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**Felicia F. Campbell, editor
Heather Lusty, associate editor**



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CIRCULATION

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From the Editor's Desk

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The forecast is 105 plus degrees in Paris today, and 112 in Las Vegas. Global warming and summer are here, and it's time for the latest issue of *Popular Culture Review*. While we won't claim to cool you off, we will try to take your mind off the heat.

This issue is rich with diversity. In "Dating in the Digital Age: A Research Experiment," Marci Mazzarotto explores some of the ways in which human relationships and communication are impacted by technology, with emphasis on the popular culture phenomenon of app-based dating. In turn, Keith Moser asks "Has True Romance Disappeared in Consumer Society?" in his Morinian and Baudrillardian reflections on the "acute crisis of simulation."

Debra Jenson moves us inside Comic Con, focusing on the participation of marginalized groups and what impact they can have in "Space at the Con: Conversations About Representations in Popular Culture at Comic Conventions."

Alana Seaman focuses on the often poor understanding of authors who are the subjects of literary tourism in "What's lit got to do with it? Deconstructing the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site." Colby Miyose's analysis of the Disney film *Moana* focuses on "the connection between nature and culture, and the possible consequences of severing this relationship."

In "I am Trying Hard to Follow the Sound: Meditations on Accepting Typhoon's *Offerings*," H. Peter Steeves proclaims the work a masterpiece and traces the conceptual themes at work in the music and lyrics. In fiction, popular song lyr-

ics are reference points for protagonist Gogol's conflicted identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, as Steven Hamelman explains in "Side 3, Side 2: The Beatles in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*."

Chillingly, we move to Richard Logsdon's analysis of Matthieu Missoffe's *Black Spot*, a European made for TV drama "offering a contemporary version of Dante's hell and a microcosmic, Gothicized caricature of contemporary Western Society."

Finally, William and Patricia Kirtley tackle *The National Inquirer* in "Fake News and Failed Friendships: An Analysis of Trump, Pecker, and *The National Enquirer*," including its development, analysis of readers, treatment of Trump and assorted campaign violations which is in its own way chilling.

We also showcase a range of new scholarly publications in our expanding Reviews section in the latter section of the journal—check out the hottest new research in popular culture!

Remember that the 32nd Annual Conference of the Far West Popular and American Culture Associations is February 21–23, 2020 at the Palace Station Hotel in Las Vegas. See our website at fwpca.org.

Felicia Campbell

Side 3, Side 2: The Beatles in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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By Steven Hamelman

ABSTRACT

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* pivots on her Indian-American protagonist's divided identity. Gogol Ganguli is caught between two cultures, one of which, the Bengali one, he rejects, partly because his parents named him after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol. Lahiri draws upon the Beatles, about whom Gogol is "passionate," using the "White Album" and *Abbey Road* as reference points for Gogol's conflicted identity and for the cycle of love and loss he hears expressed in their music.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, the Beatles, the White Album, *Abbey Road*, reference, allusion, intertextuality

Los Beatles en *The Namesake* de Jhumpa Lahiri

RESUMEN

"The Namesake" de Jhumpa Lahiri se trata de la identidad dividida de su protagonista indio-estadounidense. Gogol Ganguli está atrapado entre dos culturas, una de las cuales, la bengalí, él rechaza, en parte porque sus padres lo llamaron Gogol, como el autor ruso Nikolai Gogol. Lahiri recurre a los Beatles, que "apasionan" a Gogol, utilizando el "White Album" y *Abbey Road* como puntos de referencia para la identidad en conflicto de Gogol y para el ciclo de amor y pérdida

que escucha en su música.

Palabras clave: Jhumpa Lahiri, The Namesake, The Beatles, White Album, Abbey Road, referencia, alusión, intertextualidad

唱片第三面、第二面：

裘帕·拉希莉作品《同名人》中的披头士乐队
摘要

裘帕·拉希莉作品《同名人》主要聚焦于主人公作为印度裔美国人的身份认同分裂。主人公果戈里·甘古利（Gogol Ganguli）生活在两种文化中，其中一种是他所拒绝接受的孟加拉文化，部分原因是因为他的父母将俄罗斯作家尼古拉·果戈里（Nikolai Gogol）的名字为其取名。拉希莉利用果戈里所“热爱”的披头士乐队、《白色专辑》和《艾比路》作为果戈里身份认同矛盾的参考点，也作为他在披头士音乐作品中聆听到关于爱与失的交替的参考点。

关键词：裘帕·拉希莉，《同名人》，披头士乐队，《白色专辑》，《艾比路》，参考，引喻，互文性

.....

INTRODUCTION

Taken from the second track on the 1965 recording *Rubber Soul*, the title of Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood* (1987) is but one of fifteen or so Beatles songs embedded in the story to enhance setting (late sixties Japan) and to enrich character. In his late thirties, the narrator Toru tells readers

that his lover Naoko's favorite song is "Norwegian Wood," a song her older friend, Reiko, in a guitar recital after Naoko's suicide, plays along with "Yesterday," "Michelle," "Something," "Here Comes the Sun," "The Fool on the Hill," and seven other standards, whose lyrics and melodies offer emotional relief to Naoko's survivors. These popular tunes also resonate in the minds of readers, increasing their bond with the characters.

Although not as pervasive in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake* (1997), the Beatles again make their mark. The group appears in the third sentence of *Extremely Loud*, when the 9-year-old narrator Oskar, trying to make sense of his father's death in the 9/11 attacks in New York City, says, "I could invent a teakettle that sings the chorus of 'Yellow Submarine,' which is a song by the Beatles, who I love" (1), as did his father: "Dad always used to tuck me in ... and sometimes he'd whistle 'I Am the Walrus,' because that was his favorite song" (12). So smitten is he with the Fab Four (whose "Yellow Submarine," composed by Paul McCartney with children in mind,¹ is the song from their catalog best suited to ease a child's sadness) that he imagines inventing a door lever that would trigger the playing of "Fixing a Hole" or "I Want to Tell You" (14). Late in the book, with "Hey Jude" on the radio, Oskar confides, "It was true, I didn't want to make it bad. I wanted to take the sad song and make it better. It's just that I didn't know how" (207).²

Timequake also keys into the Beatles on the first page, where Vonnegut extols their artistry: "I say in speeches that a plausible mission of artists is to make people appreciate being alive at least a little bit. I am then asked if I know of any artists who pulled that off. I reply, 'The Beatles did'" (1).

That is it for the book—no more Fab Four talk—but it is more than enough to set the tone and to establish a position, which is that Vonnegut understands a core value and purpose of art—to give people a reason to live, and since the Beatles are a transcendent example of this purpose, the statement may inspire readers of *Timequake* who have not heard the Beatles to correct that lack at their first opportunity.

More effective than these writers in using the Beatles to develop character (Foer) while implying a universal truth about their genius (Vonnegut), all without name-checking, as Murakami does, a bunch of their songs, is Jhumpa Lahiri, whose novel *The Namesake* (2003) draws upon the foursome at two key junctures in the life of her Indian-American protagonist Gogol Ganguli. Lahiri integrates their music so seamlessly into his inner life that a reader not familiar with the two albums (technically, one album and one compact disc) cited would miss altogether the poignancy of each reference. Not to hear the songs that Gogol hears in these scenes—not, that is, to know the music well enough to know that Lahiri is testing her readers' knowledge of the band's oeuvre—is to be left, without realizing it, with a diminished sense of what the Beatles mean to her hero and to the world in general. It also means missing a crucial link between the rhetorical terms "reference" and "allusion." With Gogol's happiness in the balance, these two terms breach their apparent differences, impinging on and complementing each other to the sound of the Beatles. To a reader who is at once a Beatles enthusiast, a student of rhetoric, and an aficionado of literary fiction, *The Namesake*, is a red-letter day.

GOGOL GANGULI'S DIVIDED IDENTITY

In order to understand the references in *The Namesake* to side 3 of the Beatles' White Album and to side 2 of their album *Abbey Road*, one needs to know the reason behind the main issue for the novel's male namesake, this issue being his conflicted Indian-American identity as embodied in his Russian-derived first name.

Gogol Ganguli spends his life preoccupied with a divided identity that hinges, first, upon having been given a name that does not represent his Indian heritage, about which he is also conflicted; and, second, upon being born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and growing up in "a university town outside Boston" (48). It takes many years for his parents, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, immigrants from Calcutta (Lahiri retains this spelling of Kolkata), to adapt to American customs; they remain attached to their Indian family and friends, as well as to the Bengali culture whose traditions they keep alive in their new home. Their son Gogol is caught between two cultures, one of which, the Bengali one, he does not fully embrace.

As for the name he does not like: Gogol's parents, having left Calcutta as newlyweds in the 1960s so that Ashoke could study electrical engineering at M.I.T., wished to give him, upon his birth in 1968, a "good" Bengali name (as opposed to a private "pet" name, a *daknam* [25], for family and friends to use) that his great-grandmother in Calcutta was supposed to choose and announce by letter. That letter never arrives; the baby is born; a name is needed for the birth certificate, and so, under pressure, the parents register their baby boy as Gogol Ganguli.

Why name their Indian-American son after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol? As a young man, Ashoke had been saved from the wreckage of train crash by a single page of "The

Overcoat,” which he had been reading at the time of the accident. Only when a rescue worker sees this page fall from Ashoke’s raised hand is he saved. When his son is a 22-year-old senior at Yale, Ashoke tells him about his near-death experience at the same age (122–24) and the reason why he, his son, is named Gogol, in honor of an author and a story Ashoke have adored since childhood (18).

Ashoke initially tries telling his son about the accident on Gogol’s 14th birthday in 1982. The first reference to the Beatles happens then: “Later that night [Gogol] is alone in his room, listening to side 3 of the White Album on his parents’ cast-off RCA turntable. The album is a present from his American birthday party, given to him by one of his friends at school. Born when the band was near death, Gogol is a passionate devotee of John, Paul, George, and Ringo” (74). Gogol “sits cross-legged on the bed, hunched over the lyrics, when he hears a knock on the door” (74). It is his father, bearing a gift: *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol*. Gogol has never read a word of this Russian author responsible for a name that “manages ... to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear” (76). Ashoke lingers as the record plays; Gogol wants to get back to the lyrics; his father begins to speak, but “[t]he music ends and there is silence Gogol flips the record, turning the volume up on ‘Revolution 1’” (77). Seeing John Lennon’s “obituary pinned to the bulletin board, and then a cassette of classical Indian music he’d bought for Gogol months ago ... still sealed in its wrapper” (78), Ashoke decides that the story of Gogol’s name will have to wait. The right time comes 8 years later.

DIACHRONIC ALLUSION AND SYNCHRONIC INTERTEXTUALITY

Is the phrase “side 3 of the White Album” a reference or an allusion? The answer matters, for there is little point to rhetorical analysis if we fudge distinctions between and among terms. It also matters because on the heels of allusion is a third term: intertextuality.

In his well-known handbook of literary terms, M. H. Abrams defines allusion as “a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage” (9). Though different from reference, an allusion depends on, or proceeds from, it: allusive inexplicitness (absence) is the “other” in a rhetorical binary that seems to privilege referential explicitness (presence).

In practice, allusion is even more complex than this binary model suggests, largely because allusion connotes a third term, intertextuality, which is often taken as synonymous with allusion. In her 1984 study *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva introduced yet another term, “transposition,” which is

the redistribution of several different sign systems The term *inter-textuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources,’ we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new ... enunciative and denotative positionality. (59–60)

Analyzing the meaning of allusion in *PMLA* 35 years after Kristeva wrote these words, Gregory Machecek returns to her work, defining intertextuality as a discursive phenomenon akin to Kristeva's transpositionality, where the condition for interaction among contemporaneous textual and cultural relations exists. In contrast, allusion is either a "learned or indirect reference" or a "phraseological adaptation"; in other words, allusion evokes a "roundabout reference" to an earlier text/fact or incorporates "a short phrase reminiscent of a phrase in an earlier work of literature" (526). Allusion connotes diachronic connection; intertextuality connotes synchronic relationships—Kristeva's "transposition," the re-positioning of sign systems but without the sense of intertextuality as simple source-searching. Kristeva notes that the novel genre is an example of transposition (59).

As for transposition, the aforementioned *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a tour de force in high postmodern fashion; at the end, the photographic images of the rising man bring to a peak the many typographic, textual, and visual devices that flaunt the redistribution of sign systems in this (for want of a better term) "novel." Vonnegut played similar transpositional games—drawing childlike pictures, blending genres, deforming linear time—in novels such as *Breakfast of Champions* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Turning to *The Namesake*, transpositional elements of rock music (by the Beatles and bands) do not attain that same level of spectacular transposition. This novel neither "sounds" like a rock song/album/compact disc nor is structured like one—a rock sound and/or structure impossible to standardize anyway. It does, however, reveal traces of transposition insofar as at two critical moments the music of the Beatles is "heard" beneath the surface of reference, where both allusion and its near companion intertextuality thrive.

Ostensibly, the phrase “side 3 of the White Album” is direct; thus, it is a reference. Yet, partially hidden behind this reference to the White Album (1968) is allusive material so rich with meaning that it breaches its “local” diachronic meaning. No less than a Beatles purist, a rhetorical purist could well argue too that the title “White Album” itself is less reference than allusion, since it alludes to the actual title of this recording—*The Beatles*. Furthermore, the referential phrase “side 3 of the White Album,” containing the referents “3” and “White Album,” simultaneously alludes to seven songs on that side (of four sides)—neither the number of songs nor the number of sides are specified—and each of these songs has lyrics that Gogol is poring over when his father interrupts him. These lyrics mean something to readers sufficiently “learned” to know what the words are without seeing them reproduced. To quote Machecek again, “[a]llusions may allow covert communication among a cognoscenti. They establish a special kind of rapport between author and reader” (531). From such rapport, it is a short step to Kristeva’s synchronic intertextuality (transposition) and the proliferation of meaning that spreads beneath the textual surface.

In a novel so indebted to a single reference—it would collapse without Nikolai Gogol’s “The Overcoat” to bolster plot and character—it is little wonder that scholars have explicated *The Namesake* through that lens while examining the implications of this famous short story in Lahiri’s study of Indian-American cultural/identity conflict. A good example is Karen Cardozo, beginning her exploration of *The Namesake* with its epigraph from “The Overcoat” (“The reader should realize himself that it could not have happened otherwise, and that to give him any other name was quite out of the question”) and then assessing “the impossibility of ethnic purity” (13) in Gogol Ganguli’s divided life. In her reading of

the birthday scene, Cardozo states that the “cultural work of the novel ... lies in its assiduous exploration of Bengali American experience as a particular form of a more general struggle for identity—an intertextual structure that is simultaneously generative and restrictive” (16). Although Cardozo is alert to the ebb and flow of Gogol’s existential dilemma, at no point does she mention his fixation on the Beatles and their music’s place in his identity formation. Their importance in this regard is backlit by several other rock references in *The Namesake* to artists such as The Who, Dylan, and Clapton, and to the albums *London Calling* and *Talking Heads: 77*, names and titles cited matter-of-factly, not allusively or synchronically. They are what Gogol listens to during certain phases of youth. They tell readers about his changing tastes in rock, and they measure the passage of time; they are the same popular albums and rock stars that fans in his generation listen to; but they do not illuminate, with the same intensity as the Beatles do, the young man’s emotional struggles.

SIDE 3 OF THE WHITE ALBUM, SIDE 2 OF ABBEY ROAD

A passage in Beatles fan Ron Schaumburg’s memoir *Growing Up with the Beatles* conveys the effect these four young Englishmen had on millions of young adolescents in the 1960s: “As I passed my twelfth birthday, I reached the years of a new maturity, of a slowly growing sense of love and sexuality. I found that Beatle songs expressed the hurts and happinesses [sic] of those twelve years The Beatles sang to me, taking my joy and my pain and explaining it to me in terms I could understand” (29). A generation later, they cast the same spell on Gogol Ganguli, giving him joy as he figures out his role as a young American male whose Bengali parents cling to the customs and values of a homeland that is theirs, not his. He is the type of teenager that Devin McKinney, in *Magic Circles*:

The Beatles in Dream and History, has in mind when writing, “[k]ids, American kids especially, laded the Beatles with the aspirations, the psychic fears and physical intensities which religion had traditionally sought to absorb” (143).

As Gogol ages, the Beatles continue to speak to him. As indicated, Gogol had listened to other pop acts; in college, for instance, wishing to bond with his girlfriend Ruth, he “listens to the music she loves: Simon and Garfunkel, Neil Young, Cat Stevens, buying brand-new copies of the albums she’d inherited from her parents” (117). On his side, he gives her “a mixed tape of his favorite Beatles songs” (116)—a predictable gesture (and a common courtship ritual in the seventies and eighties) since Beatles music frames Gogol’s emotional life, from insecurity to despair, with stretches of happiness in between.

To Devin McKinney’s perceptions of the Fab Four’s appeal—for example, they “distilled a poetics of possibility, imagination, action,” and they “changed the course of world history by inspiring mass fantasy, and by driving mass aspirations toward an ethics of radical possibility” (167, 305)—the present thesis adds this more focused reason for the Beatles’ universality: the Beatles do for Gogol what they did and do for countless human beings because their music, more than any other band’s in the history of the form, expresses the universal narrative of love, loss, and recovery—a key reason, probably, why they are the top-selling recording artists in history. Their recordings track Gogol’s first romantic hope and his later despair, just as they track what most human beings experience. At the same time, this music consoles all grief-stricken survivors of broken relationships. Dozens of Beatles songs chronicle the major stages of such relationships—falling in love, feeling it grow, peaking, anticipating the end, and reaching peace after an indeterminate period of

grief. No matter what one's current place in the cycle of love, loss, and recovery, the Beatles recorded at least several songs to express the feeling.

Jhumpa Lahiri seems to know this about the Beatles. She defamiliarizes them by inviting her readers to look at/listen to the White Album through the eyes of an Indian-American male listening to its third side on his 14th birthday—an extraordinary act of sympathy and imagination on Lahiri's part that causes long-time Fab listeners, no matter what their national or ethnic backgrounds, to hear this music with new ears. Lahiri connects the dots between the band's extended stay in India, the creation of the White Album, and Gogol's actual birthday, all of these occurring in the year 1968. To peel back, the veneer of the birthday scene is to find this content:

- Of the White Album's 30 songs, 19 were composed during the Beatles' sojourn from February through April 1968 at the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Rishikesh, India.
- Of the seven songs on side 3 of the White Album, five were written while he was in Rishikesh.
- By 1968, George Harrison had spent the previous 2 years in studying classical Bengali music as well as Hindu scriptures. Ironically, had they not explored the music of a heritage that Gogol resented, his favorite band's catalog from 1965 and on would have been far less impressive. Here is the timeline of the main Indian-related events in the Beatles career:
 1. In February 1965 while filming the Bahamas scenes for *Help!*, the band members were approached by Swami Vishnu-Devananda, of-

fering them copies of his book *The Illustrated Book of Yoga* (1960); this first brush with Indian culture happened on Harrison's 22nd birthday (*Beatles Anthology* 171). Harrison heard sitar for the first time on the *Help!* movie set in London (the restaurant scenes, originally designed for comic effect) and promptly purchased one (Shapiro 69).

2. At a party in Beverly Hills in August 1965, David Crosby and Roger McGuinn of the Byrds introduced Harrison to Ravi Shankar's music.
3. In October 1965, the Beatles taped their sitar-embellished first take of "Norwegian Wood."
4. Ravi Shankar "met George for the first time in June 1966, one evening in a friend's house in London" (Shankar 189); he gave Harrison his first sitar lesson at Harrison's home in Esher (Cox 70).
5. In September 1966, two weeks after the Beatles final concert at Candlestick Park in San Francisco, Harrison went to India for six weeks to study sitar in Mumbai with Shankar.
6. In August 1967, all four Fabs attended the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's lecture in London.
7. Harrison "traveled to India in December 1967 where he wrote, arranged, and produced an entire album (*Wonderwall*) of tuneful, soothing, Indian-inspired music" (Shapiro 83); he was in Mumbai from January 7–13, 1968, overseeing the project.

8. The Beatles arrived in Rishikesh, India, in February 1968; they returned at different times, Lennon and Harrison staying the longest (until April 12).
9. *Wonderwall* and *The Beatles* were released in November 1968.

The extent of Gogol's knowledge of the finer details of this period in the band's history is unknown. Some of these details had not yet appeared in print; Ravi Shankar's autobiography (number 5 above), for example, was not published until 1999. It is hard to imagine, however, that in 1982, this "passionate devotee" would not at the very least have been aware of the Beatles' sojourn in India, thus making Gogol's denial of his heritage, signified by his indifference to the cassette of Indian music, more pronounced. The band speaks to him, but, ironically, he does not know how much he is missing, or is willing not to hear, unless or until he begins to listen to the same music that George Harrison—like Gogol, a devotee, in this case to Ravi Shankar—studied and introduced to his bandmates. Since for years even non-devotees had been enjoying the crude Orientalist "humor" of the film *Help!* and Indian-inflected tracks such as "Love You To" (on 1966's *Revolver*) and "Within You, Without You" (on 1967's *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*), it is likely that Gogol had enjoyed them too before unwrapping the White Album. Some years will have to pass before this 14-year-old will understand what his father's gifts of two masters other than the Beatles—that is, the musician (conceivably Shankar, or perhaps the sarod virtuoso Ali Akbar Khan) on the sealed cassette, and Russian author Nikolai Gogol—represent in a familial as well as musical context.

Lahiri is being more than just clever by showing Gogol immersed in side 3 of *The Beatles* on his birthday. Leading off

is the rave-up “Birthday.” Readers hitherto unaware that this is the first tune on side 3 will perhaps experience the shock of recognition that Lahiri’s allusiveness is designed to cause; and as the side’s cuts succeed each other, this shock does not let up. Listening to “Birthday” on his birthday, a sensitive 14-year-old Beatles fan would feel as if he were receiving a personal greeting from John, Paul, George, and Ringo. The songs that follow would touch something deeper—in today’s parlance, they would “trigger” complex feelings.

The noisy guitars and crashing drums of “Yer Blues” swing the mood from joy to suicidal despair. John Lennon, the song’s composer, howls, “Yes I’m lonely / Want to die / Yes I’m lonely / Want to die / If I ain’t dead already / Girl you know the reason why.” Despite being surrounded by friends, wife Cynthia, and the other Beatles, Lennon was unhappy in Rishikesh. He admitted later on that he was “[u]p there trying to reach God and feeling suicidal” (*Beatles Anthology* 283). Unlike the song “Help!,” which camouflaged Lennon’s misery in 1965, “Yer Blues” lays it out in blunt imagery (“Feel so suicidal / Even hate my rock and roll”), the four Beatles, crammed into a small room in Abbey Road Studio, whaling away at their instruments in living fury, replicating on guitars and drums the singer’s anguish. Young Gogol likely hears in Lennon’s pain the isolation that is an integral part of his own life. Fourteen years earlier he had arrived in Mount Auburn Hospital “[w]ithout a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at [his mother Ashoke’s] side” (24). “As [Ashoke] strokes and suckles and studies her son,” the narrator states, “she can’t help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived” (24–25).

Just as quickly, the mood swings back to serenity. “Mother Nature’s Son,” McCartney’s homage to Rishikesh’s pastoral calm, foreshadows the vacations the 26-year-old Gogol will

spend in New Hampshire with his girlfriend Maxine and her parents, who greet the couple on their first visit to their woodland retreat with these words: “Welcome to paradise” (152). Approaching a cabin situated “down a long dirt road in the middle of a forest, dense with hemlock and birch” (151), Gogol “sees the lake, a blue a thousand times deeper, more brilliant, than the sky and girded by pines. The mountains rise up behind them” (151). Paralleling his idols (except for Lennon) in Rishikesh, when they are far from the stress of fame and the bustle of London, Gogol is at peace in this haven, far from the stress of his architectural career and the bustle of New York City. Only in New Hampshire does Gogol “appreciate being utterly disconnected from the world” (154). At 14, he may not yet be aware that his destiny includes the comfort of nature to mitigate character traits fixed at birth, but “Mother Nature’s Son” is there to remind him that nature is a source of healing and acceptance.

“Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey,” penned in India by Lennon, takes its cue from the Maharishi’s pet phrase “come on is such a joy.” Since biographer Bruce Spizer divulged this fact in 2003 (qtd. in Womack 270), Gogol in 1982 could not have known about it. On the other hand, the identity of “Sexy Sadie” had been revealed 12 years earlier. In 1970, Lennon told *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner he wrote “Sexy Sadie” while leaving Rishikesh in disgust over rumors of the guru’s sexual misconduct. The rumors were never substantiated, which is why it is fortunate that, as Lennon said, “I copped out and I wouldn’t write ‘Maharishi’” (55). The first non-*Rolling Stone* version of this interview came out the following year in a paperback titled *Lennon Remembers*; it appeared again in a 1981 collection of *Rolling Stone* interviews, increasing the likelihood that a Beatles fan would have owned it. Young Gogol loved the

band so much that he tacked Lennon's obituary to a bulletin board in his bedroom, another clue that he had probably read this famous interview and, consequently, that he knew the origins of "Sexy Sadie" well before hearing the song for the first time on his 14th birthday.

"Helter Skelter," though not conceived in India, is a masterpiece of bone-crushing four-beat bars and frenzied vocals depicting chaos through the noise of monolithic chords and thudding drums. To hear all of that at age 14 is to hear the promise of rock music fulfilled by its premier four-man collective.

The closing track, "Long, Long, Long," is the only one of George Harrison's four compositions on *The Beatles* that "finds its origins during the Beatles' 1968 visit to India" (Womack 571). At this point in the novel, readers cannot foresee the calamity awaiting Gogol in the form of a failed marriage. For the Beatles fan who is eventually privy to Gogol's wife's affair before Gogol himself is—the very same Beatles fan who has dwelled on the subtext of the White Album's third side long after the birthday scene ends—the pathos is felt upon realizing that the allusion to "Long, Long, Long" is "adumbrative": its power lies in its foreshadowing of disaster. But it will be some time before the narrative allows the listener full knowledge into why the lyrics that the teenaged Gogol is studying so many pages (and years) earlier are a bitter foretaste of what has finally come to pass. As Allan Pasco illustrates in a reading of Honoré Balzac's *Illusions Perdus*, an adumbrative allusion "constitutes an important means of giving order to works of art" (151). In this instance, it helps to order the unfolding of catastrophe. On the page, the tune's lyrics seem simplistic; hearing them in the context of what is to come/what has come for the young husband is devastating: "How can I ever misplace you / How I want you

/ Oh I love you / You know that I need you / Oh I love you.” Harrison yearns for divine presence in this 12/8 dirge that ends on the sound of what may be a heavenly door, or a coffin, creaking open and then slamming shut. Gogol’s yearning, though less spiritual, will be equally futile.

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This devastation is well on the way to fulfillment when hundreds of pages later 31-year-old *Nikhil* Ganguli (Gogol officially changes his name to Nikhil before matriculating at Yale) inserts into his compact disc player the Beatles’ last-recorded album, *Abbey Road*, on a freezing morning in his Manhattan apartment. More bitter than the irony of the 14-year-old Gogol’s indifference to his father’s gifts of Indian music and the tales of Nikolai Gogol is that the love songs (e.g., “Something,” “I Want You [She’s So Heavy]”) of this recording are, for Gogol, the aural backdrop of his year-long marriage to Moushumi, which on that cold morning is already null and void. At the moment, Moushumi, a graduate student at New York University, is attending a conference in Palm Beach, Florida, with her boyfriend. She has been cheating on Nikhil for months when he “puts on his *Abbey Road* CD, skipping ahead to the songs that would have been on side 2 of the album” (269). (The first compact disc version of *Abbey Road* was released in 1987; its second iteration, remastered, was released in 2009.)

Why should the narrator/Lahiri mention this detail—not that this is the record Nikhil wants to hear but that he starts it on the seventh track? The short answer: to invite readers to coordinate their own playback of the album in real intertextual time with the novel. The longer answer begins with the observation that an LP’s sides are incompatible with compact discs. When a vinyl record is configured for compact

disc, its two-sided aesthetic and material structure is reduced to one. The album as analog signal contained on the finite plastic medium (optimum length of side between 18 and 20 minutes) is nullified by the digital technology. There is no side 2 of *Abbey Road* on Nikhil's first-generation compact disc; the digital format cannot convey to unwitting listeners that the original track sequencing on each vinyl side of the late-sixties recording *Abbey Road* was deliberate—Lennon's preference for single cuts honored on side 1, McCartney's preference for suite-like synthesis honored on side 2 (*Beatles Anthology* 338–40).

The reference to *Abbey Road*, with its allusive subtext echoing the “side 3” reference/allusion to the *White Album*, packs a double, perhaps triple, significance. First, it indicates that the format was the new—and for many of them, unpleasant—reality for rock fans. The analog transition to digital began in the early 1980s during Nikhil's own transition from adolescent to adult—not the easiest of crossings for this conflicted Indian-American male trying to negotiate not only, as most young people must, the rites of sexuality and gradual pulling away from parental authority, but also the matter of personal destiny that for him is bound up in the hated name Gogol. No matter how hated, the name, and the identity bound up in it, is not easy to abandon: the newly minted Nikhil soon learns that

he doesn't feel like Nikhil At times he feels as if he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different. At times he still feels his old name, painfully and without warning, the way his front tooth had unbearably throbbled in recent weeks after a filling, threatening for an in-

stant to sever from his gums when he drank coffee, or iced water, and once when he was riding in an elevator. (105)

The analogy between these musical media and the young man's struggle is more than suggestive: that is, nominally, *Nikhil* Ganguli is a new identity for a previously shaped personality within the same physical body; literally, the compact disc is a new body for a previously shaped musical artifact whose identity has not nominally changed.

But much else has. In the mind of aficionados, the analog-to-digital evolution in form had serious consequences. Dwelling on the two-sided format of a vinyl record reproduced as a compact disc, the "Vinyl Freak" columnist John Corbett explains a concern that in the 1980s and 1990s engrossed millions of music lovers skeptical of the digital industry's claim to "progress": "The drama of vinyl, in part, is an echo of theater's standard use of the intermission. Something happens. Then a break to reflect, shake it off. Something else happens There are always two sides to the story" (12). With the CD, no longer two sides; and as if both resisting and resigning himself to this upheaval, Nikhil treats the CD like the traditional LP, unaware that this pop culture artifact replicates the splitting in two of a seemingly unified product of civilization called a marriage. There is no going back.

Furthermore, the compact disc "revolution" brought with it the loss of sonic fidelity, a sterile digital sound, at least in the first-wave of analog-to-digital discs—a major point of contention among anxious Beatles fans who closely monitored their transition from analog to digital in 1987 and 1988. In his assessment of digitally engineered Beatles albums, Paul Winters analyzes compact disc (monaural and stereo) and vinyl remasterings and reissues of the Fab Four catalog from

2005 to 2009, explaining that fans, already dissatisfied with the first run of compact discs, grumbled because they “consider their music to be authentic only in its original analog form. Attempts of the recording engineers to alter and ‘improve’ the sound of the original recordings using digital means is considered to be a degradation of the music and the sound” (27–28). Whether or not Nikhil is an audiophile, with top-brand components dialed in *just-so* to make the most of his compact disc and record collection, is irrelevant; what counts is his long-time love of the Beatles, a band for whom a stubborn nostalgia for analog usually clings to those who grew up with them on vinyl. The warm medium to which Nikhil has been turning for comfort since his teen years both mirrors and mocks his relationship with Moushumi: it is not as fine as it once was. Indeed, it can be said not to exist at all.

To these analogies, one must add the fact that the first song on side 2 of *Abbey Road* is Harrison’s “Here Comes the Sun,” written in Eric Clapton’s garden during a respite from the squabbling that had been tearing the Beatles apart for months (Spitz 839). Nikhil turns to the optimism of “Here Comes the Sun” in frigid New York City while Moushumi sunbathes in Florida with her lover. And although there may not be a song-by-song correlation with Nikhil’s marital situation, *Abbey Road*’s second-side medley would no doubt have had a cheering effect on Nikhil as it has had on millions of actual listeners. *Abbey Road* builds to the crowning cry in “The End” that “the love you take is equal to the love you make.” Nikhil’s loss is underscored by the triumphant climax of one of rock music’s highest achievements.³

Abbey Road is the last music recorded by all four Beatles. In September 1969, the LP complete, John Lennon told Paul McCartney he wanted a “divorce” (*Beatles Anthology* 348). The faithful fan Nikhil would have known that. As he shiv-

ers in his apartment, “Here Comes the Sun” and the tunes that follow it mask the devastation that will define his own divorce.

UNIVERSAL LOVE

Addressing the group’s perennial global attraction in *Dreaming the Beatles*, rock journalist Rob Sheffield at one point spins out on flat “be” verbs, second-person plural, and hyperbole: “The Beatles are what they are because they are the most beloved human beings of their lifetimes and mine” (19). Sheffield is like other top writers on the band—e.g., Kenneth Womack, Mark Lewisohn, and Walter Everett—who tinge historical, cultural, and social reasons for their impact with hagiography, seen in Ian Inglis’s closing words in his 2017 book simply titled *The Beatles*: “the Beatles’ story has transcended the constraints of popular music to become one of the key historical events of the twentieth century” (176). In a collection on the Beatles co-edited by Kenneth Womack and Todd Davis, the scholar Jane Tompkins shares that the boys

let me know that kindness, fantasy, creativity, and vulnerability could go together and were not necessarily unmarketable traits. This knowledge ... made me feel better about myself; it comforted me to know that some of the sensitivities and longings I had were shared, and it made me feel better because these attitudes and feels were being expressed in a way that joined me to millions of other people. (219)

To such testimony, the present writer, with the emotional life of Gogol/Nikhil Ganguli in mind, restates the earlier point

that the Beatles were and are universally beloved because better than any other band they captured in music and lyric the experience of love, loss, and recovery. Gogol/Nikhil “does” for the Beatles what his father “does” for Nikolai Gogol. From his own early shyness to first love, from dating to marriage, then divorce and, by book’s end, signs of acceptance and recovery, he shows where and why the Beatles (for reasons different than the Russian genius) resonate so deeply across borders, across time. Gogol/Nikhil does not say that they “save” his life after Moushumi’s infidelity; he does not say that their “Indian” songs point to the ambivalence at the core of his divided identity. He does not have to say any such thing. If Lahiri respects readers enough to have them figure out why her hero is listening to the respective sides of the White Album and *Abbey Road* at those crucial times in his life, then she respects them enough to let them fill in all the rest by themselves. To fill in all the rest means to extrapolate from Gogol’s tortured self-consciousness as a youth and his happiness, then despair, as an adult that the Beatles have been his most trusted “soundtrack” all along. It is as easy to picture this abandoned husband listening to “Let It Be” repeatedly in the months following his wife’s revelation of her affair as it is to assume years earlier he included “Got to Get You into My Life” on the mix-tape he made for his college girlfriend Ruth.

Proof of the group’s preternatural grasp of the arc of love from infatuation to despair is immediate. Despite their youth on their first long-play album, 1963’s *Please Please Me*—Lennon was 22-years-old, McCartney 20 years, Harrison 19 years, and Starr 22 years—they seem to “get” it all (8 of the 14 songs were originals). Astonished teenagers heard instantly hummable tunes about first sighting of the beloved (“I Saw Her Standing There”), courtship (“Love Me Do”), devotion (“Ask Me Why,” “Baby, It’s You”), sexual intensity (“A Taste of

Honey,” “Hold Me Tight” [recorded at the time but held over for the next LP, *With the Beatles*]), deep relationship (“P.S. I Love You”), stirrings of doubt (“There’s a Place”), fading affection (“Anna”), and rejection/break-up (“Misery”). No older than 22, the four Beatles had not only mastered their craft as pop musicians but had experienced and/or observed the love/loss cycle with sufficient maturity to channel what they had learned into pop-rock tunes that to this day sell in the millions annually. Much of their catalog following *Please Please Me* showcased ever more sophisticated and nuanced musical expression of the vagaries of love. Sheffield uses the 2000 compilation *1* to “prove that three things never change: (1) people love the Beatles, (2) it’s a little weird and scary how much people love the Beatles, and (3) even people who love the Beatles keep underestimating how much people love the Beatles” (307). *1* “shocked the industry by selling 30 million, 40 million, something like that. It ... was the fastest-selling album of all time” (306). It sold so well because most if not all of its purchasers were either in relationships or had been in relationships that were, would be, or needed to be enhanced, salvaged, figured out, or survived by listening to the Beatles, a pop/rock group that broke up 30 years before the release of *1*.

CONCLUSION

The reader’s not-knowing Jhumpa Lahiri’s intention in referring/alluding to the Beatles in *The Namesake* does not alter her sleight-of-hand in staging his interaction with them. Without slowing down to ponder Lahiri’s referential touch in two key scenes in Gogol/Nikhil’s life, readers of the present analysis, along with the writer of it, may not have realized the degree to which they were key scenes in the first place. Had

Lahiri's narrator talked readers through those pivotal moments, there would have been no defamiliarizing lurch into awareness of her feat, no reason for the present essay.

Lahiri's novel of Gogol Ganguli's transformation into Nikhil Ganguli, with all of the protagonist's attendant anxiety, self-consciousness, guilt, thrill, and, in the end, emergence into post-betrayal detachment, is enriched beyond measure when we understand the allusive and intertextual elements—primarily the music of the Beatles, and secondarily (as well as more explicitly) a major story by Nikolai Gogol—that mingle with an engrossing narrative. Lahiri paints a double portrait of the same man: one, an Indian-American individual raised by loving parents in a close-knit expatriate community; and two, an “everyman” transcending that family and community; both a specific human being wrestling with personal problems, and a fictional surrogate of the identity crises, many brought on by the alternating glories and miseries of love, with which many if not most human beings wrestle from their teen years until their deaths. For the past 50 years, the Beatles have been representing all of this—to wit, the highs and lows of love, the grief that so often follows the bliss, and the everyday effort made by human beings to function in a world where identity is as fluid as it is hard to define—in pop and rock music of the highest order imaginable, accessible to all, forever.

NOTES

1. “I quite like children's things; I like children's minds and imagination. So it didn't seem uncool to me to have a pretty surreal idea that was also a children's idea” (McCartney in *Beatles Anthology* 208).
2. McCartney's inspiration for “Hey Jude” was John Lennon's

young son Julian: I always feel sorry for kids in divorces ... their little brain spinning round [sic] in confusion, going, 'Did I do this? Was it me?'" (Miles 465).

3. *Rolling Stone* ranked *Abbey Road* number 14 in their "500 Greatest Albums of All Time." Number 10 was *The Beatles/White Album*.

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Space at the Con: Conversations About Representation in Popular Culture at Comic Conventions

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by Debra E. Jenson

ABSTRACT

“Space at the Con” explores the motivations and goals of individuals who participate in discussions at Comic-Cons and conventions centered on diversity and representation of marginalized groups (women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of color, people with disabilities, and more) in popular culture. Comic-con-style events occur across the United States and around the globe, showcasing movies, television, comic books, and even online content. These events are one way for individuals to encounter and learn about popular culture. A person of color, a woman, a transgender person, a homosexual or lesbian, can often encounter hostility, sometimes because they are seen as less “legit.” However, this geek-keeping phenomenon can also stem from the absence of marginalized groups in the representation of geeks in popular culture. People learn about norms and customs from popular culture. To better understand the narratives and themes around representation of marginalized groups in media and what impact participants believe these discussions can have. To realize this understanding, interviews were conducted with participants on panels about issues of diversity and marginalization at a comic convention. These interviews included questions about the motivations for participating and the perceived impact they might be having. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified three themes: creating representation through shared stories, creating understanding through shared stories, and creating advocates through shared stories.

Panelists view their work as using narrative to help individuals in pain find comfort through common experiences and to build a more welcoming community and, eventually, culture.

Keywords: representation, diversity, comic-con, marginalized groups, geek culture, thematic analysis, advocacy

Space at the Con: Conversaciones sobre la representación en cultura popular en las convenciones de cómics

RESUMEN

“Space at the Con” explora las motivaciones y los objetivos de las personas que participan en las discusiones en Comic-Cons y las convenciones centradas en la diversidad y la representación de grupos marginados (mujeres, personas LGBTQIA +, personas de color, personas con discapacidades y más) en la cultura popular. Los eventos estilo cómic ocurren en los Estados Unidos y en todo el mundo, mostrando películas, televisión, cómics e incluso contenido en línea. Estos eventos son una forma en que las personas pueden encontrarse y aprender sobre la cultura popular. Una persona de color, una mujer, una persona transgénero, un homosexual o lesbiana, a menudo puede encontrar hostilidad, a veces porque se les considera menos “legit”. Sin embargo, este fenómeno de mantenimiento de geek también puede deberse a la ausencia de grupos marginados en la representación de los geeks en la cultura popular. La gente aprende acerca de las normas y costumbres a través de cultura popular. Para comprender mejor las narraciones y los temas en torno a la representación de grupos marginados en los medios y el impacto que los participantes creen que pueden tener estas

discusiones se realizaron entrevistas con participantes en paneles sobre temas de diversidad y marginación en una convención de cómics. Estas entrevistas incluyeron preguntas sobre las motivaciones para participar y el impacto percibido que podrían tener. El análisis temático de las transcripciones de las entrevistas identificó tres temas: crear representación a través de historias compartidas, crear comprensión a través de historias compartidas y crear defensores a través de historias compartidas. Los panelistas consideran que su trabajo utiliza la narrativa para ayudar a las personas con dolor a encontrar consuelo a través de experiencias comunes y para construir una comunidad más acogedora y, en última instancia, una cultura.

Palabras clave: Representación, diversidad, comic-con, grupos marginados, cultura geek, análisis temático, incidencia

Space at the Con: 动漫展上关于流行文化代表的交流

摘要

“Space at the Con”探索了那些在圣地亚哥动漫展（comic-con）和相关展览会上参与讨论的个人动机和目标。这些展览会聚焦于流行文化中边缘群体的多样性和代表，边缘群体包括女性、LGBTQIA+个人、有色人种、残疾人士等。像comic-con这样的活动在美国和全球都有举行，这类活动展示电影、电视、漫画书、甚至是网络内容。这类活动为个人面对流行文化并从中学习提供了一种方式。有色人种、女性、跨性别者、男同性恋或女同性恋者可能时常会面临敌视，有时这是因为他们被视为不那么“合法”。然而，像动漫展这类呈现保持极客的现象，也有可能源于流行文化中的极客代表缺少边

缘群体。人们从流行文化中学习规范和习俗，以更好地理解媒体中围绕边缘群体代表的叙事和主题，以及参与者认为这些讨论能产生的影响。为实现这一理解，笔者在一次动漫展上对参与者就多样性和边缘化问题进行了面谈。面谈所提到的问题包括参与动机和参与者可能感知到的影响。通过对面谈记录进行主题分析，识别了三大主题：通过分享故事创造代表、通过分享故事达成理解、通过分享故事创造倡议。面谈人员将各自的工作视为用叙事的方式帮助受痛苦的个人通过相同体验获得安慰，和建立一个更友好的社群，并最终建立一种文化。

关键词：代表，多样性，圣地亚哥动漫展，边缘群体，极客文化，主题分析，倡议

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Every year in September, hundreds of thousands of people make a pilgrimage to the desert of Salt Lake City. Devotees don Star Fleet uniforms, carry Captain America shields, eat Wookie Cookies at the concession stand, and stand in miles of lines for hours. Civilians can see Last Airbenders walking on the sidewalk and sit across from Wonder Woman on the train. The scene is at once overwhelming and inspiring. For a few days, the city is transformed and, with over 127,000 attendees in September of 2015, Salt Lake Comic Con¹ became the third most populous place in the state of Utah, just edging out Provo, the home of Brigham Young University (Davidson 2014).

