expectations amongst male viewers towards idealized masculinity in society.

**Keywords:** *The Wire*, bureaucracy, racial representation on television, masculinity, racialized masculinity

**Resumen:** *The Wire*, que estuvo al aire en el canal premium de cable HBO de 2002 a 2008, es una de las series más aclamadas que se ha producido para el medio de la televisión. *The Wire* tiene como escenario a Baltimore y examina la burocracia estadounidense y se enfoca en los problemas de las instituciones públicas. Notablemente, más de la mitad del elenco de *The Wire* es afroamericano, y mientras esto refleja correctamente la

demografía racial de Baltimore, este tipo de diversidad sigue siendo una rareza en la televisión dramática en Estados Unidos. Por ende, *The Wire* proporciona una oportunidad única para la investigación académica acerca de las representaciones culturales de raza y género en los medios populares, particularmente en el tema de cómo se entrelazan. El objetivo de este ensayo de estudios críticos es determinar si *The Wire* perpetúa o desafía nociones populares de la masculinidad hegemónica, y cómo son diferentes en varias representaciones raciales. Esto es especialmente importante dado el importante papel que los medios populares tienen para influenciar expectativas entre los espectadores hombres hacia una masculinidad idealizada en la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** *The Wire*, burocracia, representación racial en la televisión, masculinidad, masculinidad racializada

**摘要:** 电视剧《火线重案组》从 2002-2008 年在美国有线 HBO 付费频道上播出，这部剧是电视媒体中收到高度评价最多的连续剧之一。该剧场景设立在巴尔的摩，讲述了美国官僚，同时思考了公共机构的缺陷。值得注意的是，该剧成员超过一半都是非裔美国人，这精确地反映了巴尔的摩的种族人口，但这样的（种族）多样性在美国电视剧中依然是极少数。因此，该剧为学术研究提供了独一无二的机会来调查种族和性别在大众媒体中的文化表现——尤其是二者的交汇方式。本篇批判性研究的目的是确定该剧是否让（大众）对霸权性男性气质（*hegemonic masculinity*）的普遍认识一直持续下去，还是说质疑这种认识。研究还确定了这种认识如何在不同的种族表现中存在差异。这一点尤为重要，因为考虑到大众媒体能显著影响男性观众对男性气质理想化的期望。

**关键词:** 《火线重案组》，官僚，电视中的种族表现，男性气质，男性气质种族化

Since the debut of *The Sopranos* on HBO in January 1999, television critics and scholars have retroactively credited the series with heralding the arrival of the third and current Golden Age of Television. This new Golden Age is distinguished by an abundance of critically acclaimed American dramas that demonstrate complex characters and cinematic quality (Albrecht 9; Damico and Quay viii; Sepinwall 41). Besides *The Sopranos*, popularly cited texts from the current Golden Age include *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men*, which aired on basic cable channel AMC, and *The Wire*, which aired on HBO alongside *The Sopranos*. Together, these four series are popularly considered the preeminent series of the current Golden Age. Although these series vary in terms of aesthetic style and plot, each of them is concerned with contemporary notions

of masculinity, which are explored through the usage of morally ambiguous antiheroes as protagonists (Sepinwall 41). However, *The Wire* is unique from its peers in several important ways.

*The Wire*, which aired for five seasons from 2002 to 2008, consists of 60 separate hour-long episodes. Set and filmed in Baltimore, *The Wire* serves as a critique of American bureaucracy and local government, with each season examining institutional and systemic dysfunction within a different public service of Baltimore. One of *The Wire*'s most unique traits is its casting, as more than half of the series' cast is African American. While *The Wire*'s casting accurately reflects the racial demographics of Baltimore, such diversity remains a rarity in American dramatic television. Instead, representation of African Americans in television – and entertainment as a whole – have been historically limited to roles that reinforce cultural stereotypes, the most prevalent of which being the presentation of African American males as criminally or sexually dangerous (Ward 285). It is noted that:

The relationship between race and masculinity has always been one vested with popularized stereotypes that... involve representational practices that classify and categorize members of another group, reducing those members to simplified and exaggerated characteristics, which are then communicated as fixed by nature. (Park 370).

Due to the racial diversity of its cast, *The Wire* is a distinctive research text that provides a unique opportunity for scholarly research on cultural representations of race and gender in popular media, particularly regarding how they intersect. Specifically, does *The Wire* perpetuate or challenge popular notions of hegemonic masculinity, which describes the “most honored way of being a man” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832) in society? How does *The Wire*'s portrayal of hegemonic masculinity differ across racial representations? Such questions are especially important given the prominent role that mass media plays in influencing expectations amongst male viewers towards idealized masculinity in society (Moss 29). Popular television is recognized as exerting especially strong influence over audience conception of gender roles, as audiences derive “contemporary archetypes ... from the small screen” (Watson 3). Out of *The Wire*'s expansive ensemble, two characters in particular will serve as the prism through which this research is conducted: Jimmy McNulty, an Irish American police detective, and Omar Little, an African American stickup artist who robs Baltimore's drug dealers.

McNulty is *The Wire*'s most prominent white character, being the main protagonist of the series. Dominic West, the

actor who portrays McNulty, is credited first each season of the series, and it is his character's actions that instigate most of The Wire's overarching plotlines. McNulty is only absent for half of the fourth season because West himself requested to spend more time with his family (Barton, "'The Wire': The Dominic West Perspective"). Omar is one of The Wire's most prominent black characters, similarly appearing in each season of the series. While initially a recurring character, Omar was promoted to main character from the third season onwards. However, out of The Wire's entire ensemble, Omar is unquestionably the character to have received the most academic attention, specifically for how he subverts popular stereotypical expectations of black masculinity in television (Johnson Jr. 334). In contrast, McNulty displays many characteristics of a "macho male," a stereotypical model of masculinity common in police dramas. This model of masculinity, which often manifests as the dominant hegemonic model in certain environments (Connell and Messerschmidt 840), is characterized by several exaggerated, narrowly defined traits:

Characteristics of the macho orientation are a lack of empathy or sensitivity especially in regards to sex; pursuing excitement, adventure, and sensation seeking; and espousing the belief that violence is normative and acceptable for men. (Scharer 617)

In The Wire, most white characters occupy positions of institutionalized power, primarily in law enforcement. In contrast, the vast majority of The Wire's black characters are criminals, specifically drug dealers. However, a historical trend in American police dramas is that macho models of masculinity are displayed by both the police and the criminals they pursue (618), a tradition that The Wire largely continues:

[The Wire] is especially attractive to a masculinities theorist because it is a "starkly masculine" battle between mostly male police forces and mostly male drug dealing organizations. Both of these groups displays distinctly masculine, and even hypermasculine, traits. (Cooper 98)

In particular, the same hyper-masculine traits emphasized by macho masculinity are similarly valued among African Americans of low socioeconomic status who subscribe to the "gangsta" model of masculinity (Chambers and Waldron 182; Collins 158), which is similarly represented in The Wire. The widespread representation of such masculinities in popular television has been criticized as yielding "potential consequences for socialization of audience members into roles and for the learning

of aggression from exposure, due to the frequent correlation between exaggerated expressions of masculinity and aggression” (Scharrer 615). However, textual elements of *The Wire* condemn macho masculinity, highlighting its regressive qualities and toxicity. In contrast, Omar occupies a counter-hegemonic model of masculinity, presented as a healthier alternative to the macho and gangsta models of masculinity commonly represented in popular police dramas. Thus, the ultimate aim of this critical studies essay is to normalize alternative and progressive forms of masculinity.

### Theoretical Foundation and Methodology

The concept of hegemonic masculinity, pioneered by sociologist R.W. Connell, describes normative societal masculinity, and the subordination of other masculinities that do not meet these standards (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Commonly, such marginalized masculinities include alternative gender identities such as homosexuality (Connell and Messerschmidt 837; Demetriou 341; Donaldson 648). Law professor Frank Rudy Cooper describes hegemonic masculinity as contemporary “ideal[s] of manhood that ... set the norm by which all men will tacitly agree to be judged” (100). Because hegemonic masculinity “is based on practice that permits men’s collective dominance over women to continue, it is not surprising that in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men’s engaging in [macho] practices ... that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting” (Connell and Messerschmidt 840).

To contrast *The Wire*’s presentation of white hegemonic masculinity with its presentation of black hegemonic masculinity, both of which are commonly expressed in the series through macho practices such as physical aggression and violence, this critical studies essay employs rhetorical criticism for its method. Media scholars harness rhetorical criticism to identify and interpret the persuasive messages embedded within texts by their authors (Jasinski 128). Rhetorical criticism was best suited for this project due to the methodological position of *The Wire* and other television series relating audience interpretation of thematic content. Additionally, this essay draws from multidimensional masculinity theory, intersectionality theory, and queer theory for its theoretical framework. All 60 episodes of *The Wire* were viewed for this case study, with specific episodes being coded for scenes and dialogue that link McNulty and Omar’s masculinity to their respective racial identities.

Akin to its peers on HBO and AMC, *The Wire* deconstructs masculine identity in American society. It is important to note that masculinity exists as a socially constructed ideal rather than a realized actuality, and for men in general this ideal is perpetually

“just out of reach. It becomes ideological, a goal to strive towards, but not ultimately attainable” (MacKinnon 7). A reoccurring theme in contemporary Golden Age series is that masculinity is fundamentally anxious, as the protagonists must constantly display or prove their masculinity to their peers. However, the majority of these series focus on white protagonists, thus conforming to historical trends regarding racial representation. In contrast, *The Wire*’s protagonists demonstrate various racial identities and backgrounds, and the series is noted for giving “dignity and a voice to even the most abject of its represented urban individuals” (Shapiro 212). Consequently, multidimensional masculinity theory is the most applicable framework through which to conduct this research. Multidimensional masculinity theory advocates that all masculinity, either traditional or alternative, is influenced by race (Cooper and McGinley 329). This theory is influenced by intersectionality theory, developed by scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. According to intersectionality theory, when multiple categories of identity overlap, such as race and sex, they produce unique and subjective experiences (Crenshaw 145). Omar demonstrates an intersectional identity in *The Wire* through his identification as a gay man, which influences his treatment amongst Baltimore’s African American community. Taking into account Omar’s homosexual orientation, this project also correspondingly incorporates queer theory into its framework.

### Analysis

Jimmy McNulty. In *The Sopranos* and other eminent series of the current Golden Age, hegemonic masculinity is most commonly expressed through aggression, physicality, callous sexual attitudes and other macho characteristics. However, while Tony Soprano and most other contemporary Golden Age protagonists are generally criminals or outlaws, McNulty instead occupies a position of law enforcement, which produces a far more distinct masculine identity. In particular, “white heterosexual middle- and upper-class men who occupy order-giving positions ... produce a hegemonic masculinity that is glorified throughout the culture” (Cooper 104). McNulty’s macho masculine identity is characterized by three particular traits: sexual conquest, alcohol abuse, and resistance to authority.

