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# From the Editor's Desk

Felicia recently mentioned to me that she has been thinking about the importance of analyzing and understanding pop culture “alternative facts” shape our realities. Our authors this issue all demonstrate just how important such work is. Reading their texts through the frame of the recent US election reveals the breadth of application of their insights.

H. Peter Steeves’s essay on the “politics at play” in the *Star Trek* franchise’s intertextual homages to *Moby Dick* illuminates the futility of the monomaniacal pursuit of an ultimately self-destructive goal. Infinite consumption, anyone? And, in his free-ranging analysis of Turkish cartoons lampooning President Trump, Yusuf Eradam reveals the Loveable Rogue image President Trump tries to project as an “alternative fact,” one the author rejects in favor of the Devil Incarnate underneath.

Frank E. Dobson shows us that history matters and that in ways, we have been marching to where we arrived on 20 January 2017 for a long time. Read through the “Trumpian” frame, Dobson shows that despite “alternative fact” rhetoric of walls and easy fixes, revolution may be necessary to ensure justice. John-Henry Harter’s contribution—an analysis of the reality show *Undercover Boss*—demonstrates that by contributing to the banalization of surveillance the show functions to “discipline workers” in the same

way that the Panopticon leads prison inmates to self-discipline.

As he examines the reasons for and consequences of the erasure of *The American Sherlock Holmes* from the US canon of detective fiction, Daniel Ferreras Savoye, too, builds on the notion that historical *anamnesis* can create a space in which “alternative facts” arise to create an alternative reality, an unreal reality. Next, Michael Green’s paen to broadcast media celebrity Garry Moore unveils a man of integrity who turned down a lucrative offer because he did not want to be associated with the sordidness he was sure would accompany it. Green’s Moore provides a striking contrast to the public face of the US’s “celebrity” head of state.

Emily Acosta-Lewis’s analysis of the effects on viewers’ body image of identification with and admiration of media characters exposes the ugly reality behind the “alternative fact” that it’s “only TV.” Indeed, her research shows that popular culture profoundly affects the ways we see ourselves—and by extension, our world.

Examining representations of automobiles in mid-twentieth-century US-American film, Lisa E. Robinson argues that the films construct their characters’ relationships to technology in general, and cars in particular, on a base of “alternative facts” that valorize pasts that never were. Robinson concludes that we need to account for the multitudinous varieties of nostalgia and the ways films create alternative realities for which we are encouraged to pine. “Make America great again!” That kind.

Finally, Carl Rollyson's discussion of Ted Hughes's letters hints at some ways even texts composed of primary documents can be shaped and molded into "alternative facts" by incautious, dishonest, or self-aggrandizing compilers and sources. Remind you of anyone we know?

Peace,

Gina

## **“He Tasks Me!”: Khan, Ahab, and Star Trek’s White Whale**

By H. Peter Steeves, DePaul University

Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851) and the various incarnations of *Star Trek* have a long and intertwined history. In the latter’s original series (ST:TOS), which aired on NBC television from 1966-69, the crew of the *Enterprise* often encountered various obsessive characters playing a maniacal Ahab to some sort of space-whale. In “The Doomsday Machine” (dir. Marc Daniels, 1967), for instance, Capt. Kirk and crew come upon Commodore Matt Decker, the lone survivor aboard the *Enterprise*’s wrecked sister ship, the *USS Constellation*. Having gone up against and lost a battle with a “doomsday machine” that looks a little something like a humongous space cornucopia genetically mixed with a sperm whale, Decker is intent on hunting the leviathan to its death even if it costs the lives of everyone around him. With an Ahab-like intensity, he takes over the captaincy of the *Enterprise* and gives chase, eventually launching himself in a small shuttlecraft—something like a whaling ship’s

harpooner/chase boat—ending up swallowed by the beast.

In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (ST:TNG) movie, *Star Trek: First Contact* (dir. Jonathan Frakes, 1996), Capt. Picard—a man whose previous encounter with the Borg left him physically and mentally deformed—now wishes to pursue his abnormally white-skinned enemy to the death, all reason be damned. When someone points out to him that his desire for vengeance has become a kind of madness that is not unlike Ahab's, Picard flies into an uncharacteristic rage, smashing the little models of previous ships named *Enterprise* in his ready-room, eventually calming down and realizing his problem before being moved to quote directly, if slightly incorrectly, from chapter 41 of the novel: "And he piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the rage and hate felt by his whole race. If his chest had been a cannon, he would have shot his heart upon it." In an early version of the script for an episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (ST:DS9) eventually entitled, "Extreme Measures" (dir. Steve Posey, 1999), Chief of Operations Miles O'Brien discusses *Moby-Dick* with Doctor Julian Bashir, claiming that it was a "tough book" for him to read when he was younger due to Melville's tendency to go on and on describing the minutiae of the nineteenth-century whaling trade: "I remember him spending pages and pages talking about the different kinds of harpoons," says O'Brien, revealing to us a side of his character that is

surprising given the Chief's own obsession with technical manuals. "I actually like the level of detail," replies Bashir. And, of course, there is the TOS movie, *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1986), which is all about saving humpback whales by means of time-travel, and includes direct and indirect references to *Moby-Dick* throughout.

We could go on. The point is not only that *Moby-Dick* is an enduring novel, one that the Star Trek writers assume will still be well-known centuries in the future and thus can be referenced with some degree of certainty that its greatness will remain intact. Nor is the point that whenever a storyteller of any kind needs to make a reference to an individual driven by maniacal obsession, *Moby-Dick* is the best go-to example. Rather, there is an important link that ties together Star Trek and *Moby-Dick* that has something to do with the ideology at work in both—the politics in play as well as the nature of a text itself. To illustrate this point, we'll take a closer look at just one instance of the connection: the role of *Moby-Dick* in the TOS movie, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (dir. Nicholas Meyer; 1982). Like the disparate chapters in Melville's novel that have radically different tones, voices, and topics yet make a whole, my hope is that the mix of moods, subjects, and approaches to the topic at hand here will form something that comes to meaning much like the novel.

Melville created a work that resonates across different spectra—high/low art,

fiction/nonfiction, poetry/drama/history, etc. It is, in reality, a bizarre novel: the leviathan of Rorschach tests, meaning so much and yet meaning so much precisely by being able to reflect back so much of what we bring to it (See figure 1). This is a book that is redefining what a novel can and should be for a generation, and, indeed, it would take a generation or two to appreciate it. For Hemingway and his contemporaries at the start of the twentieth-century, *Moby-Dick* rose from the depths of, at best, ridicule, and, at worst, obscurity, to become *the* model for late-modern writing. We might even call it *postmodern*. As is the case with *Don Quixote*, the very first novel ever written, there is something about a novel itself that undermines its own essence, something postmodern and deconstructive about the novel from the very start centuries ago. The novel, it turns out, is a curious form of writing.

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville inserts his own voice, conflating his and his narrator's point of view. He goes off on long excursions into terminology, custom, and history—so much so that they might not best be thought of as excursions but as the heart of the novel *per se*. Chief O'Brien is right: Melville's descriptions of whales and whaling as a practice often read as if they are part of nineteenth-century whaler's training manual rather than a novel. The main protagonist, Captain Ahab, doesn't appear until nearly a quarter of the way into the book. To be sure, everything about this book is startling. It

doesn't even really start in the way you probably remember it starting.

“Call me Ishmael,” is one of the most famous first lines of any novel, but the truth is that *Moby-Dick* actually begins before it begins. It begins with two sections entitled “Etymology” and “Extracts” that come before the first chapter. “Extracts” includes quotes about whales from popular and classical sources. “Etymology” discusses the history of the word “whale” (especially the meaning of the silent “h”—importantly, and deconstructively, here claimed to be the part of a text that is unspoken yet gives it meaning). And although this might appear a bit of scholarly apparatus before the novel launches, Melville’s choice to attribute the etymological work to a fictional character—and a *comedic* character at that, described by the narrator as a “late consumptive usher to a grammar school”—lets us know that the novel’s actual beginning is already in question.

But let us begin again, like Melville.

After the critical failure of the movie, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (dir. Robert Wise, 1979), Paramount decided to return to the original seventy-nine episodes in order to draw inspiration for the second feature film in the Star Trek franchise. The first film lacked a real villain and thus a real sense of conflict, urgency, and resolution, but the film’s producers found the antagonist they were looking for in the twenty-second episode of

season one, "Space Seed" (dir. Marc Daniels, 1967) in which Kirk and crew battle a genetically enhanced group of humans led by Khan Noonien Singh (played by Ricardo Montalbán). Thinking himself the intellectual and physical superior of Kirk in every way, Khan tries to take over the ship, fails, and, at the end of the episode is given the option of facing life in prison or taking his remaining crewmates (and the woman from Kirk's crew whom Khan had managed to convince to mutiny and now wishes to marry) to Ceti Alpha V, a rugged planet that could only be "tamed" by such a "superior man." Khan is banished, the *Enterprise* is returned to normal, and the episode concludes. Chronologically accurate, *The Wrath of Khan* picks up fifteen years later when we learn that neighboring planet Ceti Alpha VI exploded soon after Khan and his people were left on Ceti Alpha V, the explosion altering the orbit of Khan's new home and making it virtually inhospitable to life. Because Kirk never went back to check on Khan's progress, nor, apparently, told Star Fleet to do so either, Khan has been barely holding on for all of these years, his wife and most of his crew now dead. When the USS Reliant's captain sends a search party down to the planet all of these years later, he assumes they are orbiting and exploring Ceti Alpha VI. No one expects to encounter life of any kind. Khan, however, soon overtakes the landing party, learns of their mission, commandeers the Reliant, and sets off to find Kirk and exact his revenge. The Reliant's directive was to find a planet

completely devoid of life for the testing of Star Fleet's "Genesis Device," a mechanism that by means of introducing "proto-matter" into the matrix of any planet can reorganize the matter that is already there in order to create life and a habitable, terra-formed world ready for colonization by the Federation. After various cat-and-mouse games, and a fair amount of scenery chewing by Mantalbán and Shatner, Khan and Kirk battle each other and battle for control of the Genesis Device, Khan bent only on getting his revenge and making Kirk suffer. At various times, Khan's crew pleads with him to run off and enjoy their freedom, but Khan is too obsessed with vengeance to consider it. Eventually, the *Enterprise* crew beats Khan, and the Reliant is so combat-damaged that it sits immobile in space, Khan its sole survivor on the bridge. As the *Enterprise* inches away from the battle having lost its warp engines in the firefight, Khan starts the Genesis Device's detonation sequence knowing that it will kill him but taking great pleasure in knowing that it will also kill Kirk and everyone aboard the *Enterprise* as well. At the last moment, Spock sacrifices his life to fix the *Enterprise*'s engines, the *Enterprise* warps away from the Reliant, the Genesis Device and Khan explode, and Kirk is left to mourn his friend, eventually placing Spock's corpse inside a photon torpedo casing and firing it at the "Genesis Planet" that has emerged from the nebulous cloud of reorganized matter back at the explosion site. In the final scene, the photon torpedo shell is

seen resting on the newly formed planet, the Genesis mists washing over it.

*The Wrath of Khan's* relation to *Moby-Dick* does not lie merely in the fact that the story of Khan is indebted to and inspired by the story of Ahab, but in the way in which this movie takes up the novel such that it adds layers of interpretation to the novel. It is true, that is, that Khan's obsession with revenge is specifically and intentionally modeled on Ahab's. We know this because we see Khan's home back on Ceti Alpha V. It's nice to know that two-hundred-and-seventy years from now, we envision a future in which *Moby-Dick* is still on our bookshelves. (For that matter, it's nice to envision a future in which there are actual books to sit on shelves.) (See figure 2.) In a still from the movie, and we can see that while stranded on the planet, Khan has been doing some heavy reading: Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Melville. It's little wonder, then, that when he seeks to make sense of his own pursuit of Kirk and the *Enterprise*, he filters it through narratives of the past.

At times, Khan adapts Ahab's words, adding a few space-themed—rather than water-themed—locations and terms, as in the near-quote: "I'll chase him round the moons of Nibia, and round the Antares maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up!" At other times, Khan fully casts himself as Ahab and recites the Pequod captain's dialogue word for word, as in his soliloquy while activating the Genesis Device's

detonation sequence: “To the last, I grapple with thee; from hell's heart, I stab at thee; for hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee.” It is interesting to note, as well, that some of the most quoted lines from the movie—and, let's be honest, some of the lines that are cheesy guilty pleasures for those of us who are fans—are actually direct quotes from *Moby-Dick* as well, though they often are not acknowledged as such. Ahab probably didn't have Ricardo Montalbán's accent, smooth as fine Corinthian leather, but I cannot help but hear Khan's voice whenever I read chapter 36, the chapter in which Ahab explains how the whale *tasks him*, enlisting his crew to join in the mad pursuit. And it should be noted, too, that chapter 36 is one of those bizarre chapters where the novel becomes something more like a play, with stage directions and narrator intervention written into the text. All in all, Khan is simply acting the part that Melville is offering up to all of his readers.

There are, then, these quotations. But there are visual quotations as well in the movie. That space is like water, and space vessels are like ships, is really a creation of science fiction, and especially of Star Trek. In real life, NASA created rockets and tended to recruit pilots from the Air Force, thinking of each lift-off more like the launch of an aircraft—a plane or a jet—rather than a *ship*. It took Star Trek, with its fleet of ships named like naval vessels and modeled after the Navy—for us to think of space as sea rather than air. Both, of

course, are metaphors. Neither one is more true than the other. But there are implications to thinking of space as if it were water. Importantly, toward the end of the movie, Spock is the one to note that Khan is strategizing more like an air-bound-captain than a water-bound-captain, pointing out to Kirk that Khan is thinking “two-dimensionally” as he circles around the nebula searching for the *Enterprise*. Kirk then orders the *Enterprise* to drop “down” (which, granted, is a hard thing to understand in space). The big moment of the battle is then when Khan’s ship is moving forward on screen and we see behind it the *Enterprise*—that massive grayish-white ship—rising up from below in order to unleash its smashing fury. The “hero” of the movie, that is, takes on the role of the whale. The *Enterprise* is Moby Dick.

It might be unoriginal to suggest that Ahab has always been an anti-hero, a villain in a starring role. But to consider that the whale is the *true hero* of the narrative—that’s more...interesting. And to cast a piece of complicated technology, the *Enterprise*, in the role of the living, organic, natural whale is further to ask us to consider if Melville’s novel really is about humanity’s struggle against *nature* or more properly about humanity’s struggle against humanity’s nature. Perhaps it would be interesting to read *The Wrath of Khan* as a re-telling of *Moby-Dick* from the point of view of the whale—a sort of *Grendel* to oppose *Beowulf*, a *Wicked* to oppose *The Wizard of*

Oz, a *Maleficent* to oppose *Sleeping Beauty*. Interestingly, the sequel to the sequel to the sequel—that is, the fourth Star Trek movie, *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*—will later become the highest grossing film in the franchise, and its story will be all about going back in time to save whales, the whole movie focusing on whales, even including one climactic scene in which Kirk and crew physically stop a whaler’s harpoon from flying toward its target by placing their borrowed Klingon ship between the whale and the flying harpoon.

Perhaps. But to be honest, I have always found the supposed “good guys” to be somewhat morally questionable in *The Wrath of Khan*. The Federation has, after all, created a bomb—and that’s the appropriate word, a *bomb*—that will reorganize any planet (really, reorganize matter itself) into a matrix that we, as humans, as Federation humans, like better than what is already there. It creates life from lifelessness: the final God-like *telos* of all technology, really, and just one step away from NASA’s plans to settle and terraform Mars in the coming decades. And those who made the Genesis device, like all too many scientists, believe that the tool they have created is value-neutral and can lead either to good or to bad depending merely on who the user is and how the tool is used. That there is an inherent value, a built-in set of moral imperatives, to the tool never occurs to them.

In some ways, Khan is right: why should a massive institutional neo-liberal and colonialist state such as the Federation get to wield such power? When Star Fleet uses the Genesis device, they are “terraforming” and “doing science.” When Khan uses the Genesis device, he’s a terrorist. And Spock’s cold utilitarian calculus—the same calculus he espouses, while dying from radiation poisoning, as the reason he sacrificed his life to save the ship—of “the needs of the many outweighing the needs of the few, or the one,” is part of the problem as well.

Indeed, consider the final scenes of the movie—those of Spock sacrificing himself to save the ship, and the funeral in which his body is placed inside a photon torpedo casing and shot out into space. Spock’s photon torpedo casing is Queequeg’s coffin, the repository of the one who will be the true survivor of the tale. In the novel, Queequeg requests that his coffin be a canoe, what he had earlier taken sailor’s coffins in Nantucket to be, and a tradition for Queequeg’s native tribe (which would literally send their men out to sea in a canoe after death). That Spock’s coffin is another kind of bomb rather than a boat, a casing of a war artifact and instrument of violence, is not unimportant here. It is part of the ideology of the logophallogocentric *Enterprise* crew that there are no values inherent in things: they are what we make of them. And the Federation gets to do the making.

Queequeg's coffin becomes the life buoy that saves Ishmael, but in the movie, Spock's coffin literally becomes Spock's resurrection chamber as we see in the sequel, *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1984), once the photon torpedo case has crashed on the Genesis planet and the Genesis mists can start to do their work reanimating Spock's body. If they had kept his body on board, cremated it, or taken it home to Vulcan, Spock could not have been resurrected. The key to his survival was being placed inside a torpedo casing and shot out to sea/space.

Initially, Ahab is reluctant to allow a coffin to be used as a life buoy—but, in chapter 127, he considers that it is possibly the case that “in some spiritual sense the coffin is...[already] an immortality-preserver.” This is, after all, a captain with only one good leg left behind after his first encounter with Moby Dick; a captain, we are told in the “Spirit-Spout” chapter, whose “one live leg made lively echoes along the deck, every stroke of his dead limb sound[ing] like a coffin-tap.” Ahab always has one foot in the grave—or at least one foot inside the whale's belly—and one foot above water. Kirk, though, sees no problem with stuffing his best friend's corpse into a bomb-shell and firing it off into the abyss.

Are things merely what we make of them? Can a text such as *Star Trek* truly support such a reading? In order to point in the direction of an answer—and to address, as well, the

question of whether or not *Moby-Dick* is the sort of work that can support an overlay of such popular culture—let us conclude by briefly considering a single chapter from this marvelously crazy book.

Choosing one chapter of *Moby-Dick* is difficult. I am torn here, because I would love to discuss at length the character of Pip, one of my favorite characters in all of literature; or a queer reading of the novel; or the centrality of Ahab's demonic blessing of the harpoon; or the importance of the historical setting in which Melville is writing—an America that, in 1848, had just won the Mexican War and basically cemented its dream of being one continuous nation across the continent, yet an America on the verge of Civil War (to be sure, there are many reasons the whale is *white* in this novel)—but instead, let us turn to “The Doubloon,” and the question of how it is that we should interpret a text in general.

“The Doubloon” is chapter ninety-nine in *Moby-Dick*. At this point in the book we have not seen Ahab for twenty-nine chapters. For any novelist other than Melville, this would be *surprising*. The last time the captain appeared in the novel, in fact, was when he was interrogating the decapitated head of a whale back in chapter seventy. Reappearing on deck in chapter ninety-nine, though, Ahab still prefers an inanimate interlocutor, now addressing the coin he had earlier nailed to the masthead, having promised it to the first crewman to spot Moby Dick. The captain looks

at the doubloon, minted in Ecuador, for the first time in earnest, noting the imagery and symbols on it, and he pauses to try to make out the meaning of it all, the meaning of this text. When he finishes, Starbuck next tries to read the coin. Then come Stubb, Flask, the old Manxman, Queequeg, and finally Pip. One by one, each stands alone before the coin, speculating with the textual currency, reading, thinking, interpreting, trying to sound out what it all means.

On the coin there are various marking, including signs of the zodiac. The sun is seen entering the equinox in the constellation of Libra, the balancing scales. Below are three mountains, one topped by a fire, another a tower, and another a rooster. (See figure 3.)

“All are Ahab,” concludes the captain, the whole world speaking only to him, only of him. Penitent Starbuck sees the sun as God, the mountains as the holy trinity. Stubb goes below and consults a book on astrology in order to interpret the coin’s meaning, finally declaring that it is a round text that tells the whole story of humanity’s existence. Flask sees nine-hundred-and-sixty cigars nailed to the masthead, because this is what he would purchase with it given the monetary value of the gold out of which the coin was minted. The Manxman sees in it the future of the ship, the fact that they will find the white whale in the autumn of the year. Queequeg, his own body tattooed with markings said to answer every question about the cosmos yet he is unable to

read any of them himself, looks back and forth from his body to the body of the text, studying the ways in which the coin's stamps—the coin's tattoos—are like and unlike his own. And Pip—poor, mad, possibly brilliant Pip? Pip babbles out the conjugation for the verb “to look”—“I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look....I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look...”—and declares the coin to be the ship's central navel, the Pequod's wooden body soon to splinter, buried at the bottom of the sea, bellybutton and all.

There is a text, and there is a world, and there is no distinction between the two. But what it means for anything to have meaning is that someone capable of bestowing meaning takes it to be meaningful. We always bring ourselves to the text—sometimes narcissistically like Ahab, at other times with general openness like Queequeg. We search for something above and beyond, hoping like Starbuck, that it points to the eternal. We bring other texts to give meaning to a text, like hermeneut Stubb, making sense of one book with another, knowing that there is nothing other than yet another book that can begin to explain that second book. Like Flanx, we see the immediate meaning of a word, see through to what it represents in our lives, what it *does* as well as *means*. Like the Manxman, everything that can possibly come to meaning in our future is already there in our past: even a word only has meaning for us if we have already encountered it and know its meaning,

or if we have, at least, encountered the words used in its definition. And like Pip, we know that rather than approaching the text-coin one-by-one standing before it on the mast-head, when we look for meaning, we look for meaning together: I look, you look, we look. And what it means to ask a text the question of how a text has meaning—what it means to ask the meta-question, the ur-question that circles back on itself and rises out of the deep threatening to capsize us as much as answer our question—is to stare into the navel of meaning, the birth of meaning, the place where meaning connects to the world.

And this, Melville tells us, is how to read a novel. This is how to know the true meaning of *Moby-Dick*.

Except, of course, for the fact that through Ishmael he has earlier told us never to believe anything a book says because there is true knowledge and then there are things written in books. If we go looking at this book to tell us what it means, it will only remind us, like Yahweh, that it is what it is. And it is thus, with Pip, that we encounter God's foot on the treadle of the loom, spinning the eternal hermeneutical circle beneath the sea—leaving us staring up at the heavens, mistakenly thinking that the coin, that life, is only and always all about us, erroneously believing that we truly are the hero of the story, madly screaming the name of the one we have written into our narrative as our great persecutor, the one hell-bent on our

destruction, the one serving up revenge colder  
than the echoing sea: *Kaaaaahn!*

## **Donald Trump in Turkish Media: Loveable Rogue or Devil Incarnate?**

By Yusuf Eradam,  
Istanbul Kültür University

“Hell is empty, and all the devils are here.”

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Act I, Scene II., Ariel to Prospero about one of King Ferdinand’s men’s crying out these words.)

“Once upon a time in a galaxy far far away . . .” (*Rogue One*, opening line)

In his article, “The Rhetoric of Othering,” S. H. Riggins, while opening up the hidden coves of the discourse of othering, defines “critical discourse analysis” as

The theoretical foundations of critical discourse analysis are based on perspectives that see the relation of words and truth as highly tenuous and problematic. Any form of writing is

considered to be a selection, an interpretation, and a dramatization of events. All representations of events are polysemic – that is, ambiguous and unstable in meaning – as well as a mix of “truth” and “fiction.” Despite the desire of some writers to be utterly truthful and accurate, we are unwittingly trapped in a world of biased perceptions and “stories,” all of which both exceed and shortchange “reality.”  
(2)

The best example of this definition and illumination of Trump’s discourse of hatred and

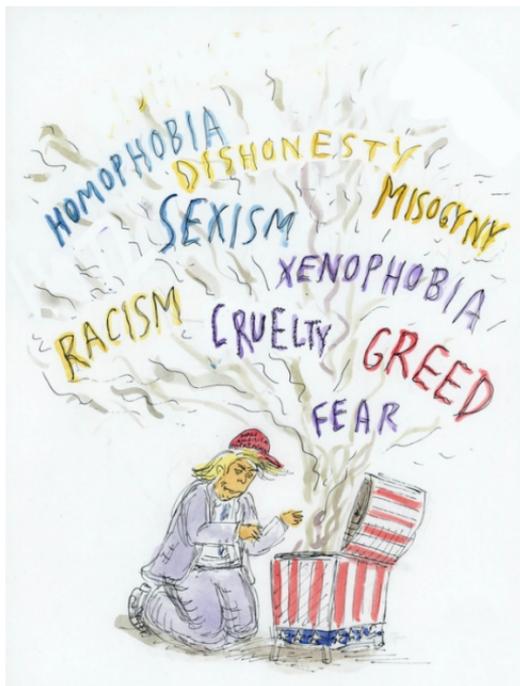


Figure 1

othering after he won the elections came from *New Yorker* editor Françoise Mouly and the designer cartoonist Gayle Kabaker in the activist cartoon magazine *Resist*. The issue protesting the outcome of the election is to be distributed free on January 20 for Trump's lunchbox of othering was full of homophobia, sexism, racism, misogyny, dishonesty, xenophobia, greed, cruelty and fear. This is by all means what Turkey, Turkish people, the Turkish media of all kinds has known about Trump for years and has lived and learned by heart and by life experience. However, it is a matter of honesty and truthful decision-making to decide which side one should be on when one is dealing with serious issues concerning the deluded masses on their behalf—and sometimes, despite a public that is subject to mediated hypnosis.