The first Comic-Con² took place in San Diego in 1970 (Comic-Con International 2018). What began as a three-day event, attended by 300 people, dedicated to sharing news and insights into the popular media of the day has grown to

a five-day multi-media extravaganza wherein every major and minor film, television, gaming, and publishing company attempts to out-wow the over 300,000 attendees. It has become an international movement, inspiring conventions across the United States and around the globe. In New York, more than 167,000 attend, Toronto hosts 127,000, France's Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Alger draws more than 200,000, and Tokyo's Comiket had over 180,000 attendees (Salkowitz "How Many").

So, comic cons are big business and well attended. But why? They are expensive—major cons cost at least \$200 for a pass to attend all days—and crowded. What is the allure? The simple answer is *access*. Fans who attend comic cons enjoy access to the people who create some of their favorite media, celebrities who star in the film and television iterations, and experts who pontificate on the media. Important announcements and delicious behind-the-scenes tidbits are shared on panels, sneak previews are shown, and autograph and photo opportunities with celebrities are sold. Comic con is the place to learn more about pop culture and what its future looks like. The purpose of this qualitative research project is to better understand the narratives and themes around representation of marginalized groups (women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of color, people with disabilities, and more) in media and what impact participants believe these discussions can have.

If one were looking for a place to directly encounter media and popular culture, a comic con would be ideal. As Smith describes it, San Diego Comic-Con "plays host not just to the comic book industry, but it has become an important promotional venue for the film, television, video gaming, role gaming, and toy industries, among others" (10). Beyond learning about the media they consume, attendees at comic cons find

a place where fans can directly communicate with the creators of that media. Panels often include Q&A sessions that allow individuals to speak directly with artists and celebrities. They can share their opinions, ask questions, and even make suggestions. Bolling found that many of the creators “expressed genuine interest in consumer input in the creative process” (48). Beyond the ability to drive content, comic con panels are important signals of the culture. When a topic is important enough to merit a panel, it signals that that topic is something the community should be discussing or considering. Expected comic con topics include “Marvel vs. DC,” “The Future of Star Wars,” and general cosplay tips. In recent years, however, panels have begun to focus more on marginalized groups and their representation in popular culture.

Across the continent, comic cons in 2015 featured panels dedicated to discussing diversity. In Kansas City, a panel titled “LGBT and Comics” included “a gender non-binary writer ... a lesbian comics fan, and ... a transgender woman in an awesome supergirl [*sic*] costume” (Arnone). Yet another panel addressed the virtual absence of people of color in comic books. Panelists “all remembered going to their local comic shop, looking at the wall of comics, and finding few characters who looked like them.” In New York diversity was a theme, with events and panels dedicated to questions of diversity in media content and a focus on bringing more diverse voices to speak on the panels (Salkowitz “Diversity”). This last lesson was learned, painfully and infamously, by Denver ComicCon months earlier when they held a “Women in Comics” panel that featured only white men as speakers (Asselin). This misfire was repeated again on an all-male panel titled “Writing Women Friendly Comics” at Gen Con in Indiana. This has become a common enough problem at conventions and academic conferences that all-male panels

have been dubbed “manels” and spawned a Tumblr page called “Congratulations, you have a Manel.”

Perhaps due to the firestorms created with each new manel, or perhaps out of a sincere dedication to make cons more intersectional, fall 2015 was dubbed “The Year of the Woman” at San Diego Comic-Con International. It was noted that more women attended and more panels were dedicated to discussing sexual and racial equality: “The default Comic-Con panelist is still a white man, but it does seem that more of an effort has been made to correct this lazy lopsidedness” (Scott). The dream of a more intersectional geek community will not be without a struggle, though.

GEEK CULTURE

The terms geek and nerd are often used interchangeably, and while there are similarities between the two categories, there are also distinctions. The term “nerd” is associated with above average intelligence and lower social acumen; and the geek is obsessed with certain types of fandoms (science fiction, fantasy, comics and superheroes, and anime) and socializes around those fandoms. In the Venn diagram of these two descriptions, there is often overlap. Nerds can be geeks, but not always. And not all geeks are brilliant.³ Where the stereotypes are most similar is in their rather specific demographic assumptions: they are white, male, straight, and cis-gender.

Tilton attempted to further categorize the geek / nerd / dweeb / dork using the four temperaments, or humours of sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. The sanguine, represented by blood, is a warm loving, charmer; the choleric is seen as the practical leader, often a hard worker; the melancholic is the conservative, loyal perfectionist; and

the phlegmatic is the thoughtful and patient people-pleaser. Tilton further argues that the “nerd” is the choleric keeper of knowledge, one who learns for the sheer joy of gaining more knowledge. He describes the dork as the melancholic creative lover of esoteric knowledge of a thing. The dork is the cosplayer in any fandom. The geeks are the extroverted sanguine. In this, we see someone publicly reveling in their love for a fandom and socializing around that fandom. It is important to note that “these mediated representations are not exactly being created by real people” (2). For the geek community, much of what they know about themselves and each other depends on portrayals in media such as *The Big Bang Theory* (TBBT) or Comic Book Guy on *The Simpsons*. And again, they are overwhelmingly white men.

While there are occasional variations, they are almost always male. Varma argues that this is not so much a new gendered idea; rather it is “the logical extension of implicit and over messages to which both men and women have been exposed ever since they were children” (362). Varma’s work is in computer science—trying to understand the gap between men and women in this STEM field—but the gendered stereotypes remain. Varma finds that hostility, whether latent or open, was a problem for women, just as in every other field. So when the label of geek is applied to women, they are experiencing an additional layer of social pressure.

According to Pustz, comic culture shares “a body of knowledge and information, an appreciation of a medium that most Americans have dismissed as hopelessly juvenile and essentially worthless” (22). Several methods of gatekeeping exist to keep the community closed. Wertley identified knowledge and gender specifically as measures for true geeks. Approaching this culture, a person of color, a woman, a transgender person, a homosexual or lesbian, can often encounter hostility.

Women and marginalized groups struggle to enter the geek culture often because they do not fit the stereotype and are not seen in the media. This is unfortunate for several reasons, not the least of them that girls want to be geeks. Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz attempted to better understand the experiences of girls in secondary school. What they learned was that girls felt limited in their expression of themselves in two ways: pressure from peers to not stand out and dominance of male narratives and experiences. Surprisingly, several girls expressed a desire to be seen as a geek in high school—it was a label they embraced. For young women, to be labeled a “geek” was positive, particularly in comparison to the other labels girls are often given such as “slut” or “girlie girl.” Even more sadly, the labels that young women aim to escape by joining the geek community are not left behind in schoolyard. As Maggs described it, “Women are ostracized from online gaming, called out as fake, accused of being desperate for attention, harassed while cosplaying, and, worst of all, forced into silence” (11). This phenomenon, known as gatekeeping or geek-keeping, is not unique to women, though.

For people of color, the geek community can feel just as unwelcoming. Brandon Jackson describes his experience as a “blerd” (black nerd) in the 1990s: “They used to call me Urkel—and not in an endearing way either.” The stereotype of geeks as white is often not surprising, considering superheroes were around for just under three decades before a black superhero—Black Panther—was created by Marvel, and can lead to assumptions that there is a certain way to be a geek. Traditional geeks can engage in gatekeeping, leading to a hostile space for black geeks (Valenzuela).

In response to this gatekeeping, groups have begun organizing to create their own spaces. From Black Girl Nerds to the Mary Sue to Gay Nerds, marginalized groups are creat-

ing their own spaces to discuss their obsessions, address the problematic aspects of those obsessions.⁴ However, the content that these geeks obsess over often remains mainstream and includes movies and games created by major production houses. For example, in 2009, researchers found that white, male characters were overrepresented in video games released in the United States from March 2005 to February 2006. While men are only half the population, they are more than 85% of video game characters. And white characters are 80% of video game characters, when the US population is only 75.1% of the population (Williams, et al). The popular culture that nerds of all genders, colors, orientations, abilities learn from is shared.

REPRESENTATION

The importance of understanding media lies in the power the media have in “shaping broad social definitions” (Croteau and Hoynes, 161). The influence media has on social norms and patterns has been found in several studies and does not need to be revisited here, but Postman described it as the power to “direct us to organize our minds and integrate our experience of the world, it imposes itself on our consciousness and social institutions in myriad forms” (18). Beyond the ability to categorize, popular culture familiarizes us with concepts. Most Americans learn about government, issues, each other, and themselves through the television, music, movies, and books we consume. And that learning begins at a young age (Foy). The media present to us images that categorize things as either normal or other, and prescribe the roles those others are to take.

In America, people whose race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity, are not in the majority learn early that they are not the norm. In short, anyone who is not a

white, straight, cis-gender, male is *other* and the media teaches them clearly what roles to play.⁵ As Douglas described it, “The mass media raised us, socialized us, entertained us, comforted us, deceived us, disciplined us, told us what we could do and told us what we couldn’t” (Douglas, 13). This is especially unfortunate, as scholars agree that mass media representations are full of stereotypes, shortcuts, and misinformation (Holtzman and Sharpe). The media helps to define our surroundings and our selves. And for geeks, the place they gather to better understand media, their community and themselves, is a comic con.

To better understand the experiences of people who participate in comic con panels about diversity and representation in media and popular culture, this project asked the following research questions:

What themes are present in discussions of representation of marginalized groups at comic con panels?

Who participates in these panel discussions?

What are the goals and motivations of these participants?

METHOD

To answer the research questions, interviews were conducted at a comic con in Salt Lake City in March 2016. The researcher attended all panels with a title that suggested diversity or representation would be a specific topic of discussion. After the panel, individual panelists were approached about an interview.⁶ A total of 17 individual interviews were conducted with more than 12 hours of recording to transcribe. The only demographic questions asked of respondents were their proper pronouns and their profession. Of the 25 participants, 16 identified as female, 6 identified as male, and 3

identified as using *they, them, their* pronouns. This is an interesting breakdown, considering the usual demographic and stereotype of comic con goers. It also suggests that women are doing much of the heavy lifting when it comes to speaking about diversity and representation in geek circles. Of the in-person interviews, six were authors, six were artists or in the art community, and five had general professions.

Interviews at the comic con event were conducted in hallways or the green room available to panel participants. The interviews in hallways often occurred immediately following a panel, meaning the participants had just recently experienced the emotions of a panel. The emotions can run very high during and after some of these events. For example, following the panel about being LGBTQIA+ in the geek community a throng of people moved to the front to speak with the panelists. Several audience members were in tears while many others hugged each other; the panel immediately following was delayed because of the difficulty clearing the room.) Interviews were digitally recorded in order to avoid loss of context and comprehension, individual interviews were transcribed within 24 hours. Field notes were compared and added to analysis. The interview questions are added in Appendix A.

Thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted by repeated reading and comparison for themes, at both the individual interview level and the overall question level. The researcher not only read through each individual transcript repeatedly, but also created documents with all answers to each question combined together to better understand how each question was answered. Using thematic analysis “identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, and theorizes language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social”

(Braun and Clarke, 81). Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate for this project as the researcher did not wish to approach respondents' descriptions of their experiences with existing theories or to place predictive expectations on the language and its own meanings. After repeated readings and coding, three themes were identified across respondents: individuals believed first, that they were creating representation by sharing stories like theirs; second, that they were creating understanding by sharing their stories; and, third, that they were advocating for themselves and creating other advocates at the same time.

FINDINGS

For many interviewees, the act of sharing their stories was motivated by a desire to help to create representation in their community. While it may not have been in major motion pictures or a top shelf comic book, by putting themselves on the stage in front of 20 to 250 people, discussing their sexuality, their experience as a young, black geek, or sharing their frustration as a woman in the gaming community, these people believed that they were helping create representation. As Leia⁷, an author, said,

I think that it's very rare to hear from a person of color and to hear from their perspective ... I didn't get to see my self in books when I was growing up ... I've felt that it's been important to share my story so that other people understand that these books can be published. I thought it wouldn't ever be published because it had a person of color as the protagonist (Personal interview. 17 March 2016).

Whether it was in the form of speaking up or acting up, participation as their true selves was an important aspect of the event. Jessica participated in a panel addressing issues for the LGBTQIA+ community. She shared that her mere presence as an asexual person was an act of representation: “It’s talked about so little and acknowledged so little to the point that they’re just adding the “A” to the LGBTQ and it was just something I felt very strongly about and I wanted to talk about it in a public forum” (Personal interview. 17 March 2016). The first time she spoke publicly on a panel about her sexuality and the experience of multiple people approaching her and “one girl started crying! And she was like ‘Thank you for getting up there and talking about us because we’re barely acknowledged!’” (Jessica). The absence of popular culture representations for people to identify with seemed to be a motivating factor for participation in conversations where they could then proudly label themselves and let the audience relate.

For Tiana, a Black woman who dressed in elaborate cosplays, her participation was a response to the negative experiences she had as a non-conforming geek in her teens. She described always wanting to cosplay but being afraid that people would make fun of her and then one day deciding “to speak up as much as possible because I would have loved to have someone speak up that much when I was entering the field when I was 18.” She spoke of wanting to let people know that she knew what it was like to feel like you’re “the only one” (Personal interview. 17 March 2016). It became obvious that Tiana was a very popular presence at the event. Over the course of our interview, Tiana was interrupted twice to take photos with other attendees. One woman expressed that she had been waiting to see a Princess Tiana and just had to have her picture taken with her. This may speak to the fact that the pop-

ulation of Salt Lake City is overwhelmingly white—72.8% white according to the 2010 US Census—and with fewer than 3% of its people identifying as Black, there were likely few people to dress as Tiana at the con (US Census). But it also could be a result of the lack of Black female characters to represent: Tiana is the only Black Disney Princess and there are no major Black female superheroes other than Storm, though Black Panther and *Deadpool 2* have given us several secondary Black characters. Whatever the reason, during the interview, people waved or shouted things such as “You look gorgeous!” to Tiana as they walked by. You could sense that attendees *needed* to see her.

Another interesting aspect of feeling a need to be a representative for audiences came from white participants. Becky and Luke, both white, spoke of their commitment to speaking to white audiences about the importance of diversity and representation. Luke discussed seeing himself in media and the way that inspired him:

I thought I could be a writer because every representation of a writer from, you know, Shakespeare to Hemingway to every white [guy], you know like, every movie about a writer is about a white guy that looks approximately like me. So it was very natural for me to say, ‘Yes, of course I want to be a writer. You know people who like me become writers; that’s something we become.’ And so standing back and realizing that not everyone has that experience is something that I like pointing out to people when I can, because my voice does come from place of that sort of privilege (Personal interview. 18 March 2016).

Luke seems to be describing a motivation to demonstrate a “wokeness” in his participation; a desire to show other white men that they can acknowledge their privilege and help create more opportunity for diverse stories. While Becky, a white woman who has a podcast about geek news, was motivated by the idea “that in our community there are a lot of people who are marginalized who are not represented and I have a very unique opportunity because I have this built in audience that I can speak to those things and people will listen to me, generally” (Personal interview, 18 March 2016). Both Becky and Luke describe their participation as a type of modeling for other white people; a hope that, through their speaking on panels, white audience members will think critically about media and be inspired to consider what such a lack of representation in media means to those who are marginalized. As Leia, a woman of Asian descent put it, “It’s important for others to hear my message of the importance of what it feels like to not see yourself in books and not feel like your story is important” (Personal interview, 17 March 2016).

The meaningfulness of story was the second theme identified. Respondents often described the idea that sharing stories on panels would help audience members understand their own experiences. Cindy spoke of being motivated to participate because of her 15 year-old daughter, who is on the autism spectrum. She described bringing her daughter to panels and seeing someone she could relate to. “Even if there isn’t someone that’s exactly like her, there’s probably somebody who also feels marginalized and that the feeling of being marginalized is not unique. And THAT is more broad spectrum than maybe she supposed and that actually really does help her mental health” (Personal interview, 17 March 2016). Cindy continued, explaining that this phenomenon was what motivated her to participate as a panelist:

If I can help them [the audience] feel like, yeah, their position is awkward or misunderstood but it's not something that they have to be ashamed of. That is something that people understand and that is something that they're capable of being sympathetic toward in a positive way.

The goal of helping others understand themselves, and come to a point of understanding others, was mentioned by individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community as well.

The “LGBTQ panel” is increasingly popular at Salt Lake Comic Con events. Over the past five years, organizers have had to move the panel to progressively larger rooms due to demand, as measured in volunteer reports of rooms filled to capacity and large numbers of attendees being turned away. The emotional reaction to this panel was mentioned by multiple respondents. Jessica said, “As soon as I said my name and what I was representing, there were cheers. And that, just, oh yeah. There were cheers. And I was just like ‘Holy crap!’ and I had no less than three people come up to me at the end” (Personal interview. 17 March 2016). This direct interaction after panels was also familiar to several panelists. Thor, a cosplayer, shared what happened when they “first did the LGBTQ panel, the first two times we did it, we actually one girl come up in tears because we told her it's ok to be queer. She's like, she was in tears, she said, ‘I can't tell my parents. How do I tell my parents?’”

Storytelling can be an intimately experience, allowing us to share facts as we saw them and emotions as we felt them (Haigh and Hardy). And for several respondents, coming out stories served as a pivotal event to share. Thor admitted that “when we told our stories—our coming out—sometimes it's

positive, sometimes its negative.” Thor continued, “Well, I was scared to death for the longest time to come out to my parents.”

Then Thor shared their coming out story:

When we told her our stories—our coming out—sometimes it’s positive sometimes it’s negative. I’m like ‘You never know. Like I thought my dad was going to hate me; I thought my world was going to end because I love my mother and my father. And I thought it was going to kill them.’ And they were just ‘Meh. It’s probably just a phase.’ But they love me for who I am (Thor. Personal interview. 18 March 2016).

Yet another interviewee, Mal, shared his coming out experience, concluding, “While the Queer community has taken great strides in the past several years, I believe I has a long way to go before it reaches general acceptance and equality. Not everyone has a positive experience when coming out ... I barely made it out alive myself” (Personal interview. 18 March 2017). This deeply ingrained pain in the LGBTQIA+ community appeared often in discussions about the motivation to participate in panels. Several expressed the desire to share a brutally honest truth about the experience:

I constantly hear “It gets better” but that just isn’t true ... It does not always get better. Actually it can get worse. However, what did get better was me. I got better. I rose above it. I surrounded myself with loving incredible people who make me happy. I married a wonderful man and he is my family now.

I like to feel that if I rose above it, others can too. I want to be a voice to those lost in the fear and dread, as their worlds are falling apart, that *they* will get better too. That is why I do LGBTQ panels (Mal. Personal interview. 18 March 2016).

Each interviewee appeared committed to the idea that they could use their past experiences and their standing in the geek community to create change for those in the audience. As expressed by Mal, these “panels are very personal to me. They are a place where I can be a voice to injustice and help bring healing to the con communities.”

And for many of the participants, the goal was to advocate for their community.

The third and final theme discovered in the interviews was the desire to be an advocate and even to encourage others to be one as well. Cisco said, “It is my goal in every panel I am on to try to say AT LEAST one thing that will make people think, make people want to research, learn, and inspire others to talk about the topics” (Personal interview. 17 March 2016). Participants seemed to share the view that panels were a place they could serve as a resource to the people attending the panel. Peter described it as the ability to “help answer a question, maybe direct someone to somewhere where they can maybe get some help because a lot of times you’ll see younger kids who might be wondering or questioning or asking a question because they would like some direction” (Personal interview. 17 March 2016). The issues that are addressed in these panels can involve deeply personal questions of experiences with racism, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexism, and more. Panelists share their experiences in an attempt to spread knowledge. Jessica said, “Any public

form of conversation is an important thing to have because somebody out there is going to listen. Someone out there is going to be educated in some way” (Personal interview. 17 March 2016). Panels are a way to educate and activate the geek community, though admittedly, because panels can have audiences that range anywhere from 25 to 250 people, this can happen at small numbers at a time.

Some panelists saw their role as starting a thought process and a conversation. For example, Thor said, “You plant one seed, that person’s going to go out and do it. And then they’re going to talk ... they’re going to share. And then someone from them shares it. It’s going to spread” (Personal interview. 17 March 2017). The hope that this discussion about important issues related to marginalized groups and communities is also with the final goal, articulated by Becky: “We’re ready for people to start acting” (Personal interview. 17 March 2017). As far as what kind of action—beyond sharing information—panelists hoped they would see, the answers ranged from audience members being proactive media consumers to inspiring them to becoming media creators. Interviewees suggested, though, that participation on a convention panel is meant to help educate and activate the audience.

DISCUSSION

The power and influence of comic conventions has expanded, both geographically and culturally. As new cons appear across the nation and become more popular, the importance of studying geek culture becomes more important. With the demographics of geeks—that they are white, male, straight, and cis-gender—breaking down, there becomes a need to address the ways in which marginalized groups enter and experience geek culture. A person of color, a woman, a trans-

gender person, a homosexual or lesbian, can often encounter hostility, sometimes because they are seen as less “legit.” However, this geek-keeping phenomenon can also stem from the absence of marginalized groups in the representation of geeks in popular culture. People learn about norms and customs from popular culture. And people in marginalized groups also learn that they are not the majority, what that means, how they can contribute, and what their value is.

It should be noted that this research was conducted over a short period of time and at a specific location. Future work could broaden the research site to more locations or to larger events, such as San Diego Comic-con. There is also the possibility that quantitative surveys—particularly with open-ended questions—would allow more panelists to share their thoughts and motivations about the importance and impact of panels addressing diversity and representation in the geek community. It would also be valuable to engage in this same conversation with those take time out of their precious comic con time to attend these panels, so that we can better understand what diversity and representation really means to this community.

The purpose of this qualitative research project was to better understand the narratives and themes around representation of marginalized groups (women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people of color, people with disabilities, and more) in media and what impact participants believe these discussions can have. To realize this understanding, interviews were conducted with participants on panels about issues of diversity and marginalization at a comic convention. These interviews included questions about the motivations for participating and the perceived impact they might be having. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified three themes: creating

representation through shared stories, creating understanding through shared stories, and creating advocates through shared stories. Panelists view their work as using narrative to help individuals in pain find comfort through common experiences and to build a more welcoming community and, eventually, culture.

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APPENDIX A

Interview questions

Please give your name, profession, and proper pronouns.

What is your chosen pseudonym?

What other conferences or conventions do you present at?

How did you get involved in comic con panels?

Why do you speak on panels that discuss representation of LGBTQIA / women / racial and ethnic groups / disability / etc.?

What other panels do you participate on at comic con?

What personal experience do you have with these topics?

What professional experience do you have with these topics?

What else would you like to add about your participation on this panel?

NOTES

- 1 Interviews were collected at the event known as Salt Lake City FanX, run by Dan Farr Productions. Subsequent to a lawsuit, this event has been renamed FanX Salt Lake Comic Convention.
- 2 “Comic-Con” is part of the trademarked name of San Diego Comic-Con International and will be used when referring to that specific event. “Comic con” will be used when referring to all other types of comic conventions.
- 3 For the most current understanding of these stereotypes, Urban Dictionary was consulted. Specifically, the entries for “nerd” (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Nerd>), “geek” (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=geek>), and “Geek/Nerd Debate” (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Geek%2FNerd%20Debate>). Retrieved August 30, 2018.
- 4 Black Girl Nerds <http://blackgirlnerds.com>, The Mary Sue <http://www.themarysue.com>, Gay Nerds <http://gay-nerds.com/site/>.
- 5 In keeping with inclusive language practices, this article will use the singular, gender-neutral *they* when gendered pronouns are not appropriate. The singular *they* has been recognized as grammatically correct and was even named the 2015 Word of the Year by the American Dialect Society. <http://www.americandialect.org/2015-word-of-the-year-is-singular-they>. Retrieved February 8, 2015.
- 6 It should be noted that the researcher has a relationship with Salt Lake City Comic Con and regularly participates in panels. Several of the interviewees were individuals who were personal friends or acquaintances.
- 7 To protect confidentiality, all participants chose a pseudonym.

What's lit got to do with it? Deconstructing the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site

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by Alana N. Seaman

ABSTRACT

While ties to literary works and the authors who penned them are capitalized on to attract tourists, justify preservation and revitalization efforts, request funding, and gain historic and protected status, the role of literature in tourism experiences at these places is poorly understood. Utilizing electronic word of mouth (eWOM) data and a deconstructive approach, the purpose of this study was to examine the role of literature in the experiences of tourists at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site.

Keywords: Literary Tourism, Literature, Place, Heritage Tourism, Carl Sandburg

¿Y qué tiene que ver la literatura? Deconstruyendo el sitio histórico nacional de Carl Sandburg Home

RESUMEN

Si bien los vínculos con las obras literarias y los autores que las escribieron se capitalizan para atraer turistas, justifican los esfuerzos de preservación y revitalización, solicitan financiamiento y obtienen un estatus histórico y protegido, el papel de la literatura en las experiencias de turismo en estos lugares es poco conocido. Utilizando datos de eWOM y un enfoque deconstructivo, el propósito de este estudio fue examinar el

papel de la literatura en las experiencias de los turistas en el sitio histórico nacional de Carl Sandburg Home.

Palabras clave: turismo literario, literatura, lugar, turismo de patrimonio, Carl Sandburg

是什么让人们痴迷于旅游景点？
解构卡尔·桑德堡故居——国家历史遗址

摘要

尽管（旅游景点）与文学作品的关系，和撰写文学作品的作者，这二者被用于吸引游客、为旅游景点保护和修复工作提供正当理由、请求资助、获得历史地位和受保护地位，但（人们）对文学在旅游体验中产生的作用还十分缺乏理解。通过使用网络口碑数据和一项解构方法，本文目的在于检验文学在游客体验中产生的作用，这些游客参观了卡尔·桑德堡的故居——国家历史遗址。

关键词：文学旅游，文学，地点，遗产旅游，卡尔·桑德堡

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INTRODUCTION

Authors' birthplaces, homes, and gravesites have attracted tourists for centuries. Five hundred years ago when Chaucer was entombed in the walls of Westminster Abbey, visitors who came to pay their respects were dedicated readers and wealthy individuals who could afford to travel, had the ability to read, and had access to books (Watson 2). Today,

literary ties to places are used for their profitability potential as a tourist attraction. Many locations employ a connection to authors as a means to draw visitors, justify preservation and revitalization efforts, request funding, or gain historic and protected status. Shopping centers bear the names of generation-defining authors, whole landscapes are preserved in the name of local essayists, and souvenir shops sell t-shirts, snow globes, and shot glasses featuring iconic area writers. To create a unique sense of place, hotels, restaurants, and bars claim that famous novelists *slept here*, *ate here*, and *drank here*, cities erect statues to pay tribute to native literary sons and daughters, and otherwise obscure towns host festivals events to authors ... all in the name of tourism.

Regardless however of whether this is undertaken as a means to attract tourists or as an honest attempt to honor a person's creative talents, the related author is memorialized, deemed worthy of recognition for the literary work created. As Lowenthal points out, commemoration in any form implies cultural importance (Lowenthal 27). As such, the values popularly associated with an author and his or her literary works are inscribed upon the local landscape (Rigney 77), and in turn, tourists flock to otherwise indistinguishable destinations simply because literary connections set them apart from neighboring locations (Herbert 80). Tourists' willingness to visit these places and pay tribute to a writer further solidifies the related author's literary and cultural significance. In turn, Buell (190) argued that memorializing an author implies readership. Active admiration for an author and the values expressed in texts (in the form of tourism), he contends, works to demarcate related texts as classics: worthy of honoring and reading. Another recent study also suggested visiting a literary location and participating in site-specific, literature-inspired activities may motivate tourists to read

the related literary work before and after a travel experience (Seaman 157).

Yet, despite these seemingly intimate relationships between literature and tourism, the role of literature in the experiences of tourists at these “literary” places is poorly understood. Instead, the practice of literary tourism remains heavily theoretical; with many scholars implying literature is central to the phenomena. Despite an absence of empirical evidence to support this, a number of contemporary scholars also agree that *anyone* who visits a literary site is a literary tourist (see, for example, Lowe 5; Westover 16). And, a number of destinations build on this assumption, both literally and figuratively. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the role of literature in the experiences of tourists at one site devoted to an author in the American South. A deconstructive approach was employed to examine a robust collection of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) data to reveal whether literature is, in the mind of tourists, a meaningful component underlying how a place is experienced, a means of to achieve conservation or public space goals, or simply an excuse for kitsch as Luftig (153) asserts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary Tourism

Literary tourism can be seen as a form of heritage tourism, where particular versions of the past are memorialized, celebrated, and more than anything, emphasized for tourist consumption (Lowe 12; Lowenthal 250). While the practice of literary tourism, or travel to places associated with works of literature or authors (Watson 12; Lowe 3), has garnered the attention of some scholars, the phenomena remain relatively unexplored. Nonetheless, the practice of visiting places asso-

ciated with books and their authors remains incredibly popular even in the age of instantaneous entertainment streaming. Herbert (81) illustrated the links between visitors' choice to visit three literary and artistic sites in France. Although data suggested patrons appreciated ties to famous artists, authors, and their works, there was little indication these tourists were dedicated fans who sought out a site specifically to honor the memorialized creator. Instead, visitors identified the literary and artistic links as traits setting the sites apart from neighboring heritage sites, prompting a visit. In a later survey-based study, Herbert (330) found tourists to two literary sites in the UK reported a number of reasons for their visit, but many cited literary interest as a motivating factor. Herbert also found most visitors had a good general awareness of the related authors and their works but concluded that overall "literary places prove to be no different from the experience of other heritage places" (329).

Research on other features of the literary tourism experience has also been conducted. Fawcett and Cormack (680) attempted to understand how the story of native author L.M. Montgomery was told across Prince Edward Island, Canada, by examining how authenticity was interpreted at sites dedicated to the *Anne of Green Gables* writer. Others have examined the long-term effect of literature encountered during childhood as fueling of a desire to travel to associated destinations later in life (Iwashita 75), the growth of literary tourism in the nineteenth century (Watson 2), and the iterations of Mark Twain in tourism in contemporary America (Lowe 7).

Many studies, however, are predicated on the notion that visitors to sites associated with authors or their stories are readers who know the author or text(s) well enough to recognize a destination's literary references (see, for instance, Earl, 401). Westover (17) contends because visitors who have

read a text prior to visiting a literary destination will have the cultural capital to appreciate the literary signs, symbols, and nods to the text experienced during their visit, they garner an added level of enjoyment from their trip. Likewise, upon surveying visitors on a coach tour of Catherine Cookson country in the UK, Pocock (241) found participants were largely dedicated readers who came prepared to see the aspects of the landscape that confirmed their notions of the writer and her fictional works. Later, Johnson (105) explored how the widely read novel *Ulysses* could work as a tourist guide to the city of Dublin and concluded the text provides visitors with a way to engage with and understand the modern city. Echoing the assumption that literature underlies literary place experiences, several scholars assert that upon visiting a location associated with a literary work, visitors cannot help but simultaneously see the landscape through the eyes of the author and the lens of reality (Pocock 240; Westover 12). Similarly, Lowe (36) argued visitors often cannot (or choose not to) discern between the real lives and histories of an author and the fictional past an author created. She illustrates this by noting how tourists often come to Hannibal, Missouri (Mark Twain's hometown), hoping to see the white picket fence Tom Sawyer painted in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, associating it with Twain's childhood. Thus, in some cases, fiction may even eclipse reality (Lowe, 40; see also Alexander 108). Similarly, upon their examination of Dracula-related tourism in Transylvania, Muresan and Smith (83) found visitors were looking for a mix of fact and fiction.

Among scholars who theorize about literary tourism, there is a general assumption that visitors to places of literary importance are driven by, or have at least read, the associated text(s). A number of scholars contend literary tourists are really just readers who have been left unfulfilled by texts and are

searching other means of engaging with a book or its author (see Buell 177; Johnson 105; Lowe 40; Santesso 379; Watson 11; Westover 12). Other scholars contend literary places allow readers to further savor a text by learning more about the place or people who inspired the work, where a story was set, or the life of an author (Iwashita 75; Santesso 379; Watson 12). Given that many authors are widely known to use references to real places and actual, identifiable landmarks in their literary tales as a means of grounding the imaginative in reality (Groth 3) and making the entire story more believable (Groth 3; Pocock 51), visiting these locations is enticing for tourists.

Literature and Place

More broadly, the relationship between literature and place has been widely considered. Humanistic geographers, Taun (28) and Lefebvre (86), contend otherwise indistinguishable spaces become specific places (or a location becomes a meaningful and unique destination) in part through how we communicate about it and the ways people move around and act within it. Literature is one of the many ways we communicate about place. Literature gives people a way to visit a place they have never been and to imagine places unknown to them. In turn, literature shapes, in part, the way we think about place (Ryden 32; Taun 28). In the United States, for example, the *local color* movement in literature is largely credited with creating, stereotyping, and entrenching images of different regions of the country in the minds of the American public (Baker 33; Litwiller-Berte 142; Hsu 37; Shortridge 285). The literary genre, which featured detailed depictions of everyday life (albeit fictionalized and embellished) in geographic locations and social landscapes around the quickly expanding nation, found a huge following just after the Civil War when the railroads were building westward and new ar-

eas of the country were accessible to a growing number of people (Baker 35). The public was fascinated by the possibility of travel to these new places, and literary depictions of the local color allowed them to visit without the financial and physical challenges of travel in the late nineteenth century (Baker 36). The popularity of the publications was so prolific that many of the images of regional identity became ingrained in popular culture and are still recognizable today.

In turn, literature not only illustrates for readers what it is that makes a place different from other similar locations but also communicates, in part, what kind of behaviors are expected when visiting those destinations and introduces readers to what activities can be enacted while there. Montana, for example, has always been a sportsperson's paradise but it was Norman Maclean's novel *A River Runs Through It*, and later, Robert Redford's film by the same name that sparked a wildly successful fly-fishing tourism industry (Fraser; Hepworth; Seaman 52). Both Maclean's vivid literary depiction and Redford's beautiful cinematic interpretation gave people a reason to travel to Montana, and an idea of what to expect there; they too could cast a line into a rushing glacier-fed river and pull out a large glistening trout. Some 25 years later, the fly-fishing industry remains healthy (Puckett), and just recently, the tiny town of Seeley Lake has begun hosting a biennial Norman Maclean literary festival. While it is extremely unlikely that every single potential visitor has read, seen, or even heard of *A River Runs Through It* (in either manifestation), scholars contend the images of place depicted in literature (and film) often permeate popular culture and are powerful influencers of people's conceptualization of and behavior in place (Ryden 60; Shortridge 285). Thus, while all places, including literary places, may be many things to many people, the ways we communicate about a place are influ-

ential in how we think about that place (Lefebvre 42; Taun 31) and influence activities we engage in when visiting there (Edensor 65; Goffman 67; Light, 241). Yet while the connections between place and literature in a broad sense have been considered by scholars in a variety of fields, little research has addressed the effects of specific literary works on the places associated with them or their authors.

THE CASE—THE CARL SANDBURG HOME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

To examine the role of literature in the experience of tourists in literary places, a deconstructive examination of traveler reviews about the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site was conducted.

Sandburg and His Literary Works

Carl Sandburg was a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and poet. Born in Illinois in 1878 to Swedish immigrants, Sandburg worked in cities across the Midwest and is perhaps best known for his writing about the rapid industrialization of the country he witnessed as a young man during the early part of the twentieth century (NPS). As a boy, Sandburg grew up on the open Midwestern prairie and worked odd jobs to help support his large family, particularly after his father became underemployed in the wake of the economic downturn of the 1890s (NPS). During his teen years, Sandburg rode the rails around the Midwest and worked in a number of cities (Callahan 17). When the Spanish American war broke out, Sandburg enlisted and was stationed in Puerto Rico, though he never saw combat (Callahan 28). Upon his return from the war, the young veteran enrolled in college for a short time before growing restless and again heading out to ride the rails and work odd jobs around the Midwest. During his travels,

Carl witnessed a changing America. Callahan explains that “great social changes during Sandburg’s young adulthood—unions being formed, workers revolting against extreme working conditions, [and] rapidly developing transportation and manufacturing technology was changing the nation from a predominantly agrarian society to a more urban and industrial society” (51). Seeing firsthand how the working class (predominantly immigrants) was exploited greatly influenced Sandburg’s writings (Callahan 73; Niven 84). As a socialist, his literature brought attention to the struggles of immigrants and the working class, the unfair and life-sucking work conditions resulting from industrialization, and the increasing economic divide between laborers and captains of industry. The writer wrote about the life of the working man and for this became known as the poet of the people (NPS).

Sandburg first won the Pulitzer Prize for *Corn Huskers* (1918), a book of poetry illustrating the many facets of industrialization taking place around the Midwest. His seminal work on Abraham Lincoln entitled *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* won Sandburg his second Pulitzer Prize in 1939, and he later won a Pulitzer Prize again in poetry for his work on the depression, *Complete Poems* (1950). Despite having won the Pulitzer Prize *three* times, Sandburg seems to remain relatively obscure in contemporary culture. He is not widely depicted in popular culture in the way that Hemingway, Twain, or even, Steven King are. Yet, his home is a National Historic Site owned and run by the National Park Service.

The National Historic Site

Regardless of his lack of notoriety, the Sandburg residence became the property of the National Park Service when Carl’s wife Lillian donated it to the public in 1968. The site sits just a few minutes away from a freeway and a little

over an hour away from the famed Blue Ridge Parkway—easily accessible to tourists in the western North Carolina area. Located just outside Hendersonville, North Carolina (about 30 miles from Asheville), the homestead features a large antebellum house situated on a small farm perched high on a picturesque ridge deep in the Appalachian Mountains. The home's front door and large raised front porch trimmed with twin staircases faces northeast, affording visitors a pleasant view of neighboring forested ridges and distant mountain tops. Just a short walk from the main house sits Mrs. Sandburg's goat barn and barnyard complete with a herd of young goats (direct descendants of her prize-winning herd). Several other original outbuildings are also near the house and serve as maintenance service buildings. The rest of the 264-acre property has over 5 miles of recreational trails that weave through the mountainous natural landscape (NPS).

Until recently, the house, which is also home to Sandburg's large personal collection of books and the family's original furnishings, had several roof leaks and areas of rotted wood and mold. However, a multimillion-dollar renovation and restoration project was just completed in mid-2018 (National Park Service; see also Axtell). The National Park Service's investment in the house implies it believes the site is important not just as a place where the public can come and enjoy the natural local environment, but also as a tribute to the late author as evidenced by the decision to preserve his home and belongings (in order to continue to tell the story of his life and communicate the importance of his writings). Despite the Park Service's belief that Sandburg is still a relevant and important figure in American history, little is known about how visitors perceive either Sandburg or his literature (either before or after their visit) or how those perceptions

impact their experiences at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site.

METHODS

Deconstruction

Borrowed from the field of literary theory, deconstruction assumes the meaning of any text is inherently subjective and may therefore be interpreted in any number of ways (Derrida in Culler 78; Saussure in Kneale 105). Text, whether communicating great literary tales, or a weekly grocery list, is essentially just a set of arbitrary signs and symbols that gain meaning from a relationship with and in opposition to other signs and symbols (Culler 113). Thus, the meaning of any text is contingent upon both the individual reading it and the reader's contemporary culture. Semiotics, based on the same general theory, examines how signs and symbols communicate meaning through a variety of texts, from films, museum exhibits, landscapes, and other cultural artifacts to the experiences of individuals expressed in verbal, written, and artistic forms (Waterton and Watson 24).

The purpose of deconstruction, regardless of the type of text examined, is to tease out the multiple and often warring meanings it communicates to unsettle the dominant interpretation and highlight how a text is, in fact, also working to send an opposing message (Culler 22; DeMan in Kneale 109). The approach highlights how some meanings take precedence over others and instigate further examination of how dominant meanings are cultivated. Additionally, deconstruction is a flexible approach to research to achieve an overall goal rather than demanding researchers adhere to a rigid structure (Plug 387). Canton and Santos (374) for example, used the approach to examine the experiences of motorcyclists

traveling Route 66 by investigating a number of data sets including interviews, narrative inquiry, and photo elicitation. Similarly, Chronis (375) used a deconstructive methodology to examine how tourists to the Gettysburg Civil War site derived heritage meaning. Despite its potential, few tourism scholars have used deconstruction as a research methodology. Though underused by tourism scholars, deconstruction is well suited for examining tourist opinions, given that tourism places are often wrought with various signs and symbols created specifically to be read or interpreted by tourists (Waterton and Watson 110).

Data Collection—eWOM

To deconstruct the experiences of visitors to the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, visitor-generated feedback posted to the travel review website TripAdvisor was collected. Given that the home has been under construction since 2016 and was therefore not accessible to tourists, data was collected reflecting visitors' experiences prior to the start of the recent restoration project (i.e., prior to June 2016). Reviews were available as far back as October 7, 2007, and *all* reviews were collected for examination. In total, 257 reviews were in the data set.

Electronic word of mouth or eWOM is user-created data, usually written by a contributor (with little to no reward for posting feedback) and has become a popular way for tourists to investigate aspects of a destination before and during their visit, and to report back about their experience (see Catallops and Salvi 43; Livtin et al. 460). Scholars, noting the availability of eWOM reviews and its ability to reflect visitors' thoughts in (close to) real time, have looked to various eWOM resources to examine how visitors conceptualize destinations (see, for example, Leung et al. 127), to explore the

connection between attitudes toward destination and travel intention (see Jalilvand et al. 485) and to consider how tourism organizations might take advantage of user-generated content (see Akehurst 51).

Though insightful, scholars are careful to recognize visitors often only post about unusually good or unusually bad experiences. Many tourists never post about travel experiences at all, and of those who do, few offer more than a handful of details about their engagement with the subject. Further, there is often no way to verify a reviewer actually experienced the place or service posted about, no way to ensure the accuracy of the review, and no means of determining when a reviewer's experience actually took place. Nonetheless, eWOM reviews offer researchers insight into the minds of tourists and a means of gathering a large amount of presumably unbiased data that can be used to examine a number of phenomena. And, like literature, content encountered on-line contributes to perceptions of related places and impressions of the types of activities and behaviors that can and should be enacted there (Cantalalops and Salvi 43; Livtin et al. 466).

Data Analysis

The 257 reviews were first examined using an open-coding approach where the data were explored with no initial expectations about what might be found. During the initial coding phase, reviews were examined for any mention of features that contributed to a visit in one way or another (good, bad, or indifferent). Creswell explains open coding consists of "coding the data for its major categories of information ... from this coding, axial coding emerges in which the researcher identifies one open coding category to focus on ... then goes back to the data and creates categories around this phenomenon" (64). With this approach in mind, the data

were first explored with an open mind allowing patterns to emerge, then, after patterns had been identified, each was examined in depth and from various angles. Many reviewers, for example, mentioned stopping in the gift shop as a part of their visit to the Carl Sandburg Home. In the initial phase of data analysis, mentions of the gift shop would have simply been coded *gift shop*. Upon closer inspection, a reviewer's mention of the gift shop would be examined for its relationship to other themes developed. Visitors who mentioned a primary interest in Mrs. Sandburg's goats, for example, then mentioned purchasing fudge made from the site's goat milk at the gift shop would then be cross-coded as having been influenced by both the goats, and in turn, the gift shop. Codes were also considered in terms of their contribution to a reviewer's visit. For instance, the steep trail from the parking lot was a positive aspect of their visit for some reviewers as the climb afforded them incredible views. However, the same trails were noted as challenging for other parties and therefore detracted from their overall experience. Themes were analyzed in aggregate and several overall conclusions were drawn.