Over the course of the series, McNulty, a divorcee, engages in numerous affairs and one-night stands, even with the prosecutor to whom he is assigned, Rhonda Pearlman. Notably, “callused attitude[s] toward women or sex” (Scharrer 620) are a recognized characteristic of macho masculinity. McNulty’s sexual proclivities are well known amongst his peers in the Baltimore police; in the second season episode “Stray Rounds”

(7/27/2003), McNulty is chosen to infiltrate a brothel connected to a drug organization, specifically due to his reputation. True to form, McNulty ends up participating in a ménage à trois with two prostitutes before the brothel is raided, much to the bemusement of his peers. Later, in the fifth season episode "Not for Attribution" (1/20/2008), McNulty has sex with a woman on the hood of his car in a parking lot, flashing his police badge to a pair of amused detectives who investigate the noise. It is not uncommon for either working or upper-class men to engage in extramarital affairs as a form of rebellion against the boredom and restrictions of marital domesticity; this rebellion then functions as a reassertion of their masculine power (Pyke 536). Marital infidelity is a common trait amongst contemporary Golden Age protagonists, such as *The Sopranos*' Tony Soprano or *Mad Men*'s Don Draper, both of whom are married in their respective series. *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men* and other Golden Age series use their protagonists' infidelity as a vessel to critique shifting notions of masculinity and related male anxieties. When contrasted against their roles as husbands and fathers, Soprano and Draper's infidelity adds further layers of complexity to their characters. However, *The Wire* breaks tradition from these and other Golden Age dramas by explicitly condemning McNulty's infidelity. Unlike Soprano and Draper, McNulty is already punished for his infidelity prior to the beginning of his series, with his ex-wife Elena having discovered his affair with Pearlman and filed for divorce. Despite McNulty's attempts to reconcile with Elena, she repeatedly denies his advances, correctly characterizing his actions as immature and toxic.

Besides casual sex, McNulty's greatest vice is alcohol, another recognized marker of macho masculinity (Scharrer 617). Throughout the series, McNulty is frequently seen drinking both on and off the job. However, *The Wire* starkly portrays McNulty's consumption of alcohol as dangerous. In the cold open for the second season episode "Duck and Cover" (7/27/03), McNulty attempts to drive home from a bar while severely incapacitated, instead crashing his car and cutting his hand. This incident is the most prominent within the series that de-romanticizes McNulty's consumption of alcohol. Even Bunk Moreland, McNulty's partner and best friend, admits in "Duck and Cover" that McNulty is "a picture postcard of a drunken, self-destructive fuck-up." The emphasis on McNulty's alcohol abuse is an important aspect of the character's masculinity; as recognized by Cooper, "Many of the most powerful expressions of masculinity within contemporary American society continue to be associated with blue-collar imagery" (102), with various commercials for alcohol products celebrating working class masculinity. The police officer is one of the strongest examples of working class masculinity,

due to the aggressive, dangerous nature of the job, contrasted with its relatively poor pay. Many other police officers in *The Wire* in addition to McNulty display traits of alcohol abuse, although generally not to his extent. However, the officers' motivations are generally consistent, turning to alcohol to "mask emotions and ... disguise their fears and frustrations" regarding their personal and professional lives, with the consumption of alcohol intended to reassert their masculinity (Chambers and Waldron 181).

As with callous sexual attitudes and alcohol abuse, machismo is correlated with antisocial actions (Scharrer 616), embodied by McNulty in his habitual dismissal of authority. Throughout the series McNulty views himself as an underdog, attempting to solve crimes despite the limitations unfairly placed upon him by his bureaucratic superiors, whom he regards them as far less intelligent and qualified for police work than himself. In the third season episode "Slapstick" (11/21/2004), McNulty even goes as far to declare that he believes "there aren't five swinging dicks in the entire department" capable of doing what he can. The "outlaw hero," a particular version of the antihero archetype, is especially prominent in crime fiction. In such narratives, the protagonists' own instincts towards justice are more authentic and valid than the legal establishments in which they are employed, commonly due to excessive bureaucracy or corruption (Parshall 135). Institutional dysfunction, and the frustration it produces amongst police officers such as McNulty, is a reoccurring motif in *The Wire*. Throughout the series, McNulty repeatedly circumnavigates the established chain of command, pressuring his superiors into initiating (or diverting resources towards) investigations that best suit his own interests.

In *The Wire*, McNulty's Irishness is racialized, as the Irish American ethnic group has since been identified as White American (Ignatiev 81). Most white police officers in the series identify as Irish American and are frequently seen listening to Celtic music and frequenting the Irish pub Kavanaugh's, thus embracing their cultural heritage. In *The Wire*, Irish American masculinity is largely represented through "heroic resistance" (Meaney 13); McNulty explicitly likens himself to a hero in the fifth season episode "Clarifications" (2/24/08). In this season of the series, McNulty's anti-authoritative rebelliousness influences him into fabricating a serial killer, in order to divert resources towards a new case he is spearheading against drug kingpin Marlo Stanfield. Although Stanfield's organization is responsible for dozens of murders, the Baltimore police have been unable to investigate him due to lack of funds. In "Not for Attribution," McNulty defends his duplicity to a morally outraged Bunk, stating that "Upstairs wouldn't jump on a real serial killer; fuckin' Marlo, who's got bodies all over him!

Maybe they need the make believe.” However, “Clarifications” asserts that McNulty’s motivations are in fact purely selfish rather than serving any greater good, thus subverting the outlaw hero archetype. The FBI profiles the killer based on McNulty’s fabricated evidence, unknowingly providing a near-perfect profile of McNulty that highlights his character flaws, all of which are tied to McNulty’s macho masculine identity:

[The suspect] has a problem with authority and a deep-seated resentment for those that have impeded his progress professionally ... He may be struggling with lasting relationships and potentially a high functioning alcoholic, with alcohol being used as a trigger in the crimes. The suspect’s [crimes] may simply be an opportunity for the killer to assert his superiority and intellectual prowess.

McNulty’s plot is eventually revealed to his superiors, finally resulting in his termination in the series finale, “-30-” (3/09/08). For McNulty, who “disintegrates when his identity is not fixed by his job” (Meaney 12), this is a punishment worse than incarceration, leaving him aimless and metaphorically emasculated. Near the conclusion of “-30-,” McNulty finally abandons his previous delusions of heroism, and concedes that he is “a fucking joke,” both personally and professionally.

Ultimately, macho masculinity essentializes several specific qualities, including sexual charisma, alcohol consumption, and resistance to authority. Ultimately, McNulty’s masculine identity does not deviate or progress from traits typical of a white, working class heteronormative alpha male, which are designed to compensate them for shortcomings in other areas of masculine validation:

[Working class men] who ostentatiously pursue drugs, alcohol, and sexual carousing are constructing a compensatory form of masculinity. Such behavior is worn like a badge of masculinity in the work and social environments inhabited. ... This exaggerated masculinity compensates their subordinated status in the hierarchy of their everyday work worlds. (Pyke 538)

However, *The Wire*, as with other series of the current Golden Age, deconstructs such archetypal notions of masculinity. In particular, *The Wire* deromanticizes McNulty’s macho masculinity and instead exposes it as emotionally stunted and ultimately self-destructive. Contrastingly, while McNulty displays stereotypes of white macho masculinity, Omar wholly rejects conventional macho masculinity, black or otherwise, and deviates entirely from popular societal expectations.

Omar Little. It has been observed that the “hypermasculinity found in certain lower-status male locales, such as [in] urban gangs,” functions as an effort to establish and assert masculine identity and self-esteem in spite of low economic standing (Pyke 531). In particular, men in these environments “use the physical endurance and tolerance of discomfort required of their manual labor as signifying true masculinity” (531). To further assert this particular form of masculinity, these men “also engage in pervasive talk of their sexual prowess and a ritualistic put-down of women” (532). This particular socioeconomic trend is accurately depicted in *The Wire*, as the vast majority of African American gang members in the series conform to “a particular type of black masculinity ... centered on sexual conquest, materialism, nihilism, respect, violence and vengeance” (Chambers and Waldron 182). Noted sociologist Patricia Hill Collins specifically identifies this certain type of masculinity as that of the “gangsta”:

When it comes to representations of Black male deviance, several important variations exist. The thug or “gangsta” constitutes one contemporary controlling image. [...] The “gangsta” may be crafty, but the essence of his identity lies in the inherent violence associated with his physicality. (158).

Characters in *The Wire* who ascribe to this archetype are aggressive, sexually promiscuous, and entirely focused on protecting their street credibility and reputations, which they affirm to their rivals in the drug trade through displays of violence. Thus, gangsta masculinity similarly emphasizes macho values (Scharrer 617). In contrast, Omar is an anomaly who breaks from his peers’ conventions in numerous ways, with the most immediate example being his sexuality: Omar is openly gay. Cultural stereotypes of African American criminality are popularly associated with overt masculinity, which in turn is commonly associated with heterosexual hypersexuality (Jackson 105). When viewed through the lens of early 2000s popular culture, the masculine identity conjured by Omar’s status as a dangerous criminal is not easily reconciled with his sexual orientation, as homosexuality was commonly portrayed in other contemporaneous television series as effeminate and unthreatening (Avila-Saavedra 8). The cold open for the fourth season episode “Home Rooms” (9/24/06) best encapsulates Omar’s contradictory identity: Omar leaves to pick up cereal for himself and his romantic partner one morning, leaving behind his handgun after a humorous scene where Omar unsuccessfully attempts to conceal the weapon in his bathrobe. After buying cereal at the convenience store, Omar stops in the street to smoke a cigarette, coincidentally outside a local stash

house. Despite Omar being unarmed and wearing nothing but his bathrobe, the dealers abandon their entire drug supply to him, purely out of fear. Omar returns home with the cereal and drugs, and sits down to eat breakfast with his partner.

Omar's partner in this scene is his newest boyfriend Renaldo, with "Home Rooms" being Renaldo's first appearance in the series. A unique aspect of Omar's personality is that Omar is one of the few characters in *The Wire* to enjoy committed relationships, having three serious boyfriends over the course of the series. In order, they are: Brandon in season one, Dante in seasons two and three, and Renaldo in season four and five. Omar remains monogamous with each of his partners, a departure from popular depictions of homosexual activity in early 2000s television. Such depictions often reinforced cultural stereotypes by linking homosexuality with sexual chastity or deviancy, very rarely presenting healthy and normalized relationships typical of the heterosexual model. In response to such stereotypical media depictions of homosexuality, "a primary purpose of the critical application of queer theory has been to demonstrate how sexuality is culturally essentialized to inscribe heterosexuality as normal and all other sexualities as deviant" (Avila-Saavedra 6). However, *The Wire* subversively presents Omar's homosexuality as anything but deviant. Unlike McNulty, Omar does not pursue casual sex, and his sexuality is instead expressed solely through these three relationships. This is especially noteworthy when contrasted with other African American characters in the series, as promiscuity is popularly seen "as a defining feature of black masculinity" (Collins 162). Additionally, Omar demonstrates a romantic and tender nature towards his partners, with "baby boy" being his most frequently used term of endearment; Omar's tenderness towards his partners is portrayed a stark contrast with McNulty's emotional ineptitude towards Elena.

