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REVIEW**

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



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Guest Editor's Note

.....

I asked Felicia if I could pen this issue's Note, as I am stepping down from the *Popular Culture Review* after three years as Associate Editor. I have enjoyed working on the journal, encouraging fellow conference goers to submit in fields a bit outside our traditional fare, like law and music, and being supported by the fantastic team at Westphalia Press as we designed a new online site, worked to diversify cover art, and improved other aspects like layout and copyediting. It has been a great experience, and I'm happy to hand over my role to the next PCR supporter knowing that we have a really strong system in place.

In the current issue, we have a wide variety of articles that continue to draw upon the wealth of connections between popular culture and various mediums. Regina Judge's "Twitter in the Courtroom" examines social media, real-time reporting, and courtroom etiquette at a cross section. Senne Schraeyen reminds us that Susan Sontag's "Melancholy Object" continues to influence social perspectives, and William and Patricia Kirtley examine the art and architecture of Las Vegas' Guardian Angel Cathedral. Historian David Schwartz delves into the literary body of Mario Puzo, highlighting the connections between capitalism, gambling, and cynicism. Kenneth Payne explores Algernon Blackwood's gothic tales from a perspective of extreme forms of extra-sensory perception.

We have several articles on films this issue: Todd Giles' piece on the film adaptation of *American Psycho* offers a retrospective look at American masculinity in the 1980s. Isa Flores gives us an eco-critical reading of Darren Aronofsky's film *Mother!*, while Carl Rollyson scrutinizes Falkner's *The Left*

Hand of God, and Seth Vannatta offers a Freudian-Marxist analysis of Jordan Peele's *Us*. We are also happy to include four book reviews that present contemporary scholarship on aspects of music and memory in culture.

As always, this issue of *PCR* offers slivers of inventive scholarship on popular culture studies from around the world, and we're happy to present it to you this summer.

Heather Lusty, PhD, JD

Twitter in the Courtroom: Do You Object?

.....

by Regina Judge

ABSTRACT

Twitter is a powerful communication tool that allows for the instantaneous dissemination of information to millions of people across the globe. Journalists have begun to use it to report on the day-to-day occurrences of trials in courtrooms across America. It provides a faster, more efficient means of transmitting information to the public concerning the judicial system. Some see it, however, as a threat to defendants right to a fair trial. Apprehension stems from the fact that it could be distracting for jurors and other trial participants to view an individual in the courtroom using their cell phone to report on a case. Jurors might be preoccupied with reporters pecking away at their phones or laptop computers rather than with the testimony at hand.

Keywords: Twitter, social media, reporter, microblogging, courtroom, hand-held electronic device

Twitter en la sala del tribunal: ¿se opone?

RESUMEN

Twitter es una poderosa herramienta de comunicación que permite la difusión instantánea de información a millones de personas en todo el mundo. Los periodistas han comenzado a usarlo para informar sobre la ocurrencia diaria de juicios en los tribunales de todo Estados Unidos. Proporciona un medio más rápido y eficiente de transmitir información al

público sobre el sistema judicial. Sin embargo, algunos lo ven como una amenaza para los acusados que tienen derecho a un juicio justo. La aprensión proviene del hecho de que podría ser una distracción para los miembros del jurado y otros participantes en el juicio ver a una persona en la sala del tribunal usando su teléfono celular para informar sobre un caso. Los miembros del jurado podrían estar preocupados con un reportero que mire su teléfono o computadora portátil en lugar de con el testimonio en mano.

Palabras clave: Twitter, redes sociales, reportero, microblogging, sala de audiencias, dispositivo electrónico portátil

法庭中使用推特：你反对吗？

摘要

推特是一个强大的沟通工具，它能将信息瞬时传播给全球成百上千万人。记者已开始用推特来报道全美法庭每日的审判案件。推特为公众了解司法体系提供了一个更快、更高效的信息传递途径。然而，一些人将其视为一个对被告获得公正审判权的威胁。这种担忧源于一个事实，即陪审团和其他审判参与者可能会因看到个别在场人士使用手机报道案件而分心。陪审团可能会留意一名记者在其手机或手提电脑上打字，而不是专注于眼前的证词。

关键词：推特，社交媒体，记者，微博，法庭，手持电子设备

I. INTRODUCTION

Twitter is a social media website that allows people to communicate with others around the world instantaneously. It is a microblogging service that permits one to post information (tweets) up to 280 characters in length, as well as pictures, video, and website links.¹ Users can follow one another to keep abreast of the information the other has tweeted. Tweets can be reposted (retweeted) as well, thereby making the content even widely accessible. Although this is an ingenious way to communicate, it can unfortunately adversely affect the integrity of the courts.² Whether the press should be allowed to use Twitter in the courtroom is a critical issue. “Critics are concerned that play-by-play updates from the courtroom could turn a trial into a media circus compromising a defendant’s due process rights.”³ “Proponents of this type of live, real-time broadcasting believe that allowing journalists to tweet updates from court results in the faster, more efficient transmission of information to the public and enhances the transparency of the criminal justice system.”⁴ This paper examines both positions, in an effort to explore this topic.

Public trials are vehicles through which citizens are protected against the abuses of government. Since most people cannot attend these proceedings on a daily basis, the press serves as

1 Serena Larson, “Welcome to a World with 280-Character Tweets.” *CNN Business*, Nov. 7, 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/11/07/technology/twitter-280-character-limit/index.html>

2 Emily M. Janoski-Haehlen, *The Courts Are All A ‘Twitter’*: *The Implications of Social Media Use in The Courts*, 46 VAL. U. L. REV. 43, 44 (2011).

3 Jamie K. Winnick, *A Tweet Isn’t Worth a Thousand Words: The Dangers of Journalists’ Use of Twitter to Send News Updates From the Courtroom*, 64 SYRACUSE L. REV. 335, 337 (2014).

4 *Id.*

their eyes, ears, and correspondents. Their role can only be accomplished, however, when trials are accessible. Journalists' usefulness rests on their ability to be present, observe, document, and relay information. Their job is important because they educate through written accounts of their observations. Technology like Twitter has made reporting much easier. It provides for up-to-the-minute access and dissemination of information. Text or images can easily be uploaded in seconds. The availability of an Internet connection translates into instantaneous access.

The traditional method of news reporting consists of a journalist taking handwritten notes that are combined to produce an article that is later typed on a computer. After editing, the article is published either in print or online. Today, journalists have direct access to the public via social media networks. This means of disseminating news provides moment-by-moment reporting. It also allows readers to comment on what is written and to pass the information along to other social media users, thereby providing the reporter with an even larger audience.

Although the Internet is an efficient method of reporting, it is a method that reporters can only make use of outside of the doors of many courtrooms. Journalists are prohibited from using social media websites like Twitter to report within some courtrooms during a trial's progression.

The use of Twitter in the courtroom is a matter that touches upon many constitutional issues. It involves the press's First Amendment right of free speech, a defendant's Sixth Amendment right to a public trial, and a defendant's Fifth and Fourteenth due process guarantees. "Even though the trend is becoming more prevalent, the current law does not properly address whether reporters should be allowed to

tweet ...”⁵ Since the United States Supreme Court has not ruled on this matter, judges have discretion as to whether to allow or exclude Twitter use.

II. STATE COURT REVIEW

Live courtroom media coverage using emerging technologies is commonplace in many state courts.⁶ Often, judges will consider a set of enumerated guidelines and any other factor they deem relevant when deciding whether to allow broadcasting in their courtroom. In California a jurist must consider some of the following criteria:

1. The importance of maintaining public trust and confidence in the judicial system;
2. The importance of promoting public access to the judicial system;
3. The parties’ support of or opposition to the request;
4. The nature of the case;
5. The privacy rights of all participants in the proceeding, including witnesses, jurors, and victims; ...”⁷

These standards help ensure that journalists are able to serve as messengers and that the court’s integrity is upheld. This mandate is followed in New York state courts as well: broadcasting is allowed as long as “[it does not] [detract] from

5 Adriana C. Cervantes, *Will Twitter Be Following You in the Courtroom? Why Reporters Should Be Allowed to Broadcast During Courtroom Proceedings*, 33 HASTINGS COMM. & ENT L.J. 133, 136 (2010).

6 *As Witnesses Sing, Jurors Twitter Tweets*, CBS NEWS, Mar. 6, 2009, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/as-witnesses-sing-journos-twitter-tweets/>.

7 2019 California Rules of Court. R 1.150. (e)(3).

the dignity or decorum of the courtroom or courthouse.”⁸ No matter the technology, judges retain control at all times and can impose restrictions whenever necessary. The use of Twitter in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Maryland courts also demonstrate that the news media can use technology in a reasonable manner to gather news and report on proceedings.⁹

III. FEDERAL COURT REVIEW

Broadcasting bans include the use of Twitter as a means of information delivery in many Federal courts.¹⁰ *United States v. Shelnutt*¹¹ is a case that involved a Columbus Ledger-Enquirer reporter who requested that he use a handheld electronic device to send tweets via his newspaper’s Twitter page. Federal District Court Judge Clay Land denied his request, citing Rule 53 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure.¹² Rule 53 states, in relevant part, “[T]he court must not permit the taking of photographs in the courtroom during judicial proceedings or the broadcasting of judicial proceedings from the courtroom.”¹³ Judge Land concluded that the drafters of this rule intended to extend its reach beyond the transmission of trial proceedings through television and radio.¹⁴ Thus, Twitter use was considered broadcasting and therefore prohibited.

8 Winnick, *supra*, at 345.

9 *Id.* at 346.

10 Validity, Propriety, and Effect of Allowing or Prohibiting Media’s Broadcasting, Recording, or Photographing Court Proceedings, 14 A.L.R. 4th 121, § 3 (2009).

11 *U.S. v. Shelnutt*, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 101427, at *1 (M. D. Ga., Nov. 2, 2009).

12 Fed. R. Crim. at 53.

13 *Id.*

14 Cervantes, *supra*, at 142.

The United States Supreme Court has declared that the prohibition against broadcasting, as provided by Rule 53, does not restrict the freedom of the press under the First Amendment,¹⁵ since reporters can always utilize the old pen and paper method to communicate. Conversely, access to the court is still available to them. “[The] First Amendment guarantees that journalists may attend, listen, and report on judicial proceedings[; however], this right does not extend to the right to televise, record, and broadcast trials.”¹⁶ The definition of broadcasting describes the sending of electronic messages from a courtroom that contemporaneously describes the trial proceedings and are instantaneously available for public viewing.¹⁷ “In reaching its decision, the Court determined that, although the term broadcasting is typically associated with the dissemination of information via television or radio, its plain meaning is broader.”¹⁸ It determined that the contemporaneous transmission of electronic messages from the courtroom and the dissemination of those messages in a manner such that they are widely and instantaneously accessible to the general public falls within the definition of broadcasting as used in Rule 53.¹⁹

Some district court judges have allowed journalists to tweet in their courtrooms despite Rule 53. They apply Rule 57(b) to exercise their discretion and allow reporters to tweet. The rule states that judges may regulate any practices occurring in their courtroom so long as that practice is consistent with federal law and the local rules of the district.²⁰ Accordingly,

15 *Id.* at 140.

16 *Unites States v. Hastings*, 695 F.2d 1278 at 1280 (11th Cir. 1983).

17 *Shelnutt*.

18 *Id.*

19 *Id.*

20 *Fed. R. Crim.* at 57.

district courts in Kansas and Utah have amended their court rules to allow journalists to use cell phones and laptop computers to report from the courtroom.²¹ The Utah rule goes so far as to create a presumptive right for news reporters to use electronic media to report on court proceedings.²² Pursuant to Rule 53(b), Kansas District Court Judge Thomas Marten permitted *Wichita Eagle* reporter Ron Sylvester to tweet during a trial for racketeering.²³

More judges have recognized the popularity and effectiveness of the use of cellphone and tablets to report what happens during a trial. For this reason, live blogging has become routine. As early as February 2010, the Judicial Council for the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit authorized judges throughout that circuit to allow reporters to provide live blogging and other text transmission in criminal cases.²⁴ Likewise, United States District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois, James Zagel, has permitted reporters to live blog with Twitter.²⁵ In the Knox County murder trial of Nicholas Sheley, Circuit Judge James B. Stewart permitted Twitter use. He described the experience as “an enormous success.”²⁶ Judge Stewart explained that tweeting allowed the public to see the judicial process at work. His remark compliments Twitter advocates who state that microblogging is the equivalent to more traditional means

21 Cathy Packer, *Should Courtroom Observers Be Allowed to Use Their Smartphones and Computers in Court? An Examination of The Arguments*, 36 AM. J. TRIAL ADVOC. 573, 591 (2013).

22 *Id.*

23 *As Witnesses Sing, Juror's Twitter Tweets*, *supra*.

24 Esther Seitz, *#Oyez, #Oyez: Why Judges Should Let Reporters Tweet From the Courtroom*, 101 ILL. B.J. 38, 41 (2013).

25 *Id.* at 41.