Mouly and Kabaker's cartoon shows Trump as a homeless person warming himself up by the heat of all the concepts the world is suffering from, which ironically translates into Turkish as “Yatacak yeri yok” (“He does not have a bed to sleep on.”), as the idiom is used in Turkey for whoever is equated with the image of the devil incarnate.

Before he was elected, Donald Trump used every way to look and sound like the devil incarnate of an extremely vulgar, unacceptably repulsive version of a loveable rogue as a PR strategy. Benefiting from Islamophobia, calling Islam as the only enemy of the US, and then

after the elections addressing Erdogan as the greatest leader of the world of Islam is hypocritical. We Turks are, in Trump's eyes, probably *better or less worse* than the 'original' muslims, or the lesser of the two evils.

It is an historical commonplace that the pagan Turks were introduced to Islam in the seventh-century during the rule of Caliph Omar and were rapidly converted after the *jihad* (holy war) attacks of the Arabs on the lands of pagan Turks, the so-called *heathens*. Therefore, Trump's loving Erdogan as a Muslim leader means to us here, knowing him as a Muslim is better than not knowing what he is. At this point, the philosopher Zeno's paradoxes speak better, as when he underlines the inevitability of the surprise even when one knows there is a surprise coming; i.e., one cannot get ready for a surprise.

Misinformation or parodies like montages to Trump's speech in his Ohio Rally found believers quickly. Even the CNNTurk put the protestors behind Trump pleading him to shut down the schools in Turkey which are raising imams. However, journalist Metin Uca's tweet shows Trump like a *Hodja*, the Islamic prayer leader or "minister", preaching with the Islamic praying-gesture with his two hands behind meaning "Tekbir" (Takbeer: the gesture to mean *Allah is great.*) Metin Uca's tweet of mockery translates as follows: "From today onwards, by means of flattery and exaltation (apotheosis) here is 'the friend of believers, His Grace, the Trump *Hodja*.'"

CNNTurk is among the leading TV news channels known to support the leading party in the office, monitored by Erdogan, the President of Turkey, and it was thanks to a CNNTurk woman-journalist during the July 15, 2016 “coup-attempt” as via her mobile phone connecting all Turkish TV channels and people to Erdogan, who would not hesitate to “call” not



Figure 2

only his followers but his “people” to go out on to the streets and fight the new terrorists, the followers of Fetullah Gulen, who is known to have been “hiding or sheltering in Pennsylvania under the wings of the USA” (which therefore makes the US government no longer a friend and collaborator of the Turkish government) and the next day Gulen and his people, who had been oozing for ages into the state offices, educational and social grounds of not only Turkey but all over the world behind a mask of mild Islam, became a new terrorist group threatening Turkey under the *organizational* abbreviation FETÖ (which raises the hopes of Trump’s kicking Gulen out, hopefully back to Turkey to be jailed and “punished” as the ultimate devil incarnate).

The Turkish media, therefore, is sure to select and appreciate the bullying loveable rogue images of Donald Trump, his addressing the public with his puckered mouth and his seemingly “portable” hair when, for instance, he does not permit the aggressive journalist to ask his question at a press meeting. Trump’s calling the CNN a terrible and evil organization is immediately equated with the image of Erdogan’s interrupting Perez with his now sloganized, though badly pronounced English “One minute” at the World Economic Forum in 2009.

The Turkish version of the same organization, CNNTurk is supporting Erdogan and his deeds behind the veil of neutrality. The irony was that we here watched Trump

reprimanding the CNN journalist on the same CNNTurk channel on their “News by the Hour” on Jan 13, 2017.

On the other hand, similar to the misleading generalizations about Americans, Trump’s praising Turks or the Turkish army, implying our habit of loving to be praised for being a “soldier nation.” He is also giving advice that we Turks should fight against ISIS, which is taking advantage of Turkey. Trump brings the Turkish viewers to that crossroads at which we should decide whether Turkey is friend or foe to the US, again another binary opposition only the masses would love. Therefore, we watched Trump with our polished egos, with the interference of a journalist screaming “I’m from Turkey” (probably a designed mise-en-scène)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSdvdMrHEEQ>), which actually gives away the inferiority complex of the lack of power on our behalf, which is an understandable reason why we “should” fight ISIS (as our new leader says) and why we should keep on loving our loveable rogue here.

Why? Andre Gide is right: “A true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception and lies sincerely,” which actually describes politics.

We all believe in true hypocrites. What’s more, they flock together and as their interests are to accumulate their capital, at the expense of the planet the resources of which they

themselves are devouring and living on. Their understanding of patriotism is “asking for more of that money” because Money is numbers, and figures made up of numbers, i.e., infinite. Hence is the hunger for more and that explains why and how the Trump family chose their idols among world politicians. It is not surprising for Trump’s daughter not to idolize the Uruguay President, the unfortunately late, modest and humble “Jose, Pepe” Mujica, who also became internationally popular although he was not a loveable rogue.

Professor Ilber Ortayli, the most popular professor of history, with the power he has gained via his popularity, has again claimed after Trump’s election victory that Donald Trump is his generation-mate. He described Americans as “simple people” who can select between only two. This has got nothing to do with intelligence but Americans are used to that system of binary oppositions, they prefer to choose between two. Ortayli, in love with his “talent-of-diagnosing” and condemning one while praising other, falls into the same trap of what Higgins calls “biased perception,” from a distance, that very disease of yet again encouraging to choose between two options, like Frost’s immortal poem we have been teaching our children, at the end of which the voice in the poem says his choosing the road not taken (the alternative is the road chosen by the majority, made the difference. In other words, what matters is what the masses learn or taught by the media as the road not taken,

although it might in fact be the very road taken by the masses all throughout the history of politics and the history of stupidity.

This is the reason why the images of political leaders keep fluctuating like the value of the dollar in the Turkish market. The images of Obama and Trump have kept changing in this part of the world since I started writing this article (for almost a month now). Though he was never a rogue, Obama was hope for many, but lately, as he seems to have decided to support financially what Turkey claims to be “terrorist groups” he no longer preserves for the Turkish eyes the loveable gentleman of justice for all. This is valid for not only the supporters of Erdogan’s AKP government in office but also for the majority of Turkey who want all the terrorist groups wiped off from the surface of the earth. (I deliberately refrain from using the word “terrorism” as it is an abstract term like the “society” which can not be found anywhere as concrete and tangible presences.) On the other hand, before he is in the White House, Trump and his will-be-men have started accusing Obama and the former US government for producing ISIS and supporting the terrorist groups which are Turkey’s enemies, which is a sign that they are proving to pull us into a really post-truth era by creating a so-called “truth-speaking” self-same power (in Emerson’s words in “The Rhodora”) presenting Trump to Turkey and therefore to all the Turkic identities (ethnos) on earth as a “high-profiled” billionaire, who is the possible

hero for the downtrodden of all the peoples of this planet earth (global demos).

Keeping this fluctuating image of the old and the new US presidents in mind like the dollar's market rate, let's have a look at the meaning of the word "*trump*" and its connotations, not only because there are many English-speaking people in Turkey, but because within popular culture the name's denotations and connotations mean a lot for our interpretations in this article on how Trump appears in the "popular and never independent Turkish media.

*Trump* means "a card that belongs to the group of cards that has been chosen to have the highest value in a particular game," says Cambridge dictionary, hence its relation to gambling and people's extravagant expectations of gambling. Popular superstitions and the power of the word are actually the forces we believe in (hidden in the clichés of *Rogue One* and in other popular films like *La La Land* and the stories of success, which is confused with the pursuit of happiness, underlined as another road to take in *Captain Fantastic*.) Also remember the significance of the Nevada State (famous for gambling because of the iconic city, Las Vegas) in Trump's history on his way to becoming a "billionaire" and a candidate for the "Elect" with all its Puritan connotations.

The US election result was like the traditional Turkish fortune telling via coffee

cups; i.e., the meaning of the word “trump” has been realized. Other examples of us for the sake of using the word in a sentence in English classes may be as follows:

“Luckily, the USA has drawn a trump.”

The dollar in Turkey nowadays is a *trump*. A year ago, 1 US dollar was about 2 Turkish Liras, now it is almost 4 TL; i.e., “The dollar has *trumped* the Turkish lira twice as much within a year.”

“Erdogan’s government has managed to *trump up* almost all the opposing intellectuals, academicians, artists, institutions and journalists within the law it abode after the failed coup attempt on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.” (Such comments are frequently uttered on the social media to claim that in order to eliminate its “threatening” opponents, if not the visibly acceptable ones, the AKP government seems to have found the opportunity to accuse some people of what they did not do or were not involved in.

The title of this paper is, therefore, allusive to the connotations of the word “trump,” first as a loveable rogue and then as the devil incarnate, and maybe many more in between because Donald Trump, the President Elect of the USA seems to attract the extravagant expectations of Turkish media, and the AKP government, if not of the general public, at least not of the fifty percent of the voters, but this is part of the definition of a loveable rogue anyway.

The loveable rogues of world literatures, story-telling traditions, and the US film industry have formed our collectively unconscious extravagant expectations (from them as opposed to the humble and reticent “I” in the “me” of my very “self”—the self-reliant individual, again in Emerson’s transcendental teachings that produced Thoreau), and my students’ love of civil disobedience, towards openly admitting but covertly admiring rogues rather than civilly disobedient individuals. Therefore, the loveable or likeable rogues appear as the only figures of salvation in the mediated mind, although they might indeed be devils incarnate. The best and most popular loveable rogues that prepare us to embrace people like Trump are in Hollywood, including Han Solo of *Star Wars*, Jack Sparrow of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the archetypal Mad Hatter of *Alice* and many more. One must get out of borders to have a more objective look at his/her own seemingly safe and cosy cocoon.

The first time I met the phrase *loveable rogue* was in my English literature classes as a student at Hacettepe University, Ankara, when we were assigned to read Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, whose eponymous protagonist happened to be one loveable rogue. Had we not been introduced to such characters, we would not even try to understand Holden Caulfield of Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, who became a role model for a psychopath to *imagine* to kill another loveable rogue, John Lennon of The Beatles.

In real life he can join a long list of “misbehaving” but loveable celebrities like Bill Clinton, Oscar Wilde, Truman Capote, Edgar Allan Poe, Lord Byron, and so on.

It would not be very difficult for Donald Trump to change his image during his tenure as president if he takes Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* or, even closer to home, the one and only Huckleberry Finn, the immortal child created by Samuel Langhorne Clemens (who preferred to live and write under his pen-name, Mark Twain) as a likeable rogue— always on the road, the most loveable image of the American abroad. Hence the immortality of Dean Moriarty in Kerouac’s *On the Road* and many more. Huck’s childish talent in moral improvisation never allows us to criticize that child escaping from the drunk dad and “sivilization.” On the contrary, we tend to empathize with him on the Mississippi of freedom, only to shed tears later, in 1993, watching the justified deeds of Forrest Gump’s military and imperial aspirations, believing that anything and everything he participated in as legal and moral. Trump and other politicians “should” adopt a touch of those loveable “outsiders” as well gather more fans around them from all walks of life. All Trump has to do is to decide to be a rebel *with* a cause, like R.P. McMurphy in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. If he does not, he can very soon turn into a tyrant like Nurse Ratched, or a wretch similar to Victor Frankenstein’s until he suffers enough to turn into Adam. Otherwise,

American success stories turn into famous histories of mockery. George Lipsitz ends his book *Time Passages* as follows:

These quests open up wounds, and they take place under conditions of communications distorted by commerce, racism, state, power, and sexism. But they persist, even against the grain of economic and cultural matrices, because they keep alive cherished possibilities. In defiance of concentrated economic and political power unprecedented in world history, they continue to look for an America that is a realization of its own best hopes – a chorus of many voices and a land of a thousand dances. (271)

This is one reason why masses are supposed to be happy with the benign neglect of the so-called “elect.” The literary trope or character suddenly becomes a “presence” in our real lives as our family members, relatives, close friends, neighbors, professors, colleagues etc.

For whatever reason, if not because of hubris, they defy rules, principles, laws and because they are the ‘other’ more reckless or courageous part of our selves although they might appear as antagonistic. We admire them and empathize with them for what we are not.

While I was teaching at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in 1994 one of my students, who later evaluated my teaching as

“top-notch” said in the first class, he did not even know where Turkey was and yet there I was to teach him American literature. Simple statements to hide significant popular culture prejudices, or even superstitions, veiling romantic prejudices about a remote land as strange and the native of that land a stranger never to be seen in one’s homeland. When I said he is young encouraging him to find the time to travel and see “even” Turkey, he refused to take that road because, he said, the USA was too large a country, which would need many lives so that one can claim one has seen it all. I remember I replied that in Turkey the same exaggeration is popularly used for every single district of Istanbul, a line from a famous poem “Bir Başka Tepeden” (“From Another Hill”) by Yahya Kemal Beyatli: “It’s worth a lifetime to love only one district of yours even.”

“A new world order is coming, not with and thanks to Trump but because of him, as the world will be facing so many evil aspects of capitalism that finally people will start questioning not the persons leading these capitalistic countries but capitalism itself” said an academic colleague of mine at lunch on the day following Trump’s victory in the US elections. Political leaders are like one district of a metropolis, they need a lifetime to get to be able to say we “know” them. One must be able to relate to them, and this is not possible by mocking the physical traits of them, like the

hair, or nose, or mouth or stuffed belly of a rich man.

Most of Trump's image in Turkish media is, therefore, criticized only if and when it is related to some Turkish issue, politician, norm or concept, like the terrorist groups or immigrants, like Erdogan, like the Independence of the Turkish Republic and or Islamophobia.

Before the results were announced many people in Turkey, academic or not, would say "The American people must be mad to choose such a good example of the devil incarnate." As the elections came closer and when Hillary Clinton stumbled while getting in her *car*, a top symbol of freedom and self in American culture (remember the Burnhams of *American Beauty*) the image of "a stumbling *woman*" became an image nobody wished to see in the White House. Since the election system is the summit of the Americans' love of binary oppositions exemplified in literature and in the high budget Hollywood movies, the image of a tall aggressive and richly "erect man" winning the elections is a great possibility for a capitalist messiah. For the ordinary man, the everyman, he might not be the capitalist businessman who is there to slurp out the marrow in their bones – remember the homeless in *Angels in America* and her "slurping" her soup before she claims that in the new century we will all become insane.

Therefore, I claim that the cinema, the products of the movie industry are not only the innocent products of the seventh art but the conspicuously invisible media we love being subjected to but can not turn off easily with our remote controls in our couch-potato hands.

And came yet another *Star Wars* film: *Rogue One*. Coincidence? I believe there is no coincidence. Coincidences are products of good intentions and we here ask now: “Is the road of hell paved again by the stones of good intentions?”

Other meanings attached to Donald Trump’s name interfering with our judgments and related to our collective unconscious can come up from the dark nooks of the American animated collective memory. Donald Duck (The Wise Little Hen) and Hilarious-Hillary Clinton, the deceived woman, who might have tried to take her revenge from the world that insidiously giggled after her, and may still be doing so whenever they watch *Wag the Dog*. Power should not be given to such a *wo-man*. Remember John Updike’s analysis of the word in his subtly formed short-story “Wife-Wooing” which ends with the loveable act of the wife kissing the narrator-husband on the lips while she was brushing her teeth. Therefore, the story ends: “An expected gift is not worth giving.” Hillary Clinton was an expected gift. She (her created image) might not give in to the demands of whoever is in fact ‘ruling’ the US and the rest of the world. This approach was the pervading belief in Turkey and we did

believe those who would vote for Trump would also remember the connotations of their names and their past. A deceitful man is to be rewarded, whereas a deceived woman must be punished as she probably was not doing her duties to her husband. (And what are we doing here but oscillating between two seemingly opposing candidates, again a fake binary opposition pattern.)

Trump proved to be similar in character to Donald Duck, an angry character (who is now a presence in our lives) as he was always walking with chips on his shoulder, ready to be provoked, and the weakness of his rivals made him even more powerful. Besides, whose uncle is a billionaire? Donald's of course. The Simpsons also have a rich-evil uncle. This is no coincidence. At least one billionaire in a family makes you sleep with confidence, as if that well-off person can one day be yourself.

The patriarchal-language-ridden sexist and misogynistic and homophobic memory enhanced by recorded events, led to the rise of a bully to the Whitehouse, which is a universal trend nowadays. And, oh Lord, he has his Daisy too, and my gosh she is yet another immigrant, who has an accent. Who would not have a belly-laughter while watching this video that shows Melania Trump speaking to the public in favor of her husband, mocking her Slav originated pronunciation and intonation patterns. (20 July. 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBuWePk2zeI>  
16 Jan. 2017)

And aren't we all immigrants? This is the American dream coming true. Marrying a rich man as in films like *Lady in Red* or with the "pygmalion effect" of G.B. Shaw's we see ourselves in their dreams only to wake to our nightmares soon; i.e., instead of from rags to riches, it can be from rags to more rags. This mediated family rule is the new aristocracy of capitalism giving hope to the masses that the pursuit of happiness is no myth. The American dream of success is no myth. Look at the results of the elections. Look at the First Lady now.

And if Hillary had won, don't we all agree that a former President, Bill, would look really bizarre as the First Husband in the White House. Moreover, Donald Trump is blond too. In the west the femme-fatale image of the antagonist is usually dark as opposed to the collective memory of Turkey in which the blondes are dangerous. The villainous? *L'homme fatal* is rarely, if not never, blond. In English-language beauty, the word *fair* means *just* as well as beautiful. One's native language is not to be taken for granted.

Donald Trump is the epitome of what I called in my book *Vanilla Ideology* on collective memory: the outcome of the narratives that formed the mainstream or canonized (hence vanilla) choices of ours. On the other hand, to be objective, the USA is the top representative

of capitalism and actually it should not be surprising for a capitalist castle to choose a wild capitalist as the leader.

Turkish media was not as interested in the latest US elections as before because of the social unrest in the country. Our major concerns here are inflation, unemployment, live bombs, millions of Syrian immigrants, and last but not least, the intention of the present ruling party to change the Constitution hand in hand with the nationalist party. The media's guided and monitored lack of interest in fact found its compensation in "Ekşi Sözlük" ([sourtimes.org](http://sourtimes.org)), which is an multi-anonymous-authored "encyclopedic dictionary" whose claim is to be "the source of sacred knowledge-information," with over 300 pages of comments by its authors. It is actually the mouthpiece of the general public, more than most of the visual media siding with the ruling party. Behind their pseudonyms the authors of this site write about anything and everything and especially about current issues immediately, even before they show up in the news on TV. Their discourse is informal, the information and knowledge sources may not be reliable, that is why their self-defining adjective is "sacred" in a self-mocking way. Most of Trump's utterances in public which attracted the anonymous writers' attention are what William James classifies as "behabitives" classified according to their illocutionary force.

The fourth, behabitives, are a very miscellaneous group, and have to do

with attitudes and *social behaviour*. Examples are apologizing, congratulating, commending, condoling, cursing, and challenging. (Austin 151)

The last two of these classes, *cursing and challenging*, have been often used by Trump in his racist and sexist discourse, which contributed to his image in Turkey as a “jerk, brute and/or lout,” all of which can be summarized in one single Turkish word as “kiro,” however “homely” he might seem to be. In my opinion, one of the reasons why he or



Figure 3

any similar politician receives so many votes by the ignorant and downtrodden masses. In other words, he deliberately exploited the will-be-fans. Nobody is concerned with or about how the country is to be ruled anyway. All the election process is but a popular performance and / or show.

Most of the humor magazines in Turkey are refractory; ie. their basic problem is authority and authoritarian personalities to take the country to some “greatness” (akbar=great).

In December 2016, my friend the Turkish novelist Buket Uzuner took a photo of a window design just across the Tiffany’s on Fifth Avenue, which shows a cap with this inscription on it: “Make America Great Again” (Figure 3). The cap is so fitted on the head to look down on Trump’s face although the face is supposed to be looking up to the President Elect, which is supposed to make America great again. Trump’s face is on the Tshirt in the “window of a shop” actually and if you buy the two you will be demythifying your President Elect, while trying to mythify him. The word “again” implies that the USA is no longer great, and similar to the discussions among the LinkedIn groups American dream is dead. Why is American Dream dead? My answer on LinkedIn is “Because it is no longer peculiar to only the US. The dream of success and pursuit of happiness merged with conspicuous consumption turned all of us into consuming slaves to capitalism. The dream now is

therefore not a dream to be fulfilled but a dream within a dream for the masses.” (*Linked In* Jan 8, 2017).

If making America great again means to create the utopian society, the city upon the hill, in addition to personal happiness and fulfillment, claims Rooney Jr., something else is a prerequisite, as was proven in historical American utopias.

"The alternate degradation and insufferable pride so long associated with social classes would be impossible in a world built on the principle of a classless society. Work for everyone afforded a personal leisure that could go a long way toward individual fulfillment. Similarly, the satisfactions associated with the spirit of altruism could be overwhelming in themselves, and, significantly, even the staunchest individualist took this value into account." (165)

The general public chooses not the gentlemanly, polite-mannered guys but the bullies (staunchest individuals) and the rich in whom he or she sees himself or herself in power. Hence, is the illusion of the unpowered masses by the popular image of the empowered icons of loveable rogues or outlaw heros in Hollywood movies, who in the collective memory of the whole world are believed to do good by offending, by fighting,

and by war. Therefore, the screaming, the angry, the offensive bully shouting is not that very actual politician but the repressed loser inside the voter. This repressed soul is always ready to obey the head, leader of the party of bullies who are there to do all kinds of evil and injustice in his/her name, for retribution, by all means, like Montresor in Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Cask of Amontillado." May they R.I.P. This is one very good reason why Poe's story is an immortal masterpiece as Montresor is not sure at the end of the story, of that the perfect revenge described at the beginning of the story is taken, because the victim is drunk and suffering from asthma and is busy with post-truth, which is now the very make up of his and our lives.

What is disturbingly prevailing is the tendency of some Turkish interpreters and media surveyors to generalize the meanings of Trump image to the image of all Americans. This is an outstanding attitude among our students at the university too. Nobody seems to be repelled, although they are surprised, shocked or sometimes even astounded. Why? Because they are at the same time amused, most people find the exaggerated remarks, discourse of hatred and discrimination of the bullying candidate entertaining, like those of a comedian. Sentences starting like "As we all know, Americans are complacent people..." or "Americans who are obviously conformists and who like comfort..." , while showing prejudice we want to legalize or understate the shock or

trauma we all suffer from the results of the elections.

Before I started this article, being a theatre critic too, I was invited to the premiere of a play at the Trump Tower in the Sisli district. I had avoided visiting this tower until I had to see the play, whose director was a friend. A tweet says it was opened by the cries of “Allah and bismillah” and claims that the building is the Middle East Listening Center of the CIA. Huge Christmas trees alight welcome you at the entrance next to the shallow pool into which curious “uplookers” can easily fall while gazing at the building mouths wide open. After security check you enter the tower which is one of the lowest taste malls, narrow and smelly compared to the other clean malls. In the theatre hall, you could hardly hear the artists on stage but all the noise of the music broadcast and children having fun in the mall-park (!) indoors, a surreal pseudo-entertainment-metropolis refuge, by no means carrying any sign of environmental humanism.

Cartoons in the mainstream media and on the internet clearly visualize the above-mentioned image pervading the Turkish impression of the US President Elect.



Figure 4

In Sefer Selvi's caricature (Figure 4) , Obama is presenting Trump a baseball bat saying "Here, this is the most important permanent article in the inventory of the White House that you will have to use in your foreign policy." The message is clear, but maybe we should also add the implication here that "even" Obama, who was a hope for peace for the whole world, was not able to not give in to violence and war.

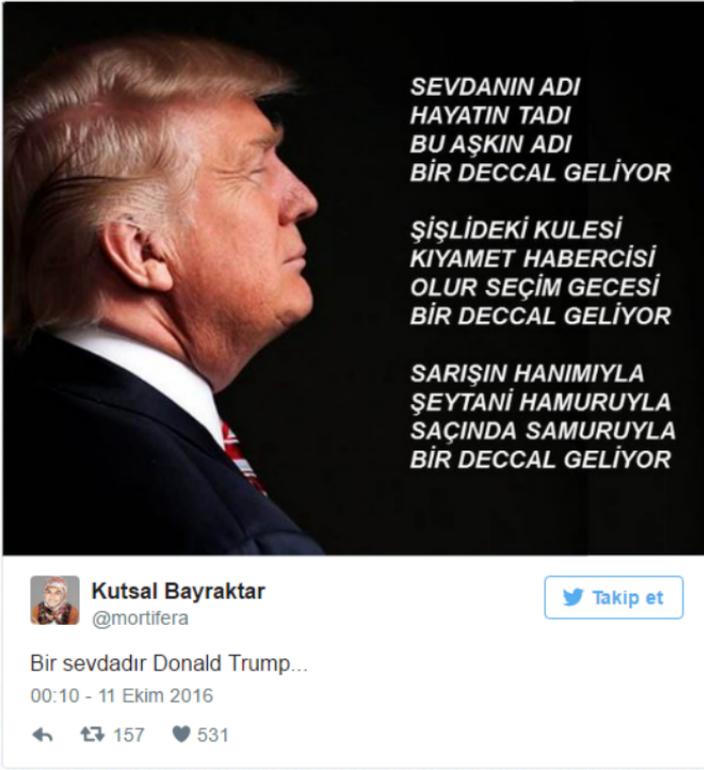


Figure 5

In this mocking poem about Trump on social media (Figure 5), each stanza is like a haiku, similar to a traditional Turkish stanza form with repetitive rhymes and final lines. The poem mocks the expectations of a messiah as opposed to the reality of the arrival of an antichrist:

The name of passion  
The taste of life  
The name of this love  
An antichrist is coming

His tower in Sishli  
Will be a message of doomsday  
On the night of the election day  
An antichrist is coming

With his blondy wife  
And his devilish make  
And with the sable fur on his head  
An antichrist is coming.