With reliability and validity in mind, initial findings were scrutinized, and alternate explanations explored. Additionally, the researcher engaged in reflexivity by keeping in mind that literature is not often as important to tourists as it is to researchers. Sandburg's relative obscurity was helpful in this regard as, despite having an extensive background in American literature, the researcher had no prior knowledge of either the author or his literary works. Finally, the researcher also engaged in memoing, where developing themes, findings, and conclusions were noted as data analysis progressed. Babbie (413) points out that both reflexivity and memoing are important aspects to ensure validity and reliability.

FINDINGS

Given that literary places, like all places, are many things to many people, reviewers expectedly reported a broad array of preconceived notions, personal situations, travel companion considerations, and positive and negative site attributes that contributed to their experiences at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site. Despite the range of feedback, seven general themes emerged. The themes are not mutually exclusive, and some aspects of several themes overlapped the aspects of others. Above all, two themes emerged far more frequently than the others: the natural aspects of the property and experiences related to the site's goats.

Natural/Pastoral Environment

The site's extensive trail system was central to the experiences of an array of visitors. Tourists marveled at the natural beauty including trees, small animals, birds, and other plants encountered along the trails, and the views of neighboring mountain ridges, and deep, thickly treed valleys below. Comments like "listening to the birds sing and smelling the fresh mountain air was invigorating" illustrate what countless other reviews also noted. Those that alluded to being local residents reported regular use of the trails for recreational endeavors such as exercise, dog walking, and as an area where they could entertain both children and guests. One visitor noted "I have been many times for a pleasant walk and with guests with children," while another pointed out that "dogs on leashes are welcome in the park, and there were lots of folks out taking advantage of that."

Both groups indicated an appreciation for the "quiet" or "peaceful" experience the property's trails provided them. In the same sense, many respondents acknowledged that "being out in nature" along the trails allowed them to "unplug" or

“get away” from the modern world. Appreciation for the area’s natural beauty and vistas the trails afforded visitors were also widely appreciated: “A gorgeous property with stunning views and several hiking trails”; “rustic trails ... are beautifully maintained ... and unspoiled by excessive unnatural aids”; “very serene ... I enjoy going by myself or with the family ... we go every chance we get.”

Under the same general theme, the overall aesthetic of the pastoral landscape at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site was impactful for visitors. Reviews noted the picturesque way the large white antebellum home was set in a clearing above a large mossy pond. Illustrating this notion, one visitor marveled at the home, describing it as a “big old Greek Revival-style mansion completed in 1839 (with outbuildings added in the years following).” While another noted that “the setting is lovely” given the way “the house, a white one-and-a-half story on a raised basement, with Greek Revival columns on the front porch, built around 1839 as a summer cottage by a South Carolina railroad owner, sits on a knoll above a lake.” Others found the old barn and other rusty red outbuildings aesthetically pleasing aspects of the farm’s rural landscape. “Many out buildings are left as their original purpose, including slave quarters and the milking barn,” explained one post. Indicative of the property’s aesthetic appeal, one visitor posted “the property is quite large, and the rural mountain views are both peaceful and spectacular.”

Western North Carolina is known for its natural beauty, so visitors’ appreciation of the natural and aesthetic beauty is no surprise. However, visitors overwhelmingly viewed the property as a place to engage with nature, be outdoors, and find peace. Ultimately, a recent visitor summed up what many had expressed in their reviews:

For me, the property is all about nature. The trails wind through well maintained forests, with a variety of flora and birds. It's worth the challenging hike to the top of Big Glassy Mountain to see the impressive views. The goats and their barns and the dairy where Mrs. Sandburg bottled milk is worth a look. It's a relaxing and inspirational place.

The Goats

Equally as pervasive among the reviews were experiences related to the site's herd of goats. The goats' barn and pasture are open to the public, and, used to the attention, the goats are quite friendly. Visitors enjoyed petting the goats, feeding the goats, and taking photos with the goats. One post captured the feelings many shared "we loved (sic) the goats and could have stayed much longer." Others noted that they had been excited to see the goats in order to "pet them and take great pictures of them up-close." Given the novelty and immersive experience the goats offer visitors, it is no surprise that they were widely noted as factors contributing to people's experiences. However, the popularity of the goats reinforces the notion that the pastoral elements of the property were most impactful for visitors.

In addition to interacting with the goats directly, visitors enjoyed purchasing goat-milk related products in the gift shop and learning about Lillian Sandburg's connection to the goats as the animals are direct descendants of her original herd. The gifts shop sells various items, mostly National Park Service branded souvenirs, a number of books about the local area, several books written by Sandburg, and an array of goat-milk based items including fudge, caramels, cheeses, and half

gallons of the milk itself. One woman was, similar to many visitors, impressed with the “small gift shop in the basement of the house where you can buy goat cheese and other items.” In fact, many reviewers who mentioned the gift shop reported being most intrigued by the goat milk products. “There is goat cheese for sale in the gift shop—not sure that the goats are milked commercially any more there or not though,” pondered a reviewer from Charleston, S.C. Fewer reviewers were affected by the goat herd’s link to Lillian, but those who mentioned the connection were clearly intrigued by the National Park Service’s willingness to sustain the living heritage of the property. “Be sure to visit Mrs. Sandburg’s goat barn, they still raise the four varieties of goats Mrs. Sandburg (and others) prized” noted one reviewer echoing what others had also said. For many, however, the experiential aspect of interacting with the goats and of consuming goat-related products helped to link many visitors to the past. “I liked showing my kids and grandchildren a home furnished in the 50’s when I grew up ... and they played with pretty 4-day old baby goats and learned how to make goat cheese,” wrote a visitor who lives nearby.

Seasonal Aspects and Special Events

Various infrequent natural occurrences and planned special events also contributed to a number of visitors’ experiences. In addition to the mild weather, autumn was recommended as an excellent time to visit. Many reviewers noted an enthusiastic appreciation for the beauty of the fall leaves. Capturing this notion, a tourist from Georgia wrote, “the setting is lovely, especially in the fall when the leaves have color and are reflected in the pond/lake in the front of the property.” Others echoing the same opinion posted reviews noting that the property was “especially beautiful during leaf season” and “always peaceful and serene and very lovely in the fall.” Winter was reported

as a quieter time to visit but was still notable for a number of visitors. “Even in December,” explained a tourist from Nebraska, “along the trail, we found vegetation, waterfalls, and a couple of small animals.” “At Christmas, the house is decorated beautifully,” another visitor pointed out noting how it had been an enjoyable experience for her and her family. Springtime offered visitors a unique experience. “I’ve visited this site several times in the past” wrote one visitor, “but the last visit was special ... it was raining, which lent a particular ambience to everything ... the grounds were peaceful, the gardens beautiful in bloom and a bonus was visiting with the goats and their newborns.” While this was widely regarded as a positive aspect of the site, several reviewers mentioned the negative impact that the natural elements of the property had on their allergies. The property’s goatherd also regularly expands in the spring, and visiting the baby goats was a popular seasonal activity. “One of the most popular times of the year to visit the park is in the spring when the baby goats are born ... all the goats run around the farm and you can pet them, making this a great place for kids” pointed out one local visitor.

Few visitors mentioned the summer specifically except to note the increased heat, humidity, and number of bugs affecting their time on the property. The “trails are (sic) wooded and best done when the weather is cool,” explained a reviewer, “otherwise it will be humid and there will be a lot of bugs.” Others described their summer visit as “bordering on torture” and advised people to visit the property instead “in early spring or fall, but not summer.” Regardless, a number of regular site visitors proclaimed it “beautiful in all seasons!” noting “this is a wonderful place to visit over and over when the weather is nice” and thus implying that tourists should make a point to return to the location to experience it again during another time of year.

The House

The house itself garnered attention from a number of guests. Visitors remarked on both the exterior aesthetics of the home—marveling at the beauty of the antebellum architecture and the position of the residence in a natural clearing at the top of a wooded ridge. “The home itself is charming with a beautiful view of the distant mountains,” said one visitor capturing the appreciation many other reviewers also had for the house and its surroundings.

Touring the house was a popular site experience and both positive and negative reviews of the guides leading the tours played a role in people's visits. Those who enjoyed their guide noted the docent told stories about Sandburg and his family with enthusiasm and candor. “Our tour guide was excellent and really made the visit for me” one reviewer noted capturing this theme. Quirky vignettes that illustrated the late author's personality and his relationship with his wife and daughters were well received. “We had a really informative tour with the docent who brought the Sandburg family to life and we could just imagine them writing” said one woman. On the other hand, tour guides who either moved too quickly through the home or focused mostly on factual information and the professional achievements of Sandburg and his family were often perceived as dry and uninteresting. One reviewer from New York, like others, wanted more time to explore the home's many nooks and crannies, but thought he was moved along too quickly. “The tour guide did not give us the time we so desired to look at all of Carl's books to get a glimpse into his mind,” he said, illustrating the frustration also reported by other visitors. Regardless of their take on the guide leading their tour, numerous reviewers were impressed with Sandburg's extensive collection of books. The packed shelves lining nearly every wall upstairs and half the main lev-

el made an impression on many guests who toured the home. “When you enter the house one thing you will see is books, books, books and more books! And of course, with books you need bookshelves—lots of them. There were bookshelves in every room except maybe the kitchen!” exclaimed one reviewer. There must be “more than 70,000 books [that] line floor to ceiling bookshelves in nearly every room!” wrote another man. Thus, as one tourist put it, “One cannot help but be impressed with his collection of books.”

The condition and setup of the home itself were also notable aspects of their visit for many who took the home tour (ironic because the house was recently renovated due to severe moisture damage and deterioration that had affected the building in recent years). “On the guided tour, you’ll see the Sandburg house much as it was in the 1960s, as if the family had stepped out for a walk,” noted one respondent. Tables scattered with papers, books left open and resting on chairs situated in quiet sunny nooks throughout the house, and original dishes, linens, and furnishings gave the impression that the home was not a museum to be admired from a far, but rather an inviting and warm home where visitors “could just imagine them (the Sandburgs) writing, entertaining guests, and taking Mrs. Sandburg’s prize-winning goats to a show,” as one reviewer put it. This gave visitors the sense of stepping back in time and was, in turn, viewed as largely authentic; an accurate representation of an average home in the 1950s/60s. “It’s a real step back in time if you grew up or lived in the 1950s or 1960s as there are many objects in the home you will recognize” pointed out a male reviewer from New Jersey. Others noted that the home reflected “how real people lived” pointing out that the home was “humble” and “warm” exemplifying what they believed to be Sandburg’s values. Articulating this point one woman posted “his (Sand-

burg's) very simple lifestyle is appropriately preserved in this modest home." In this sense, the house was seen as "normal" particularly in contrast to the nearby Biltmore. "The house is low key and charming, a HUGE contrast with the excess and opulence of the Biltmore, which isn't too far away," wrote one reviewer. Thus, visitors appeared to be engaging in their own deconstruction of the area's attractions. In other words, the meaning of the site (the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site) was derived, in part, from the meaning of a neighboring site (the Biltmore Estate). For many, this was enjoyable; "a nice change from the Biltmore" as one woman from Maryland put it.

Also located in the home, the gift shop in the basement emerged as an important factor contributing to the experiences of a number of visitors. Some reported that they had enjoyed exploring the items in the gift shop (consisting of postcards, several of Sandburg's texts, books about the history of the local and surrounding areas, t-shirts featuring various natural motifs, trinkets made by local artisans, and of course, goat-related items such as goat milk cheeses, goat milk fudge, goat milk, and a stuffed-goat toy). Exemplifying this interest in the gift shop was one woman's review that read "I was also referred to several important books in the Gift Shop and I was happy to discover that any book purchase receives the National Park Carl Sandburg embossed book stamp inside it. I will treasure my purchases for a long time."

Sandburg

Only a handful of visitors indicated having any sort of existing knowledge of either Sandburg or his texts. "My guess is that 9 out of 10 people won't know who Carl Sandburg was (and 99 out of 100 have never read anything he wrote)," estimated one astute visitor. Yet, many reviewers reported having

learned something about Sandburg, his literature, and/or the values he publicly advocated for. "I learned so much about someone I could have only told you one fact about," a woman from New Jersey wrote reflecting this notion. A number of visitors were surprised at Sandburg's many talents, "I did not know he was a folk singer!" another woman said. Several saw the site first and foremost as a place to learn about Sandburg "after finding that our grandchildren did not know who Carl Sandburg was or what he did, we decided to take them to Connemara (the name of Sandburg's estate)" explained a visitor from Tennessee. Others had not necessarily sought out the site because of Sandburg, but expressed their visit had sparked an interest in reading Sandburg's works nonetheless. "I came away encouraged to read more of CS works," posted one woman. Echoing this same notion, another reviewer noted the influence of a visit on literary interests, "I never appreciated poetry before, but once I visited Carl Sandburg's house and learned something about this 'Man of All Seasons,' I was hooked on anything he wrote!" Regardless of whether guests had been familiar with the author or his works prior to visiting, a number of reviewers noted the literary contributions Sandburg made and, in turn, viewed him as an important American, and his home as a place to pay tribute to his literary and political efforts and the values he wrote about. "Carl Sandburg is a national treasure," wrote one man indicative of the notion. Another post claimed, "if you are a Carl Sandburg fan this is the best memorial in the country to the famous 1950s author and philosopher." For a fair number of visitors, the site's connections to Sandburg the man, who they considered admirable for his literary feats, was central to the way many visitors conceptualized the site and the experiences they cultivated there. "You will see the life and story of a notable American family fastidiously conserved in the form of their physical environment," reflected one user high-

lighting the way some tourists conceptualized Sandburg in relationship to their visit.

Site Appeal Characteristics

Reviews also indicated that a number of visitors happened upon the site without any previous knowledge of either the site or the author. "This was quite unexpected for us to find this nice little gem on a recent road trip we were on" explained a traveler from Maryland. Another woman depicted a similar scenario, "We had no idea we would stumble across this wonderful place. I'm glad we did (if we had been on a different road we would have missed it)." Thus, for a number of reviewers, a visit was more than anything, convenient. Others sought out the property because they believed that it offered "something for the whole family; culture, baby goats to pet, flower and vegetable gardens, and hiking with pristine vistas" as one reviewer put it. Citing the need to entertain visiting family members of varying ages and interests one man explained, "my wife and I live less than 5 minutes from the home and always make sure we take our guests to enjoy this great attraction." Another local resident pointed out that she "had been many times for a pleasant walk and with guests with children." In this sense the site was conceptualized as a place where kids could run around outside and play with goats, older family members could relax and take in the views, and readers and history buffs could tour the home and explore the grounds.

The site's low/free cost (the property itself is free to the public, a tour of the home is \$5.00 and is discounted for children, seniors, and military) was central to many visitors' experiences. "\$5 admission is really a bargain for an historic home tour" pointed out one visitor. "Not least of our delight in this place is the price" said another woman. Others made the trip

strictly because of the affordability, “We visited the CS home when in the area for a wedding basically because it was free (except house tour) and advertised walking trails.”

Visitors with Children

The site was also conceptualized as a place to occupy children. Parents reported bringing their children to the site not just to wear them out but also to let them learn about nature, see the baby goats, and/or attend the Rootabaga Plays (an annual outdoor play series featuring storylines based on Sandburg’s collection of stories of the same name). One local parent highlighted how “Kids can pet and feed the goats too” while another pointed out that “experienced staff and new and growing animals every year make this a perfect place [for the kids] to learn about the animals.” Others reported making special memories with their young family members during special events hosted at the National Historic Site. “My grandson was taken to Connemara when he was about 3 to enjoy the Rootabaga stories performed by the apprentices at the Flat Rock Playhouse and to enjoy the goats. He fell in love and begged to return to “Carla Sandburger’s.” Overall, the property was widely viewed as a great place to bring kids of all ages, with the exception of the house tour which several reviewers pointed out that, while interesting, might “bore the kids.”

National Historic Site/National Park Service Site

Finally, a handful of visitors viewed the property (at least in part) as significant because of its status as a U.S. National Park. Reflecting this view of the site was a woman from Oregon who reported that she visited the site because “I was visiting the Asheville, NC area and always love to visit National Park Service sites.” Similarly, a man from nearby Greenville, South Carolina made the trip simply “to get our senior passes

for the national parks." Those motivated to visit because of the site's importance as a National Park reported being primarily engaged with the natural features of the site instead of with the history of Sandburg or his literary works.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

What Is the Role of Literature in Literary Tourism?

While the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site was, as expected, many things to many people, the findings suggest specific literary works were of little importance to visitors' overall experiences. Instead, findings indicate the connections to Sandburg, and in turn, his literature, were an added bonus but not central to the site's meaning or the experiences visitors cultivated there. Few visitors alluded to any of Sandburg's works, thus implying that his literary contributions had little effect on either their choice to visit the site or their experiences at the site. Rather, visitors overwhelmingly depicted the site as a place to recreate and to engage with nature in a rural pastoral setting. In contrast to many prevailing theories about literary tourism, at this particular site, there was little indication that visitors knew *anything* about either Sandburg or his Pulitzer Prize-winning literature. Further, findings here challenge the widely held notion that literature is the main reason tourists are drawn to literary sites as many scholars have theorized (Buell 177; Johnson, 105; Lowe, 40; Santesso 379; Watson 11; Westover 12).

While Herbert also found little evidence in his examination of literary sites in Europe to support the notion that literature was central to visitor experiences, many respondents to his surveys had (as other scholars have also predicted) a "good general knowledge" (80) of the related author and/or their literary works (Herbert 81). However, that was not the

case with the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site. Out of 257 reviews examined, only a handful of posts even hinted that the reviewer had *any* thorough familiarity with *any* of Sandburg texts and not a single one indicated that a specific literary work had influenced their visit to the site. Given the stark difference in findings between this study and Herbert's, further research is suggested. Perhaps writing style, use of specific geographic features in a text, the number of times the story has been recreated in popular culture, or other aspects of a literary work or an author who penned it play a role in the number and type of tourists a literary site attracts, and the level of visitors' knowledge. Some scholars have even questioned whether literary genre plays any role in the sites' popularity (Herbert; Lowe). Perhaps there is something about the author himself that influences visitors. What is it about Sandburg that has allowed him to be forgotten by popular culture when images of Hemingway, Twain, Fitzgerald, and even Sandburg's contemporaries like Capote, Welty, London, and Sinclair persist? This is important for sites and destinations looking to capitalize on their links to famous authors or specific literary works. To attract tourists, provide the type of experiences they expect, and to profit from themed events, festivals, and souvenirs, literary places must know what visitors are looking for during their visit. A more thorough understanding of the economic impacts of literary tourism would also be helpful to both scholars and destinations with literary links.

To visitors, the site itself seems to both reinforce and conflict with their image of Sandburg and his values. Of the few reviewers who indicated a familiarity with Sandburg's works, several believed the home and site was a proper memorial; reflective of the author's mostly socialist values—primarily seen as humble in contrast to the opulence of the nearby Bilt-

more. Conversely, for some, the site was seen as undermining the values Sandburg stood for. As one astute visitor pointed out, the home (and property) “although not an opulent mansion, is still awfully fancy for someone who embraced socialism like Sandburg. The amount of books were surprising ... but even more surprising were the 1950’s TVs in abundance in the house.” Though the sprawling farmstead was deeded to the National Park Service for the enjoyment and enrichment of *all* people (NPS), the property itself was no small investment.

Further, while Sandburg would likely have enjoyed the idea that people were coming to his home to enjoy the same natural elements he admired so much in viewing the site primarily as a natural recreation area it is largely excluding references to the urban life that was central to much of what Sandburg so passionately worked to draw attention to in his writings. Given that, as one visitor noted, Sandburg “won 3 Pulitzer Prizes (2 for poetry and one for a bio of Lincoln), but is most famous for his writing in and about Chicago and his political beliefs,” it is notable that the memorial property does not fully reflect the values of the author. Beyond the home itself, not a single review mentioned how the site related to Sandburg’s commentary on industrialization, economic inequality, and the struggles of immigrants and the working class. These findings may be of interest to the National Park Service who may consider tweaking the memorial to better cater to visitors’ perceptions of the site and/or to better communicate the importance of Sandburg and his literary works to American history. Scholars may also find these disparities between an author’s literature and the memorials dedicated to them worthy of investigation, as memorialization often reflects more about the society that creates them than the thing that is commemorated (Lowenthal, 18).

Finally, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has inherent limitations as a data source (as on-line reviews are well known to be skewed—written by either highly satisfied or extremely disappointed customers). However, star ratings aside, because reviews are usually unsolicited, they can offer researchers insight into visitor's experiences in a particular destination without any influence from the researcher (Xiang and Gretzel 180). Additionally, to gather this type of data in person, spanning such a range of dates, times, and visitor types, would be both prohibitively time-consuming and quite expensive. Thus, eWOM reviews provide researchers with an easily accessible place to start examining how visitors conceptualize a specific tourist attraction (Owens 40). Nonetheless, more research, using other methodologies, is needed to confirm the findings of this study and to explore how the role of literature may differ from literary site to literary site. Additionally, both in this study and previous studies, visitors expressed a desire to seek out related texts after having visited the literary site (Seaman 190), yet little is known about this phenomenon. The potential for tourism to spark an interest in and understanding of literature could be of use to educators worldwide and is therefore worthy of scholarly attention. Finally, if literature is not central to the literary tourism experience, what drives this enduringly popular niche form of tourism?

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Dating in the Digital Age: A Research Experiment

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by Marci Mazzarotto

ABSTRACT

This article explores various facets of dating in the digital age in order to highlight the ways in which technology has impacted human communication and relationships. Taking together the personal accounts of individuals' online dating experiences, customized survey data, as well as the first-hand experiments of using Tinder in New York City, the primary goal herein is to offer a unique and multi-faceted look into the popular culture phenomenon of app-based dating.

Keywords: Tinder, dating apps, online dating, app-based dating, digital communication, experimental research

Citas románticas en la era digital: un experimento de investigación

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora varias facetas de las citas en la era digital para resaltar las formas en que la tecnología ha impactado la comunicación y las relaciones humanas. Reuniendo las cuentas personales de las experiencias de citas en línea de los individuos, los datos de las encuestas personalizadas y los experimentos de primera mano sobre el uso de Tinder en la ciudad de Nueva York, el objetivo principal aquí es ofrecer una visión única y multifacética de la cultura popular. fenómeno de las citas basadas en la aplicación.

Palabras clave: Tinder, aplicaciones de citas, citas en línea, citas basadas en aplicaciones, comunicación digital, investigación experimental

数字时代恋爱：一项研究实验

摘要

本文探索了数字时代约会的不同方面，以强调技术通过哪些方式影响了人类传播和关系。通过将个人在网上约会经历的陈述、个性化的调查数据、和在纽约市使用Tinder软件的第一手实验进行综合考虑，本文主要目的在于，为研究“基于应用程序的约会”这一流行文化现象提供一个独特和多面的视角。

关键词：Tinder，约会应用程序，网络约会，基于应用程序的约会，数字传播，实验研究

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The proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the landscape of human communication, from easily facilitating business meetings across continents to allowing for a simultaneous group chat with a dozen people to carrying around hundreds of choices in possible romantic partners right in our pockets. Having a background in psychology and media studies, it is not too far-fetched to understand my fascination with human communication when it goes digital. While the arena of digital communication is vast and constantly changing—thus in need for ongoing evaluation

by scholars across various disciplines—I became interested with the specific concept of app-based dating, and just what kind of mental and emotional effects such online apps can have on our ability to communicate and relate to one another—online and off.

The popularity of online dating makes sense, as does the increasing ubiquity of dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid. Tinder, which launched in 2012, still remains one of the most popular dating apps (Fruhlinger). The app offers users an addicting and easy-to-use platform: simply connect the app to your Facebook account, choose up to six photos to display on your Tinder profile, write a short bio, and then you may begin swiping through potential partners. Users swipe left to reject someone, while swiping right to “like” them. If two individuals swipe right on one other, it is considered a “match,” which then allows either party to message the other. Without a mutual like or match between two people, the messaging option does not unlock, therefore preventing any form of communication from occurring.

Undoubtedly, there is great appeal to being able to quickly judge potential partners through a short bio and a few photos, and to do so while comfortably lounging at home. The process not only requires minimal effort, it eliminates the risk of direct rejection, awkwardness, and the initial guessing game of whether or not someone finds you attractive. However, with the ease of dating apps, what happens to human communication? What impact does it have on the direct/indirect accountability for the ways we speak and act toward another person?

Communicating primarily via technologically mediated means can act as a barrier to real human communication, in turn, preventing or truncating the formation of a deep,

meaningful connection among two people. Communication via a digital screen appears to easily and unwittingly transform the otherwise thoughtful actions of an individual into uncaring and disrespectful acts, simply due to how easy it can be to forget there is a real person on the other side of that digital device. While Tinder may eliminate the fear of rejection, it can also encourage an overinflated sense of self. The abundance in contemporary dating options can lead anyone to fall prey to the vicious cycle of FOMO, or fear of missing out, which can leave us with the idea of yearning for someone or something better, with a good chance that it never materializes.

My intent is not to vilify Tinder, dating apps or online dating; rather, it is to provide another angle in which those who choose to use such apps can adapt to the technology smartly and responsibly, instead of surrendering to it. In order to accomplish this educational goal, I decided to spend some time directly experimenting with Tinder. I set out to see what happens when we carry around a multitude of dating options right in our pockets. What kind of psychological, emotional, or even physical effects does app-based dating elicit? How does it destroy or enhance our ability to communicate? Does the technology itself influence who may or may not become our potential partners? If so, how?

My attempts in answering the above questions came from not only my direct user experimentation on Tinder itself, but also in asking willing (sometimes anonymous) participants, both in-person and online, to share their personal stories and experiences with dating in the digital age. Consequently, the focus on this article is not in providing a systematic conclusion to the underlying science of dating, as such a feat would prove difficult to accomplish. Nor does this article seek to

give dating advice, talk about the dos and don'ts of love and relationships, nor place judgment on an individual's dating decisions. What I set out to do was a bit different than most *Sex and the City* type material, as this experiment was focused on the technological apparatus and its influence on the ways in which we communicate, specifically within the context of dating. With that, there are few disclaimers I would like to share:

1. This was an artistic experiment coupled with academic curiosity, and it is not reflective of my personal life nor should it be interpreted as empirically driven scientific inquiry.
2. The Tinder experiments discussed throughout were purposely absurd in order to test the limits and nuances of the app; thus, I strongly advise against using any dating apps in the ways described herein.
3. There are a lot of research materials and advice columns on the various facets of online dating—this article serves to add another dimension and voice to that ongoing discourse.

The initial idea behind this project was partly driven by a desire to better understand human communication and its complex relationship with technology. Having recently moved to New York to conduct some research and writing, I was artistically inspired by the city's bedlam and the seemingly endless pop culture references to its preoccupation with sex, love, and dating.

The initial findings of this project were presented at the *Far West Popular Culture Association* conference, and this article serves to provide a more comprehensive explanation and contextual analysis of that preliminary presentation.

THE BACKGROUND

One of the key elements of my academic research is the premise that research and experimentation are foundational in the pursuit and creation of knowledge, which is derived from the philosophical underpinnings of avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus. One does not need to be familiar with the inner workings of the avant-garde to be impacted by these movements' extended influence on popular culture practices, technological advancements, and academic discourse.

What is important to note is that research and experimentation, particularly through an arts-based perspective, can provide tools that enable us to create a more robust understanding of ourselves and our relationship with the world. Often, we acquire knowledge through our failures, and we can apply the “research/experiment/fail/repeat” dynamic to most aspects of life, including dating. It is not a novel concept, but one that is important to recognize. Research becomes part of the dating process, for example, not so much in researching the person you are about to meet in real life (although that does happen), but more about researching logistical information in order to determine a good meeting spot (e.g. location, cost, vibe, etc.).

While we may fail to realize it much of the time, we share an ongoing relationship with the process of research and experimentation and how it applies/influences our personal and professional contexts. The key then is to capitalize on the research and experimentation process by making it more active, relatable, and effective to whatever context we choose. That is part of the reason that I decided to experiment with dating in the digital age, which in turn has allowed me to develop a creative, yet scholarly product immersed in first-hand experiences.

THE PROJECT

As mentioned earlier, the initial idea for this project came about after my move to New York, where I quickly harnessed a greater fascination with the various aspects of daily life in the city. I also came to realize how obsessed New York, as a pop culture identity, seems to be with the concept of dating, as there are many films and television shows dedicated to addressing the plight and hilarity of finding love in the city. To name just a few cinematic examples: *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Annie Hall* (1977), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *You've Got Mail* (1998), *Serendipity* (2001), *Hitch* (2005), and *Friends with Benefits* (2011), along with television shows like *Living Single* (1993–1998), *Friends* (1994–2004), *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005–2014), *Girls* (2012–2017), and *Master of None* (2015–2017).

Granted, New York's iconic scenery and larger-than-life persona offers the audience a unique character in and of itself, which serves as additional appeal in utilizing the city as a backdrop in so many films and TV shows. In turn, the city's persona, coupled with the ongoing popularity of romantic comedies, makes for a successful cinematic formula that has been deployed time and time again. Nonetheless, I can only imagine the real chaotic nature of attempting to navigate the city on a full-time basis, particularly if you are in the market for love, which is one of the reasons I wanted to obtain a greater understanding of the nuances, however topical, of urban life through the intersection of dating, communication, and digital technologies with a specific focus on Tinder.

I set up a Tinder profile using a fake Facebook account that included a fictitious name and age; however, I did use a few real, yet somewhat elusive photos of myself. I created a digital

persona that had elements of the real me (to maintain believability) but was not actually me (to maintain some level of anonymity). In order to test the dynamics of the app itself, including the specific limitations and opportunities in matching with potential partners, I conducted several mini-experiments. These mini-experiments, such as attempting to match with as many individuals as possible, goes beyond the realm of what I or the average serious user would do under normal circumstances while on Tinder.

I would not directly consider this experiment a social one, due to its personal nature and small scale; however, I did set up my experiment primarily to test out a socially centered hypothesis: app-based dating offers an easily accessible and seemingly endless menu of potential mates, which in turn can create a superficial experience, as well as a breakdown of communication and mutual respect due to the connection being mediated via technology. This, of course, is not to say that app-based dating fails to produce real or meaningful connections, even if such connections fulfill a brief carnal desire or offer long-term companionship.

THE RESEARCH

In order to better grasp the nuances of the contemporary online dating landscape, my research comprised of gathering information from individuals willing to speak on and off the record, from my own experimentation, as well as from examining various source materials on the topic. I spent time reading a range of various materials from lifestyle and academic articles to viewing numerous videos ranging from the silly to the serious. I also spoke to dozens of individuals who were kind enough to share their dating stories, which presented as an odd combination of the horrifying and the hilarious, with some conversations occurring digitally and/or in-per-

son. Some of the people I spoke with were friends, others were strangers, and sometimes they were friends of friends. I spoke to anyone willing to openly and honestly share details of their personal dating lives and experiences. Lastly, I conducted an online survey of 100 strangers through a paid subscription service via SurveyMonkey.

A helpful and relevant resource was the 2016 book, *Modern Romance: An Investigation*, which was co-authored by stand-up comedian Aziz Ansari and New York University professor and sociologist Eric Klinenberg. The book is a light-hearted, comedic read, while still delivering legitimate, data-driven social science research. While I do not agree with all that the book argues, I still find its nuanced approach to the dilemmas of dating in the digital age both poignant and relatable. The book addresses single life in New York, as well as Los Angeles, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, and Paris, covering a broad, albeit limited, cultural range of contemporary dating mores.

Since I was interested in conducting a creative, hands-on experimental project, while simultaneously fusing together a few elements from my dissertation, the scope herein is a bit more limited, with a lighter overall tone, than that of my other academic work. If a significant level of financial support was existent, the research and experimentation demonstrated and discussed throughout *Modern Romance* is, in many ways, an example of the ideal culmination of an experimental research project such as this one. Nevertheless, I believe a key value to this project is mainly derived from its experimental processes.

THE PEOPLE

My real Facebook account served as the initial go-to place for collecting stories about dating in the digital age. While the

initial response was not overwhelming, I did receive messages from several friends eager to share their experiences. One friend publicly posted an article she had written about a previous dating experiment conducted while living in Las Vegas. Another friend collected an essay that a friend of hers wrote especially for this project, a response of which had been a result of a public appeal within my Facebook network. In turn, this particular friend had shared information about my project with her Facebook community and one man jumped at the opportunity to share feedback regarding his online dating adventures.

I also had several of my personal friends message me privately sharing their experiences about the good and bad of dating in the digital age. Although successful stories of people meeting through more serious sites like match.com are fairly common, I was surprised that I did not receive messages from anyone who had such positive experiences. Ultimately, individuals were more open to share their funny, quirky, sad, and sometimes disturbing stories of navigating the facets of online dating, rather than sharing their successes of finding love in the digital era.

THE STORIES

I am grateful to the individuals who allowed me a quick peek into their personal dating struggles and victories. While I have heard many stories—good, bad, happy, and sad—I chose only four of these to share here. The stories below were written by the individuals themselves, and all besides one remains anonymous. Since I wanted the stories to be told in their original voice, I have left their writings unedited (with the exception of formatting and/or bracketed information), hence any errors in spelling, grammar, or syntax that may appear in the text below.

Male #1:

Circa 2005 I was on Match.com. I don't know if apps like Tinder make it any easier since they bring people to your attention rather than have you hunt for them but being on Match was hard in a smallish college town. I was around 24 and everyone on it was either late thirties or 18–21. Once I found someone who was a great match and just slightly younger than me. I thought I recognized her but couldn't place her. After indicating interest (I can't remember but maybe Match's metaphor for this was a wink?), it hit me: she was a former student of mine from when I taught freshman comp. I was just horrified.

I stopped paying for Match because it just wasn't working for me. From late 2004 to early 2005, I was still technically married and from then on I was divorced. I'm pretty sure I was simply filtered out of many peoples' searches because of that. FB played a big part in the early part of my relationship with my current wife. [It abruptly ends here, as there was no further discussion of his current relationship.]

Female #1:

I went on two dates. One was good, I thought. The second was weird because his sexual preference seemed questionable. I did have phone conversations with at least 4 of the guys I interacted with. I'm only friends with one, on FB.

I went on two dates with the first guy. He was funny, attractive, smart. The time I met him at his house and his ex was there. He said she really wanted to meet me. I felt like she was seizing [sic] me up if that makes sense. He was still very much in love with her I think. So that was a dud. The next guy I met had a humorous personality which I love so we met up. We had only texted prior to meeting but he was completely gay and totally not into chicks. At least that's the vibe I got.

I've never actually met my friend. We chatted for a month or so and then started to talk on the phone. He was easy to talk to like a friend, funny, sweet. There were so many creepers that would message me about what they would do to me sexually. That was repulsive. Both old guys and young guys.

I also met a guy who I chatted with and he seemed normal and nice. Cute profile pic. We began to talk on the phone, but his voice didn't match his pic. With determination I persuaded him into sending me a pic of himself at that very moment. He stammered and had excuses until he gave up and sent it. He was clearly not the person he was in his profile. He either aged 30 years or it was a picture of his son. I'll never know.

After about 4 months I wasn't even going on the site [Plenty of Fish] anymore but started receiving phone calls from around the country. I never answer calls if I don't know the phone number. No voice messages were ever left. I also got weird texts asking me for sexual favors.

This had gone on for about a month. Calls almost every other day. I finally answered a call and this guy was trying to meet up with me for sex. I confronted him and asked him where he got my #. He said he had the wrong number. I finally got him to admit he found my # on back page which is an escort site. I truly believe someone from POF that I had engaged in phone conversations with put my # up on that site. I ended up changing my # and inactivated my POF account. It was a mess.

Male #2:

So a little background about me, I'm 31 a male and bisexual [sic]. Being single for most of the last 15 years, I can say that single life is not all it's cracked up to be. I will say that Tinder and other dating sites have made the process much easier in terms of finding a match. The use of immediate judgement on

personal appearance in photos plays a major [role] in that process. Letting the other person know that you are also attracted to them on a physical level releases some of the worry in normal dating.

I took a long break from the dating scene after college. After experimentation I surmised that although I like men, I can't see myself happy in a long term relationship with a man. For the past few years I have exclusively dated women or tried to that is [sic]. I have only been on Tinder for a couple months now, it has been hit and miss for me. No lasting relationships, just fleeting romantic adventures mostly. Although I did just have a second date, who knows maybe this could be something lasting. I did try OKCupid a little over a year ago, the first date was a train wreck. She told me the worst sob stories of her actual life, [worse] than I have [heard in] my entire life.

Overall the hardest part I have struggled to get used to is that chivalry is almost dead. There are a few women still interested in hopeless romantic types like myself. But overall it has come to rely on initial pick up lines and jokes to get things started rather than just greetings or normal conversation starters. But I've had fun, so I'll keep on swiping.

Female #2:

A woman went on 8 first dates with 8 different men on 8 consecutive days. She then wrote a [wonderful article](#) about it for [Las Vegas Weekly](#).

THE SURVEY

In addition to speaking with individuals in a face-to-face setting, as well as reading their stories in digital format, I conducted an online survey of 100 strangers (plus a few friends) about their experiences with dating in the digital age. The

survey was conducted via a paid service through SurveyMonkey, and they were responsible for identifying individuals who matched specific parameters for acceptable participants (e.g. individuals over 21, with experience in online dating). Unfortunately, much of the data provided by these anonymous SurveyMonkey participants turned out to be insignificant, as many respondents filled out the questionnaire with gibberish and/or provided falsified information. Consequently, I was left to analyze the results with only 57 out of a total of 106 responses.

I asked the anonymous respondents a total of 10 questions, three of which are highlighted in Figures 1–3. The numeric results are telling, particularly because the resulting percentages are split nearly 50/50, an indicator of contrasting experiences happening nearly at the same rate to one another. For example, in question #5, the numbers indicate a high percentage of individuals reporting as having experienced a successful sexual encounter versus those who did not (58% versus 42%). However, in question #6, a split percentage of individuals report having experienced a successful relationship versus those who did not (51%–49%). As for the final question, the general feedback regarding digital dating experiences fell somewhere between successful and depressing, which is yet another indicator of the wide range of individuals' feelings about finding love and companionship in an online platform, be it app-based or not.

It is important to note, however, that the definition and parameters of what makes for a successful relationship or sexual encounter can vary widely among participants. Despite such a definition not being expressly stated within the survey, the results are significant in that they demonstrate a drastic, yet near equal divide between what was perceived as a good versus a bad experience in online dating.

5. Did you ever have a successful sexual

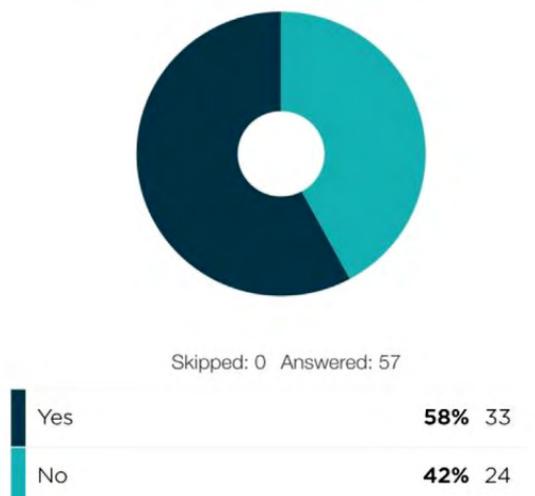


Figure 1. *The Final Word in the Question Should Read “Encounter?”

6. Did you ever have a successful relationship?

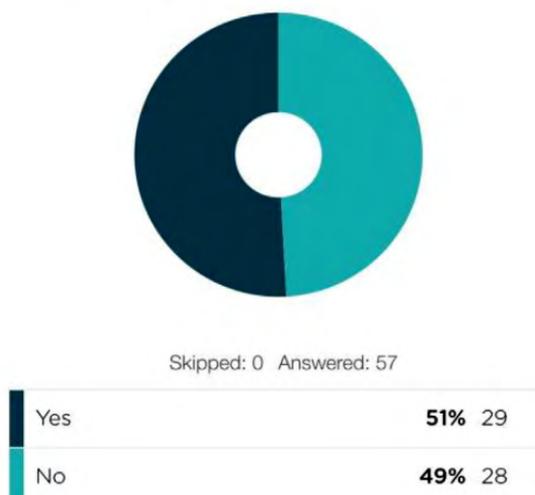


Figure 2. Successful Relationship?

10. How would you describe your overall online dating experience?

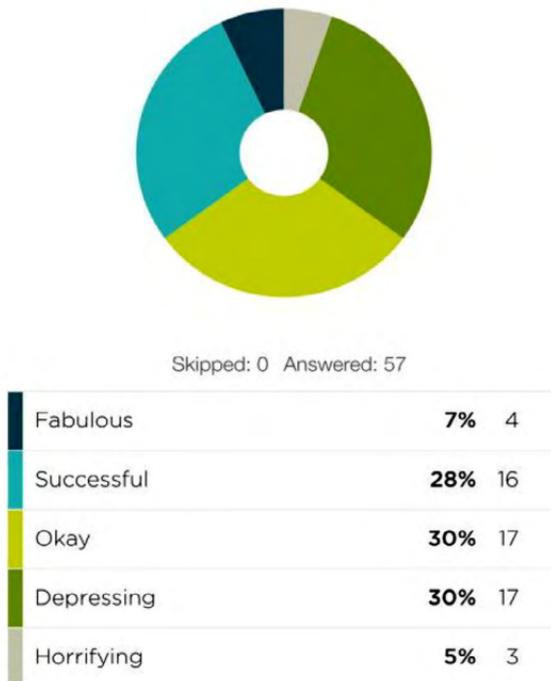


Figure 3. Overall Dating Experience

THE EXPERIMENT

As I sat alone in my New York apartment on rainy Sunday afternoon, this experiment began with a seemingly simple question: in what ways was the latest craze of app-based dating impacting the overall quality of human communication and relationships? And then I thought more specifically about a swipe-style dating app like Tinder and whether or not it was realistically possible that it could offer something more substantial than the ease of casual sex.

In an attempt to shed light on the above questions, I used a fake Tinder profile and spent a total of 35 nonconsecutive days on the app. The psychological and emotional consequences of being on Tinder were both positive and negative, but most of my experiences, albeit fictional, were surprisingly unexpected, and thankfully, short-lived. Throughout the 35 days, I took notes in order to more specifically, although not precisely, track and summarize most of my interactions with the technology and the people within it.

Before I dive into discussing what I term as “soft statistics” of my time on Tinder, I must stress that I am not a professional statistician; therefore, the numerical stats found within this article are estimated and based on various notes I took during my brief time on the app. More importantly, my Tinder experience should not be taken as reflective of the average user experience, as part of my goal was to push the app’s boundaries to absurd levels in order to test the dynamics of the app’s design and its real-life applicability, particularly in relation to the intersection of human communication and technology. With that said, however, I do believe the stats below are profoundly indicative of a couple of key issues in today’s dating world.

First, a lack of depth. Tinder’s swiping design is inherently superficial, as it allows us to quickly judge others based solely on physical appearance and their geographical proximity; hence, why Tinder has a reputation for being a hook-up app. Tinder’s design can act as an immediate reward system, much like a game, which is why there are those who have taken to using Tinder for humorous purposes only. If there is no “match” (i.e. the reward of two people liking one another), then the rejection may not feel real, since the rejection was mediated via technology and did not occur in person. In a large, tech savvy city like New York, the options can appear

endless, and particularly for females, it is easy to become overwhelmed with a long list of matches, yet substantial conversation or a real-life meeting may still feel far-fetched.