It is important to note that Omar's widely known queer sexuality does not detract from his masculine reputation (Johnson Jr. 333). Instead, Omar arguably enjoys the most feared status out of any character in *The Wire*, as evidenced by the cold open of "Home Rooms." His mere appearance prompts civilians to clear the streets and yell, "Omar comin'!" to warn others. Additionally, Omar's sentimentality towards his partners is not portrayed as a weakness that undermines his masculinity, but rather reinforces it. In the first season episode "The Wire" (7/07/02), Avon Barksdale, Stanfield's primary rival in the drug trade, captures Brandon and tortures him to death, ultimately displaying his body as a warning to Omar. These actions are primarily motivated by retribution for a robbery Omar and Brandon commit in "The Buys" (6/16/02), an earlier episode in the season; however, the excessive brutality

of Brandon's death "is [also] a reflection of Brandon's lack of recognition as human" (Deylami 136) due to his homosexuality.

In the concluding scene of "The Wire," McNulty escorts Omar to the coroner's office to identify Brandon. Upon seeing Brandon's mutilated corpse, Omar screams. Barksdale and other black characters in *The Wire* shun such forthright displays of emotion, as they believe it indicates effeminate weakness. Indeed, macho masculinity emphasizes "the suppression of sensitivity or 'soft' or 'feminine' emotions" (Scharrer 618). However, Barksdale's plan backfires by instead provoking Omar to target his lieutenants and safe houses, systematically dismantling his organization. While Barksdale, Stanfield and other drug kingpins tacitly acknowledge that Omar is a dangerous presence, they frequently address him by homophobic slurs, such as "dick sucker" and "faggot," and mock his motivation of avenging Brandon. The purpose of these actions is to understate the threat Omar poses to their operations by delegitimizing his masculinity:

Since the means of signaling masculine behavior are governed by cultural norms, men tend to grant other masculine esteem only when they see behaviors that they already associate with masculinity. Manhood is thus a never-ending test of whether one's behaviors measure up to the ideal form of manhood. (Cooper 101)

To the vast majority of black criminals in *The Wire*, homosexuality is aberrant behavior far outside the acceptable norms of masculinity. Because of this, Omar's sexuality is a frequent source of ridicule from his peers in the drug trade, and in some cases results in extreme vilification. Notably, in the first season episode "Old Cases" (6/23/02), Barksdale, after placing a bounty on Omar, quickly doubles the reward after being informed of Omar's homosexuality. While Omar's criminal occupation makes him a rogue in greater American society, his homosexuality also makes him a rogue in African American society, contributing to his isolation and demonstrating the intersectionality of his identity. However, Omar is completely comfortable with his sexual identity and the show never depicts Omar coming out or questioning his sexual orientation in any way, further defying contemporaneous depictions of homosexuality in popular television. Unlike many other characters in *The Wire*'s vast ensemble, including McNulty, Omar is never motivated to validate his masculinity. Instead, Omar has already achieved self-actualization (Maslow 382).

Further deviating from the masculine norms that his black peers adhere to, Omar also refuses to employ profanity in his speech or indulge in flamboyant displays of wealth, the latter

linking masculinity with materialism (Cooper 101). Bunk, who maintains a begrudging respect towards Omar, nevertheless mocks Omar's aspirations of morality despite his criminal lifestyle, wryly commenting in the first season episode "One Arrest" (7/14/02) that "a man must have a code." Ultimately, Omar's homosexuality and monogamous behavior subverts not only traditional notions of masculinity, but also more specifically those of black masculinity, as "considerations of hegemony and sexual identities in queer media studies cannot be divorced from issues of class and race" (Avila-Saavedra 7). Omar's entire character serves as a critique of American objectification of the black male body, which has historically been characterized as either unrelentingly violent and/or sexually desirable (Jackson 79). Omar is especially attractive to masculinities theorists for how his very existence challenges traditional black gender expectations and instead advocates for a more progressive, nuanced model of masculinity.

## Conclusion

The high level of critical and popular success that *The Wire* has accumulated both during and following its initial run on HBO provides the series with a highly visible profile to promote research regarding the representation of race and masculinity in American television. In *The Wire*, McNulty and Omar represent two culturally enduring archetypes of societally constructed masculinity, i.e. the cop and the gangsta. Throughout their portrayals in police dramas, both archetypes have commonly demonstrated macho traits. In "social science research in the U.S., [machismo] refers to a socially constructed 'gender ideological' notion of what it means to be 'manly' that is carried out to the point of exaggeration" (Scharrer 616). However, while McNulty adheres to white stereotypes of macho masculinity, Omar challenges black stereotypes of macho masculinity. Therefore, the characters are interesting to contrast against each other for research purposes.

Although other eminent series of the current Golden Age, such as *Mad Men* and *The Sopranos*, have attempted to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity, the greater diversity present in *The Wire* provides a unique research opportunity into how the presentation of masculinity differs across racial representations, and to promote alternative masculine norms in popular media. *The Wire* deconstructs the various tenets of McNulty's white macho masculinity, including his hypersexuality, alcohol abuse, and anti-authority tendencies. Such norms do not deviate from typical portrayals of masculinity in popular fiction, which can influence and encourage audience adoption of these characteristics by glorifying them, thus resulting in "potentially harmful social consequences" (Scharrer 633). However, *The Wire*

exhibits greater social conscience by explicitly portraying such norms as regressive and self-destructive, as evidenced through McNulty's fall from grace at the conclusion of the series.

In contrast to McNulty, Omar wholly rejects macho masculinity and conventional black masculinity, instead embodying a more progressive masculine identity where traditional masculine values can coexist with romanticism and alternative sexuality. Cooper recognizes that "The Wire's lasting popularity alone means that it has influenced and continues to influence people's perceptions of ... masculinities" (98), specifically by portraying a wide variety of distinct masculine identities. Over the course of five seasons and 60 episodes, *The Wire* acknowledges that different masculine models can exist simultaneously, including, as demonstrated through Omar's subversive nature, models reconciled with normalized homosexuality.

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# The Trajectory of a Comic Celebrity's Career: Robin Williams Does Television

By Kathy Merlock Jackson

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**Abstract:** The whole world mourned when actor and comedian Robin Williams ended his life on August 11, 2014 at his home in Tiburon, California. The larger-than-life actor and comedian was best remembered for big-screen performances as a warm paternal figure or caregiver, often a man-child with traces of arrested development. Williams accomplished what many television actors today aspire to but cannot achieve: he made the transition from situation comedy star to movie star. This article explores Robin Williams's early career in television, arguing that his unconventional role in *Mork and Mindy* proved the perfect vehicle for this, informing his future roles and serving as a trajectory for his film career, thus offering a thematic lesson for comic actors seeking movie stardom.

**Keywords:** Robin Williams, *Mork and Mindy*, *Mork and Mindy*, *Dead Poet's Society*, *Hook*, *Aladdin*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Good Will Hunting*

**Resumen:** El mundo entero estaba en duelo cuando el actor y comediante Robin Williams se suicidó el 11 de agosto de 2014 en su casa en Tiburon, California. El grandioso actor y comediante era mejor conocido por sus actuaciones de pantalla grande como una figura paterna cálida o como un proveedor de cuidados, a menudo un hombre niño con características de un desarrollo frenado. Williams logró a lo que muchos actores de televisión hoy aspiran, pero que no alcanzan: hizo la transición de estrella de comedia de situación a estrella de cine. Este

artículo explora la carrera temprana de Robin Williams en la televisión, argumentando que su papel no convencional en *Mork and Mindy* resultó ser el vehículo perfecto para esto, informando a sus papeles futuros y sirviendo como una trayectoria para su carrera cinematográfica, por ende ofreciendo una lección temática para futuros actores que busquen el estrellato cinematográfico.

**Palabras clave:** Robin Williams, *Mork, Ork*, comedia de situación, *Mork and Mindy*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Hook*, *Aladdin*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Good Will Hunting*

**摘要:** 演员兼喜剧演员罗宾·威廉姆斯于2014年8月11日在加州蒂伯龙市家中自杀身亡，全世界为此哀悼不已。这位极具传奇色彩的人物给观众留下最深刻的银幕形象是温暖的父亲或看护人，这些角色通常还是发展受阻的大男孩。威廉姆斯实现了当今诸多电视演员渴望却无法企及的成就：他从情景喜剧明星成功转型为电影明星。本文探索了罗宾·威廉姆斯早期在电视圈的事业，并认为他在《莫克和明迪》中扮演的新奇角色证明了其十分适合（扮演）这类人物，他的电影事业轨迹由此展开，为其带来更多角色。威廉姆斯的经历因此也给希望成为电影明星的喜剧演员上了一次专题课。

**关键词:** 罗宾·威廉姆斯, 莫克, Ork, 情景喜剧, 《莫克和明迪》, 《死亡诗社》, 《铁钩船长》, 《阿拉丁》, 《窈窕奶爸》, 《心灵捕手》

When Viola Davis accepted her Oscar for Best Supporting Actress at the 2017 Academy Awards ceremony, she said in her impassioned speech, “I became an artist, and thank God I did, because we are the only profession that celebrates what it means to live a life” (“Viola Davis”). The actors who do this well—those who have the rare talent to capture what it means to be alive and human—grace the movie screen and win Oscars. Many actors aspire to this, but few achieve it, especially those who start out in stand-up comedy and television sitcoms. Robin Williams, however, accomplished what only a select number of actors ever do: he made the transition from TV sitcom to Oscar-worthy, big-screen performances. His unconventional role in *Mork and Mindy* proved the perfect vehicle for this, informing his future roles and serving as a trajectory for his film career, thus offering a thematic lesson for comic actors seeking movie stardom.

Robin Williams was born in Chicago on July 21, 1951, to wealthy, preoccupied parents who later moved to a thirty-room mansion on twenty acres of land near Detroit, Michigan. “‘I was living on this huge estate,’ said Williams ‘It was miles to the next kid’” (qtd. in David 3). He attended elite private schools, where, short and overweight, he was often bullied by classmates who called him names such as “dwarf” and “leprechaun” (David 3). Although by the time he entered high school, Williams had shed his baby fat, taken up sports, and become a popular, outgoing class clown, as a child he had spent a lot of time isolated and

alone, playing with his large collection of toy soldiers, creating scenarios, and entertaining himself by talking in different voices, which contributed to the impersonation style that later became his trademark.

Prolific television producer Garry Marshall gave Williams his first big break. According to Marshall, his two daughters were big fans of his hit sitcom *Happy Days*, but his eight-year-old son Scott, who loved *Star Wars*, did not watch the show because it had no aliens. Scott suggested that Fonzie have a dream in which an alien comes to *Happy Days*, and Marshall thought it was a great idea. He set out to find an alien. His agent at William Morris sent a few actors who were not quite right for the part before convincing Marshall to see a newcomer named Robin Williams, who at the time was doing stand-up in clubs and performing on street corners, passing a hat for tips. Marshall was skeptical but agreed to meet him. He recalled the first moment he saw Robin Williams: "I walked into my office and the street performer was sitting on my couch upside down and pretending to drink a glass of water with his finger" (103). He would later recall that out of all those who applied for the job, only one alien auditioned. Marshall immediately envisioned Williams as the star of his own TV series, but he first wanted to see how audiences would respond to him on *Happy Days*, where he played Mork from the Planet Ork.