26 *Id.* at 42.

of reporting and that it helps to improve transparency and public access to courts.²⁷

IV. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF TWITTER USE

One of the overarching reasons that many support the use of Twitter in the courtroom is because it provides immediate access to courts of law. “Live blogging allows citizens instant access to the judiciary, letting them follow and discuss what is happening inside the courtroom and thereby strengthening public trust in the system as envisioned by the First Amendment.”²⁸ Another reason identifies the educational value provided. “... Tweets effectively [teach] citizens about the judicial process as it unfold[s].”²⁹

Another argument in favor of courtroom tweeting is the fact that the Internet has had a negative effect on print media. People now turn to the Internet for news on the judicial system, technology, politics, etc. For this reason, many newspapers have ceased operations.³⁰ “Their absence therefore necessitates that websites like Twitter be used to fill their void.”³¹ Twitter’s unlimited capacity means that reporter scan tweet as much as they like throughout the day or evening. The use of blogging tools like Twitter has provided more trial coverage for readers who are interested in knowing more about a lawsuit, but who previously would have been unable

27 Emily Itner, *Technology in the Courtroom: Promoting Transparency or Destroying Solemnity?* 22 *COMMLAW CONSPECTUS* 347, 363 (2014).

28 *Id.* at 40.

29 *Id.* at 41.

30 Lili Levi, *Social Media And The Press*, 90 *N.C. L. REV.* 1531, 1537 (2012).

31 *Id.* at 1540.

to get that information as traditional newspapers limit the amount a reporter can write about a case.³²

Twitter supporters say that there is no difference between providing news via traditional print and contemporary electronic methods and therefore journalists should be given the option of deciding how they wish to report trial information. They see no difference between the two and therefore say that each should be provided equal weight since they bring about the same result. Federal Judge Thomas Marten agrees with this assessment and recently commented that he did not “see any difference between [a journalist using Twitter and one sitting in the courtroom taking notes]. In fact, it is surprising how much the Twitter world resembles that of a newspaper ...”³³ Judge Marten has allowed reporters to post live Twitter updates straight from several trials over which he has presided. He comments, “The fact that tweets were posted throughout the day allowed the public to follow the trial as it progressed. Through Twitter, people will have the opportunity to follow and discuss what is happening inside our legal system as it is happening.”³⁴ One judge praises Twitter for lessening the noise and distractions in his court. Judge James B. Stewart explains that tweeting actually lessened disturbances typically associated with reporters’ exiting and entering the courtroom to send communications or make phone calls.³⁵

32 Cervantes, *supra*, at 152.

33 Nick Bilton, *A Tech World That Centers on the User*, N.Y. TIMES, Sep. 13, 2010, at B1.

34 Cervantes, *supra*, at 157.

35 Seitz, *supra*, at 41.

V. ARGUMENTS AGAINST TWITTER USE

Many opposed to broadcasting courtroom proceedings have argued that allowing reporters to tweet will harm participants' due process and privacy rights. The fundamental concern is that tweeting will result in too much transparency. An individual's willingness to testify before a judge or jury may be impacted by the scope of media coverage and will therefore affect an individual's willingness to file a claim or testify.³⁶ Claimants and witnesses may shy away from coming forward for fear that their name, reputation, or testimony could be the subject of a tweet that results in public ridicule.

Concern over the tweeting of sensitive information during the course of a trial is another argument against its use. This apprehension was apparent during the criminal prosecution of Jerry Sandusky. Presiding Judge John Cleland agreed to allow reporters to tweet news updates. He later reversed that decision after confusion over what he meant in his prohibition against tweeting verbatim testimony.³⁷ Fearing that improper information would be disseminated, the judge subsequently withdrew his original consent.³⁸ "Reporters were thereafter allowed to possess and use electronic devices but not to transmit any type of communication from the courtroom, they could not therefore tweet."³⁹

Further criticism against the use of Twitter stems from apprehension that allowing broadcasting during trial will result in the obstruction of justice through juror misconduct.⁴⁰

36 Cervantes, *supra*, at 151.

37 Winnick, *supra*, at 347.

38 *Id.*

39 Ittner *supra*, at 367.

40 Cervantes, *supra*, at 153.

Judges instruct jurors that they are barred from conducting outside research regarding the trial they are reviewing.⁴¹ This research includes watching television news programs or reading an article about the trial they are hearing. In this technological age, that admonition must also include using search engines, websites, or blogs to acquire information as well. Unfortunately, although warned against it, some jurors use the Internet while serving and can be exposed to inappropriate influences. The fear is that jurors will follow reporters and obtain their views of the evidence presented and thereby be persuaded by their opinions and observations and not think independently about the evidence presented during the trial. Twitter could be dangerous in this scenario because additional information about the trial could prejudice the jurors' opinions, thus jeopardizing the defendant's due process rights.⁴²

Another concern is that witnesses may see news tweets about the trial where they will appear, compromising their ability to testify.⁴³ In order to cope with the extreme accessibility of Twitter and the possibility that media tweets may be re-tweeted to a juror's or witness's Twitter account, judges have either banned live broadcasting via Twitter or tried to restrict its use by jurors and witnesses.⁴⁴ With the addictive nature of social media, there is no guarantee that jurors or witnesses will follow a directive to refrain while serving. An illustration is provided with a burglar who was caught because he left a digital trace for police after logging onto his Facebook account from

41 Daniel J. Ain, *The Tweeting Juror: Prophylactic and Remedial Methods for Judges to Manage the Risk of Internet-Based Juror Misconduct*, 98 MASS. L. REV. 16, 16 (2016).

42 Winnick, *supra*, at 347.

43 *Id.*

44 *Id.* at 348.

his victim's computer.⁴⁵ A jury consultant commented on this incident by stating, "[If] a burglar can't resist checking his Facebook status while in the high-adrenaline process of burglarizing your home ... what's to stop a juror or witness during courtroom tedium?"⁴⁶

A fundamental argument against reporters' use of Twitter in the courtroom identifies the disruption it could cause to the daily proceedings. This argument is similar to the one used against the use of cameras in the courtroom, "Cameras cause physical and psychological disruptions in the courtroom that jeopardize the fair administration of justice."⁴⁷ "Many judges view electronic devices as the same type of threat. Their goal in banning these items mirrors those held with camera bans; preventing members of the press from interfering with the business of the court and with the right to a fair trial."⁴⁸ It could be distracting for jurors and other trial participants to view individuals in the courtroom using their cell phone or other electronic device. Jurors might be preoccupied with reporters pecking away at their phones or laptop computers, rather than with the testimony at hand. For this reason, the Illinois state court judge presiding over the 2012 trial of William Balfour, the defendant accused and later convicted of killing singer-actress Jennifer Hudson's family members, told reporters they could not tweet or post on Facebook from inside the courtroom.⁴⁹ "[A]ccording to a court spokesman, the judge 'didn't want constant typing

45 *Id.*

46 Winnick, *supra*, at 348.

47 Packer at 578.

48 *United States v. Cicilline*, 571 F. Supp. 359, 361-62 (D.R.I. 1983).

49 Michael Tarm, *Jennifer Hudson Family Murders: Jury Selection to Begin*, HUFFINGTON POST, Apr. 5, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/06/jennifer-hudson-family-mu_n_1405442.html.

on cell phones to distract jurors and other courtroom participants.”⁵⁰

VI. COMPROMISES

Some judges have identified the effectiveness of Twitter as a communication tool and have therefore allowed its use. They see the need to balance the public’s desire to receive information with the court’s need for decorum. Jurists, therefore, have sought to strike a balance. Federal Judge Federico Moreno of the United States District Court of the Southern District of Florida prohibited reporters from posting live via Twitter while directly in the courtroom but did allow them to step into the hall to tweet and return. This approach serves as a middle ground for judges who advocate for more open courts but are also sensitive to the possible disruption of using electronic devices while in a courtroom.⁵¹ Iowa Federal Judge Mark Bennet allowed a reporter to micro-blog about a tax fraud trial, so long as the reporter sat toward the back of the courtroom. Judge Bennet explained that sitting in the back of the courtroom would ensure that the reporter would cause minimal distraction while typing.⁵² Other judges have allowed Twitter use, while imposing some basic restrictions on tweeting, including requiring that any cameras, audio recording, and sound creating functions on the reporters’ devices be disabled.⁵³

50 *Id.*

51 Cervantes, *supra*, at 155.

52 *Id.* at 156.

53 Seitz, *supra*, at 41.

VII. CONCLUSION

The arguments on both sides of this issue are compelling. Advocates for the use of Twitter view it as a vehicle for the public to gain access to the courts and therefore to become educated and informed. It is seen as an instrument that reinforces transparency and promotes public trust. As one Illinois court stated, “what goes on in court is the business of the people. Courts function best and most effectively when they are available for public view. When courts are open, their work is observed and understood, and understanding leads to respect.”⁵⁴ Microblogging serves these important goals. Tweeting updates from court results in faster, more efficient transmission of information to the public.

The opposition is concerned that Twitter threatens the fair administration of justice. “Tweeting from within the court may physically disrupt judicial order and decorum, impede proper fact finding, and jeopardize security.”⁵⁵ It could lead to juror and witness misconduct, threatening the due process rights of the accused.

Many courts have struck middle ground. They have outlined measures that allow reporters to use Twitter in the courtroom but also protects the privacy interests of court participants and lessens the impact on jurors.

It is abundantly clear that social media tools like Twitter allow people to stay connected and to have instantaneous conversations about what is happening. Whether the courtroom is an appropriate place for this conversation continues to be the subject of debate.

54 *Id.*

55 Packer at 584.

**Susan Sontag's Melancholy
Object in the Wake of
(Post-)Postmodernism: A Case
Study of the Portrait of Klein
by Hannah Diamond**

.....
by Senne Schraeyen

ABSTRACT

This article is a close reading of a photograph by Hannah Diamond. The work is analyzed using updated versions of Susan Sontag's Melancholy Object theory in a postmodern and post-postmodern society. Diamond's work is a variant of Melancholy Objects: a postmodern Melancholy Object, an image that is made to evoke feelings of nostalgia. This makes Diamond's practice an interesting case to magnify contemporary pop culture's interest in nostalgia and postmodernism, despite Sontag's and post-postmodernists' critiques.

Keywords: Melancholy Object, nostalgia, photography, contemporary popular culture, postmodernism, post-postmodernism, Susan Sontag, Hannah Diamond

**El objeto melancólico de Susan Sontag
tras la (pos-) posmodernidad: Un
estudio de caso del retrato de Klein
por Hannah Diamond**

RESUMEN

Este artículo es una lectura cercana de una fotografía de Hannah Diamond. El trabajo se analizará utilizando versiones actualizadas de la teoría del Objeto Melancólico de Susan Sontag en una sociedad posmoderna y posmoderna. El tra-

bajo de Diamond es una variante de Melancholy Objects: un Melancholy Object posmoderno, una imagen hecha para evocar sentimientos de nostalgia. Esto hace que la práctica de Diamond sea un caso interesante para aumentar el interés de la cultura pop contemporánea en la nostalgia y la posmodernidad, a pesar de las críticas de Sontag y de los postmodernistas.

Palabras clave: objeto melancólico, nostalgia, fotografía, cultura popular contemporánea, posmodernismo, posmodernismo, Susan Sontag, Hannah Diamond

苏珊·桑塔格在（后）-后现代主义时期提出的
伤悲物件：针对汉娜·戴蒙德为Klein打造的肖像
画作品的案例研究

摘要

本文对汉娜·戴蒙德（Hannah Diamond）的一副摄影作品进行了细致解读。该作品将通过苏珊·桑塔格在后现代和后-后现代社会中提出的伤悲物件（Melancholy Object）理论的更新版进行分析。戴蒙德的作品是伤悲物件的一个变体：一个后现代伤悲物件，一个用于唤起思念之情的图像。尽管受到桑塔格和后-后现代主义者的批判，这却让戴蒙德的作品成为一个有趣的案例，用于放大当代流行文化对思念之情和后现代主义的兴趣。

关键词：伤悲物件（Melancholy Object），思念之情，摄影，当代流行文化，后现代主义，后-后现代主义，苏珊·桑塔格，汉娜·戴蒙德

INTRODUCTION

Last year, I found myself gazing at a photograph on my computer screen. An unknown woman in close-up was staring at me, dressed in a baby pink outfit and shiny jewelry. The clothing, posing, and kitsch that the airbrushed portrait radiated, was both endearing and humorous. It instantly reminded me of the aesthetics from the late nineties and early noughties pop music scene, which were dominated by American musicians such as Missy Eliot, Mariah Carey, and Pussycat Dolls. I was surprised to find out that the person who was photographed was Klein, an experimental musician from London who released her first song around 2016. The photograph was shot and reworked around the same period by London-based artist and musician Hannah Diamond.

Puzzled by the nostalgia this picture evoked in me, I wondered why it was that this piece transported me back in time. How can a picture deceive us so easily? I immediately started to think of postmodernist concepts such as parody and pastiche, but also of Susan Sontag's concept of the picture as a Melancholy Object. But is this concept of Sontag, which refers to modernist photography traditions, applicable to postmodernism? And is a postmodern framework still relevant to our contemporary society and art scene, wherein the theory has been declared dead by multiple scholars for over a decade? In this essay, I firstly try to revise the concept of the Melancholy Object in postmodernity by using the photograph of Hannah Diamond. Secondly, I judge if postmodern art making and the Melancholy Object are still relevant in a post-postmodern society.

THE MELANCHOLY OBJECT AND NOSTALGIA

In 1977, the American writer Susan Sontag released her bundle of essays *On Photography*. After the publication's release, Sontag swung between celebrity figure and cultural critic: popular magazine *Time* had previously published multiple of her essays throughout the sixties, and the author was well liked in the media. Apart from her intelligence, Sontag was known for high-profile gay relationships (most notable with celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz) and striking presences at shows and parties (During; Emre). Although the critical work became mandatory reading for every art scholar or photographer, Sontag's thinking method and essays read as accessible and non-academic. This makes her theories easy to dismiss or unravel.