Figure 6

In Figure 6, “Team Race,” the cartoon by by Ibrahim Ozdabak mocks Trump’s racist zeal by showing him as an ardent member of the KKK relay team, their torchbearer, so to speak.

Burak Uygur's cartoon (Figure 7) from *Uykusuz (Sleepless)*, made immediately after Trump passed Clinton in the surveys by two points, shows two young men, two pals or mates, one of whom is an African-American, the other a white guy, both in sporting clothes as mates, implying there is no sign of racism between the two, but they are ready to move out of the USA after the news in the cartoon's headline. The first thing we tend to express when we are unhappy about anything in



Figure 7

everyday life here is this need to escape somewhere else: Guy on the left: "We gotta find a way to escape to Canada." Guy on the

right: “Yeah, this place sucks. We’d better get the f\*&k out of here.”



Figure 8

Musa Kart draws for the daily *Cumhuriyet*, which is a central target of the present Turkish government as it is a guardian of the secular Turkish Republic. This caricature (Figure 8) is mocking the status of women in Turkey again over Trump’s sexist and misogynistic discourse during his election campaign. In the first frame Trump says “One must die like a man, not like a wo-man.” In the second frame he says, “What the f\*&k! I wish I were in Turkey now!”

To conclude, Donald Trump, the President Elect of the USA is sure to gain a lot if he continues exhibiting the loveable rogue image for the interests of the US citizens at first, but also for the rest of the world if he wants to become a world leader. We are not sure if he has the motivation for it but he can by no means become a savior, nor can he escape his wrongdoings like a loveable rogue would unless he becomes the devil incarnate in his presidential deeds. It might be my extravagant expectation of Donald Trump to be trying to “hold the children falling off their precipices” or trying to be a caul to the not yet born children like Trump’s own mother’s womb. It maybe too much of an extravagant expectation to hope that he become a Holden Caulfield of Salinger’s.

It is obvious that voters do suffer from amnesia, which is a prerequisite for happiness. Together with the rest of the world Turkey will find out if Donald Trump is the devil incarnate or a likeable rogue or (to avoid binary opposition as a cliché) an evolving, changing presence like the narrator in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Otherwise, from this part of the world, we will very soon come to the realization of the pathetic human condition.

If Donald Trump is not designed to be, or does not aspire to be “Rogue One,” a hero, a savior, he had better pretend to be one. We believe that he sure has the inbeing, the make to do the latter.

Ah Donald Trump! Ah humanity!

But still, "In the Force we trust!"

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**Music of Martyrdom in Spike Lee's  
*Malcolm X***

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More than perhaps any other contemporary African-American film maker, Spike Lee understands the ethos of African American music. The son of Bill Lee, a jazz musician, Spike Lee uses "black music as black talk," to quote Ben Sidran in his important work, *Black Talk*. Indeed, in Lee's movie *Malcolm X*, music functions on two levels, as sound track and as signifier. As sound track, the music reinforces the scenes in which it is heard as well as the film's overall theme. Moreover, given the range of musical genres as well as the chronological periods represented by the songs, it can be argued that the soundtrack offers an accompanying statement concerning 20<sup>th</sup>-century black life in America. The music within the soundtrack represents the decades from the 1930's to the

1990's, covering such genres as the blues, gospel, R&B, and hip-hop. For example, the opening song for the film is "Revolution," by the 1990's hip-hop group, Arrested Development. This piece was made specifically for the film. Following this, there are a number of songs from the 1930's and 1940's, songs which help to chronicle not only Malcolm Little's development into the Nation of Islam spokesman and leader, Malcolm X Shabazz, but also to help tell the story of African American life during those decades. The earliest date of release for one of the songs was, 1938, for "Roll 'Em Pete," by Big Joe Turner, while the latest release date was 1992, for the aforementioned song, "Revolution." The majority of the songs were ones recorded and popularized during Malcolm's lifetime, with the recordings by such luminaries as Lionel Hampton a, Billie Holiday, and Ray Charles. The songs, and the film, speak to the migration of black southerners to the urban spaces of the North, and the ways in which they coped with the harshness of life in urban centers—Boston, Chicago, New York City—of the North. The liner notes to the soundtrack album contain these words from Lee: "Many of the artists on this project were friends of Detroit Red/Malcolm Little. Malcolm loved to dance, and to be around the music. We have attempted to re-create that music, that sound—the distinct sound of the African-American experience. The songs gathered here, from Big Joe Turner's 'Roll 'em Pete' to Arrested Development's rap anthem, 'Revolution,' all in

some way reflect what it means to live, breathe, die and love, as descendants of slaves.” Clearly, then, the film, *Malcolm X* is about not only the martyred hero, but also about those other “descendants of slaves” whose music, throughout the decades of the last century, serves to powerfully convey their collective story.

In the film, Lee’s use of three particular pieces of music further perhaps the overarching theme of the film, which is that martyrdom of Malcolm X serves as a symbol for the historical suffering of African Americans and blacks world-wide. The three pieces are of varying genres within the African-American music musical tradition. One of them is a jazz piece, “Alabama,” by John Coltrane. “Alabama” appears on Coltrane’s 1963 album, *Live at Birdland*. The second piece is the Sam Cooke, gospel-inspired R&B classic, “A Change is Gonna Come,” which first appeared on his 1964 album, *Ain’t that Good News*. (However, it must be noted that although the piece is featured quite prominently in the film it was not included in the official soundtrack release, due to a dispute between Cooke’s music publisher, ABKCO and the record company, RCA Records.) The third piece is again a gospel-inspired rhythm and blues song, Donny Hathaway’s, “Someday We’ll All Be Free,” sung in the film by Aretha Franklin. The song, which was co-written by Hathaway and Edward Howard, first appeared on Hathaway’s classic 1973 album, *Extension*

*of a Man*. Prior to examining the ways in which these pieces serve to underscore the theme of “martyrdom,” it is important to examine a bit more the entire soundtrack.

As Craig Watkins notes in his work, *representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema*, “Lee has also used music and music video as promotional devices. The filmmaker has often crafted movie sound tracks that consciously tap into the varied popular music cultures of the African Diaspora. Sound tracks from a Spike Lee joint have included genres as diverse as rhythm and blues, jazz, reggae/dance hall, hip hop, go-go, and gospel” (122). Watkins goes on to discuss Lee’s politics as a filmmaker, citing what Watkins would call Lee’s intentions to “stake out a particular set of claims on the nature of race relations, and the post-industrial experiences of black especially, and manipulate the techniques of film production to articulate those claims . . . .” (161). As mentioned above, the film is not simply a biopic on the life of Malcolm X, but additionally a piece which addresses the suffering, struggles and historical martyrdom of people of African descent. As Spike Lee says in a 1993 interview, “I think the inclusion of the Rodney King video footage in the in the opening of our film along with the image of the burning American flag and the words of Malcolm X, say that things haven’t changed much. Things have opened up to some individuals but not to the masses (Verniere 83). Ultimately, then, this is

this is a film not simply about a singular historical African-American leader, but also about the masses of African-Americans, from the Rodney Kings of the world to countless others, for whom Malcolm X attempted to speak and for whose sake, it may be argued, he was ultimately martyred. It is important to note that the video of the Rodney King beating, along with the burning American flag, was added during the post-production stage. As is noted in the documentary on the making of the film, the first day the crew ever saw the film was the day of the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles, April 29, 1992. This footage was thus added following the actual filming, to clearly tie the present day into the past.

As Donald Bogle notes in his work, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*, “Based on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley and working with the screenplay begun by James Baldwin and Arnold Perl, Lee’s *Malcolm X* opened with a spell binding credit sequence. As the words of Malcolm are heard, images of a burning American flag are intercut with sequences from the videotape of Rodney King being beaten by members of the Los Angeles police force” (353). This is a film about alienation, estrangement, and suffering – not simply on the part of Malcolm X but also on the part of black people, in America and throughout the African Diaspora. The film is a protest vehicle, and its visual imagery is confrontational; the burning American flag serves as a reminder of

race riots and racial strife. Indeed, the musical pieces serve to underscore the films themes of African-American struggle, racial strife, suffering, and martyrdom. The Rodney King beating, caught on videotape, served to capture the nation's attention and that videotape and the subsequent trial of the police officers accused of beating King, became the subjects of a national debate about police violence and race relations. Indeed, the race riots which ensued once the officers were acquitted also served as the subject of a national debate on race. What this opening sequence posits, then, is that the nation's racial problems have not been solved. The sequence says, instead, that those racial problems are simmering, burning, just as Los Angeles did following the Rodney King verdicts.

John Coltrane's incredibly moving ballad is the first of the songs used in the film. It is used during the period of Malcolm's life when he is beginning to have troubles within the nation of Islam and, just as importantly, the civil rights struggles of the 1960s are at their height. As has been noted by numerous scholars, in spite of his legacy of leadership, Malcolm X was not a participant in the civil rights struggles in the South during the 1960s. Rather, he was an observer; and the movie shows this well when one first sees a shot of Malcolm X (Denzel Washington) watching a television set in a hotel room, as the television is broadcasting news regarding the civil rights

movement. The music of John Coltrane is heard as we are shown repeated shots of documentary footage used by Lee. Blacks are lynched, sprayed with water hoses, beaten with Billy clubs, and water hosed to 'Trane's mournful sounding saxophone. This poignant scene serves to illustrate Malcolm's estrangement from the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a wailing saxophone, playing a song about the sufferings and deaths of Blacks during the civil rights movement. In his study on John Coltrane, Bill Cole notes:

When, in 1963, black children were killed in a bombing in Alabama, train rolled a composition in memoriam called "Alabama." The significance of the piece is even greater when one realizes that the melodic line of the piece was developed from the rhythmic inflections of a speech given by Dr. Martin Luther King. . . . Compositions like "Alabama" . . . were his attempt to articulate the plight of African-American people and all Oprah asked people throughout the world. (150-151)

The speech which Coltrane used to compose "Alabama" was Dr. King's eulogy given at the funeral of three of the four little black girls who perished in the September 15, 1963 bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, in Birmingham. The slain girls were

Addie Mae Collins, age 14, Carol Denise McNair, age 11, Carole Robertson, age 14, and Cynthia Wesley, age 14. It is important to note that in 1997, Spike Lee made a documentary on the historic bombing of the church which took the lives of these four children. The title of the documentary is simply, *Four Little Girls*. This same jazz piece is also used by Lee in this documentary at several points throughout the film. The first instance is at a point when the film addresses the actual bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963, by white racist members of the Ku Klux Klan. This use of the Coltrane composition is heard during a visual sequence which shows still photos of the dead little girls, taken of their bodies at the morgue. These still photos are juxtaposed not only with John Coltrane's saxophone, but also with the voices of their loved ones, fathers, mothers, sisters and friends left behind to mourn, sharing their sad recollections of the occurrences surrounding the bombing on that tragic day. The second time Lee uses the song "Alabama" in *Four Little Girls* is near the end of the documentary, after the narrative has discussed the trial and the conviction in 1977 of one of the killers, Robert Edward Chambliss, who planned the bombing and planted the device. Coincidentally, Chambliss was also known as "Dynamite Bob," and Birmingham was called "Bombingham" during the civil rights movement due to the numbers of dynamite explosions that occurred in the city between 1947 and 1965. These bombings were mainly

targeted against African Americans attempting to move into previously white neighborhoods. Later, the film interviews NFL Reggie White and others, to discuss the bombing of black churches during the 1990's, suggesting that this sort of terrorism against blacks has not gone away. Still photos of the little girls, in Sunday School dresses or holding dolls, are shown to the sounds of Coltrane's tune and testimonies of loved ones concerning the emotional impact of their loss, years later. Throughout the scenes when "Alabama" is heard in *Four Little Girls*, the music function as a signifier of black heartache, suffering, and loss. As it accompanies the still photos of the little girls--some of the photos of them in life, while others of them in death, naked and tagged in the morgue--the song serves as a funeral dirge which itself seems to mourn the tragedy of their passing and the toll which racism has exacted upon not only Birmingham, Alabama of the 1960's, but historically, all of black America.

The second song to be discussed is Sam Cooke's classic ballad, "A Change is Gonna Come," and it is heard during scenes when Malcolm X is driving to the Audubon Ballroom, to his death. There is a strong sense of dread in this scene, visually and audibly. It is clear that at this point in the film, Malcolm realizes that his death is imminent. Both in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and in interviews, Malcolm X Shabazz stated that he felt his death was imminent. In 1964 he said this to

Claude Lewis of the *New York Post*: I'll never get old. You'll find that few people who feel like I feel live long enough to get old." Of Cooke's song, "A Change is Gonna Come," Spike Lee notes in *By Any Means Necessary*, his book on the making of the film that, "he had always wanted to use this song." It is a song about mortality and death:

it's been too a hard livin'  
but I'm afraid to die  
I don't know what's up there beyond  
the sky  
it's been a long, a long time coming  
but I know a change gone come, oh  
yes it will. (Cooke)

Of this song, Peter Guralnick, in his biography of Sam Cooke, *Dream Boogie: The Triumph of Sam Cooke*, notes the following:

It is a song at once both more personal and more political than anything for which [Sam's friend] Alex might have been prepared, a song that vividly brought to mind a gospel melody but that didn't come from any spiritual number in particular, one that was suggested both by the civil rights movement and by the circumstances of Sam's life. . . . The statement in its title and chorus . . . was the faith on which it was predicated, but that faith was qualified in each successive verse in ways that any black man or woman living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would

immediately understand. When he sang, 'it's been too hard living / but I'm afraid to die / I don't know what's up there / Beyond the sky,' he was expressing the doubt, he told Alex, that he had begun it to feel in the absence of any evidence of justice on earth. 'I go to the movies / And I go downtown / Somebody keeps telling me / Don't hang around' was simply his way of describing their life – Memphis, Shreveport, Birmingham – and the lives of all Afro-Americans. (541)

In fact, some have suggested that part of the genesis for this song was a racist incident which Sam and his band suffered in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1963. They were denied entrance to a brand-new Holiday Inn, and later charged by the police with creating a public disturbance, due to their protesting of this discriminatory practice. During the band's gig in Shreveport, there was also a bomb threat to the venue. All of this was taking place in October of 1963, just a month after the Birmingham church bombing which took the lives of the four little girls. As Guralnick notes,

*The New York Times* ran an AP report the following day headlined "Negro Band Leader Held in Shreveport," but the black weeklies told a tale of racial outrage. . . . But for Sam it was one more reminder of just how fragile was the black man's place in the white

man's world, just how tenuous were the bonds of status, safety, and human dignity in a fundamentally racist society" (528).

Finally, it should be noted that when Sam Cooke first heard the Bob Dylan song, "Blowin' in the Wind," he "was almost ashamed to not have written something like it himself" (Guralnick, 512). In other words, the impetus for the song, in the mind of Cooke, was to address the racism that he and other blacks had experienced. It is no wonder, then, that the song was later adopted as an anthem for the civil rights movement. The song has been covered numerous times, and it has been used over and over again as a strident song of protest and change. Testimony to the potency of its message concerning the plight of black life in America is that the song was included in July 1964 on an RCA album entitled *The Stars Salute Dr. Martin Luther King*. An additional sign of its power and spirituality is that, as Guralnick notes, "When Martin Luther King was killed, Rosa Parks, the woman who had galvanized the Movement in 1955 when she refused to give up her seat on the bus, was sitting at home with her mother, and in the midst of their tears, holding each other and rocking back-and-forth, they played Sam's 'A Change is Gonna Come.' Sam's 'smooth voice,' she said, 'was like medicine to the soul. It was as if Dr. King was speaking directly to me'" (651). Recently, it was used in 2008 by Barack Obama, following the 2008 United

States presidential election, when Obama said to a supportive audience in Chicago, “It’s been a long time coming, but tonight, change has come to America.”

The double irony of both songs, of all three songs, is the musicians, like Malcolm X, died early, tragic deaths, at the heights of their careers and in two cases, violently. John Coltrane died in 1967 of natural causes. However, Cooke’s death was by gunshot. In the work, *Honkers and Shouters*, Arnold Shaw makes this observation regarding the death of Sam Cooke: “The end [of Cooke’s life] came suddenly in 1964 when he was shot to death in a Los Angeles motel room by a white woman. The woman claimed he had tried to attack her, any coroner’ jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide” (271). There were numerous rumors concerning and surrounding Cooke’s death, including that he was the victim of a mob killing, but the point here is that his death, at age 33, sent shock waves through black America. An *Ebony* magazine article about the two funeral services in Chicago and Los Angeles reports that 200,000 came to pay their respects. A further point here is that for this film to emphasize the sense of martyrdom and suffering of African-American men, Lee chose songs by black men who were at the comparative heights of their careers, young men, who still died at relatively early ages. Sam Cooke died in 1964 at the age of 33. Donny Hathaway died in 1979 at the same age, 33. John Coltrane died in 1967 at the age

of 40. And, of course, Malcolm X died in 1965 at the age of 39. While his father, who also seems to die a martyr's death per the movie, died in 1931 at the age of 41. Examined together, these songs seem to serve as meditations on black death within the film. As Anna Everett notes, "Lee's choice, then, to link through editing Malcolm X's life and death struggles with those of his father is a powerful visual economy and recurrent motif that speaks to repressive apparatuses brought to bear on black masculinity in America--a literal and figurative arresting of black masculine development. For instance, in the final third of the film, Lee draws a visual and thematic parallel between the night nighttime bombing of his childhood home with Malcolm X's own family fleeing the destruction of the nighttime bombing of their own home. Through a creative arrangement of flashback scenes, then, Lee references important historical occurrences in Malcolm X's past that foreshadow eerily similar tragic outcomes later in his life" (104). Within the film, one sees Malcolm's mother descend into madness, while his father's own suspicious "suicide" at the hands of the Klan, also underscores the violence of racism. Clearly, this is a film which speaks to the bombing of black churches and homes. This is a film which speaks to the devastating effects of American racism on the black body, psyche and life. Both "Alabama" and "A Change Is Gonna Come" are songs which speak to suffering and, ultimately, to dying. As a matter of fact, of the song, Cooke's good friend and

musical protégé, the singer Bobby Womack said, that it sounds “like death.” It seems that this is precisely why Lee uses the song more than once in his film, because of its mournful, somber quality.

The third song to be discussed here is Donnie Hathaway’s, “Someday We’ll All Be Free,” sung by Aretha Franklin. This song is heard at the film’s very end, during the rolling of the credits. Like the other two songs it speaks on multiple levels. Hathaway, too, died tragically, as mentioned at the young age of 39, plummeting to his death from a skyscraper window. Some called it suicide, while others labeled it foul play. As with the other two songs, it seemingly also was birthed out of pain and anguish. As Edward Howard, Donny Hathaway’s collaborator on the song notes, “What was going through my mind at the time was Donny, because Donny was a very troubled person. I hoped that at some point he would be released from all that he was going through. There was nothing I could do but write something that might be encouraging for him.” However, unlike the other two songs this tune is one of triumph and hope. By utilizing this song, Lee’s film once again emphasizes the theme of black martyrdom and early death.

Lee’s choice to not use the original version of the piece as recorded by Hathaway but to have Aretha Franklin record a new rendition also represents a movement away from the focus on simply martyrdom and this is of course fitting as the movie closes on a

positive upbeat tone with oral and visual images which communicate that all African-Americans and, indeed, all blacks, “are” Malcolm X--inheritors and benefactors of his legacy. Hathaway’s song leads back into the song which begins the film, “Revolution,” by Arrested Development. The ending scenes for the playing of “Revolution” feature images of Nelson Mandela, recently released from prison, and black school children, both in America and Soweto, South Africa. Both Mandela and children chant, “I am Malcolm X.” Mandela, who stands as a symbol of black resistance in the face of death, also recites, some of Malcolm’s own words. The choice of Mandela, is very telling, as Mandela, who was almost martyred during his South African imprisonment, symbolizes the struggles that all of the martyrs depicted in the film—Martin, Malcolm, Earl Little, Malcolm’s father, Medgar Evers, and others--have died for. But Mandela did not die in the struggle and so his life, his image, at the end of the film clearly symbolizes the theme of black resistance without another martyr. As Spike Lee says in a 1991 interview with Gray Crowdus and Dan Georgakas, “I wanted to tie the film into today. I did not want this film just to be a historical document. That’s why we open the film with the Rodney King footage and the American flag burning and end the film with classroom, from Harlem to Soweto” (67). Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X* is an epic film, covering 202 minutes in length, as it attempts to not only address the epic story of Malcolm’s life, but also the story of black

American life in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Everything surrounding the film and its filming points back to this theme. Clearly, that chant is an acknowledgment of Malcolm X as an iconic symbol of black suffering, struggle and achievement and Spike Lee's use of the "music of martyrdom" reinforces that theme. In addition to supporting the scenes in which they are heard, these pieces of music, John Coltrane's "Alabama," Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," and Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free," serve to underscore the historical martyrdom of figures like Malcolm X, as well as the suffering black America. These songs, taken together within Lee's film, point to the importance and necessity of an enduring commitment to freedom and justice and, to revolution if necessary, as a means of achieving those ends. As Malcolm X and Spike Lee would say, "By any means necessary."

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## ***Undercover Boss*: Disciplining Workers for Fun and Profit**

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There is no mistaking the dominant narrative of *Undercover Boss*, the U.S. version of the hit show that made its debut right after the Super Bowl in February of 2010 (Lambert and Holzman 15). *Undercover Boss* U.S. makes its point of view clear in the voice of God introduction that intones: “The economy is going through tough times. Many hardworking Americans blame wealthy CEO’s out of touch with what’s going on in their own companies but some bosses are willing to take extreme action to make their businesses better.” This introduction goes on to explain that each week a CEO will go undercover in their own company to try to understand their business and workers better. *Undercover Boss* functions as a cultural response to economic uncertainty and represents a clear attempt to reassure the American people after the economic collapse

of 2008. While superficially *Undercover Boss* is a feel good story about the benevolence of corporate CEOs, a closer reading reveals it creates a myth that resolves itself squarely on the side of capital while simultaneously functioning as a warning to workers that they must devote all their time and mental space to the service of their bosses and corporate codes or they could be found wanting and therefore disciplined. In this way, *Undercover Boss* functions to discipline workers much in the way that the panopticon functioned to ensure a disciplined inmate.

### **The Audience**

While a full reception study is beyond the scope of this article, this textual analysis of *Undercover Boss* can be seen as a first step leading to further analysis of the show and how it is received by audiences. Premiering after the Super Bowl gave *Undercover Boss* the benefit of a built in audience with over 39 million people watching the debut episode. While *Undercover Boss* has never replicated the post-Super Bowl numbers, it has remained strong in the ratings for its timeslot, which has varied between Sunday and Friday nights. Two years after the debut episode, *TV Guide* noted that *Undercover Boss* garnered 13.06 million viewers beating every show both in its timeslot and the whole night (Rowe). Switching broadcast days is usually a bad sign for a TV show, however, *Undercover Boss* has thrived on both Sundays and Fridays and it has had a positive effect on other CBS shows by lifting up

their ratings as well. In its sixth season, *Undercover Boss* “returned to Friday and immediately gave CBS its biggest 8 pm audience of the season and boosted *Hawaii Five-O* and *Blue Bloods* as the network won primetime in all measures” (Fienberg). Despite Friday night audiences skewing older in terms of viewers, *Undercover Boss* performs well for key demographics. A ratings snapshot from 2013, its fifth season, shows that *Undercover Boss* was first in all households, first with adults 25-54 and first with adults 18-49” (CBS).

The success of the show cannot just be measured by ratings as the corporate tie ins built into each episode are important. The companies featured have their own metrics with which to gauge success. For example, Marco’s Pizza, featured in a recent season seven episode, conducted an analysis of the show’s reception. Their measures were: media exposure, audience numbers, and perhaps most importantly to the company, increased business. By all measures, Marco’s saw the show as a success and used this success as a marketing tool for their franchise.

The episode has been picked up by numerous online and print news outlets, such as the Las Vegas Review and the Toledo Blade. Broadcast news channels also covered the show. Toledo CBS affiliate WTOL 11 publicized out live viewing party in downtown Toledo, where the red carpet was rolled out for local

residents eagerly awaiting Marco's Pizza and Bryon's appearance on *Undercover Boss*. The episode won its timeslot in the ratings on Jan. 29 with 8.1 million viewers and has the second-highest overall viewership for the day. The exposure was productive for Marco's pizza, as well. Our website and mobile traffic on Jan.29 was eight times greater than was typical. More than 400 franchise leads were generated in the week after the episode aired, and more than 7,000 customers joined our eClub through a promotion tied to the *Undercover Boss* show (Marco's Pizza).

In addition, *Undercover Boss* is unique in that it is more easily rebroadcast than other reality shows as the producer of the show explains, "Unlike serialized shows like *The Amazing Race* and *Survivor*...having weekly, closed ended episodes gives *Undercover Boss* repeatability" (Grosz). This repeatability has allowed the producers to sell the show to Discovery that broadcasts repeat episodes on TLC and OWN (Ibid). This opens up the audience further and increases revenue. *Undercover Boss* has mass appeal across age groups and it appears a large part of this audience is comprised of the working class. In a ranking of viewers' income, the *Undercover Boss* audience was in the bottom ten shows for audience median income at \$55,800. To put this in perspective the top show for audience

median income was Modern Family at \$81,100 (Maglio). *Undercover Boss* has been a success and is currently enjoying its seventh season.