Prior to his *Happy Days* gig, Williams did stand-up routines that were marked by profanity and irreverence. As one critic described, "Onstage, he was known for ricochet riffs on politics, social issues and cultural matters both high and low; tales of drug and alcohol abuse; lewd commentaries on relations between the sexes; and lightning-like improvisations on anything an audience member might toss at him" (Itzkoff). Although Williams toned down his performance for television, it was still edgy, and his well-honed skills in improvisation and impersonation served him well. Using body language and electronic sounds, he proved such a hit with the *Happy Days* live audience that he got a standing ovation at curtain call. Seeing this remarkable talent, even Marshall got the chills. Right after the episode aired on ABC, Marshall received a call from Paramount executive Michael Eisner, who said, "Garry, I heard you have a Martian who got a standing ovation. Can you build a series around him? Do it fast" (Marshall 104).

The result was *Mork and Mindy*, starring Williams and former model Pam Dawber, which aired on ABC from 1978 to 1982. Williams's performance in *Mork and Mindy* showcased the talent that catapulted his career. In the series, Orson, the leader of the Orkans, shoots Mork to Earth in an egg, trusting him with the task of observing humankind and reporting back. Mork lands in Boulder, Colorado, and the first person he meets is Mindy, a young

woman who works in her father's music store and aspires to be a journalist. Mindy lets Mork sleep in the attic of her apartment and becomes his guide in learning about Earthlings, and eventually the two fall in love. At the end of each episode, Mork channels Orson to recount what he has learned about life on Earth. The key to the series is Mork's growing awareness of what it means to be alive, to be human, and to experience emotion. The most repeated song on the series was "Staying Alive" by the Bee Gees.

Mork and Mindy is, of course, a sitcom, a rather silly one, and humor in the series centers on Williams' distinctive comic style. As Mork, Williams plays the frenetic, childlike Orkan, exhibiting the wild physical humor and impersonation style that became his signature. For example, after going out on a date with Mindy's friend, he reenacts for Mindy his entire disastrous evening in one quick dramatic skit. Williams also creates comedy through Mork's misunderstanding of language, taking words literally, again demonstrating his ability to improvise verbally. If someone tells him to "button it up," he looks for something to button. If he hears "go jump in the lake," he looks for a lake. Scriptwriters for the show learned to leave spaces for Williams to improvise his scenes, and he took great delight in shocking and amusing both Mindy the character and Dawber the actress, once by entering his scene right on cue, but naked. Finally, Williams as Mork expresses confusion about how earthlings act, especially regarding their connections and feelings. On Ork, babies are created in test tubes and raised by computers, and Orkans believe that love and emotions are "hazardous to one's health." Mork creates comic mayhem by misreading situations and misunderstanding social conventions, each day discovering something new about humanity. Producer Garry Marshall and television critics seemed to agree that the first year of the series—when Mork falls in love with a mannequin, wants to buy a baby, and learns what Christmas means--was the funniest and had the best scripts. The show was a hit, and Williams won an Emmy Award for outstanding lead actor in a prime-time comedy series.

Gradually, though, traces of a new Robin Williams begin to show, as Mork experiences crises and human emotions. In his personal life, Williams was experiencing drama too. Although he had become a television celebrity, he continued to do stand-up, following a full day of filming with a gig at a comedy club, performing until the very last person in the audience decided to leave. As Garry Marshall observed, "We couldn't control this. It was just the way he was wired. He'd be tired the next day, but he would always show up ready to play Mork." (108). He formed relationships with other actors who lived fast, drug-fueled lives and was with John Belushi the morning before the Animal House

actor died of a cocaine and heroin overdose. Williams's marriage to first-wife Valerie Valardi, with whom he had a son named Zak, was failing. As his life became more complicated, so too did his performances. Mork and Mindy become closer, leading to more dramatic moments.

By the end of the first season, amid the wild gags, the show addresses life experiences, relationship issues, and empathy. For example, only when Mork and Mindy get stuck in a dilapidated cabin in the frigid cold and fear they will die can they express what they mean to one another, prompting Mork to report to Orson that people can't always communicate their feelings. In another episode, when Orson tells Mork he wants to transfer him to another planet, Mindy expresses her sadness, telling Mork that she does not want him to leave. Mork concedes that he, too, is developing feelings for her and decides to stay. In a particularly telling episode, "Mork's Mixed Emotions," Mork struggles with his feelings, claiming that Orkans have no emotions, and vows to Mindy, "I'm closing off my emotions forever." She replies, "If you study human beings, you'll find we cannot exist without emotions. People really need their emotions." When Mork cannot handle his emotions and goes berserk, Mindy feels guilty, and her father tries to console her, saying, "You were only trying to help Mork be like other human beings."

The second season takes Mork's desire to discover humanity a step further, offering a glimmer of the movie Robin Williams. In an episode titled "Dr. Morkenstein," Mork gets a job as a security guard in a science museum, where he reprograms a robot to be his friend and then becomes distraught when the robot dies. This episode, in which Mork cries inconsolably, marks a sentimental turn in the series. In a subsequent episode, when Mork thinks he is allergic to Mindy, he is afraid of getting too close. He learns that through closeness, maybe love, he's experiencing a new emotion and tells Mindy, "You helped me be more human." By the third and fourth seasons, this trend continued and Williams seemed more intent on showing his dramatic acting chops. By then, as Garry Marshall ascertained, "I knew that Robin started dreaming of making movies. It is difficult to maintain the momentum on a sitcom when your star has one foot out the door and the rest of the cast know it" (Marshall 108-109). One show in particular foreshadows Williams' cinematic fame. In one of the most compelling episodes of the series, "Mork Meets Robin Williams," journalist Mindy aspires to get an interview with actor Robin Williams, who bears a shocking resemblance to Mork. Mindy lands the interview and learns that Robin Williams can't say no. Mork understands, as he describes to Orson, "what it is like to be famous on Earth. When you are

a celebrity, everybody wants a piece of you.” The exchange underscores latent sadness in Robin Williams, an individual uncomfortable being alone with himself.

In 1982, after four seasons, which culminated in Mork and Mindy’s marriage and Mork’s having a baby Mearth, played by adult actor Jonathan Winters, the series ran out of steam and was cancelled. Pam Dawber went on to star in another television series, *My Sister Sam*, which ran from 1986 to 1988. Williams, too, appeared frequently on television, clowning on *Saturday Night Live*, being interviewed on *David Letterman* and other talk shows, appearing in guest spots and even his later forgotten series *The Crazy Ones*, and filming sequences for *Sesame Street*, including one titled “What is Alive?” in which he teaches children what it is to be alive: eating, breathing, and growing. However, Williams found his greatest opportunities not in television but in film.

All told, Williams appeared in roughly seventy-five films, becoming one of Hollywood’s biggest stars. Interestingly, some of his most memorable roles seem to emanate from Mork and Mindy, when his character was learning what it was like to be alive on Earth, to be human, and to have emotions. Perhaps Williams’s first film to suggest this was *Dead Poets Society* (1989), in which he played John Keating, a brilliant, inspiring, but decidedly unconventional teacher at an elite 1950s boarding school. In key scenes in *Dead Poets Society*, John Keating shocks his young charges by encouraging them to rip pages out of their textbook’s boring, pompous introduction and jump atop their desks to see things from a different perspective. “*Carpe, carpe. Carpe diem,*” the former Rhodes Scholar and lover of poetry shouts to his students in Latin, urging them to live in the moment. “*Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary.*” Recalling his mantra, Williams says, “‘I like the point of the movie, . . . of trying to find the passionate thing in your life, finding some sort of passion’” (qtd. in Weber). His mercurial performance reflects the essence of what makes one human. As one writer, Megan Gibson, reflects on *Dead Poets Society*, “To this day, I still can’t resist Williams’ line, ‘But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for’” (Gibson). *Dead Poets Society* became one of the highest-grossing films of the year and won Williams an Academy Award nomination for best actor.

Several of Williams’s subsequent films show him thrust into new worlds, discovering life and emotion anew. In *Hook* (1991), Williams plays Peter Banning, a workaholic lawyer out of touch with his wife, his children, and his own inner child. When on a trip to London to visit his mother Wendy for a charity event for orphans, Peter discovers that his children have been kidnapped by Captain Hook and learns that he is the real Peter Pan but that

his memories were erased when he was adopted. He returns to Neverland as Peter Pan, regains his youthful spirit, and after a period of soul-searching and a confrontation with Captain Hook, reclaims his children and returns to his mother's home. When Wendy suggests that Peter's adventures are over, Peter expresses his enthusiasm for life. "To live," he says, "would be an awfully big adventure." Similarly, Williams's Genie role in the animated feature *Aladdin* (1992) has his character experiencing "a whole new world," this time after popping out of a magic lamp. Once again, Williams creates a character with a frenetic style and a good heart. The Genie's signature song, "A Friend Like Me," underscores the importance of emotion and connection. Even in *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), for which Williams won a Golden Globe Award for best actor, he enters a new world of femininity when he poses as a nanny to be closer to his children after his wife asks for a divorce. "My first day as a woman," Mrs. Doubtfire quips, "and I get hot flashes." Finally, in *Jumanji* (1995), Williams' Alan Parrish is trapped in a jungle-themed board game for twenty-six years and finally escapes when children find the long-forgotten game in their attic and begin playing. Now thirty-eight, Alan confronts his new world as an adult and navigates relationships.

However, it is in *Good Will Hunting* (1997), where Williams finds perhaps his most important and emotional role, harkening back to his character in *Dead Poets Society*. Here he plays the role of therapist Sean Maguire, who treats twenty-year old blue-collar laborer Will Hunting (Matt Damon), an unrecognized mathematical genius, and helps him to re-evaluate his life. Both Sean Maguire and Will Hunting suffered abuse as children and misfortune later in life but through disclosure and trust in one another find ways to move forward. Following a poignant scene in which Maguire repeats nine times to Hunting that the abuse was not his fault and the men weep, the script describes a quintessential image: "Two lonely souls being father and son together" (Dogan 231). Showcasing Williams's dramatic talents, *Good Will Hunting* proved to be a critical and popular success and earned Williams his first and only Academy Award, despite three previous nominations, for best supporting actor. Once again, Williams created a character who discovers deep feelings.

In his best performances, Robin Williams merged manic energy with heartfelt emotion. However, if there is one criticism of Williams's movie career, it is that his work became too sentimental, a characteristic hinted at as early as *Mork and Mindy*. Movies such as *Jack* (1996), in which he plays a boy whose rare disease makes him age four times faster than normal, and *Patch Adams* (1998), in which he plays a clownish doctor who shakes up the hospital and lives of his young patients with his

optimism, humor, and unconventional methods, feature Williams in what had become an all-to-familiar mawkish man-child role, and it was getting stale. One critic called such performances “lame and embarrassing” and “missing the mark” (Iversen). Although audiences will always revere Williams for his zany, off-the-wall improvisations, it seems, he could not escape the role he played in *Mork and Mindy*: an outsider who comes to a new place and learns how to feel. In his own way, he, like Viola Davis, celebrated what it means to live a life.