On Photography, in this vein, was her first big commercial breakthrough. Sarah Parsons, a professor of photography theory and history, notes that when *On Photography* was released, its "emotional intensity, internal contradictions and leaps of logic were often cited as weakness" (290). Yet Parsons also declares that: "[It] is a passionate and brave effort to think through photography as a affective and effective medium, to understand how and why it impacts us so deeply" (290), Sontag focuses, quite harshly, in multiple chapters how multiple characteristics of photography have considerable negative impacts on our worldview. Literary academic Simon During describes the work as "[an attack on] photography as a mode of anti-culture and of anti-literature, on the predictable grounds that photographs 'certified' experience by actually destroying it. A casual, easy, enjoyable craft, photography deprived the world of seriousness." Seriousness is a term that multiple scholars attribute to Sontag's cultural critiques and personality. *On Photography* shows the incredible critical of the impact that photographs have on our emotion-

al intelligence, claiming that photography influences our look on, and interaction with, real life events. Thus, it comes as no surprise that multiple scholars also mention "Detachment" as the core of Sontag's moralist problem with photography. As photographs are detached moments of a greater narrative that we, as viewers, do not know, we can interpret or dismiss a photographed situation, as we like (Sontag 292-93).

One of the essays of *On Photography* describes photos as "Melancholy Objects." Sontag describes the melancholic feeling a photo can evoke when the viewer becomes aware of the distance (a form of detachment) they feel towards it. This can come from a distance in time, space, politics, or culture, either with what is depicted or from the materiality of the photo (Dewdney). Sontag originates this distance as a concept from the surrealist tradition. For Sontag, surrealism is less a picturing of a dreamlike image and more a picturing of what the surrealists viewed as uncanny lifestyles. The exotic, the sexually liberated or "obscene," the poor and the royalty: they are all against the then-ruling, modernist bourgeois lifestyle. What makes something look surreal to us is something we do not experience in our everyday life (Sontag 41-45). Sontag notes: "What is surreal is the distance imposed and bridged, by the photograph: the social distance, and the distance in time. Seen from middle-class perspective of photography: celebrities are as intriguing as pariahs" (45). This is why, for example, even contemporary wildlife or nature pictures from magazines like *Lonely Planet* or *National Geographic* can make us feel melancholic. They show remote areas in which the cultural and political lifestyle of urbanized places is non-present. They are, de facto, distanced from us, not in time, but in space and lifestyle.

Another surrealist aspect that Sontag mentions is the "collage making of history" that photographs enable us to do. When

we try to sketch an image of our history on a certain theme (be it a personal history or a collective), we select pictures that best suit our exotic idea of that theme. Sontag builds on Walter Benjamin's thesis that we are drawn to the temporary and declares that photographers tend to take pictures of things that they know are about to disappear (e.g., landscapes, endangered rural traditions, and family moments). Photographers thus tend to create pictures of oddities and temporary phenomena; we, much later, will select pictures that generate the most distance from us, the ones that make us feel melancholic, to re-create the past. Sontag (59-62) states that this makes our look at the past subjective and only partly correct, since we only focus on things that are gone and not on the numerous things that remain and are continuous.

The essay concludes that the Melancholy Object is a detached moment from history. The picture focuses on one precise moment that we—because we focus on the distance/melancholy of it—start to detach from a greater timeline and appreciate due to the oddity and uniqueness it depicts. “Life is not about significant details, illuminated by a flash, fixed forever. Photographs are” (Sontag 63-64). It is precisely this “detaching” that is also an integral part of nostalgia.

Merriam-Webster defines nostalgia as “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition” (“Nostalgia”). It is a feeling that springs forward from a melancholic distance with a certain moment or object. It is a way to mentally and emotionally escape the here-and-now, and it can be triggered by Melancholy Objects. But we need to understand that the place we escape to is, just as the Melancholy Objects, part of a personal and glossed historical view. As Parsons says (to describe Sontag's sentiments): “Rather than leading to any sort of specific or moral knowledge, historical photographs affect us

in a generalized nostalgic way. They entice us to wallow in a comforting *pathos* safe without fear that we will be called upon to affect the lives of those pictured" (293). The phrase one mostly uses when in a nostalgic mood is "it was a time where everything was still simple," focusing only on the positive and disappeared elements of a certain time scape. When we look at a snapshot of someone from the eighties, for example, we see quirky clothes and cultural references, not the then reigning broader social difficulties, like the Cold War or the AIDS crisis.

Hannah Diamond's work is certainly based around nostalgia. Yet before we discuss her work and influences, it is necessary to contextualize the artist. Diamond is a musician and (commercial) photographer/image maker affiliated with the PC Music group. This is a collective of electronic musicians known for left field, extremely layered songs inspired by Eurodance, Happy Hardcore, and, most importantly, noughties mainstream music (Bakare). Apart from the noughties references, critics describe Diamond's music as feel-good "saccharine synth-pop" (Joyce) and "bubblegum hyper-reality" (Bowe). Her hyper-real vocals and visuals leave critics and "ordinary" listeners both endeared to and confused by her music. Her quirky songs granted her multiple reviews and recommendations on different (renowned) music blogs. For Diamond, pop-music and imagery intertwine heavily. For every one of her songs, the artist also creates the entire single art from scratch. The inspiration for these artworks is the same as for her commercial work for fashion brands, other musicians, and magazines.

Diamond's practice draws inspiration from several huge fashion players from the past. The influences of photographers David LaChapelle, Mert & Marcus, and Nick Knight, combined with Diamond's interest in turn-of-the-century Dior

and pop music videos, clearly show in her art (Cragg). For example, the aforementioned portrait shows the same medium close-up framing and colored background as a Mert & Marcus fashion shoot. The clothing and accessories Klein wears look as if they are selected from a late nineties fashion catalogue. The framing evokes a feeling of monumentality that, together with heavy digital retouching, gives the picture a larger than life and even unrealistic look, as if we are gazing at a celebrity. The unrealistic look is reminiscent of the way pop stars were presented in the late nineties/early noughties. They are the symbols of the mainstream culture of a (in hindsight not-so-feminist) society in which auto-tuned popular musicians are presented as good-looking, fun, and glossed up “products” for us to consume and enjoy (Nash 27-28, 30, 32-33, 38-39, 44; Zeisler 123, 128-131). The larger-than-life image that these celebrities radiate is, as Sontag would put it, a perfect strategy to create a distance with the middle-class consumers’ lives, so that we would be completely infatuated with them.

The portrait of Klein does work as Melancholy Object for me. It is this odd feeling of nostalgia and carelessness (distances in time, culture, and lifestyle) of the noughties that draws me to the picture. As I look at Hannah Diamond’s picture now, I nostalgically think of the late nineties/early noughties era as if mainstream culture then was filled only with these ultra-feminine, uncomplicated, and poppy entertainers. The distance I feel between the image of an actual hyper-perfect pop star of that time period and me works as a catalyst to create a distance between this contemporary portrait and me, as if it is a Melancholy Object made in that time.

However, when Sontag talks about Melancholy Objects, she talks about “authentic” photographs from the past. The es-

sayist only refers to photography practices from the pre-digital era.¹ When we state that Hannah Diamond captures late nineties/early noughties iconography with her images (Widomska), we should definitely emphasize that her works were not made in that time. Digital photography enhances the power to manipulate pictures so that every form of distance can be added immediately. In this case, the distance in time and culture is fabricated and the viewer is almost tricked into feeling melancholic or nostalgic. The qualities of a Melancholy Object can thus only be partly attributed to Diamond's picture. This is logical, since Sontag mostly uses pictures from a modernist tradition to define these Objects, while Diamond is active almost a century later, and much has changed in the tradition of photography. Diamond's photography draws a lot of inspiration from several post-modern traditions, a style that goes head-to-head against the modernist tradition.

POSTMODERNISM: THE COMMERCIALIZATION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

The start of postmodernist thinking is difficult to pinpoint, but it began to take ground in different art forms around the sixties. Just as its starting point, its characteristics are also multifaceted and can, at times, even be messy and paradoxical (Boie 22-40; Canavan and McCamley). However, postmodernism has some undisputable core themes that show through in different readings and practices. One is skepticism towards the modernist principles of progress and the creation of a utopic, bourgeois worldview. This leads some postmodernists to focus on creating a language

1 This is logical, since the first consumer digital cameras were released around 1990, while Sontag wrote about Melancholy Objects in the seventies.

founded on the debris that modernism left behind (Willette). Namely, the postmodernist uses the techniques of “parody” and “pastiche” to create a new image based on an exaggerated and mocking view of old iconography and themes (Willette).

Literary critic Frederic Jameson has written extensively on this topic in his influential work *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson declares that postmodernists select images and “flatten” them. The images they select from the past have no meaning anymore and are judged purely on a superficial level. This goes hand-in-hand with the growing fixation on kitsch, lowbrow culture, the waning of emotions that art can show and the rejection of one, universally acceptable truth (Jameson). Nostalgia embodies, for me, all these aforementioned concepts, together with parody and pastiche, as it is a flattening and subjective view of past memories. Tied with this flattening of the past is the growing (interest in) consumerist culture after World War II. Culture becomes a commodity that should be consumed by, and draw the attention of, both the rich and the middle class. This leads to a flattened past (nostalgia) being used in Hollywood blockbusters (Jameson; Willette), fashion, art, and design.

Apart from the commodification of nostalgia, describing postmodernism as a deconstructive movement also identifies it (Canavan and McCamley). In their essay on postmodernist practices in marketing, consumption and pop-music, Brendan Canavan and Claire McCamley list five quintessential deconstructive motifs deduced from other interdisciplinary postmodern studies: anti-foundationalism, de-differentiation, fragmentation, hyper-reality and consumption, and production reversal (Canavan and McCamley). For this case, de-differentiation, fragmentation, and hyper-reality are interesting aspects. De-differentiation stands for a loss

in cultural hierarchy and a freedom for sub-cultures to gain importance and become cultural trendsetters (Canavan and McCamley, based on "Marketing in Multiplex: Screening Postmodern" and Van Raaij). Fragmentation defines that our identity is in flux due to the high amount of cultural styles the media and de-differentiation provides us with (Canavan and McCamley, based on "Marketing in Multiplex: Screening Postmodern" and "Recycling Postmodern Marketing"). Hyper-reality involves the loss of a sense of authenticity and the becoming real of what was originally simulated (Canavan and McCamley, based on "Marketing in Multiplex: Screening Postmodern," 39).

Deconstructive processes are the core of Hannah Diamond's creative process. The artist has collected fashion magazines from the early noughties and created a scrapbook and several mood boards out of them. Over the years, she has gathered an almost encyclopedic memory of her favorite fashion shows and pieces. These are all tools that help her create and inspire her visual universe (Schültz). These practices connect to fragmentation and, in certain aspects, to de-differentiation. Diamond literally collects fragments from fetishized consumerist products (high fashion) in her archives. This gives her the opportunity to cherry-pick what best suits her imaginary world. The artist appropriates codes and symbols of luxury brands, lifestyles, pop culture, and photography to enrich her own art with both highbrow and lowbrow flair.

In the portrait of Klein, all the aforementioned postmodernist tactics are crystalized in one artwork. Diamond applies her de-differentiation techniques for the set-design and re-touching of the photograph. The costume of Klein consists of luxury brands' finest attempts to be lowbrow or street style during the noughties: a pink Dior bucket hat and a

pink Dolce & Gabbana choker necklace (with rhinestones!). Although the kitsch in the photograph catches the eye, it is actually the fragmentation and hyper-real that gives the photograph the most postmodern vibe. Diamond states [translated from French]: “I took photographs of my friends, who I had met online, and placed them in a context of popstars from the past. It was a manner to deconstruct what I think about pop-culture and fashion imagines” (Schültz).

Klein is an experimental electronica composer who performs in fine art museums, not a popular R&B star, as someone might assume from the portrait. Diamond takes relatively unknown musicians and places them in her world, where they are catapulted to stardom. This is a technique related to the hyper-real. The kitsch that the picture radiates makes it abundantly clear that this is not an authentic image of someone. Yet because of the convincing set-design and retouching, we are deceived to think it is an authentic picture from the past. The line between simulation and reality is faded by the convincing pastiche that Diamond makes of a past time. This also alludes to the idea of fragmentation. The portrait fluctuates between underground and mainstream, between outdated and contemporary, between sincere and over-the-top just by selecting and combining the right visual techniques and cultural metaphors. This, eventually, leads us to what Jameson calls flattening. It does not matter who the depicted is. To us, she looks like a vapid pop star from the past, and therefore, without any further research, she might as well be one. Despite Klein’s true multilayered background and contemporary identity, she becomes a Melancholy Object.

What is the impact of postmodernism on the definition of the Melancholy Object? First and foremost, it is a case of deceiving the viewer. All the features of postmodernism and

Diamond's work link to Sontag's warnings about detachment and disregarding the negative narratives of a photograph. Whilst the original Melancholy Object has an "authentic" growth of distance between the viewer and the photograph, the postmodern Melancholy Object has a fabricated, quasi "prêt-à-porter" distance that enhances the photograph's "consumerist quality," as Sontag describes (53). This runs parallel to the heavy commodification of nostalgia that the postmodern age promotes, together with its flattening, superficiality, and pastiche practices. It does not matter any more what the real story, objective details, or pedigree behind the picture are, as long as it immediately functions as a visual trigger for the feelings and emotions that we want it to trigger. It becomes a Melancholy Object on steroids, ready to deliver a quick fix of nostalgia.