### **The Structure**

Every episode of *Undercover Boss* follows the same format. It first introduces the business and the CEO who is to go undercover. Each undercover boss disguises themselves and takes on different jobs throughout their *Enterprise*. If the company is a franchise, they will go to a variety of locations often in different states. If it is in one fixed location, the boss will do a variety of jobs within the company. They most often do three to four jobs in each show. The narrative function is to show the breadth of jobs and workers within their company. However, it also serves as an extensive advertisement for the companies. The narration always extols the size and breadth of each company. For example the introduction to the season one “7-Eleven” episode exclaims, “This convenience store empire spans five continents. They’ve turned the local corner store into a global corporate icon.” Each company is introduced with superlatives regardless of how well known they are. In season six, “Rocket Fizz” was claimed to be “the fastest growing soda pop and candy shop franchise in America.” The show does not mention how many soda pop candy shop franchises exist in the United States.

The premise of the show, the boss going undercover in their own company, is predicated on a deception of the workers in the company.

In *Undercover Boss*, the workers know they are being filmed for the show but they are lead to believe the undercover boss is a contestant on a different reality show. In this way, *Undercover Boss* is different from shows such as *Big Brother* or *Survivor* where the participants are fully aware of what type of show they are on and are there by choice. In those shows, as Misha Kavka phrases it in *Reality TV*, “private behavior is voluntarily brought from behind closed doors into the public sphere of the media gaze” (90). In *Undercover Boss*, the workers believe their new coworker is the one inviting the media’s gaze so when they take their coworker into their confidence they have no idea it is actually their boss. This is where we see the idea of the panopticon comes into play.

### **Undercover Boss as Panopticon**

Foucault used Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the panopticon to examine how society can create order and discipline through observation even when the subjects are not being observed. For the audience, it is enough to know that a boss, perhaps their boss, could be working alongside them at any time. This acts “so to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (Foucault 201). *Undercover Boss* extends the surveillance culture right into our living rooms in the guise of entertainment and normalizes the strict adherence to company policy at all times as a workplace norm. The employees who

transgress company policies are disciplined on national television for all to see. This exercise in humiliation functions not simply as the discipline of one worker; the disciplined worker becomes a proxy for all workers. For example, in the GSI Commerce episode, Danielle, a customer service operator, essentially answering phone complaints all day long, lost her cool with a customer. Danielle rightly points out that sometimes you cannot actually make a customer happy. They show the CEO fuming and stating, "It took every bit of constraint I had to let that call even go on. There wasn't a lot that Danielle was doing right. She had an attitude with customers." He takes a break after the call and notes, "She is actually getting lucky that this show is being filmed because if she wasn't she would actually be getting walked out of here today." Contrary to the CEO's observation, Danielle was actually extremely unlucky; she was filmed behaving rudely to a customer while unknowingly sitting beside the CEO of her company. She would later be unlucky enough to be disciplined on national television. In the dénouement credits stated, "Danielle underwent customer service retraining. She is no longer with the company" ("GSI Commerce"). This serves as a warning to the viewers by illustrating that the boss has the ultimate power over their livelihood, the power to fire.

What accentuates this power is that the workers in *Undercover Boss* are most often low wage workers whose job demands a lot of

work (including emotional labor) for little pay (Wharton 149). This makes them even more susceptible to the uneven power relations that result in them being deceived by their boss. In this way, the show manifests the goal of the panopticon where “perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault 201). In the case of *Undercover Boss*, the viewer, as well as the worker on TV, becomes the bearer of the unequal power relation by watching the workers being spied upon by their boss and thus becomes aware of the power of the corporation over their everyday work life. This situation fulfils Foucault’s thesis that, “he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 202-3). The viewers of *Undercover Boss* internalize the idea that their boss may be watching them at any time.

Although written before *Undercover Boss* first aired, Bloodsworth-Lugo provides an analysis of how surveillance as entertainment was becoming increasingly acceptable setting

the stage for a show like *Undercover Boss*. “Ironically while Americans sought an escape from the threats and fears of a new era via ‘reality television’ the country’s leadership consistently re-invoked and re-deployed narratives to trigger fears within the collective psyche. While Americans voted for the next ‘American Idol’ or invested in the next ‘Survivor’ the discourse of fear and threats to security created another ‘reality show’” (Bloodsworth-Lugo 93). That *Undercover Boss* debuted in a post 9/11 world is not a coincidence. As Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo point out, the public has increasingly accepted, “domestic surveillance (which can be cast as ‘self-containment’), as necessary and justified” (3) thus making *Undercover Boss* the perfect show for a post 9/11 world.

A common reading of these types of reality TV shows focuses on the vicarious thrills that viewers gain by seeing the bad behaviors of the employees and the schadenfreude of the punishments delivered. As noted by Martina Cartwright, “The reasons people watch are complex but research points to ‘schadenfreude.’ Schadenfreude is a German word for ‘taking delight in the problems and misfortune of others.’”(Cartwright 2013) Amber Watts expands on this in her dissertation “Laughing at the World: Schadenfreude, Social Identity, and American Media” discussing how schadenfreude and reality are interdependent and reliant on one another for authenticity. “Indeed, just as schadenfreude depends on a

sense of reality for its pleasures, reality television depends on schadenfreude as a means to access “the real” (49). However, the relationship the viewer has with *Undercover Boss* can be more complex than schadenfreude. Most certainly, the show wants us to identify with the boss and not just to laugh at their blunders. However as most of us are workers, the show has to win over the audience to empathize with the boss and find joy in the workers rewards as well as pleasure at their punishments. In order to encourage viewers to identify with the bosses and not the deceived workers, there are a number of narrative devices used by the show to humanize the CEO.

### **Humanizing the CEO**

Before going out into the workplace, the show must humanize the CEO. This takes the form of a backstory narrative that is almost always heart wrenching. For example, in the “Fastsigns” episode the CEO tells the story of his brother Chuck who had a surfing accident that broke his neck. The brother became a paraplegic and now runs a charity called Wheels of Mercy. Further in a confessional this CEO states, “Mom was an alcoholic, mean and belittling.” We find out the mom eventually shot herself with a shotgun (“Fastsigns”). While not all the backstories are so heartrendingly tragic, this segment of the show functions to humanize the CEO. It allows us to see the boss as a fully realized human being. They are no longer the distant boss in corporate

headquarters but a human that suffers through life like you and me. In another example, the CEO of chauffeur company Empire CLS, David Seelinger, recounts how throughout his childhood he was bullied for being overweight. This led to him dropping out of high school and developing a serious drug and alcohol addiction and an eventual suicide attempt (“Empire CLS”). In the Philly Pretzel episode, the founder recounts the death of his father when he was in seventh grade. This humanizing device is repeated in every show though the details differ the effect is the same. The viewer, rightfully, feels compassion for the CEO and begins to relate to them on a more human level. This is important for the show as it increases the likeability of the CEO when they give out rewards and perhaps more importantly when they dole out punishment. Gareth Palmer suggests, “Reality TV depends on recognition for its effect – the acknowledgement that the individual on the screen [could] be you or I” (185). The show is deliberately framing the boss as sympathetic. The show also frames the workers in particular ways and this is illustrated in the makeover segment of each show.

### **The Makeover: Framing the Working Class**

Every episode of *Undercover Boss* features a makeover segment. The makeover has two functions. First, it functions to introduce the cover story of the CEO. The cover story can range from stating the CEO is on a reality show called *Second Chances* to a

contestant on a show to win a franchise in the company featured on the show. The second function is to literally remake the CEO into what they believe someone who works at their company would look like. This is more revealing than the producers may know.

The CEOs are essentially undergoing the ugly duckling story in reverse. Invariably no boss is made to look better in their undercover guise than in real life. In fact, most disguises appear to the viewer as laughable. The wigs are ridiculous. Fake tattoos are common. Bad dental work is created. For example, the “Utah Jazz” episode features the CEO putting on a fat suit that adds at least 25 pounds and fake teeth. Upon seeing his disguise his son says, “Your teeth are nasty” and his wife chimes in, “I won’t be visiting you.” In the “Retro Fitness” episode, the owner also has a fake belly and says he is portraying, “a down on his luck guy.” His daughter asks, “You’re going to look like that?” This segment inadvertently reveals how the CEOs and the producers of the show view the working class. These makeovers, coupled with the CEO’s incompetence at tasks, end up perpetuating stereotypes of the working class. Joan C. Williams comments on the prevalence of negative working class stereotypes in contemporary television in her book *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate*. She notes, “Archie Bunker was a rocket scientist compared with that icon of the 1990’s, Homer Simpson. Homer embodies several American working-class stereotypes: he is crude, over-weight,

incompetent, clumsy, thoughtless, and a borderline alcoholic” (154). In many ways *Undercover Boss* is recreating a caricature of the working class that more resembles Homer Simpson than any of the actual workers in the show. This is consistent with Williams’s argument about Homer, “He is emblematic of the shift in cultural status of white working-class men. Far from having their lives celebrated, as in the Coit Tower paintings, they become the butt of jokes” (154). The workers themselves do not resemble the CEO in disguise and they recognize this. A Retro Fitness worker observes this about their undercover boss, “I noticed his hair’s a little disheveled. I think he needs to clean up a little bit. Make sure he looks presentable” (“Retro Fitness”). The workers themselves would not present themselves at work looking the way the bosses seem to think they look. For example, an employee at discount clothing store Forman Mills remarked on the strange look her new ‘co-worker’ was sporting, “When he first walked up to me, Oh my God! I was thinking, is this guy from a ‘70’s sitcom or something? Like his mustache and hairdo looks kind of outdated. He reminded me of a character or somebody from the Brady Bunch” (“Forman Mills”). In most episodes, the disguises are a caricature of the working class and reveal how the show itself views the workers.

## **The Jobs**

The undercover boss will usually spend a day in each of the three or four jobs they take within the company. There are a number of different devices the boss will use to gain information about the work. The key is to ask the employees lots of questions. In addition to introducing the different jobs, this segment introduces us to the workers in each job who are in charge of training the undercover boss. This part of the show often plays the bosses ineptitude at the job for laughs. In the first season of the show the introduction implied that it would dispel the myth of CEOs being out of touch with their workers however, after more than seventy shows, it seems to have only reinforced this idea. In the first season of the show the dénouement featured a gathering of employees that the undercover boss would address and show clips from their (mis)adventures in their companies. The clips were often shown for laughs. For example, the 7-Eleven CEO not being able to make coffee (“7-Eleven”); or GSI commerce CEO not being able to pack a truck and hitting a fellow worker in the face with a box. He ends up being fired from one of his jobs (“GSI Commerce”). While this is funny in a schadenfreude type way, it also reinforces that the CEOs were out of touch with their companies. While the clip show ending was cut after the first season, the gaffes of the CEOs were still evident within the body of the show.

The jobs segment is meant to provide some comic relief but it also reveals ruptures in

the narrative of the American Dream which suggests CEO's have worked hard to get where they are. Many episodes not only reinforced the idea that CEOs are out of touch they also revealed the fraudulent nature of the idea that most CEOs work their way up from the ranks. For example, John Fuller, the CEO and President of restaurant chain Johnny Rockets admits that he, "never worked a day in my life in a restaurant" (Johnny Rockets"). Todd Ricketts, the co-owner of the Chicago Cubs, was fired from his first job he did on the show cleaning the bathrooms at Wrigley Field. In his next job as a hot dog vendor, he threw hotdogs in the garbage. His trainer confronted Todd when he found the hotdogs and Ricketts lied to his trainer insisting he did not throw them out. To his credit he had paid for the hotdogs out of his pocket and threw them out so he could appear to have sold them all. While some viewers may have simply laughed about this, it can be seen as a CEO unable to do the job he demands of his own workers and uses his money to get out of hard work.

Each episode also uses the segment that introduces the different jobs as way to feature the backstories of the employees. These are inevitably heartbreaking. For example, Gary from Fastsigns opens up to the boss about living in South Central Los Angeles - the gangs, the drugs, how he prayed to God, joined a church, and in addition how he had lost his house that very day ("Fastsigns"). Billy, the mascot at Philly Pretzel factory, had

his mom escape 9/11 only to hit by a car and paralyzed (“Philly Pretzel”). The Phenix Salon Suites episode introduces hairstylist Richie who volunteers in a homeless shelter where he had stayed a youngster and whose own child was delivered very prematurely resulting in two million dollars of hospital bills (“Phenix Salon”). Every worker has a story to tell and this segment functions much like the humanizing of the CEO. However, it is also sets the stage for showing the benevolence of each CEO as they help the individual workers in the climax of the show by showering them with large gifts and in some cases punish the workers transgressions. This sets up the heart of the show: the big reveal.

### **The Big Reveal**

The most important segment of each show is the big reveal as it functions to reassure the workers, and the viewers, that the boss is listening. The big reveal is when the boss calls in workers to the head office to reveal that they have been working undercover. They meet without their disguise and the workers come in for individual interviews. It is when the boss gives large rewards for exemplary employees and doles out punishments for those who have transgressed corporate policies. The rewards can be extremely generous. For example, Sheldon who highlighted the website problem for Fastsigns is sent on the honeymoon of his dreams and his medical bills of \$50,000 were paid (Fastsigns). This segment serves to

highlight the largesse of the CEO and suggest that the company has made improvements to how they treat their workers. For example, Angel from the “Modell’s” episode had lived in a homeless shelter for two years while working at Modell’s. At the big reveal the boss announced that he was giving Angel \$250 000 to buy a house. She dropped to the floor in shock and happiness (“Modells”). In addition to making the bosses look good, this part of the show functions as myth. As John Storey points out myth can function to clearly resolve the problems on the side of capital (Storey 121). The boss is framed as benevolent, the company progressive in its human resources management, and the workers problems are solved. This promotes the image of what June Deery in *Consuming Reality* calls “caring capitalism.” Deery explains this is “when companies employ television as a mechanism for positioning themselves as a producer not only of goods but of social good” (92). However, the social good is illusory as it only benefits the individual worker. The structure of *Undercover Boss* highlights the great gifts the boss bestows upon his or her workers but does not question or discuss the structural reasons for the employee’s problems.

There are major gaps in this narrative as all of the problems facing the working class and working poor such as lack of medical insurance, unstable housing, and constant lack of money creating the inability to save for major expenses such a car or for children’s college,

are addressed by the CEOs on an individual basis. We, the viewers, are happy that these workers have been helped. However, the systemic nature of the problems is never addressed. For example, the largesse provided to Angel of Modell's solves her individual problem but the fact she worked at Modell's for two years while living in a shelter is glossed over. Most of the problems solved by the bosses are the result of low wages and inadequate or non-existent medical coverage. The big reveal also requires those who transgressed company rules to be disciplined on national television and those who were model employees to show the requisite amount of gratitude for the gifts. The New York Times television critic referred to this section of the show as "feudal":

There is also something embarrassingly feudal about the denouement, like a king dispensing small favors on his way back to the throne. Feudal and also futile: Larry's plans to reform his company and humanize the workplace seem great, until he starts to order up committees to study what he has learned. So many good intentions have gone to die in task forces, off-site meetings and mentoring programs. *Undercover Boss* is a working-class fantasy that bursts its own illusions. (Stanley 2010)

The feudal analogy works for the flip side of the big reveal as well. Rather than rewarded, the employees are punished.

### **Discipline and Punish**

*Undercover Boss* doesn't just reward model employees but also punishes errant ones. The introduction to the show was changed in season five to reflect the importance that the discipline part of the big reveal had achieved. The voiceover provides a complimentary summary of the shows successes and emphasizes how much good the CEOs have done: "Since the premiere of *Undercover Boss* more than sixty bosses have given away nearly six million dollars and implemented sweeping company-wide changes to benefit the lives of nearly forty million employees. But not everyone deserved to be rewarded." The first sentence of the new introduction was intercut with scenes of the bosses largess but it is the last sentence that is perhaps more important, the narrator states, "not everyone deserved to be rewarded", while a clip showed the employee from O'Neil clothing offering to get his boss weed and the soon to be fired Boston Marker employee inadvertently letting his boss know exactly what he thinks of customers.

Not all the disciplined workers were trying to sell pot to the boss. Most are disciplined for not towing the company line, some simply because they find their job boring. Many of these employees offer up a critique of manual labor and service industry minimum wage jobs

that those of us who have toiled in such jobs can readily identify with. For example, Andrew a warehouse logistics manager for United Van Lines states that his job is, “just boring” of course the CEO underplays this and suggests to the camera that “he didn’t appreciate the big picture.” The CEO also alludes to further discipline, “when I get back I’ll talk to our team about what additional steps we can take in order to make sure he takes his job very seriously” (“United Van Lines”). The show suggests that stating that your job is boring could only mean that you are not taking it seriously enough, not that your job may actually be boring. Some employees offer a more nuanced critique that hits close to home for the undercover CEOs. Aaron, a shift manager at Popeye’s Louisiana Kitchen, in conversation with his undercover boss, completely unaware that he is actually talking to his boss, offers a critique of Popeye’s executives who he refers to as corporate clowns, “You never wanted to be a corporate clown?” He goes on to discuss how corporate executives sometimes visit the store by whisking in and out without ever getting their hands dirty. He then shares his critique; “You’re not back here frying chicken. You’re not back here doing none of these things. You came here smelling like Dolce Cabana cologne, you left here smelling like Dolce Cabana cologne” (“Popeye’s Louisiana Kitchen”). He would have to address this in the coming big reveal which is meant to provoke laughs but Aaron is forced to recant his critique

of the bosses and agrees to undergo mentorship to improve his attitude.

One of the most (in)famous of the disciplined employees Ronnie, a shift supervisor at Boston Market, was originally featured on the season four episode “Boston Market.” He called himself the Kim Kardashian of Boston Market and the boss was initially amused by him. Things took a turn for the worse when Ronnie shared his views on customers. “I literally hate customers. I hate them so much. They’re terrible. But it’s okay, we suffer” (“Boston Market”). He expounded on his hatred of customers singling out old people and young children as they could not make up their minds. The boss broke cover and fired him on the spot. That was the last we heard of Ronnie until the end of season four where there was a special episode entitled “Epic Employees.”

The Epic episode revisited past employees including Ronnie. The show highlights some good employees and then intones, “Not all employees impressed the boss enough to get their own franchise. Some employees fell short, like Ronnie a shift supervisor at Boston Market who stunned the boss with his treatment of customers” (“Epic Employees”). It then presents a greatest hits montage of Ronnie’s comments including, “Children and old people are literally the worst I’ve seen in my entire life because none of them know what they want and they literally can’t talk” (“Boston Market”). The episode

catches up with Ronnie at home. “I watched T.V. for a week straight, just eating ice cream, being depressed. I haven’t worked since then.” He expands on his dilemma, “I can’t find work anywhere.” (“Epic Employees”) Ronnie still has his sense of humor as he states, “I used to be the Kim Kardashian of Boston Market but now I’m like the Shirley Temple of Unemployment.” One of his most interesting observations is on the nature of the show. He knows it is premised on the bosses finding out about their company and states, “Everybody wants honesty and then when they get it they want to cry” (“Epic Employees”). This is an important observation. Throughout the episode Ronnie is never unkind or rude to customers. It is obvious that his views would be seen negatively by the boss however, he thought he was sharing these with a new coworker. It also seemed clear he was showing off for this new worker. His position as shift supervisor suggests he conducted himself well amongst his coworkers and executed his job well until the undercover boss came in. The firing of Ronnie was for the cameras. It served to restore faith in the brand image of Boston Market and to remind workers that one must offer service with a smile both externally and internally. Any breach of the corporate mantra that the customer is always right, even to your coworkers, is grounds for termination. This discipline is not unexpected as the structure of the show helps to scaffold our expectations building to this outcome. The working class stereotypes invoked in the makeover segment

set the stage for a negative view of the working class and the employees' bad behavior can be expected. However, this does not mean that the dominant reading is the only one. As cultural theorist John Fiske has pointed out, "the ability and freedom of the viewer to bring extra-textual experience and attitudes to bear upon the reading of the program" (Fiske 31). He goes on to argue that, "meanings may be socially determined rather than textually determined, and that it is through this openness and polysemy that the same program can be popular with a variety of audiences" (Fiske 31). This polysemy allows for alternate readings of *Undercover Boss* and there are openings left by ruptures in the narrative.

### **Ruptures in the Narrative**

The show is structured in such a way as to direct audiences to a certain understanding of capitalism. It suggests that CEOs are in business to help workers become their best selves and that corporations are benevolent friends offering a hand up. However, there are cracks in this narrative and the show can function in many ways unanticipated by the creators. For example, the CEO of Fatburger, Andy Wiederhorn, is a convicted corporate criminal who suggests his problems with his real estate finance company were created by people who "resented him and were looking for a way to crucify me" that and, "an obscure pension fund law that I had never even heard

of. I really felt like this was coming from small town vindictiveness” (“Fatburger”). This is unlikely to endear him to viewers and even though we are meant to identify with the CEOs and see their interests as our interests, it is hard to do so with someone who commits corporate fraud and dismisses Portland, Oregon as a vindictive small town.

*Undercover Boss* attempts to limit worker agency in its highly constructed reality show. Every employee who voices a critique is reprimanded, retrained, retired, or outright fired. However, even the show cannot make us ‘un-hear’ the critique. For example, Sam Taylor the CEO of the Oriental Trading Company wants to “bring happiness and fun to people’s lives” but the worker, Andrew, states the truth of the company, “We work you more for less” (“Oriental Trading Company”). While this does not undo the myth making of *Undercover Boss*, it does offer a path to alternative readings of the show. Ronnie from Boston Market inadvertently alludes to the critique of fast food work contained in Ester Reiter’s *Making Fast Food: From the Frying Pan into the Fire* when he suggests he is just a robot. Reiter explains, “Employers, with the help of management consultants and technical support, have perfected the treatment of workers as human machinery. With careful planning, workers can perform almost as well as robots. They may be more difficult to deal with, but then, in minimum wage part-time jobs, they are not quite as expensive to maintain” (Reiter 116). While

perhaps not as sophisticated Ronnie's critique is very similar when he states, "We don't ask questions. We just work like robots" ("Boston Market"). Even a highly constructed narrative like *Undercover Boss* cannot paper over all the cracks and contradictions in capitalism.

There are other, more extreme, ruptures as well. For example, there are a disproportionate number of restaurants featured on the show that use the female server's sexuality as the main draw. Starting in the first season, the Hooters episode shows the undercover boss disciplining the manager that forces his servers to participate in a degrading eating contest ("Hooters"). In this way, Hooters is no longer the exploiter of women's bodies, it is the savior protecting women from sexual harassment. Superficially, this serves to recuperate the image of Hooters. Though the company clearly relies on the objectification of women, literally naming its business after a slang term for breasts, it is framed positively by the show. It is difficult to gauge how all viewers saw this, however long time viewers of the programs can see that over time the show has been drawn to the bars and restaurants that rely on scantily clad women in sexy uniforms and continually attempts to recuperate their image.

The show itself employs scopophilia to draw in viewers just as the restaurants featured employ the same voyeuristic urge to bring in customers. (Mulvey 6-18) For example, season four episode two, featured the

restaurant Tilted Kilt and the opening episode of season five would feature Twin Peaks, which was opened by the ex-CEO of Hooters. This disproportionate featuring of restaurants that feature scantily clad waitresses seems to have finally blown up in season six when the CEO of Bikinis went undercover and ended up firing one of his 'bikini babes' for refusing to wear a bikini on camera ("Bikinis"). While the CEO's of the other restaurants predicated on scantily clad women servers have resisted the term breastaurant; the CEO of Tilted Kilt argues, "A lot of competitors tip toe around who they are. They don't want to that they're a breastaurant. We're all about it. We call our servers bikini babes. We're a breastaurant and I love the fact were a breastaurant " ("Tilted Kilt"). The owner of Bikinis is so proud of it that he has trademarked the term. The Bikinis website claims they are "America's only sports breastaurant." The firing of the employee who did not want to wear a bikini on camera, coupled with offering another employee breast implants as part of her reward, created a backlash against the show. (Hughes) In this way the desired narrative, the kind benevolent CEO getting to know their workers and rewarding the stellar employees, was ruptured. Instead of accolades the business featured was being criticized for its employment practices. This has not changed the way the Bikinis does business but it does present an alternate reading of the show that challenges the dominant reading and ruptures that narrative. How sexism is recuperated in the

series operates as almost a separate narrative function and goal of the show however it is part of the larger narrative that employees should follow corporate dictates regardless of how wrongheaded or exploitative they are. It reinforces sexism and misogyny while simultaneously disciplining the female workforce. The *Bikinis* episode illustrated that there is only so much viewers are willing to accept perhaps the gendered nature of the discipline and the seeming inherent misogyny of the episode was one step too far.

The dominant discourse of the show remains, consistently framing the undercover boss and their company in as positive a light as possible. In addition, the show functions to discipline employees who transgress company policies. Perhaps more important is that the disciplined employees are on national television for all to see which serves as a proxy for all workers which can serve “so to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (Foucault, 201). However, while *Undercover Boss* functions to extend the surveillance culture into our living rooms it also, inadvertently, introduces the beginnings of a critique of the very corporations that are being sold to us as beneficent.