Second, a lack of respect. Tinder, along with other forms of digital communication (e.g. social media platforms like Instagram), allow for people to disappear without a trace. No awkward conversations, no painful confrontations. However, the lack of respect can happen long before we are ghosted by someone, such as via a barrage of thoughtless, uncomfortable, and sometimes disturbing messages. Digital media technologies and social media platforms have made it easy for us to forget there is a real person on the other side of our mediated conversations. As a media and communications professor, I find the above dynamic disturbing and encourage my students to understand and contextualize media objects in order to become both informed consumers and conscientious citizens.

Moving back to the statistical discussion of my Tinder experiments, I must admit that after I gathered the stats on the total number of profiles I swiped through, matched and talked with, etc., I attempted to compile a visual graph that could clearly communicate the figures. However, the disparity in the numerical range was so large, that any visual rendition looked bizarre and not in the least bit helpful. Consequently, I decided to write out the stats in a bulleted format and I urge you to pay close attention to figures below, as they may surprise you:

- Over the course of a two-month period, I was actively on Tinder for 35 days.
- Of these 35 days, which equals a total of 840 hours, I spent about 6 hours actively swiping, with addi-

tional time spent on other things such as messaging matches.

- These 6 swiping hours make up roughly 0.7% of my total time in a 35-day period.
- And using only 0.7% of my time, I managed to swipe through an estimated 21,000 profiles of individuals living within less than 5 miles of my Upper East Side apartment.
- Once again, that number is 21,000. Not 2,100. Not 210. Not 21. *Twenty-One Thousand.*
- I understand how the 21,000 may appear unbelievable. Although it is an estimate, it is a realistic number nonetheless. Below is an explanation on how I arrived at that figure:
 - I conducted various 60-second drills to see how fast I could swipe through profiles, while still being able to “judge” them. Sometimes I could swipe through as many as 75 profiles per minute, other times as little as 48. But, the average number of profiles swiped in a 60-second period was 58.5.
 - By swiping an average of 58.5 profiles per minute, one can easily swipe through around 3,500 profiles an hour. At least initially, Tinder can be addicting; thus, spending hours glued to your phone swiping right or left is completely feasible.
- Of the 21,000 swipes, I swiped right (i.e. “liked”) on approximately 500 profiles—meaning that I rejected 97.6% of all profiles encountered. However, of those 500 profiles, about 150 of them were right-

swipes-only mini-experiments, which I conducted as another mini-experiment to test my overall match rate. So, I only swiped right on about 350 profiles, which increases the rejection rate to 98.3%.

- My overall match-rate was roughly 80%, meaning that 20% of individuals were not mutually interested in my profile. Thus, rendering about 400 matches out of the 500.
- Of those 400 matched profiles, I likely spoke with about 75 individuals, while generally maintaining only about a dozen matches at a time.
- And out of the 75 individuals I did message, I would say that maybe only 8 or so seemed interesting enough to have possibly met in person.
- Consequently, over the course of 35 days, I was presented with a total of 21,000 prospects and narrowed that down to a mere 8, a rejection rate of 99.96% of all eligible profiles I encountered on Tinder in New York.

If the above scenario took place in real life, I would have encountered a total of 25 individuals every hour for 840 straight hours, which equals 600 people a day for 35 days. These insanely high statistics serve to demonstrate just how absurd and unhealthy our relationship with technology can become and is certainly telling about the technological underpinnings that contribute to app-based dating, particularly Tinder, being perceived as overly superficial.

As I mentioned earlier, these figures are certainly not representative of the real, average Tinder user, as my goal was experimental in nature, but they can nevertheless serve as an

indicator of unrealistic expectations and a harmful dynamic technology can leverage on otherwise healthy and more natural human communication patterns (e.g. meeting face-to-face). Also, it should be noted, had I conducted this experiment in a small rural town, reaching such high match figures would not have been feasible. New York provided a unique cultural space in which to test out these ideas. With that, ask any single New Yorker about their dating experiences and they will likely have a combination of funny and sad stories to share.

CONCLUSION

I am not a dating expert. I set out to experiment with the complex and nuanced relationship between technology and human communication in attempts to gain greater insight into the landscape of dating in the digital age. Online dating, be it through whatever form one chooses, is as diverse as the individuals partaking in the process. Sure, Tinder has rightfully earned a reputation as a hook-up app, but there are many stories of real romance and marriage developing from it as well. Thus, numerous variables must be considered when using technology as a means of pursuing any type of relationship, romantic or otherwise.

Throughout this experiment, I found that my initial hypothesis did ring true: app-based dating can provide a superficial experience, as well as a breakdown in communication and mutual respect, due to the technologically mediated nature of the connections. However, I also learned that the underlying reason people navigate such an exhausting dating landscape is to fulfill the common human goal of sharing mutual love. Because in the end, it really is about finding and maintaining human companionship, and it is up to us to utilize these digital media technologies in way that enhances our various

communication styles and real-life experiences, rather than oppressing them.

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Fake News and Failed Friendships: An Analysis of Trump, Pecker, and the *National Enquirer*

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by William M. Kirtley and Patricia M. Kirtley

ABSTRACT

It is easy to trivialize a supermarket tabloid that titillates, provokes, and focuses on human foibles, but the *National Enquirer* influenced the 2016 election and continues to unravel the present administration. This paper details its development into a celebrity gossip newspaper, analyzes the magazine's readers, treatment of Donald Trump, and the anatomy of campaign finance felonies committed by its editor David Pecker, along with Trump, and his personal attorney David Cohen.

Keywords: *National Enquirer*, Tabloid, Celebrity, AMI, Donald J. Trump, David Pecker, Michael Cohen, Karen McDougal, Nondisclosure Agreement, Propaganda, Campaign Finance felony, Presidential affairs

Noticias falsas y amistades fallidas: Un análisis de Trump, Pecker y el investigador nacional

RESUMEN

Es fácil trivializar un tabloide de supermercado que estimula, provoca y se enfoca en las flaquezas humanas, pero el Investigador Nacional influyó en las elecciones de 2016 y continúa desentrañando la administración actual. Este documento detalla su desarrollo en un periódico de chismes de celebridades, analiza a los lectores de la revista, el tratamiento de

Donald Trump y la anatomía de los delitos graves de financiamiento de campañas cometidos por su editor David Pecker, junto con Trump y su abogado personal David Cohen.

Palabras clave: *National Enquirer*, Tabloide, Celebridad, AMI, Donald J. Trump, David Pecker, Michael Cohen, Karen McDougal, Acuerdo de no divulgación, Propaganda, Campaña, delito grave de Finanzas, Asuntos presidenciales

假新闻和失败友谊：一项关于特朗普、佩克和《国家问询报》的分析

摘要

人们很容易轻视一本煽动、挑起并聚焦于人类弱点的超市小报，但《国家问询报》却影响了2016年大选，并持续解析当前美国政府。本文对一本聚焦于名人绯闻的报纸进行了研究，分析了以下方面：小报读者、小报对唐纳德·特朗普的论述、小报对犯下竞选财务罪的编辑大卫·佩克以及对特朗普和其（前）私人律师迈克尔·科恩的解析。

关键词：《国家问询报》，通俗小报，名人，美国媒体公司（AMI），唐纳德·特朗普，大卫·佩克，迈克尔·科恩，凯伦·麦克道格，保密协议，宣传，竞选财务罪，总统绯闻

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INTRODUCTION

The *National Enquirer* depends on impulse buying by supermarket shoppers. It attracts attention by promising shocking and tragic news about celebrities. Its writers use the common language of everyday people employing words like “hubbies”

and the “down-low.” Lawyers review each story for possible libel. Those who sue the magazine declare it as the epitome of the worst in popular culture. The style and tone of this celebrity gossip publication appeal to the sordid vices of envy and schadenfreude.

The first section of this paper deals with the history of the *National Enquirer*. The second section analyzes stories about Trump before and after his election as president of the United States. The third section details the consequences of the friendship between Trump and David Pecker, CEO and Chairman of American Media Incorporated (AMI), the parent company of the *National Enquirer*. The last section of the paper provides a timeline of events starting with a meeting in 2015 among Trump, Cohen, and Pecker. It ends in 2019 with Cohen testifying before Congress and awaiting prison. This paper demonstrates how the *National Enquirer* contributed to the election of Donald J. Trump as president, and how his collusion with Cohen and Pecker led to his implication in the commission of several felonies.

THEORY

John Storey in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, a key text in this subject, offers several definitions of popular culture. The most pertinent is media scholar, John Fisk’s argument that “popular culture is what people actively make of it, actually do with the commodified practices they consume” (11). The *National Enquirer* is a commodity that targets readers with a specific notion of the world populated by film, television, and political celebrities, exploring their fame, wealth, and weaknesses. The circulation of this magazine has declined over the last few years from 1.6 million to 260,000. AMI reportedly lost 72 million dollars last year. In January, the company raised \$460 million to refinance its crushing

debt. Parties to lawsuits against the magazine claim the decline in readership forces its writers to court libel in an effort to keep the magazine solvent and rumors of a Saudi Arabia bailout abound (Sherman para. 2)

Fiske, in his chapter on “The Jeaning of America” in *Understanding Popular Culture*, argued that there is a constant guerrilla war between the subordinate and dominant culture in popular culture (15). This notion highlights the contradictions inherent in the *National Enquirer*. The magazine supports a capitalistic system that gives much to a few people based on their charm, beauty, and notoriety. At the same time, its writers shred the reputations of celebrities in the most vicious way possible. The *Enquirer* supported Donald J. Trump in every way they could. They treated Hillary Clinton in a scurrilous manner, describing nonexistent diseases and her imminent death. This paper proves that collusion among Trump, Cohen, and Pecker orchestrated this attack.

Storey noted that popular culture is based on the profoundly political concept of ideas about the constitution of the people (11). President Thomas Jefferson (1789) emphasized the value of an informed electorate in a letter to Ricard Post (1). He wrote, “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.” Leaders in a democracy break down the walls separating the people from their government and build bulwarks of trust. Jürgen Habermas (1991), the German philosopher, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, wrote how democratic societies protect the public. He described this phenomenon as “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state” (176). Dialogue, debate, and discussion in the public sphere legitimize the authority. According to Habermas, the major danger was ma-

nipulative publicity (178). This type of propaganda “manages views, fosters political theater and conveys authorized opinions to assert the dominance or entitlement of those in authority” (Soules para. 12).

Jack Shafter, senior media writer for POLITICO, in his article “Pravda on the Checkout Line” referred to magazines like the Enquirer, “All the hallmarks of classic propaganda appear in the newly politicized tabloids” (para. 17). French Sociologist Jacques Ellul argued that people are easy prey to the lies and half-truths of propaganda. He contended that individuals subjected to propaganda over time exhibited an increasingly limited and rigid personality, hardened prejudices, increased anxiety, and a propensity to violence. Ellul further argued that once people fall victim to propaganda, it is difficult to revive their facility for critical thinking because the individual has a new set of prejudices and beliefs, a sense of membership in a community, and confidence in a charismatic leader (166).

Anthropologists Debra Spitulnik and Thomas Tufte called for “more ethnographic investigation of the relations across media, nation and publics” (para. 1). The analysis of one of these tools, the celebrity/sensational tabloid, the *National Enquirer*, starts with an investigation of how this publication resonates with the everyday life of real people who buy the paper on impulse and discuss its stories in bars, beauty shops, and break rooms. President Trump relies on social media, Fox News, the Sinclair TV station chain, and the *National Enquirer* to orchestrate a symphony of propaganda. The more we know about the tools he uses, the better we can understand their lasting effect on the politics of the Trump era. The story of the *Enquirer* began with an associate of yellow journalist, William Randolph Hearst.

HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER

William Griffin founded the *New York Enquirer* in 1926. It cost 10 cents a copy and featured stories about horse races. Generoso (Gene) Pope Jr., a graduate of MIT, bought the paper in 1953, for \$75,000, reputedly with mob money (Calder 55). He renamed the newspaper as *The National Enquirer* and extended its circulation to New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut and then nationally. He changed the format of the paper from an eight-column broadside to a tabloid, less than half the size. This innovation saved money on printing costs. Readers found the new format more convenient to read while traveling to work on the subway or bus. Pope had an uncanny ability to “recognize what stories would sell and what kind of stories the average person wanted to read about” (Connolly para. 2). He focused on sex, gore, and crime stories. By the 1960s, his newspaper became a dominant tabloid, with a loyal fan base, strong financial cushion, and lucrative national distribution contracts.

Pope instituted practices still in use at the *Enquirer*. He authorized reporters to pay up to \$2,500 for tips without prior authorization. He paid \$18,000 for a picture of Elvis in a white suit lying in a copper coffin snapped by a distant teenage cousin (*Newsweek* para. 14). He negotiated with celebrities to bury salacious stories in exchange for an interview, gossip about another famous person, or other favors. He paid his writers well and rewarded them with lavish bonuses for sensational scoops. Pope pressured reporters to produce. He established a grading system to assure the quality and quantity of their work. If writers did not measure up, he fired them.

Pope anticipated sociological changes in the 1950s and 60s. People moved to the suburbs. They no longer bought their

paper at a newsstand or small grocery store. Pope conceived the idea of selling the *Enquirer* at supermarkets. He had to tone down the carnage on the cover to sell his tabloid in a marketplace where women shoppers predominated. In a 1972 interview, Pope observed, “We had saturated the gore market, and since this is a business, I knew we had to change” (Morton 33). He diversified the content. The tabloid featured stories about celebrities, especially new TV personalities. Yet the *Enquirer* remained true to its heritage. The tabloid’s writers continued to write stories that provoked and aroused a negative emotional response.

Supermarkets proved a tough market to enter until Pope hired blond movie star, Jane Mansfield, to promote the paper at a convention of supermarket executives. He offered them 25% off the cover price of every *Enquirer* sold and promised to buy back unsold copies (Calder 56). It was a retailer’s dream. They had only two points of contact, when a clerk rang up the sale of the tabloid at the cover price and when they remitted the agreed upon fee for the *Enquirers* they sold.

Pope moved the publication to Florida in 1955 after his mob connections warned he could get hurt if he stayed in New York (Connolly para. 2). More likely, the cost savings effect of nonunion labor and favorable backhaul freight rates to distribute his tabloid nationally also figured in his decision. In the 90s, the supermarket tabloid business went through a period of rapid consolidation. Pope’s heirs sold the *Enquirer* and other affiliated newspapers for \$412 million on Pope’s death in 1968. The publication suffered an anthrax attack in 2001, filed for bankruptcy in 2010 with \$1 billion in debt, and moved back to New York in 2015.

THE AMI ERA

David J. Pecker, born in 1952, was the son of a bricklayer from the Bronx. He graduated from Pace University in business administration and passed the CPA exam. After a succession of accounting jobs in the media business, he, along with investors from the Evercore Corporation, purchased the publishing conglomerate American Media Incorporated (AMI) in 1999 for \$850 million. He became chairman, president, and chief executive officer of the company. He oversees a collection of more than a dozen magazines and newspapers including the *National Enquirer*, *Star*, *US Weekly*, *Globe*, *OK!*, and several men's fitness magazines.

In a June 20, 2018 article in the *New Daily*, Larry Hackett, former editor of *People*, reported AMI's acquisition of 13 gossip and celebrity magazines owned by a German firm, Bauer Media. AMI now owns every tabloid on the rack in the supermarket, except for *People*. Hackett worried that a company that controls so many different magazines with an estimated readership of 38 million people has unprecedented power to influence the electorate. He warned that it was time to take the tabloid/celebrity magazine industry seriously (Hackett para. 14).

ANALYSIS OF THE ENQUIRER

Pecker portrays the image of a bon vivant, but at heart, he is a clever bookkeeper trying to stave off further losses in an overcrowded and declining magazine sector. The *Enquirer* sold an average of 4.5 million copies a week in the 1980s. Five people read each issue sold, meaning almost 25 million people read it every week, more than 10% of the US population (Connolly para. 2). Today, one can read celebrity gossip at TMZ.com on the Internet or watch it on television.

The *Enquirer* is overpriced in a competitive marketplace. At the beginning of 2018, the scandal sheet had a weekly circulation of 260,000 copies, a 13% drop from the previous 6-month average, according to the publisher data provided to the Alliance for Audited Media (Rutenberg Investigator para. 12).

The future was obvious in turning around troubled media companies: restructure through bankruptcy, slash staff, and force each member of those remaining do the work of three or four people. Amy Wicks, a reporter for Women's Wear Daily quoted Pecker as saying. "We encourage accountability and aggressive reporting, and if you make a mistake, that's OK." Colleagues added, "If you succeed you get credit, if you fail, it can get ugly" (Wicks para. 7).

The lurid headlines of the *National Enquirer* attracted the attention of shoppers in one Florida supermarket, Publix. It found the covers so offensive, and they ordered them covered (Sorentroue 1). A tabloid headline focuses on who did what, forsaking the why for development in the story itself. Every cover features a picture, a headline telling the story as unambiguously as possible, and a sub-headline called the money line. The May 7, 2018, edition of the *Enquirer* featured the stern visage of President Trump. The main headline read "Trump Fixer's Secrets and Lies" (1). The money line developed a favorite theme of the tabloid, "Payoffs & Threats Exposed." An analysis of the story showed that there were seven individual stories, each with its own sub-headline. Each story had a different slant, on Cohen, the president's personal lawyer. Of the seven stories, six were less than 100 words long (16).

Pecker devised a proprietary database of the covers of all celebrity magazines, including those of his competitors, called

“cover explorer” (Toobin 36). Trump, the Royals, and Heidi Klum lead the list in the Spring of 1918. Trump or his enemies appeared in 39% (N = 71) of the covers from March 6, 2017, to July 12, 2018. Like most newspapers, there are actually three headlines on the front page: a banner or sky-box, the main story, and a footer. Headlines on Trump or his opponents appeared in the Skybox 20% of the time, the center 52% of the time, and the footer 27% of the time (N = 44). Twenty-eight percent of the time there is no mention of Trump in any of the three headlines (N = 25), but there is a story related to Trump somewhere in the body of the tabloid. The issue date June 4, 2018, contained a story on facts about the presidents. It related Trump has a \$29 million yacht on which he has not spent a night. The billionaire explained, “It makes me nervous to relax” (30).

Each issue contains ads, a tremendous amount of gossip about A and B list celebrities, news, games (cross words and puzzles), health watch, market place, (psychics and New ID) oddities, horoscope, a giveaway, and pet vet. The *Enquirer* is a direct-response retailer’s fondest desire. The most common and largest ads are for weight loss products, including a weight loss recliner. There are an equal number of ads for collector dolls. Impulse buyers can even purchase one with a birth certificate. Other popular products for sale include commemorative coins and memorabilia, including a cat dressed in a Marine Corps uniform or a Queen Elizabeth statue. This celebrity gossip magazine touts products designed for seniors especially life-alert bracelets, easy to read computers, and simple phones. Other ads tempt readers to purchase antique model cars, nonsnoring bracelets, and male enhancement products.

GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT

The *Enquirer* executives pride themselves on knowing their audience. One editor argued, “The big news organizations tell people what they think they should be interested in, whereas we try to give them stories that they are interested in” (Newsweek para. 11). Pecker described the weekly’s target audience as, “People that live their life failing, so they want to read negative things about people who have gone up and then come down” (Borchers Why para. 2). The writers for the tabloid stoke the anxieties and feelings of inadequacy of their readers with gossip, guilt, and victimization. Paula E. Morton (2009) in *Tabloid Valley*, stated the *Enquirer*, “Frequently, in the process of exposing personal hypocrisy or impropriety, it inflames a public outrage that the mainstream media pursue in depth” (156).

Tom Kludt, a CNN reporter, in his article, “Most Americans think National Enquirer is covering for Trump” noted the *National Enquirer*’s readership is female, older, and conservative (1). Global Direct Response, a subsidiary of AMI, sells advertising for the publication. Their website stated that the average age of readers is 52.3. The ratio of women to men is 62/38. The average household income of the inquiring minds who purchase the weekly is \$76,319, well above the average (Global 1). If they bought the *Enquirer* on impulse, they can afford to purchase a direct mail order item advertised in the tabloid.

Jack Shafer, POLITICO’s senior media writer, in his January/February 2017 article, “Pravda on the Checkout Line,” offered two contrasting views of *Enquirer* readers. He sees them as representatives of the emerging post-truth era, reliant on their own beliefs and indifferent to the facts accepted by the mainstream. He also views them as a pre-truth group, drawn

by arguments based on emotional appeal able to spread its message by word-of-mouth and other organizations to main stream newspapers. Walmart accounts for 23% of the sales of the *Enquirer* and Kroger, the largest supermarket chain in the United States, for 10% (Toobin 45). The *Enquirer* appeals to buyers with stories of celebrity extramarital affairs, surgeries, sudden weight losses and gains, and, increasingly, Donald Trump.

The *Enquirer* and its fellow AMI tabloids emit a constant cultural background noise to American life. There are 37,000 supermarkets in America, with an average of 10 checkout stands. Each one has a wire rack displaying the *Enquirer* and other AMI magazines. According to an industry study, American households make an average of 1.5 trips to the supermarket each week. Every customer passes by the checkout stand, which means even people who never purchase a tabloid absorb the ambient headlines, and those headlines can shape their view of the world.

Enquirer writers are well paid and consider themselves some of the best in the business. Their writing is easily understood with the patois of the streets. Some say the best way to read it is to leave your logic at the door. Note the headlines and read the stories twice; first to observe the emotional impact on the target audience and second how well the story is written. A typical headline reads “FBI Coup to Take Down Trump,” a “Double-dealing” FBI agent secretly orchestrated a sinister plot causing “incalculable havoc.” The story itself describes Hillary Clinton as “rubbing her hands with glee” (January 6, 2018). For the writers of the *Enquirer*, “Romps” are always wild. “Perps” are usually busted (June 18, 2018, 15).

TRUMP AND PECKER: THE PERFECT FRIENDSHIP

The story of this friendship began with a prominent real estate developer in New York in the 80s and 90s who developed a fondness for celebrity gossip. He basked in the publicity, even if the headline announced, “Trump’s Mistress Cheats on Donald with Tom Cruise” (Gillette para. 9). When Pecker became CEO of AMI in 1999, the negative Trump stories ceased. The publication gave glowing coverage of Trump before and during this campaign. It ceased shortly before the FBI subpoenaed Pecker in 2018.

Trump authored several stories in the newspaper revealing, “the most intimate details in my amazing life, I am the only one who can make America great again!, and, on a personal note, my wife, Melania would make a terrific first lady!” (Suebsaeng para. 14). In another article, that appeared in his book *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, the Republican candidate for president appealed to the cult of the hero, telling the story of how he punched his music teacher in the eye “because I didn’t think he knew anything about music. I’m not proud of that, but it’s clear evidence that even early on I tended to make my opinions known in a forceful way” (Trump 1). One campaign staffer described the tabloid as a “campaign mailer” (Hensley 1).

The 2016 Presidential candidate received only a few newspaper endorsements, one of them from the *Enquirer*. Pecker explained, “Nobody influences the editorial decision-making process at the National Enquirer other than myself and our editors” (Toobin 47). An article using the *Enquirer*’s term for the candidate trumpeted, “TRUMP MUST BE PREZ!” The *Enquirer* promised “He will chase down illegal immigrants” and “stand up to foreign leaders like Vladimir Putin” (*Enquirer*, March 14, 2016).

The current POTUS has a short attention span, expressing himself in provocative blocks of speech. Both the *Enquirer* and the president ignore facts and indulge in outrageous self-promotion. Amy Peck, senior reporter for *Huffington Post*, stated that Trump's campaign committee, White House staff, and the *National Enquirer* writers are remarkably similar in approach. They spent the time before and after his election "sharing blatantly false articles with reckless abandon, knowing their audience had a high tolerance for half-truths and whole lies" (Peck 1).

Trump loved the weekly publication with national reach. The *Enquirer* printed positive stories like, "Natural-born leader Donald Trump is a highly focused, driven and charismatic genius who thinks outside the box and is almost too smart for his own good" (Taylor Magzter 1). The editors of the *Enquirer* felt free to name-call and exploit resentments if it furthered Trump's agenda. Trump wondered, "Why didn't the *National Enquirer* get the Pulitzer Prize for Edwards?" (Borcher Trump para. 4). He claimed that the publication was "very respected" and suggested Pecker would make a "brilliant Choice" for *Time* magazine CEO (Eglish 1).

The *Enquirer* staff wrote a self-congratulatory piece after the election declaring, "Only one magazine told the world all along how Americans REALLY were feeling about the 2016 election! As the world of professional pollsters spend today in humiliation, we look back at the figures that showed Trump was winning over America" (November 9, 2016). An online readership poll conducted on May 31, 2016, showed that 58% favored Trump and 42% favored Clinton. The tabloid crowed, "Although the *Enquirer* polls did not follow the strict rules of statistical samples, one thing is certain: We had our finger on the pulse of the nation all along, and always will!" (November 9, 2016).

“David thought Donald walked on water,” a former Enquirer employee told *The New Yorker* (Levine 1). “Donald treated David like a little puppy. Donald liked being flattered, and David thought Donald was the king. Both have similar management styles and attitudes, starting with absolute superiority over anybody else” (Levine 1). “We used to go after newsmakers no matter what side they were on,” a former *Enquirer* staffer told Jeffrey Toobin, a reporter for *The New Yorker*, “He (Trump) is the ultimate target-rich environment. The *Enquirer* had a golden opportunity, and they completely looked the other way” (Levine 1).

Pecker has no strong political views and a fascination with celebrity (Toobin 45). Asawin Suebsaeng of *The Daily Beast* quoted him as saying, “Few presidential aspirants in recent history have generated the kind of discussion Donald Trump has” (para. 17). Pecker also claimed, “It’s no surprise that the readership of the *Enquirer* recently told us that they wanted to read more about Trump than any other 2016 candidate” (Suebsaeng para. 17). Trump often acted as a source for the publication. “When there was something going on in New York, David would talk with Trump about it (Toobin 46). An American Media (AMI) employee told Toobin, “if Donald didn’t want a story to run, it wouldn’t run. You can put that in stone” (46).

Pecker wields great power through his multiple magazine properties. Stu Zakim, a public relations executive who worked at AMI for 3 years noted, “Donald being the media manipulator that he is—it’s a perfect friendship” (CNN 1). The media mogul is emphatic about Trump, “The guy is a personal friend of mine” (Borchers Trump’s Love para. 14). Toobin noted that the friendship has lasted for decades and the publisher boasts about helping his friends (40). According to Pecker, a cover depicting Donald Trump as a hero, lam-

basting his opponents, boosted sales by 23%. “The readers of the *Enquirer* voted for Trump,” Pecker told the New Yorker. “And 96 percent want him reelected today.” (Borchers Why para. 6).

THE ENQUIRER ATTACKS TRUMP'S ENEMIES

No challenger to Trump was safe during the primary. The *Enquirer* published a story in March 2016 about “boozin” Ted Cruz’s five mistresses and his father’s involvement in John F. Kennedy’s assassination (para. 1). When asked about it, Trump said he did not know if it was true, but he did read it in the *Enquirer*, which had a good reputation. The paper also ran a story about “bungling” Ben Carson claiming he left a sponge in a patient’s brain. The scandal sheet also ran a story on December 31, 2015, titled “Senator Marco Rubio’s cocaine connection” (para. 1). The celebrity newspaper reported Jeb Bush was a “dope smoker” and had an affair with a Playboy bunny (Suebsaeng para. 6).

Far-right publications, talk show hosts, and Trump operatives picked up stories from the *Enquirer*. The cover of the July 4, 2016, edition noted that “crooked Hillary,” “sounds like Obama in a skirt” (1). The 15 August 2016 issue, “Donald Trump’s Revenge on Hillary and her Puppets,” related rumors of mob connections and a gay double life in (1). A story detailing “Hillary’s Full Medical File,” appeared in the September 8, 2016, issue, an effort to make Clinton’s health a campaign issue (1). The cover picture showed her apparently on the verge of death. The Headline alleged she suffered from muscular dystrophy, Alzheimer’s, brain damage, seizures, and strokes. The issue that appeared in supermarkets across the country the day before the election informed shoppers, “Hillary Blackmailed FBI to Kill Corruption Probe” (1).

Former president Barack Obama and his family were subjects of disparaging stories. One alleged that the Obamas were divorcing. The headline on December 14, 2016, screamed “Malia Obama—Out of Control” and reported that Obama’s daughter was missing because she was undergoing treatment for cocaine addiction (1). The *National Enquirer* ran a cover story on February 8, 2017, “Obama’s Secret Plot to Impeach Donald Trump,” claiming Obama was secretly trying to get Trump impeached (1).

The *Enquirer* signals who is out of favor with the president. After, the news broke that the FBI raided the home of Paul Manafort, the *National Enquirer* reported that the president’s former campaign chairman cheated on his wife (Siegel 1). Once Cohen turned on the President, readers of the May 7, 2018, edition of the *Enquirer* learned of “TRUMP FIXER’S SECRETS & LIES!” (1, 16). National Memo writer Oliver Willis announced, “Afraid he will squeal to Feds, Trumps Tabloid Pals’ Attack Cohen” (1). Trump stories in the *Enquirer* ceased after a Federal Court subpoenaed Pecker’s records, but their sister publication, the *Globe*, lambasted radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh for insinuating the President gave into Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D) over the wall with Mexico.

CATCH AND KILL

The *Enquirer* practiced a type of transactional journalism known as “catch and kill” for decades. They paid for stories, but did not print them, thus gaining leverage over the celebrities involved. Ronan Farrow of the *New Yorker* received threats of blackmail from representatives of *The Enquirer* while researching his story, “A Playboy Model and a System for Concealing Identity,” according to *The Washington Post* reporters Allyson Chiu and Kayla Epstein (para. 1). Farrow said, “Pecker knows where the bodies are buried and has the

power to run stories or not to run them” (para. 7). Pecker suppressed negative coverage of Arnold Schwarzenegger. White House officials reputedly pressured television hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski to apologize to the president for their comments. In return, the *Enquirer* would not publish a story about their relationship. The same month the scandal sheet dropped a negative story about Tiger Woods after he agreed to a cover story in Men’s Fitness.

Jonathon Chait of *The National Interest* observed, “Trump habitually pays for sex, and we also know he is willing to pay to keep embarrassing secrets from going public” (para. 2). Pecker helped his friend by keeping damaging information from the public. A former senior editor at the *Enquirer*, said “We never printed a word about Trump without his approval” (Farrow para. 7). Pecker kept files containing negative stories on Donald in a safe. Sources close to the editor say that he removed them to a more secure place or destroyed them around the time of Trump’s inauguration. These contained information and sources relating to Trump’s marital problems, affairs, and lawsuits, plus multiple tips that he cheated while playing golf. Pecker probably did not destroy this treasure trove of malicious gossip figuring that it might provide written insurance in times of adversity (Rutenberg and Haberman 1).

Rachel Maddow, MSNBC anchor, described the *National Enquirer* as “weird, outrageous, and fantastically false” (Emery para. 11). The magazine counter-attacked with a flurry of vicious articles. One questioned why Maddow did not attend gay parties and another reported a feud between Maddow and Megan Kelly over Tom Brokaw. Enquireman in “Rachel Maddow’s Brain-Dead Enquirer Attack” chided Maddow for getting the price of his tabloid wrong and sent her a free

subscription (para. 5). Rob Shutter, in his “Number One in America Gossip Column,” reported a make-up artist working on Maddow for a cover of a *Rolling Stone* magazine described the news host as a vain diva who did not like her face touched (para. 4). Such petty second-hand gossip is largely irrelevant; however, a seemingly insignificant event soon threatened to involve the president of the United States in the commission of a felony.

ANATOMY OF A CRIME

According to Farrow’s article in the *New Yorker*, Karen McDougal met Trump at a party at the Playboy Mansion. He asked for her telephone number and they soon began chatting on the phone. Their first date was dinner in a private bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Trump’s polite manner, intelligence, and charm impressed her. “We talked for a couple hours—then, it was ‘ON’! We got naked + had sex” (para. 8). As she was getting dressed to leave, Trump offered her money. “I looked at him (+ felt sad) + said, No thanks—I’m not ‘that kind of girl. I slept with you because I like you—NOT for money’—He told me ‘you are special’” (para. 8). McDougal and Trump continued their relationship during the American Celebrity Golf Tournament in July 2006 at Lake Tahoe. Allegedly, “the Donald” had sex with adult entertainer Stormy Daniels at the same event. Both relationships continued through 2007.

McDougal claimed she had intercourse with Trump dozens of times from June 2006 to April 2007. Trump flew McDougal to public events, but hid the fact he paid for her travel so as not to leave a paper trail. He introduced her to members of his family and took her to his private residences. While visiting Trump Tower in New York, Trump pointed out Me-

lania's separate bedroom. He said Melania "liked her space to read or be alone" (Farrow para. 12). McDougal ended the relationship in April 2007 because of her paramour's derogatory statements about her mother, racist remarks about a black friend, and feelings of guilt about dating a married man. Eight years passed. The public would have forgotten the story of these two affairs, except for the fact that Donald J. Trump was considering a run for the Presidency of the United States.

Michael Cohen's testimony and documents seized from the offices of David Pecker, substantiate a meeting took place at Trump Tower in August 2015 at which the three laid out Trump's strategy for his campaign for the Presidency. Trump asked for and received Pecker's unqualified support. Pecker promised to endorse Trump for president, run favorable stories on his political adversaries, and pay for negative stories about Trump, but not publish them. Pecker further agreed that he would allow Cohen preview stories for content and ensure the magazine used the most favorable photographs of Trump. The three discussed the possibility that Trump might buy the decades of negative information about Trump in Pecker's safe, including many stories about how Trump cheated at golf, but came to no conclusion.

A friend of McDougal tweeted about the Playboy Bunny's affair on May 7, 2016. McDougal's friends told her this was the perfect time to take control of her story, earn some well-deserved compensation, and advance her career. The next month, she hired Keith Davidson, a Hollywood celebrity lawyer, who represented both adult-entertainment star Stormy Daniels who also claimed she had an affair with Trump and Shera Bechard, a playboy bunny, who had an affair with the Republican finance chair. In all three cases, Davidson coordinated with Michael Cohen and collected 45% of the payment to the women as his commission. Davidson

later felt compelled to appear on television in an effort to repair his tarnished reputation.

The *Enquirer* sent a representative to Los Angeles to negotiate with McDougal, but Pecker would not agree to it. After Donald Trump received the Republican Party nomination in July, Pecker saw the wisdom of an NDA with McDougal. He offered her \$150,000, a cover on a men's fitness magazine, and the opportunity to write fitness articles. AMI paid for exclusive rights to her story. The contract required her to keep quiet about any relationship with a married man. The CEO of AMI boasted that now she was a part of the company, "She can't be bashing Trump and American Media" (Tobin para. 20). Afterward, Cohen reported that Pecker repeatedly asked for compensation from Trump, until the president notoriously tight-fisted with his money paid him through Cohen. As far as Stormy Daniels, Pecker refused to pay money to a porn star. Cohen, under the direction of the President Trump, paid \$130,000 for an NDA with Daniels in October.

The Wall Street Journal published a story about Karen McDougal on November 4, 2016, 4 days before the Presidential election. However, without corroboration, the story soon died out. Had the NDAs not worked, coupled with the October Access Hollywood tape, they might have made a difference in the campaign, especially on the issue of character.

McDougal, a Republican, voted for Trump. At this point, she had the "inkling that she had been duped, especially when AMI threatened her with a \$10 million penalty if she breached the contract" (Weis para. 10). McDougal fired Davidson because he did not tell her about the contract's fine print and negotiated with Cohen without her knowledge. She contacted a well-known first amendment lawyer, Ted

Boutros, who renegotiated the contract to allow her to respond to legitimate inquiries about Trump without fear of penalty.

Michael Cohen left the Trump campaign to become the president's personal attorney. He announced "I am the guy who would take a bullet for the President" (Palazzolo et al. 1). Trump paid him by check over the course of the year for the Daniels NDA. Hints of the president's affairs came out, but the president continued to deny them.

In March 2018, McDougal hired a third lawyer, Peter Stris, who filed suit in Los Angeles Superior Court to void her non-disclosure agreement. Stris, stated, "Through efforts including the collusion of her own lawyer, AMI has consistently deceived and manipulated Ms. McDougal through an illegitimate contract" (Conley 1). The former Playmate charged Davidson did not explain to her that allowing her to write stories for AMI did not mean they would publish them. She argued Davidson, Cohen, and Pecker conferred without her knowledge to protect the president. The suit claimed her payout amounted to an illegal corporate contribution intended to influence the election.

Kate Briquet, a reporter for *The Daily Beast*, reported on how AMI counsel, Jean-Paul Jassy, fought back with a motion to strike McDougal's suit. He contended that AMI had a First Amendment right not to publish her story and its editors "who chose not to publish it cannot be punished for exercising that right" (para. 6). In rebuttal, Stris said "As we have learned through brave truth-tellers like Ms. McDougal, the tabloid went to great lengths to silence her and others, and they are now attempting to silence her again with the absurd claim that their own free speech was violated" (Briquet para. 7).

McDougal revealed telling details about her affair on the Anderson Cooper show aired 3 days after she filed her suit. She expressed affection for Donald Trump who, she said, was always a gentleman and paid her compliments. She recalled Pecker invited her to lunch after she signed the NDA and thanked her for her loyalty. She realized too late that he did not want to help her and had lied to her. She said Davidson promised her millions of dollars. She signed the NDA, not for the money, but a chance to transition from modeling to writing. She expressed regret for the relationship and apologized to Melania.

On April 9, FBI agents served a warrant on Michael Cohen. They sized computers, tapes and files from his office, home, and storage sites. Matt Appuzo, writing for *The New York Times* quoted President Trump as declaring these actions, “Disgraceful” (1). On April 17, 2018, Karen McDougal announced “I am relieved to be able to tell the truth about my story when asked, and I look forward to being able to return to my private life and focus on what matters to me” (Dedaj 1). She anticipated working again with the *National Enquirer*. The tabloid announced, “Ms. McDougal has always been free to talk about her relationship with President Trump” (Weis, 2018). AMI agreed to everything they promised in the original nondisclosure agreement. They offered to publish five additional McDougal health and fitness columns. They maintained a financial interest up to \$75,000 in any re-sale of an exclusive on McDougal’s personal story.

In her show on April 18, Rachel Maddow tried to make sense of it all. She could not understand why McDougal settled when her lawyer was on the verge of obtaining documents and depositions that further implicated the president. The television host’s guest, former US Attorney Chuck Rosenberg, warned, “It was not for us to decide. We do not know

her goals.” He added Stris represented the wishes of his client, and this settlement did not affect a criminal case brought by the US Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York against Cohen for possible campaign finance law violations and improper lobbying activities (Maddow President, 2018).

New York Times writer Matt Apuzzo in “Lawyer’s Secret Tape Reveals Trump’s Talk of Payments to Model” described about tapes and emails seized from Michael Cohen’s office. At about the same time, Federal authorities subpoenaed evidence from Pecker and offered him limited immunity for his testimony. The evidence thus gathered proved McDougal’s contention that Cohen, Pecker, and Davidson discussed her settlement unbeknownst to her. One tape revealed Trump considered buying the rights to McDougal’s story as a way of reimbursing Pecker (July 21, 2018, p. A1). Another tape revealed he considered forming a corporation to buy Pecker’s safe full of secrets (Rutenberg Immunity 1). The tapes also indicated that Trump and Cohen discussed how to repay Pecker for picking up the tab on the McDougal’s affair, which the notoriously parsimonious president eventually did.

Michael Cohen pleaded guilty to eight counts of tax evasion, bank fraud, and campaign finance charges on August 21, 2018 (US District Court). He told the judge that he made payments to McDougal and Daniels, “in coordination with the direction of a candidate for federal office” (Rashbaum para. 1). He identified that person as Donald Trump who “knew about everything” and “approved everything” (Ruiz 1).

The headline of the *Daily News* on August 24, 2018, read, “Pecker in a Vise, Enquirer Honcho grabs immunity as feds put squeeze on catch-and-kill enabler” (1). Pecker turned against his lifelong friend because he and his company faced

a Federal Election Commission complaint claiming the \$150,000 payment to Karen McDougal represented an illegal campaign contribution. AMI denied any wrongdoing, while also saying its cooperation with investigators would not extend beyond its constitutionally protected status as a news organization. Cameron Stracher, a lawyer for AMI, contended that “It’s easy to look down at the work product of celebrity magazines and assume they are not entitled to the same protections as the mainstream media” (Briquelet 1).

Pecker fulfilled his settlement with McDougal. She appeared on the September 2018 cover of *Men’s Journal*. The issue contained her story, “Four Moves for Stronger Abs” (September 2018) despite the protestations of the magazine’s CFO that it would hurt advertising revenue (Maddow, August 10, 2018).

In a letter from John Khuzami, acting attorney general for the Southern District of New York, dated September 30, 2018, under the heading Exhibit A, Statement of Admitted Facts, AMI attorneys admitted that they made a \$150,000 payment at the suggestion of agents of a candidate in the 2016 election to ensure a woman did not publicize damaging allegations about the candidate in an effort to influence that election. They further stipulated that in August 2015, Pecker, Cohen, “and at least one other member of the campaign” met to coordinate how best to deal with “negative story about the candidates relationships with women.” AMI agreed to implement specific improvements to prevent future violations of campaign finance law.

“This is a remarkable surrender of any First Amendment protections they might otherwise claim,” said Edward Wasserman, dean at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. “It basically gives complete and unbridled discretion to the prosecutors of the DOJ to ask whatever they like and

leaves AMI with no recourse but to comply” (Rosenbaum 1). AMI further agreed “to commit no crimes what so ever” for a period of 3 years (Khuzami). AMI stipulated that failure to keep their part of the bargain left them open to prosecution for any and all crimes they had admitted to under this agreement. This development is unprecedented for a magazine that constantly advocates freedom of the press. However, the alternative is unthinkable. The fines for campaign finance violations could put the *Enquirer*, already struggling for economic survival out of business.

Cohen pleaded guilty in the Southern District Court of New York to lying to Congress about how long discussions involving a proposed Trump Tower in Moscow extended into the 2016 campaign. Federal Judge William Pauley III of the Southern District Court of New York sentenced Michael Cohen to 3 years in jail for tax evasion and campaign finance violations, as well as lying to Congress about his efforts to build a Trump Tower in Moscow during the 2016 campaign. Special Counsel Robert Muller, who brought the later charge, recommended that Cohen serve sentences for both crimes concurrently. However, Robert Khuzami of the Southern District of New York in a 40-page sentencing memorandum that the serious nature of his offenses and the need to promote respect for the law warranted a substantial sentence (Khuzami Sentencing). Judge Pauley chose a sentence on the stronger side of the sentencing guidelines observing, Mr. Cohen pled guilty to a veritable smorgasbord of fraudulent conduct, "Each of the crimes involved deception and each appears to have been motivated by personal greed and ambition" (Orden et al. 1). David Jackson of *USA Today*, in his article, "President Trump defends payment to women as a private transaction" (1), stated that Cohen lied in an effort to receive a reduced sentence.