Secondly, there might be a more meta aspect at play. To create these postmodern Melancholy Objects, artists fall back on the original Melancholy Objects. When Diamond makes her mood boards and scrapbooks, she selects images from the past decade that spark her interest. She picks the most kitsch and unique pieces as inspiration, like TLC's weird "Waterfalls" music video or Blu Cantrell's insanely retouched video for "Breathe," but also Dior's baby pink clothes and logo-filled accessories (Cragg; Schültz). It is also the decade of which she has childlike memories. The inspiration for Diamond's artworks is clearly her own Melancholy Objects. Just as Sontag refers to the photographer as a ragpicker of unconventional themes to photograph (61-62), the postmodernist image-maker is a ragpicker of unconventional photographs that they can rework as pastiches in their own images. In *On Photography*, the author almost seems to warn us about postmodernism without using the term. Sontag suggests that a collection of these Melancholy Objects will create an alternative

reality or vision of the past, one where uniqueness and oddities shine through the most. The postmodernist image-maker takes this option and starts to create a subjective alternative past, by creating a postmodernist Melancholy Object.

THE (POST-MODERN) MELANCHOLY OBJECT IN OUR POST-POST-MODERN AGE

It may also be paradoxical, or coincidental, that Diamond refers to an era in which the postmodernist turn was actually losing its momentum in the academic world. Around the late nineties and early noughties, an age when global, consumerist optimism got replaced with global crisis in the form of 9/11, the unstable Middle East, and a global banking crash, scholars started to grow (even more) critical of postmodernism's nonchalance and mocking attitude. Instead, they began to propose or observe new critical theories that focused on realism and truth (Gibbons). Around this time, Sontag distanced herself and her works from postmodernism in an interview for *Postmodern Culture*. She denounced the theory as too fluid and criticized the work of Jameson as too theoretical and too cursory in making art forms and popular culture equivalent (Chan). She said:

And what are intellectuals doing with postmodernism? How people move these terms around instead of looking at the concrete reality! I'm for complexity and the respect for reality. I don't want to think anything theoretically in that sense. My interest is to understand the genealogy of ideas. If I'm against interpretation, I'm not against interpretation as such, because all thinking is interpretation. I'm actually against reductive

interpretation, and I'm against facile transposition and the making of cheap equivalences. (Chan)

It should come to no surprise that someone who holds seriousness in such high regards and criticizes detachment would be dismissive of postmodernism. The author's criticism is much in line with most post-postmodernist ideas, although Sontag has not called herself a post-post-modernist. For this part, I selected three much-used post-postmodernist theories that are quite influential and can be linked to Sontag's reading of Melancholy Objects and her criticism of postmodernism.

One of these models is critical realism. A complex and multifaceted theory, critical realism mostly goes against post-modernism's fetishized attention towards flattening and subjectivity. Rather than being an explanatory framework, it wants to be meta-theoretical, revitalizing the need for a (semi-)objective view in sciences with the realisation that they are incomplete. At the heart of it there is an ontological reflex: the idea that a lot of what happens in nature and society is unknown, independent, or invisible to us (Archer et al.). Instead of using the declaration that there is no truth possible, critical realists try to investigate and create results and frameworks with an eye on epistemic relativism, judgmental rationality, and a cautious ethnical naturalism (Archer et al.). This means, in short, that critical realists understand that there are still crucial factors that did not make it into their data, methodology, or results, and therefore their results will change over time, when more research from other points of view are conducted.

A second model is pseudo-modernism, a term coined by Alan Kirby in 2006. The British critic begins his essay, "The

Death of Postmodernism and Beyond,” by denouncing critical realism’s relevance outside the world of academics (Archer et al.). Kirby observes mass media and popular culture and notes that we do not want to be just consumers anymore, but inventors. He refers to reality shows such as *Big Brother*, in which the viewer has an actual impact on the television show by voting who leaves the show, to videogames where one can build one’s own unique cyberworld and to self-made music playlists that replace music albums (Archer et al.). Next to interactivity, pseudo-modernism is typed by a feeling of “now.” These urges for immediate interactivity in fictional settings make us lose all sense of historical connections and these quick decision-making actions will never be recorded (Archer et al.). Kirby concludes that contemporary society, post-9/11, is everything except critical for the real world and its systems, but is rather absorbed in spectacular, fictional micro worlds where modern day crisis is absent. Kirby states:

This technologised cluelessness is utterly contemporary: the pseudo-modernist communicates constantly with the other side of the planet, yet needs to be told [by cooking and lifestyle television shows] to eat vegetables to be healthy, a fact self-evident in the Bronze Age. He or she can direct the course of national television programmes, but does not know how to make him or herself something to eat—a characteristic fusion of the childish and the advanced, the powerful and the helpless. (Archer et al.)

These post-post-modernist characteristics also link very closely to Sontag’s aforementioned quote about finding “the genealogy of the truth,” “complexity and the respect for re-

ality," and making serious, funded interpretations. Sontag's scepticism of photography and the Melancholy Object also leans towards these post-postmodernist approaches. Just as critical realists interpret their data, Sontag acknowledges that a photograph is never an objective, all-telling source of the past, but rather a snapshot that detaches something from a greater and complex narrative (64). Just like data and academic results only make sense in a certain context and are malleable to different interpretations, so is the Melancholy Object. Sontag also remains aware of the ragpicker attitude of the photographer (that the postmodernist also has) and is critical to the dangers of losing a greater, more objective, narrative in favour of a personal history detached from it (like Kirby's criticism of the contemporary helpless pseudo-modernist society). Sontag can therefore be revised as a post-postmodernist voice to question the subjective and populist elements of photographs.

The third post-postmodernist theory is not one clear model, but is inspired by Brendan Canavan's and Claire McClamley's aforementioned essay on pop music. As the two scholars describe postmodernism as a movement of deconstruction, post-postmodernism is based on reconstruction. They highlight rewriting, re-differentiation, and reengagement as core practices, amongst other practices. Rewriting means recreating pre-modern and modern meta-narratives with postmodern influences (Canavan and McCamley, based on Ateljevi and Braidotti). This means respectfully rediscovering past motifs with only a little flattening. Re-differentiation is the return to local identification and community dimension amidst a globalized world centered on de-differentiation (Canavan and McCamley; Cova and Cova). Reengagement, which could be tied to re-differentiation, is a sincere appreciation of different and blended backgrounds and identities

and promotes a reinstitution of the self, society, and reconstructive spirits (Canavan and McCamley, based on Adams, Ateljevic, and Cova et al.).

In the same vein as these concepts of reconstruction and the critical realists that keep an open mind on wide variety of actors in a context, Sontag also notes, in the aforementioned interview, that the aggressive gap between high and low culture that obsesses postmodernism is unnecessary, whilst popular culture should not be dismissed. Susan Sontag claims:

I've also enjoyed a lot of popular music [...].
It seemed we were trying to understand why that was perfectly possible and why that wasn't paradoxical ... and what diversity or plurality of standards might be. [...] I was very struck by how rich and diverse one's experiences are. Consequently, [...] a lot of cultural commentators were lying about the diversity of their experiences. [...] It wasn't a question of bridging the gap. It's simply that I saw a lot of simultaneity in my experiences of pleasure, and felt that most discourse about culture was either philistine or shallowly snobbish. (Chan)

In recent years, low culture has been taken more seriously as social and cultural signifiers, just like high culture. Feminist and pop-culture researcher Andi Zeisler notes in 2008 that academics now study popular culture on such an elaborate scale under the moniker of "Cultural Studies" that it is as important as high culture. Rather than clashing the two cultural forms to provoke or flatten them, a post-postmodernist critic tends to compare and analyze them on a more rational and serious level. Post-post-modernists do not denounce popular

culture. It is an integral part of our life and the complex and layered greater narratives of (creating) our identity.

How is the postmodern Melancholy Object read through the glasses of post-postmodernism? Diamond's picture shows kitsch, an enhanced, sensational micro-world based on mass media and the photographer's outspoken subjective view of the past combined with a disregard of the portrayed person's background. The only relation Diamond seems to have with post-postmodernism, based on this photograph, is that her work radiates what these scholars refute. But does that make Diamond's art outdated? No.

Several post-post-modernists admit that postmodernism still has an influence on consumerist culture. Brendan Cavanaugh and Claire McCamley (6) state that postmodernism has lost its overruling touch, but still mingles with post-post-modernism in a successful formula to stay relevant in the pop-music landscape. Kirby declares that postmodernism, in the noughties, "has sunk to a source of marginal gags in pop culture aimed at the under-eights" (Kirby). Ironically, Kirby starts his 2006 essay by stating that postmodern literature is "all about as contemporary as The Smiths, as hip as shoulder pads, as happening as Betamax video recorders" (Kirby). These cultural signifiers have actually been gaining momentum in our pop culture since 2010 (Kirby). The postmodern idea of nostalgia and the flattening of past pop-imagery are almost crucial ingredients in the current mass consumerist landscape.

The artistry of Hannah Diamond is a perfect example of this intertwinement. When asked about the level of satire of the PC Music collective, label founder and close collaborator of Diamond, A.G. Cook, states that: "I never set it up in that way. Everything can get interpreted as satire, in that very cyn-

ical way. [...] We take it seriously. This is a big part of our lives. There's no way that satire could be at the core of anything" (Voznick-Levinson). This statement suggests rewriting aspects of post-post-modernity, as artists actually respect what they refer to and make, and want to be taken seriously. Calling Diamond's photographic practises solely postmodern and superficial might be short-sighted and denounce the artist's own statements. Diamond proclaims that her art (music and images) does have a level of sincerity, as she genuinely loves the era she refers to. It is not meant to be a mocking of the late nineties/early noughties or pop music (Cragg), and nostalgia and pastiche are massive creative catalysts for her creative process.

Diamond draws inspiration from the world of the global Internet celebrities. She wonders where the crossing-point occurs where a niche artist blows up into a global pop star (Schültz). In post-postmodernism, this transition would happen with an eye on re-differentiation and reengagement. Contemporary pop stars are more aware of their local traditions or identity and are starting to incorporate them in their global practices.² Yet the reconstructive aspects of Diamond's other works are nowhere to be found in the picture of Klein. The depicted person's own identity is almost completely unknown and buried under the noughties' images and references. Nothing in the picture could spoil the music or personality Klein typifies, despite it being a promo image for Klein's experimental music.

The post-post-modernism rewriting has no place in this deconstructive image by Diamond. It is also important to note

2 A clear example is Catalan pop star Rosalía, who has recently risen to fame with contemporary pop songs sung in Spanish and Catalan, mixed with their and global cultural signifiers.

that flattening, nostalgia, and postmodernism are still huge aspects of Diamond's popularity and attraction. It is something that the media likes to discuss: in almost every interview she gets asked about what she likes about the noughties era and what inspires her. And more importantly, the picture as a postmodern Melancholy Object is what draws me, and many other Diamond fans, to it in the first place. Because we see these pictures flying around on the Internet without little-to-no background knowledge of the depicted, it is attractive to denounce Sontag or post-postmodernist warnings and to start to project one's own nostalgia onto the picture and fantasize a superficial narrative around it. Perhaps post-postmodernists want to rationally revisit and revise the border between high- and lowbrow, that postmodernism so violently messed up, by marginalizing postmodernism, but this does not mean that all postmodernism has run its course. The postmodern Melancholy Object has not yet become a Melancholy Object itself due to its freshness and interest for pop culture standards.

RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION

Did Susan Sontag's concept of the Melancholy Object stand the test of time? The answer is yes. The idea has proven to be malleable, yet founded, to apply to different western cultural theories. The critical note that Sontag applies is quintessential to unmasking the power a photograph has to deceive us and trigger our emotions. This is now, in our age of blinding nostalgia and fake news, even more important to wield than ever. Although a critical framework to judge images has gained in popularity in our current post-postmodernist academic field, postmodernism has not left our cultural field. Enter: the case study of this essay.

The nostalgia I feel from observing the portrait of Klein linked to the characteristics of a Melancholy Object on a superficial reading. Going beneath the surface, however, the picture is nothing more than a postmodern trick. This is a trick of feel-good, prêt-à-porter nostalgia, an appropriation of Melancholy Objects that Sontag so passionately warned about: a postmodern Melancholy Object. These postmodern Melancholy Objects are still well liked in our popular culture due to a nostalgic fondness of (what seems to be) a careless era and the postmodern techniques used then. The postmodern Melancholy Object may not be appreciated by contemporary post-postmodernist thinkers, but it will still be enjoyed by a broader public and can be used as a tool to typify our contemporary popular culture.

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Where Angels Tread: The Art and Architecture of Guardian Angel Cathedral in Las Vegas, Nevada

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by Patricia M. Kirtley and William M. Kirtley

ABSTRACT

Las Vegas is an adult amusement park with incredible culinary delights, potent alcoholic libations, and gaming that promises the possibility of instant wealth. Here, Googie style buildings, like Guardian Angel Cathedral, feature upswept roofs and geometric shapes. The Cathedral's religious art challenges viewers intellectually and spiritually. One stained glass window even depicts several Las Vegas casinos. This paper analyzes the Cathedral's art and architecture from a sociological viewpoint.