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## **Harry Dickson, Detective of the Impossible**

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One of the most disconcerting aspects of popular culture studies as a scholarly discipline is the facility with which important works and authors disappear from our landscape before having had the time to be either recognized or evaluated. The current over-production of “popular” narrative artifacts as well as the ferocious financial constraints that determine the future or even the mere survival of any work in particular not only still prevent us from establishing a functional and very necessary canon of so-called “popular culture” that would reflect more than vague, mostly subjective preferences, but condemn as well to an early and most underserved grave many works of true value and significance. This is the case of Harry Dickson, whose name is only recognized by a few in the English language, but whose adventures, especially when penned by Belgium writer Jean Ray, have been enjoyed

by several generations of readers, particularly in France, Belgium and Spain, and are still very much a part of popular literature history through fan web-sites, fanzines and comic book adaptations. In English, however, the fame of Jean Ray's Harry Dickson is much more restrained, for only six of his adventures have been translated: a late, timid and rather brief appearance for a character who between 1927 and 1938 was the protagonist of no less than one hundred and seventy eight adventures, published bi-weekly in a dime novel entitled *The Adventures of Harry Dickson, the American Sherlock Holmes*. Before presenting the significance of the adventures of Jean Ray's Harry Dickson from the point of view of their structural exemplarity as detective fiction in the fantastic mode and pondering their conspicuous absence from the Anglo-Saxon cultural landscape, a few contextual markers must be established, for the very inception of Harry Dickson is itself worthy of a scholarly detective plot.

## **Origins**

Any reader of the adventures of Harry Dickson is familiar with the strange circumstances of their creation: in 1907, a German publisher launched a series of pulp magazines entitled *Sherlock Holmes and his Most Famous Cases* that ran for 230 weekly issues until March 1911. Needless to say, these allegedly famous cases of Sherlock Holmes were not penned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle but written directly in German by far

more obscure professional authors who, for the most part, will remain forever anonymous. The use of the name “Sherlock Holmes” on the cover naturally raised some legal issues and was subsequently eliminated by the German publishers, without however disappearing from the narrations themselves; only Dr. Watson was substituted by a younger man in his early twenties named “Harry Taxon,” who surreptitiously became the main protagonist as some issues of the original series were re-printed in 1908 and 1909 under the title *Harry Taxon and his Master*. In 1927, a Flemish publisher re-launched the original German series translated into Dutch under the title *Harry Dickson, the American Sherlock Holmes*, in which the main protagonist had become Harry Dickson and his young assistant Tom Wills, and this new series was in turn translated into French for the Belgium and French public from 1928 to 1938.

Due to their conditions of production, for they are written mainly by more or less mercenary authors, the quality of these original narrations tends to be unequal, however, they proved historically popular enough to warrant successive re-publications and numerous translations. The shadow of Sherlock Holmes still haunts the series, but the cold, reasoned deductions have given way to a more action and adventure driven narration, ironically resembling more the two fairly recent cinematographic adaptations of Sherlock Holmes than Conan Doyle’s original creation.

The six episodes that compose the merciless war opposing Harry Dickson to Professor Flax for instance (*Professor Flax, Human Monster*), are indeed reminiscent of that between Holmes and Moriarty, however, the modalities of the struggle are very different, as Harry Dickson chases his arch-enemy throughout the world – from America to China to India rather than just continental Europe – before finally killing him in a mine shaft, in direct contrast with the final battle between Holmes and Moriarty in the Swiss Alps: a dark mine tunnel is the perfect topographic binary opposition to the heights of Reichenbach Falls from where Moriarty and Holmes plunge to their deaths in “The Final Problem”, albeit only temporarily in the case of the latter as we will find out in the first story of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, “The Adventure of the Empty House.”

The original German stories evolved considerably as they were translated and adapted by anonymous hands throughout these successive re-editions, however, they never lost their main characteristics, and Harry Dickson was destined to become yet another Sherlock Holmes knock-off, only more active and adventurous than his model, if, on one fateful day of 1929, the translation of his adventures had not been entrusted to Jean Ray (Jean-Raymond-Marie de Kremer) who ended up appropriating the character and turning him into an ideal vehicle for his own imagination.

As the story goes, Jean Ray found the original adventures of Harry Dickson flat and unimaginative, and decided subsequently to create his own narrations, solely inspired by the colorful covers of the German series, which were reprinted along with the new translations. The reality might turn out to be a bit less romantic: the cover illustrations from the original 1907 series were due to a respected artist, member of the Berlin academy, Alfred Roloff, and were part of the package; they had been purchased in bulk by the Dutch publisher along with the translation rights of the adventures of Harry Dickson, and then passed on to the Belgium publishing house which hired Jean Ray to translate them into French for the Belgium and French markets. Very colorful and quite provoking, Roloff's illustrations possessed an undeniable marketing value and were deemed by the publishers to greatly contribute to the success of the series.

Jean Ray henceforth obtained the authorization to write his own stories as long as they would include the scene depicted on the cover, which could have been chronologically problematic if nothing else fashion-wise, since said covers were painted in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century while the adventures of Harry Dickson were set in contemporary times, that is more than twenty years later. Nonetheless, Jean Ray effortlessly included the narrative moments suggested on the covers and created a very specific, highly entertaining treatment of the fantastic in its detective modality, which

proves exemplary when it comes to defining the specificities of the fantastic mode in relationship to its similar yet opposed narrative structure, that of detective fiction.

## **The Absent Solution**

For the purpose of our discussion, we will stay away from the ambiguous notion of “genre,” which can terminologically be broken into four notions of a much easier use: medium (text versus theatre), format (novel versus short story), mode (the concept of reality as represented in the narrative universe, i.e., realism versus marvelous) and narrative category (love story versus detective story). Rather than a narrative mode, detective fiction should be considered as a narrative category of realism, for its textual authority depends upon a satisfactory resolution of the enigma in accordance to our collective perception of what reality is. The fantastic, on the other hand, is a true, self-contained narrative mode with its own conception of reality, for it presents a universe in which the unexplainable phenomenon will remain unexplainable. Whereas the universe of detective fiction corresponds to our reality and belongs therefore to the realistic mode, that of the fantastic suggests an altered, perverted reality, which should not be confused with the radically different realities we find in the marvelous mode, where wolves can talk without raising any suspicion. The universe of the fantastic depends indeed as much if not more upon a believable representation of our

reality than upon the supernatural, for an excess of supernatural elements would dissolve the basic opposition between the real and the unreal, however it points to a perversion of our reality and can be therefore opposed to realism. Nonetheless, we still only dispose of realistic tools to solve the problem, that is reason and reasoning – just as we do in detective fiction – and the failure of these tools is one of the most significant aspects of the fantastic mode, which implicitly challenges our epistemological certainties, while their triumph is precisely what characterizes detective fiction.

When considered from the angle of their most significant paradigms, the detective narration and the fantastic tale have a great deal in common, for they both establish narrative authority by presenting an enigma and an attempt to progress towards its resolution: the main, fundamental difference between both is that the unexplained will become explained at the end of a detective story but unexplainable at the end of a fantastic tale. Detective fiction and the fantastic mode represent hence a strikingly similar conflict while offering diametrically opposed resolutions, for whereas a detective narration demonstrates the validity of positive and rational thinking, implicitly reinforcing our epistemological certainties by reducing the apparently impossible to rational terms through the resolution of the enigma, a fantastic tale, on the contrary, illustrates its utter defeat: the

supernatural element which creates most of the narrative tension is by definition forever unexplainable. This opposition is clearly reflected at the formal level when we contrast the structure of a detective narration with that of a fantastic tale: once the enigma has been elucidated and the culprits identified, the narrative structure of a detective story is closed; that of a fantastic tale, on the contrary, remains open, for the question it has raised has not been nor could ever be answered.

Such parallelism between both narrative tendencies is historically confirmed by the works of Edgar Allan Poe as well as by those of Arthur Conan Doyle. With "The Murder in Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," Poe is often credited with having created the modern detective, Dupin, and it is not a coincidence if Sherlock Holmes explicitly distances himself from his predecessor in the second chapter of his very first adventure, untitled so appropriately "The Science of Deduction" (*A Study in Scartet.*) However, the name of Poe is just as easily associated with the fantastic mode as it is with detective fiction, although not always for the right reasons: if several short stories by Poe, such as "The Cask of Amontillado," depict extreme situations, they do not belong to the fantastic mode for they remain within the boundaries of realism, however uncanny and unbelievable they might appear to be, and do not defy the laws of nature. Nonetheless, the tales "Morella" and "Ligeia," which both tell of a

reincarnation, are truly fantastic for they introduce a supernatural, hence forever unexplainable event within a realistic context. As to sir Arthur Conan Doyle, although the fame of the Greatest Sleuth of all times has eclipsed much of his other literary production, his contribution to the fantastic genre should not be ignored; a story such as “Lot 249,” which tells of a mummy coming back to life in the apartment of an Oxford student is doubtlessly fantastic and if its ends somewhat happily with the destruction of the source of the unexplainable evil, it does not offer any type of explanation as to how said evil was performed or could even exist. As in *Dracula*, we can only destroy the monster – we cannot explain it.

The Harry Dickson created in Germany by anonymous writers on a payroll belonged to the realistic mode and the lack of originality of its authors – they were not, after all, Conan Doyle – was compensated by the accumulation of travels, chases and fights, in the style of the dime adventure novels, which sought above and foremost to defamiliarize their receptor by a succession of surprising events, not neglecting to add some gore to the mix here and there to make it more attractive. However, when Jean Ray takes over the series, the narrative authority of the adventures of Harry Dickson no longer relies on stock thrills but upon a pervasive and subtle opposition between the real and the unreal, and Harry Dickson becomes a new, original detective, whose adventures take place in a reality which

always seems on the verge of eluding our capacity to understanding it rationally.

### **The Edge of the Impossible**

Jean Ray was a writer of fantastic stories in his own right before becoming a translator for the Belgium Janssens publishing house and his previous works do not indicate any inclination towards detective story telling; his contribution to detective fiction was therefore paradoxical from the start. Unlike Poe or Conan Doyle, Ray did not chose to write detective fiction *per se* but rather appropriated a pre-existing narrative universe that happened to be the adventures of a detective, and unlike Poe or Conan Doyle, who kept their incursions into the realistic mode in its detective modality entirely separated from their contribution to fantastic literature, Jean Ray merged both, which is why the adventures of Harry Dickson prove exemplary to illustrate the subtle mechanisms of the fantastic effect.

The successive anonymous translators and adaptors of the original fake Sherlock Holmes had taken their hero across the world for the sake of defamiliarization making him into an adventurous rather than consulting detective. When his adventures are imagined by Jean Ray, however, Harry Dickson appears to be much more sedentary and his travels are generally confined to England, with the occasional visit on the continent as in “The Vampire with the Red Eyes.” His fundamental

difference vis-à-vis Sherlock Holmes resides with the nature of the enigmas he has to face, which always include a supernatural note usually suggested by a narrative motif characteristic of the fantastic mode, such as hallucinations, madness, mysterious deities, ancient religions, esoteric rites, exotic drugs, abnormal beasts or deformed humans. By the end of the story, the mystery has been unveiled and what appeared to be supernatural is rationalized, more or less satisfactorily, as the result of a strange, usually uncanny cause. The final, traditional explanation we find at the end of each case of Harry Dickson is quite less detailed than that which concludes each adventure of Sherlock Holmes, suggesting henceforth by its very briefness that not all can be clearly explained. Furthermore, most cases will remain “obscure,” involving natural forces, human practices or psychological behaviors we know “so little about:” if the case is indeed closed, for the immediate threat has been eliminated, the narrative structure, on the other hand, remains ajar.

Two highly informed articles on the subject, as can be Jean-Paul Labouré’s “Harry Dickson, les détectives de l’étrange” (“Harry Dickson, the Detectives of the Strange”) and Philippe Jaussaud’s “Science et récit policier: les aventures de Harry Dickson” (“Science and detective fiction: the Adventures of Harry Dickson”) reach opposite conclusions when it comes to considering the adventures of Harry Dickson either as detective fiction or as

fantastic tales. For Labouré, Harry Dickson's fight is "lost in advance," (14) for all the positivism in the world will not succeed in explaining the impossible events and enemies Harry Dickson faces in each of his adventures, and although the fearless detective appears to triumph, his victory can only be partial, for he will be confronted again with the unexplained always on the verge of becoming the unexplainable. For Jausaud, on the contrary, the fantastic "fades away" at the end of the adventure (8), as the arsenal of modern sciences allows us to consider the rational probability of the final explanation. Or at least it should. But it does not.

In the majority of the adventures of Harry Dickson, the pseudo-scientific, often elliptical explanation we are provided at the end of each episode is but an elegant manner to ultimately suggest the limitations of reason. The omnipresence of a great variety of sciences throughout the adventures of Harry Dickson, from geology to anatomy, from botanic to chemistry only underlines their ultimate powerlessness by consistently pointing to areas they have precisely not yet conquered. And so, some of the enemies of Harry Dickson are given supernatural force due to schizophrenia as in "The Unknown God" ("Le Dieu inconnu"), some others master the art of manipulating magnetic fields, as in "The House of the Hallucinations" ("La Maison des hallucinations"), and some others have the power of controlling a collective illusion thanks

to a barely known hallucinogenic substance from an exotic place, as in “The singular Mr. Hingle” (“Le Singulier Mr. Hingle”). They will be defeated, however, their very existence has already underlined the limitations of the reality we know and understand. Contrarily to what is customary in the universe of Sherlock Holmes, the resolution of the enigma does not reestablish a known order but rather informs us upon more disorders to come in a reality that always seems to elude our rational understanding. However, Harry Dickson’s endeavors are not exactly “lost in advance” either, quite the contrary, for his interventions save lives and restore a temporary normalcy to reality; he is motivated by a strong sense of justice, truly believes in his mission and tackles every new case with the same interest, only feeling discouraged in rare occasions when the leads are missing and the investigation is at a stalemate. Loyal to his narrative function as detective, Harry Dickson is above all a proactive character, who never abandons a case unresolved and always unmasks the enemy, and his adventures represent a fairly unique case of positivism in fantastic literature. But if the character is indeed a positive one, the reality he confronts is not, unlike that of his ex-model, Sherlock Holmes.

This difference between the positivist reality of Sherlock Holmes and its problematic representation in the adventures of Harry Dickson becomes all the more apparent when we encounter narrative motifs common to both

universes, such as in “The ideas of Mr. Triggs,” which presents a character, Mortimer Triggs highly reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes’ older brother, Mycroft. Just as Sherlock does regarding his brother in “The Greek Interpreter” (*Memoirs on Sherlock Holmes*, Adventure IX), Harry Dickson introduces his friend Mortimer Triggs as being intellectually superior to him but whose personal distaste for action renders incapable of applying his deductions at a practical level. However, the personality, occupation and surroundings of Mr. Triggs, by opposition to Mycroft’s, emphasize an atmosphere of hyper-realism, which proves highly propitious to the fantastic effect for it underlines the semiotic opposition between an identifiable reality and a supernatural occurrence, creating the tension between possible and impossible upon which the mode relies. Whereas Mycroft is a plump gentleman who receives Holmes and Watson in the fancy Diogenes Club, Mortimer Triggs is a “tall and skinny” man, dressed in quaint clothes, owner of a rundown bookshop and renter of books, who serves a miserable dinner to his guests. Whereas “The Greek Interpreter” deals with fairly down to earth matters – kidnapping, extortion and murder – the case evoked at the end of the dinner in “The Ideas of Mr. Triggs” involves hallucinations, madness and an unexplainable stigmata, generating the tension between a highly identifiable normalcy, that of a bad dinner, and the possible existence of a supernatural phenomenon. Mr. Triggs’ suggestion will allow Harry Dickson and Tom

Wills to solve the enigma, however, it must be said – attempting carefully not to spoil the story – that the final explanation provided for the appearance of a stigmata in the shape of a heart on the victim's body is more than far-fetched scientifically speaking: it is simply impossible.

## **The Fear**

Besides hiding the impossible behind a rational alibi in the guise of pseudo-scientific, albeit well informed explanations, the adventures of Harry Dickson introduce a dimension altogether absent from the universe of Sherlock Holmes, that of irrational fear. The problems confronted by Sherlock Holmes appear incomprehensible, out of the ordinary and even sometimes disturbing if not scary – the hound of the Baskervilles comes to mind; however, they rarely provoke the irrational, supreme fear of the unknown, which for Guy de Maupassant as well as for Howard Phillip Lovecraft remains a constant of the fantastic mode. This fear is not the mere apprehension of a phenomenon with foreseeably negative consequences upon our physical integrity or that of our immediate context, but an uncontrollable terror which paralyzes our capacity for reasoning; as Maupassant put it, “we are only afraid of what we do not understand.” The unspeakable fear of the impossible permeates the general atmosphere of Harry Dickson's adventures and the Great Detective himself experiences it in several

occasions despite his privileged mind and exemplary character. Unlike Holmes, Dickson feels the threat of the supernatural and considers the possibility of the unexplainable rather than confining himself simply to the unexplained. In the final analysis, Holmes fights and defeats a threat to the social order; Dickson confronts the possible breakdown of the epistemological order.

The conclusion of “The Resurrection of the Gorgon” is in this sense most exemplary, for it demonstrates the existence of the impossible and leaves the reader with the opposite conclusion to that we can expect from any honest detective story: once the monster, a beautiful woman who mineralizes her victims thanks to an exotic drug and the hypnotic glance of a mysterious aquatic creature she keeps in a pond has been defeated, the autopsy reveals that her luxuriant hair covers strange “protuberances” in the shape of “tiny viper heads,” that her feet exhibit the claws of a tiger, and that the composition of her cornea includes a viscous, yellowish substance, similar to the “*tapetum lucidum* found in the eyes of cats and of certain cephalopods”(83). The narrative voice then ponders upon the possible existence of the Gorgons before concluding with two very significant words: “Who knows?” This question refers us directly to Maupassant’s last short story, precisely entitled “Who Knows?” (“Qui sait?”), which undeniably belongs to the fantastic mode for it opposes directly a highly identifiable reality to

an unexplainable occurrence: as he returns home, a man sees all his furniture leaving his house on its own. The furniture will return after the protagonist finds some of his runaway chairs in an antiquarian shop, however, the phenomenon remains unexplainable – who knows? – and, prey to the unnamable fear of the unknown, the protagonist decides never to return home and to seek asylum in a psychiatric facility. Maupassant's story is a perfect illustration of the fantastic mode, for it presents the rebellion of every day's objects and the betrayal of the most familiar context of them all – one's home – in order to create an uncertain reality which eludes our cognitive abilities. The interrogation mark in the title could by itself symbolize the eternal epistemological question raised by the fantastic mode and appears clearly out of place as a resolution for a detective story: the detective is supposed to know and if "who knows?" is the beginning of the investigation, it cannot be its conclusion. Many cases of Harry Dickson raise more doubts than they solve and the universe in which his adventures take place is always on the verge of giving in to the irrational; if a semblance of normalcy is restored at the end of each episode, the fear of what we do not understand lures already in the next one.

### **We Want Dickson**

The adventures of Harry Dickson when authored by Jean Ray are both unique and exemplary, and exhibit a strong narrative authority due to their author's style and

imagination. They are not exempt of social and ethical criticism and often raise themes of a deeper nature than those generally – and quite falsely – associated with popular fiction, such as loneliness, social inequities, human bondage, bigotry and otherness. We are hence entitled to wonder why they are virtually unknown in the English language, especially when we consider their immense popularity still to this day in Belgium, France and Spain. As in the case of Arsène Lupin or that of Fantômas, two major figures of French detective/crime fiction, Harry Dickson seems to have been enthusiastically ignored in England and the United States, as if we were witnessing some type of unspoken linguistic narrative territoriality when it comes to detective fiction. Arsène Lupin and Fantômas being the former a thief and the latter a murderer, their inclusion in the Occidental canon of detective fiction might appear contrived; however, both include a great amount of detective work and Arsène Lupin himself has the honor of confronting a certain “Herlock Sholmès” and his friend, “Wilson,” in more than one occasion. Concerning Harry Dickson, one can only deplore that he has apparently not been deemed financially viable enough to deserve an English translation, which is highly debatable, for there are myriads of fans on the web asking for a greater availability of his adventures in English.

The translation in English of the one hundred and some episodes of the adventures

of Harry Dickson by Jean Ray is long overdue, as shown by the cannibalistic attitude already displayed by some authors who are appropriating Harry Dickson, albeit in a less original manner than Jean Ray did in his day. For instance, Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier's translations of four stories by Jean Ray in *The Heir of Dracula* are presented as "adaptations" and are not attributed to Jean Ray, whose name is omitted from the cover. In their introduction, the "adaptors" glide over the fundamental contribution of Jean Ray to the series and present the four stories in the table of content as being "from the secret files of the king of detectives," which corresponds to the second name of the original German series – the Belgium series, from which these four stories authored by Jean Ray are taken was simply named "The American Sherlock Holmes." Furthermore, the volume entitled *Harry Dickson Vs. The Spider*, also edited by Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier includes two stories by Jean Ray, "The Gang of the Spider" and "The Phantom Executioners" along with 16 more from different authors, some of them being reprints from the series of short stories anthologies published annually by Black Coat Press, *Tales of the Shadowmen*, edited as well by Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier, and which specialize in generously cannibalizing popular characters and adventures, in particular from the French heritage, such as Arsène Lupin, Fantômas, Judex, and, of course, Harry Dickson. According to the blurb, *Harry Dickson vs. The Spider* includes "two original episodes

plus 16 short stories paying homage to the greatest holmesian pastiche of all times.” This description appears misleading not only in terms of authorship attribution but also regarding the significance of the adventures of Harry Dickson when created by Jean Ray, for their originality and interest reside precisely in their capacity to distance themselves from the original model to become a truly independent narrative universe which succeeds in taking the detective story structure into the fantastic mode – hardly a pastiche of Sherlock Holmes. The table of content of *Harry Dickson vs. The Spider* is itself quite revealing of the intentions of its editors, for it lists the authors of all the short stories included in the volumes except for the first two – those precisely written by Jean Ray, which directly inspired the title of the entire volume. Whether the editors of the volume sought consciously or not to dissociate the name of Jean Ray from the adventures of Harry Dickson in order to more easily appropriate the character may not be as relevant as the fact that Jean Ray’s Harry Dickson still appears to be a very strong narrative commodity, with enough appeal to justify questionable editorial moves.

### **The Detective of the Fantastic**

As early as 1883, in his chronicle entitled “The Fantastic” (“*Le Fantastique*”), Guy de Maupassant clearly established the difference between the marvelous and the fantastic modes; letting aside old legends and fairy

tales, Maupassant insisted particularly upon the necessity to suggest the supernatural, “the almost impossible,” without openly defying the incredulity of the reader and cited the works of Edgar Allan Poe as exemplary. It may have been too soon for Maupassant at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to perceive the distinction between the uncanny, which is to be considered as one manifestation of the realistic mode, well represented by the narrative category of detective fiction, and the fantastic mode, which perverts realism by introducing a supernatural phenomenon in a familiar, highly identifiable context. Apparently, it was not for Jean Ray in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and his treatment of the adventures of Harry Dickson remain an original, significant work of modern fantastic literature. By taking advantage of the realistic framework provided by the detective story structure, Ray succeeded in evoking the supernatural without ever directly challenging our incredulity, rather constantly fooling it, and created a very unique narrative universe still susceptible to captivate today’s readers – even in English.

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## **Garry Moore: A Great Communicator**

By Michael Green,  
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Eleventh on the American Film Institute's list of greatest movie quotes is *Cool Hand Luke's*, "What we've got here is failure to communicate." Even before this film came out, Tom Lehrer observed that people "spend hours bemoaning the fact that they can't communicate. I feel that if a person can't communicate, the very least he can do is to shut up." All of us have some ability to communicate but, obviously, some are better at it than others. It also depends on the form of communication, whether a movie or a nightclub performance by an ABD in mathematics who wrote satirical songs.

Radio and television performers may stand out for their looks or voice or talent. But in the infancy of these media, what often mattered was adeptness at filling time in a

variety of ways—comedy, possibly singing, interviewing, or just chatting with the audience. How rare these professional communicators have become may be gauged by this: when the producers of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* first sought a host in the late 1990s, they allegedly thought first of Bill Cullen, a longtime game show host who had been dead for a decade, and when Bob Barker retired after more than half a century in television, his successor as the host of *The Price Is Right* was stand-up comedian Drew Carey rather than another radio or television announcer. As a *TV Guide* reporter wrote in 1962, “It is interesting that nearly all of the men who have been able to keep one-man shows going on television for years have been professional lifelong broadcasters .... What this tells us is that there is such a thing as pro broadcasting, as sharply distinct a profession as acting or baseball playing.”

The list of lifelong broadcasters included Jack Paar, the subject of the article, and Steve Allen and Arthur Godfrey, to name a pair of veteran hosts, but also someone who often seems less remembered for both similar talents and the lack of them: Garry Moore. For the better part of 40 years, Moore was on network radio and then television regularly, claiming that he was always himself because he lacked the talent to be anything else. That in itself took talent. Ed McMahon, who hosted and announced television programs for half a century, once said of him, “He just made the

audience feel comfortable, as if they were with an old friend.” A production aide said of Moore that “his greatness was his ability to communicate an honesty and genuine respect for his audience.” Moore summarized it: “I was an everyman.”

Born in Baltimore on January 31, 1915, Thomas Garrison Morfit was a teenager when he started performing at dances and in variety shows, wrote humor columns for his school newspaper, and performed in a troupe that won the attention of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who apparently invited him to help write a musical (they failed). Morfit slipped scripts under the door of WBAL Radio and then, his son recalled, ran home after school to find out whether his jokes made it on the air. In 1934, he joined WBAL as a \$25 a week writer, beginning an apprenticeship common at the time. “You got into all sorts of things. You wrote mysteries, shows, advertising, spot announcements. I wrote the jokes for a daily one-hour variety show. It was emceed by an ex-vaudevillian brought down from New York,” he said. “And then, just like a bad ‘B’ movie, he got ill one day and the station manager came to me and said, ‘Listen, you’ve been writing this junk. You may as well get up there and read it.’ The emcee turned out to be terminally ill and I inherited the job.” Then, he said, “After I’d been there about 2 1/2 years, I guess, I began looking around for other pastures where I could be an actor, or at least something more important than an entertainer. I sent demo

discs around to several radio stations, and one of them was KWK in St. Louis.” The station hired him to announce special events because of his talent for ad-libbing.