Congressional Committees issued subpoenas for Michael Cohen to appear before them soon after Cohen canceled testifying voluntarily because of threats to his family from President Trump. Pecker reached a plea agreement with the Federal Government, which granted him immunity from prosecution providing he committed no other crimes for 3 years. Although articles in the *Enquirer* praising Trump ceased, Pecker could not help expressing his loyalty to Trump in other ways. When Rush Limbaugh lambasted the president for caving in on building a wall on the Mexican border, The *Enquirer's* sister publication, the *Globe*, ran a front cover story dredging up all the old dirt on Limbaugh, including his opioid addiction. Commenting on this story, Peter Sheridan of the online website Boing Boing noted that if you rolled up a copy of the *Globe* in the “shape of a sea shell, and hold it to your ear, you can hear the sound of President Trump screaming” (para. 1). Sheridan warned there was more to come from “Trump mouthpieces like the *Globe* and the *Enquirer*” (para. 1).

Jeff Bezos, owner of Amazon and *The Washington Post*, wrote an article for MEDIUM.com, a blog post, entitled “No Thank You Mr. Pecker” on February 7, 2019. Bezos charged that the *Enquirer* had, “Made him an offer I couldn’t refuse” (para. 1). Bezos presented copies of emails from Howard Dylan, the *Enquirer's* chief content officer, describing intimate photos of Bezos and Lauren Sanchez. Bezos’ provided other emails from the *Enquirer's* lawyer spelling out the quid pro quo. The *Enquirer* would not publish the photos, if Bezos called off his investigation of how the incriminating emails and photos were obtained and publicly stated that he believed the actions of the *Enquirer* were not politically motivated. The Southern District of New York U.S. attorney’s office is reviewing whether the alleged extortion violated the non-prosecution agreement. If the agreement is nullified, Pecker

and AMI could face prosecution for other crimes, which they have admitted.

Bezos asserted that the motivation for this blackmail stemmed from Trump's personal animosity toward him, the coverage of the president in *The Washington Post*, or an effort by Saudi Arabia to pressure the *Post* to limit their investigation of the killing of one of their reporters, Jamal Khashoggi. Bezos wrote that the *Enquirer* could not intimidate him and could publish the photos. A spokesman for the *Enquirer* denied all these charges.

According to Gabriel Sherman, an investigative reporter for Vanity Fair, Bezos is preparing a 90-page investigative report charging that the *Enquirer* paid David Sanchez, the brother of the mistress, \$250,000 for the compromising pictures. The report also charges that a financially failing *Enquirer* published the Bezos expose to curry favor from Saudi investors.

On February 27, members of the House Oversight Committee questioned Michael Cohen. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) zeroed on the treasure trove of catch and kill documents in Pecker's secret safe. She asked for and received the names of AMI executives that might provide information on these documents to the Committee.

The Judiciary Committee headed by Representative Jerald Nadler (D-NY) requested documents pertinent to their investigation from AMI on March 4, 2019. Clearly, the election fraud crimes connected with the coverup payments to Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels will continue as subjects of investigation by a Democratic Congress.

The Federal Court scheduled Cohen to report for prison on May 6, 2019. Whether he can reduce his 3-year prison term

by further cooperation with the Courts and Congress or incur further criminal liability is open to conjecture.

CONCLUSION

The history of the Enquirer showed the development of a highly skilled specialized magazine that developed a market for their product in supermarkets. Their long time practice of paying for tips tarnished their journalistic reputation from its beginning as a New York tabloid. Presently, their profits and circulation are declining as a result of the increased price of the magazine and competition from television programs like TMZ. This, as charged in Dr. Phil McGraw's suit, forces the writers of the magazine to write sensationalistic articles that increasingly skirt the edge of libel (McGraw).

David Pecker understands these market dynamics. He uses a computer program that details which celebrities sell magazines and the design of the all-important front page. Pecker has taken advantage of the decline in the tabloid market to consolidate celebrity and fitness magazines under the control of American Media Incorporated (AMI). President Trump thought Pecker was the most likely candidate to take over *Time* magazine.

The friendship between Pecker and Trump continued over decades. It involved convenience, style, and mutual interests. The messages of both are short, easy to read, and designed to elicit an emotional response. Both men are brash and utilize name-calling, conflict, and division. Both employ the argot of the streets of New York. Their friendship blossomed at boozy parties featuring Playboy bunnies once AMI took over distribution of that magazine. That friendship solidified into a verbal agreement made at Trump Tower in which Pecker promised the *Enquirer* would support Trump's candidacy for

President with supportive articles, lies about his opponents, and suppression of negative stories about his affairs.

Once Pecker violated campaign finance laws, the story just kept going. It quite possibly is more dangerous than the alleged Russian collusion for Trump because it implicates him directly in committing a felony. Cohen's fears for his family and impending imprisonment will not prevent various Congressional Committees from subpoenaing him for testimony. Congress knows where to find him, and prison authorities will deliver him to the proper venue for his testimony.

Most Americans are familiar with the *National Enquirer*. It has a long history dealing with UFO's, aliens, gore, and celebrity scandals. Many times, its writers scooped the mainstream press. It is ubiquitous, seemingly in every supermarket in the United States. Its garish headlines call out to the public. "Discover secrets and find out the truth." So why take notice, besides a chuckle at a headline or schadenfreude over the fall from grace by film, TV, or political celebrities?

One reason the *Enquirer* is worthy of scholarly investigation is because of its unwavering support of President Donald J. Trump before and after his election. Trump lacked the endorsement of the mainstream press. He relied on a few select media outlets to broadcast his message to the American people. He uses the 140 characters of Twitter, the "Fair and Balanced" approach of Fox News, the many local TV stations of Sinclair Broadcasting, and the *Enquirer*. The President loves and respects the *Enquirer* and has a long relationship with the tabloid. It was the first national publication to endorse his bid for the Presidency. It published articles written by the candidate himself. The scandal weekly bashes Trump's enemies and supports his every policy. David Pecker, is a loyal friend, willing to pay money to buy and kill stories detrimental to Trump.

This paper examined “Enquirerized” politics from the standpoint of Storey’s insistence that any analysis depends on the various categories of people that make up popular culture. A total of 70% of Americans who are skeptical of Trump’s motives and veracity are not fooled by the *Enquirer* as the Presidents’ mouthpiece. They fulfill Habermas’s belief that an informed democracy thrives on contention, debate, and discussion, but need protection from manipulative publicity. The electorate must read critically, from more than one source.

Approximately 35% of the population make up the President’s base and remain loyal no matter what the circumstance. Ellul’s notion of propaganda explains why the *Enquirer* closes the minds of its recipients and provides them with a set of prejudices and beliefs, as well as offers objective justifications that apply to Trump’s base. Informing the electorate takes time and patience. Democracy’s safeguards lie in what people read and how they react. The press should foster discourse, not anger and resentment. Incivility is a toxic virus. Americans can avoid this disease only by listening, accepting, and respecting one another. If democracy is to prevail, it needs a healthy prescription of liberty, equality, and especially, fraternity.

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“We Know the Way”: Culture–Nature Relationship and Kuleana in Disney’s *Moana*

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By Colby Y. Miyose

ABSTRACT

On the Thanksgiving weekend of November 23, 2016, while families were celebrating one cultural tradition, another cultural cornerstone was making waves across the big screen. *Moana* (meaning wide expanse of water in Hawaiian) has splashed into the hearts of young children, as Disney’s latest princess adaptation. Though a sparse amount of recent literature has evaluated the portrayal of *Moana*’s tough-girl femininity, fewer have analyzed representations of Pacific culture. When evaluating cultural values within the movie, *Moana* encapsulates a nature–culture dualism that many Pacific Islanders (i.e., Hawai’i, Samoa, Tahiti) have adopted as their way of life. For many years, these islands have been favored destinations for vacationers and adventurers as well as colonizers and usurpers, who venture there because of their beautiful landscapes and strategic placement. However, there is another side of these islands that many do not see and even fewer understand. The following paper analyzes *Moana*’s portrayal of the connection between nature and culture, and the possible consequences of severing this relationship.

Keywords: culture–nature relationship, Pacific Island culture, sustainability, textual analysis

“Conocemos el camino”: La relación entre la cultura y la naturaleza y Kuleana en el film *Moana* de Disney

RESUMEN

En el fin de semana de Acción de Gracias del 23 de noviembre de 2016, mientras las familias celebraban una tradición cultural, otro clásico cultural estaba haciendo olas en la pantalla grande. *Moana* (que significa una amplia extensión de agua en Hawaiano) ha salpicado los corazones de los niños pequeños, como la última adaptación de la princesa de Disney. Aunque una cantidad escasa de literatura reciente ha evaluado el retrato de la feminidad ruda de *Moana*, y aún menos han analizado las representaciones de la cultura del Pacífico. Al evaluar los valores culturales dentro de la película, *Moana* encapsula un dualismo de naturaleza y cultura que muchos isleños del Pacífico (es decir, Hawai'i, Samoa, Tahití) han adoptado como su forma de vida. Durante muchos años, estas islas han sido destinos preferidos para los vacacionistas y aventureros, así como para los colonizadores y usurpadores, que se aventuran allí por sus hermosos paisajes y ubicación estratégica. Sin embargo, hay otro lado de estas islas que muchos no ven y aún menos entienden. El siguiente artículo analiza la representación en *Moana* de la conexión entre la naturaleza y la cultura, y las posibles consecuencias de cortar esta relación.

Palabras Clave: relación entre cultura y naturaleza, cultura de las islas pacíficas, sustentabilidad, análisis textual

“我们知道怎么做”

迪士尼电影《海洋奇缘》中文化与自然的关系、以及 *Kuleana*

摘要

2016年11月23日感恩节周末，当家庭正庆祝一个文化传统时，另一个文化基石正在大屏幕上引起热潮。

《海洋奇缘》(*Moana*, 意味着夏威夷的广阔水域)作为迪士尼最新改编的公主电影已俘获了年轻儿童的心灵。尽管近期很少有文献评价电影主角莫阿娜的坚强女孩形象，但分析太平洋文化代表的文献更少。当评价该片的文化价值时，《海洋奇缘》概括了自然与文化并存的二元性，这是许多太平洋岛民(即夏威夷人、萨摩亚人、大溪地人)采取的生活方式。多年来，这些岛屿成为旅游者和探险家青睐的目的地，殖民者和篡位者也因岛屿的秀丽风景和战略位置而冒险选择此地。然而，这些岛屿还有大多数人看不见，甚至更少人能理解的另外一面。本文分析了《海洋奇缘》对自然-文化关系的刻画，以及割断这种关系可能会产生的后果。

关键词：文化与自然的关系，太平洋岛国文化，可持续性，文本分析

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On the Thanksgiving weekend of November 23, 2016, while families were celebrating one cultural tradition, another cultural cornerstone was making waves across the big screen. *Moana* (meaning wide expanse of water in Hawaiian) has splashed into the hearts of young children, as Disney’s latest princess adaptation, grossing \$642 million to date (IMDB 2018). Set about 2000 years ago, the plot is modeled after

the legend of the goddess of nature: *Te Fiti's*, heart is stolen, blight has overcome the islands, devastating the vegetation and fish supply and endangering the livelihood of the people. *Moana* is called by the ocean to return *Te Fiti's* heart and restore balance to the islands. As her journey proceeds, she encounters many who want *Te Fiti's* heart for their own personal gain.

Though past literature pertaining to Pacific Islander media representations has focused on the many negative stereotypes perpetuated in mainstream media, such as the idea that Oceanic people are lazy and apathetic, few commentators explore the positive messages that can be garnered from these films and television shows (Konzett 5). Also, although an abundance of research has looked into the over-sexualization and hyper-gendered portrayals of Disney princes and princesses, fewer have looked at portrayals of race and ethnicity, with exception to Pocahontas, Mulan, the Princess and the Frog, and a few others (Cheu 7). Nonetheless, when race and ethnicity is focused on, mostly negative portrayals and stereotypes are highlighted, with disregard for the potential of depictions. Furthermore, though a sparse amount of recent literature has evaluated the portrayal of *Moana's* tough-girl femininity, few have analyzed representations of Pacific culture (Cheu 8). Those that have focused on how Pacific Islander culture is misrepresented, such as nitpicking the use of particular language in song lyrics, or pointing out the minute inaccuracies in the depiction of *Maui* the demigod (Leslie 18). However, when evaluating cultural values that are interconnected between Oceanic cultures on a “big picture” level within the movie, *Moana* encapsulates a culture–nature dualism that many Pacific Islanders (i.e., Hawaiian, Samoan, Tahitian) have adopted as their way of life. For many years, these islands have been favored destinations for vacationers

and adventurers as well as colonizers and usurpers, who venture there because of the islands’ beautiful landscapes and strategic placement. However, there is another side of these islands that many do not see, and even fewer understand. When the sunscreen, ABC Stores, island tours, and *lu’aus* are left behind, when the tides recede, one might find that there is a part of Oceania that longs for the return of its independence, its identity, and its culture. These cultures no longer wish to see its people impoverished. They no longer wish to be forgotten in history books and remembered only when it is time to plan a family trip over the summer. Mainstream media depictions of the people of the Pacific pale in comparison to the truth provide false depictions of wealth, lifestyle, physical characteristics, intelligence, and exaggerating Pacific Island culture as a commodity. This paper argues that the film *Moana* does the opposite. Using Hawaiian culture as an example, the following paper analyzes *Moana*’s portrayal of the connection between nature and culture, and the possible consequences of severing this relationship.

MEDIA, DEPICTIONS, AND STEREOTYPES

Take a moment to ponder what you know about Hawai’i,¹ maybe you’ve been there for vacation, or even watched a movie where the setting took place in Hawai’i. Think about what kinds of things come to mind when thinking about Hawai’i. Does a paradise escape with girls in hula skirts, people surfing, people wearing Aloha shirts, and untouched lands come to mind? If you have only watched a movie about Hawai’i, or visited for a short time, these kinds of things may be

1 Although it is considered to be grammatically correct to spell it either Hawaii or Hawai’i, in its native language, the *okina*, or glottal stop, between the two i’s changes the pronunciation of the word. Recent efforts are being made to legally change the spelling to Hawai’i, so I will use this spelling to honor the traditional spelling.

the first things to come to mind because of the way popular culture projects life in Hawai'i. As someone who was born and raised in Hawai'i, and identifies as being part Hawaiian, these depictions are humorous and flattering, and even blatantly degrading at times, but far from the truth.

Media institutions are powerful. Children between the ages of 2 and 17 watch an average of 25 hours of television each week; adults spend half of their leisure time in front of the screen or consuming other forms of media; 86 percent of homes in the United States subscribe to a cable TV company; and 61 percent of Americans have computers (Elliott 11). The United States has the highest Internet penetration rate in the world, with an estimated more than 72 percent of the population being users (Elliott 12). Gerbner et al. suggest that the level of media consumption is related to how people perceive their world (47). Seeing oneself in media can aid in constructing a view of the self and of the world around the self (Merskin 334). At the same time, not seeing oneself, or viewing a skewed portrayal of the self, could also impact one's identity. Stereotypes can be used to legitimize hegemonic ideals of race and ethnicity.

Past literature has shown that media continue to underrepresent, misrepresent, and skew the representation of particular minorities, such as Asian Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders (see Kopacz & Lawton, 2011; Larson, 2002; Merskin, 1998; Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). When depictions are present, they often show native peoples through a narrow range of stereotypes that are considered to be subaltern (Poindexter et al. 531). Negative depictions can be harmful to minorities, as Enteman contends, "stereotypes impose a rigid mold on the subject and encourage repeat use without revision Stereotypes are ultimately used to stigmatize" (20). Stereotyping converts real per-

sons into artificial persons. Such stereotypes in media may contribute to discrimination of Native Hawaiians and other minorities (see Kopacz & Lawton, 2011; Parker, 2016; Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). In typecasting groups, people treat others that are different from themselves with fixed proxies. In short, we deny them their humanity. Sniderman and Hagendoorn argue:

Prejudice’s power partly comes from its ability to propel people to action; partly from its capacity to coordinate an image of the “other.” Individuals who make up the “other” recede as individuals; what remains is an image of a group Seeing another as the “other” minimizes awareness of difference among them and maximizes perceptions of difference between “them” and “us.” (44)

Prejudice and discrimination magnify the dangers of stereotyping, in that audiences tend to use these slanted generalizations of a group to form their knowledge of race, culture, and ethnicity.

Another consequence of negative portrayals of race in media is that people learn social, gender, race, and class roles from mass media portrayals that aid them in defining their own personal identity (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 81). By comparing themselves with characters in media content and modeling-mediated behaviors and attitudes, individuals learn to become who they want to be, as well as what is deemed acceptable by society. The media culture has emerged to assist people in producing what constitutes their everyday lives. This shapes their political views and social behavior and provides them with the materials to forge their

own identity (Strelitz 24). Hence, media creates a dialectical relationship between culture as a lived experience and culture as a representation (Strelitz 28). Those who own this conglomerate influence media in itself, and crucial historical events play a major role in deciding who owns what.

MISREPRESENTATION OF HAWAIIANS IN FILM AND TELEVISION

In a BBC article titled, “Aloha to the US: Is Hawai‘i an Occupied Nation?,” Peter Apo, a Native Hawaiian, said that “the only thing I knew about Hawaiians was what I saw in television and the tourism ads.” He also reflected on how he spent almost half of his 75 years not knowing who he was (Streiff & Dundes 84). This article brings up one major problem in Hawai‘i—Native Hawaiians’ identity crisis as a product of the media emphasizing an oriental narrative for Native Hawaiians. As Said wrote in the opening of *Orientalism*, “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1). Taking this idea one step further, these Western constructed narratives of Hawai‘i were without a doubt a Western invention.

In an orientalized version of Hawai‘i, an extension of the benevolent Hawaiian is seen, as the spirit of *aloha* is about tourism rather than a spiritual belief grounded in centuries of theology (Antinora 30). Here, predominantly white American tourists are targeted as consumers while Native Hawaiians are largely consumed. Further, Native Hawaiians, while not entirely removed from some aspects of the tourism industry, are largely absent from any positions of power in the production of “Hawaiian” culture. Instead, “the orientalization of *Hawaiiana* (Hawaiian culture) silences or marginalizes contemporary Native Hawaiians, while simultaneously freezing

them in a romanticized past” (Antinora 19). Trask equates the orientalization of Hawai’i in media and advertising to prostitution, as she asserts that media and tourism have represented Hawaiian culture as a prostitute (17). She contends that “the prostitute is a woman who sells her sexual capacities ... the pimp is the conduit of exchange, managing the commodity that is the prostitute while acting as the guard at the entry and exit gates, making sure that the prostitutes behave” (Trask 140). Corporations utilize *aloha* as a guise for selling “authentic” *Hawaiiana*. Today, like its historical account, *aloha* is far removed from its Hawaiian cultural context. As Wood contends, “the Hawaiian values of generosity and love such as *aloha* were misappropriated to make it seem as if they are particularly suited to the visitor industry” (49).

Most people who have never been to Hawai’i learn about it from movies and television (Wood 12). Media constitutes what Laura Mulvey calls “an advanced representational system” (7). Films produce multilayered representations that seem to mirror reality. Sparse literature on Native Hawaiian depictions can be assembled into four categories: (a) Shapely, sexy, uninhibited women ever-willing to sleep with a Westerner; (b) The pleasant and generous, but ignorant and passive native; (c) The savage cannibal who inevitably is overcome by superior Western power; and (d) self-inflated men who strut their primitive masculinity, who are easily fooled by superior Western intelligence (Parker 19).

Moana also has quite a few skewed portrayals. For example, Guam scholar Vicente Diaz contends that “the romanticization of the primitive that characterizes Disney movies like *Moana*, whitewashes how those same people were colonized and their cultures dismembered by the West” (32). *Moana*’s

story, which draws heavily on Polynesian culture, is being told through the prism of “a Disney animated film.” Even though directors Clements and Musker put together the Oceanic Story Trust (a group of Pacific Island experts that guided this project), *Moana* is still an animated fantasy version of Polynesian life and customs steered by two non-Polynesian men. Furthermore, Taika Waititi, a screenwriter, director, and actor of *Māori* descent, offered Disney the first write up *Moana*, but was ultimately rejected for unknown reasons.

Their depiction of *Maui*, a demigod, depicts him as overweight and immature—as a person who does things for his pride, and to gain legitimacy from the Oceanic people (Diaz 36). Instead, Pacific Islanders see *Maui* as a legendary hero, who had help to bring sustenance to all of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. World-renowned Native Hawaiian singer Israel Kamakawiwo’ole, nicknamed Braddah Iz, whose passing at a young age has left many Pacific Islanders to mourn this cultural advocate, has equated *Maui* to preceding the legendary fame and supernatural might of Clark Kent, also known as Superman. Braddah Iz writes of the many deeds that *Maui* has done for the people of the islands in his song, “Maui (Hawaiian Supa Man)”:

He fished out the islands with his magic hook ...
 In blue morning sky, the sun he entwined
 To slow down his flight, so *kapa* could dry

He found out the `Alae held the fire connection
 But his plan of deception fell short of perfection
 With no other choice he had to get mean
 So he squeezed `Alae’s throat until she screamed the
 secret.

Maui, the legend, pulled out the Pacific Islands, so that we may live on it; captured the sun, so that we may have longer days, essentially creating the concept of time; brought us the tool of fire used for cooking and other daily tasks for our sustenance. As Braddah Iz illustrates in his chorus, “Mischievous, marvelous, magical *Maui*, hero of this land. The one, the only, the ultimate Hawaiian Suppa Man.” *Maui* is indeed a hero to the Oceanic people.

As an animated studio product, *Moana* also has to fit into the larger Disney business model, which demands profits be made from the film, from the soundtrack, and from the merchandizing. What I do propose, however, is though distinct representations of culture are skewed, the Disney movie *Moana*, purposely or not, portrays significance in the relationship between nature and culture, and the consequences when either one of these two things is neglected.

CULTURE–NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Due to colonial neglect and historical isolation, the Pacific Islands, home to the world’s most diverse range of indigenous cultures, continue but struggle to sustain many ancestral lifestyles. Fewer than 6.5 million in all, the people of the Pacific islands possess a vast ocean of cultural traditions (Lindstrom 3). For example, Papua New Guinea alone is home to one-third of the world’s languages—about over 800 distinct vernaculars (Lindstrom 4). Oceania thus has the most to lose, culturally speaking, from the pressures of global political and economic change and environmental erosion (Lindstrom 4).

Spread across a vast expanse of the Pacific, these people occupy an array of environments, from Papua New Guinea’s massive mountains to Auckland New Zealand’s urban jun-

gles. About 85 percent of the population is rural and often nearly self-sufficient. Still, over one-fourth of the more than 2 million Micronesians, Melanesians, and Polynesians live in cities or move to metropolitan centers in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (Lindstrom 5–6).

Despite diversity, all Pacific societies are small and vulnerable. A typical native group consists of only a few thousand people, and this has drastic consequences for cultural survival (Lindstrom 6). Before contact with the West in 1778, an estimated 1 million Native Hawaiians lived in the Hawaiian archipelago. By 1892, this number had diminished to 40,000 (Dudley & Agard 87). In 1990, there were a mere 8,244 full-blooded Native Hawaiians left, 992,000 less people than before Western contact, a decrease of more than 99 percent (Dudley & Agard 88). Declining numbers of the Native Hawaiian population threatens the legacy of Hawaiian identity, culture, and livelihood. Environmental forces also pose a major threat to island communities. In Fiji and Samoa, the damage from recent major storms to villages and national infrastructure will take years to rebuild (Lindstrom 6).

As observed, to Oceanic people, culture and nature play hand-in-hand with each other. It is a distinct relationship in which the suffering of one affects the other. This idea of the culture–nature relationship has been embedded at the inception of Pacific culture. For example, Hawaiians cherish a value called *aloha aina* (caring for the land). *Aloha aina* is spiritually recognized during the course of life and death. Hawaiian cultural historian and practitioner Rita Knipe states that, “the land is religion. It is alive, respected, treasured, praised, and even worshipped. The land is one Hawaiian, sands of our birth, and resting place for our bones. The land lives as do the spirits of our ancestors who nurtured both physical and spiritual relationships with the land” (33).

Haunani Trask, professor of Hawaiian Studies, states, “we are children of *Papa* (earth mother), and *Wakea* (sky father) who created the sacred lands of *Hawai’i Nei*. From these lands come the taro, and from the taro came the Hawaiian people” (112). Trask educates and reminds the indigenous people of the commitment their ancestors made to the land, and that the land made to its *ohana* (family). Hawaiians consider the land to be an entity that works in harmony with life. Kanahele notes that, when reviewing the relationship of Mother Earth and *aina* (land), if the earth is considered to be a living entity, so must *aina*. He also states, “Hawaiians, therefore, did not regard land as a lifeless object to be used or discarded as one would treat any ordinary material thing. As part of the great earth, land is alive—it breathes, moves, reacts, behaves, adjusts, grows, sickens, dies” (Kanahele 187). *Aloha aina* is the spirit that connects the land to Native Hawaiians. The land is a part of the Hawaiian—a part of Hawaiian identity. As nature dissipates so does Oceanic culture, but also as Oceanic culture dissolves, the land is then neglected. This relationship is displayed in *Moana*.

CULTURE–NATURE IN DISNEY’S MOANA

The people of *Motunui*, the place where *Moana* resides, live in harmony with their natural surroundings. “Consider the coconut,” they sing, celebrating the fruit that supplies food and liquid for their nutritional needs. It also provides the Islanders with fiber from the shell, which can be used to make netting and other useful tools. The coconut tree supplies shelter from the weather, and its palms can be used as a building material. Chief *Tui* strongly believes that the island supplies them with all they need to live a rich and fulfilling lifestyle. But there are signs that this form of living on the land might be in trouble. The villagers are catching fewer fish than they used to. And the coconuts on the island are starting to decay.

Later in the film, *Moana* has visions of her island becoming rotten and black, with her people hungry and struggling. Even though *Moana* is drawn to the ocean, and longs to find out about the world beyond the reef, her father is firm. The island is their home, and the reef is their safety barrier—no one goes sailing beyond it.

Later in a cave, a hidden secret is unveiled; we see depictions of Islanders sailing very large boats, much larger than the small fishing boats that the people of *Motunui* use inside the reef. *Moana* then has a vision of people who look like those who live on *Motunui*, but who are roaming the ocean, using stars as a navigational tool. She hears them sing: “We are explorers We tell the stories of our elders in a never-ending chain.”

Moana learns that people stopped exploring the seas at the same time that *Te Fiti's* heart went missing. They found a safe island and decided to stay there. *Moana* is to be the one who restores *Te Fiti's* heart, and, when she does, the goddess then starts to rejuvenate the destroyed lands around her: green leaves start to emerge, and they quickly start to reinvigorate the blackened and dying islands. Where darkness was once spreading across the Pacific, now there are tropical plants and flowers.

As *Motunui* rediscovers a luscious version of itself, its inhabitants also rediscover something from their past: the desire to explore what lies beyond the ocean reef is reignited in them. As the Islanders celebrate *Moana's* return and the re-greening of their island, they drag the large boats out of the secret cave. Finally, we see the Islanders sailing the large boats out beyond the reef. *Te Fiti's* heart has been restored. The oceans are safe again. The islands are healing and the people of *Motunui* have embraced their ancestors' natural penchant for exploration.

Moana justly represents the culture–nature relationship. As we see, the people of *Motunui* once were voyagers who used the stars to navigate and explore from one island to another, tending to these new lands, yet when they stop this practice, their environment slowly dissipates; the land no longer provides for them because they no longer tend to the land. Thus, it was *Moana’s* calling to rebuild this severed relationship by returning the heart of *Te Fiti*. We see this struggle of sustaining culture and environments across the Pacific Islands. For example, in Hawai’i, recent attempts to build a telescope on top of the mountain *Mauna Kea* or *Mauna O’Wakea* have sparked Native Hawaiians to protest against construction on that sacred ground (Brown 151).

KULEANA

In addition to displaying a culture–nature relationship, *Moana* showcases the inherent role of *kuleana*, or responsibility, to continuing the beliefs, traditions, and legacy of Pacific Island culture. For Hawaiians, *kuleana* is extremely important (Wright 21). According to Pukui and Elbert, *kuleana* means “right, privilege, concern, responsibility” (179). In traditional society, *kuleana* referred to a plot of land an individual person or family was charged with maintaining and caring for (Kame’eleihiwa 34). So, this idea of responsibility is culturally grounded within Oceanic tradition. *Moana* displays different levels in which *kuleana* is classified: to the self, to family, and to community.

Understanding one’s own purpose helps to illuminate personal responsibilities toward the Polynesian culture. Understanding one’s own role, not just physically, but also spiritually, is *kuleana* to the self. In finding one’s self, understanding and connection to the land and the people is realized, as well as one’s responsibility to them. It is the individual’s responsi-

bility to learn and understand their Pacific Islander identity and the importance of preserving the culture and *aina*. At the outset, *Moana* questioned her own identity, and her purpose within her tribe. Her father keeps telling her that no one travels beyond the reef—that the island would provide all that is needed for her and her people. Her calling, according to Chief *Tui*, was to follow his footsteps and lead the people of *Motuni*. Nevertheless, an inner inkling tells *Moana* that she was meant to do more. She was to go beyond the reef to find her identity and her true calling. This tension between being the person her father wants her to be and trying to find out who she is meant to be is displayed in the song that she sings, “How Far I’ll Go”:

I’ve been staring at the edge of the water
Long as I can remember, never really knowing why
I wish I could be the perfect daughter
But I come back to the water, no matter how hard I try ...

I know everybody on this island seems so happy, on this island
Everything is by design
I know everybody on this island has a role, on this island
So maybe I can roll with mine
I can lead with pride, I can make us strong
I’ll be satisfied if I play along
But the voice inside sings a different song
What is wrong with me?
See the light as it shines on the sea?
It’s blinding
But no one knows
How deep it goes
And it seems like it’s calling out to me

It is when *Moana* discovers that her ancestors were explorers that she finds her own purpose and responsibility to the people of *Motuni* and to the land. Through finding herself, she was able to pass on her legacy to her family and community.

Not only is *kuleana* a value for the self, but it expands to the community. Once Pacific Islanders understand their own role within their culture, they have a responsibility to pass on that knowledge to the next generation in order to preserve their identity, culture, and land. This is apparent in *Moana*. After sailing past the reef, finding *Maui*, and returning *Te Fiti*’s heart, not only does *Moana* literally rescue her people and the land, but she also saves them in terms of their lost identity. Not only is the heart of *Te Fiti* restored, but also the heart of the people of *Motuni*. Voyaging is restored and passed along to the next generation.

CONCLUSION

Since Westerners/Europeans first encounter with Pacific Islanders, they have consistently depicted them historically and contemporarily as benevolent, primitive, sexualized, unintelligent, savages. Western constructed narratives, which continue to be told about oceanic people, are prevalent in the eyes of global audiences. Representations of exotic indigenous cultures in media are usually used to promote tourism. These depictions have advanced from colonial times when ethnic images often reflected a submissive or deferential “other” (Parker 23). Hall explains that the representation of an “other” is established by a process in which the context of meaning is found not only in one image but also in how one image is read against or in connection with other images (17). The repetition of images gains textuality, accumulating meaning by playing off each other (Hall 240). Stereotyping is often fixed by those in a position of power as a way to differ-

entiate between what the dominant group regards as normal according to their own views and what might be excluded as the other (Hall 234). Stereotypes may also be developed by what is ignored, trivialized, or left out of the mass media, a theoretical approach labeled symbolic annihilation (Tuchman et al. 13).

In "Tourism, Mass Media, and the Making of Visual Culture in the Greater Yucatan Peninsula," Geddes Gonzales asks excellent questions about Western portrayals of indigenous cultures:

Could it be that representations of the non-Western other, coded as difference, continue to facilitate the reaffirmation of the modern constitution? Is this a form of "imperialist nostalgia" that mourns the subjugation of the other, yet simultaneously perpetuates the "primitive," at times actually identifying with it? If so, what does this say about the influence of the margins in defining Western subjectivity and visual culture? What has been the Mayan (or Oceanic and other cultures') response? (52)

The answer to these questions may lie in conducting critical ethnographies of the way indigenous people experience contemporary visual culture, taking into consideration the socially and historically contingent context of social interaction and signification. Indeed, one might say that given the extant asymmetrical social and symbolic media and film representations, Pacific Islanders are subject to an ongoing process of dispossession of their material and cultural resources, a process accentuated by a neoliberal order promoted by corporate and local elites. The resulting toll on the environment,

society, and culture is the subject of much debate within state organizations, local media, and civic groups. However, much of this escapes the attention of the major national industries, which continue the long tradition of making local concerns invisible, thereby foreclosing global awareness and policy initiatives around these issues, in order to continue to profit from subjugating subaltern groups (Gonzales 57).

In response, some scholars have argued for a more ethical representation of Oceanic people. Trask, for example, makes a forceful argument to show that the tourism industry has oppressed *kanaka maoli* (Native Hawaiian) identity, culture, and land (156). Desmond traces the exploitative dynamics of tourism’s representation of “native” bodies (92). Ferguson and Turnbull have studied the signs and symbols of the U.S. military in the Pacific and show how these images dominate the historical meaning and everyday use of the islands’ landscape (53). Wood explored “how journalism, novels, diaries, advertisements, visual arts, museums, films, television shows, and various other types of cultural productions assist the more naked coercion associated with armies, revolutions, and the criminal justice system in the usurpation of Hawaiian lands and the displacement of indigenous Hawaiian culture” (9). These studies suggest the importance of adopting a critical perspective on how the political economy of the media represents the people of the Pacific.

Though Oceanic populations have seen a sharp decline since Western contact, there is some optimism. For example, since allowing participants to identify as more than one race in the 2000 Census, numbers of identified Hawaiians have increased. According to 2013 census estimates, the Native Hawaiian population in Hawai’i stands at 298,000. Also, there are more than 560,000 Americans, nationwide, who identify as being at least part Hawaiian (Goo 13). Research by Kame-

hameha Schools' Native Hawaiian Educational Assessment suggests that the total Native Hawaiian population in Hawai'i is projected to be about 500,000 by 2045, and 675,000 by 2060 (Kahakalau 26). This increase in numbers heightens the urgency of preserving Hawaiian culture and land in order for this next generation of Hawaiians to have a tradition in which a part of their identity relies on.

As a result of globalization, learning about the authentic Pacific Islander identity is possible, but only after filtering through a plethora of Western constructed narratives as to see the Pacific through the eyes of natives. These groups are not exoticized others waiting to entertain tourists. They are strong, resilient, and increasingly taking charge of their own history and identities. As a sign of good faith to the people of the Pacific, Disney has translated *Moana* into Hawaiian, making it the first Disney movie to be translated into *olelo* (Hawaiian language).

Organizations that focus on conservation and sustainability can learn from traditional practices of Pacific Islanders. One applicable lesson that can be gained from an examination of *Moana* is the importance of the finely tuned relationship between natural resources and culture. Examining the loss of those connections in a rapidly changing world that followed Western contact and global warming can also display the importance of a tightly integrated relationship between resources and culture. The actions and forces that resulted in a breaking of that interrelationship contributed to our current conservation crises.

Consequently, the reestablishment of those relationships represents a reconnection for building a sustainable society that once again values and maintains its unique island legacy. To many Oceanic people, the natural world is in an ongoing

“We Know the Way”: Culture–Nature Relationship
and *Kuleana* in Disney’s *Moana*

reciprocal relationship with people that requires dedication and effort to maintain. Cultural identity, knowledge, and practice are rooted in this reciprocal relationship with the land—and the health of one depends upon the health of the other. As the *Moana* song, “Where You Are” states:

This tradition is our mission
And Moana, there’s so much to do (make way!)

...

Consider the coconut (the what?)
Consider its tree
We use each part of the coconut
That’s all we need
We make our nets from the fibers (we make our
nets from the fibers)
The water is sweet inside (the water is sweet
inside)
We use the leaves to build fires (we use the
leaves to build fires)
We cook up the meat inside (we cook up the
meat inside)

Consider the coconuts
The trunks and the leaves
The island gives us what we need

But this only happens when we take care of the land as well. As the state of Hawai’i’s motto declares, “*Ua Mau ke Ea o ka ‘Āina i ka Pono.*” This can be translated as “the life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.” Three words should be emphasized here: *Ea*, *Aina*, and *Pono*. Life, land, and righteousness—these three words succinctly display the heart of Pacific Island culture. One’s life is connected to the land, both life and land should be taken care of through righteousness, or *kuleana*.

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Has True Romance Disappeared in Consumer Society? A Morinian and Baudrillardian Reflection of the Acute Crisis of Simulation

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by Keith Moser

ABSTRACT

In the context of the transdisciplinary philosophy of Edgar Morin and Jean Baudrillard, this essay delves into the gap between image and reality that has further problematized the elusive quest for love and companionship living in a technologized world. Both thinkers persuasively maintain that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the postmodern subject to establish any kind of meaningful affective bond with another person due to the proliferation of idealistic images of romance that bombard us from all sides in the digital age. According to Morin and Baudrillard, celebrities play an important hegemonic role in the transmission of pervasive hyperreal fiction denoting utopian signs of love that stand in for true romance in the collective imagination of the consumer citizen. In a post-Marxist landscape in which the incessant reproduction of commercial simulacra is paramount for the survival of the capitalist paradigm, these unconventional philosophers and sociologists explain that simulated reality is the most oppressive and effective form of social control ever conceived.

Keywords: True Romance, Consumer Society, Edgar Morin, Jean Baudrillard, Celebrities, Hollywood, hyperreality, simulation, post-Marxist thought

¿Ha desaparecido el amor verdadero en la sociedad del consumo? Una reflexión moriniana y baudrillardiana de la aguda crisis de simulación

RESUMEN

En el contexto de la filosofía transdisciplinaria de Edgar Morin y Jean Baudrillard, este ensayo profundiza en la brecha entre la imagen y la realidad que ha problematizado aún más la difícil búsqueda del amor y la compañía en un mundo tecnologizado. Ambos pensadores sostienen persuasivamente que se está volviendo cada vez más difícil para el sujeto posmoderno establecer cualquier tipo de vínculo afectivo significativo con otra persona debido a la proliferación de imágenes idealistas de romance que nos bombardean desde todos los lados en la era digital. Según Morin y Baudrillard, las celebridades desempeñan un importante papel hegemónico en la transmisión de una ficción hiperreal omnipresente que denota signos utópicos de amor que representan el verdadero romance en la imaginación colectiva del ciudadano consumidor. En un paisaje posmarxista en el que la reproducción incesante de simulacros comerciales es primordial para la supervivencia del paradigma capitalista, estos filósofos y sociólogos poco convencionales explican que la realidad simulada es la forma más opresiva y efectiva de control social jamás concebida.

Palabras clave: Verdadero romance, Sociedad del consumidor, Edgar Morin, Jean Baudrillard, Celebridades, Hollywood, hiperrealidad, simulación, pensamiento posmarxista

真实浪漫已从消费者社会消失了吗？莫兰和鲍德里亚对“模拟”这一严重危机的反思

摘要

在由埃德加·莫兰（Edgar Morin）、让·鲍德里亚（Jean Baudrillard）提出的跨学科哲学背景下，本文探究了形象与现实之间的差距，这种差距进一步对全球科技化背景下爱情与伴侣关系的追求难以实现一事进行问题化。两位思想者以令人信服的方式主张，后现代主体相互建立任何形式的，有意义的情感关系越来越难，因为数字时代下对理想主义式浪漫形象的扩散在各方面充斥着人们（的生活）。莫兰和鲍德里亚认为，名人在传播无处不在的超现实小说的过程中发挥了重要的支配作用，超现实小说预示爱情的乌托邦表现，后者在消费者公民的集体想象中替代了真实浪漫。在后马克思主义格局（商业模拟的不断复制对资本主义范式存活而言至关重要）中，这两位非传统学者兼社会学家表示，被模拟的现实是最具压迫性，最有效的社会控制形式。

关键词：真实浪漫，消费者社会，埃德加·莫兰（Edgar Morin），让·鲍德里亚（Jean Baudrillard），名人，好莱坞，超现实，模拟，后马克思主义思维

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The purpose of this reflection is to explore how symbolic representations depicting an idealized vision of romance have proliferated themselves to such an alarming extent in the modern world that they appear to be on the verge of effacing the real entirely. Through the lens of Edgar Morin and Jean Baudrillard's philosophy, this investigation related to the

inability to distinguish between reality and its representation will demonstrate that banal commercial simulacra whose only purpose is to generate revenue shape romantic conceptions of love and amorous desire in Western civilization that are grounded in chimerical fantasies. With the publication of his landmark essay *The Stars* in 1957, Morin became “one of the first academics to take popular culture seriously” (Montuori 5). Specifically, Morin probes the hegemonic role of the Hollywood star system in the incessant creation and dissemination of lucrative signs promoting an idealistic concept of love inextricably linked to a vast array of cosmetic products. Morin offers concrete examples that illustrate how our tenuous grasp of anything real that exists outside of this ubiquitous realm of simulation has been eroded by our unending consumption of these contrived images. Morin posits that actual couples try to mold their partners into the shape of the imaginary, cinematic archetypes that fuel their hyperreal reverie. Morin explains that Hollywood simply invented the notion that an ideal lover “closes her eyes when being kissed” (80). Heavily influenced by Morin, Baudrillard expands his theories reaching the radical conclusion that global society has entered into an “acute crisis of simulation” in which all semblance of meaning has been withered away by this avalanche of signs that now stands in for the real (48). For Baudrillard, the “nectar of simulation” has commodified every facet of the human condition including the search for love and companionship (Cline n.p.).

Both thinkers contend that the “Hollywood star system” is a by-product of what scholars such as Fredric Jameson, Michel Husson, and Francisco Louçã commonly refer to as the crisis of late capitalism (Montuori 5). In a changing economic landscape in which “all of the basic needs of the masses have been satisfied,” the capitalist paradigm predicated upon

constant growth and expansion had to find a way to survive (Messier 25). According to Morin, Baudrillard, and other post-Marxist theorists, marketers developed a calculated strategy to promote incessant and frivolous consumption in order to keep the wheels of the financial system spinning at all times. Taking advantage of modern technology, Morin and Baudrillard assert that transnational corporations would begin to sell prepackaged, metonymical pieces of the good(s) life¹ reflecting a purely symbolic universe that has never truly existed anywhere with the exception of a digital screen. Morin and Baudrillard maintain that celebrities are an important cog in a larger system of post-Marxist exploitation, because stars enable the “consumer citizen” to breathe life into these utopian fantasies that have been carefully manufactured for his or her immediate consumption (Baudrillard *Le Système des objets* 218).

In Chapter 1 of *The Stars*, Morin argues “the star plays an essential role [...] in the capitalist atmosphere” (2). Describing celebrities as an ideological archetype whose function is to encourage unbridled consumption of a plethora of consumer goods with a symbolic value that far outweighs their practical usage, Morin declares, “Movie stars rule over radio and television alike [...] The stars endorse everything: toilet articles, makeup, refrigerators, beauty contests [...] their private life is public; their public life, publicity. The stars play a social and moral role as well” (4). For the philosopher, the Hollywood star system is part and parcel of a new repressive social order that indoctrinates purchaser citizens² to rein-

1 This expression was coined by Keith Moser in Chapter 3 of *J.M.G. Le Clézio: A Concerned Citizen of the Global Village* (2012).

2 Some researchers prefer the term “purchaser citizen” instead of “consumer citizen.” I am using these expressions interchangeably. For a brief historical overview regarding how post-Marxist soci-

force the economic model through the power of the purse strings. Morin theorizes that the simulated chimeras endlessly promulgated by celebrities are linked to “a system which is contingent upon the domination of human and natural life” (Hardwick 372). According to Morin, traditional mores that have undergirded human civilizations for centuries are “under threat from the largely visible star culture” that has permeated all facets of the human condition at the dawning of a new millennium (Czach 145).