Keywords: architecture, art, casino, cathedral, Moe Dalitz, Guardian Angel Cathedral, Googie, Las Vegas, mystic realism, Piczek, popular culture, sociology of religion, stained glass windows, Stations of the Cross, Paul Revere Williams

Donde pisan los ángeles: el arte y la arquitectura de Guardian Angel Cathedral en Las Vegas Nevada

RESUMEN

Las Vegas es un parque de diversiones para adultos con increíbles delicias culinarias, potentes libaciones alcohólicas y juegos que prometen la posibilidad de una riqueza instantánea. Aquí, los edificios de estilo Googie, como la Catedral del Ángel de la Guarda, tienen techos elevados y formas geométricas. El arte religioso de la Catedral desafía a los espectador-

res intelectual y espiritualmente. Un vitral incluso representa varios casinos de Las Vegas. Este artículo analiza el arte y la arquitectura de la Catedral desde un punto de vista sociológico.

Palabras clave: Arquitectura, Arte, Casino, Catedral, Moe Dalitz, Guardian Angel Cathedral, Googie, Las Vegas, Realismo Místico, Piczek, Cultura popular, Sociología de la religión, Vitrales, Estaciones de la Cruz, Paul Revere Williams

天使踏过的地方：内华达州拉斯维加斯守护天使大教堂的艺术与建筑

摘要

拉斯维加斯是一个拥有美妙烹饪食物、强烈酒精饮料、以及保证获得瞬时财富可能性赌博的成人游乐场。在这里，古奇风格建筑（例如守护天使大教堂）以上翘的屋顶和几何形状为特征。守护天使大教堂的宗教艺术对参观者的智力和精神都是一场挑战。一片彩色玻璃窗甚至描绘了好几个拉斯维加斯的赌场。本文以社会学的视角分析了该大教堂的艺术和建筑。

关键词：建筑，艺术，赌场，大教堂，Moe Dalitz，守护天使大教堂，古奇（Googie），拉斯维加斯，神秘现实主义，Piczek，流行文化，宗教社会学，彩色玻璃窗，苦路，Paul Revere Williams

INTRODUCTION

The once marvelous Googie architecture ...

—Outsource Plan Architecture Solutions

Everything is possible in a study of popular culture. Research into the origins of Googie architecture led to a better understanding of the definition of popular culture. A reference to Guardian Angel Cathedral, a Googie style church, as “The Church of George Jetson,” prompted a YouTube search that found the introduction to the 1962 TV show *The Jetsons*. It depicted department stores, schools, and office buildings drawn with brilliant colors, daring shapes, and gravity-defying signage (*The Jetsons*). A visit to the Guardian Angel Cathedral in Las Vegas confirms that this building is a classic Googie edifice, housing vibrant mosaics and luminous stained-glass windows. Reflection on the entirety of the artwork on display is personal, inspiring, challenging, and charismatic.

Googie’s relegation to low culture by professional architects is a perfect example of theorist John Storey’s second definition of popular culture. It is “residual culture”—that is, “what is left after we have decided what is high culture” (5). The elite have the power to set standards. They consider popular culture inferior, and thus, a marker of status and class. The arbiters of taste and culture assigned a lowly status to Googie for three main reasons. First, they considered this futurist style crass, garish, and commercial. Second it did not follow the rules laid down by the architectural establishment. Third, they believed a style typified by coffee shops, fast food restaurants, and car washes could never aspire to the level of excellence of architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, who created significant structures that blended into the community and the environment.

Googie architecture gravitated from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and around the world. This style reached its highest expression in airports and churches, like the LAX Theme Building and the Guardian Angel Cathedral in Las Vegas, both designed by architect Paul Revere Williams. Googie demonstrates an ability to surprise, challenge, and inform. The brilliant mosaics and radiant stained glass windows of the Las Vegas church are exceptional examples of a type of ecclesiastical art called “mystical realism.” The two talented sisters who created this art, Isabel (1927–2016) and Edith (1919–2014) Piczek, viewed it as a roadmap to salvation.

A huge mosaic of four guardian angels invites pilgrims into the Cathedral. The most remarkable feature of this edifice, from the standpoint of popular culture, is the South Sanctuary window to the right side of the altar, entitled “The Cosmic Christ.” The lower section of the window depicts famous past and present Las Vegas casinos, including the Hilton, the Stardust, and the Landmark (later the Stratosphere). Closer inspection reveals a deeper message of inclusion: everyone is welcome here. All professions are part of this kingdom: scientists, engineers, farmers, healthcare professionals, teachers, poets, and performers. Harlequin stands in the lower right quadrant of the window, holding masks of tragedy and comedy, an apt representation for a city billing itself as the entertainment capital of the world. Other stained glass windows in the Cathedral tell stories from the Bible or depict the Stations of the Cross.

The authors of this paper used the tools of participant observation to discover the mysteries and beauty of Guardian Angel Cathedral. They attended services, examined relevant theory, analyzed documents, and interviewed clergy and parishioners. They discovered the Cathedral embraces a unique community bound by sacred rituals, symbols, be-

liefs, organizational structures, and inspirational art. Functional sociologists emphasize that architecture and the art of the sacred binds worshipers into a unique community. The soaring A-frames of the Cathedral's Googie architecture signal to congregants that this is a holy place in a city noted for the profane. The murals, mosaics, and stained-glass windows instruct pilgrims on how to treat each other, and describe a unifying plan of salvation. Those who wish to view the art of the Cathedral for themselves can find images at <http://www.gaclv.org/aboutourcathedral.html>.

Guardian Angel Cathedral offers several gifts as an object of analysis. It provides a quiet contemplative space away from the gaudy neon lights and temptations of the strip. Its religious art carries a total message that challenges viewers intellectually and spiritually. This paper demonstrates how Googie-style architecture attained its highest expression in the Guardian Angel Cathedral of Las Vegas. This building provides sacred space for riveting art that enhances the experience of worshipers and encourages them to strive for profound meanings.

GOOGIE ARCHITECTURE

Phony, dated, childhood oriented trash
— Hess (170)

Investigating the origin of Guardian Angel Cathedral raised the question of who was its architect and why did the builders choose this location? The answers to these questions led to exploration of Googie's history, meaning, and relationship to popular culture. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu asserted, "if you want to understand the tastes of someone, you should consider their dislikes." The disciples of Frank Lloyd Wright designed buildings that fit or harmonized with

a particular time and place. No wonder they found Googie garish, tacky, and commercial. Googie cried out for attention. Critics were thankful Googie lasted about twenty-five years before falling out of favor (Budds 3). Architecture writer and critic Douglas Haskell was the first to use the term “Googie,” after the nickname of Lillian K. Burton, wife of a Los Angeles coffee shop owner, to describe this modern or Atomic Age architecture (Holub 1).

Haskell wrote a devastating critique of Googie in the February 1952 issue of *House and Home Magazine*. He wondered if ambitious mechanics, rather than architects, drew up the plans for the “spicy goulash” of Googie (86). He declared, “It looks funny, but I guess the guy has a right to do it that way if it attracts attention to his business” (86). He criticized Googie for attempting to surpass the work of the revered Frank Lloyd Wright “with no canons save that it looks modern and organic” (86). Other architects simply dismissed Googie as “atrocious design” (Hess 170).

However, to lovers of Googie like architectural writer Alan Hess, “Popular culture gained a new vitality, reshaping the landscape” during the period from 1945–1965 (29). Googie, an iconoclastic, unabashedly commercial style, developed from two post-WWII phenomena: the advent of car culture and the beginning of the Space Age. In 1913, Los Angeles completed the California Aqueduct, conveying water to the city from hundreds of miles away. Nearby communities joined the city to acquire enough water to survive and grow. A patchwork of small towns grew into the sprawling megalopolis of Los Angeles, the second largest city in the United States.

A system of streetcars connected the various suburbs of Los Angeles in the early part of the twentieth century. However,

with the advent of universally owned automobiles, Southern California became a maze of freeways. The surrounding communities had developed an identity, a central core of banks and government buildings. Other services followed their customers to these new residential areas, lured by easy access and cheaper rent than downtown.

The owners of these businesses commissioned architects to design buildings and high-flying signage to attract the attention of drivers, prompting them to exit the freeway and patronize local businesses. Design writer Diana Budds in her lively blog, “How LA Got Its Grooviest Architecture,” noted, “Signage is where many Googies sing. Their architects experimented with custom typography, abstract symbols like dingbats and starbursts, neon lights, and more” (5).

Googie architects used vibrant colors, bold designs, a myriad of materials, and pulsing elevated signs decorated with cosmic rays to call attention to their buildings. Googie spoke to average people in their ordinary life as they frequented coffee shops, fast-food restaurants, bowling alleys, and car washes. Commuters knew the trademark golden arches meant a cheap, fast, and predictable meal (Outsource Plan Architecture Solutions 1). Customers easily recognized the proliferating franchise outlets from the road because each carried the same design features.

Space Age themes fascinated the public. During the 1950s, space travel became a reality. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the first human-made satellite to achieve Earth orbit in 1957. They shot Yuri Gagarin into orbit in 1961. The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations made the “Space Race” a national priority. Googie style signs reminded citizens of this contest with its sharp and bold angles, suggesting the aerodynamic features of a rocket ship. Mushroom clouds, billowing

above the Nevada Test Site sixty-five miles away, shocked the residents of Las Vegas, and served as a dramatic reminder of the extraordinary power unleashed in the Atomic Age.

Googie architecture proliferated in the US and around the world. Notable examples of this style are the Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel, Seattle's signature landmark Space Needle, Dulles Airport in Washington, DC, and the early Tomorrow Land in Disneyland. International examples range from steel lattice structures like the Osaka Tower and Beppu Tower in Japan to concrete towers like the Fernsehturm in Berlin and the Skylon Tower in Niagara Falls, Ontario. In *Googie Architectural Design*, Howard Holub described these buildings as "Jetson-esque because of their modern architecture and flashy designs" (1). The animators at Hannah-Barbara drew inspiration for the Space Age buildings in the Jetsons cartoon from the Googie structure in which they worked, the Hannah-Barbara building.

COFFEE SHOP HEAVEN

Alan Hess, author of the authoritative book, *Googie Redux*, and a devotee of this "Ultramodern roadside architecture" noted, "One of the primary legacies of Coffee Shop Modern lies in an unexpected place: the Las Vegas Strip" (158). The signature "Welcome to Vegas" sign with its starburst on Las Vegas Boulevard continues as the most famous enduring Googie artifact. The starburst on this iconic sign is in the form of a high-energy explosion, an example of non-utilitarian design. The star shape has no actual function and merely serves as a design element.

Googie style soon spread to Las Vegas where many of the same architects who designed Googie coffee shops in Los Angeles drew up plans for hotels and casinos. Googie-influ-

enced casinos, like the Mint, the Sands, the Stardust, and the Desert Inn, have long since fallen victim to implosion and destruction. However, the Stratosphere, now called the Strat, still stands as an overpowering symbol of Googie architecture.

Other examples of Googie appeared along Charleston Boulevard and Maryland Parkway. Motels from the early days of Las Vegas, like the Tod, Yucca, and Sky Ranch, displayed Googie signage and architecture (Googie Architecture in Las Vegas, Part I). Today, these buildings are in transitional neighborhoods, dilapidated and for sale or lease. Many examples of Googie are now repurposed coffee shops, like Tacos Mexico, the Cleaner, and Title Loans (Googie Architecture, Part II). Most of these buildings have fallen to the wrecking ball since these two YouTube videos debuted in 2012. Hess noted, “Around 1970 commercial architects gave up building the future and largely began to build the past again” (176). After two decades of robust popularity, tastes changed. Instead of grabbing attention, roadside buildings strove to blend in. Googie style became unfashionable and numerous examples were destroyed. Yet, when one observes the yellow directional arrow common to the In-N-Out burger chain or the neon-lit stalls and barrel vaults of Sonic restaurants, it is clear Googie lives on, especially in the fast food business.

Today’s architects study Googie for insight into new materials and construction techniques. They use exposed steel beams and glass as a design element to create structures that defy gravity. They recognize it as the popular style of a particular period that demonstrated the possibilities of the future. The critics detested Googie, but never found it boring. Its adherents found support among people who realized Googie’s contribution to the history of suburbia and car culture. They see Googie through the eyes of nostalgia: bright, shiny,

challenging, and the wave of the future. They seek to preserve some of the remaining examples of this style by placing them on the National Register of Historic buildings.

THE CHURCH OF SAINT GEORGE JETSON

According to French sociologist Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Las Vegas is the “absolute advertising city,” where consumers can find a greater variety of large-scale reproductions than in any other place (91). Cascades of pulsing neon lure gamblers to casinos. A pyramid, a castle, and replicas of architectural delights in Venice and Paris beckon those with money to spend. Hucksters prowl Las Vegas Boulevard preying on gullible tourists. North on Las Vegas Boulevard, past the upscale Fashion Show Mall and Steve Wynn’s Encore, is a narrow curving road. At its end lies a unique Roman Catholic Cathedral. How it found a place amidst the glitter and excess of the Las Vegas Strip makes for a fascinating story that features a nod to the theme of Las Vegas and the mob.

The Viatorians, a Catholic teaching order dedicated to education, opened Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas in 1954. The following year they built a church on the site of the city dump. It proved untenable and the city condemned it within six months after its completion. Rev. Richard Crowley established excellent relationships with casino owners. In 1958, he began celebrating a 4:30 PM Sunday Mass in the showroom of the Desert Inn Hotel, especially for hotel workers: cooks, waiters, bartenders, and musicians in ballrooms littered with the detritus of Saturday night revels. Crowley convinced the moguls that a church on the strip was good business for their Catholic employees and patrons whom they did not want wandering too far from Las Vegas Boulevard (Cathedral Celebrating 1).