But the young announcer soon wound up doing more of the same. “Then they decided that they wanted an afternoon variety show just like the one I had fled in Baltimore. They told me they wanted me to do it and I told them I wasn’t very good at it. They said ‘That’s not what we hear from Baltimore.’ The program they gave me had the magnificent name of ‘Mid-Afternoon Madness,’” he said. His break came when an NBC executive from Chicago heard his show and requested a demo record, “which I did, and the next thing I know, I’m on a network show based in Chicago, much to my surprise. And I’m still doing this thing I thought I was no good at, but I thought, ‘Well, if they want to pay me this much money to do something I don’t think I do very well, why should I argue?’” The show, called *Club Matinee*, based in Chicago, held a contest to “Name the Morfit,” since his name seemed difficult to say. A Pittsburgh woman won \$50 by suggesting “Garry Moore.”

Moore’s leap forward in network radio came three years later. He and Jimmy Durante appeared separately on a variety show. According to Moore, a producer thought they were “such a contrast. Because I was maybe 27 at the time and Jimmy would have been 47. I was kind of young and brash, a little bit on the preppy side .... And Jimmy was Jimmy .... The

contrast between the two characters would make an interesting theme.” They filled in for Abbott and Costello when the latter became ill and wound up with their own program. Durante would, as he was known for doing, mangle the English language, and Moore would sound mellifluous and erudite, prompting Durante to exclaim, “Dat’s my boy dat said dat.” Their show aired for four years before Moore left to try to carve out a solo career. After working in Los Angeles, he went to New York in September 1949 for a daily radio show for CBS.

In 1950, Moore started a daily evening show on CBS that then moved to the afternoon and aired for eight years. His first hire was former *Club Matinee* cast member, Durward Kirby, whose height—6’4”—contrasted with Moore’s 5’6”, and who was open to participating in just about any sketch imaginable. Singers Denise Lor and Ken Carson completed the cast. Moore’s guests varied from an 80-year-old former buffalo hunter to Frank Lloyd Wright and the von Trapp Family. On his live afternoon show, Moore did everything from bouncing on a trampoline and playing with animals to being flipped in a ju-jitsu demonstration.

In 1952, Moore added a prime-time program. Game show producers Mark Goodson and Bill Todman had struck gold with *What’s My Line?* in which a panel tried to guess a guest’s occupation. Comedy writers Allan Sherman and Howard Merrill suggested a

show in which a panel guesses a guest's secret. Goodson and Todman replied that would be stealing their own idea. Sherman shot back, "You might as well, because if you don't start copying your shows, somebody else will." The result, *I've Got A Secret*, debuted that June 19, with Moore as host. While *What's My Line?* was more formal, with the host and panel members in eveningwear, *I've Got A Secret* evolved into more of a variety show, with the weekly celebrity guest not actually having a secret but his or her presence serving as an excuse for some sort of gag, ranging from secrets like David Niven sitting on a block of ice to Ronald Reagan's secret being that every time a panelist said a certain word, he would get up, leave, come back, and start the game over.

Moore's genial demeanor was crucial to the show's success. It took a few episodes for the producers to figure out the ideal panel: the curmudgeonly Henry Morgan, the pleasant Bill Cullen, and two female panelists—first, Jayne Meadows and Faye Emerson, and later Betsy Palmer and former Miss America Bess Myerson; the latter two remained with Cullen and Morgan until the show went off in 1967. In turn, Moore continued, as he did on his afternoon show, to be part of the action, subjecting himself to magic tricks and demonstrations. The show ranked in the top 30 for 10 of its 15 seasons and popped up, with the full panel, in the Doris Day-Jack Lemmon film *It Happened to Jane* in 1959.

In 1958, Moore gave up his daytime show for a prime-time variety show that September. Satirical sketches used a nail file rather than a blade, perhaps because his writers included Neil Simon, Buck Henry, and Woody Allen. "That Wonderful Year" spotlighted songs, events, and fashions of a particular year. Another segment featured Allen Funt's "Candid Camera," with Moore and Kirby participating in stunts; before long, it became a separate program. Moore said his goal was "to project the spirit of nice people having a good time. And the secret sometimes is more in what you don't do than in what you do do. We don't do insult humor, sick humor, blue material or shady jokes."

Out of generosity and necessity, Moore believed in nurturing young talent. The necessity involved limited budgets and time to fill. Jonathan Winters and Barbra Streisand are among the performers who racked up considerable time on his shows. The generosity became obvious in the career of someone he mentored much as Durante taught him: Carol Burnett. On two days' notice, she filled in during the first season of his prime-time variety show, and Moore invited her to be a regular. "I can never say enough about his kindness, his smarts, and his generosity. Many times when we were rehearsing a sketch, if Garry had a funny line he would turn it down, saying, 'Give this to Durward or Carol—they can deliver it better than I can,'" Burnett said. "There was no such thing as a big ego where

this man was concerned. Working with him provided me with an amazing education—and I had a helluva good time, too.”

Moore also came across as the modest, pleasant person others described him as being. He told an interviewer, “It can be very dangerous having such a well-known face. When you go into restaurants, you’re likely to get preferential treatment. When you go out some place, they clear the way for you. And pretty soon you get to believe that you deserve it.” Accordingly, his family continued to use the name Morfit, and he spent his weekends one of two ways: when he was not on his 40-foot ocean sloop, he said he was in bed reading.

Moore obviously could be, as one observer wrote, “square,” but “if Moore was a square, he was one with integrity.” In 1955, asked to host a new game show, *The \$64,000 Question*, he declined, saying, “I don’t want to be involved in a demonstration of mass greed,” and, “at that price, some backstage hanky-panky would creep in.” He was right: the show’s fixed results became part of the quiz show scandals of the late 1950s. A religious group tried to honor him and he declined, saying that as a non-churchgoer, he would feel hypocritical if he accepted such an award. He looked into doing more news and public-affairs, but CBS had little interest: not only was Moore a profit center for the network, but with a news division with Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, Moore was unnecessary. Yet he offered a comment worth pondering as

broadcast news has changed for better and (mostly) worse: “You should never underestimate the intelligence of the audience but you should never overestimate its knowledge either. Any idea ever conceived by man can be explained to anybody if you don’t insist on being stuffy about it.” In 1976, Moore joined more than 50 prominent people—ranging from Dick Van Dyke to Buzz Aldrin and Representative Wilbur Mills—who publicly called themselves recovering alcoholics; Moore called it “a great step forward.” Indeed, he believed in the importance of believability: his afternoon show proved so popular with advertisers that CBS advertised three different products every 15 minutes, prompting Moore to say, “You’re being asked to recommend it to your friends, the viewers. If the product doesn’t live up to the sponsor’s claims, you have two choices: you demand that the sponsor reduce his claims to fit the facts, or, failing that, you don’t accept the product as an advertiser .... How can one guy possibly know thoroughly about 60 different products ... and still have time to worry about his real product: the entertainment content of the show? The tail was wagging the dog into insensibility, so I called it a daytime.”

Moore’s Baltimore upbringing seemed unlikely to make him a liberal on racial issues, but in fact he was. Harry Belafonte made some of his early television appearances on Moore’s shows. One of his staff recalled that when CBS fired his daytime show’s African American

janitor for moonlighting, Moore climbed the corporate ladder until the janitor had been rehired. When Moore took his daytime show to Florida in 1957, he demanded that two African-American members of the production staff have the same accommodations as everybody else. Numerous African American entertainers appeared as guests during his tenure, which ended shortly before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, on *I've Got a Secret*, over which Moore had influence as the host and, after 1959, the co-owner of the show.

Moore demonstrated both loyalty and a commitment to what was right. As producer Mark Goodson remembered it:

*I've Got A Secret* got a new sponsor, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, with its advertising agency, William Este. When they came aboard, someone from the agency called me and said, "Please get rid of Henry Morgan," one of the regular panelists on the show. Morgan had been named in *Red Channels*. I had known Henry for a long time; he was one of those young curmudgeons who was acidic at times, but he was by no means a Communist ....

So I went to Garry Moore, the MC of the show and an established comedian. He was a conservative, a Republican from Maryland. I knew that he liked Morgan. I said that if he'd be willing to back me up, I'd tell the

agency I'd do the show without a sponsor. He agreed without hesitation. I phoned up William Este and said, "We're not going to do the show without Henry." The people at the agency were flabbergasted. It was virtually unheard-of to have this kind of confrontation. They told me they'd think about it, and in the end, they actually backed down ....

Moore had another encounter with the sponsor over Morgan, who said,

"One night I was doing my own local TV show and, in lighting a cigarette, I remarked that I was creating my own cancer. It didn't occur to me, of course, that 'Secret' was sponsored by Winston ..... But it did occur to a viewer, a well-wisher who got in touch with Winston-Salem so fast that they fired me at dawn. Garry flew down to North Carolina and talked them out of it. What can you do with a guy like that? More to the point, what can you do without him?"

Morgan soon would find out. In 1964, Moore's variety show ended. The stories differ: that Moore decided it had gone on long enough and that CBS canceled it. But Moore had taken stock and left *I've Got A Secret* as well. He said that he was quitting television because he had "said everything I ever wanted to say three

times already.” He spent a year sailing around the world but returned to find himself bored. He tried another prime-time show but it lasted less than a season.

Then, in 1969, Moore made a comeback. Seeking a younger demographic, CBS had canceled three prime-time Goodson-Todman game shows: *What’s My Line?*, *I’ve Got A Secret*, and *To Tell the Truth*. When *Line* succeeded as a daily syndicated show, the company brought back *To Tell the Truth*. Goodson and Todman turned to Moore, who returned to daily television. *To Tell the Truth* required fewer demonstrations, and thus less danger, to Moore, who still dealt with a variety of animals, children, and products. His ease with panelists Bill Cullen, Peggy Cass, and Kitty Carlisle and cordiality toward guests made for a relaxed atmosphere.

But Morgan actually predicted what happened next. On *I’ve Got A Secret*, Moore averaged three cigarettes per 30-minute show. By the time *To Tell the Truth* aired, knowledge of the dangers of smoking had reduced its appearance on television and Moore went along, although the bulge from a pack was visible in his pocket and he occasionally was caught smoking as the show came out of a commercial break. In 1976, diagnosed with cancer of the pharynx, he decided to retire. Cullen and Joe Garagiola substituted as host, with no explanation to viewers.

In June 1977, the show's producer convinced Moore that he should leave his retirement to say goodbye. He returned for the first show of the fall season to a long ovation. With his voice slightly gravelly, he began, "It's delightful to be back even for just this one day," oversaw one game, then reminisced with the panel, including Garagiola, the new host. Moore said doctors had found a "no-no" in his throat, a surgeon "practiced his needlepoint," and he was just fine. As for his sabbatical while he recovered, "for a while we thought it would be temporary," but coming back again after 43 years of broadcasting would be "greedy," so he retired. Perhaps the death of his first wife in 1974 and his remarriage to an old friend the following year had an impact. He said, "I'm doing all the things I used to do. I sail, I snorkel, and yesterday I knocked over a little old lady with my skateboard." He continued to move between his homes in Maine and Hilton Head, South Carolina, writing for a local publication and giving time to local charities. He appeared for a tribute to Burnett in 1985 and explained, "I had been around the track so many times, I didn't feel uncomfortable about retiring. Also, I had a cancer operation on my throat and my mouth, as a result of which I talk like I'm stoned all the time, which, I assure you, I am not. But I figured that when you quit, you ought to quit .... After I retired, I kept getting calls from *The Love Boat* to come out there and do a show ... but they always had what I called the formaldehyde corner .... When they came on, instead of the audience saying, "Isn't

it great to see him again?” They’d say, “My God, what happened to him?” So, Moore enjoyed retirement until he died of emphysema on November 28, 1993, at age 78.

Moore’s honors included Emmy Awards and, in 1970, the Peabody Award. The citation read, “To be effective in communicating directly with peoples of the world, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of its listeners. Even-handed, factual reporting of world news, and public affairs programming in music, literature, science, lectures, and documentaries on the American scene achieve these goals. This citation particularly honors the selfless contribution of Garry Moore, who gives of his notable talents, experience, and knowledge, weekly on VOA’s *New York, New York*, a kaleidoscope of our nation reflected through the prisms of New York City, its people and its visitors.” He became known for his charitable work, including active roles with the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults and the National Hospital for Speech Disorders, and for setting aside time on his radio and television shows for various public service announcements.

Moore set no particular records as a host or made a controversial impression. That was as he liked it. He was modest enough to say of himself that reruns made him “the oldest living thing on public exhibition,” and modest and confident enough about his abilities to share the stage with a legendary and legendarily outgoing vaudevillian like Durante and younger

entertainers he encouraged to upstage him. He belonged to an era in which more radio and television performers grasped that being invited into people's homes, then a newer phenomenon, required them to act like good guests in their own right. As Tom Shales, the longtime television critic for *The Washington Post*, wrote upon Moore's death, "he was always a guest as well as a host—a guest in all the homes that were tuned in. a more affable, better-behaved guest you could not ask for .... He was not an awe-inspiring superstar or temperamental artiste; he was the guy next door, except that this was the new electronic 'next door' reached via the TV screen." If the media and the role of those appearing in and on them have changed, and they have, it has been the result in part of success. Garry Moore is among those who should be remembered as one who made that success possible.

## **Does This Make Me Look Fat?: Character Body Size and Viewer Self Image**

By Emily Acosta-Lewis,  
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Many factors, such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, culture, and individual psychology have been offered as explanations to individuals' dissatisfaction with their body. However media exposure and consumption have been the most widely studied and arguably the most influential of all known predictors to body dissatisfaction (Spurgas, 2005). Past research suggests that media conveys an ideal female and male body and can thus negatively impact many people's attitudes toward their body. As a result, some individuals subsequently partake in unhealthy and often dangerous behavior. Indeed, the image of the ideal woman portrayed in entertainment media over the past five decades has gotten thinner in the waist and

hips and larger in the bust. Similarly, the image of the ideal man has become more lean and muscular. At the same time, the prevalence of eating disorders and cosmetic surgery is at an all-time high (Harrison, 2003; Law & Labre, 1999). Past research has suggested that the amount and type of TV programming watched as well as magazines read can be detrimental to body image satisfaction, and can lead to eating disorders and plastic surgery (Harrison, 2003; Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to examine the media's potential negative effect on appearance importance by taking a slightly different approach from previous research. My goal is to look at these potential effects in emerging adulthood as opposed to adolescence or adulthood, the focus of most of previous research. As I will discuss cultivation has been put forward as one of the most compelling explanation for the link between TV and negative body image. Based on insights from social comparison theory and social cognitive theory, I will argue that individuals who have a favorite character with a body that fits the "ideal" type (i.e. the thin ideal for females and the muscular ideal for males), will place more importance on appearance for themselves, place more importance on appearance for their romantic partners, and also be more likely to want to get cosmetic procedures. The focus on emerging adults for

this study allows for an examination during a unique developmental period consisting of identity exploration. In order to follow up on research stressing gender differences, I also tested potential differences in males and females. Favorite TV character traits and other media use variables (TV exposure and magazine readership) were included to explore the potential the linkage with appearance importance, importance of partner's appearance and likelihood of getting cosmetic procedures. In sum, this study built on previous research on media and body image by examining whether cultivation or TV character identification will have a greater impact on appearance importance among emerging adults.

### **What are Emerging Adulthood and Appearance Importance?**

Although one of this study's construct of interest was appearance importance, it is important to discuss a more general and related construct often put forward in the literature, body image. According to the Merriam-Webster medical dictionary, body image refers to a subjective picture of one's own physical appearance (Pease, 2006). A person with a negative body image sees a discrepancy between current and ideal body types. A person with a positive body image sees consistency between current and ideal body types (Cash & Strachan, 1999).

Arnett (2000) proposed that emerging adulthood is a period where people are not constrained by social roles or normative expectations and are exploring possible future life directions. This is a culturally constructed developmental period, between adolescence and adulthood, when one is independent, discovering one's self-identity, and making decisions that will affect the rest of one's life. The need for this new group is because of trends in behavior, such as more young adults attending college and graduate school and entering the workforce, marrying, and having children at a later age. Emerging adults are likely to be vulnerable to sources of negative body image that can cause increased appearance importance. Results of a study on emerging adults and body image found that identity exploration was related to higher levels of negative body image (Mccourt, 2004). This developmental stage is therefore well-suited to explore media effects on appearance importance and cosmetic procedural likelihood, which is the purpose of the present study.

Since there is no published research examining what might impact appearance importance of emerging adults, my literature review will focus on body image research done with young people (aged 13-30), with a special focus on research conducted with adolescents. Since those in emerging adulthood are still exploring their self-identity and looking for

relevant information, this developmental period is seen by many as an extension of the exploration period that begins in adolescence (Mccourt, 2004). However, one could argue that this period is even more exploratory than adolescence because one is free of parental constraints.

### **Can Media Influence Appearance Importance?**

Media images seem to suggest that the thin female ideal and male muscular ideal have increasingly become accepted in today's society. In an early study, Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly (1986) conducted content analyses of portrayals on popular TV shows and in magazines. They concluded that on TV, females were more likely to be thin (69% vs. 18%) and less likely to be fat (5% vs. 30%) than males. In fact, women on TV have become thinner (Silverstein et al., 1986). A content analysis of situational comedies aired during 1996 and 1997 concluded that below average weight female characters were overrepresented while above average weight characters were underrepresented (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). For magazines, a similar pattern arises such that as of 1980, the mean bust-to-waist ratio of female models in popular women's magazines had decreased to one third of the value that it was in the early 1900s and the mean bust-to-waist ratio for movie

actresses had also decreased steadily (Silverstein et al., 1986).

For young women, body image satisfaction generally relates to being thin and appearance while for young men, it might be related to being thin and muscular (Botta, 2003; Hatoum & Belle, 2004). This could imply that men and women's body image are not influenced by the same factors. In sum, research examining the relationship between gender and body image, more particularly for the 18-25 age group, has produced conflicting results.

**Cultivation theory.** So what are the effects of a predominance of thin characters on TV on viewers' appearance importance, more particularly in the young adult cohort? According to cultivation theory, viewers might believe that thin is the norm. Cultivation theory argues that media representations are distorted views of reality and those who are heavy TV viewers are more likely than light viewers to perceive reality consistent with televisions' distortions (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). The cultivation effect is cumulative and increased exposure over time will lead to viewers' perception of a reality more closely reflecting the reality on TV. Fiji is a country that had very low rates of disordered eating behavior and body dissatisfaction prior to the introduction of

a single TV channel, which broadcasted American, British, and Australian programming. Three years after the introduction of TV, the rates of disordered eating behaviors tripled, body dissatisfaction swelled to 74%, and dieting increased to 69% among adolescent females who had televisions in their household (Becker, Burwell, Herzong, Hamburg, & Gilman, 2002). Some scholars claimed that this Fiji case exemplified the cultivation effects of TV.

Cultivation has been used to explain attitudes of Americans toward body image, such that viewing body ideals in the media distorts the view of how one should look, which may make one feel that he or she should emulate the ideal body and place more importance on appearance. A study showed that female adolescents who watch more TV with idealized body images possess lower self-esteem (Morrison et al., 2004). Light TV viewers are affected by cultivation effects as well, though indirectly, by interacting with those who are heavy TV viewers (Morrison et al., 2004). Some scholars have argued against the cultivation hypothesis, and have claimed that there is no overall effect of TV viewing. Rather, the negative effects of TV on body image are specific to the content being viewed. A study among adolescent females showed that overall TV viewing did not predict body dissatisfaction or drive for thinness, but that the amount of

time watching specific content, such as soap operas, negatively affected body image (Harrison & Cantor, 1997).

Although intuitively appealing, cultivation effects on body ideals has not been demonstrated consistently and cannot be tested with a true control group in a real-world setting, and hence the theory is widely debated. The question remains if simple exposure to TV entertainment can be linked to body dissatisfaction among the 18-25 year old or whether the effect is content specific (Harrison, 2003; Morrison et al., 2004).

### **How Can Identification with Favorite TV Character Influence Body Image?**

***Social comparison theory.*** An alternative explanation for a relationship between media use and appearance importance is social comparison theory, which states that individuals have a need to compare themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison proposes that individuals have a need to look to outside sources in order to evaluate their own opinions and abilities (Festinger, 1954). The original direction of the theory was that people generally look to similar others to evaluate their progress, because similar others are most relevant. However, the theory also proposes that there may be situations in which individuals compare themselves to dissimilar others – either those

performing better or those performing worse. The direction of the comparison is particularly important for attitudinal outcomes. “Downward” comparisons involve comparing self to someone who is worse off in a certain respect (in the case of body image, believed to be less attractive or more overweight), which may increase well-being (Holmstrom, 2004). “Upward” comparisons involve comparing self to someone who is believed to be better off in some aspect (in the case of body image, believed to be more attractive or thinner) which may damage well-being (Morrison et al., 2004). In many cases, individuals perform these comparisons without being conscious of it.

Research has tested social comparison theory with adolescent females by using an extensive list of questions related to upward comparison of self to media images, and questions related to body satisfaction, disordered eating habits, and approval of the thin ideal. It was shown that media variables accounted for 15% of the variance in drive for thinness, 17% in body dissatisfaction, 16% in bulimic behaviors, and 33% in the thin ideal endorsement (Botta, 1999). Results indicated that making comparisons with media image predicted body image disturbance (Botta, 1999). A study on male and female adolescents found that comparison to targets predicted appearance self-esteem, number of diets to gain weight, use of pathogenic weight

control practices and steroids to increase muscle mass for males and appearance self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, number of diets to lose weight, and use of pathogenic weight control practices for females (Morrison et al., 2004). Similar research looked at undergraduate females' interpersonal attraction to media personalities and found that attraction to thin media personalities positively predicted eating disorder symptomatology and drive for thinness, while attraction to average or overweight did not (Harrison, 1997).

This study fills a gap in research on media effects and body image by using social comparison theory as a theoretical framework to investigate the potential effects of TV, specifically favorite TV character, on emerging adults' appearance importance, rather than focusing on adolescents or adults. Additionally, other research that examines social comparison theory and body image has coded TV programs that are watched by viewers for ideal body content, and asked directly whether respondents compare themselves to people on TV (Morrison et al., 2004). I believe that people will not readily admit to such comparisons and I also assume that when viewing TV, people will likely compare themselves with characters portrayed on TV, most likely their favorite one. It is unclear the way that these comparisons will affect appearance importance.

Based on previous research looking at social comparison processes with thin media representations (Botta, 1999; Harrison, 1997; Morrison et al., 2004), one can assume that young adults who have a favorite character who is underweight will place more importance on appearance than those whose favorite character is of average weight. The latter are likely not to feel very different from their favorite character who is representative of the average body, while the former are more likely to perceive they do not the norm. I therefore predicted that compared to emerging adults whose favorite character is average weight, those who have an underweight favorite character will place more importance on appearance.

According to a meta-analysis of media and body image, TV's portrayal of overweight women may have a positive effect on women's body image (Holmstrom, 2004). This would be a type of a downward comparison, such that people think that they are better than the overweight actor or actress and consequently feel better about their appearance.

The way media representations may affect importance of a partner's weight and attractiveness has not been researched. Since, presumably, people will compare themselves to their favorite TV character; this may affect how they subsequently evaluate their romantic

partners. Therefore I predicted that compared to emerging adults whose favorite character is average weight, those who have an underweight favorite character will place more importance on their partner's appearance.

### **What are Potential Consequences of Excessive Appearance Importance?**

According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (2015), in the United States, 80% of women are dissatisfied with their appearance and nearly eight million have eating disorders. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2013), there were nearly 15 million cosmetic procedures done in the previous year. The extent to which this can be linked to body dissatisfaction as related to media is an interesting question. The negative effects of heightened appearance importance related to media have been empirically tested mostly with adolescents. Outcomes include decreased self-confidence and assertiveness, extreme attitudes about dieting and exercise, thin ideal endorsements, and drive for thinness (Spurgas, 2005). Increased appearance importance can also lead to unhealthy and unsafe activities since people who have high levels of body dissatisfaction are more likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors and to approve of and get cosmetic surgeries (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Emerging adults are at risk for negative behaviors as part of

their identity exploration which is vital to this developmental period.

One study showed that the more female undergraduates were exposed to media with a high proportion of thin ideal body images, the greater their likelihood of trying to manage their weight through behaviors which are characteristic of anorexia and bulimia, such as skipping meals and taking laxatives (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw & Stein, 1994). More particularly, a survey of high school females illustrated that restricting caloric intake and taking diet pills was influenced by reading beauty and fashion magazines (Thomsen, Weber, & Brown, 2002). Similarly, results of an experiment indicated that adolescent females had increased eating disorder symptoms with increased exposure to fashion magazines while females with decreased symptomatology had significantly decreased their exposure to fashion magazines and TV (Vaughan & Fouts, 2003).