Demonstrating that the never-ending reproduction of commercial signs transmitted by actors and actresses has replaced production itself as the most salient feature of the capitalist paradigm in the postmodern world, Morin affirms,

The star system is first of all production [...] Let us add that the star is not only a subject but an object of advertising. She sponsors perfumes, soaps, cigarettes, and so on, and thereby multiplies her commercial utility [...] she is the typical merchandise of capitalism on a major scale. The enormous investments, the system's industrial techniques or rationalization and standardization, effectively convert the star into merchandise destined for mass consumption [...] she is capital merchandise. (113–115)

In a different economic climate in which having a stronghold over the means of production is less vital than controlling the dissemination of information, the nexus of power now

eties condition the masses to buy products with very limited use value, see Steigerwald, David. “All Hail the Republic of Choice: Consumer History as Contemporary Thought.” *The Journal of American History* (September 2006): 385–403.

emanates from an elaborate semiotic network comprised of enticing signs from which there is “no exit” (Kellner 128). Morin explains that the powers that be no longer need to subdue the masses using brute force, given the ideological efficacy of the images of success, happiness, and luxury that bombard the postmodern subject through a myriad of divergent screens. Moreover, the philosopher describes stars as floating signifiers that no longer refer to anything real outside of a code imploring brainwashed consumers to purchase more items at the mall or in a department store. For all intents and purposes, Morin insists that the public persona of a given celebrity, which is merely another imaginary product to be sold through a line of accessories that supposedly allow someone to live like Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie, has “eclipsed” the real (Norris n.p.). In simple terms, stars have assumed the hegemonic function of convincing the public that the grandiose, far-fetched simulations that flash across our screens are somehow attainable, if we are able to acquire enough metonymical bits of these illusory pipe dreams. As the following section of this essay will highlight in a more systematic fashion, perhaps the most profitable aspect of the fantasies that stars are constantly peddling in advertisements and commercials is an image of romance that is quite disconnected from concrete reality.

As numerous critics like Alex Cline, Douglas Kellner, Kelly Maddox, Gerry Coulter, Emil André Røyrvik, and Marianne Blom Brodersen note, “Jean Baudrillard is widely considered to be one of the first post-Marxist philosophers” (Cline n.p.). Similar to Morin, Baudrillard often expresses his disquieting anxiety related to the deluge of insignificant signs that accost us at nearly every waking moment in consumer republics, a term coined by the historian Lizabeth Cohen in *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar Ameri-*

ca. Summarizing Baudrillard's position about the essence of power in an age of consumer capitalism, Emil André Røyrvik and Marianne Blom Brodersen elucidate, "In the post-modern society of simulation and hyperreality, Baudrillard contends that capitalism is organized around sign-values. The modern logic of production has ended, the referent as well as depth, essence and any 'outside' have all disappeared and societies are organized around the play of images, signs, codes and models" (639). Proposing a similar interpretation of Baudrillard's theoretical framework for understanding the pivotal role of simulated paradises in contemporary capitalism as Røyrvik and Brodersen, Douglas Kellner underscores, "We live in 'hyperreality' of simulations in which images, spectacles and the play of signs (or simulacra) replace the logic of production and class conflict as key constituents of contemporary societies" (129). Morin's "complex theory" and Baudrillard's reworking of symbolic exchange implore the postmodern subject to be skeptical about the signs that we internalize on a daily basis. Both philosophers attempt to dig beneath the surface of the hyperreal façade concealing the hegemonic purpose of these ubiquitous images in an effort to expose what they consider to be the latest and most oppressive type of social control ever conceived.

In his seminal essay *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, Baudrillard decries, "la production systématique de signes, les systèmes de valeur pour brouiller la lutte des classes et mystifier les gens" (131). The philosopher further clarifies, "la classe dominante assure sa domination et perpétue par un code, une fiction de parité [...] au profit de la classe dominante" (*Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* 139). In these passages and all throughout his prolific *œuvre*, it is evident that Baudrillard shares many of the same philosophical convictions as Morin concerning the struc-

ture of late capitalism. Given that Baudrillard's first work *Le système des objets* was published only a few years after Morin's *The Stars*, it is surprising that intertextual studies comparing the theories of these fellow philosophers and sociologists are scant. Baudrillard seems to have derived a considerable amount of philosophical inspiration from Morin's reflections about the Hollywood star system. Although Baudrillard pushes the boundaries of semiotic control through the continual transmission of commercial simulacra even further than Morin announcing "the final stage of simulation" in his later texts like *The Intelligence of Evil* and *The Transparency of Evil*, they reach many of the same overall conclusions (Barron 394).

Furthermore, Baudrillard also denounces the complicity of celebrities in the manufacturing and diffusion of hyperreal delusions that have no basis in reality. It is in his often-misunderstood essay *Amérique* in which the provocative philosopher most clearly articulates his derision for what stars represent in the programmed imagination of the consumer citizen. As a result of the wide-ranging influence of Hollywood culture in American society and the hollow, consumerist virtues that it reflects, "Baudrillard sees America as the ultimate simulacrum, no longer an artificial copy of an authentic original but an endless chain of copies referring to each other" (Kooijman 22). Baudrillard avers that the United States is "the land of hyperreality [...] a country where the simulation of experience in film, television, museums, theme parks, and moments is irrevocably replacing the 'real' and 'objective' facts of the past, works of art, human relationships and geographic locales" (Toth 199–200). In reference to the image-based (hyper-) reality that celebrities are in part responsible for generating, Baudrillard opines, "The screen idols are immanent in the unfolding of life as a series of images. They are a system of luxury prefabrication, brilliant syn-

theses of stereotypes of life and love. They embody one single passion: the passion for images [...] They are not something to dream about, they are the dream” (*America* 56). In his disconcerting analysis of the hegemonic function of the star system, Baudrillard explains that celebrities symbolize a dream that millions of people around the planet strive to emulate. Additionally, Baudrillard discusses how the meaningless clichés “of life and love” or prepackaged caricatures of romance that stars quite literally sell to the general populace have affected our ability to discern between reality and its representation. In *Amérique*, Baudrillard suggests that the trite vision of the ideal lover that accosts us from all sides in magazines, newspapers, billboards, and television has taken on a life of its own, thereby replacing genuine romance, because of the force of Hollywood archetypes.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Morin and Baudrillard formulated bold hypotheses for this time period related to “the impact of imaginary and subjective projections on reality” in the context of these cinematic conceptions of romance in mainstream Western culture (Margulies 68). Decades before, it was commonplace to identify an actor or actress as a “provender of dreams,” Morin affirms that the star “assists in the worldwide diffusion of a concept of love, a whole culture of love, very particular to Western society” (136; 145). Theorizing that the utopian image of perfect love epitomized by movie stars has been arbitrarily fabricated by the system in order to unload a surplus of goods in a post-Marxist atmosphere, Morin maintains, “Love thus manufactured is evidently created in the image of love in the movies themselves” (53). Explicitly linking cinematic depictions of romance to the aforementioned post-Marxist dilemma, the philosopher reveals why lovers in many Hollywood films and advertisements feel compelled to smoke a cigarette after engaging in

coitus. As the philosopher clearly states, “The star is always good advertising [...] she invites us to use her cigarettes” (137). Not only do celebrities promote a certain view of romance that is emblematic of pure hyperreal reverie, but Morin also reminds us that simulated sexuality revolving around the cult of the stars is often used to manipulate clients into purchasing specific items. In this vein, the researcher Michele Schreiber highlights the hegemonic role of product placement in the “postfeminist romance film” (15). Providing several concrete examples of this phenomenon in contemporary American cinema, Schreiber argues that “The high production values and glamorous, well-appointed décor and costumes in many of these films create an attractive environment for product placement, and sell romance, even if it is a failing romance, as an attractive lifestyle” (15).

In *The Stars*, Morin evokes the philosophical and anthropological theory of mimesis in an effort to shed light on why product placement appears to be such an effective ideological tool for dictating consumer behavior. Implying that *Homo sapiens* have a heightened predilection to imitate the actions of those around them in comparison to the rest of the animal kingdom to which we in fact belong, Morin posits, “The imaginary identifications are themselves ferments of practical identifications or *mimetisms*. The stars guide our manners, gestures, poses, attitudes [...] the way we lift a glass-casually or with significant sex appeal-the way we [...] refuse or permit a kiss” (136). Similar to other contemporary French philosophers like René Girard and Michel Serres, Morin contends that mimesis is the very foundation of human collective identity. From a biological standpoint, our innate desire to belong to a social group and to be accepted by others is so strong that it is an evolutionary flaw strategically exploited by marketers. As Serres theorizes in a recent

conversation with Michel Polacco, “We are animals that like to imitate, who willingly repeat a gesture or a word. You tell me something, I repeat it, and a hundred other people that I tell it to repeat it in turn, as if mimesis, as if imitation is the core of the social link par excellence. This is how to explain fashion [...] we are the most imitative animals, even more imitative than monkeys” (Polacco 58). In addition to tapping into our imagination thus convincing us to suspend disbelief and all critical reflection related to erotic simulacra that are utterly divorced from reality, Morin also observes that “many mimetisms focus on clothes” (136). Harnessing the power of mimesis, the financial system sells us all of the metonymical pieces that we need to conform to a preexisting mold of an ideal mate.

In Chapter 3 of *The Stars* entitled “The Stellar Liturgy,” the philosopher includes persuasive excerpts from interviews that he conducted in the field as a formally trained sociologist to reinforce the theory of mimesis. One of the most revealing of these recorded conversations is between Morin and an unidentified nineteen-year-old girl. Confessing that the steady diet of romantic comedies that she devours has distorted her appreciation of what true romance entails outside of the confines of cinematic (hyper-)reality, the young woman divulges, “The settings of love scenes always held my attention and I’ve always noted little tricks (which I’ve put into practice) such as curling my boyfriend’s hair in my fingers and stroking his face exactly as I’ve seen my screen favorites do in the love scenes” (Morin 80). In the remainder of this section of the essay, Morin probes the philosophical implications of this complete internalization of a code solely conceived to maximize revenue for a corporation. The philosopher argues that it is becoming increasingly difficult to establish any sort of meaningful romantic bond with another person because of

the gap that exists between these prepackaged signs of love and the real thing.

In a misguided attempt to attract a partner, many people force themselves to fit into a manufactured archetype representing a Hollywood facsimile of romance. Not only has the consumer citizen been conditioned to look for a companion that speaks, dresses, and behaves in accordance with simulations of love, but Morin also emphasizes that millions of individuals fall prey to the trap of “training” their partners to be more faithful representations of screen-based images. In this regard, the philosopher asserts that romantic simulacra associated with stars are not innocent fantasies. As Keith Moser explains in his Baudrillardian investigation of hyperreal romance in the film *Don Jon*, the aforementioned teenager studied by Morin is an actual “victim of erotic simulations” (79). In Western civilization, Morin outlines how signs of romance have further problematized the elusive quest for love in this sense. In his dissertation entitled “What’s Love Got to Do with It? Diamonds and the Accumulation of De Beers 1935–55,” David Troy Cochrane traces the historical origins of social conventions related to engagement rings. In particular, Cochrane reveals that an aggressive De Beers marketing campaign created arbitrary rules regarding how much money should be spent on a diamond ring. As Cochrane uncovers, “De Beers’ efforts to transform the diamond engagement ring tradition were very successful. Diamonds became the singular symbol of a couple’s engagement. The aspirational component, which was intended to counter a trend toward smaller, cheaper diamonds, has become contained in the widely quoted ‘two months salary’ benchmark for what a man should spend on an engagement ring” (265). Although this fabricated “tradition” should have been dismissed immediately by everyone as an overt form of manipulation, Co-

chrane notes that “the nectar of simulation” to which Cline refers in semiotic terms would become the socially accepted cultural norm. This baffling and profoundly unsettling example gives credence to Morin’s theories about the prevalence and force of romantic simulacra. Given that this “benchmark” has become thoroughly ingrained in American culture, it is hard to deny that many people expect their partners to conform to hyperreal, exploitative, romantic archetypes.

In addition to the compelling evidence that Morin presents in support of his main argument that the consumer citizen is indoctrinated to seek love and affection in a symbolic universe devoid of any real meaning, the philosopher underscores how all traces of negativity are deliberately removed from the romantic images that we consume. Specifically, Morin maintains that the star system promotes an unrealistic ideal of feminine beauty that most women simply cannot live up to from a biological perspective. Even though “the socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women’s most important assets, and something that all women should strive to achieve and maintain” has been around for countless eons, Morin theorizes that this pressure to make oneself correspond to an ideal of beauty has been elevated to unprecedented heights with modern technology (Spade and Valentine 711). In the middle of the twentieth century, the philosopher documents the cinematic techniques that producers were already using to get rid of all visible imperfections. In reference to how the innate physical attractiveness of female stars is greatly enhanced by a skilled director, Morin muses, “Beauty is one of the sources of ‘star quality,’ and the star system does not content itself with prospecting for it in merely its natural state: it has created or revived the arts of cosmetics, costume, carriage, manners, photography, and, if necessary, surgery, which perfect, prolong, or even produce

beauty” (31). As Morin suggests in this passage, the embellished beauty of Hollywood actresses had already entered into the domain of the hyperreal as early as the 1950s. Lending support to his philosophical claims, Morin identifies Martine Carol and Juliette Gréco as two female stars whose new surgically enhanced faces only bare a vague resemblance to the ones that they inherited from birth (34).

For those who are wary of plastic surgery, the philosopher observes that a photographer or producer has many other options at his or her disposal, including the usage of different kinds of camera lenses, makeup, and lighting techniques. Illustrating how the star industry has long utilized various types of technology to distort the lucrative images that they sell to the public, Morin asserts, “To all of the artifices of makeup and plastic surgery are added those of photography. The cameraman must always control the angles of his shots [...] must always eliminate every infraction of beauty from his field of vision. Projectors redistribute light and shadow over the stars’ faces according to the same ideal requirements” (35). After reflecting upon how seductive images of feminine sexuality and romance that are not naturally occurring are generated, the philosopher explores the philosophical and social repercussions related to the proliferation of these manufactured simulacra representing an inauthentic ideal of beauty. Morin implies that this phenomenon is a real problem because actual flesh and blood women whose image has not been digitally enhanced cannot measure up to this unachievable goal. In her review of the existing literature devoted to this contentious subject, A. Poorani offers the following assessment: “Many advertising scholars have offered cultural critiques of advertising. Some of the emergent themes in their works investigate the beauty myth. Wolf (1991) argued that portrayed images of beauty present im-

possible standards for women to achieve. She claimed idealized beauty is unrealistic” (6). Siding with numerous theorists who argue that trying to imitate a conception of beauty that originates from a symbolic realm is problematic on multiple levels, the philosopher ponders whether the search for love is more fraught with peril than ever before.

For Morin, it is deeply troubling that so many people judge potential mates based upon signs of romance that have conditioned them to desire certain traits that do not exist outside of simulated reality. Not only does this kind of semiotic programming lead to perpetual dissatisfaction, but it can also be a contributing factor to serious health issues. In this vein, Galya Hildesheimer and Hemda Gur-Arie investigate the relationship between Photoshopped images and eating disorders. Adopting an empirical approach, Hildesheimer and Gur-Arie undermine “myopic views” of anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating that solely focus on the role of computer-generated imagery to the detriment of ignoring many other underlying root causes of these disorders (103). Nonetheless, these researchers have noted a strong correlation between the unnatural, consumerist simulacra decried by Morin and the increasing frequency and intensity of these medical conditions.

Beginning with the publication of *Le système des objets* in 1968, Baudrillard builds upon and expands the theoretical framework developed by Morin in *The Stars* for understanding the hegemonic purpose of all manifestations of Hollywood semiosis including signs of romance. According to Baudrillard, genuine romance is simply another casualty in the disappearance of reality on a larger scale. In the context of erotic simulations and representations of love, Baudrillard declares, “Here too one cannot distinguish between

reality and its models, there being no other reality that that secreted by the simulative models" (*Seduction* 11). The philosopher posits that the flood of incessant simulacra that we ingest has commodified human sexuality and the search for romance. Like Morin, Baudrillard directs much of his attention to the "code of beauty" that has transformed the female body into a hyperreal sign or a mere object of consumption (*The Consumer Society* 26). The philosopher describes the enhanced imagery highlighted by Morin, which is supposed to exude femininity and sex appeal, as a fetish or "an object that is positioned purely for its symbolic value" (Koch and Elmore 556). For both thinkers, the problem with idealistic archetypes of romance and eroticism that are generated in a studio and disseminated to the general populace through Hollywood cinema and other expressions of popular culture is that "The fetishisation of the body through makeup and adornment creates a seductive sexuality that is not grounded in real sexuality" (Dant 507).

In a passage that is reminiscent of Morin's apprehension about how women are judged by prefabricated signs of beauty that represent an impossible standard, Baudrillard laments, "For women, beauty has become an absolute, religious imperative, being beautiful is no longer an effect of nature or a supplement to moral qualities. It is the basic, imperative quality of those who take the same care of their faces and figures as they do of their souls. It is a sign, at the level of the body that one is a member of the elect" (*The Consumer Society* 92). A few pages later in *The Consumer Society*, the philosopher reiterates, "If a woman does, in fact, consume herself, this is because her relation to herself is objectivized and fueled by signs, signs which make up the feminine model, which constitutes the real object of consumption" (96–97). Similar to Morin, Baudrillard contends that the dominant feminine ideal of beauty

in postmodern Western society is a simulated caricature that exists outside of nature. In an effort to belong to a given social group and to find love, Baudrillard asserts that consumer citizens pledge their allegiance to a preexisting model of romance linked to all of the products that are supposed to bring these utopian images to life. Baudrillard shares Morin's conviction that it is because of the power of mimesis that there is such little resistance to romantic simulacra that do not hold up to critical scrutiny.

In comparison to Morin, Baudrillard more explicitly outlines the very real dangers of simulated femininity. Creating a rending portrait of the dark side of the cult of feminine beauty that has crossed over into the hyperreal because of technological advances, the philosopher notes that the feminine ideal "can only be slim and slender, according to its current definition as a combinatorial logic of signs, governed by the same algebraic economy as the functionality of objects or the elegance of a diagram. It even tends, somewhat, towards the scrawny and emaciated, on the lines of the models and mannequins that are simultaneously the negation of the flesh and the exaltation of fashion" (*The Consumer Society* 142). Baudrillard grumbles in disgust about "the skinny, emaciated models of *Vogue*" that have become the desired feminine body in Western civilization (*The Consumer Society* 142). It is in this sense in which Baudrillard's earlier comments in *The Consumer Society* regarding the "perils of the social liberation of women" should be understood (97). After enduring centuries of systematic patriarchal oppression, Baudrillard explains that many women in Western society would soon become pawns of late capitalism to the point of allowing virtual simulations to define their corporal essence.

In their Baudrillardian interpretations of the crisis of simulated femininity and its real-life victims, Kathleen Dixon, Dan-

uela Koleva, and Andrew Root highlight the schism between manufactured cinematic images and reality. Arguing that the Hollywood star system itself is nothing but a gigantic semiotic hologram from which all substance has been intentionally excised, Dixon and Koleva declare, “the [...] hyperreal real world of celebrity—it exists nowhere other than in mass-mediated images and the events staged around and through such images” (n.p.). Juxtaposing “the ugliness of real celebrity lives and their real bodies” to the contrived signs of beauty that they continually display, Dixon and Koleva reveal, “We won’t see Paris and Nicole in the bathroom of a nightclub shooting up drugs (in ‘real life,’ Nicole is said to be an addict), or barfing up their dinners to keep their Size 3 bodies” (n.p.; n.p.). Dixon and Koleva’s frank analysis of the deleterious effects of cinematic hyperreality upon young women is in line with the concerns expressed by Hildesheimer and Gur-Arie in their previously mentioned study. From a medical perspective, experts agree that the skeletal image of beauty scoffed at by Dixon and Koleva is no laughing matter at all.

From a romantic angle, Andrew Root explains that the emaciated look vividly depicted by Baudrillard in *The Consumer Society* is a serious issue rendering the timeless quest for love even more daunting as well. Many women correctly think that potential mates will evaluate them according to an unachievable, artificial conception of beauty. As Root emphasizes, “So now men judge real women by the sign, by the simulation, and want the simulation more than the real, measuring beauty not by the real, but by the simulation” (240). Unless they are able to mold their bodies into the ideal cinematic shape, women realize that their romantic options are limited. Given that men have been trained to seek satisfaction for their amorous desires through signs of female attractiveness, it is a rather shallow dating pool for women who do not corre-

spond to this predominate model. Knowing that they will be ultimately evaluated according to their ability to replicate simulations of what sexy females are supposed to look like, many women spend a lot of time and energy trying to duplicate these screen-based images of femininity. In this regard, Baudrillard observes that the “ascetic practice of ‘dieting’” or what he calls “the aggressive drive against the body” was already a million-dollar industry in the 1960s (*The Consumer Society* 142; 142). The fact that unscrupulous companies like *It Works!* still generate millions of dollars in revenue from gimmicks like body wraps that exploit an individual’s need to be accepted and loved by someone else proves Baudrillard’s arguments related to simulations of romance.

In *Seduction*, the philosopher pinpoints another manner in which signs of sexuality have created unrealistic expectations that a partner is likely unable to fulfill. As opposed to condemning pornography on classical ethical and philosophical grounds, Baudrillard denounces it as a crime against reality. Explaining that the pornographic industry transmits an idealistic vision of sexual gratification that real lovers can never hope to achieve, the philosopher asserts, “The same occurs with hard core and blue porn: the sexual organ, whether erect or open wide is just another sign in the hypersexual panoply [...] the more immersed one becomes in the accumulation of signs [...] the more enclosed one becomes in the endless oversignification of a real that no longer exists, and of a body that never existed” (Baudrillard *Seduction* 32–33). Summarizing Baudrillard’s unconventional stance about pornography, Richard King affirms, “Telex constructs a domain in which all the women are beautiful, always ready and always satisfied, a space in which the men are skilled lovers, with large pricks and beautiful bodies [...] There are no hesitations, doubts or failures: disease, discomfort, lack

of lubrication, and premature ejaculation never intrude [...] Telex is perfect; it is clean [...] It is disinfected, it does not communicate disease(s), but desire" (97–98). As King underscores, the Baudrillardian view of pornography illustrates that erotic simulacra set up both men and women for chronic disenchantment. Given that many people cannot realistically aspire to imitate the bedroom antics of their favorite adult film star, Baudrillard hypothesizes that pornography is antithetical to true romance as well. For Baudrillard, the reason why couples are often frustrated with the quality of their sex life is because they long to experience the signs of pleasure on their screen. Baudrillard insists that pornographic images are yet another reason why romances often fail in postmodern society.

In conclusion, Morin and Baudrillard are two maverick philosophers who create a destabilizing vision of the postmodern subject living in a purely symbolic world in which everything is at the brink of disappearing. Both thinkers posit that how Western society responded to the challenges of late capitalism would have far-reaching effects. After the limits of production had been reached, these post-Marxist theorists argue that the capitalist paradigm was forced to evolve. With the unending reproduction of symbolic images through various communicative vectors, Morin and Baudrillard maintain that the economic system found a well that would never run dry. Whereas actual needs are finite, the capacity of *Homo sapiens* to dream knows no bounds. For this reason, marketers would begin to take advantage of the most profitable fantasy of all: perfect love. Given that human beings appear to be hardwired from an evolutionary standpoint to seek companionship, Morin and Baudrillard demonstrate that we are extremely vulnerable to this particular form of hegemonic control through signs. Moreover, the pervasive-

ness of the Hollywood star system and its hollow conception of romance would further compound our inability to discern between reality and its representation. In the wake of the acceleration of romantic simulacra representing a carefully manufactured symbolic paradise, Morin and Baudrillard arrive at the harrowing conclusion that true romance is dead, if indeed it ever existed at all. Although these highly original philosophers do not propose a way out of the crisis of simulation, their philosophy is indispensable in a brave new world in which an increasing amount of our quotidian experiences are filtered through technology. The next time that we find ourselves enthralled in the latest romantic comedy, Morin and Baudrillard implore us to think a little harder about the artificial nature of the cultural product that we are consuming.

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Dante, the Gothic, the Abject, and the Grotesque in Mathieu Missoffe's Thriller-Crime Drama *Black Spot*

.....
by Richard Logsdon

“... we have no hope, and yet we live in longing.”
Canto IV, Dante's *Inferno*

ABSTRACT

Set in the fictional French village of Villefranche, Mathieu Missoffe's *Black Spot* offers both a contemporary version of Dante's Hell and a microcosmic, Gothicized caricature of contemporary Western society. Upon a first viewing, the episodes of this televised crime drama may seem randomly arranged. However, closer inspection reveals three elements that hold the series together while sustaining the terror, dread and horror typical of traditional Gothic fiction. One of these is Missoffe's selection of details that steadily build upon what Gothic-horror writer H. P. Lovecraft refers to as “cosmic dread,” in this series the cumulative effect of the graphic depiction of the corpses of murder and suicide victims, of the often barbaric behavior of the townspeople, and of the continued sightings of the Wendigo. A second unifying element is the repetition-compulsion disorder that drives protagonist Sheriff Major Laurene Weiss' search for Mayor Steiner's missing daughter Marion. According to Freud, this mental disorder “compels one to consume the same stories, experience the same jolts, behold the same devastating sights” over and over. However, the most significant element is the graphic depictions of the corpses of people who have been murdered or have committed suicide. These depictions are rendered according to an aesthetic that combines the grotesque with

the abject and that exaggerate, the terrors, horrors and dread associated with living in a village that Missoffe compares to Dante's *Inferno*.

Keywords: gothic crime drama, cosmic dread, grotesque-abject aesthetic

Dante, el gótico, lo abyecto y lo grotesco en la novela de crimen y suspenso de Mathieu Missoffe
Black Spot

“... no tenemos esperanza, y sin embargo vivimos en el anhelo”. canto IV, el Infierno de Dante

RESUMEN

Ubicada en el pueblo francés ficticio de Villefranche, *Black Spot* Mathieu Missoffe ofrece una versión contemporánea del Infierno de Dante y una caricatura gótica microcósmica de la sociedad occidental contemporánea. Al verlo por primera vez, los episodios de este drama policial televisado pueden parecer aleatorios. Sin embargo, una inspección más cercana revela tres elementos que mantienen unida a la serie mientras mantienen el terror, el miedo y el horror típicos de la ficción gótica tradicional. Una de ellas es la selección de detalles de Missoffe que se basan constantemente en lo que el escritor de horror gótico HP Lovecraft denomina “temor cósmico”, en esta serie el efecto acumulativo de la representación gráfica de los cadáveres de víctimas de asesinatos y de personas que se han suicidado, del a menudo bárbaro comportamiento de la gente del pueblo, y de los continuos avistamientos de Wendigo. Un segundo elemento unificador es

el trastorno de repetición-compulsión que impulsa a la protagonista, la Sheriff Mayor Laurene Weiss, a buscar a la hija desaparecida del alcalde Steiner, Marion. Según Freud, este trastorno mental “obliga a uno a consumir las mismas historias, a experimentar las mismas sacudidas, a ver las mismas vistas devastadoras” una y otra vez. Sin embargo, el elemento más significativo son las representaciones gráficas de los cadáveres de personas que han sido asesinadas o se han suicidado. Estas representaciones se presentan de acuerdo con una estética que combina lo grotesco con lo abyecto y lo exagerado, los terrores, los horrores y el temor asociados a vivir en una aldea que Missoffe compara con el Infierno de Dante.

Palabras clave: drama del crimen gótico, temor cósmico, estética abyecta-grotesca

Mathieu Missoffe所编写的惊悚-犯罪剧《白区黑点》中的但丁、哥特、绝望、和怪诞

“...我们没有希望地生活在欲望之中。”——但丁《地狱篇》，第四诗

摘要

由Mathieu Missoffe担任编剧的《白区黑点》将故事设置在虚构的法国小镇Villefranche。该剧呈现了当代版的但丁地狱，对当代西方社会进行了缩影和哥特化滑稽描述。这部电视犯罪剧剧情在首次观看时可能给人以随意安排的印象，然而，仔细观看后便能发现，这部剧由三大元素支撑，将传统哥特式惊悚小说的恐怖、害怕和惊悚进行了延续。三大元素之一则是Missoffe对细节的选取，这些细节不断建立于哥特惊悚小说家H. P. Lovecraft所提及的“无尽恐惧”，在这部剧中则指因对谋杀和自杀者尸体、对小镇人

民的残暴行为、对不断看见温迪戈食人魔的生动描述所产生的累积效果。第二个元素则是主人公Major Laurene Weiss警长所患的反复强迫症，她因此去搜寻市长Steiner的失踪女儿Marion。依照弗洛伊德的理论，这种精神障碍反复不断地“强迫人去接受同样的故事、体验相同的强烈情感、看见一样的可怕情景”。然而，最重要的元素则是对那些被谋杀或自杀的受害者躯体的生动刻画。这些描述通过一种怪诞又绝望的审美进行了表达，因此强烈放大了因生活在该小镇而经历的恐怖、惊悚和害怕。Missoffe将小镇比作但丁所描述的地狱。

关键词：哥特式犯罪剧，无尽恐惧，怪诞-绝望式审美

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Film critics have finally begun to pay attention to the recent made-for-TV crime dramas coming out of Europe. Some of these shows, particularly those from Scandinavian countries, capture a darkness characteristic of film noire. Several others, just as dark, contain elements that align them with the Gothic. Of these, one of the best and bleakest is the current crime-thriller fantasy *Black Spot* (or *Zone Blanche*, originally an Amazon Prime series), an eight-episode TV series that represents a joint effort by French and Belgian companies in 2018 (Nurbel).

Season One of *Black Spot* takes place in Villefranche, a fictitious French village that is set in the middle of a dark and forbidding 15,00-acre forest reputed to harbor a monster and that claims a murder rate six times the national average. In line with Gothic tradition, season one reflects those cultur-

al anxieties that have been generated in response to several cultural phenomenon that have reached crisis proportion in Villefranche and in the contemporary Western world for which Villefranche is both caricature and microcosm. In fact, the most significant crises are variations of two standard Gothic tropes: a tyrannical, even bullying white patriarchy, and women who find themselves marginalized, victimized, and at times brutally abused by members of this patriarchy. Additional anxiety-inducing crises that the series targets include the continuing rape of the environment by capitalistic enterprises, a growing crime rate, an epidemic of mental illness, and the seeming absence of God, once the spiritual and moral center for a Western world that currently seems to be moving toward an almost complete rejection of traditional belief (Trofimov 2, Wells). Indeed, to help call attention to these crises, the series' creator Mathieu Missoffe has incorporated several other Gothic elements into the script of *Black Spot* to create a steadily building sense of terror that verges on dread: a protagonist haunted by terrifying memories, a gloomy forest setting where the rays of the sun penetrate only the tops of the gigantic pines, a series of uncanny events, and a monster, presumably a demonic Wendigo with a craving for human flesh ("Wendigo"). Complimenting his series' Gothic dimension, Missoffe has woven into his script an analogy comparing Villefranche to Dante's *Inferno*, where the condemned must spend eternity separated from the transforming light and love of God. Indeed, Villefranche is offered to the viewer as a Gothicized caricature of a contemporary Western world recalls the Hell of Dante's own *Inferno*.

At first, season one's episodes may seem randomly arranged. Each is a tale of mystery and horror, complete in and of itself and takes place in a "savage wilderness" (Dante, *Inferno*,

Canto I, l. 93). The episodes' seemingly hap-hazard arrangement may in fact reflect a popular contemporary world view that sees no order or purpose to existence.ⁱⁱⁱ Even so, closer inspection reveals at least three elements that help hold the series together and contribute to sustaining the terror, dread and horror typical of traditional Gothic fiction (Radcliffe). One of these is Missoffe's selection and arrangement of details that steadily build upon what Gothic-horror writer H. P. Lovecraft referred to as "cosmic dread," in this series the cumulative effect of the graphic and ghastly depiction of the corpses of murder and suicide victims, of the often barbaric behavior of the townspeople, and of the continued sightings of the Wendigo. A second element that contributes to sustaining the series' growing dread is the repetition-compulsion disorder that drives protagonist Sheriff Major Laurene Weiss' search for Mayor Steiner's missing daughter Marion. According to Freud, this mental disorder, common among characters in works of Gothic horror, "compels one to consume the same stories, experience the same jolts, behold the same devastating sights" over and over (Hutchings 71). However, the most significant element may be the graphic, revolting depictions of the corpses of people who have been murdered or have committed suicide. These haunting depictions are rendered according to an aesthetic that combines the grotesque with the abject to emphasize, even exaggerate, the terrors, horrors and dread associated with living in a village that Missoffe compares to Dante's *Inferno*.

I. COSMIC DREAD

The sense of "cosmic dread" that the series awakens has its basis in the fears and superstitions of people who, in ages past, believed in and feared the demonic side of the supernatural. This level of intense dread is characteristic of the "weird-

ly horrible" Gothic literature that H.P. Lovecraft addresses in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature":

This type of fear-literature must not be confounded with a type externally similar but psychologically widely different; the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome. Such writing, to be sure, has its place, as has the conventional or even whimsical or humorous ghost story, where formalism or the author's knowing wink the true sense of the morbidly unnatural; but these things are not the literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense. The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and pretentiousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign or particular suspension of defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and of the daemons [sic] of unplumbed space. (107-108)

The one scene confirming Missoffe's intent to create and sustain this intense level of dread comes at the end of episode two and occurs in the office of the town's young Mayor Steiner. Hanging from one of the office walls is a painting that shows a lone man standing in snow in a darkening forest. Positioned in front of the painting, the mayor's father Gerald asks his

son, seated at his desk across the room, “Is the man out for an evening walk, or is he lost and afraid? The darkness is falling, and something watches and awaits from the trees.” The mayor does not answer. Indeed, the questions posed by the father creates an ambiguity, or an obscurity, that Fred Botting and eighteenth-century Irish philosopher Edmund Burke have identified as a key element in Gothic literature (Burke 58-61, Botting 170-171). Thus, the viewer may wonder what the man is doing out in the woods. If the man is afraid, then what does he fear? At this point in the series, the viewer has no idea what the man is doing in a darkening forest, clearly an allusion to the enormous forest around Villefranche and to the *Inferno*’s “shadowed forest” (*Inferno*, Canto I, l. 2), nor does the painting provide any clue to clarify what the man is doing there and what this “something [that] watches and waits from the trees” may be. Perhaps Missoffe also intended for this scene to reveal a duplicity on the part of Mr. Steiner, a villainous man whose reference to the “falling ... darkness” suggests his awareness that a disaster of possibly dreadful proportions awaits the town and people of Villefranche. At the very least, Missoffe uses the words of Gerald Steiner to appeal to the viewer’s fear of the unknown, a fear that over the centuries has become “an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue” (Lovecraft 106).

II. THE SHERIFF

Throughout this series, much of the dread that viewers experience is generated, vicariously, by Sheriff “Major” Lauren Weiss, a stern, expressionless female from whose position most of the series unfolds. Indeed, whatever Laurene sees is filtered through the dread that she has experienced as an effect of the horrors that she encountered as a teenager and that she must encounter as sheriff of this darkened region. The dread

generated in Laurene by atrocity after atrocity, most visually rendered, adds a level of dreadful urgency to the sheriff's unrelenting search for the Mayor's missing daughter Marion, the story-line for which constitutes the series' central plot. As the story goes, Marion disappeared sixty days before District Attorney Frank Siriano arrived in Villefranche and during "initiation night," a local ritual requiring local teens who have turned eighteen in the past year to spend a night alone in the supposedly Wendigo-haunted forest. Indeed, Laurene's search is driven by at least two obsessions that, in turn, fuel her compulsions.

One obsession is Laurene's haunting and inescapable recollection of her own initiation night twenty years before. On that night, likely terrified by rumors of the creature, she was kidnapped by a "woodsman" (whom she does not or cannot identify), chained to a mountainside, and left to die screaming for the help that did not come. The ordeal that Lauren experienced has contributed to shaping the character of the compulsive, unsmiling woman that she has become. (In fact, to insure her survival, Lauren used a sharp stone to cut off two fingers from her left hand and free herself from the manacle binding her to the mountain.) Additionally, this experience constituted Laurene's own rite of passage into the hellish and therefore terrifying and horrifying dimension of Villefranche. In spite of this ordeal, perhaps because of it, Laurene displays unrelenting determination in her search for Marion Steiner and in her fight against the "falling ... darkness" that threatens to consume not only the mayor's daughter but that manifests itself in the town's unusually high murder rate.

However, Laurene's constant, often uncontrollable replaying of the memories of her three nights of horror, combined with her search for Marion Stein, provides the foundation for another possibly inexplicable compulsion, this one to drive the

dark and lonely road leading from Villefranche (again and again, always at night), return to a particular spot in the forest, and apparently search for something lost. According to Steven Bruhm, “What becomes most marked in contemporary Gothic—and what distinguishes it from its ancestors—is the protagonist’s and the viewers’ compulsive return to certain fixations, obsessions, and blockages” (261). Bruhm adds that this compulsive return “center[s] on ... the problem of a lost object, the search for which ... usually has a psychological and symbolic dimension to it” (263). In a series played out in the darkened world of a gigantic forest, Laurene’s compulsive return to this one spot is treated with ambiguity, for it is difficult if not impossible to determine what Laurene has lost and what she thinks she is going to find. Likely, she is searching for Marion—or clues that might reveal what really happened to the mayor’s daughter. The possibility does exist that she may not be looking for anything—or that she is looking for something that she is not supposed to find. After all, on one of her visits, Mayor Steiner follows Laurene to this spot, an action that Laurene misinterprets as a rendezvous with a former lover and one that raises the likelihood that there may be something at this place that the mayor does not want Laurene to find. However, given the psychological dimension of the series, perhaps the most plausible explanation for Laurene’s long and lonely drives to this one spot in the forest is that she is seeking to recover that part of herself which now lies buried beneath the mountain of the seeming indifference that has afforded a defense against the horror and dread generated by past experience and by the many visually rendered atrocities, embodied in the corpses of murder and suicide victims that she encounters in series one.

The other obsession-driven-compulsion that fuels Sheriff Weis’ search for Marion and ultimately contributes to the

series' building dread is her desire to reconnect, romantically, with Mayor Steiner, whom she has known since high school. Indeed, the script reveals that the Mayor has used an on-again, off-again affair with Laurene to keep her from discovering his and his father's plot: to shut down the local lumber plant, replace it with a local quarry for storing barrels of toxic waste (and, in the process, supposedly insure the village residents of a new source of income), and possibly bring to Villefranch other money-making enterprises. At first, Laurene refuses to acknowledge what the viewers cannot fail to see: Mayor Steiner's own duplicitous involvement in projects that will threaten to destroy Villefranche and that stand in bold opposition to the safety and well-being of the people and the village that Laurene must protect. In fact, to Laurene, a single mother in need of male companionship, finding Marion will undoubtedly cement her relationship with the Mayor, who is married to another woman whom he does not plan to leave. The alternative is something she dreads: to live out her life alone, her deputy Teddy Bear, a gay male, and her rebellious teenage daughter Cora as her only companions. Thus, in the third episode, at the Mayor's request, Laurene feels compelled to risk her own life and that of her deputy Teddy Bear in descending into a seemingly bottomless labyrinth of caves. Initially in search of a mystery woman named Natalie Duval, Lauren instead finds—or think she finds—a frantic Marion Steiner bound to a wall of stone and frightened to the point of hysteria by a creature that inhabits the abyss. Laurene sets Marion free, only to watch as the mayor's daughter flees from the sounds of the coming monster and into a network of caves. That Laurene is the only one who hears or sees Marion at the bottom of the caverns, and that Teddy Bear claims that he saw and heard nothing, becomes problematical; indeed, the script treats Laurene's encounter

with Marion with an ambivalence suggesting that the sheriff of Villefranche may suffer from a lingering psychosis. In other words, the viewers are left with the possibility that, in finding the mayor's daughter (or in thinking she has done so), Laurene has suffered a hallucination inspired by the three horrifying nights that she spent chained to a mountain twenty years before Marion's disappearance. If it is Missoffe's intent to use this scene to show Laurene's mental instability, then the hysteria that verges on madness that the imaginary Marion seems to experience is a projection—or replaying--of Lauren's own memories of her three nights of terror. In this sense, Lauren's descent into the caverns becomes a metaphor for her descent back into her own inescapable personal hell, in this case memories of the three nights of horror that she spent chained to a mountainside.

The probability that Laurene may have experienced a delusion becomes even more likely in the eighth episode. In this final episode, Laurene finds the dead Marion Steiner in a swamp contaminated by a toxic waste that has prevented her corpse from decomposing. In fact, the coroner's report sets the probable date of Marion's murder at some time before the sheriff's descent into the caverns. Again, toward the end of the eighth episode, now driven by the need to know the truth about the mayor and by the suspicion that the mayor has been using her, Laurene stumbles upon a large quarry pit containing the beginnings of what promises to become a huge toxic-waste plant, one that the mayor and his father plan to supervise. This discovery validates Laurene's suspicion that the mayor has been carrying on an affair with her only to prevent her from uncovering a project that will contaminate the drinking water, drive the inhabitants from their homes, and increase the Steiners' wealth and power. But the discovery is followed by the series' ending horror, as Laurene

is shot to death by her deputy Camille, who has been given the task of eliminating both Marion and Laurene, possibly to cover for the mayor and his father's nefarious schemes. With the murder of a sheriff devoted to fighting the "falling ... darkness" that threatens the area, the demonic Wendigo fully emerges, possibly in response to Laurene's murder and signifying the termination of any semblance of law and order in the Villefranche region. Laurene's death and the creature's emergence reinforce the dread that a catastrophe of monstrous proportions, a clear manifestation of the "falling ... darkness" that Gerald Steiner referred to, awaits the town of Villefranche and, possibly by extension, the Western world for which the village is both caricature and microcosm.

III. DANTE, THE ABJECT AND THE GROTESQUE

To sustain the sense of terror and dread, Missoffe inserts into his script the series' key analogy according to which Villefranche, as a microcosm of the contemporary Western world, has become a version of Dante's *Inferno*. In the first episode, district attorney Frank Siriano observes to Laurene and Teddy Bear that Villefranche reminds him of Dante's seventh circle of Hell, where the souls of those who committed suicide are condemned to spend eternity imprisoned in gigantic trees. The second, perhaps more significant allusion comes later in episode one. In this scene, Laurene finds Frank seated at a table at the Eldorado bar, his nose buried in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Curious, Laurene reaches across the table, grabs the book, and looks over what Frank has been reading. In response Frank quotes directly from the first Canto of *Inferno*: "When I had journeyed half of life's way/ I found myself within a shadowed forest/ for I had lost that path that does not stray" (ll.1-3). The passage certainly applies to Frank, who has lost his way professionally—he has

somehow offended his superiors—and has been sent away from an unnamed larger city and to Villefranche (a dead zone where cellphone-contact with the outside world is nearly impossible) as a form of professional chastisement. However, the passage is more applicable to Laurene, who, like Dante's character in *Inferno*, is journeying into a netherworld of growing darkness. Seemingly locked in this dark world, and twenty years after her kidnapping, Laurene is still searching for a way out of a personal hell consisting of recurring and unbidden memories of her three nights of terror and, just as significantly, her regular and seemingly unending exposure to the corpses of murder and suicide victims.