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# The Blacksmith

## By Todd Moffett

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**Abstract:** One of the earliest literary archetypes is the Blacksmith, a figure who appears in mythologies worldwide. Archaeological evidence of the Blacksmith's trade may go as far back as 5000 BC, and stories about the Blacksmith may be just as old. In some cultures, the smith, the flint knapper, and the potter are inextricably interwoven. Yet the Blacksmith is an ambiguous figure whose inventions both help and harm humankind. Two main storylines surround the Blacksmith, the first being a quest to transform baser materials to gold, and the second being the invention of the Fantastic Machine. As a secondary character, the Blacksmith is often portrayed as the weapons master of the Chief or Warrior or as the craftsman of the gods. One final note focuses on a peculiar physical detail: The Blacksmith is often depicted as crippled or blinded.

**Keywords:** literary archetypes, Blacksmith archetype, quest narrative, alchemy, mythology

**Resumen:** Uno de los primeros arquetipos literarios es el herrero, una figura que aparece en mitologías de todo el mundo. La evidencia arqueológica del oficio de herrero podría venir desde antes del año 5000 a.C., y las historias de herreros podrían ser igual de antiguas. En algunas culturas, el herrero, el tallador de pedernal y el alfarero están insolublemente entrelazados. Sin embargo, el herrero es una figura ambigua cuyos inventos tanto ayudan, como perjudican a la humanidad. Dos narrativas principales rodean al herrero, la primera es la búsqueda de transformar materiales básicos en oro, y la segunda es el invento de la máquina fantástica. Siendo un personaje secundario, el herrero está

frecuentemente representado como el maestro de las armas del líder o guerrero, o como el artesano de los dioses. Una nota final se enfoca en un detalle físico peculiar: El herrero es a menudo representado como inválido o ciego.

**Palabras clave:** arquetipos literarios, arquetipo del herrero, narrativa de búsqueda, alquimia, mitología

**摘要:** 铁匠是最早的文学原型之一，全世界的神话中都有这样的人物出现。关于铁匠这一职业的考古证明可追溯到公元前 5000 年，与铁匠有关的故事可能也自那时开始。在某些文化中，铁匠、燧石匠和陶匠三者有着密不可分的联系。然而，铁匠是一个多面的人物，因为他的发明既能帮助人类，也能伤害人类。围绕铁匠的故事线主要有两种，第一种是追求将低等材料转变为黄金的人物，第二种则是神奇机器的发明物。作为第二种人物时，铁匠通常被刻画为首领或勇士的武器大师，或者是众神的工匠。最后要留意的是一个奇怪的物理细节：铁匠通常被描绘为瘸子或盲人。

**关键词:** 文学原型，铁匠原型，追寻叙事（法），炼金术，神话

## Introduction

In many stories, in particular myths and folk tales, the hero's occupation places him in certain adventures with predictable action sequences. One of the earliest of these occupational archetypes is the Blacksmith, a figure who appears in mythologies worldwide as both artisan and technician, as both respected culture hero and as feared creator of the weapons that have caused so much misery to humankind. What follows is a brief examination of the Blacksmith's origins in literature, his ambivalent character, and the primary storylines shaped by his actions.

## Origins

The Blacksmith is identified by the metal with which he works—iron, which in its ferrous form was not widely processed until approximately 1200 BC, the start of the Iron Age. But archaeological evidence of metalworking, at least in Europe, may go as far back as 5000 BC. A clay figurine excavated in Hungary holds a copper sickle over its right shoulder, clear evidence that the craft of smelting already existed (Baring and Cashford 76; Campbell, Goddesses 37). Stories about the Blacksmith may be just as old. According to folklorist Sara Graça da Silva and anthropologist Jamshid Tehrani, who examined the Tales of Magic classified in the Aarne Thompson Uther (ATU) Index, the earliest story in that category is a Proto-Indo-European legend—some 6,000 years old—about a blacksmith (9). However, the Blacksmith

is not the first artisan who made tools. In the Paleolithic Age, for example, the flint knapper created the axes, needles, spear tips, arrow points, and other tools that helped the tribe survive. The potter, too, may predate the Blacksmith: Pottery shards, clay vessels and figurines, and kilns have been discovered in Neolithic villages of Europe that date as far back as the seventh millennium BC (Gimbutas 75).

Some of humankind's earliest myths evolved from the flint knapper and the potter as well. The stone axe became linked to the Thunder God and thereby to "agricultural fecundity" (Eliade 30). This tie between the axe and fecundity is made explicit in the statuary of the Yoruba thunder god Shàngó, who is often represented on an axe, wearing a crownlike double-axe (representing meteorites or thunderstones), or wielding an axe and pointing at the sky with one hand while touching or pointing to his genitals with the other (Thompson loc. 1323-62). Further, the double-axe was linked to the union of the Thunder God with the Earth Mother (Eliade 21, 30). The double-axe was also sacred to the Mother Goddess herself in her role as regeneratrix (Baring and Cashford 112-13). The potter, on the other hand, is linked to the creation of humankind. In Genesis, God creates Adam from the earth. In The Epic of Gilgamesh, the goddess Aruru creates Enkidu from clay, and in a fragmentary creation myth, an alternative to the Enuma Elish, Aruru and Marduk cocreate humankind and animals from a reed and dust (Baring and Cashford 280). In Greek mythology, Prometheus creates humankind from mud, taking the best pieces from the animals he has already created. In Native American mythologies, a Pima legend shows how Se-eh-ha and Coyote reform the people out of earth after a flood has destroyed them (Shaw 4-5). In a Yakima story, Great Chief Above creates the world and then man and woman out of mud (qtd. in American 117-18). Similarly, an Okanogan creation story sees the Old One fashioning the Earth out of a woman and rolling mud balls from the Earth's flesh to create first the Animal People and then the human race (qtd. in American 14-15).

In some cultures, the smith, the knapper, and the potter are inextricably woven. The ancient myths of the stone tools, which focused on their power to strike, create sparks, cause injury, and produce explosions, were transferred to and magnified by the iron tools that replaced them (Eliade 29-30). Among the Yakuts, the smith and the potter were "blood brothers" (Eliade 81). In some African tribes, the wife of the blacksmith was the village potter (Eliade 90). In Ancient Egypt, the god Ptah, the creator of the universe, was the god of all artisans. However, the Iron Age brought many changes to human culture. The Blacksmith superseded the knapper in occupation and the potter in cultural

influence, the perfection of his processes signaling the rise of the industries that have shaped recorded human history. In turn, later incarnations of the Blacksmith follow the development of science and technology, two prime manifestations being the alchemist and the scientist.

### An Ambiguous Character

Smithcraft by its nature excites awe and dread, for it symbolizes humankind's power to alter natural forces, to fashion forms and materials that Nature cannot create or would take eons to produce (Eliade 47). Yet the Blacksmith is an ambiguous character. In the Proto-Indo-European tale mentioned above, which survives in the ATU Index as "The Smith and the Devil," the Blacksmith sells his soul to the Devil in exchange for the power "to weld any materials together" (Graça da Silva and Tehrani 9); the Blacksmith regains his soul (and keeps his power) only because he invents the means to bind the Devil to an "immovable object" (9). This somewhat sinister origin points to how the Blacksmith is seen as a hero who brings tools, song, agriculture, and many of the things that ease human existence (Eliade 87-89), but also as the creator of weapons that have brought untold suffering (28-9, 90). In Yoruba legend, this ambiguity is signaled in the person of Ogún, the iron god, who lives in the "cutting edge" of all iron tools, both helpful and hurtful, and in the flames of the smith's fire (Thompson loc. 805). The amula, an apronlike pendant fashioned from iron and brass to honor Ogún, typically has representations of hoes, knives, needles, chains, bells, arrows, shovels, swords, hammers, horseshoes, and other metal tools (loc. 835-67) fashioned to foster civilization or promote destruction. Further, his songs characterize him as the "support of the newborn child" (loc. 811) but also as the killer of the "husband," the "wife on the hearth," and "the little people who flee outside" (loc. 818). Joseph Campbell discusses the Blacksmith's ambiguity further. In describing Daedalus, the famed architect of the Minotaur's Labyrinth, he defines this character type as the "artist-scientist" (Hero 24). This character is both "curiously disinterested" and "diabolic . . . beyond the normal bounds of social judgment" (24). Morally, the character is not tied to the customs of his society or time but to the rules of his own craft (24). Conversely, he is the hero of the "way of thought," searching for the truth that shall set us free (24).

### Main Storyline 1

A common image of the Blacksmith shows him working on clever inventions in his underground lair. Hephaestus, to take a well-known example, has his workshop under the volcano on the island of Lemnos, or, alternately, under Mount Etna in Sicily. Vulcan,

his Roman equivalent, also has his workshop under Mount Etna. In Norse mythology, the dwarves who fashion Odin's spear and Thor's hammer live underground in their realm of Svartalfheim. Neil Gaiman, in his amusing retelling of the story "The Treasures of the Gods," recounts how Loki, because he has stolen the golden hair of the goddess Sif, must visit the sons of Ivaldi and the brothers Eitri and Brokk, both to find a way to replace Sif's hair and to placate Thor (Sif's husband), Odin, and Frey. The dwarves present not only Odin with his spear and Thor with his famous hammer, Mjollnir, but also Frey with a ship that folds into a pocket handkerchief, and a bristling golden boar to pull his chariot. And of course, they bring new hair for Sif.

Out of this central image spring the two main storylines surrounding the Blacksmith. The first storyline may have him on a quest to transform baser materials to gold. This goal is the life's work of the alchemist, perhaps most famously achieved by Nicholas Flamel with his philosopher's stone, which turns all metals into gold and grants immortality. The legends of Flamel have influenced popular works such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and Michael Scott's bestselling series *The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel*. The image of the philosopher's stone may derive from one of humankind's most important tools—the flintstone. For millennia, the flintstone was a prime method by which humankind ignited fire, and thus it was considered to have magical properties. In one Russian fairy tale, for example, a flintstone contains a steed that helps the hero on his quest (Propp, loc. 1057-62). Because the flintstone can produce something so at odds with itself—flame out of rock, living fire out of dead matter—it represents, in some cultures, divinity appearing on earth (von Franz 291). Western alchemists spoke of the stone as having a spirit in it, a spirit they magnified in their quest for the philosopher's stone, which also has spiritual power (291).

The lead-to-gold story, however, may appear in a displaced form—and perhaps with an outcome unforeseen by the protagonist. Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Birthmark," for example, has a scientist becoming increasingly obsessed with the hand-shaped birthmark on his wife's face. He works unceasingly to remove the birthmark, and even convinces his wife to assist him. Yet when he succeeds, he loses her, the birthmark proving to be the tie between her spirit and her body. Another such story comes to us in the tale "Rumpelstiltskin." The little man appears out of nowhere to help the poor girl whose father has bragged about her ability to spin straw into gold. The little man helps her—but eventually at the price of her firstborn son when she becomes queen. At the end, however, he is cheated of

his prize when the young queen learns his name. A related story is that of King Midas, as told by Ovid. Midas helps the old satyr Silenus and gains the favor of Bacchus, god of wine, who grants Midas a wish. Foolishly, Midas wishes that his touch will turn any object into gold. Only when he sees that he transforms all food and drink into gold—thus rendering all sustenance unfit to eat—does Midas realize he has put himself under a curse and beg to lose the power.