**Social cognitive theory.** Social cognitive theory provides some explanation in outcomes of negative body image and increased appearance importance. The theory asserts that observing behaviors, attitudes, and emotions that are rewarded will be learned while behaviors that are punished will not be learned (Bandura, 1977). For instance, a content analysis of sitcoms indicated that

thinner female characters received more positive comments than heavier female characters and heavier characters received more negative comments than thinner female characters (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). According to social cognitive theory, the audience will learn that being thin leads to rewards while being overweight leads to punishment. Another potential consequence of exposure to the thin ideal represented in the media is increased approval of body alteration methods and increased future likelihood of getting a cosmetic procedure for young adults (Harrison, 2003).

In sum, research has consistently linked the idealized depictions of women in the media to the mainstreaming of cosmetic surgery (Harrison, 2003). Therefore, I predicted that compared to emerging adults whose favorite character is average weight, those who have an underweight favorite character will be more likely to want to get cosmetic procedures.

### **Summary of Methods and Results**

Participants in this study were randomly selected from motor vehicle and voter registration records for potential jury duty in Arizona. The response rate was approximately 70% with a total of 948 adults filling out the questionnaire. In this study 179 emerging adults were included in the sample of respondents (those with an age range from 18

to 25 years old). In order to test my hypotheses, I used hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model in the analysis, in which the independent variables were entered in blocks according to their assumed casual order.

The overall regression model predicting appearance importance accounted for 26.5% of the variance in the dependent variable. Confirmed by the analyses, compared to those who had an average weight favorite character, those who had an underweight favorite character placed more importance on appearance ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The overall regression model predicting partner appearance importance accounted for 13.5% of the variance. According to the data, compared to emerging adults whose favorite character is average weight, those who have an underweight favorite character ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) place significantly more importance on their partner's appearance. The regression model predicting likelihood of cosmetic procedures accounted for 32.5% of the total variance. The data indicated that compared to emerging adults whose favorite character is of average weight, those who have an underweight favorite character ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ), will be more likely to want to get a cosmetic procedure.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the media's potential negative influence on appearance importance, by taking a somewhat different approach from previous research. My goal was to look at these effects in emerging adults as opposed to adolescents or adults. In particular, this study used insights from social comparison theory, cultivation theory, and looked at the relationship between an individual's favorite TV character and the importance the viewer attributed to his or her appearance. As predicted, comparing the self with one's favorite character seems to be a more valuable explanation for the relationship between media use and appearance importance, than the cultivation hypothesis put forward. It was also found that character identification was a more successful predictor of partner's appearance importance and cosmetic procedural likelihood.

The effect of gender in the partner appearance importance model was not significant, when controlling for media variables, which was somewhat surprising based on previous research. Gender was significant in the partner appearance importance and procedural likelihood models, such that males are more concerned with partner's appearance and females are more likely to want to get cosmetic procedures. Both of these make sense intuitively, especially as

many cosmetic procedures are female focused.

The most compelling and consistent finding of this study is that having an underweight favorite character is related to increased appearance importance, partner's appearance importance, and likelihood of getting cosmetic procedures in emerging adults. This suggests that social comparison processes are at work and that one's favorite character negatively affects the way that one views the self and others. Although, without longitudinal data, we cannot argue that there is a causal relationship between appearance importance, partner's appearance importance, procedural likelihood and media, this study does point to a noteworthy relationship. Consequently, by placing more importance on appearance, an emerging adult might be less satisfied with his or her body. This might explain why upward comparing to an underweight character also causes one to be more likely to want to get a cosmetic procedure. It should be noted appearance importance is not statistically significant in the final cosmetic procedural model, and appears to be mediated by the TV use variables.

Similarly, favoring an underweight character was significantly related to placing more importance on partner's appearance importance. Importance of partner's

appearance is also significant in the final model of cosmetic procedural likelihood, such that increased partner appearance importance is related to increased procedural likelihood. An emerging adult, who holds his or her partner's up to higher standards, might reflect more on how others look and therefore may think more about how he or she can alter his or her body to look better. Although having an overweight favorite character was not significantly related to appearance importance, partner's appearance importance, or likelihood to get cosmetic procedures, this could be because there are few truly overweight characters on TV or that overweight characters are not used as comparison targets. Future research can examine this idea experimentally or use a larger sample of emerging adults to find more people who do have overweight favorite characters on TV. Other characteristics of TV characters, such as attractiveness and likeability, could be examined in future research to determine which character traits exemplify the social comparison process and how these traits affect appearance importance and other potential outcomes of social comparison.

In sum, this research offers important insights on how emerging adults may be affected by media images as they relate to importance given to one's appearance and partner's appearance, and one's likelihood to

get cosmetic procedures. More specifically, that character identification is more influential than a cultivation effect of TV exposure. In particular, this study shows that traits of one's favorite TV character may be important in social comparison processes and a key determinant of the importance emerging adults place on their appearance and partner's appearance, and likelihood of cosmetic procedures. Social comparison with favorite TV character is more important than the cumulative cultivation effect of media in predicting importance of own and partner's appearance, and likelihood of cosmetic procedures.

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**Nostalgia Four Ways: Mid-Century  
Hollywood's Representation of the  
Automobile  
in Turn-of-the-Century Small-Town America**  
By Linda A. Robinson

In scholarship on nostalgia in popular culture, there has been little recognition that purportedly “nostalgic” texts vary widely in tone, content, and representation of the past – and even in their positioning of the past vis-à-vis the present – and consequently in the way in which they engage with their intended audience.<sup>1</sup> Here I demonstrate this variety by

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996; Stephanie Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001; Ann Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998; Linda Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern.” <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>; Paul Monaco, *Ribbons in Time: Movies and Society Since*

tracing the way in which four mid-twentieth-century films with a single “nostalgic” setting – small-town America at the turn of the last century – represent a single object – the automobile. Thus, I illuminate the differences in how these films construct their “nostalgic” effect and, indeed, the variety in the type of nostalgic “comfort” they offered their mid-century audiences at different points in a ten-year period. Released at the outset of America’s involvement in World War II, the 1942 film *The Magnificent Ambersons* is an overtly nostalgic film in which the coming of the automobile symbolizes a distinctly expressed loss of a yearned-for pre-industrial way of life, *explicitly* inviting its audience to mourn its passing. In contrast, 1944’s *Meet Me in St. Louis*, by omitting the automobile altogether and expressing ambivalence toward other new technology, presents this past moment as one artificially frozen in time just before modernity’s takeover. Thus, its elevation of its imaginary “good” past over the “bad” present is *implicit*, achieved by eliminating any modern dissonance in its idealized construction of the “home fires” to which the nation would be returning with the end of World War II.

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1945. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987; Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1993; Stuart Tannock, “Nostalgia Critique.” *Cultural Studies* 9 (1995): 453-464.

In the post-war films *Summer Holiday* (1948) and *Excuse My Dust* (1951), however, the automobile symbolizes the exhilarating future of the turn-of-the-century small town, replacing any sense of loss or distance with a merging of the past into the present. In these latter films, the turn-of-the-century small town becomes a place not so different from present-day America – or as one striving mightily to eliminate any difference there was. Here, the “good” past/“bad” present construction is inverted; the present is elevated over the films’ period setting, and their nostalgic “comfort” is the reassurance of having achieved the technological success our forebears sought; we have become what they only aspired to be.

In the mid-twentieth century, at the time these films were produced, the turn-of-the-century small town served as the quintessentially nostalgic object. It exists, in Stuart Tannock’s three-part conception of nostalgia, in a pre-lapsarian past separated from the post-lapsarian present by the definite break of World War I, an obvious dividing line between the predominantly rural life that had characterized the United States since its founding and twentieth-century modernity. Indeed, in the first half of the twentieth century, the popular perception of the American small town in the decades immediately before and after the year 1900 was largely of the “good old days” in a universally beloved “home town” – in

short, the site of America's lost innocence, a time and place as yet untouched by modernity, and hence offering a stability and serenity life now lacked. For instance, in his memoir of his 1890s small-town boyhood, published in the 1930s, Henry Canby referred to the turn of the century as "the last era in the United States when there was a pause, and everyone, at least in my town, knew what it meant to be an American" (258). His town was "a unity, indissoluble and unchangeable," and "[t]here has been no such certainty in American life since" (314).

In reality, of course, life in the turn-of-the-century small-town was never the pure and untroubled existence subsequent popular imagination painted it to be; moreover, these decades, far from being stable, were a time of unprecedented technological and sociological change. In short, this was a moment on the cusp between the nation's original predominantly rural and horse-based lifestyle and the industrialized, mechanized, and predominantly urban lifestyle of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During these pivotal decades, the American small town was similarly on the cusp, poised between the isolated, self-sufficient community it had been since its inception and its position as a link in a nationwide, interconnected technological web.

Thus, the turn-of-the-century small town has a particularly Janus quality in that it simultaneously looked backward toward the pre-industrial past and forward toward modernity. The four Hollywood films examined here were all uniformly described in the popular discourse of the time – publicity materials, trade press, and reviews – as “nostalgic” films valorizing the lost days of the “true” American hometown. The turn-of-the-century small town’s Janus positioning, however, made it particularly well-suited to produce, in fact, multiple “nostalgias,” as illustrated by these films’ representation and use of the automobile.

In the post-war period, in fact, the automobile began to have an impact on the American countryside – and on conceptions of time, travel, and distance – similar to the impact it had had at the turn of the century. As recorded in such works as the Lynds’ study of Muncie, Indiana, the automobile was, at the least, the one innovation of the pre-World War I transitional era whose effect on small-town life was the most immediately visible. Between 1895 and 1929, the increased mobility and independence offered by the automobile affected adolescence and courtship rituals,

even as it spurred the paving of small-town streets and caused multiple changes in, for example, retail and shopping practices and in municipal housing and growth patterns (Lynd & Lynd; Francaviglia). Fifty years later, the automobile again served a key material and symbolic role in transitions occurring in post-war America. Automobile production having been suspended during the war, demand for new cars was high once the war ended; this demand dovetailed with government and industry efforts to stave off post-war recession by promoting consumer spending on American-made goods, thus encouraging Americans to spend the savings they had accumulated during the war when the combination of low unemployment and austerity measures meant that nearly everyone had income but there was little to buy. The pervasiveness of the automobile in turn contributed to the growth of the suburb, with its attendant shift in retail and entertainment activity from downtown to outlying areas, and was, of course, the justification for the national interstate highway system. Moreover, its mobility and visibility, as well as the aesthetic appeal and technological innovation emphasized in industry marketing, made the

automobile one of the most prominent symbols of post-war status and material success.

From *The Magnificent Ambersons*, released in 1942, through the 1951 film, *Excuse My Dust*, the automobile is transformed from an unwelcome harbinger of modernity and urbanization to a glorious symbol of progress and sophistication; it serves as well as the marker by which the gaze of the American small town in these films is shifted from the past to the future, from what is being lost with the coming of new technology to what is being gained. It is a progression as well from a truly “nostalgic” portrait of the turn-of-the-century small town – in the sense of a longing for a lost time – to the post-war construction of the turn-of-the-century small town as a place eager to be left behind, and as thematically, narratively, and visually *aligned with* rather than contrasted to the mid-century America of its audience.

Orson Welles’ *The Magnificent Ambersons* was released during the first year of the United States’ involvement in World War II, a time of uncertainty in which the Allies’ ultimate victory was by no means guaranteed. The film was based on Booth Tarkington’s novel of the same name, a work awash in memory and loss. In both the novel and the

film, the Amberson family's fall from its position of wealth and social prominence proceeds inversely to their town's development into a city, both of which are presented as distinct losses. A sense of a remembered lost time and place is conveyed in part through Welles' voice-over narration describing, for instance, the Amberson ball as "the last of the great, long-remembered dances that everybody talked about," held at a time when the upper classes, at least, "had time enough for everything."

The primary means by which the film conveys its dual narrative arcs – the Ambersons' decline and the town's becoming a city – is transportation. The film begins with a long shot of a multi-storied Victorian home; in a lengthy single take, pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles leisurely pass in front of the house, while a lilting waltz plays on the soundtrack. A horse-drawn streetcar enters the frame and stops when a woman calls from an upstairs window to flag it down. She then emerges from the house to board. Simultaneously, Welles' narration is heard:

The magnificence of the Ambersons began in 1873. Their splendor lasted through all the years that saw their

midland town spread and darken into a city. In that town and in those days, all the women who wore silk or velvet knew all the other women who wore silk or velvet. . . . The only public conveyance was the streetcar. A lady could whistle to it from an upstairs window, and the car would halt at once and wait for her, while she shut the window, put on her hat and coat, went downstairs, found an umbrella, told the girl what to have for dinner, and came forth from the house. Too slow for us nowadays, because the faster we're carried, the less time we have to spare.

In contrast, one of the last sequences in the film is a montage of tracking, low-angle shots of industrial plants, warehouses, run-down frame houses and apartment buildings, power lines, and an overhead sign reading, "Automobiles Slow," all shown from George Minafer's point of view on his "last walk home." Eerie, unsettling music plays under Welles' voice-over:

George Amberson Minafer walked  
homeward slowly through what

seemed to be the strange streets of a strange city. For the town was growing and changing. It was heaving up in the middle, incredibly. It was spreading, incredibly. And as it heaved and spread, it befouled itself and darkened its sky. This was the last walk home he was ever to take up National Avenue to Amberson Addition and the big old house at the foot of Amberson Boulevard. Tomorrow they were to move out. Tomorrow everything would be gone.

Two scenes later, George is struck by an automobile. The low-angle shot of the accident's aftermath is overcrowded – stretcher bearers carrying George offscreen, the automobile's driver, a policeman, curious onlookers, and indifferent passersby – and strident with street and traffic noise, the driver's and policeman's shouting; one of the film's last shots, it could not contrast more strongly with the initial shot of Victorian home and leisurely traffic passing before it.

The specific technology that serves the narrative and symbolic purpose of representing progress-as-loss is the automobile. Early in the

film, the widowed Eugene Morgan, an automobile manufacturer, returns to the town of his youth to build an automobile assembly plant. He renews his acquaintance with his first love, Isabel Amberson Minafer, and her sister-in-law, Fanny Minafer. Throughout the film, the passage of time and the rise in Eugene's fortunes are conveyed through his appearance in a succession of early automobiles, each more "advanced" than the last. Nonetheless, despite the automobile's association with the character who comes closest to being the film's protagonist, its development is conveyed in a tone of loss. V. F. Perkins notes, for instance, that in the scene of the simultaneous horseless carriage and sleigh rides, filmed in an icemaking plant so that the actors' and horse's breath is visible, this

vapour creates an image of new-minted purity to contrast with the smoke that befouls the air as it issues from the exhaust of Eugene's horseless carriage. The negative side of this contrast belongs to the motor car, whose ultimate triumph is known to us. The characters, in these moments of happy ignorance, look threatened as their world displays to

our eyes so clear a token of its doom  
(Perkins 47-48).

The certain end of the characters' anachronistic way of life is implied as well in the punctuation Welles uses to end the scene: As the automobile and its laughing, singing passengers disappear over a hilltop, the screen goes black with a silent-movie iris effect. This quotation of an outmoded film practice reinforces the viewer's knowledge that the diegetic moment thus ended is equally a relic, equally wedded to outmoded traditions and practices long since abandoned.

In addition, after Isabel's husband dies, the attraction between Isabel and Eugene – which represents a loss to both the spinster Fanny and Isabel's spoiled son George – is explicitly linked with the automobile in an exchange between George and Eugene at Isabel's dinner party. Throughout the film, George has disparaged the automobile as a short-lived, foolhardy venture; now fearing the loss to Eugene of his mother's affection, he strikes out at Eugene by attacking the automobile as “a useless nuisance” that “had no business to be invented.” Eugene responds,

With all their speed forward, [automobiles] may be a step backward in civilization. May be that they won't add to the beauty of the world or the life of men's souls. I'm not sure. But automobiles have come. And almost all outward things are going to be different because of what they bring. They're going to alter war, and they're going to alter peace. And I think men's minds are going to be changed in subtle ways because of automobiles. And it may be that George is right. May be that in ten or twenty years from now, if we can see the inward change in men by that time, I shouldn't be able to defend the gasoline engine but would have to agree with George that automobiles had no business to be invented.

This is a moment in which Eugene's loss of Isabel to George – accomplished by George's first taking Isabel for an extended stay in Europe and then preventing Eugene from seeing her when she returns home to die – is foreshadowed by Eugene's polite but palpably pained concession to George's position on the automobile. Tied as it is with

Eugene's ultimately hopeless attempt to reunite with Isabel, the lost love of his youth, Eugene's speech suggests a broader regret at the irrevocable effects of time and change. The nostalgia explicitly expressed in *The Magnificent Ambersons* is for a specific moment enjoyed by a specific group: mid-America's privileged class. As one for a lost life of affluence, *The Magnificent Amberson's* nostalgia is thus one a viewer can resist intellectually even if seduced emotionally by the film's elegiac tone; Perkins argues, in fact, that in the combination of script, cinematography, and Welles' voice-over narration, "[a] particular achievement of [*The Magnificent Ambersons*] is to have found a form that dramatizes the awareness that an attachment to a past, and the piercing sense of its loss, is not dependent on a judgment that it was better than the present, or that its values were ones we should wish to recover" (68). Indeed, the visual and thematic linking of the Ambersons' decline with the advance of urbanization via the automobile enlarges the film's sense of loss from the Ambersons' being stripped of their privileged lifestyle to a more generalized extinguishment of some implied, unarticulated quality of life known by – and consequently lost to – all strata of society.

Thus, insofar as nostalgia is defined as a *longing* for a lost time and place, *The Magnificent Ambersons* is an overtly nostalgic text, elegizing the late nineteenth-century small town as lost to *all* with the coming of the twentieth-century modernization, urbanization, and mechanization succinctly symbolized by Eugene's automobile.

In the next nine years, MGM produced three turn-of-the-century small-town musical comedies that progressively deny, discard, and eventually replace this lament with a celebration of the automobile: *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), *Summer Holiday* (1948), and *Excuse My Dust* (1951). *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *Summer Holiday*, both produced by Arthur Freed, are a sort of Freed Unit *Pinkie* and *Blue Boy*, both based on works of nostalgic memory, both set in small towns shortly after the turn of the last century, both centering on a white, comfortably middle-class family who live in picturesque surroundings and face no significant problems, both containing narratives in which few events occur, and both visually idyllic. The sources for both films, Sallie Benson's Kensington stories and Eugene O'Neill's stage play, *Ah, Wilderness!*, were very much the product of

memory, and both were nostalgic works. Born in 1897, Benson was forty-four years old when the first of her Kensington stories was published in *The New Yorker*. The vividness of her memory of a home she had left thirty-eight years before and of events she had purportedly experienced there bespeaks a profound attachment to a period of her life that ended when she was six years old. O'Neill unabashedly called *Ah, Wilderness!* a "Nostalgic Comedy" (Carpenter) and "a comedy of recollection" (Gabriel); he explained that its "whole importance and reality depend on its conveying a mood of memory in exactly the right illuminating blend of wistful grin and lump in the throat" (Carpenter), and its "quality depended upon atmosphere, sentiment, an exact evocation of the mood of a dead past" (Milne 139).<sup>2</sup>

As has been widely recognized, *Meet Me in St. Louis* is a matriarchal, female-dominated story, with Judy Garland as its star and a supporting cast dominated by established female names – Margaret O'Brien, Mary Astor, Marjorie Main (Kaufman). In contrast, *Summer*

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<sup>2</sup> MGM obtained the film rights to O'Neill's play in the mid-1930s and produced a film adaptation of the play, *Ah, Wilderness!*, in 1935.

*Holiday* is male-dominated, the protagonist being the teenaged Richard Miller and the primary narrative axis being the father-son relationship, in contrast to the various sister-sister relationships which structure *Meet Me in St. Louis*. A certain gendering of the films' representation of technology occurs as well, insofar as ambivalence toward technology might be stereotypically characterized as a feminine reaction and embrace of new technology stereotypically viewed as masculine.

*Meet Me in St. Louis* does, of course, contain a hint of modernity. For instance, the Smiths' home has indoor plumbing and a telephone. Moreover, the World's Fair itself is positioned as an incarnation of the wonders of modernity, its very presence in St. Louis not only bestowing on the city status and glamour but heralding the city's future technological growth and cultural sophistication. At the same time, however, the film's representation of technology is highly ambivalent, as reflected most obviously in the family's relationship to the telephone. Historically, the film captures a moment when telephone technology requires

users to shout over the line<sup>3</sup> and when the protocols for telephone use were being developed. For instance, the telephone call's status as a public or private event was still being negotiated, as evidenced by the telephone's location in the family dining room and the family's sitting as audience to Rose's conversation with Warren, as well as the telephone's ability to confer on Rose – as the recipient of a long-distance call – public admiration and status. Moreover, the telephone is simultaneously a mechanism that can serve tradition and an instrument subject to distrust and ridicule: Rose and Esther expect that Warren's purpose in making the long-distance phone call is to propose to Rose, while the family's cook states that she wouldn't marry a man “who proposed to me over an *invention*.” Thus, the telephone is still a novelty rather than a tool integrated into its users' lives.

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<sup>3</sup> These technological flaws are, of course, the source of humor, as when Rose shouts so loudly over the telephone that her mother hurries to shut the window to avoid disturbing the neighbors (or making them privy to Warren's courtship of Rose), and when despite the shouting, Warren, calling from New York, exclaims enthusiastically that it sounds as if Rose were in the next room.

The World's Fair of course signals St. Louis's eventual urbanization even as it is a source of awe, excitement, and pride for the town's residents. As Bruce Babington and Peter Williams Evans recognize, "[t]he dazzling lights of the fair at the end of *Meet Me in St. Louis* are the most extreme example of a metaphor that holds together both the past and progress in an impossible image, in spite of reason's claim that the world of the city, by entering the small town, must destroy it" (144). While anticipation for the fair pervades the entire film, the fair itself is curiously lacking; as Robin Wood recognizes, expectation of a conventional finale, a big production number at the Fair, is disappointed. In the end, then, symbols of change, progress, and disruption in the film are overshadowed by dominant images of and narrative attachment to a world in which twentieth-century technology has yet had little effect.

As for the automobile, it is effectively absent from the film altogether. In the opening long shot of the Smiths' home, two automobiles drive by, but they are the only ones in the film. With the exception of the trolley car in the "Trolley Song" number, the transportation the Smith family uses is exclusively horse-drawn.

Thus, as part of its narrative and thematic strategy of preserving the “moment before” – the moment before the arrival of the fair and before the changes it promises and portends, the moment before the Smith family begins to disperse with Esther’s and Rose’s marriages or Grandfather’s death (Kaufman) – *Meet Me in St. Louis*, despite its 1903-04 setting, is positioned at the *moment before* the automobile arrives. In ignoring the automobile altogether, much as in its “absent” presentation of the World’s Fair, *Meet Me in St. Louis* neatly sidesteps the automobile’s threat to the way of life the film portrays so charmingly. Thus, it offered its 1944 audience an imaginary moment effectively devoid of any anxiety about the unknowns that lay ahead in the modernity at its door (or in post-war America), conjuring up instead an impossible but comforting return to a warm and stable home life unaffected by the changes to be brought about by twentieth-century technology (or the war).

In contrast, *Summer Holiday* paints a more ambivalent and unstable portrait of the turn-of-the-century small town, a key component of which is characters’ celebratory embrace of the automobile. Unlike the equation of small town as home and haven established

in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, where the major dramatic tension – the threat of expulsion – is resolved in favor of maintaining that equation when Mr. Smith cancels the family’s move to New York City, the characters’ assessment of Dannville in *Summer Holiday* is not universally favorable. *Summer Holiday* does valorize the town’s timeless stability; for instance, one line from the film’s first song, “Our Home Town,” is that in Dannville, “nothing ever changes.” At the same time, however, this “pass-along” song<sup>4</sup> is used to express less sanguine views. In particular, when the song passes to eighteen-year-old Richard Miller, the film’s protagonist, he complains that the town is dull and backward. Although his girlfriend defends it, Richard eagerly anticipates leaving Dannville

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<sup>4</sup> As Mamoulian had done in prior films, such as *Love Me Tonight* (1932), he stages “Our Home Town,” with which the film opens, as a song that is “passed along” from one character to another, beginning with Nat Miller, publisher of the town’s newspaper as he leaves the newspaper office to walk home for lunch. When he arrives home, the song is taken up sequentially by his wife, his youngest son, and other members of the family, and finally his son, Richard, and Richard’s girlfriend, Muriel. With Richard and Muriel, the song’s locus is shifted back out of the Miller home to Dannville’s Main Street business district (the town’s ice cream parlor).

for college and the experience of “real life.” Throughout the film, he espouses radical ideas, expressing disdain for Dannville’s provincialism.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, even though he eventually “outgrows” this “immature” view of Dannville and comes to appreciate its traditional, family-oriented lifestyle, he is still scheduled to leave for college at the film’s end.

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<sup>5</sup> In addition, *Summer Holiday* includes an episode in which Richard ventures into the “wrong” side of town, a part of town missing entirely from *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

Within this context, rather than lamenting or ignoring the automobile, *Summer Holiday* embraces it. Unlike the telephone in the process of being domesticated in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, the automobile in *Summer Holiday* is coded as a masculine machine promising motion, speed, and excitement. Moreover, instead of being an object of ambivalence or a fleeting on-screen image like the 1904 World's Fair electrical show, the automobile in *Summer Holiday* is the focus of full-blown utopian celebration. A telling comparison, in fact, is that between the "Trolley Song" in *Meet Me in St. Louis* and the "Stanley Steamer" number in *Summer Holiday*. In both, modern transportation becomes, in Richard Dyer's terms, the focus of utopian celebration by being made subject of songs. And to be sure, the reason for the trolley ride in *Meet Me in St. Louis* is to visit the fairground site; thus, the trolley literally travels the road to the future (i.e., the fair). The trip's purpose is downplayed, however, being conveyed only by a few lines of dialogue and a sign on trolley car. Rather, the dominant effect of the song is a celebration of young love.