The graphic depiction of these victims, their deaths almost always a form of punishment, reveals an aesthetic that combines the grotesque with the abject to emphasize that Villefranche is indeed a version of Dante's Hell. According to Julia Kristeva, the abject involves

[a] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, as familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. A "something" I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I recognize it, annihilates me. (2)

Jerrold E. Hogle adds that the presence of the abject represents "the return of the repressed familiar in 'the uncanny'" (7). For its part, the grotesque magnifies the horror of the

abject. According to William Yates, co-editor of *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, the grotesque “most often embod[ies] distortions, exaggeration, a fusion of incompatible parts in such a fashion that it confronts us as ... strange and disordered, a world turned upside down ...,” an observation certainly applicable to Dante’s Hell. Yates adds that “[the grotesque is] an embodiment of demonic and sublime forces ...” (2-3). Roger Hazelton reinforces Yates’ definition when he writes, “No discussion of the grotesque in a theological perspective would be adequate if it omitted reference to the demonic,” whose presence is clearly established in *Inferno* (78). Indeed, Missoffe’s purpose in using grotesque imagery in *Black Spot* seems roughly equivalent to what Dante had in mind in writing *Inferno*: to emphasize the presence of the demonic, the perverse ugliness of sin, manifest in this TV drama in barbarous acts driven by an “insane anger” (*Inferno*, Canto XII, l. 49), and the absolute hopelessness of ever experiencing the transforming power of the light and love of God, Whose presence fills Dante’s paradise (Millbank 157-158). In summary, the cumulative effect in this series of merging the grotesque with the abject, in this case the corpses of those who have been murdered or taken their own lives, confronts observers, and certainly Laurene, with “a severe violation of [their] sense of moral, natural, and social order ...” and threatens viewers with fears of their own annihilation (Hogle 14). Indeed, the sense of horror generated by these images of death “depends ... on [the viewer’s] intuitive sense of order in the world” (Tallon 39)—and the recognition, certainly in Missoffe’s series, that morally and spiritually, Villefranche and the Western society for which the village is an exaggerated representation have become a Hellish place that has been turned “upside down.”

In *Black Spot*, scenes merging the grotesque with the abject capture a dread and horror that have reached epidem-

ic proportion in the fictional Villefranche and that roughly correspond to a level of anxiety in the Western world that Villefranche symbolizes. For example, in the first episode, Laurene encounters in the perpetually darkened forest the corpse of rookie nurse Sandra Chevrier. Chevrier has been murdered, then hanged from a tree that bleeds. By the time Laurene and Teddy Bear find it, the corpse is barely ten hours old, its eyes already pecked out by the omnipresent crows, creatures that find their counterparts in Dante's "foul harpies ... that utter their laments on the strange trees" (*Inferno*, XIII, 10-15). The nurse's defiled corpse thus becomes a grotesque symbol of ultimate abjection (Creed 40); monstrous but dead, this woman has been cast off as so much detritus, is no longer recognizably human, the annihilation of her person bringing to the viewer's mind an image of their own inevitable extinction. This visual image of Sandra Chevrier is thus an example of "the repressed familiar" that Hogle refers to as the "[terrifying] annihilation of self" (14).

The story behind the nurse's hanging reveals the grotesque, even damnable natures of those who participated in the murder and who, like most everyone else in Villefranche, are condemned to living out their lives in a village that, like the *Inferno*, no one ever seems to leave. In fact, the twisted story of what supposedly happened to Sandra Chevrier creates an ambivalence and ambiguity that, in turn, sustain the series' steadily building dread. Apparently, Sandra had recently assumed responsibility for taking care of her former boyfriend, the comatose and mute Bruno Walter, his unblinking, wide-open eyes possibly signaling a recognition of the horrors of living in this village and reinforcing Carol Clover's emphasis on "looking as the avenue of horror" (167). Reduced to the level of the abject, Bruno is little more than a living corpse, one who has been kept barely alive in his parents' living

room by a breathing machine. Apparently, five years before Laurene and Teddy Bear discover him in his parents' house, Bruno joined the nurse's brother Dmitri in raping Sandra in the corner of the gigantic lumber mill that the Steiners shut down in the first episode. Possibly overcome by remorse, Bruno then attempted to hang himself from the tree from which Sandra Chevrier's corpse was hung. However, that Bruno tried to take his own life out of remorse or that he alone was responsible for his hanging, while seemingly substantiated by a police report, remains a mystery to Laurene, Teddy Bear, and the viewer. The key to the case is Dmitri, who has been driven nearly out of his mind by the overuse of drugs, presumably to erase his guilt. As Laurene holds him and prevents him from dying, Dmitri finally confesses to raping and murdering his sister and then hanging her corpse from a tree for threatening to publicly reveal the names of her rapists. Clearly delusional, reduced to a grotesque caricature of his former self, Dmitri embraces a paranoid fear that the immobilized Bruno is coming after him. Indeed, the theory, entertained by Laurene and Teddy Bear, that Sandra planned to pull her patient's life support as a form of retribution, combined with the possibility that Bruno's parents may have participated in Sandra's murder to save the life of their comatose son, is not entirely implausible, particularly among a people condemned to a contemporary version of the Inferno.

Throughout *Black Spot*, the abject and grotesque are almost always associated with the punishment that women undergo for crossing an invisible line established by the community's ruling white patriarchy. This punishment, generally in the form of savage murders and suicides, is a recurring act in the darkened world of Villefranche and finds its parallel in Dante's Hell, where the condemned must suffer eternal retribution and often carry with them an "inhuman [and] insane

anger" (*Inferno*, Canto XII, ll. 33, 49) that finds its reflection the mad rage behind most of the violence in Missoffe's series and much of the violence of the Western world. In the third episode, for instance, the viewer learns that the Fuchs brothers, two simple-minded farmers, have executed Natalie Duval, a young woman who conveniently disappeared after escorting one of the Fuchs brothers into the labyrinth of caverns where Laurene supposedly found Marion Steiner tied to a wall. The truth of the matter seems to be that Natalie seduced both brothers with the intention of getting them to sell their parents' farm and so erase their mountain of debt. Apparently, she had also seduced several other males in order to defraud them and take their money. Thus, not satisfied with taking Natalie's life, the Fuchs brothers hung her now decomposing, darkened corpse from a make-shift cross overlooking what was once their farmland, the repulsive and eyeless corpse representing another combination of the abject and grotesque and symbolically revealing a spiritually and morally bankrupt region, and finding a parallel in the ninth circle of hell, where those guilty of fraud are forever condemned to Malbroge, "an abyss, a broad and yawning pit" (*Inferno*, Canto XVIII, ll. 1-4).

In fact, most every episode in this series targets a murder or a suicide, the remains of which are graphically rendered in grotesque-abject manner. In a particularly disturbing episode, the wife of the coach of a local high school swim team, a man who has received praise from the community for pulling a young woman from a burning car, puts a shotgun into her mouth on the night that her husband is honored by the mayor and the community. With no hesitation, she pulls the trigger, blood spattering the walls of her hotel room and her eyeballs winding up in her mouth. The wife's suicide is clearly intended as an act of vengeance and punishment directed

toward a husband who has used his position to seduce/rape some of the female members of the swim team in a cabin that is surrounded and inhabited by "a dreadful swarm/ of serpents" (*Inferno*, Canto XXIV, ll. 82-83), the presence of which constitutes an allusion to the serpent in the Garden of Eden and possibly suggests that Laurene is in a place that is the counterpart to, or a version of, the circle in which Lucifer, named Dis in Dante's work, feasts off those who have most grievously sinned (See *Inferno*, Canto XXXIV). Indeed, the episode certainly reveals the perverse and diabolical character of the swimming coach, an old friend of the Mayor and one who has no hope of redemption. Again, in the last episode of season one, in the company of sheriff's deputy Camille, Laurene's teenage daughter Cora finds the deceased Marion Steiner's flash drive in some contaminated swamp water, near the place where Laurene found Marion's corpse. The flash drive, one of the most important "lost" items in the series, contains information that would reveal the Mayor's compromised and duplicitous character. Camille pulls a gun, demands that Cora hand over the device, and suddenly finds herself attacked by hundreds of crows, a distraction that gives Cora the opportunity to run the deputy though with a long, sharp piece of drift wood. Grotesquely rendered, Camille dies impaled on the large piece of wood holding her up in a small body of contaminated water.

Laurene herself provides the series' final example of the blending of the grotesque with the abject. After she murders Laurene, Camille discards the sheriff's corpse by tossing the it down a mountainside and into a tangle of bushes, thus reducing Laurene to the level of the abject. In the final scene of the series, the demonic Wendigo fully emerges in the forest, and Lauren, her corpse embraced by roots and branches that the sentient forest has sent forth presumably to heal her, re-

turns to life as her eyes suddenly burst wide open. Laurene's return from the dead may be somewhat ominous particularly if one considers this uncanny, supernatural, even grotesque phenomenon within a pantheon of movies and TV shows that have been influenced by the zombie craze. Italian director George Romero's films *The Night of the Living Dead*, *The Dawn of the Dead*, and *The Day of the Dead* have been credited with inspiring the countless flesh-eating zombie shows that have found an enthusiastic acceptance in Western culture. With the possible exception of Jesus Christ's Resurrection, people who return from the dead as zombies are generally the ghastly effect of a post-apocalyptic disaster, like a worldwide nuclear war. Beyond this, it is difficult if not impossible to determine what Missoffe had in mind beyond providing viewers with a shocking ending intended to carry them to the next season.

Missoffe thus combines the grotesque and the abject to capture the horrors of the continuing victimization of women not only in Villefranche but, by extension, in the Western society for which the village is a microcosmic caricature. Indeed, the central cultural crisis—or social evil—that Missoffe calls special attention to in this series is the continued abuse of women. To further emphasize the horror of this continuing victimization, Missoffe also incorporates into the first season scenes that depict women in bondage: thus, considered “grotesque” because she amputated two of her fingers, Laurene is punished for an unnamed infraction by being chained her to a mountainside for three days and nights for a crime that is never revealed; later, Laurene seems to discover a hysterical Marion Stein (likely a projection of the sheriff) bound to a stone wall and terrified nearly to the point of insanity by the demonic Windigo; even later, Laurene's daughter Cora, tied to a chair, suffers kidnapping, abuse and humiliation at

the hands of her boyfriend Ramon, who justifies his mistreatment of Cora as a method of finding whether she sides with his group of eco-terrorists or with the of mayor and his followers; and, finally, the village coroner is forced to suffer painful humiliation as, for no apparent reason, her wrists are bound to a post of the bed on which she used mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to breathe life into a badly wounded outlaw, who suddenly died as she began treating him. Within the context of a series in which the setting is compared to Dante's *Inferno*, the barbaric act of placing women in bondage must have as one of its sources a demonic dimension filled with those dark and conflicting impulses that find some level of gratification in controlling, subduing, even punishing females who just might cross the imaginary line created by the ruling patriarchy (Kuznetsova 281). Indeed, the scenes just cited enable Missoffe to make the point, powerfully, that the women of Villefranche and, by extension, the women of the Western world, have suffered and will continue to suffer dehumanization, marginalization, and abjection at the hands of an often self-seeking, "barbarous" male patriarchy.

IV. NOTES TOWARD A CONCLUSION: THE FINAL HORROR

The first series of Matthew Missoffe's *Black Spot* effectively creates and builds upon an almost tangible dread, the cumulative effect of the terror and horror that Laurene seems to take for granted. It is this building sense of dread that, episode after episode, allows Missoffe to draw the viewer into this very dark fantasy-crime-thriller. In the process of doing so, he targets those social evils that have provoked fears and anxieties in the Western world: the continued victimization of women by an abusive patriarchy, the continuing rape of the natural environment; an increase in violent crime, drug-abuse that has reached pandemic epidemic proportions, and

rampant mental illness that is manifest in most of the series' characters, whom Missoffe himself regards as disturbed (Nurbal).

Indeed, Missoffe has given his viewers a Gothicized series in which the terrors of living in Villefranche, a contemporary version of Dante's Hell and a microcosm of the contemporary Western world, are exaggerated to the point of grotesque caricature. In this series, Gothic terrors

activate a sense of the unknown and project an uncontrollable and overwhelming power which not only threatens the loss of sanity, honor, property, or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms. (Botting 7)

At the core of the terrors and horrors that characterize life in Villefranche and that find a parallel in the anxieties that have gripped the Western world that this small village represents lies a level of despair that verges on a form of madness. Indeed, the despair that grips not only Villefranche and but the Western world it represents may have its ultimate source in the absence of God.

Interestingly, perhaps typically, Missoffe treats the problem of God's seeming absence with ambivalence. In the series' first episode, after Frank Siriano observes that the village has no church, Laurene responds that, in the 15th century, the village sent for stone that would be used to build the edifice. She adds that a storm sank the vessel carrying the stones, the church was not built, and now, more than 500 years later, Laurene is left with the conclusion: "We are alone." Laurene's somewhat ambiguous observation reveals a fear of abandon-

ment that, for the sheriff of Villefranche, has as its source not only in the three nights that she spent, alone, chained to a mountain side, screaming for help and left to die, but in the history of a town that God seems to have abandoned or forgotten.

In fact, Laurene's observation "We are alone" reflects a larger desperation or longing that has so infected the residents of Villefranche that they no longer seem able to recognize it. It is a desperation, born of despair and dread that characterizes those condemned to live in the Inferno and will never know the light and love of the God alluded to in Dante's *Paradiso*. More importantly, it is a desperation that has infected the larger Western world that Missoffe had in mind when he gave Amazon Video service the rights to stream *Black Spot* to an "international" audience (Stewart). In the current world, this hopelessness born of desperation and longing—which psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl labels "sociogenic neurosis" (140)—is more likely to lead one to the psychiatrist's office than to the church. In this sense, the final and ultimate horror for Laurene, for Villefranche and for the Western world it represents may be the absence of God. Indeed, the analogy that informs Missoffe's script, that Villefranche is a contemporary version of the Inferno, provides a ground for Laurene's ambiguous statement "We are alone" and for the conclusion that God has apparently separated Himself from a Western world that, morally and spiritually, has lost sight of its center. Like Yeats' falcon, this world seems, at times, to be frantically spinning out of control and in a descent into an Inferno of a "new barbarousness" that characterizes those condemned to Hell, that characterized Dante's thirteenth century Florence for which the Inferno is a microcosm, and that characterizes Missoffe's twenty-first century Western society.

Indeed, Missoffe's work offers little hope of change or redemption for either Villefranche or the larger world it represents. It is this hopelessness that provides another foundation for the almost tangible dread that steadily builds through the series' first season. Finally, it is a dread that the viewer experiences vicariously through Laurene's confrontations with an evil that most effectively manifests itself in the corpses of murder and suicide victims, each graphically rendered according to an aesthetic that combines the grotesque with the abject, and that emphasizes the absence of God. In short, what series creator Matthieu Missoffe offers the viewer is a Gothicized, grotesque and even dreadful depiction of a fictional French village that, as a contemporary version of Dante's *Inferno*, reflects to the point of exaggeration the fears and anxieties created by several social evils that are afflicting, and may continue to afflict, Western society.

NOTES

- i. See the following articles, most of them summaries: "5 Swedish Crime Dramas You Should Watch Right Now." *culture trip.*; Cook-Wilson, Winston. "Nordic Noir: An Obsessive's Guide to the Best Scandinavian Crime Shows." *Spin*. April 2018; Forshaw, Barry. "This winter's best European TV crime dramas," *Reader's Digest*, Readersdigest.co.uk N.D; Hansen, Toft, Kim Peacock, Steven Turnbull. *European Crime Drama and Beyond*. Palgrave Film and Media Studies. 2018, www.palgrave.com; Keeley, Joe. "The Eight Best Nordic Dramas to Watch on Netflix and Amazon Prime." Entertainment. MUD. 1 March 2019; Livingstone, Josephine, "The New Wave of European Crime Drama on Netflix," *The New Republic*. 16 February 2017; Nakamura, Reid, "23 Foreign Crime Dramas to Stream on Netflix, From 'Luther' to 'Border Town,'" *The Wrap*. 16 June 2017; Nelson, Alex, "15 of the best European TV thriller series on Netflix," *Inews.co.uk.*, Wed. Feb. 28; Paiella, Gabriella, "I Can't Stop Watching European Crime Dramas," *The Cut*,

17 Jan. 2019; Vincentelli, Elisabeth, "11 Great Foreign Police Shows to Stream Tonight." NYTimes.com.

- ii. My conclusion that the monster in *Black Spot* is a Wendigo, a demonic spirit with a craving for human flesh, has two bases. The first is Missoffe's two comic-book set titled *The Curse of the Wendigo*. The second is that Missoffe's Wendigo bears an uncanny resemblance to the Wendigo of NBC's recent adaptation of Richard Harris' Hannibal series.
- iii. In his *The Open Work*, Umberto Eco argues that the form of a given literary work, or of a particular kind of literary work, generally reflects the prevailing world view of the culture in which the work was written. "In ever century, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality. The closed, single conception in a work by a medieval artist reflected the conception of the cosmos as a hierarchy of fixed, pre-ordained orders" (13).
- iv. Several reviewers have commented on the fact that Lauren Weiss rarely, if ever, smiles. If we use Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a subtext for *Black Spot*, we learn from *Paradiso* that smiles reflect the transforming power by the love and light of God. Those condemned to the Inferno, on the other hand, like those who never leave Villefranche, are forever separated from God, their grim expressions revealing this fact. As grotesques, those condemned to the Inferno—as well as those who dwell in Villefranch—are incapable of changing.

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I Am Trying Hard to Follow the Sound: Meditations on Accepting Typhoon's Offerings

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By H. Peter Steeves

ABSTRACT

The latest album from indie-rock band Typhoon, fronted by Kyle Morton, is an existential trip through birth, sleep, love, life, and after-life. With ties to Greek mythology, surrealist filmmaking, twentieth-century literature, and the history of philosophy, *Offerings* is an album that invites the listener to imagine a stream of consciousness that navigates a watery life-path toward something liberating. This essay traces the conceptual themes at work in the music and lyrics of the album, offering a song-by-song analysis of an intricate narrative that unfolds within a work of art that deserves to be recognized as a contemporary masterpiece.

Keywords: Rock, Indie-rock, music criticism, music theory, philosophy, existentialism, birth, death, sleep, dream, liberalism, communitarianism

Me estoy esforzando mucho para poder seguir el sonido: meditaciones para aceptar Offerings de Typhoon

RESUMEN

El último álbum de la banda de rock Typhoon, liderada por Kyle Morton, es un viaje a través del nacimiento, el sueño, el amor, y la vida antes y después de la muerte. Con vínculos con la mitología griega, el cine surrealista, la literatura del si-

glo XX y la historia de la filosofía, *Offerings* es un álbum que invita al oyente a imaginar un flujo de conciencia que navega por un camino de vida acuoso hacia algo liberador. Este ensayo rastrea los temas conceptuales en el trabajo en la música y las letras del álbum, ofreciendo un análisis canción por canción de una narrativa compleja que se desarrolla dentro de una obra de arte que merece ser reconocida como una obra maestra contemporánea.

Palabras clave: Rock, Indie-rock, crítica musical, teoría musical, filosofía, existencialismo, nacimiento, muerte, sueño, liberalismo, comunitarismo

我正努力尝试理解这种声响：关于接受Typhoon 专辑《*Offerings*》的沉思

摘要

独立摇滚乐队Typhoon（由Kyle Morton担任主唱）的最新专辑《*Offerings*》是一次穿越出生、睡眠、爱、生命、来生的存在式旅行。与希腊神话、超现实主义电影制作、二十一世纪文学、哲学历史有关的是，这张专辑邀请听众想象一种意识流，这种意识流将脆弱的生命之路导向一种解放。本文追踪了这张专辑的音乐和歌词制作所包含的概念主题，对每首歌进行复杂叙事分析，这种叙事在一种值得被认可为当代杰作的艺术作品中展开。

关键词：摇滚，独立摇滚，音乐批判，音乐理论，哲学，存在主义，出生，死亡，睡眠，梦，自由主义，社群主义

"Listen."

It is the first word, the first command, the first plea that Kyle Morton and Typhoon offer us on their latest album, *Offerings*. And it is an intriguing one. Of course, every album begins with the command, *Listen*; every book with the command, *Read*. This is the force of the medium beneath the message: the book in all of its bookness asking you to pick it up, the song by its very essence asking you to hear it. Just as every sleep commands, *Dream*, and every life commands, *Live*. And so we listen.

Offerings is the fourth album from Portland, Oregon-based Typhoon, and one could call this the band's most mature album, though to do so runs the risk of prizing maturity over youth, perpetuating a mistaken belief that living more necessarily means knowing more. But *Offerings* is mature. And one could call this album Typhoon's darkest as well, though again the risk is that we give in to the false promise of the Enlightenment and think that darkness is somehow bad.

"List, list, O, list!" says Hamlet's father's ghost to his son. Hamlet heeds the command, listening, becoming the living audience to the dead, baring witness, and remembering. And unable to forget what he hears, Hamlet loses his mind. If we think that truth is the uncovering of everything, a shining of light into every dark corner, exposing what is hidden once and for all, we misunderstand the nature of truth. This is the Enlightenment conception of truth that Morton battles. The sort of truth that dreams of the lights always being on, forgetting that it is difficult to sleep without any darkness. This is the sort of truth that causes perpetual insomnia—which inevitably leads to madness. The command that *Offerings'* protagonist—let us call him Morton's Ghost—gives us at the start of this album threatens to do to us the same. This is a

work of art about the biggest questions that we could ever possibly ask: why must we be mortal? who are we really? are we constituted by our memories? what does it mean both to live and to die? and how must we exist in this world, and treat each other, knowing that “we’re involved in something irreversible,” that we are given life only to be asked inevitably to sacrifice it, and that existence might legitimately be seen as a long slide into inevitable darkness? Follow this path, seek only to keep remembering, keep shining light on everything, and we’ll all end up mad. Even in the midst of such beauty—and this album is a staggeringly beautiful work of art—these are the stakes: to lose our minds like a hesitant prince. And of all of the things we are about to lose, that would be the most painful.

Sleep is as little understood as death. Philosophically, both are puzzles, breaks in the continuous flow of consciousness that seems to hold the self together as one united thing. We might say that memory, sleep, and death are the three axes around which *Offerings* unfolds.

Aristotle, in *Generation of Animals* 5.1 (778b28–33) writes: “[T]he transition from not-being to being is effected through the intermediate state, and sleep would appear to be by its nature a state of this sort, being as it were a borderland between living and not-living; a person who is asleep would appear to be neither completely non-existent nor completely existent ...” René Descartes maintained that in dreamless sleep the soul “withdraws” from the body, perhaps to contemplate pure logic, math, geometry, and metaphysics, thus leaving no trace of memory. And John Locke, the great British empiricist who imagined the mind starting off as a blank slate (as does Morton’s Ghost in the song “Empiricist”), rejected

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the Cartesian view of sleep, maintaining that when we sleep, the mind simply shuts off for a bit completely: our experience showing this to be true. A nonactive mind, however, is a problem for personal identity since the self seems to be constituted by memories, by the ability to think “I am the same me that was thinking this thought a moment ago.” Is the self really a continuous whole, then? Is the self what we think the self to be?

Memory, sleep, and death have deep philosophical connections, and thus can stand in for each other artistically as well, with waking and sleeping becoming, metaphorically, birth and death. *Offerings* begins with the song “Wake,” turning next to “Rorschach,” which makes an appeal to “the river of forgetfulness”—a reference to Lethe, the river in Greek mythology from which the dead must drink upon arriving in Hades, thus causing them to forget their earthly lives. Ingested, Lethe's waters erase memory. But, Lethe, it is also said, flows around the cave of Hypnos, the god of sleep, its babbling provoking drowsiness in anyone listening to its gentle current.

Listen.

The ancient Greek word for “truth” is derived from *lethe*. It is, in fact, the absence of *lethe*: *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια). “Truth” is thus literally a kind of non-forgetting, an a-Lethe, an unconcealedness. But as the Greeks knew, and as Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida reminded us two-and-a-half millennia later, “unconcealedness” always still conceals something. In order to shine a light in one corner of a dark room, you must necessarily cast other areas into darkness. To enframe something and put it in the spotlight is necessarily to leave something else outside the frame in the shadows. The force that brings a text to meaning is always at the same time the force that threatens to dismantle it into nonsense. In order

to remember, there must be a forgetting; in order to know, there must be an unknowing. *The river of forgetfulness is spilling its banks*, Morton's Ghost sings. And we know, then, that we are in safer hands than Hamlet's father's, because for this interlocutor *aletheia*/truth is not *merely* about remembering but about forgetting as well. Lethe is always only on the way toward veracity: truth necessarily spills its banks.

Though Morton draws from many sources on *Offerings*, from film to novels to painting, he returns always to the Greeks. Allusions to Greek philosophers, gods, and myth abound. The whole of the conceit of the song-cycle—and *Offerings* is a consistent whole, a continuous narrative with all of the stops and starts that the narrative of a life demonstrates—is the Platonic idea that before we were born, our souls, that part of us that is eternal and perfect, used to live in a realm populated by things that are eternal and perfect as well. Our souls, that is, were once in the realm of the Forms, hanging out with Triangle, Blue, Two, Justice, and every other universal that finds its origin in the realm of *Being* rather than the land of *becoming*. When we are born into a body, Plato argues, we forget. Lethe's waters wash over us and we struggle to remember all that we knew in the realm of the Forms. In this way, birth is a kind of death. The infant awakes in a new world to start a new life, but such awakening is also like falling asleep—like a Shade entering Hades.

As a result of this complicated process, education is not really an act of writing onto a blank slate but a process of *recollection*. As we go through life, we don't so much learn new things as remember what we used to know already. The possibility that this cycle repeats is left open, each incarnation of a soul into flesh being both an awakening and a falling asleep, a birth and

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a death, a forgetting and a remembering. When, on the first track of the album, Morton's Ghost tells us that he has been "reborn," that this is also like a Form being "unborn," that he is waking into darkness ("benighted") rather than light, that his life goes "round and round" in an "unbroken loop," and that he is saying goodbye to his "little memories," Plato nods in agreement. But as in all things, this is just an old idea circling around again—even for Morton, who seven years earlier, told us that he had "started a new beginning suspiciously like the old one" ("Starting Over [Bad Habits]" from the 2010 album *Hunger and Thirst*). And, indeed, all of this living business is suspicious. As is death. Again.

The pain that Morton's Ghost recounts is not merely the pain of living, but the pain of living in this particular world today—a world where one is commanded to remember everything, where one is told that s/he is fundamentally alone, where the best hope that thousands of years of philosophical opining has given us is the dreary existential conclusion that life is absurd, death is legitimately terrifying, and there is no meaning to it other than the meanings we make up. For the ancients, it was hard enough to figure anything out and live happily, but after modernity took over Europe—promising us that technology would cure our ills, that we are all merely selfish biological machines at heart, and that what it means to be is to be fundamentally alone—happiness and fulfillment seem ever farther away. Liberalism is the worldview we have inherited. This is the worldview of Descartes, who worries that he might be completely alone in the universe because it is impossible ever to experience another person's consciousness, so why even believe that they *are* people? It is the worldview of Thomas Hobbes, Descartes' contemporary,

who proposed that we are born alone into a state of nature where there is a “war of all against all,” getting together only by means of vicarious social contracts, leading lives that are ultimately “solitary, nasty, poor, brutish, and short.” It is the worldview of twenty-first century America. Our worldview. The worldview we have under President Donald Trump. The same fundamental worldview we would still have had under President Hillary Clinton. But, thankfully, there are alternative—true and truly radical alternatives.

Communitarians view the self as constituted by roles and relationships, as finding our very being in our enmeshment with others. We are immediately born into an intricate web of interrelations, communitarians argue, that does not merely support our selves but *is* our selves. We live in and through one another, even the supposed flesh boundary of the body a false construct of liberalism. Intercorporeity is the norm, and “your pain is my pain” (as Morton’s Ghost realizes in “Beach-towel”). Indeed, the liberal and communitarian views are struggling to claim the protagonist all throughout the album, throughout his life/death. Does he give in to the world’s demand that he think of himself as alone, no time, even, to love another? Or does he embrace an identity that fixes itself only by means of the ever-changing flow of relations and communal entanglement? The Enlightenment, again, tells us that *logos* (i.e., rationality, reason, logic) will help us answer such questions, but its view of reason is a liberal one: a cold calculation done alone, disinterestedly, like a scientist poking without mercy at a splayed frog until it gives up the ghost, gives up some knowledge. The Greek conception of *logos* was not originally like that. *Logos*, for the Greeks, was always instantiated in a community, a *polis*. For Plato, it emerged dialectically, in conversation, ultimately often ending in *aporia*

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rather than certainty. For Aristotle, one always thinks best with friends.

As we move from floodplains, to flood, to reckoning, to whatever comes next, we hold out hope that we can survive this world of liberal solitude and sadness—that we can survive it precisely by realizing, together, that such interpretations were never really true from the start.

Typhoon is a community as much as a band, enacting Morton's vision but adding to it with a chorus of musical and artistic talents weaving together complicated orchestration with virtuosity. Dave Hall's haunting guitar is, as always, immediately recognizable. Shannon Steele's sopranic intonations ring out as the voice of comfort—the soporific, well-grounded, communal sound of hope and reason. Ferrin's horns and guitar, Tanabe's grounded bass, Fitch, Gallagher, and Hilton's steady pulse—the whole of the band singing and playing multiple instruments—this has always been the heart of the collective that is Typhoon, and *Offerings* is served up to us as something that pushes the idea of a concept album into new territory precisely because of this being-together. The band has never sounded more in synch, more inspired. Recorded in the year of the 50th anniversary of the release of The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, it is hard not to think that Typhoon has moved beyond the idea of being a meta-band, moved beyond wondering if noise is also music and speech is always already a form of singing, moved beyond trying to tie together songs, and instead has merely accepted that one is always a collective meta-self, everything is music, and life—and art—cannot help but hang together meaningfully in the act of living them. This is an offering, a

deep and important work of art we have been given, and we need to listen.

Listening is an active process. To perceive anything at all is to interpret it. We cannot hear noises or sense data. We can only hear ... meaning. But we bring our collective history to the listening whenever we lend an ear. What follows below—indeed, all of what has come so far—is what *I* hear. It is true, I think. But only in the sense that truth is open and infinite, waiting for others to listen along and add their voices to the chorus. This is what I hear, song by song on the album—taking it as an immeasurable gift from Kyle and the band to live in a world with such incredible beauty in it.

As we “WAKE,” we realize that sleep is like an ocean; it comes in waves. But the immanent flood of the amniotic fluid of Lethe is also a first watery baptism into a new kind of existence. We are born into a play, our once-memorized lines suddenly forgot. It is a startling experience leaving one world, slowly forgetting it, and being tossed into another already up and running. Mother brings us food; we soil ourselves; we feel suddenly alone, not even able to control this body and its functions. Being awake is a forgetting. Being born is a forgetting as well. We forget the land of sleep, our dreams, our dream-self. We forget the realm of the Forms, saying, in a foreign tongue *adieu* to our memories, even though we are told that we’re not losing anything, but are, instead, gaining something by offering them up. But as we wake from apparent nothingness, we think we can remember a song. If there is really nothing, then from where did that song come? “Asa Nisi Masa” is the phrase that begins this life—chanted here and elsewhere on the album. We know the phrase from Federico Fellini’s 1963 film *8½*. It is what Guido is thinking

when a clairvoyant correctly reads his mind; it is a memory we see in a flashback to Guido's life as a child when, instead of falling asleep like the other children, he and another boy stare at the eyes in a painted face trying to get them to move by reciting the phrase. "Asa Nisi Masa." It is an Italian "Pig Latin" version of the word, "anima"—"A-sa NI-si Ma-sa"—that is, *soul*. In book III of Aristotle's *De Anima*, the human mind is said to be special. This is true, perhaps, only if finding meaning in meaninglessness, embracing absurdity as reasonable, is special.

"RORSCHACH"'s meditation on first being born/waking is also about being alive in the modern age—the so-called *information age* (which might be better thought of as *the age of missing information*, as Bill McKibben once wrote). The transmission over the wire is distorted so that we can barely understand. We cannot look away from our screens, nor from the idea that the eye projects reality onto an inner private screen trapped in our singular heads. This modern life has nothing to do with real *logos*. Enlightenment reason is not the reason for which Socrates gave his life, drinking up the poison at his execution. But now we are left with only the irrationality of pseudo-science, reading the dregs of the hemlock like tea leaves. The violence of rationality makes itself known all around us and we sadly celebrate it, thinking that the splatter of blood is like a work of art that opens itself to our interpretation, a sanguine ink-blot on an otherwise white light(er) life. We know it's not true, but we cling to the lie. And, we go mad.

Still in the dark. We turn to the "EMPIRICIST" to try to figure out who we are, from where we came. The Greek foundations of this thought are at war with the Judeo-Christian notion of our mother being sculpted from Adam's pulled rib,

but dissonance is our inheritance. In ancient Greece, 100 head of cattle would be sacrificed to the gods at important moments. We are but “a single calf in the hecatomb,” the world telling us we are alone. Occam’s razor having cut away our subjectivity, filleting our personhood as one would a sacrificial bull, we have nothing left to do other than accept the existential dread and dreck of “being and nothingness,” an allusion to Jean-Paul Sartre’s book in which he claims that our existence precedes our essence, that without a creator god, we are free to constitute ourselves as anything we want, though this freedom is a kind of hell. We have wrestled with Søren Kierkegaard’s brand of existentialism before (“The Sickness unto Death” from the album *Hunger and Thirst* begins with us waking up, living alone), but empirical evidence now suggests that it is Albert Camus, Sartre’s shorter-lived French existentialist contemporary, who makes the most of this senselessness. Camus will deem life fundamentally absurd: the idea that we have souls, *anima*, an unthinkable thought. We push a rock up a hill for no reason, only to have it roll down again tomorrow. This Sisyphean task is the only point of life: “Asa Nisi Masa.” Still, our infantile hand reaches up, the existential Möbius strip of being and nothingness like a mobile hung above our crib. As the music changes and the song shifts, we imagine an entire life misspent, an entire life not understanding who we are and what it is all about. Being nothing other than a tabula rasa would make us into a sacrificial calf, served up to the world. And so all of life goes by. We imitate others who are alive, because all it means to be something is to imitate that something. We find a mate. We have children. Our children discover us in old age, looking in the mirror like the protagonist in Luigi Pirandello’s *One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand*, not quite knowing who is there looking back because whoever that is is someone seen

and constituted by others. Each birthday passes like the last, but who is it that was born? *Who* is it that has this being?

In Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, "ALGERNON" is a mouse who gains greater intelligence following an experimental surgery that Charlie, the mentally challenged protagonist, also soon undergoes. The novel, which begins with an epithet from Plato's Republic about the challenges both of leaving and returning to the cave of shadows where there is no Truth, recounts how Charlie and the mouse eventually regress from their genius status back to a state of simplicity (which, we remember, is for Plato the path that we all take when we are born). Charlie's final wish, made while he can still remember that he used to know things but can no longer remember exactly what those things were, is that flowers be placed on Algernon's grave. Trying to remember who one was while asleep—or while still a Form in Plato's realm of Being—is like trying to remember what it was like to understand anything once, to know in general. Being born is like being diagnosed with Alzheimer's, like a dementia in which we forget the truth of what came before, even the truth of love. Now older, we are being examined—apparently by a psychologist, but also by life in general. We pretend to know the answers but then admit that it is all just pretending. Such moments of pain and longing last forever, even if the path of life is short.

The floodplains have set the stage for what is to come, what has already come, what returns. The flood arrives—again.

It is, perhaps, not "UNUSUAL" to realize that truth is immaterial. Language (another translation of *logos*) fails us after all. There are no "systems," no institutions, to save us in this liberal world of violent isolation. There is only the waiting—and the horizon of Jean Baudrillard's "desert of the

real” stretching off just out of frame, a simulacra of a better world we might imagine. Perhaps this is what it means to go mad like Hamlet. The music now becomes crowd noises, nothing particularly “sensical” coming from them, no liberal reason emerging. Until the epitaph is sung—with swords and debts and blood. It is like a revolution (number nine), a day in the life that leads directly into the sudden epiphany of “BEACHTOWEL”: the child that we have (or that we are) has been injured, and it is suddenly clear that the liberal view of a monadic, solipsistic self is utterly false. “Your pain is my pain.” A “single harp” empathically ties us together. It is a truth we once knew before being born to this world. “Don’t you remember?” The question keeps repeating. When *logos* was communal, consanguine? You have cut it out, cut out the way in which we were all together before, before life tricked us into thinking we are all isolated selves. The music changes and changes again. It sounds as if it is several different songs, yet it is all one song, all wrapped up together in a beach towel.

Hamlet’s father’s ghost begins his time with his son by commanding that he listen, and the ghost ends it with the command, “REMEMBER.” We remember. We remember Algeron in the maze, no longer remembering. We remember the force of the world that acts upon us demanding we forget how intertwined we are. And so we forget our enmeshment. It might seem we have dementia—that we are literally “out of our minds”—but the real truth is that we *all* have it, that society is *based* on it. It is a collective madness that we cannot see clearly any longer. We are all “ass-naked in the backyard,” but we are the Emperors of our own new clothes, unable to see the madness. We are all feral wolf-children, putting out fires with gasoline, the punishment being the same as the crime as we splice in fugues where they don’t belong. When the self becomes a black hole bending everything back into

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is singularity, making all of existence just about me, then we *are* doomed. And at the moment that we wake, there's a brief instant when we feel the dread wash over us: I am born to die. And in a panic, we hurt each other. This knowledge will kill us all if we let it. We will forget to live before we die. (The female voice comes in with hope: While it is true that we have no stature if measured up against the infinite—while it is not a question of *if* we'll die, but of how long it will take—it is also true that infinities are never real. Even black holes leak, bleed out, and die. This life, this other's pain, this chance to melt together rather than get our pitchforks out—this is real, too. We must embrace that chance.)

A memory continues. Past song lyrics are interwoven. It is something true, something beautiful. A childhood memory. I am attached to my neighbors, to my community, no sense of time. But in the background, John 14:2 is twisted and distorted over the wire, and we believe for a moment that there are many rooms in the devil's "MANSION." Perhaps it is true. Perhaps there is all too much living space for us to do wrong.

We have unleashed Nemesis, the Greek goddess of revenge who predates even Zeus. Taking her name from νέμειν, a verb meaning "to give someone what is due," Nemesis' main job is to punish humans for their *hubris*, especially for their arrogance in thinking that they know more than what they know. She will bring the reckoning. She knows nothing about mercy.

Since the time of *White Lighter's* "Morton's Fork," we have been obsessed with the fact that none of us lives forever. "Let it go, let it go, let it go," came the refrain of the female voice of reason back then. She returns here, our head under the "COVERINGS," telling us that we know what we have to do, even if we don't do it. That we have to *let it go*. Not only is the battle unwinnable, but it is war we are fighting on false prem-

ises. We are not alone and cursed to die. The images we have allowed to frighten ourselves have softer edges at the break of dawn. We are all in this together. “Every part of you,” she assures us, “I feel in me.”

We are still remembering. All the way back to the illness and death of *Hunger and Thirst's* “CPR/Claws Pt. II.” We are still remembering. Caught up in the shadows, in the “CHIAR-SCURO” that makes it so hard to see. We are still remembering. The self we were who wished to save everyone in the family from the supernova in “Morton’s Fork” has come to realize that the thermodynamic heat death of the universe taking everything to absolute zero (at which point time stops still) is inevitable. There is no possibility of keeping anyone safe. Even the laws of entropy demand: we are all involved in something irreversible. We are afraid. One way or the other, the suffering always goes away. We’ll be buried. But she is right. We realize that there will be part of us buried in those we love, part of us, then, still impossibly living by means of *their* memories, *their* living. It is the ultimate communitarian realization. But it is a realization that does not last.

The shadows grow “DARKER.” It is time to be judged. We tried to be good, to love our neighbors and live in the light. We are, after all, the same man who once announced in “The Honest Truth” (from the band’s 2011 EP, *A New Kind of House*) that we are true even if we are not always honest, and that we should be kind to all of our neighbors. But we failed to take our own advice then. That chorus of voices warned us years ago that we had let the devil into our home. But now it turns out that the devil’s mansion has many rooms, and we might have been living in *his* home all along. And so, frightened as we are, we beg for help as we face the end. As in “Claws Pt. II,” we want to live and don’t want to live: something’s got to give. The water rises again. *Listen*. We try hard

to follow the sound: being “self-contained” was a lie all along. The greatest lie. The one Nemesis punishes us for believing without guilt or hesitation.

Kurt Vonnegut's 1961 short story, “Harrison Bergeron,” imagines a dystopian reality where people are forced to be the same: the strong carry around weights to hold them down, the beautiful wear masks to hide their features, the intelligent have radios implanted in their ears to distract them and keep them from thinking clearly. “BERGERON” rebels—unsuccessfully. The fatal flaw in the overall story, however, is that the government has tried to make everyone the *same* rather than make everyone *equal*. Equality is always just and true, but it *thrives* on difference; it never suppresses it. At this point in the narrative of *Offerings*, facing the wrath of Nemesis, we imagine we, too, could be a rebel—a rebel against our own modern world. The female voice comes in again, suggesting that we accept that life is finite but that being good is an intersubjective action that is still worthwhile. It's not about trying to “be somebody,” but just to do something good here and now. The former is a liberal ideal, the latter properly communitarian. Perhaps we cannot fight, but even if we do, are we a rebel for the right cause?

“ARIADNE” was the daughter of Minos, the king who controlled the labyrinth, home of the Minotaur. When Theseus was forced into the labyrinth, Ariadne aided him by giving him a sword and a ball of string to unwind and find his way out. She is the one to turn to when there are a million doorways and we have lost our way. But regrettably, in the final moments of the reckoning, we recede once more into the sadness of our existential fears: no time to love someone else, no need to know one's neighbors, no reason to think of one's self as anything other than a sacrificial offering. Everyone is a victim while at the same time being a perpetrator: hostages

to time, terrorist aggressors against each other. Other people are no longer constitutive of the self, but are back to being, at best, an audience for me or, at a Cartesian worst, a mere hallucination. No chance of being buried in the community, in those we love, as we had hoped earlier. Instead, we fear being buried in the floodplains—and being promptly forgot. This is the dream of being lost, one final and tragic nightmare before death, no king's daughter to lead any of us out. "Asa Nisi Masa"—again. We affirm our martyrdom, though pray it needn't be so.

The ultimate absurdity follows: life after life. The afterparty.