### Main Storyline 2

The second and more widely told storyline of the Blacksmith is the invention of the Fantastic Machine. The story may also involve the reasons behind the invention and the effects it brings about, but the invention itself is usually the focus, the key event that drives the plot. In myths told worldwide, someone invents a tool or some other device, often with the help of or under the inspiration of a divine agency, that s/he brings back to the people, who regard that person evermore as a hero. The movie *Quest for Fire* tells this story in the plainest and simplest of terms. The Neanderthal Ulam tribe tend their fire basket with great care because they do not know how to create fire for themselves. When the tribe's fire tender douses the basket in an escape from a pack of wolves, the Ulam leader sends three men to find another source of fire. After a series of adventures, the men are captured by the advanced Cro-Magnon Ivaka tribe. One of the Ulam, Naoh, learns from the Ivaka woman Ika how to start a fire. When the men return home with a new fire, their tribe is elated but quickly enraged when their tender accidentally douses it once more. Naoh tries to show them how he has learned to make fire but fails. Ika, who has journeyed with them, takes up the chore and succeeds, eliciting a celebration among the tribe. With this advance in technology, the tribe's survival seems certain.

But again, the story of the Fantastic Machine can be ambiguous, with its dark side as well. Daedalus invents the Labyrinth to imprison the man-eating Minotaur. Yet when he gives to Ariadne the solution that Theseus needs to enter the maze and slay the monster—the ball of twine—he is imprisoned himself. To escape, Daedalus invents the wings that he and his son use to fly from Crete, but his son perishes in the crossing. Similarly ambiguous is the story of Weyland, the smith of Norse legend. Imprisoned on an island and hamstrung by King Nidhad, Weyland also escapes by inventing wings—but only after killing Nidhad's sons and raping his daughter. More recently, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the invention is the piecemeal man that the title character brings to life. But the monster becomes the bane of Frankenstein's existence, murdering his young brother William,

his friend Clerval, and his wife Elizabeth. Frankenstein meets his own death while chasing the monster into the Arctic Circle.

Pop culture versions of the Fantastic Machine prove just as darkly ambiguous. In the 2006 film *The Illusionist*, the stage magician Eisenheim, with his elaborately created illusions, wins his childhood sweetheart Sophie, the Duchess von Teschen, from her fiancé Prince Leopold, but only by framing Leopold for a murder he did not commit. In Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*, Lady Eboshi enlists a leper colony to create a lighter, deadlier gun to defend the people of Iron Town. But she also uses her new gun to decapitate the Forest Spirit, the leader of the deities that protect the wilderness around the humans. In Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the old scientist whom we first encounter in his underground workshop can give the human mind both supercomputing abilities and the fantastic inner world of the core consciousness. However, all of the subjects to whom he has given these powers have died, and the narrator, the last surviving subject, cannot avoid death either, despite the scientist's efforts to save him. In the movie version of *Iron Man*, Tony Stark creates his first suit in an Afghanistan cave (the underground lair) to escape a band of terrorists (he flies away, like Daedalus and Weyland) and then builds a wardrobe of improved suits in his Malibu workshop (another underground lair). But he owns a company that churns out advanced weapons for the American military. Ironically, it is after demonstrating one of his missile systems in Afghanistan that he is wounded and captured by the terrorists, who are using his own weapons.

At times, the ambiguity is displaced into humor. As told in the *Odyssey*, the story of how Hephaestus uses an invulnerable net to catch his wife, Aphrodite, in bed with the war god Ares ends with the Olympian gods laughing at the lovers. In recent popular culture, Nickelodeon character Jimmy Neutron, in several TV episodes and a full-length movie, devises inventions in his underground laboratory. When it comes time for Jimmy to put them to the test, though, they fail spectacularly. Another example is Hiccup, the protagonist of the movie *How to Train Your Dragon*, who invents a tail wing for Toothless, the injured dragon he eventually befriends. But at the beginning of the film, in his rush to use his bolas cannon to capture one of the dragons attacking his village, he causes widespread damage. Even in *Iron Man*, Tony Stark has several crashes while testing the new features of his suit.

### The Blacksmith as Secondary Character

The storylines discussed above characterize the Blacksmith as the protagonist. The Blacksmith may also appear in a secondary role—frequently as the weapons master of another

critical archetypal character, the Chief or Warrior. Many myths have the Blacksmith fashioning the weapon that the leader of the gods needs to destroy the Enemy threatening the new order of the universe. Hence, in Canaan, the divine smith Kôshar-wa-Hasis forges the cudgels that Baal uses to defeat Yam, the lord of the underground waters (Eliade 97-98); in Egypt, Ptah makes the weapons that Horus uses to defeat Set (97-98); in Greece, Hephaestos creates the thunderbolt that Zeus uses to destroy Typhon (97-98); in India, Tvaṣṭṛ makes the thunderbolt that Indra uses to slay the water serpent Vṛtra (West 155, 256); in Ireland, Goibniu fashions the spear with which Lug kills Balor, the Fomorian king (155).

Yet again, showing the ambiguity inherent in the character, the same Blacksmith may also display his skill as craftsman, healer, and feast-giver of the gods. Kôshar-wa-Hasis, for example, builds Baal's palace and furnishes the abodes of the other gods (Eliade 98). Similarly, Hephaestos fashions Zeus's golden throne, the golden houses of the gods, and the robots that serve within them (West 154-55). He is also the cupbearer of the gods, plying them with the nectar that keeps them immortal (156). Likewise, Tvaṣṭṛ makes the drinking vessel of the gods (155), and Goibniu is a healer who invites the Dé Danaan to a feast at which he supplies an ale that makes them ageless (156). Several stories show the Blacksmith providing aid to mortals as well. The Ossetic smith Kurdalagon creates a cradle for the young hero Soslan, as well as armor, weapons, a plough, and a flute that plays by itself (155). The Old English hero Beowulf wears a mail shirt given to him by his grandfather Hrethel but originally created by the smith Weyland (ll. 450-55). In the Iliad, when Achilles loses his armor, his mother, the goddess Thetis, asks Hephaestos to supply him with even better equipment, including a marvelously wrought shield (book 18). In the Russian fairy tale "Iván Popyalof," the hero Iván asks his father three times to make him a cudgel so that he can defeat the Snake that has made it always night and never day; at the end of the same tale, a group of smiths led by Kuzma and Demian defeat the Snake's Wife. In modern times, we see the ingenious Lucius Fox in *Batman Begins* create the Tumbler, the Bat suit, and an antidote to the Scarecrow's hallucinogen for Bruce Wayne, and the similarly clever Q furnish James Bond with any number of tools and weapons to help him face his assorted villains.

### Final Observations

One final note about the Blacksmith centers on a peculiar physical detail: The smith is often depicted as crippled or blinded. Hephaestos and Vulcan, for example, were lame from birth. Weyland, as noted above, was hamstrung by his captor Nidhad.

The Japanese smith-god is named “The One-Eyed God of the Sky” (Eliade 104). The first Cyclopes in Greek mythology, credited (as was Hephaestus) with building Zeus’s thunderbolts, were also one eyed. These injuries may hearken to an initiation rite into the vocation of the smith (105). In ancient Greece, an early guild of smiths may have had concentric rings tattooed on their foreheads, and many smiths wore a patch over an eye to protect it from sparks (Graves, Greek 32). Smithcraft may also be linked to the lame or bull-footed king—Jacob, Talus, Dionysus, Hephaestus, Vulcan, Weyland—who is in turn a consort of the Great Goddess (Graves, White 330-31). Hence, it is totally in character that Tony Stark must use the arc reactor to keep shrapnel from damaging his heart (the reactor, placed in his chest, looks like a giant eye), that Lady Eboshi loses an arm in her final confrontation with the forest gods, and that Hiccup ends his story with an artificial leg, just like his mentor, the blacksmith Gobber.

To conclude, the archetype of the Blacksmith doesn’t appear solely in our literature. Scientists such as Madame Curie and inventors such as Steve Jobs have enriched our knowledge of the world around us or transformed our lifestyles with their creations. However, while these real-life Blacksmiths are often celebrated, their achievements offer reason for concern. As Shira Ovide of the Bloomberg View writes concerning the influence of the iPhone, “[W]e’re over the initial wonder of it all and are beginning to grapple with how smartphones affect our communities, our personal safety and basic human interaction” (E1). Further, in its most extreme manifestation, humankind’s power to alter natural forces has brought us to the brink of self-annihilation. Perhaps no story brings this point home more poignantly than Akira Kurosawa’s “Mount Fuji in Red,” where a nuclear meltdown dissolves the famous mountain and poisons the survivors with radioactive gasses. In the end, the lesson we might take away from the Blacksmith’s stories is that we must be careful of selling our souls to our tools and gadgets, for as our capacity for widespread innovation increases, so must our ability to consider the consequences of what we create.

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# Rediscovering the Pleasure Principle: Imaginology Versus Critical Theory in Post-Trump Literary Studies

By Jarret Keene

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**Abstract:** In this review, the author assesses the value of a new dismantling of poststructural theory and its ascendancy over what are supposed to be the objects of study, literary texts. Subjects discussed include the timing of the book's release, arriving as it does at a moment when university campuses are increasingly under threat from political clashes, microaggressions, safe spaces, censorship, and sexual assault. The author compares the book with an earlier effort to undermine the distinction between high and low culture. Ultimately, *Beyond Literary Studies* is necessary reading for anyone entering the field of literary studies or starting out as an English graduate student or junior faculty member in a humanities department.

**Keywords:** Poststructuralism, literary theory, Leslie Fiedler, Imaginology, Jacques Derrida, literary studies

**Resumen:** En esta reseña, el autor evalúa el valor de desmantelar la teoría post cultural y su supremacía sobre los supuestos sujetos de estudio: los textos literarios. Los temas incluyen el tiempo de la publicación del libro, ya que llega en un momento en el que los campus de universidad están cada vez más bajo amenaza de choques políticos, micro agresiones, espacios seguros, censura y agresión sexual. El autor compara el libro con un esfuerzo previo de socavar la distinción entre la alta y la baja cultura.

Finalmente, *Beyond Literary Studies* es una lectura necesaria para toda persona que entre al campo de los estudios literarios o empiece como un estudiante de posgrado de inglés o un miembro principiante del profesorado de un departamento de humanidades.

**Palabras clave:** Posestructuralismo, teoría literaria, Leslie Fiedler, Imaginología, Jacques Derrida, estudios literarios

**摘要:** 本文对后结构主义理论以及理论对文学文本（本文研究对象）的影响进行了一种新的拆解分析，并评估了这种分析的价值。本文探讨的主题包括书本的发行时间—在这个时期大学校园正受到越来越多的威胁，威胁来源于政治冲突、微观侵略、安全空间、审查和性侵。作者通过提前减少高级文化和低俗文化之间的差异，进而对书本进行了比较。最终本文认为，《不止是文学研究》（*Beyond Literary Studies*）一书不仅对任何想要进入文学研究领域的人、或是英语专业研究生、还是对人文学院初级教职人员而言，都是必读之书。

**关键词:** 后结构主义，文学理论，莱斯利·菲德勒，Imaginology，雅克·德里达，文学研究

*Beyond Literary Studies: A Counter-Theoretical Approach.* Savoye, Daniel Ferreras. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2017.