In contrast, the "Stanley Steamer" number is an overt celebration of the very technology that heralds the end of the era the film purports

to valorize. It seems likely that MGM hoped “Stanley Steamer” would repeat the success of “The Trolley Song,” but its effect is very different, given that it celebrates *only* the experience of riding in the Stanley Steamer (as opposed to the metaphorical use of the trolley ride to symbolize the exhilaration of young love) and given that it celebrates not *public* transportation but an individual consumer good, possession of which, according to its lyrics, bestows style and luster. Moreover, presenting the automobile via song and music makes riding in it a utopian experience. The Stanley Steamer’s literal overtaking of pre-existing forms of transportation – walking, the horse-and-buggy, the bicycle – symbolizes the manner in which the automobile will – and, for 1948 audiences, has – become the dominant means of transportation, as well as a predominant form of recreation and means of self-identity. In this, the film simultaneously celebrates both the past and the future, and in fact celebrates the future at the very moment at which it begins to invade, dismantle, and replace the past.

In addition, the characters’ naïve attitude toward this new technology seems designed to reassure mid-twentieth century audiences of their own sophistication and of the superiority –

and desirability – of “modern” technology. Thus, Richard brags of the Stanley Steamer’s ability to travel at twenty-five miles per hour, while his girlfriend responds with alarm to such a break-neck speed. At the same time, the Stanley Steamer itself is a not entirely stable technology, its engine’s igniting with an explosion of billowing white smoke and its repeated backfires’ startling man and beast alike. The characters’ naiveté and the technology’s unpredictability, played for laughs, position the modern audience as superior in its comfortable relationship to its own, obviously “advanced” technology. Further, the use of the Stanley Steamer is something of a technological blind alley in that steam-powered automobiles, although popular for a time, eventually lost out to the gasoline-powered combustion engine. Thus, ironically, characters sing the praises of a technology destined for obsolescence; this valorization of an ultimately discarded technology, however, again puts the 1948 audience in a position of superiority over the film’s appealing but “misguided” characters. Nonetheless, it is significant that in the first draft of the *Summer Holiday* script, “The Stanley Steamer” number ends “high and then a front tire blows out. As Richard alights, a buggy passes, and the couple occupying it give

the Stanley Steamer a horse laugh” (Brecher). This breakdown, however, was eliminated in later drafts. Instead, the number ends triumphantly as a long shot of the family, riding in its prized automobile, fades to black; thus, it ends with a cinematic moment of *undiluted* celebration of the automobile.

MGM’s 1951 release, *Excuse My Dust*, takes up where *Summer Holiday*’s “Stanley Steamer” number left off. A musical comedy starring Red Skelton, *Excuse My Dust* is set in the fictional small town of Willow Falls, Indiana; this is “America 1895,” the film’s narrator tells us, “the era of great inventors and great inventions.” Skelton’s character, Joe, is trying to invent a “gasamobile,” an endeavor which subjects him to ridicule by all the town’s residents except his mother, his girlfriend, and his best friend; the biggest production number is “Get a Horse,” which the entire town sings to Joe when his gasamobile breaks down in the middle of town square.

In the “amusing struggle between the old and the new” (*Hollywood Citizen News*), critics consistently perceived the old as the basis for most of the film’s humor. Most significantly, the film concludes with a cross-country race among a dozen early-model self-propelled

vehicles, which reviewers lauded as the film's high point (Goodman; *Variety (D)*, May 23, 1951). As had been the case with the Stanley Steamer, much of the humor was the unfamiliar, outmoded appearance and inefficient operation of the early vehicles themselves. For instance, one critic called the race sequence "a socko comedy set-up . . . which draws a lot of its humor from the sight of such incongruous carriages as compared to modern-day speed wagons" (*Variety (W)*, May 23, 1951). Further, the film includes several "flash forwards" in which Joe – with unerring accuracy – rapturously envisions the automobile's future. One joke in Joe's vision of the 1910 automobile is his description of the Model T as having "beauty in every line and curve," while another is based on its "ah-oo-gah" horn sound. Again, this humor depends on the audience's sense of the superiority of the mid-century automobile over its turn-of-the-century counterpart.

Ultimately, however, Joe triumphs, winning both the race and the girl; further, the 1951 audience knew that Joe was right and that the rest of the town was wrong about the automobile. Even as it laughs at him, the film celebrates Joe as a visionary in his insistence that the country is entering a "New World – the

World of the Future – the Machine Age.” In sum, the film places the audience in opposition to “old” – pre-industrial – attitudes and celebrates the hero’s forward-looking aspirations. Thus, the contrast between *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Excuse My Dust* could not be stronger. The small town of *Excuse My Dust* is presented not as a way of life mournfully lost but as a one eager to be abandoned – as quickly as possible – for the present.

Thus, Hollywood’s representation of the turn-of-the-century small town in these post-war films increasingly positioned it as a time and place eager to leave itself behind for the post-war suburb and city. In their explicit, thematic, and/or aesthetic valorization of the present-day – their diegetic future – these films invert the “good past/bad present” opposition supposedly central to the definition of nostalgia. Instead of offering an escape from the present to an *idealized* past, these films present an *inferior* past which demonstrates the value and superiority of the present.

Certainly, with the end of World War II, material prosperity increased for many Americans, and the United States itself – alone among major powers virtually unscathed by the

war – was at the peak of its strength and power. As early as 1950, however, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker labeled the post-war era as the Age of Anxiety: “We live in a fast changing world but have lost faith in our belief that change is always for the better and that progress is inevitable. We are not so sure of the happy ending” (308). Mike Chopra-Gant argues that the *type* of post-war Hollywood films enjoying the most popularity reflects an optimistic celebration of core elements of America’s self-image, such as democracy, classlessness, and individualism; however, most commentators perceive, underlying this domestic optimism, a pervasive national insecurity. Robert Ray argues that America’s self-image of self-sufficient independence was, as a national foreign policy, no longer possible after the war, meaning that

by fighting the war to preserve the American dream, the United States had been forced to forsake permanently the splendid isolationism on which that dream rested. More than any other issue, it was this paradox that haunted Americans in the late forties and fifties, causing widespread disillusionment and

anxiety. America had won the war, but in doing so had lost some essential part of its self-definition . . . .(133-34)

Lynn Spigel points to a number of 1950s sociological studies, such as William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1957), John Keats' *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1956), and Henry Henderson's study of Levittown (1953), as documenting the anxiety caused by the forced homogeneity of the suburbs, "instant neighborhoods . . . composed of total strangers represent[ing] friendships only at the abstract level of demographic similarities in age, income, family size, and occupation" (Spigel 222). As Betty Friedan was later to argue in *The Feminine Mystique*, the 1950s suburbs created a sense of suffocating dissatisfaction among white, middle-class housewives; similar accounts of numbing conformism in such works as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* speak of a similar malaise among male, middle-class, white collar workers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Not addressed here are the situations of ethnic and racial minorities, whose circumstances, particularly among poor blacks in the Southeast, had not undergone the changes

This well-established view suggests that a hunger for reassurance about the present or even for guidance about how to *be* in that present might have existed in post-war America. Thus, Joe's efforts to develop and produce the "machine of the future" in *Excuse My Dust* can be read as a metaphor for the nation's post-war program for itself. In addition, in their celebration of modern technology and their use of turn-of-the-century characters as foils for the audience's more sophisticated and comfortable relationship with that technology, *Summer Holiday* and *Excuse My Dust* operate similarly to such early television programs as "The Goldbergs" and "Life With Luigi," which George Lipsitz argues enjoyed popularity, despite their appearing at odds with the dominant 1950s social trends of urban renewal and suburbanization, because they "evoked experiences of the [ethnic, working class] past to lend legitimacy to the dominant ideology of the present" (42). Specifically, he argues that in the early 1950s,

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of white, middle-class America and had, of course, been difficult for decades.

American TV networks used urban/ethnic/working class sitcoms to help the public overcome psychic, moral, and political resistance to the consumerist lifestyle that the government and America's business interests had concluded was necessary to ensure post-war economic prosperity; these sitcoms appeared to align the new consumerism with the public's collective memory of traditional prewar values. In this, these sitcoms and my "nostalgic" films operate much as Janice Doane and Devon Hodges claim the TV show "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman" does, by positioning within familiar genres, long constitutive of America's self-identity, evidence that the "answer" to present-day anxieties has been part of national history and identity all along: thus, there is nothing to be anxious about because everything is proceeding (or has proceeded) as it should.

Thus, the post-war representation of the turn-of-the-century small town in *Summer Holiday* and *Excuse My Dust* does not so much try to *compensate* audiences for deficiencies in a defective present as to use the past to embrace both the changes being effected in post-war America and audiences' own position in American culture at mid-century. David Lowenthal has listed certain benefits of the

past as *familiarity* (the past's ability to render the present familiar via its traces (often unconsciously internalized) that help us make sense of today) and *reaffirmation and validation* (the past's validation of present attitudes and actions by affirming their resemblance to former ones) (48). These films deliberately manipulate their representation of the past so as artificially exaggerate these effects, re-working America's image of its early self into a template for the current self that post-war economic, social, and cultural conditions demand.

In the popular discourse surrounding these films, all were described as "nostalgic" returns to turn-of-the-century small-town America. Thus, *Meet Me in St. Louis* was "a faithful document of an American family in a happy day, gone forever[,]" (Mortimer). Similarly, *Summer Holiday*, with its "flavorsome reflections of small-town life in the sweet long-ago . . . ." (Crowther) was "a simple and effective examining of a wonderful family . . . at the turn of the century . . . ." (Lanning). *Excuse My Dust* was a "pleasant nostalgic piece" (New Films), notable for its re-creation of a "charming period" (Rowland Meg). As has been seen, however, these films constructed their nostalgias very differently from each

other. Moreover, that construction varies widely in the degree to which the films psychically replace a “bad” present with a “good” past, in the manner in which current scholarship defines pop culture nostalgia. The variety in tone and effect of Hollywood’s representations of the same nostalgic object over this ten-year period demonstrates a heretofore largely ignored variety in the nature of popular culture’s nostalgic products; that is, it illustrates the need for recognition and categorization of the *types* of nostalgic texts and their distinct productive strategies, and reveals intriguing complexities to pop culture nostalgia which warrant further examination and study.

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## **Ted Hughes and Biography: The Case of *Birthday Letters***

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Even after Ted Hughes's sister Olwyn endorsed Anne Stevenson's decision to write a biography of Sylvia Plath, he was resistant. Reluctantly, he conceded that even his own friends were beginning to write about his marriage, depicting Plath in their own terms. Hughes dreaded losing his vision of Sylvia, which had been degraded, he believed, by various kinds of interlopers—especially biographers. But during the decades of dealing with her work, her critics, and her biographers, Hughes displayed a range of emotions and responses that need sorting out, especially in light of his decision to publish *Birthday Letters*, a series of poems composed over several years that constitutes, in effect, his own biography of Sylvia Plath.

What made it right for Hughes to write *Birthday Letters* and deny others the same

privilege? Of course, some answers are obvious. He gave many of his own reasons for decrying biographies, including invasion of privacy, the impact on his children, and the mercenary motivations of biographers that Janet Malcolm deplors in *The Silent Woman*. But Hughes treated Malcolm with suspicion as well, and the deep-rootedness of his opposition to biography deserves more consideration not only by Hughes and Plath scholars, but by biographers as well. What is the full Hughes brief against biography? How well does that brief hold up? And what can *Birthday Letters* reveal about Hughes's own decision to re-create such a crucial and fraught period of his life?

I wrote the two paragraphs above before I had a clear idea of what I would do next. I decided to re-read the biographies of Hughes by Elaine Feinstein and Neil Roberts and then Jonathan Bate's new biography, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorized Life*, which I reviewed twice—briefly for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and then at greater length for *University Bookman*. Bate reveals that a major reason for Hughes's reluctance to tell his own story stems from his worry over hostile reactions to any narrative he might advance.

Quite aside, however, from concerns about the reception of what Hughes would write about his life with Plath, he believed that narrative itself was the problem. Since poetry was superior to prose, how then could Ted

Hughes, the poet, stoop to writing an autobiography—or even just a memoir of his years with Plath? As Neil Roberts puts it, for Hughes "poetry is a distinct mode of thought, which is destroyed if subject to the disciplines of prose and rationality." And biography is a form of prose that Hughes deemed especially tendentious. An objective biography is a contradiction in terms, if you follow the poet's line of argument. Unlike the art of poetry, biography cannot be transformative. Unlike the poet, the biographer cannot transmute the materiality of fact into a transcendental, universal creation. A biography can mean, but unlike a poem, a biography cannot simply be. Or so modernist poets—like Archibald Macleish in "Ars Poetica"—have declared when setting poetry apart from other writing. The great poet is disinterested, as Oscar Wilde argued. But writing about Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes realized, has always been tantamount to declaring an interest.

This myth of modernism—that a work of art is detachable and supremely autonomous, "palpable and mute" as that "globed fruit" in Macleish's poem—is nowhere more powerfully expressed than in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," an essay that Hughes, like so many of his contemporaries, revered. Eliot's impersonality principle stipulates that the "more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." While attempting to write

an essay on Samuel Johnson at Cambridge, Hughes realized that literary criticism was not for him, and he switched to studying anthropology. Quite right. I can imagine Samuel Johnson rejecting the impersonality theory as errant nonsense, especially when Eliot compares the poet's mind to the "shred of platinum" mixed in the presence of two gases forming "sulphurous acid," which contains no trace of the platinum. Thus, the theory goes, the poet disappears in the creation of a work of art, behaving just like the platinum in a science experiment.

Wouldn't it be pretty to think so? Or, like Hamlet, to say "thinking makes it so." This analogy between poet and platinum has beguiled generations of poets and even their inferiors: the novelists. But the analogy is preposterous and, in the end, Hughes realized that the impersonality conceit—which he could never quite relinquish—did him considerable damage. When he finally did produce an account of himself and Plath, he was beset by all the confusions that adherence to the impersonality principle entails.

But before considering *Birthday Letters*, I want to explore another aspect of Hughes's anti-narrative mindset. He spoke often of his hallucination of the scorched beast with human hands who appeared in Hughes's Cambridge room, telling him "you are killing us." For Hughes, this apparition was a warning that he was annihilating art by engaging in literary

criticism. Even worse, Hughes was good at the job. He knew he could be a critic, if he so chose. But to persist in obtaining a literature degree was to kill the animal in himself, and animals—no readers of Hughes has to be told—are very close to creation itself. Between the beast and creation there is no human hesitation or dissociation of sensibility, the lost link between sensation and thought that marked the decline of literature since the seventeenth century. Or so T. S. Eliot argued in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." And so Ted Hughes set out on his great project, exploring the animal world as a way of once again linking sensation and thought, working as a zookeeper at one point, and at another, grieving over Sylvia Plath to the sounds of wolves from that same zoo howling close by.

Along the way, Hughes's great project got hijacked by the myth of Sylvia Plath, a myth to which he finally succumbed in *Birthday Letters*—not all at once, as its publication in 1998 months before his death might imply, but actually throughout what amounted to a thirty years war with himself and his critics. Some of Hughes's defeat is signaled in coded poems published decades before 1998, which Bate brilliantly dissects in his biography.

And yet it was just such prosaic scrutiny of literature and life that Hughes objected to—except, of course, when he could do it himself, chiefly in the form of letters. Much has been made of Hughes's anger at Al Alvarez for

publishing *The Savage God*, that first revealing memoir of Plath. But rather than rehearse Hughes's ostensible grievances, I want to suggest that part of what troubled Hughes is that a mere critic should have constructed his own narrative of Plath's life. The critic was violating Hughes's own sense of what belonged to the province of a poet. "The usurpation of his private life by the public sphere was . . . an attack on [Hughes's] inwardness by forces that he believed to be inimical to it." Only poetry validated what was inward. And Alvarez, although he wrote poetry, was not in Hughes's estimation much of a poet. "Have you seen Alvarez's poems?" he wrote to Daniel Huws. "Very crabby little apples." Alvarez's critical powers were dismissed as so much name-dropping by a critic who "deigned to be 'impressed' and conceded me fair words. It was a very undergradutish review," Hughes concluded. Of course, he would change his tune when Alvarez became, as the communists used to say, a "useful idiot," promoting Hughes's genius. But in the end Hughes himself did not deign to think of Alvarez as an equal, and, in effect, Alvarez became one of biographers or publishing scoundrels who are upbraided in *The Aspern Papers*.

When Hughes met Plath, he had not yet decided to become a published writer. He said with some bitterness that she had made him a professional. To Hughes, poetry was sacred, as one of his biographers succinctly explains:

To be in print was to enter a system which poetry was the exact opposite of; it meant being labelled, pigeonholed, pinned down like Gulliver in Lilliput; it meant being brought back into the petty society of mankind with all its constraints, instead of staying, like Orpheus in a legendary past, Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Kevin of Glendalough, withdrawn in solitude among the free world of animals. For Hughes poetry was never primarily a matter of worldly vanity, but rather the quest of a power akin to magic, drawing the best part of its strength from secrecy.

Literary criticism was not magic. Biography was not magic; Even worse, biography was built on exposing secrets. And yet, Hughes kept giving biographers an opening, providing the rationale that Jonathan Bate uses as one of the epigraphs to his biography, taken from a *Paris Review* interview (Spring 1995). Hughes summed up the tension between art and life, poetry and biography, a tension that is far more complicated than was dreamed of in T. S. Eliot's philosophy:

When you sit with your pen, every year of your life is right there, wired into communication between your brain and your writing hand . . . . Maybe all poetry, insofar as it moves us and

connects with us, is a revealing of something that the writer doesn't actually want to say but desperately needs to communicate, to be delivered of. Perhaps it's the need to keep it hidden that makes it poetic—makes it poetry. The writer daren't actually put it into words, so it leaks out obliquely, smuggled through analogies . . . we're actually saying something we desperately need to share. The real mystery is this strange need. Why can't we just hide it and shut up? Why do we have to blab? Why do human beings need to confess? Maybe if you don't have that secret confession, you don't have a poem—don't even have a story.

Biographers took Hughes's story away, and since he did not want to write in their terms, in prose—which to him really was prosaic—he did not know how to get it back.

Only in the safe arena of letters addressed to friends did Hughes condescend to employ prose to explain what happened to Sylvia Plath. He wrote a remarkable letter—to a critic, no less—that reads very much like the kind of prose a biographer would write. In this letter, Hughes objects to the idea that *Ariel* reveals Plath's disintegration. "I read those *Ariel* poems as a climb—not a fall," he asserts. "But she was knocked off again by pure

unlucky combination of accidents.” Here we are in the biographer's world of contingency and chronology, in which what happens when is of crucial importance. Hughes goes on: "The housemaking etc, the 62/63 snow & cold, the 2 kids exhausted her physically. Flu knocked her lower. Stirrers & troublemakers complicated our getting together again, in no small way." Then Hughes mentions the reception of *The Bell Jar* and the problem of getting Plath's medication right before getting to his clincher: Carl Jung explained, Hughes notes, that "the most dangerous moment of all, in any episode of psychic disturbance—is the moment of emerging from it after having conquered it—when the sufferer has turned her back on it—steps out of it & away—at that moment it gathers all its energy and makes a last all-out attack (which as he says, very often proves to be fatal, because the victim has lowered her defences)." *Her defenses.*

Well, I have to say I am pleased. Because that's how I see what happened to Plath, and that is the burden of my own narrative in *American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath*—although I am less explicit than Dr. Hughes. I leave a little more to the reader's imagination, which is what Hughes fails to do in *Birthday Letters*. Neil Roberts is right. Hughes could not, given his poetic principles, write a prose narrative or even a narrative poem exploring his life with Plath. And so in *Birthday Letters*, "there is no continuity between the

recollected moments in individual poems.” Roberts sees a determinism in *Birthday Letters* that I deplore in my Plath biography because it absolves Hughes of agency. He becomes the prisoner of the Plath myth. In *Birthday Letters*, with no narrative sequence of events, there is also no contingency. The hard work of biography—sorting out one event from another and laying out the sequence of a life—is evaded.

The Ted Hughes of the letter, and the Ted Hughes of *Birthday Letters*, are two different people—or perhaps he is one person employing two different ways of apprehending the world. I think he tried to reconcile the two Hugheses by calling the poems letters addressed mostly to Plath. But of course, the poems are not letters—although he also said the poems were raw and not quite poems. Call it the Hughes straddle. But neither—poem or letter, poet or correspondent—can be compared to Eliot's piece of platinum.

In "A Picture of Otto," Hughes cries to Plath: "I was a whole myth too late to replace you." But that is not true—or at least that is not the whole story. What is odd about *Birthday Letters* is the absence of Sylvia Plath's Ted Hughes, the one she thought of as a god. Why is the titan described in her letters, poems, and journals absent from *Birthday Letters*? I'm afraid I have no answer, and unfortunately not even Jonathan Bate can straighten me out—unless I missed his explanation. I think the only

way Ted Hughes might have resolved his confusion (he would prefer the word “mystery”) is if he had taken on T. S. Eliot's impersonality theory and destroyed it, once and for all. He was capable of doing just that, precisely because he had the mind of a great critic and a great poet. That he chose not to descend from Parnassus—even as the Lilliputian biographers chipped away at the colossus—may have seemed noble, but like Coriolanus he might have been better off showing all his wounds to the  
populace.

## Reviews

### **Carl Rollyson's *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*, McFarland.**

By Marc Aramini

From the very first page of his exposé, Carl Rollyson conscripts his readers into a world of duplicity, parasitism, broken promises, and undercover sleuthing, revealing that the biographical publishing world and its practices exist in a shadowy chasm between the popular and the academic. Establishing the history of modern and antiquated biographical practices with a quick but telling look at Richard Ellman's work on James Joyce and Mailer's seminal but seldom acknowledged portrayal of Marilyn Monroe, Rollyson himself moves from victim to victim as he, in quick and entertaining fashion, demolishes so many of the skeins of propriety and circumspection the academic audience hides behind while they, raptor-like and voracious, enjoy the seedy (or was that tasty?) fruits of the biographer's labors.

It takes courage and tenacity to keep pushing against a wall erected around celebrities, politicians, and literary figures – how much does one stifle the most unattractive truths about individuals who (probably) deserve

to have a private portion of their lives as well? When does *tenacity* become *harassment*? Rollyson lays out the process, the tribulation, the dead-ends, and the frustrations he has undergone during his many biographical *Enterprises*, from Susan Sontag to Lillian Hellman. Above all, his book serves as an entertaining and quite pragmatic (I believe the term Rollyson uses is “ruthless”) look at the skills a biographer with a commitment to the truth requires, as well as the challenges, seen and unforeseen, that might arise because of their choices. Through it all, we see his reverence for the qualities of a double agent, as exemplified in Ellman’s example: genteel and quietly probing enough to get the truth, steely enough to resist publisher reluctance, and talented enough to produce a final product which won’t bore its audience to tears (or death? . . . some deal in clichés—others can transform cliché life experience into art) in a carefully researched and annotated brick that no one really wants to read.

With enough dirt, utility, and good old-fashioned fun to make this quick-paced and “just lengthy enough” volume worth picking up, Rollyson contributes something that the genre of biographical literature desperately needs. If it might be a “how-to” manual on navigating all of those tricky situations, it is also a book that probes our need to understand those artists and important people who shape our lives and experiences in an honest way. To bring us a

complete picture, someone has to be willing to do the “almost” unthinkable – and Carl Rollyson sounds like just the man for the job.

A copy of this book was provided by McFarland for review: [www.macfarlandpub.com](http://www.macfarlandpub.com), 800-253-2187.

**Review of *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon* by Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock. (2016, University Press of Mississippi)**

By Kim Idol

In their biography *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon* authors Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock present Susan Sontag as a woman whose personal identity and public image were as much the result of intentional construction as they were the result of Sontag's unconscious reactions to the personal experiences that shaped her personality and life story. The book succeeds because it aptly reflects a multitalented, brilliant subject in a lively and adaptive manner that seems to mirror the way Sontag lived. My impression of this woman matured as I read the book because this story develops organically and so the result is a discussion of the natural progression of human development. Although the book does not shy from describing Sontag's manipulative qualities, Sontag's changeable moods and iterations are also presented as engagements in the sincere process of becoming that did not end until the day she died.

Sontag was a voyager according to this biography. In so many ways the person she became was the best and brightest consolidation of everything she read and wrote. Her creative and academic output reflected a

constant reassessment and recombination of the body of philosophy, artistic sensibility, and history that she studied. This book invites readers into the inner workings of her creative process allowing readers to assess this woman and her work from several points of view as it reviews all the iterations of self that Sontag presented to various friends, families and enemies during her lifetime. This book is also emotionally engaging. The authors do a great job of describing the profound kind of love and loyalty that Sontag inspired in her friends. The final chapters regarding Sontag's fatal illness are particularly moving as we watch her confront her terminal diagnosis in typically complex and conflicting fashion driving friends away and falling into their arms when they refuse to abandon her.

Rollyson and Paddock also succeed in creating an unbiased text. They profess their preconceptions to start, but the story they tell does not feel constrained by precognition. Instead it is presented as a body of research that allows readers to consider from their own points of view who this woman was, who she wanted to be, and how she wanted to be judged by those around her. In the end this book celebrates a deeply complicated individual who sought and achieved incredible dimension and it does so without being disingenuous itself. The authors state their research scope and literary intentions in the prologue and never waver from them, which

makes this text a very satisfactory read because no one involved in the project or described therein seems to be doing anything but their very best to get to the unvarnished truth.

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