Crowley asked Morris Barney (Moe) Dalitz, a Jewish gangster known as “Mr. Las Vegas” for his philanthropic work, for help. Dalitz donated a narrow strip of land on the edge of his property, the Desert Inn, for the church (Viatorians Celebrate 1). He also spearheaded a fundraising effort to build the church and hired Paul Revere Williams, an architect he had worked with on the Royal Nevada Casino, to design the church. Williams had gained a reputation designing elegant stylized homes for celebrities like Frank Sinatra and Lucille Ball in Los Angeles. He was the first African-American elected to the prestigious American Institute of Architects.

The Bishop of Las Vegas-Reno consecrated the church as a Shrine on 2 October 1962. Bishop Norman McFarland designated it a Cathedral in 1977. The Piczek sisters worked on the Church’s murals, paintings, and stained glass for over ten years. The Cathedral underwent an extensive remodel in 1992.

Modernistic writer Ken Macintyre wrote in *Atomic Ranch Magazine*, “this unlikely beacon of midcentury Googie ... did not go unnoticed and raised a few eyebrows at the time” (1). Steven Schloeder, who specializes in Catholic Church architecture, continued the criticism of Googie style by the arbiters of high culture. In his blog, he questions, “How far architects should go trying to speak to the age?” (1). He argues the design was dated, not a model for replication, and the A-frame architecture was too mechanical to carry the weight of “something intended to speak of the transcendent” (1). He described the Cathedral as “a poor cousin” to the Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel” (4). He observed, with more than a hint of condescension, that architect Paul Revere Williams was “a good stylist, and obviously a keen observer of fashionable architectural publications” (3).

Schloeder said some good things about what he called a “reasonably good piece of Atomic architecture” (3). He described the interior of the church as a simple and elegant hall church with “a strong sense of rhythm, proportion, and integration of architectural form, liturgical appointments and sacred art” (3). He commented that the triangular windows depicting scenes from the Stations of the Cross provide abundant light and the dark, dense, stained glass windows cut the harsh glare of the desert sun to create a luminous interior. Schloeder’s main complaint was that a guard would not allow him to enter the sanctuary to photograph the stained-glass window depicting Las Vegas casinos.

Guardian Angel Cathedral and the Air Force Cadet Chapel, as Schloeder pointed out, show many similarities (4). Both feature Googie style at its finest, including highly engaging triangular stained-glass windows. Seventeen soaring spires highlight the Cadet Chapel. Guardian Angel Cathedral, a much smaller structure, showcases twelve. Pundits criticized the style of both edifices, although the Cadet Chapel eventually earned several prestigious awards (Mulder 4). The chapel at the Air Force Academy raises the spirits of the cadets and enlivens a utilitarian campus. Though often overlooked, Guardian Angel Cathedral remains a place of peace and energizes those who discover it.

Williams’ soaring triangular exterior gives the Cathedral presence in the face of the dominating chocolate brown twin towers of Steve Wynn’s hotel casino resort located next door. The Cathedral accommodates 1,100 congregants, ninety percent of whom are tourists (Cathedral Celebrating). Above the entrance, a bold colorful mosaic depicts a central guardian angel along with three angels representing Penance, Prayer, and Peace by Edith Piczek. The interior design provides angular

spaces for bright, glowing, stained glass windows depicting the Stations of the Cross by her sister, Isabel. Williams designed the Cathedral in traditional cruciform shape, with a transept leading to a Marian Chapel and a Blessed Sacrament Chapel. A main aisle and two side aisles allow passage to the rear of the church.

Those who visit this church cannot ignore the impressive and unusual windows that illuminate the Cathedral physically and spiritually. The Cathedral's east-west orientation ensures that sunlight constantly changes and interacts with the windows. The interior lighting also enhances the experience of visitors. Michael Garris, the lighting and sound engineer for the church, designed an indirect lighting system made up of extremely narrow and shallow troffers to augment this natural effect, giving the interior an overall light value of fifteen candlepower. Similar lighting backlights the mural behind the altar (Williams 1). These luminous sources fill the interior with light conducive to prayer and meditation.

THE ART OF GUARDIAN ANGEL CATHEDRAL

Religion, like art, lives in so far as it is performed.

—Turner (85)

Years of collaboration and common beliefs about art and religion forged the aesthetic partnership of two sisters: Edith and Isabel Piczek. Both artists worked in murals, mosaics, and stained glass. Isabel became an internationally known physicist, recognized for her study of the Shroud of Turin. Author and archivist, Monsignor Francis Weber, a friend of both artists, noted on Isabel's passing, "The unassuming sisters" saw their vocation as a "cultural and religious mission" to implant their authentic artwork on the soul of the observer (1).

The sisters' birthplace was in the town of Hatvan, Hungary. Their father, Zoltan Piczek, was an accomplished artist. The siblings displayed artistic ability at an early age, and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest. They fled the suppression of the communist regime after World War II, first to Vienna and then to Rome. The two sisters won a contest in 1949 to create a mural for the Pontifical Bible Institute, an unprecedented honor for women artists. A Canadian bishop encouraged them to emigrate and they established a studio in Echo Park, Los Angeles. Their works appear in over 450 buildings in seven countries (Uribie 1). On Edith's death, *Angelus* writer, Heather King, quoted Edith as saying, "The artist is creating visual representation to see the sacred in each of us, to show the love of God through art for the Church" (1).

Isabel's obituary related an experience that occurred while she was working on the art in the Guardian Angel Cathedral, Las Vegas. A young man approached her and asked how he could learn to paint large murals. She told him, "You cannot learn it. It was a gift from God ... a gift that comes with a very high price. Once you are born with this gift, your life and your choices are all set" ("Obituary").

MYSTICAL REALISM

An understanding of mystical realism is essential to fully appreciate the Piczek sisters' art. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann believed that religion regulated the relationships of people with the world in a comprehensive and ultimate meaning (Cipriani 242). The Piczek sisters interpreted reality through mysticism. They understood that believers can attain knowledge into the mysteries of faith, through intuition and communication with the Divine. Their philosophy of religion permeated their art. They believed Divine entities are not accurately described in terms of space, matter, time,

or causation. Realism, to them, meant art informed by their philosophy (Piczek 1).

Like a graphic novel, each frame in Isabel's series of windows on the Stations of the Cross narrates the story of the sequence of events leading to Christ's death. Once people learn the pattern, any person, regardless of their religious background, will profit from taking the time to scrutinize the windows. The figures in Isabel's windows remind the viewer of the somewhat abstract style found in adventure comics. Isabel Piczek provided an excellent example of what comics theorist Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics*, described as an artist stripping down the essential elements of a figure to "amplify through simplification" (30). She exposed the carnal aspects of humanity in her portrayal of "Flesh," as hulking, hunched, and hateful, with a beetled brow and a smirk of self-satisfaction.

Russian existential Orthodox Christian philosopher Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev (1874–1948) provided an excellent description of the art movement known as Mystical Realism in his article, "Decadentism and Mystical Realism" (1904). He contrasted decadentism, an artistic movement centered in Western Europe that followed an aesthetic of excess and artificiality, with the mystic realism of Eastern Europe that holds that entities are not accurately described in terms of space, matter, time, or causation, but only in relationship to God's Divine plan.

Berdyaev explained mystical realism through a devastating critique of decadentism. He described decadentism as a bad joke, an illness of spirit that cannot distinguish the light of the moon from that of a streetlamp. Mystical realism, on the other hand, is a joyful encounter, healthy thought striving for a new way of being. Decadentism is vulgar. It confuses mys-

ticism with aestheticism. Mystical realism bridges the gap from aestheticism to accepted and experienced beauty. Most importantly, decadentism is an expression of love without object. It does not unite with the divine. Mystical realism is love with an object uniting man with God through the incarnation of the Word into flesh (Berdyayev 8).

The humility of both sisters and their sense of community reflected their belief in mystic realism. Sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) helps one understand the concept. He defined mysticism as the belief that people attain union with the Deity or the Absolute through contemplation and self-surrender. He noted, “The mystic is constantly striving to escape from activity in the world back to the quietness and inwardness of the god” (M. Weber H.2.f). The Piczek sisters believed knowledge lies not in facts and doctrines, but in the perception of the overall meaning of the world. They judged their function as liturgical artists as guiding the viewer on a journey toward a unified understanding of the world, based on the conviction that Christian brotherly love leads to unity in all things.

The sisters’ art takes observers from fragmentation and division to unity and synthesis. It is centered on man and his connection to God through Christ. It features intuition, light, knowledge, and spiritual mystery. It portrays harsh figures like Power, Flesh, and Despair and explores the abstract reality of the seven sacraments. It celebrates the victory of Christ and man’s place in the new creation. This new age of man identifies Christ as the founder of Christianity and a monumental unsurpassed image of man. The art presents worshipers with a well-ordered unity with everything overlapping, and simultaneously a paradoxical structure. The artists noted, “the destiny of man is happiness—your happiness

and is created within you, by you” (Guardian Angel Church Bulletin 9 April 2017).

Entrance Mosaic—Edith Piczek was the creative artist of the 1,600 square foot mosaic over the main entrance to the Guardian Angel Cathedral. The Favret studio in Pietrasanta, Italy did much of the stonework. Writer Sandra Hemmerlein compared the figures in the mosaic to comic book super heroes in her blog, “Avoiding Regret.” Below the eye of God, rays of grace and power fall upon a large guardian angel, a strong compelling companion for man, ready for action, with his hair flowing behind him. One hand reaches toward God and the other touches the world of man indicating a communication between God and man. Three smaller angels, portrayed below, signify Prayer, Penance, and Peace. Penance stretches out his hand asking man to express remorse. Prayer kneels, prepared to transmit man’s prayers to God and accept His reply. Peace is the guardian and companion of man in the quest for serenity, inspiration, and joy. The four angels stand eager to help and encourage pilgrims on their journey to eternal life and happiness.

Stained Glass—The 1,000-year-old art of stained glass is complex and esoteric. One needs the palate of an artist, the skill of a craftsperson, and the knowledge of a chemist. The artist conceives an idea and draws it out in the minimal cleanliness of a “cartoon,” a charcoal sketch. The basic material for the windows is glass, colored when molten by the addition of various metallic salts. After these pieces cool, the artist arranges them in the pattern outlined in the cartoon, binds them together with strips of lead, and supports the artwork with a rigid frame.

The most obvious property of glass is color. The color of stained glass results from light radiated through the glass and

changes depending on the angle of the sun and atmospheric conditions. Isabel Piczek used variations of hues, tints, and shades to create a living animated expression of the personal vision that captivated her soul. The closest comparison to Isabel's work is the color and light emanating from the stunning stained-glass windows of Russian born Jewish artist Marc Chagall (1887–1985) that decorate the churches of Europe and the Abbell Synagogue at the Hadassah University Medical Center in Jerusalem.

Isabel Piczek was the lead artist for the dazzling luminous stained-glass Stations of the Cross located in the twelve triangular niches of the church. Thick rough lead binds the flat broken pieces of glass together. Isabel's stained glass features a severe and spartan approach to human figures. They are high in quality and imbued with pathos and strong personality, entirely at home within the building. Isabel gave great attention to composition, content, and impact, including gestures and facial expressions of the characters in the various scenes. A reoccurring theme of "choice" runs through Isabel's windows. Small scenes emerge almost as flashes of memory within many of the windows that portray Old Testament Biblical characters making difficult decisions.

The story emerges when one puts the pieces of the puzzle into a sequence that shows a progression of events like a comic strip or a graphic novel. McCloud insists this method works whether it is "stained-glass windows showing Biblical scenes in order, to Monet's series painting" (20). A tacit invitation permeates each window inviting the viewer's internal response, an inducement to reflect and ponder. What is presented is impressive, but what is implied is elusive. The viewer's first impression of the Cathedral windows is meaningful, but deeper meditation reveals a parsing of mysteries both historical and personal. As a result, the impact of these

artworks comes from an appreciation of the artistic composition the viewer sees, but also the response of one's own conscience confronting one's moral compass.

Introduction To The Message—In order to fully grasp the message of the Piczek sisters, it helps to view the murals, mosaics, and stained-glass windows of the Cathedral in a certain sequence. First, grow accustomed to the explosion of light and color radiating throughout the Cathedral. Then proceed toward the main altar and investigate the stained-glass windows in the side chapels. Second, start with Station I on the right side of the main altar and follow the Stations of the Cross to the back, moving to the left side of the Cathedral, and returning to the front. This meditative circuit generates energy that finds its fulfillment in the third part of the sequence, the north and south side sanctuary windows and the altar mural. Last, depart down the main aisle, filled with energy, hope, and guidance.

The Marian Chapel—The bright airy Marian Chapel to the left of the main altar features a beautiful wall of small stained-glass windows cataloging specific events in Mary's life, such as the Annunciation and the Marriage Feast of Cana. For many, this is a special place dedicated to reflection on the mother of Christ. Above a small altar, is a stunning mosaic depicting a figure of Jesus as a young boy standing before Mary. Both figures welcome visitors with their arms extended wide in altruism and invitation. Many Christians find solace in meditating on Mary as a conduit to the Divine, especially since she experienced the trials and distresses of normal family life. Here is comfort and consolation.