Daniel Ferreras Savoye's poststructuralist takedown, *Beyond Literary Studies: A Counter-Theoretical Approach*, is a compelling invective that arrives at a strange moment in the history of literary studies and higher education. Ten years ago, this lacerating look at the lunacy (and long con) of literary criticism would have been more satisfying and perhaps even persuasive enough to make a few academics reconsider the prioritization of theory over the literature itself. The book's rallying cry to include "nontraditional narratives"—graphic novels, cinema, rock music—might have had a better chance at stirring within young scholars a desire to explore, as Savoye calls them, "imaginary parallel dimensions." Savoye's term excludes documentaries, autobiographies, political op-eds, hardcore pornography, sentimental romance novels, and stunt-centric YouTube videos, yet embraces non-formulaic works like HBO's pioneering fantasy epic *Game of Thrones* and Stephen King's *Misery*, a meta-horror novel that addresses "the theme of literary creation."

But we are now in a remarkable, up-is-down-and-down-is-up era, when liberal college students and faculty demand safe spaces from microaggressions and call for censorship on campuses and across the Internet, even as conservatives argue on behalf of the First (and Second) Amendments. Adding fire to this fuel is the growing #MeToo movement over sexual harassment, which having engulfed Hollywood now threatens to rip through academia. Given

all this, an over-conceptualized, Derrida-driven approach to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" seems a minor crisis in a world completely and irrevocably deconstructed by President Trump.

Putting aside its timing, *Beyond Literary Studies* is required reading for graduate students and first-year assistant professors in English about to plunge into what Savoye labels a "theorize or agonize" landscape. In a series of brisk yet thorough chapters, he breaks down the many obvious and unspoken sins festering within the current academic publishing bubble: confusing the object of study with the study itself, inexpertly borrowing conceptual tools from other fields of study, using a scholarly tone to indulge in one's personal feelings or experiences and calling it "discourse," just to name a few. Because he wrestles with poststructuralism head-on, unlike better-known theory-basher Camille Paglia, who recoils from French crit, he hits hard. And as far as harangues go, much of this is gratifying, as when he lays into theory's intentional impenetrability:

Since no one can really understand exactly what Lacan and Derrida are saying, their words have acquired the metaphysical connotations of religious formulas and are quoted accordingly. What we used to understand as literary interpretation often resembles the exegesis of obscure and provocative critical texts emanating from the Great Thinkers. (61)

Sure, every so often, Savoye adopts the tortured philosophical syntax he mocks in theory to critique parts of Derrida's epistolary pseudo-novel *The Post Card*:

We are therefore confronted to a purely formal device that does not complement the traditional didactic intent of a philosophical essay but rather undermines it by injecting literariness into the text and blurring its supposed intentionality. (52)

Still, when Savoye begins to construct a new understanding of what we talk about when we talk about literary objects of study, his book earns its rightful place on the shelf of anyone who cares about the future of English departments. And, after an interesting (if largely expository) series of un-definitions, he kicks off his argument on behalf of Imaginology with this sentence: "The specificity of literature by opposition to other types of writings resides in its capacity to create an imaginary parallel dimension, whose relationship to our reality is indirect, uncertain and polysemic." Indeed, Savoye unleashes a full quiver's worth of ideas notched with an eye toward encouraging scholars to include new subjects as well as nearly forgotten objects (Spanish author Carmen Laforet's 1945 novel *Nada*, for example). He offers several adaptive—some might say regressive—methods of study (contextual analysis, relative synthesis, a return to thematic approaches, tracing a motif across several works). Naturally, discarding theory altogether is impractical and likely dangerous: "Without a proprietary theoretical

framework our field of studies is doomed to be devoured by neighboring disciplines.” (135) This seems very true, and with his announcement (“Welcome to Imaginology”), Savoye invites us to open up our discipline, which was never defined in the first place, to the pleasure principle of reading, discussing, and writing about imaginary parallel dimensions.

What will likely be useful to grad students and novice instructors is his elucidation of “at least ten different modes according to which parallel imaginary dimensions are structured: Poetic, Epic, Marvelous, Tragic, Comic, Romantic, Realistic, Fantastic, Anticipatory, and Experimental.” (224) To observe a veteran literary scholar (Savoye is a professor of French and Spanish of literary and cultural studies at West Virginia University) reassert the primacy of storytelling—and the pleasure of stories—over parasitical theory is delightful. Boredom, not theory, is the enemy, he maintains, and the reason why English departments aren’t expanding and why tenured positions are scarce. As he puts it, near the end of *Beyond Literary Studies*,

[S]tudents enrolled in literature classes are today for the most part fed with unfounded speculations of would-be writers of a new, supposedly exciting literary genre known as “theory,” the practical applications of which shine by their absence, and forced to ingurgitate a different type of vocabulary—the kind you cannot virtually use anywhere outside of a close circle of friends. Whereas the knowledge of true imaginary parallel dimensions developed linguistic and creative abilities that could be used in a variety of professional contexts [...] anyone involved in the field of publicity or public relations would certainly benefit more from enjoying a series such as *Mad Men* than from ploughing through selected passages of *Of Grammatology*. (264)

One quibble. The ghost of controversial literary critic Leslie Fiedler flickers in the margins of Savoye’s book. Fiedler, known for *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), stressed the latent interracial homosociality in, say, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A secondary work of Fiedler’s, *What Was Literature?* (1983), by most accounts is an expression of bad faith as he struggles for a reason to value the humanities in a postmodern landscape. Fiedler’s solution? To tear down the wall between high and low culture, and to address a broader range of objects, from Shakespeare to 1970s TV cop show *Starsky and Hutch*. Fiedler’s assessment ended up being prophetic; the enduring presence of this journal stands as evidence. Thus, Savoye’s disregard of Fiedler makes me speculate: Haven’t literary studies already been supplanted by popular-culture scholarship thanks to his own publisher, McFarland? Could *Imaginology*, in other words, be just another name?

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# A Review of H. Peter Steeves' *Beautiful, Bright, and Blinding: Phenomenological Aesthetics and the Life of Art*

By Marc Aramini

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**Abstract:** A review of H. Peter Steeves' book on the phenomenology of beauty and art as a living and ever-changing interplay between object and observer, across a broad range of cultural and artistic media. Grounded in a wide variety of examples, the book does an excellent job of contextualizing the complex and ever-changing nature of aesthetic appreciation.

**Keywords:** Husserl, phenomenology, aesthetics, beauty, H. Peter Steeves

**Resumen:** Una reseña del libro de H. Peter Steeves acerca de la fenomenología de la belleza y el arte como una interacción viviente y siempre cambiante entre el objeto y el observador, en un amplio rango de medios culturales y artísticos. Basándose en una variedad amplia de ejemplos, el libro hace un excelente trabajo de contextualizar la naturaleza compleja y siempre cambiante de la apreciación estética.

**Palabras clave:** Husserl, fenomenología, estética, belleza, H. Peter Steeve

**摘要:** 本文评论了 H.彼得·斯蒂夫斯 (H. Peter Steeves) 关于美和艺术的现象学著作。美和艺术作为物体和观察者之间不断变化的相互影响, 存在于众多文化媒体和艺术媒体之中。基于一系列实例, 此书出色地将审美中既复杂又不断变化的本质进行情境化思考。

**关键词:** 胡塞尔, 现象学, 美学, 美, H. Peter Steeves

Two centuries ago, John Keats suggested that a thing of beauty was a joy forever that would never pass into nothingness. In our contemporary world, the possibility that so much which is beautiful has been destroyed tragically probably haunts many of us. Luckily, H. Peter Steeves's phenomenological examination of art (and aesthetic beauty) reassures us that our ability to find beauty in art exists as a living and breathing process that comes from both within and without in a simultaneously complex and implacably simple manner, for no matter what differences of soil and climate, of culture and experience might separate us, the existence of the sublime and beautiful cuts through human existence with a blade so fine it could slice an atom.

While his book portrays an erudite examination of phenomenology and metaphysics that never oversimplifies, Steeves' strength as a thinker and writer includes making complex philosophical distinctions, from Husserl to Derrida, accessible and "alive" to his readers. Anyone who reads his introduction and takes in the ambitious scope of his project might experience a sense of apprehension that the book might be too intellectual and abstract for enjoyment. Luckily, the final goal is not to imagine a remote and impregnable ideal aesthetic accessible only to the elite, but to bring an examination of beauty and to stress the vitality of art for all walks of life. From Arshile Gorky's paintings to Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, from the films of Michael Haneke to Romero's zombies, from Andy Kaufman to hot dogs, and almost everything in between, Steeves guides us through an enlightening, entertaining, accessible, and intelligent study of the life of art that never leaves behind the human element that each of us brings to the banquet. In the end, he does not suggest that beauty is a simple thing that can be summed up in one equation, but his exploration of all manner of art through a phenomenological lens reassures us that even if we can never precisely define what speaks to us so strongly, beauty is vital and alive, and it will endure as long as there are observers to behold it. H. Peter Steeves, too, has produced an objectively beautiful and fascinating book, every bit as artistic as the objects we see through its bright and illuminating lens.

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# Book Review of *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America* by Andrew J. Friedenthal

By Amy M. Green

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**Abstract:** This book review explores Andrew J. Friedenthal's *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America* and his fascinating and important conclusions about history and continuity in the digital and social media age.

**Keywords:** Social media, video games, narrative continuity, Andrew J. Friedenthal

**Resumen:** Esta reseña explora el libro de Andrew J. Friedenthal, *Retcon Game: la continuidad retroactiva y la hipervinculación de los Estados Unidos y sus conclusiones fascinantes e importantes acerca de la historia y la continuidad en la edad digital y la era de las redes sociales*.

**Palabras Clave:** Redes sociales, videojuegos, continuidad narrativa, Andrew J. Friedenthal

**摘要:** 本篇书评探索了安德鲁·J·弗里德索尔的著作《Retcon 游戏: 追溯连续性和美国的超级链接》(*Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America*)，以及他对数字社交媒体时代中历史和连续性得出的重要结论。

**关键词:** 社交媒体, 视频游戏, 叙事连续性, 安德鲁·J·弗里德索尔

In his introduction to *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America*, author Andrew J. Friedenthal notes in part, “I contend that the editable hyperlink, rather than the stable footnote, has become the de facto source of information in America today, and that the groundwork for this major cultural shift has been laid for decades via our modes of entertainment” (8). On that intriguing and compelling note begins Friedenthal’s wide-ranging investigation into how Americans increasingly find themselves viewing history not as fixed, but as malleable and transformable. He looks first to media in many forms, from the comic book to episodic television, as the source from which American culture has been increasingly accustomed to the idea that nothing, not even fixed history, lies beyond the boundaries of change.