The alarm clock rang in Lennon and McCartney's "A Day in the Life," and we "woke up" and "fell out of bed." Now, the offering concludes with a postmodern "SLEEP" that ends our final day in the life—and ends the album of *Offerings*. As the guitar chords progress, soothing us while carrying us away, a major chord to a seventh, the acoustic strumming as percussive as it is melodic, the voice sweeter and yet sadder than it has ever been, we prepare to return to the abyss. It is true that life is full of sorrow and grief as well as joy and happiness. It is a mixed bag. It is as surreal as a Fellini film. And forgetting seems to be an act that destroys a world. But as the sleep of death arrives, we finally once and for all accept that we are not alone, even if we fear what comes next and beg to be held, to be held down to earth, to be held alive. *If only the love of others could hold us down, keep us in place, and anchor us to this world so that we could never float away. If only we never had to sleep, to die, to be less than whole.* So long. *Adieu, adieu*, but don't so much remember me as agree to meet me—some other time. And then, as the falling asleep continues, as the song progresses, it does not remain the same. And the story does not conclude. Sliding past Lethe's shores, fragments of past songs reappear and are forgot, the sounds of the liv-

I Am Trying Hard to Follow the Sound: Meditations
on Accepting Typhoon's *Offerings*

ing world, of the musical moments that first pulled us into wakefulness, now begin to calm us and take us away. They drone. They become more than mere sound. They repeat. They wash over us. We walk down a long hallway, open the door, and ... join the party. It is a surprise party—the only sort of party it could ever have been. A party already in progress. An afterparty for an after-life that is out of time and out of place. The old Typhoon sing-along moment that we fans have come to love over the years finally appears on the album as the community embraces us. And we learn how welcoming it will be to shed our selves and join everyone else in a place where talking, laughing, and even just *being* together is a form of music—the sort of music that John Cage perhaps told us about years before he, too, joined the river, the sort of music that transcends anything that a philosopher can elucidate further with a flurry of unsung words. From Plato to Sartre, we built our ivory towers, and we counted up all of our victories, but our strongest moments came when we were weakest, when we were together, when we didn't look for reason to figure it all out coldly and solipsistically, but instead found a new way to be whole. And this is the end, this is the end, this is the way the world ends. Every album commands, *Listen*. Every life commands, *Live*. Every death commands

If Sisyphus had to push the finest indie rock up a hill each night, it would surely sound something like the offerings of Typhoon—mournful, knowing, yet unswervingly looking for hope even if unsure we deserve it. Perhaps the saddest thing about dying is leaving a world with such incredible—
incredibly true and incredibly beautiful—works of art in it as *Offerings*. We are forever caught up in the absurdity of an existence that demands suffering and loss, but eternity may well yet smile on us all at the afterparty, after the long walk,

after the tellings and retellings, after we realize that we walk together, after that which animates us turns from Asa Nisi Masa to Stillsa Nesssi. We should all be so lucky as to wake up—or fall asleep—and find Typhoon there already, pushing the rock and testing the flood-waters before us.

And it is thus, with Camus, that we must imagine Morton's Ghost happy.

Book Review

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Religions Across Television Genres: *Community, Orange Is the New Black, The Walking Dead, and Supernatural*. Valenzano III, Joseph M. and Erika Engstrom. New York: Peter Lang, 2019. 162 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-4331-5280-1

Reviewed by Jarret Keene

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Communications Studies professors and English academics approach writing about visual pop narratives very differently. The former relish linking communication theories to films in an effort to reveal hidden meaning and manipulation—for instance, applying Uncertainty Reduction theory (when people rely on the initial interactions that occur before *actual* communication plays out) in, say, the Harry Potter franchise. The latter borrow critical terms reserved for genre-literature and apply them to Hollywood releases in an attempt to remove barriers between the so-called “low” and “high” culture—for example, the male gaze and *Pretty Woman*. The goal, however, is the same. Indeed, the pop culture-attuned comm scholar and lit-crit pedagogue each argue for the relevancy of entertainment that is adored by the masses and eschewed by serious scholars.

The contrast in *assumptions* is more pronounced. Communications people operate from the premise that *all* entertainment is a form of communication and therefore merits study. English folks, meanwhile, categorize pop culture as either reifying inequalities (of race, class, and gender) or

undermining these oppressive structures. (Better to *deconstruct*, naturally.) The end result: outside of conferences like the Far West Popular Culture Association, the disciplines of Communications and English speak from disparate vantages and in unique terms. Fortunately, Joseph Valenzano and Erika Engstrom offer a riveting book of analyses that should intrigue readers across the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, *Religion Across Television Genres* is as binge-inducing as the programs discussed. Moreover, Valenzano and Engstrom unite Communications and English under a glorious cultural-studies banner with a rigorous, if qualitative, textual analysis that never ceases to enthrall.

Four programs are covered, long-running series of which, unless you're living under the proverbial rock, you've likely seen at least one episode in a hotel, gym, or waiting room. The shows span genres and networks, starting with ensemble comedy (NBC's *Community*), moving on to prison drama (Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*), strolling over to zombie epic (AMC's *The Walking Dead*), with a final, fun-loving chapter focused on a dark fantasy-romance (CW's *Supernatural*). The authors do a bang-up job in their introduction with a review of scholarship devoted to religious themes in popular media entertainment, laying the groundwork for an incisive exploration of exactly how these TV series continue to push religious elements in twenty-first-century Western narratives.

The chapter titled "The Unseen Order of the Study Group: NBC's *Community* and Religious Humor" teases out the many religious moments—subtle and flagrant and frivolous—through all six seasons of the series, moments the average viewer might gloss, given how quickly the jokes land. Citing Kenneth Burke's representative anecdote (the theo-

rizing of language as “a part of” rather than “apart from” reality), Valenzano and Engstrom pay close attention to how each character represents a specific religion—from evangelical Christianity (the motherly African-American character of Shirley Bennett) to strident atheism (anarcho-vegetarian Britta Perry) to creepy cultism (moist-towelette magnate Pierce Hawthorne, performed brilliantly by comedic legend Chevy Chase, who belongs to the fictional faith known as Reformed Neo-Buddhism Laser Lotus). It’s fascinating to note how this chapter underscores the fresh approach that *Community*—a show about a community-college study group that boasts a cross-section of every(wo)man misfits—brings to TV-comedy writing, a collective endeavor that often results in stale, “groupthink” humor. Most sit-coms sound like they’re joke-injected by the same writers, but as Valenzano and Engstrom observe, *Community*’s “complex nature and repeated accolades make it worthy of attention—especially when considered within the context of its satirical treatment of religion” (31). Readers familiar with the show will marvel at how deftly and kindheartedly the show treats the subject of religion without ever being saccharine or insulting to its characters and audience.

Orange Is the New Black, a women’s-penitentiary drama that has been tagged rather cynically as “*Hogan’s Heroes* in jumpsuits,” employs a more controversial approach due to its tragicomic nature, and its ready display of strict Christianity’s negative impact on certain characters—like Black Cindy, who converted from Christianity to Judaism. Again, through their close reading of *OITNB* (which is in its seventh and final season), Valenzano and Engstrom categorize the show’s four faith-centered themes: religion as character identity, religion as divisive force, religion as con game, and religion as redemptive path. But it’s when the authors construe *OITNB*’s

“homiletic Tao” that they touch upon the show’s enduring charm: “[O]ne can read the various narratives described in this chapter as forming an overall homily, an unseen order regarding the role of religion in a place of penitence: to find oneself is more important than finding God” (89). And yes, it’s surprising to learn just how much religious content runs throughout this incredibly popular Netflix show produced by a secular Hollywood for a demographically diverse audience.

The resurrection of the dead is inherently biblical, and the biggest zombie TV show in the history of popular culture seems an ideal vehicle for addressing the nexus of religion, horror, and politics. In “Redefining Religious Boundaries in AMC’s *The Walking Dead*,” Valenzano and Engstrom zero in on a pair of unforgettable episodes—the season 2 opener (“What Lies Ahead”), followed by episode 5 of season 3 (“Four Walls and a Roof”). In the case of “Four Walls,” the authors succeed in establishing an overlooked comparison to biblical film epics. Here, Rick Grimes, a former police officer turned apocalypse-survivor and the show’s main protagonist, transforms into a vigilante to machete-slash a group of cannibals (living humans who eat murdered flesh, unlike zombies who consume the living) led by a character named Gareth, the similarities are interesting to ponder. As Valenzano and Engstrom observe:

Indeed, as Rick kills Gareth, his bearded and grizzled appearance and the violent way he continues to strike the evildoer evokes an image of a vengeful prophet (one may recall the scenes from Hollywood films such as the 1956 Cecil B. DeMille classic *The Ten Commandments*, for example, when in a rage, Moses throws down

the stone tablets at the Israelites who have turned their back on God). The framing of Rick as slightly above the backdrop of the stained glass windows, a visual symbol of the Church itself, enhances the notion that his justice is replacing God's justice. (111)

Rick's character arc is an unforgettable and deeply shattering moment, and Valenzano and Engstrom remind viewers of the show's symbolic power and imaginative risk-taking. After all, we are meant to simultaneously cry for Rick and cheer him on, which in some ways changes us, too.

Finally, the least critically acclaimed (and arguably most teen-oriented) show of the bunch: *Supernatural*. Valenzano and Engstrom summarize it smartly as "one of the most popular shows you might never have heard of." Indeed, if you're a professor, your students are likely addicted to the series while your peers will respond: "Super-*what?*" In any case, there is no condescension expressed toward the show's ridiculous premise: two brothers, Sam and Dean, hit the hidden highways of America to fight vampires and other monsters. (Think of it as *Route 66* crossed with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.) Instead, Valenzano and Engstrom dig deeply into subplots and character motivations to reveal the philosophical and theological riches that *Supernatural* offers viewers. Whether addressing the brothers' heartfelt search for God or their sibling conflict (Cain and Abel, right?) or the way in which *Supernatural* "subtly, though powerfully, upends traditional depictions of the Almighty" (128), the authors will make the most skeptical reader curious enough to check out an episode, which you most definitely will after finishing this chapter.

Valenzano and Engstrom's conclusion isn't surprising for anyone who enjoys teaching World Literature—or at least the

more religious texts like the Hebrew Scriptures. The authors see in each of these shows an “emphasis placed on tolerance of different faith traditions,” the storylines lacking “an endorsement of any religious tradition beyond a monotheistic faith” (151). Of course, religious themes are no guarantee a series will prosper: “the television landscape remains littered with shows that did not survive,” including, it is noted, the 2006 NBC show *The Book of Daniel*, about a drug addict who converses with Jesus. Still, despite waning church attendance and a decline in the percentage of people labeling themselves “religious,” it seems that, to paraphrase Valenzano and Engstrom, a story isn’t compelling if the characters don’t seek the touch of the divine. *Religions Across Television Genres* is a must-have book for anyone who studies pop culture and religion; it deserves a spot on every TV connoisseur’s bookshelf.

Book Review

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Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race. By Rukmini Pande. University of Iowa Press, 2018. 256 pp.

ISBN: 978-1609386184

Reviewed by Erika Abad

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

As a young Latina, it was a rare television show that represented immigration, bicultural identity, and gender in a way to which I could relate. Now that there's a character, Mel, on a television show, *Charmed*, that represents my gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, I faithfully follow the show. Part of how long it took relies on who is perceived as the neutral viewer, and the potential fan of any show. On social media, I engage with other fans, hoping that increased visibility of support for the show will guarantee another season. Other shows that have strong followings, however, remind me that there's no guarantee, even if shows and actors interact with fans via social media with the intent of supporting our efforts in promoting the show. As much as I am a fan of *Charmed*, talking about the community building and cultural production efforts that fans dedicate a great deal of time to, I understand myself to be on the periphery of fandom. By periphery, I mean that I love the show, but that I don't participate in weekly rituals around it such as reading or writing fan fiction, creating fan vids, or other forms of fan art, let alone reviewing or revising the content created by fans. Students of mine who study fandom or who are active in fandom have shown me, through their attention to detail regarding their commu-

nities, how much more would be required in order to feel a stronger part of any particular fandom.

Social media interactions via fanfiction, show-saving campaigns, and live discussions, my students have come to inform me, are worthy sites of inquiry regarding the inequalities that emerge in media consumption. I work with students at a minority-serving institution, so our conversations often engage in the extent to which we are on the screen as well as leading fandom conversations. In *Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race*, Rukmini Pande critiques the lack of discussions of whiteness in the examinations of fandoms and fan products because “whiteness is allowed to operate without being named as such, race may be considered as an additional and incidental layer to any analysis rather than as a factor at its core” (7). After building the first fandom studies class examining the role of race, class, gender, and sexuality, *Squee* has become the text that bring to light the disparities my research assistant, Nicole Espinosa, was making clear to me regarding women loving women, representation, and fandom community building. Rukmini Pande’s *Squee from the Margins Race and Fandom* begins to address the gap in fandom studies scholarship my years of working with Nicole Espinosa had made clear.¹

Pande argues that all that goes into fan community building, fan fiction, fan art, and fan conventions require attention to the racialization of fan visibility, fan inclusion, and fan labor. Throughout her introduction, she critiques the marginal attention given to race, whether it be in special issues focusing on race and fandom studies or special sections of books and journals that are dedicated examinations of the role of race. Pande wants to critique the neutrality of whiteness in fandom studies because of its inherent role in the promotion of

specific characters' humanity, like *Hannibal's*, that would not otherwise be permitted or celebrated through fan fiction of the character in discussion were of African, Latinx, or Asian descent.

Teaching at a minority-serving institution, where my students and I often talk about the quality of representation of our communities in screen, Pande's text speaks to their realities that fans, as consumers, and as critical feminist scholars wanting to complicate their participation in consuming media that doesn't represent them, which sets it up for finding narrow bases of fandom community support. While there are larger texts like Paul Booth's anthology *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, Pande's text is an affordable addition to the revision of my fandom course, given the first-generation, nontraditional college student population I serve.

Assigning texts that align with my students' experiences and that decenter whiteness, Pande's book provides an avenue to maintain that pedagogical ethic all the while contributing to the field of fan and fandom studies. Pande's chapter "The Fanfiction Kink Meme," for example, brings the fields of erotica, pornography, and romance novel studies in conversation with each other in order to frame (1) the pleasure readers receive from what can be considered textual pornography, (2) the ways these fields overlap while maintaining distinct approaches, and (3) the role of racialization in the construction of characters in fanfiction. Pande writes that "Santana Lopez (played by Naya Rivera), whose canon portrayal leans heavily on the stereotype of the promiscuous Latina, is most often placed in sexual situations that highlight this promiscuity" (182). Fans' willingness to perpetuate stereotypes for their pleasure, such as the Lopez example shows, expands the

potential dialog and reflection my fandom students can have regarding the content they consume and the communities in which they engage. Scholarship such as Pande's work speaks to my students' ongoing struggles to find themselves represented and supported in their fan communities. Predominantly white institutions' fandom or media studies courses could use the text to question the extent to which the stereotypes that give us pleasure sustain other forms of inequality.

Pande's attention to fandom studies' inequalities is not focused on U.S. racial constructs, rather, Pande wants fandom studies scholars to consider the limitations of U.S.-centric research. She argues that fandom studies presume, unless otherwise stated, that the average "internet user is still presumed to be straight, white, and male, as well as located in the Global North," which frames how those who do not fit into those categories as "a niche to be considered," and tokenized in scholarship on fandom studies (51). The neutralizing of the Internet user as a Global North white, straight, cis-man who is most likely able-bodied limits the layered interactions and political economic interventions participating in fan communities provides us.

The breadth of Pande's text can invite any scholar to use any single chapter as a case study that would warrant more critical examination of fan activism, fans' understanding of the role of writing and reading sex, as well as the racialized and gendered disparities of citations within fandom studies. This book successfully explores intersectionality and globalization as they need to be better integrated in fandom studies. Its survey approach, where each chapter has a literature review grounded in case studies that highlight the needs, touches on a wide variety of topics that will need to be complemented by in-depth scholarship or even curated social media content to

best allow students to unpack the glocalized nuances Pande begins to discuss. Further, to extend Pande's call to globalize the study of fandom productions and activism, future students and I will need to be mindful of how the languages we speak afford us opportunities to interact with others. I look forward to teaching Pande's book against special issues of *Transformative Works* focused on queer and people of color fandoms in the fall of 2020. Given the fieldnotes I have about participating in my own fandoms as well as from attending fan conventions over the years, Pande's text will be instrumental in helping me unpack my observations and experiences without having to center or prioritize or center white fandom studies scholarship.

NOTE

- 1 Espinosa, Nicoles @decolesinize "The Clexalogy 101 class of your dreams" <https://www.facebook.com/colesmcgee/videos/10103655348764178/> (17, Oct 17); Espinosa has given lectures, and presentations regarding the white dominance of women-loving-women in Clexa fandom as well as other shows. Espinosa has forthcoming projects regarding that white dominance and the aforementioned lecture is their preliminary to use Chicana Feminism to frame the healing potential and limitations in queer women fan creative content.

Book Review

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Television Comedy and Femininity: Queering Gender. By Rosie White. I.B. Tauris & Co, 2018. 226 pages.

978-1-78453-362-5, pp. viii–226.

Reviewed by Clayton N. Cobb

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

While many people flick on their favorite show after dinner as a means of checking out of the late capitalism existences that they inhabit from nine to five, Rosie White's *Television Comedy and Femininity: Queering Gender* reminds readers that television is unusually rich with critique of those very existences. As White exposes in her intricately researched yet accessibly written scholarship, TV comedies have openly challenged heteronormativity, heterofemininity, and hegemonic masculinity since the earliest days of network sitcom, and "unruly" women have always held an integral role in those challenges (63–64). White notes, "Funny women are always already odd, other, and out of step with the fiction of hegemonic femininity," paving the way for the queer readings and reorientations that she enacts throughout her work (13). White uncovers, recovers, and deconstructs feminine queerness, demonstrating how gender and sexual orientation have developed within television narrative through feminist and postfeminist eras.

White's book covers the extensive critical ground in relatively few pages, offering queer readings of landmark American television classics such as *I Love Lucy*, *Sex and the City*, *30 Rock*, and *Parks and Recreation*; lesser-known American sit-

coms like *The Burns and Allan Show*; and British television hits like *Smack the Pony*. While White thoroughly catalogs representations of the “funny peculiar” nature of unconventional femininity, *Television Comedy and Femininity* by no means lets anyone off the critical hook (12). White’s analysis acts as a critical pharmakon, identifying both the poison and potential remedy disseminated through television comedy depictions of femininity. White levies critical blows at obvious transgressors *Friends* and *Two and a Half Men* as well as less apparent perpetrators *The Big Bang Theory*, *30 Rock*, and *Parks and Recreation*. White observes that while many comedy shows launch themselves featuring explicit challenges to heteronormative and hegemonic gender identifications, the pressures of capitalist Hollywood inevitably result in a capitulation to heteronormative romantic pairings and displays of hegemonic gender behaviors (118).

Rosie White’s *Television Comedy and Femininity: Queering Gender* is an enjoyable read because it speaks to what we find familiar, yet in the familiar White finds the queer, the ambivalent, and sometimes the problematic, exposing the need for continued re-readings and reorientations of even our most beloved pop culture productions.

Book Review

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Gender, Science, and Authority in Women's Travel Writing: Literary Perspectives on the Discourse of Natural History. Michelle Medeiros. Lexington Books, 2019. 213 pages.

978-1-4985-7975-9, pp. v–213.

Reviewed by Heather Lusty

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Women have traditionally been excluded from the area of scientific discovery and discussion for a variety of reasons. They were excluded from giving talks to professional societies around the world solely based on their sex. Alternate ways of undertaking fieldwork and disseminating discoveries have always proved a challenge—one surmounted in creative ways. Michelle Medeiros' new book, exploring the ways in which female scientists shared their knowledge without transgressing the boundaries of gender, analyzes “the interrelations among authority, gender, and the scientific discipline of natural history in the works of transatlantic women travelers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (1). It is a unique and important contribution to narratives of scientific exploration and the formation of narratives in public discourse.

Medeiros gives a brief history of the traditional ways women have been excluded from scientific work in the Introduction, noting that the gendered character of scientific discourse has regularly portrayed women as incapable of intellectual production (being naturally more suited to reproduction and

motherhood, of course) (5). She notes that historians of science have regularly exposed the systemic neglect of women scientists, who often had to have their observations published under a pen name, or their husbands' names, to get it out into the world. The list of women mentioned here who have been robbed of credit for their discoveries and contributions falls far short, I suspect, of being comprehensive.

The unique approach in this narrative is the focus on women travelers—themselves the focus of scholarship in a variety of fields—and the ways in which their travels enabled them to gain access to fieldwork as well as a way to circulate their discoveries under an acceptable and nonthreatening umbrella of public discourse. Gender studies research has unleashed a compendium of archival source material revealing just how prevalent women's research and discussion in natural science were (8). Travel allowed women unprecedented opportunities to use their race in their favor and surpass gender limitations (8); in other words, by leaving their own national and social spheres, they were able to stretch their wings and apply themselves to any and all areas of interest.

The book's four chapters each focus on specific women travelers, and how they approached natural history discourse, negotiating their unique contexts and idiosyncrasies through their writings (15). The first chapter examines the travel narratives of Maria Graham in nineteenth-century Brazil. Graham used her position as a social explorer to create opportunities to discuss scientific subjects even beyond the boundaries of natural science, often refuting her male predecessors' impressions of Latin America (16). The second chapter presents Cuban traveler Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's travel accounts to Europe and the Spanish and French Pyrenees, which frame her transatlantic subjectivity and literary authority (16). Chapter 3 focuses on Brazilian educator

and writer Nísia Floresta, whose travels through Europe (between 1856 and 1865) were the basis of her natural history discourse; Floresta used natural history to depict her travels, inscribing herself in this tradition by creating a literary authority that contributed to her visibility in Europe (17). The final chapter focuses on Doris Cochran, an American herpetologist from the Smithsonian. Cochran's strategies in Latin America focused on overcoming the gender constraints that overshadowed the American scientific community in the early twentieth century (17). Using these four female transatlantic subjects, from different countries and with diverse educational backgrounds and scientific interests, Medeiros traces the ways in which these women leveraged their travel to gain social access to public discourse in their fields, and established themselves as authoritative transatlantic subjects with unique, valuable knowledge in their respective fields (18).

The only halfhearted criticism of this tome is that it is too short and too focused—while certainly the innovative ways Latin American female scientists included themselves in natural fieldwork and shared their discoveries with the public, despite the limitations on the venues in which they could do so, are valuable and underexplored historical knowledge, I suspect that these approaches were shared by women across the globe. As Medeiros notes in the conclusion (would could well be the foundation for another, wider study), the “under-representation of women in the history of sciences and in the construction of knowledge is a universal problem. In order to further uncover and better understand their role[s], a more comprehensive dialogue between the sciences and the humanities is needed” (185). Until there is true dialogue, the accomplishments of female scientists will always take a backseat to that of their male counterparts.

Book Review

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Transitive Cultures: Anglophone Literature of the Transpacific. By Christopher B. Patterson. Rutgers University Press, 2018. 256 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-8135-9186-5

Reviewed by Julianna Crame

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The United States' relationships to different, nonwhite cultures have always been tumultuous, as the nation tries to balance its imperial and neocolonial interests against its disdain for influxes of various groups of immigrants. The current political climate best illustrates the two seemingly opposing masks the United States wears: one of extreme racist vitriol that denigrates minorities in the name of white/American exceptionalism and one that appears to celebrate racial differences in the name of multiculturalism. But these two conflicting viewpoints may share more than most realize, for both can be powerful tools to uphold the white hegemony. In his book *Transitive Cultures: Anglophone Literature of the Transpacific*, Christopher B. Patterson examines how various authors of Southeast Asian literature question concepts of multiculturalism and diversity to demonstrate how pluralist governments use these beliefs to rule over heterogeneous populations. Through his analysis of various Anglophone texts centered on Southeast Asian populations, Patterson showcases how many are beginning to resist ideologies that insist on shallow, strictly defined notions of cultural authenticity.

Patterson covers a mixture of literature in a very deliberate manner, and his terminology is key to his viewpoint. He chooses to use the term “Anglophone literature” over Asian, Asian American, or some other variation, allowing him to cover a broad range of literature from the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia, as well as Southeast Asian migrant experiences in North America. From a theoretical perspective, Patterson’s terminology emphasizes his purpose of sliding between different countries and borders while also alluding to the colonial influence that impacts these English-speaking Asian cultures. These purposes are further illustrated through Patterson’s definition of “transitive cultures,” his titular term, that goes beyond the common perception of transition as becoming something else or achieving an “authentic identity.” Instead, “transitive cultures” cross the borders of various identity markers to recognize that identity formation is a complex, ongoing process that requires people to navigate colonial histories and their own changing relationships to their cultures. By focusing on transition as a position between different conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and nation, Patterson gives focus to those with constantly shifting, less clear-cut identities, such as mixed-race or queer Asians.

Transitive Cultures is divided into six chapters in three sections, with each chapter comparing two different texts of various cultural backgrounds. In Part I: “Histories,” Patterson looks at how some Southeast Asian texts resist the official histories pluralist governments produce, as these governments use diversity and multiculturalism to claim harmony among disparate groups and appear progressive while preserving racial, gendered, and class hierarchies. Patterson’s decision to compare texts from different Southeast Asian cultures here and throughout the book highlights how these cultures may share strategies of resistance.

Part II: “Mobilities” centers on Patterson’s examination of how “novels of transpacific travel” showcase the shifts in various racial, gender, and sexual identities that can occur when protagonists must question and compare their identities at home versus abroad (27). His readings of Peter Bancho’s *Cebu* and Lydia Kwa’s *This Place Called Absence* as social satires instead of social realist texts are particularly compelling. This viewpoint, which goes against the prevailing scholarship that reads these works at face-value, showcases how the protagonists’ complex relationships to the United States and Canada, respectively, lead them to denigrate and abandon the motherland in a manner appealing to Western audiences.

In Part III: “Genres,” Patterson analyzes how the “literary tone, form, and style” of novels can challenge preconceived notions on “diversity, tolerance, and racial harmony” (28). Patterson’s focus on the understudied genre of Anglophone speculative fiction brings to light how Asian authors may move beyond the nation-state to assert that these issues take place on a larger scale. Yet, the complexities and possible consequences for this broader perspective are not lost on Patterson, as he utilizes his own experiences of using a more ethnic sounding pen name, Kawika Gulliermo, to give readers a direct insight into how cultural currency is used in the publishing world. This personal connection illustrates the great debate for or against cultural authenticity given that this concept can be used to reinforce both traditional notions of white representation of minorities and shifting minority identities that do not fit neatly into strict categories of race, gender, and sexuality.

While Patterson focuses on how various pieces of Southeast Asian Anglophone literature expose the abuses done in the name of multiculturalism and tolerance, his scholarly purpose is to question and open a dialogue on these issues rather

than unquestionably condemn them. This perspective, which has been gaining traction among various Asian American scholars like Lisa Lowe, makes *Transitive Cultures* appealing to various Asian American studies and cultural studies scholars. Asian American literary studies are on the rise and ever expanding, and Patterson's book is a strong addition to this field. Patterson's literary analysis is also clear and innovative, meaning literary scholars, fans of those novels, or even those who are interested in Southeast Asian culture but have not read those pieces can enjoy reading this book. Anyone from or a part of the cultures Patterson examines, and especially those who exist in a transitive state, would also be interested. Patterson's critical perspectives on the institutionalization of diversity and multiculturalism make *Transitive Cultures* a necessary read for all given how these concepts permeate U.S. culture and are often used to uphold the Western, white hegemony they claim to fight against.

Book Review

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The Paris Husband: How It Really Was Between Ernest and Hadley Hemingway.

Scott Donaldson. Simply Charly, 2018. 158 pages.

ISBN: 978-1943657681

Reviewed by Carl Rollyson

Independent Scholar

One of the rules of reviewing is that you don't pay attention to blurbs—or puffs as the British like to call them. Such testimonials, it is supposed, are a form of tribute, not honest criticism. But, sometimes the touting is determinative, telling you something important about a book's provenance, and also something that the author of the book is not quite willing to say for himself. In this instance, the blurbs are built right into the beginning of the book—not on the back cover as is customary—but inside the text proper before the author tunes up. This is not unprecedented: This form of fanfare occurs most often in paperbacks using a drumroll of authorities whose own achievements, it is assumed, entitle them to their encomiums of the author and his work.

“If there were a Mount Rushmore of Hemingway scholars, Scott Donaldson would belong,” proclaims Mark Cirino, editor of the Reading Hemingway series. I wonder. Carlos Baker, the first comprehensive and still indispensable biographer has his place, but then what? Michael Reynolds's multi-volume work would seem to qualify him. And then? Jeffrey Meyers? James Mellow? Kenneth Lynn? Peter Griffin? What about more recent entrants: James Hutchisson, Mary Dear-

born, and Richard Bradford? Unlike settled law, there is no settled biography, and even law is settled only so long as a precedent is not overturned.

Donaldson's advocates imply something is amiss or missing in Hemingway biography. So, Valerie Hemingway (*Running with the Bulls: My Years with the Hemingways*) lauds Donaldson's "keen new insight into Hemingway's elusive character." Kirk Curnutt (*Coffee with Hemingway*) claims Donaldson "does us the immense favor of separating certifiable facts from the inevitable conjecture and dramatizing that have come to encrust these scenes from a marriage." Similarly, J. Gerald Kennedy (*Imagining Paris*) recommends the "separating fact from fiction," and Jackson R. Bryer is impressed with how Donaldson "debunks myths promulgated by previous biographers and critics"—evidently a sorry lot. The caper comes with the final verdict from Suzanne de Gizzo (*The Hemingway Review*): "Donaldson sets the record straight about Hemingway's precious, tumultuous—and legendary—Paris years."

This puffery would not matter so much if the book, in fact, delivered what is promised. Or if the author showed in detail how his predecessors got it wrong, and perhaps, why. Donaldson does do this kind of forensic work in *The Impossible Craft: Literary Biography* (2016), and I was hoping for more of the same in *The Paris Husband*. What goes wrong in this book may have something to do with the format. There are no source notes, which seems the *modus operandi* of the Simply Charly series, aimed at a broad audience, some of whom may not want to be bothered with sorting through the evidence. As a result, we have ungainly sentences that begin, for example: "As Miami University of Ohio professor Donald Daiker has pointed out ..." All this to say certain Hemingway letters were "more breezy than passionate."

In his introduction, Donaldson makes no claims for his book's originality. He simply retells the story of how Hemingway's first wife, Hadley, packed nearly all of his manuscripts into a valise, put them aboard a train en route to her beloved husband, and then suffered the agony of loss when someone stole the precious cargo while she briefly went out to get a sandwich and a drink. At this point, Donaldson cannot do better than quote Gioia Dilberto's "first-rate biography," *Hadley* (1992): "The perfection of the marriage was tainted by the loss, and things were never quite the same again."

The introduction is a good setup, if a typical biographer's ploy: Begin with a dramatic incident that will be explained in detail later on. Donaldson is good at the specifics that create a sense of immediacy. So we are told that Hadley left her luggage to get a bottle of Evian water, although we are not told, and Donaldson, alas, does not know what kind of sandwich Hadley ate—or even if, in her grief, she managed to finish it. Even trivial details contribute to the authenticity of a scene, and when some are lacking we are reminded that biography, no matter how thorough, is a book with missing parts. It is the missing parts that will occupy this review—what to do with them?

Donaldson admires Hadley. Under the impress of a domineering mother, she broke out of her late Victorian confinement with Hemingway's help, although that meant making her into a she-Hemingway, perfected when he had them cut their hair to the same length as part of the sexual games they invented and celebrated. Once again, Donaldson cannot do better than quote Dilberto's description of Hadley as "unpretentious, submissive, intelligent, sexy, tough in spirit." Submissive and tough? That would seem oxymoronic. But in this case, it is true: Hadley was perfectly willing to rough it with Ernest, to enjoy his sports and frolics, and so to be the perfect

wife for him. She had a mind of her own that was his. And the marriage worked, mostly, until Hadley, with child, was no longer in the same position to indulge her husband's every whim, even as plenty of other women were around willing to give this handsome and ambitious writer a go.

Hadley did not deceive herself. She understood that her husband thrived on the attention of other women. But, he was the man who had liberated her, and she could never forget that no matter what else he did. Or so I gather from Donaldson's narrative. He explores what Hadley meant to Hemingway and his terrible guilt over abandoning her for Pauline Pfeiffer, but it wasn't just the marriage that was not quite the same after the valise loss. He rejected the loyal and good part of himself. After leaving Hadley, Ernest suffered a blow to his self-esteem that he could never quite repair. He would recur over the years to that fateful decision to end his first marriage, which represented a turning point in his character, which Donaldson does not quite grasp—so transfixed is he with the disappearance of those manuscripts—about which more anon.

To understand why Hemingway left Hadley, Donaldson's next move is to a section entitled "Life Before Hadley." He briefly rehearses his hero's obsessive love for Agnes von Kurowsky, the World War I nurse, who assuaged his battlefield wounds and who first encouraged his attentions but then broke off their relations saying she was too old for him. Eight years separated them, but that did not matter to him. He wanted her, and she had rejected him. "He emerged," Donaldson suggests, "with a determination not to risk giving too much of himself to anyone else ever again." So, we get accounts of his brief involvements with other women, which really don't prove much, especially since Donaldson, far from setting the record straight, indulges in various kinds of dodges, begin-

ning with “If Hemingway’s fiction is any guide ...” Well is it, or isn’t it? The biographer wants to bootleg fiction into a factual account while providing an escape clause. I regret to say this is a very typical of the sleight-of-hand biographers practice. This first instance of biographical fiction introduces a virus that disables the narrative at key points. Fiction is tempting because it allows the biographer to link up a series of events that otherwise remain discrete and intractable. What do Marjorie Bump, Irene Goldstein, and Grace Quinlan—the three women Hemingway courts—have to do with one another? Do they really show that Hemingway would never give too much of himself again? That they don’t really fit together—or at least don’t in Donaldson’s botched narrative—is apparent in his inability to make a transition from one woman to another. So after introducing all three women, he gives each a paragraph or so, beginning one subsequent paragraph: “Irene Goldstein was another of Ernest’s interests.” This is typical of certain sentences that just go nowhere in this book. We already know she is one of his “interests” and so?

Hemingway kept his own reactions to himself, although he revealed something to Hadley in a letter that has not survived. When evidence is lacking, Donaldson resorts to inference—not a bad thing, except when it becomes too insistent: “it’s possible to construe what he must have said from Hadley’s answer.” I don’t object to construe but to “must have said.” This phrase, like “must have been” or “must have felt” compromises the work of many biographers, even the Rushmore ones. The trouble with “must have” is that once employed all other possibilities are swept off the page. Maybe Hadley was a good reader of Hemingway’s letters and we can trust her and happily construe. But maybe not. Maybe what Hemingway wrote is open to other interpretations. The point is we don’t know and that is really what the biographer is saying

when he insists on “must have.” Instead of opening up a story, “must have” closes it down, or completes it in a way satisfying to the biographer but not to “setting the record straight.” In other words, Donaldson is deeply implicated in the mythical approach he is supposed to be debunking. Apparently, in this instance, judging by Hadley’s letter to Ernest, she is praising him for resisting Irene Goldstein’s advances, although Goldstein said the opposite—that Hemingway flung himself at her. Donaldson is sure that Hemingway is lying since the biographer asserts in an equivocal sentence: “Manifestly, Ernest liked pursuing (or even better, being pursued) by two or more women at the same time.” That can be documented, yes, but the generalization nevertheless may or may not apply to the Goldstein case. We don’t know if Hemingway was the pursuer or the pursued. We know that later on Pauline Pfeifer pursued him. So nothing really is resolved. To sum up: Donaldson is in no better position than his predecessors, and his book is not a matter of “setting the record straight” but instead is, like every other biography, a construct and persuasive up to a point, and when he pushes beyond that point, he is in trouble with the truth.

I’m not picking on just one instance of a “must have” lapse. Hadley, we learn, was upset over Ernest’s frequent trips abroad on reporting assignments. When he broached the idea of a five-month separation from her to do reporting in Rome, Donaldson observes: “Hadley must have been distressed about the proposal, but she struck exactly the right notes in her comments about it.” The biographer believes she is a good sport, hiding her anxieties by saying she would miss him “pretty frightfully” but hoped the trip would produce a “great gain” in his career. So Donaldson pretends to know what she is actually thinking from what she does not say. What she thought, really, cannot be known, or perhaps was

not even that clear to Hadley, who may have been confused about her feelings or even convinced that she had to overcome them. The reality, the complexity of life, gets shredded in the pseudo knowingness that gives biography a bad reputation. Not for nothing did Boswell call biography a “presumptuous task.”

Now we come to the main event: the lost valise. Here’s Donaldson’s argument: Hemingway was not truthful, and yet biographers, with the exception of James Mellow, take him at his word when they come to tell the story of Hadley’s negligence. Donaldson sets up the story by exposing Hemingway’s duplicity. He had a contract to write exclusively for the *Toronto Star*, but in fact filed other stories as “John Hadley” for another news service. The *Star* editor, a “veteran in the field,” Donaldson notes, “must have wondered about his [Hemingway’s] truthfulness.” The circumstances are such that Donaldson is probably right, but I prefer “probably” any day over “must have” because Donaldson is no closer to the truth no matter how much he wants “must have” to carry some weight.

Here is how Donaldson sets up his handling of the lost valise: “A lot of misinformation has been circulated about the valise and what Ernest did when he learned that the serious writing he’d been sweating over in Paris, the vignettes and stories he really cared about, had gone missing. Much of that misinformation came from Hemingway himself.” Donaldson says biographers have relied on Hemingway’s memoir, *A Moveable Feast* (1964), even though the book’s preface “explicitly warns readers to expect occasional reordering or altering of what actually happened.” Hemingway said he did the following, which in fact he did not do: He left Hadley in Lausanne, took the train back to Paris to see if perhaps his apartment contained copies of what Hadley had lost, and returned to

Lausanne confirming none of his manuscripts had survived. He also added other false details like lunching with Stein and Toklas and writing a poem, “They All Made Peace.” He did not go to Paris, Donaldson reports, until a month later. Most of the circumstantiality of Hemingway’s account is suspect, Donaldson continues, explaining that in fact Hemingway appointed three friends in a failed effort to retrieve the valise from the property office at the train station. Hemingway thought of advertising a reward but was not willing to offer enough, so Donaldson surmises, to make it likely that a thief would return the valise—not to mention the possibility that the papers were thrown away by whoever coveted the valise itself. Instead of a straightforward account, Hemingway enlarged on his devastating setback even though, Donaldson suggests, it was not as great “as it seemed at the time, and it hardly represented three years’ work.” Donaldson’s estimates that Hemingway lost maybe a year’s labor, including part of a Nick Adams novel, but by the 1950s “Ernest expanded the inventory of what had been lost to include ‘good stories about Kansas City ... two short stories set on the Italian front,’ and even at one point, in a discarded draft of *A Moveable Feast*, said he lost four years of his writing.

Donaldson deflates Hemingway’s histrionics over what he lost, although the biographer does not entertain the emotional truth of Hemingway’s own account. The loss of anything a writer is working on that seems crucial at a pivotal moment in his career is likely to devastate him, especially when he thinks he is just about to attain the fame that is the fruit of his ambition. Biographers do not deal in facts alone.

Rather than backtrack to see what earlier biographers have done as a measure of Donaldson’s own practice—something he says he has already done—I checked to see what Hemingway’s three most recent biographers do with the lost valise. In

spite of his title, *Ernest Hemingway: A New Life* (2016), James Hutchisson engages in the same kind of factitious language that corrupts Donaldson's narrative: "When Hadley told him what had happened, Hemingway must have been undone not only by the loss of his work but by the terrible awareness that Hadley had treated it with such disregard." This "must have" is puzzling since Hemingway said he was upset, or is undone meant to suggest Hemingway was even more devastated than he let on? Unlike Donaldson, Hutchisson reports Hemingway "returned immediately to Paris and searched the apartment for anything of value that might remain ..."

Mary Dearborn, *Ernest Hemingway: A Biography* (2017), is more careful than Hutchisson or Donaldson, saying the loss included "all of Ernest's writing to date." The precise Dearborn also notes two different versions of how the valise was lost, and the two versions make a significant difference in how we view Hadley: One version is as Donaldson reports. But the other has Hadley consigning her luggage to a porter, "but when her baggage caught up with her in her compartment, she found the valise was missing." The alternate possibility makes Hadley far less culpable, since she was not negligent—unless you want to argue that she should never have allowed the valise out of her sight. Would Hadley have left a train compartment with that valuable valise? It is possible, of course, and it has led to much bootless speculation concerning her unconscious feelings about her husband. It seems more likely, if not dispositive, that she placed her trust in a porter—a mistake, it can be argued, but hardly a first-degree offense.

Like Donaldson, Dearborn does not believe what Hemingway said after the fact of the lost valise. But she does have him immediately returning to Paris, which seems right emotionally. Would he really wait a month, as Donaldson asserts, to

check out the Paris flat to see if he could recover his precious manuscripts? Dearborn cites her evidence: “While his passport indicates that he did indeed take a train back to Paris almost at once, on December 3, things unfolded in a less dramatic, messier fashion than he relates in *A Moveable Feast*. To begin with, he did not go to Gertrude Stein’s the next day for a consoling lunch, as he claimed; Stein and Toklas were in Provence for the winter.” She has Hemingway’s friends looking for the valise after his own visit to the Paris flat. Unlike Hutchisson and Donaldson, Dearborn consistently provides a more encompassing context, and a richer constellation of details that keeps her biography authoritative and yet respectful of what biographers can reliably ascertain. So Hemingway’s friends look “in one of the city’s Lost and Found Bureaus (or perhaps it was the railway station’s), and reporting to Ernest that it was hopeless. They also consulted Bill Bird, who suggested placing an ad in various newspapers, but Bird said it would not be worth the cost of the ad unless Ernest was willing to promise a large reward. Bird didn’t think Ernest would pay this, and indeed Bird told Steffens and Hickok that he’d in the meantime received a letter from Ernest authorizing him to pay 150 francs as a reward—or about \$10. Evidently that’s all he thought the lost valise was worth.” Perhaps, evidently—these are the proper words that keep the story in play, open to different interpretations instead of foreclosing them in a bogus boast of authority. Dearborn does sometimes succumb to the must have been of biography, but not here where, I think, it would be fatal.

In his forthcoming biography, *The Man Who Wasn’t There: A Life of Ernest Hemingway*, Richard Bradford attacks the very notion that Hemingway could tell fact from fiction. Bradford goes far beyond Donaldson, who does not call out the names of fellow biographers who have lapsed from

fact. Bradford rejects previous accounts, declaring that most Hemingway biographers have attacked Hadley for sinning “against their subject, and against art. Meyers states that her ‘inexcusable negligence... [and] The fact that she had been so careless about his most precious possession—the tangible expression of his deepest thoughts and feelings ... and had shown so little understanding of his life as a writer dealt the first disastrous blow to their marriage.’ This portrayal of Hadley as feckless and insensitive is ludicrous, as is Meyers’ conviction that Hemingway would eventually leave her because of this first sign of indifference to his vocation as a literary artist.”

Realizing that we have only Hemingway’s word for what was in the valise, Bradford brushes aside decades of Hemingway biography: “We know nothing of the content of the lost manuscripts but it is reasonable to assume that most of them would have reflected the narrow range of reading of the pre-Paris years and be based mainly on his experiences in the U.S. and Italy. He had been in Europe for less than twelve months and of the two pieces left in drawers in the Paris flat—notably ‘Up in Michigan’—the imprint of Anderson is evident, laden with a clumsy dose of immature, brutal and very male sexuality. It remains a matter for debate as to whether the lost manuscripts hindered or energized his progress as a writer.” Bradford does not deny the blow to Hemingway, but definitively measuring its impact, as he rightly notes, is not within a biographer’s remit—notwithstanding the generations of biographers who behave otherwise. Instead of “must have been,” we have “reasonable to assume” and “a matter for debate.” Biography is as much about preserving certain mysteries as it is about solving them. It is striking that Bradford uses the phrase “must have been” only once—and that it refers to the speculations of others.

As for Donaldson, he winds up his story briefly describing how Pauline Pfeiffer wooed Hemingway away from Hadley, and how Hadley nobly gave up the man who no longer loved her—at least not as a wife he wished to possess. Hadley could not heal the psychic wound that Ernest experienced when Agnes von Kurowsky jilted him, Donaldson concludes. “All his life he [Hemingway] consistently and often cruelly broke off relationships before wife or friend could do the same to him.” I think Donaldson gets carried away, forgetting that the redoubtable Martha Gellhorn certainly did not wait for Hemingway to reject her. And then—I guess from the height of Rushmore—he adds: “So the marriage [to Hadley] did not and could not last. If it hadn’t been Pauline Pfeiffer, it would have been someone or something else.” Okay, I suppose. But who knows?

Contributors

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