The Blessed Sacrament Chapel—The Eucharist is kept in a tabernacle in its own chapel to the right of the main altar. The

mosaic in back of the altar features Christ with his arms outstretched surrounded on both sides by angels and humans who stand and kneel. When Piczek tells stories from the Bible, they suddenly become light. The small stained-glass windows decorating the chapel wall depict the corporal works of mercy outlined in Matthew 25:36-46. "I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (*The Holy Bible*). A re-occurring theme in the background of each window features people shunning or ignoring those in need, lessons often portrayed in medieval stained-glass windows for those who could not read.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Christian pilgrims, after Jerusalem's conquest by Muslims, retrace fourteen events of Christ's last day on earth in a mini-pilgrimage called the Via Dolorosa. Only eight of the fourteen stations have scriptural foundations. Today, it forms part of Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Methodist liturgy. This devotional may occur indoors or outdoors. It features prayers, meditation, and a short lesson at numbered stations, most often marked by icons or images. It usually takes place on the Fridays of Lent. The stained-glass windows of Guardian Angel Cathedral portray a unique version of the Stations of the Cross, as is the artist's occasional placing of two stations in one window.

Many worshipers revere a more traditional expression of Christ's last hours, focusing on His heartrending sacrifice, suffering incredible pain, agony, and humiliation as the price of Redemption. They find it difficult to accept the Piczek sisters' interpretation of this devotion. The artists do not deny the torture of Christ's last hours. They focus on His incredible determination to offer horrible suffering as a gift

of love and deliverance for all mankind. In these windows, Christ sees beyond the sacrifice He must make, and displays the consummate example of love, strength, and courage. The title of each station demonstrates the connection to Isabel Piczek's belief in mystical realism.

Station I—Christ's journey begins at this station. "Look at the Man" is a startling contrast to the traditional version of the Stations. Isabel Piczek replaced the long-established scene of Jesus condemned to death with a striking masculine depiction of Jesus. He is strong, bold, and surrounded by fiery red flames of love, emerging from the dark world of primitive creation. A jagged figure of Human Weakness washes His hands, an homage to Pontius Pilate. Evil Will, Dark Mind, and the confined angular caricature of Flesh stand in condemnation of the promised Messiah. The hand of God in the dark apex of the window, references the Ten Commandments, symbolizing the connectedness of the Old and New Testament.

Station II—"Freedom and Obedience" covers the left and top two-thirds of this two-part window. In the traditional version of this station, Jesus is given his cross. In Elizabeth Piczek's rendition, a flaming red Jesus accepts the cross, the result of His choice to obey God's will. The artist portrays Jesus as a super-man, with powers beyond the universe. Two false types of obedience, fear and mechanical, stand forlorn in the background. A barefoot shepherd, Moses, appears in the lower left corner of the window. He contemplates the burning bush recorded in the book of Exodus. This phenomenon attracts Moses and a voice informs him God designated him to lead the tribe of Israel out of Egypt. Moses' obedience is a harbinger to that of Christ's.

Station III—"Freedom and Love," traditionally named "Jesus Falls the First Time," occupies the bottom right third of

the window, separated by an electric blue arrow from the previous station. Bright reds and orange colors call attention to a radiant and acceptant Jesus. Adam and Eve stand above Christ, symbols of man's rejection of God's will. Three evil villains emerge from a dark cave to push Jesus down. They represent Pride, Pomp, and Self, products of man's darkened intellect after the fall from God's grace.

Station IV—"The Woman of Hope" is significantly different from the conventional version, "Jesus Meets His Mother." Mary, depicted in blue, walks by her Son's side as He drags the cross. Her radiant face expresses strength and hope for Him and all mankind. In the apex of the triangular window, a woman crushes the head of a snake, a symbol of her power over evil (Genesis 3:15). Behind her, a depiction of the Ten Commandments links this scene to the Old Testament. Malevolent caricatures of Political Power, Hypocrisy, Anger, Despair, and Mockery surround mother and son. The next window also contains two stations.

Station V—"Human Oneness" traditionally depicts Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus carry his cross. Simon clasps both Christ and the cross in his arms in a heartfelt gesture of love, representing the oneness of the Divinity and all mankind. Simon represents all men who "join Christ on the Way to Hope" (Piczek 8). The rough-hewn figure of Flesh, trapped within a small dark cave of his own making, mocks Simon's sacrifice with a sardonic smile. Cain and Abel appear in the lower right corner of the station, portraying the Old Testament presence of strife in mankind.

Station VI—"The Mystery of Man" is conventionally labeled "Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus." There is no mention of this incident in the scriptures, but tradition reveals that this

woman of Jerusalem, moved by Christ's suffering, used her veil to wipe His face. A miracle occurred as a result of her kindness when her veil bore an image of Christ's face. Veronica kneels at the feet of Jesus, a reminder that human nature bears the imprint of God's face. The huge haunting eyes of God emerging from the burnt umber darkness form the centerpiece of the window. This station provides the viewer with the opportunity to witness the dramatic effect of the bleeding color of the glass to emphasize the determination of the Father's love in the fulfillment of His promise.

A small insert on the bottom right of the window portrays the ancient story of the widow Ruth, who chooses hard labor in the fields to care for her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, even though Ruth does not share her ardent faith. As a result of her humble sacrifices, Ruth meets and subsequently marries Boaz, accepts his faith, and thereby provides the lineage to David, and eventually Christ.

Station VII—"The Future," more commonly known as "Christ's Second Fall," shows man achieving a great forward thrust into impending times. Resistance to this path begins in the apex of the window, with idolaters worshiping a Golden Calf, a symbol of sins of the flesh. A pyramid of stylized faces opposes Christ's movement toward wholeness. Gluttony, a symbol of wasted love, pours a jar of wine on the ground. Brutality chokes another figure. Vanity kisses her own image in mirror. Laziness, skulking in the background, represents indifference. Jesus, pictured at the bottom of the window, has fallen under the burden of atoning for man's sins, yet His face mirrors understanding as He offers his mercy.

Station VIII—"The True Mother," formerly called "Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem," reflects a tender and powerful concept of motherhood. The focal point of the window

is Mary, who offers up her son to God. Christ is crowned with thorns and holds on to his cross. He blesses a group of lamenting women. An insert on the right portrays the Old Testament fate of two women who consider dividing a newborn baby under the judgment of Solomon. This serves as an example of enduring love and sacrifice. The two stations in the next window depict compelling versions of reality.

Station IX—"Peace" is also known as "Jesus Falls the Third Time." The lower left side of the window presents a fallen Christ. He kisses the earth as a sign of accord with God's creation. In the background, stand an assembly of assorted accusers and tormentors exhibiting deterrents to Christ's message of salvation. Wealth clutches his ill-gotten gains. Power wields a sword. Medals and ribbons bedeck Status. A slashing blue lightning bolt separates "Peace" from "Poverty."

Station X, "Poverty"—The upper right side of the window shows Christ destitute, stripped of his garments. Greed steals His cloak. Misery begs for His possessions. Anger and Hate fight over His garments. Behind Jesus, the Ten Commandments envelop the unfinished tower of Babel indicating the extent of God's plan of salvation. David battles Goliath in the lower right corner, referring to Christ's monumental struggle to overcome the negative forces of the outside world.

Station XI—"The Birth of a New Humanity" emphasizes Christ's sacrifice. "His cross is turned upside down and glowing with flaming colors" (Piczek 11). Three stark, darkly evil forces of man's nature: Pride, the World, and Flesh, hammers in hand, nail Christ to the cross. Mary, John, and Mary Magdalene stand in silent witness. The small inset of Abraham about to offer his son, Isaac, reemphasizes the Old Testament surrender of the son to his father.

Station XII—“The Victory and the New Cosmos,” occupies the left two-thirds of this dual window. Piczek gives a new optimistic slant to this station. Only His feet are nailed to the cross, his hands fly free. Christ as victor is surrounded by bright circles of red and orange. Yellow rays of light emanate from the wound at his side. He restores order to the universe welcoming the good thief into his heavenly reward. The bad thief, his hand nailed to the commandments he defied, lies sprawled below Christ. Above the bad thief is a depiction of the blinded Samson, from the Old Testament, who also sacrificed his life bringing down the Temple upon the Philistines.

Station XIII—Isabel Piczek shows a more fulfilling and imaginative message in her poignant station, “The Universal Mother,” than in the traditional representation of “Jesus Taken Down from the Cross.” Mary, serene of face and dressed in shades of blue, welcomes the lifeless body of her son. Mary extends her arms in acceptance of His sacrifice. Above her, Moses holds the Holy of Holies, a sign of God’s covenant with man. Danny Thomas, comedian, philanthropist, and long-time Las Vegas performer and his wife, Rose Marie, donated this window.

Station XIV—“The Sealed Energy,” conventionally called “Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb,” occupies this station. Cadmium lemon and white energy emanate from inside Christ’s tomb. The center of the picture is the outline of a large gold baptismal font. Christ rests on a red sarcophagus symbolizing baptized mankind. The white figure above the True Man demonstrates emerging intense feelings of hope and resurrection. The eschatological image of the Church in the form of Mary appears above Christ. At the top of window, Noah’s Ark represents the future church ringed with rainbows.

THE PROMISE FULFILLED

Having completed the devotional circuit of the stations, viewers approach the sanctuary area of the church. Two adjacent side windows frame a brilliantly colored mural on the rear chancel wall.

The North Sanctuary Window, “The Christ of Surrender.” A white shroud loosely drapes the Risen Christ’s shoulders, demonstrating his inclusive offering to all mankind and uniting the complex theme of this window. Christ’s arms extend wide in total acceptance. Two streams come from His side: one of water and one of blood, symbolizing two types of sacraments. On the right side, the blue stream represents the sacraments of the priesthood of man with three figures portraying Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. The red stream denotes the sacraments of blood including the sacraments that refer to healing with the Anointing of the Sick, with Penance for Reconciliation, with life in Matrimony, and with love in sharing the Eucharist. At the base of the window, a blue partial globe exhibits a simple connection to the earth and its inhabitants.

The South Sanctuary Window, “The Cosmic Christ, Lord of the Universe.” The casinos depicted in this window are inclusive references to the Las Vegas Gaming scene. Once again, viewers need to look below the surface. The Cosmic Christ, arms outstretched, welcomes all people and their labor. The casinos in the right lower corner of the window remind us of the people who directly work in gaming: croupiers, pit bosses, and maids. The many other professions depicted reflect the work of the larger community. In the window, humanity stands before Christ, caught between His work and the earthly pleasures of the world. Mankind can resolve this dichotomy only by following Mary and touching the depths of

Christ's heart through total acceptance. At the lower right, the Harlequin, bearing the masks of comedy and tragedy symbolizing the passing quality of earthly life, implies the façade of reality, asking challenging questions of all mankind, regardless of profession or geographic location.

Sanctuary Mural—"The Final Beginning." The images in the mural over the main altar are far different than the figures adorning traditional Catholic Churches. Souls ascend with Christ at the Resurrection. Bright, cosmic, energy-filled triangles of light and dark create a soaring, galactic world. The central, risen body of Christ bursts forth as a spirit engulfed in flame, arms stretching skyward in recognition of the redeemed and recreated world of man. A central figure below Christ represents risen mankind, whose salvation is forever intertwined with Christ's Resurrection.

The mural shows man running to life. It follows the upward thrust of the station windows joined by the sanctuary windows, culminating in the Resurrection. A red and orange fireball of light surrounds Christ, who dominates the center with arms outstretched to the corners of the composition. Triangles of energy from the power of the Holy Spirit surround him. Christ's five wounds give off light.

Groups of human figures surrounding Christ portray the senses that express perception and love. All of these groups are parts of Christ's Mystical Body and have compelling roles in fulfilling the vision of Redemption. Each participant in Christ's mission will belong primarily to one of these groups. On the left in front of a modernistic eye-shaped background, the top two figures in blue focus carefully, typifying vision and its extension, Truth. Below these, two figures in magenta reach out in a digital milieu, searching for Knowledge.

On the top right the artist pictured a couple in blue and red before a stylized mouth personifying taste and its extension, Wisdom. Below, in bright green, the artist painted a simple large ear encompassing a couple demonstrating hearing and its extension, Counsel. On the bottom right in earth tones, the artist features an outline of the human face emphasizing the nasal area to present smell, the extension of Justice. The mural puts everything together, the new cosmos, spiritualized man, angelic powers, and the material universe.

CONCLUSION

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

—Dr. Seuss

Popular culture disdains the power of elites to determine what is good and bad in matters of taste. Moreover, popular culture is fun, especially in Las Vegas, where people expect the unexpected. Life on the strip can go from trivial to profound, tempting to repulsive in a heartbeat. Turn the corner at the Encore Casino-Hotel, walk a block, and there is a Roman Catholic Cathedral adorned, not in neon lights, but with a striking mosaic featuring guardian angels.

It's a story out of Sin City's flamboyant past. A Jewish mobster named Moe, who boasted he was never convicted for a crime, ceded the property, hired the architect, and led the fundraising drive for a parish church for casino workers and visitors. Architect Paul Revere Williams chose Googie style for the church. The architecture of the Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel undoubtedly influenced his design. This suited the location, a long narrow strip of land adjacent to a huge sprawling casino-hotel, and provided a home for creative art steeped in mysticism.

The music for Sunday services is superb, performed by talented individuals, as behooves the entertainment capital of the world (Sunday Mass from Guardian Angel). A visit during a quiet moment during the week rewards the visitor with solitude and a chance to view bright meaningful mosaics and stained-glass windows. Viewers find levels of mystery in these windows and they appreciate their vibrant color.