Friedenthal begins in the first chapter of the book by exploring ways in which what he terms “narrative instability” (17) has always been a part of, and accepted by, numerous cultures. For this specific example, he turns in part to the storytellers of old, those who recited and transformed, by virtue of the individual’s preference for certain events or characters over others, narratives passed down in the oral tradition. Friedenthal distinguishes that these sorts of inventions and transformations lacked the intention often found in the recasting of history today, but reiterates their importance as setting a tradition wherein events – fictional or historical – might be changed.

Of special note is Friedenthal’s work with popular culture, especially comic books, as primary examples of those places where continuity shifts and changes. The examples are all well-chosen, carefully contextualized, and demonstrate the author’s keen understanding of the intersection between narrative-as-entertainment and narrative-as-mutable-history. His work with the Justice Society of America comics of the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates the larger reality found in long-running and wide-ranging comics wherein “a fictional universe that has propagated for so long and with such narrative multiplicity that creators are able to look back on previous stories with the perspective of history and cultural memory” (67). His knowledge of and understanding of fictional narrative across a number of formats leads to intriguing theories about text, stability, and history.

Friedenthal’s book provides a unique and terribly important perspective into our digital culture especially, one marked by editing and revision more than it might be marked by stability. By asking his readers to consider the consistent mutability of narrative in its fictional forms, he opens the complex discussion of how we might approach modern American culture’s tendency to expect all stories, from the personal to the historical, to also submit to such editing.

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# Review of *Understanding Larry McMurtry*, by Steven Frye

By Michael Velez

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One might think that the work of Texan author Larry McMurtry has been watched more than it has been read. While *The Last Picture Show* and *Lonesome Dove* were popular and critical successes in the theater and on the television screen, the author's novels remain much admired by a sizable, enduring readership. Steven Frye has written an insightful overview of McMurtry's wide-ranging body of work—and aesthetic—in *Understanding Larry McMurtry*. Frye here assays the full output of an estimable writing career that includes novels, screenplays, essays, and memoirs.

In the work's introductory chapter, Frye provides an analysis of the author's aesthetic, deftly positioning McMurtry both within and outside the genre Western. This reflects McMurtry's long-stated misgivings that the genre Western tends to enshrine simplistic national myths. Frye briefly traces the evolution of the Western, arguing that McMurtry's contributions remain singular. To Frye, the author's literary craftsmanship draws on well-honed realism, an "antipathy" to genre conventions combined with a willingness to deconstruct such along with a discerning eye for character and setting. Frye further argues that McMurtry uses elements of both the historical romance and the novel of manners to fashion a literary West that can be as drily historical as it is archetypically rich.

Frye's division of McMurtry's major novels sensibly follows the author's thematic groupings: the Thalia and Houston trilogies each receive a separate chapter treatment. Frye observes how small town Thalia, no less so than the burgeoning metropolis of Houston, seems in a state of perpetual flux to its inhabitants. Thalia is explored as an archetypal dying town, a remnant of ranch culture gradually supplanted by Big Oil. It seems almost a character in itself, bearing mute witness to its own slow secession of (literal, figurative) ground to the suburban and urban. Frye, here and elsewhere, perceptively analyzes McMurtry's sensitivities to place and region amidst the social currents that appears throughout his body of work.

Frye posits that most of these currents come together in the Lonesome Dove multi-volume saga. This eponymous 1985 novel is best remembered by some for the later mini-series, but the best-seller garnered considerable critical acclaim—a Pulitzer Prize for fiction not least of which—alongside healthy sales. As a sweeping (at 800-plus pages) epic about an Texan cattle drive, Frye suggests that while it seemed to be the conventional Western that many hoped McMurtry would finally pen, the author also relished creating a canvas that would take in not just Texas but all of the American frontier- with all due socio-historic contradictions present.

In *Understanding Larry McMurtry*, one comes to understand how McMurtry's novels have been translated with such relative ease to other media, but Frye offers a convincing case that these are not disposable summer beach reads nor screenplays in the waiting. Certainly, McMurtry has long been—as he famously and semi-ironically referred to himself—more than a “minor regionalist novelist.” McMurtry thus emerges as an ambitious author, with a vast oeuvre that both celebrates and interrogates the myths and mythos of the American West past and present.

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# Dynamic International Networks of Print Culture: Multi-Disciplinary Scholarship on Fiction and Empire

By Heather Lusty

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*Empires of Print: Adventure Fiction in the Magazines, 1899-1919.*  
Belk, Patrick Scott. New York: Routledge, 2017.

**Abstract:** In this review, the author explores a new text that investigates and connects multi-dimensional aspects of print culture on the cusp of the technological age. Strengths of the text, namely meticulous research, copious primary sources and images, and compelling arguments regarding the interconnectivity of print media, leisure publishing, politics, journalism, technology, and imperial expansion, are supported with engaging visuals and rigorous scholarship in multiple disciplines. The author notes the increasing value of broad, multi-field studies like this, particularly in the current era of multi-media news platforms, to enhance our understanding of the myriad influences daily political and cultural life exerts on our literary consumption.

**Keywords:** adventure fiction, publication networks, history of publishing, serialization, literature of empire, early twentieth-century journalism, technology and publishing, Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells, Conan Doyle, John Buchan

Patrick Scott Belk's new book, *Empires of Print*, is a masterful look at the development of the publishing industries at the turn of the twentieth century. The massive shift of print production from 1880 to 1920 shaped publishing in the Western world, permanently restructuring the reading public into a corpus of profitable consumers. By working together, leading publishers in the Transatlantic industry organized multiple-market media campaigns, synchronized complex legal and contract negotiations, and created the phenomenon of the modern best-seller (2).

The pioneering efforts of stalwart establishment firms and newer, large-scale commercial publishers created one of the earliest manifestations of a true global marketplace, bringing textbooks, magazines, and inexpensive trade-paper reprints to overseas markets, foreshadowing the modern world's multinational media conglomerates. Celebrity authors, in conjunction with their agents, editors, and commercial publishers, adjusted to the global print market, which increasingly looked to technological revolutions, celebrity culture, and the commercial marketplace (4). This study brings the complex, innovative efforts of publishers to generate a world-wide market into vivid and contemporaneously-relevant detail through riveting stories, spectacular visual support, and astute examples that link to publishing practices of today.

Belk's particular focus here highlights what he terms the "cross-fertilization of adventure fiction, periodical publishing, and the 'new mass entertainment culture'" at work in the late nineteenth century (6). Popular authors had to compete commercially in an increasingly diverse, global market, as well as actively stay abreast of and participate in key transformations of print and periodical publishing (6). Each of the book's five chapters focuses on a different set of adventure texts, presenting a chronological narrative of the expansion of publishing into overseas markets.

The first chapter lays the foundation of expansion and examines the symbiotic relationship between magazines and adventure fiction, a relationship that would critically shape literary debates between Romance and Realism at the turn of the century. Belk illuminates the vital alignment of the populist press barons at the Imperial Press Conference of 1909, tracing the expansion of periodicals through established publishing networks as well as through the media empire. Belk notes that former prime minister Lord Rosebery emphasized that newspapers should be enduring, and had great power to both guide and embody public opinion in their provinces (21). This overview also outlines the essentials of the nineteenth-century periodical form as a popular genre.

The second chapter examines the anticipatory moves to stay afloat during a significant shift in literary tradition; using Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1899), Belk highlights the ways in which Conrad acknowledges the "widespread cultural currency of a robust and multifaceted literary tradition" by drawing on conventions of adventure stories derived from adventures at sea, travel books, diaries, captivity narratives, and discover journals from the previous two centuries (8).

Chapter three considers the significant shift in adventure fiction during the first decades of the twentieth century, noting its unevenness and the adjustments made in H.G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* series for the shifting audience. This chapter presents a compelling argument for reading the turn of the century adventure story alongside contemporary advertisements for holiday cruises, tour packages, and deluxe travel itineraries (9).

The fourth chapter presents a fantastic examination of Conan Doyle's essays on photography and *The Lost World* (1912), highlighting the ways commercial and professional relationships between print and competing forms of popular media influenced new media technologies. Belk argues that Doyle skillfully appropriates photography in the popular illustrated magazine as a form of "proof and documentary evidence" that allowed him to create new adventures of escape and transgression (10). Doyle's use of cutting edge cinema technology in 1922 is a fascinating example of the innovative relationships between popular print publishing and emerging technologies, and heralded the wealth of possibilities for visually enhancing narratives to keep the public informed and entertained (130, 133).

The final chapter examines the convergence of modern media; Belk uses John Buchan's spy novels to highlight the necessary professional command of literary agency, publishing, and authorship a writer needed to navigate the threat of new media successfully (11). Attention to the differences in British and American pulp trends underscores the complex understanding of audience appeal across national lines. Overall, the chapters provide a compelling and insightful look at the complex and versatile range of adventure fiction during the decades leading up to the First World War.

This book does many things well. The rich history of publishers' active engagement in understanding the expanding base of consumers, catering to a more globally-aware readership, and quick adjustments to stay abreast of the rapidly evolving technology provide a fascinating narrative. As a scholarly text, the meticulous research elucidates connections between several fields: publishing, education, culture, pulp magazines, developing technologies, and news media. Belk connects aspects of leisure

publishing to contemporaneous concerns like Germany's rearmament, the importance of the unity of the Empire, and the essential role foreign journalism played in maintaining core cultural values (22). The abundant illustrations provided from magazines and newspapers give the reader a tangible sense of the rich array of publishing outlets in competition, as well as the global networks influencing narrative evolution.

Overall, the expansion of the publishing industry is convincingly portrayed as integral to the growth and cultural of the British Empire. Belk ends this thorough study of adventure fiction by pointing to its influence on the development of a common literary vernacular, from New Zealand to Barbados, Hong Kong to the American Midwest. The networks that made these global reading communities possible have historically been difficult to map, but advances in digital humanities scholarship make it likely that our understanding of these complex relationships will continue to become accessible, ensuring decades of interest in the way publishing shapes our cultural engagement and understanding.

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# Contributors

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**Marc Aramini** has a degree in Biochemistry from Notre Dame and a Masters in English Literature from Northern Arizona University. Most of his writing focuses on the science fiction writer Gene Wolfe, on whom he has published a book. He is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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**Amy M. Green** is Assistant Professor-in-Residence at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, USA. Her work on video games has appeared in numerous academic journals, a TEDx talk, and interviews with KNPR's State of Nevada program. She has published two books on the study of storytelling in video games.

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From 1995-2012, **Richard Logsdon** was senior editor of the literary magazine Red Rock Review. He also edited *In the Shadow of the Strip*, a short story collection about Las Vegas (2002, University of Nevada Press). He has published numerous short stories, two college textbooks, and several essays on popular culture.

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**Michael Velez** is currently preparing to defend his Ph.D. dissertation, "Reading Kerouac's Road: Region and Space in Jack Kerouac's Novels 1950-1971," exploring the roles played by space, place, and the physical environment plays in the author's work. He has earlier expanded on this critical model in articles published in *College Literature* and the anthology *Trains, Literature, and Culture* (Lexington Books, 2012).

Although he hails from a production background, **Graeme Wilson** has since dedicated himself to academia and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Bowling Green State University studying Media and Communication. Graeme's specific research interests lie in the visual representation of gender roles in popular media.



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# Popular Culture Review

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

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