What do the windows convey? It is different for every person. Visitors have the opportunity to go further and dig deeper each time they visit. The Piczek sisters, creators of the art, wanted to lead viewers on a transformative spiritual journey, describing their art as mystic realism: mystic in the sense of a religious experience and realistic as opposed to abstract. Sociologist Max Weber defined mysticism as the belief that one attains union with the Deity or the Absolute through contemplation and self-surrender (H.2.f.)

The two resourceful and artistic women who provided the art for this place of worship were driven by total dedication to their Christian faith. Each individual window tells its own story of Christ's final journey; yet, taken together they impel the viewer deeper into the positive concept of Redemption. The entire experience includes the role of each participant in the exuberant challenge of the whole. Visitors enter the main entrance, proceed to the front of the main altar, turn right to discover casinos and much more in the South Sanctuary Window, and then circumnavigate the numbered windows identifying the Stations of the Cross. As people progress, the message becomes simpler, more potent, and intensely personal.

At the completion of this circular rubric, participants find themselves once more in front of the altar. The North Sanctuary Window to the left refers to the basics of faith. The cen-

tral mural behind the altar reduces the message even more, representing a profound, elemental, and multifaceted meaning for each of the five senses of humankind in service to the deity. The mural itself displays a cosmic motion, binding all of the artwork together from the back of the Cathedral to the front, in a complex, yet simple, message of devotion.

This sense of movement caroms once again and sends its energy out to those who participate, even if they fail to comprehend the total message the Piczeks created. Most of the Catholics who attend services here are visitors. Each Mass ends with a special blessing for them as departing pilgrims. “On your journey home, remember, life is a journey; you decide to be a pilgrim or a tourist. Upon entering this sacred place, you have become a pilgrim. May the blessings of the Journey remain with you always” (Guardian Angel Cathedral Bulletin 14 April 2019).

As the vitality of the charismatic power of devotion carries visitors down the main aisle and out the church doors, they pass outside under Edith Piczek’s mosaic above the entryway, which features angelic companions who will aid the pilgrims on their way. The large central figure conveys a simple linkage between earthly reality and celestial presence. Three smaller sentinels remind worshipers that here is reconciliation, communication, and peace of soul. Amid the cacophony of clanging, spinning, and colorful machines and the groans of disappointment at felt-covered gaming tables, there exists an oasis of reflection where pilgrims can imbibe an elixir of peace and contemplate the soaring comfort of acceptance and hope.

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Pitiless Cruelty: Cynicism, Capitalism, and Gambling in the Writing of Mario Puzo

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by David G. Schwartz

ABSTRACT

The Godfather made him a wealthy man, but Mario Puzo's long years as a struggling writer and childhood in New York City's Hell's Kitchen conditioned him to treat money—and those who made a great deal of it—with suspicion. This paper explores how Puzo's cynical views of capitalism were buttressed by his experiences as a self-described “mildly degenerate” gambler, and how they are expressed in both his fiction and non-fiction.

Keywords: Mario Puzo, gambling, the Mafia, cynicism, *The Godfather*

Crueldad despiadada: cinismo, capitalismo y juego en la escritura de Mario Puzo

RESUMEN

El Padrino lo convirtió en un hombre rico, pero los largos años de Mario Puzo como escritor luchador y su infancia en Hell's Kitchen de la ciudad de Nueva York lo condicionaron a tratar el dinero, y a los que hicieron gran parte de él, con recelo. Este artículo explora cómo los puntos de vista cínicos de Puzo sobre el capitalismo fueron respaldados por sus experiencias como un juego de apuestas “levemente degenerado”, y cómo se expresan tanto en su ficción como en su no ficción.

Palabras clave: Mario Puzo, apuestas, Mafia, cinismo, *El padrino*

毫无怜悯的残酷：马里奥·普佐所描写的犬儒主义、资本主义和赌博

摘要

《教父》让马里奥·普佐变得富有，但他常年作为一名困顿的作家和他在纽约市地狱厨房街区的童年经历让他以怀疑的态度对待金钱和富人。本文探究了普佐自我描述的“温和堕落”的赌博经历如何加强了他对资本主义的愤世嫉俗的看法，以及这种经历在其小说和非小说作品中是如何体现的。

关键词：马里奥·普佐，赌博，黑手党，犬儒主义，《教父》

Thanks to its bestseller status and movie adaptations, Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather* created the modern Mafia drama, a genre that has enjoyed immense popularity through *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II* (1972, 1974), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), and *The Irishman* (2019). Although his success with *The Godfather* pigeonholed Puzo as a Mafia writer, he started his career with serious literary aspirations and only wrote the career-making tale of the Corleone family because he was desperate to make money. Puzo's experiences growing up in a poor immigrant family in New York's Hell's

Kitchen neighborhood, combined with his fifteen years as a struggling writer, conditioned him to adopt a cynical view of wealth and power. Although he humanized wealthy, powerful men, the through-line of Puzo's work is a healthy contempt for both money and authority. Yet Puzo's cynicism is more than a thinly disguised cover for his resentment of those for whom comfort came easily: it is deeply interwoven into a personal philosophy about work, risk, and fate that stemmed from and buttressed his long-lasting fixation with gambling.

On its surface, *The Godfather* owes its popularity to its up-close-and-personal depiction of life on the inside of the Mafia. Indeed, organized crime has fascinated American audiences since the Prohibition era, although interestingly it did not enjoy much popularity in media during the Gilded Age or Progressive era, both of which saw substantial criminal empires (perhaps it is not coincidental that the mob as subject emerged alongside the rise of cinema as form). But the book is more than a story about Mafia corruption and vengeance. It is a generational epic, the story of a father and his children. It is a coming of age tale, in which Michael Corleone embraces his destiny to replace his father as the head of the family business. It is an immigrant saga, depicting the struggles and triumphs of Vito Corleone and his cohort as they find success in America, attempting to find meaning in the promises and pitfalls of the New World. Yet Puzo's cynicism, more than family, more than culture, underlies his narrative. His conception of the land his parents chose is defined by his own worldview in which things are never quite as they seem, a sure bet is a guaranteed rip-off, and the only chance for success is to be on the side of those who rig the game. All of this Puzo learned from his impoverished childhood and confirmed in his experiences as a famously unsuccessful gambler.

A GIFT IN THE SCALE

Mario Puzo was born in 1920 in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan to a poor family of recent immigrants from Southern Italy. He was not Sicilian (as nearly all of his Mafiosi were) and he had no connections with organized crime outside of those that any incidental ones a law-abiding young man would have made in those days. His father worked for the New York Central Railroad before, when Puzo was seven, being institutionalized. His mother's highest ambition for her youngest (of seven) children was that he be a railroad clerk. At sixteen, he announced he would become a writer, to her great confusion—only the sons of the nobility, she believed, had the cultivation to pursue artistic beauty. Indeed, Puzo was dragged into a dead-end job until he volunteered for service in World War II. He returned to a civil service job that sustained him before he was able to make a living writing for pulp magazines. He had more serious literary aspirations, though they were not rewarded. His second novel, *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, an autobiographical tale of an immigrant Neapolitan family in Hell's Kitchen netted him \$500 less than his first novel, *The Dark Arena*, published ten years earlier. And so, with a family and debt collectors to support, he allowed himself to be convinced to write a Mafia novel. The first two sentences of his account of "making" *The Godfather* say it plainly. "I have written three novels. *The Godfather* is not as good as the preceding two; I wrote it to make money" (*The Godfather Papers* 33).

Puzo was raised in sufficiently straitened circumstances to internalize the monumental importance that money assumes in the lives of the very poor. "Money was God. Money could make you free," thinks Lucia Santa, a stand-in for the author's mother, in *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (85). Later in the novel, an

aside captures how poverty had informed the sensibilities of those who had raised Puzo:

It is easy to laugh at the prejudices of the poor, their reasoning springs from a special experience. How irritating to hear some thieving Sicilian say, "If you seek justice, put a gift in the scale." How insulting to a noble profession when the sly Teresina Coccalitti whispered, "When you say lawyer, you say thief." Lucia Santa had a saying of her own, "They who read books will let their families starve." (*Fortunate Pilgrim* 202-203)

The ethos of Hell's Kitchen—that government and business were corrupt, that only fools trusted them—Puzo traced to a Southern Italian peasant resentment of all authority. "For centuries," he wrote in *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, "[Italy's] government had been the most bitter enemy of their fathers and their father's fathers before them. The rich spat on the poor. Pimps of Rome and the north had sucked their blood" (235). When, in *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone flees to Sicily after his murder of a drug dealer and his police captain protector, both he and the reader understand the roots of his family's "contempt for authority and legal government" (309). As Puzo relates it, the Mafia was a heroic resistance to the succession of foreign powers that, for centuries, subjugated Sicily. Barons and bishops combined to oppress the peasantry, using the police as their instruments. For justice, peasants turned to the Mafia, who instituted *omerta*, the code of silence, walling off the people from their government entirely, leaving them dependent on the Mafia. The local Mafioso, Puzo writes, "was their social worker, their district captain ready with a basket of food and a job, their protector" (311).

Lest the reader become too enamored of the Mafia, Puzo then notes that the Mafia had itself become, “the illegal arm of the rich and even the auxiliary police of the legal and political structure. It had become a degenerate capitalist structure, anti-communist, anti-liberal, placing its own taxes on every form of business endeavor no matter how small” (311). In a 1967 piece for the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, Puzo lamented how Italian-language newspapers had opposed the union movement and social reforms, in stark contrast to the more progressive Jewish papers. The fault, he thought, “lay partly in the Italian character, their reliance on family rather than the social structure, their feudal dependence on the padrone because he, too, was of Italian blood” (*The Godfather Papers* 180). And yet, given their taste of the justice afforded them by the system, their insularity was not without reason.

AMERICA HAS MADE MY FORTUNE

In America, Vito Corleone assumed that he would meet a power structure as corrupt and degrading as that of Sicily. He decided that it was better to be the exploiter than the exploited. Above all, Corleone advocated a complete suspicion of any social structure larger than one’s immediate circle; after all, how could one rely on strangers? “Friendship is everything,” he explained to his godson Johnny Fontaine (a fictionalized version of Frank Sinatra). “Friendship is more than talent. It is more than government. It is almost the equal of family” (33). When, during World War II, a few of the young men insist on volunteering for the armed forces despite his finding the deferments, he is perplexed. “This country has been good to me,” one of them relates. “I have been good to him,” the Don replied angrily when the remark is relayed to him (*Godfather* 211). His youngest son, Michael, defied him as well, volunteering for the Marine Corps, where

he served with distinction in the Pacific theater, rising to the rank of captain. Some of his deeds were cataloged in a *Life* magazine photo spread. When a friend showed Corleone the magazine, the Don “grunted disdainfully and said, ‘He performs these miracles for strangers’” (14).

Although Puzo later said that he wished he had written it better (“I wrote below my gifts in that book,” he admitted), he never completely disowned *The Godfather* as his literary creation (*The Godfather Papers* 41). Written for purely mercenary reasons, *The Godfather* nevertheless contained much of Puzo. The title character, the author confessed, spoke in the voice of his mother. “He heard her wisdom, ruthlessness, and unconquerable love for her family,” explained his son Anthony (*The Godfather* vii). So even though Puzo wrote the book to make great money rather than great art, it contained much that was dear to him, much that was personal. A writer does not spend three years working on the book that he needs to change his luck without putting at least a piece of his soul into it.

In Puzo’s case, that soul is a sardonic one. His novel is grounded in the cynicism of his mother. The American Dream is just that, a mirage, for those who are so naïve to have faith in the nation’s institutions. This is plainly seen in *The Godfather’s* opening vignette. Amerigo Bonasera, a hard-working, honest undertaker who has foresworn any involvement with organized crime despite a personal connection to the eponymous Godfather through the close friendship of their wives, sits in New York Criminal Court Number 3 as the two young men who beat his daughter after she spurned their advances await their sentencing. He is astonished when the judge sentences them to three years imprisonment, sentence suspended due to the defendants’ youth and “fine families” (*The Godfather*

7). Inwardly he seethes: how could this have happened? “All his years in America, Amerigo Bonasera had trusted in law and order. And he had prospered thereby,” Puzo tells the reader, implying that such trust was misplaced. Indeed, Bonasera decides that for justice, he can only turn to Don Corleone (8).

A minor, albeit carefully constructed and vividly sketched character, Bonasera has a Dickensianly appropriate name, literally translated as “America good evening,” (eliding the u from *buona sera*). In small ways, it is clear that he is something of a noble hypocrite. He is conscientious in the execution of his duties as an undertaker, understanding as few else did that the technical aspects of his job, embalming and arranging the dead, were the least important. His true service to the bereaved was to serve as “a strict chaperon to death,” to modulate the mourners’ grief. He was pitch perfect in this role, “never cloying in the tender of his condolences, yet never was he offhand And he never, never deserted one of his clients on that terrible last night above ground” (*The Godfather* 242).¹ He focuses, perhaps, too much on appearances. His carefully selected clothes are described as comforting rather than somber, a calculated choice to put his clients at ease. Bonasera even takes an unprecedented step to keep up appearances. “He also kept his hair,” Puzo notes, “dyed black, an unheard-of frivolity in an Italian male of his generation, but not out of vanity. Simply because his hair had turned a lively pepper and salt, a color which struck him as unseemly for his profession” (242). Perhaps he believed that.

1 This ambiguity is a delightful display of Puzo’s literary skill. Who is his client, the deceased or the bereaved? Most would assume the former (for whom, after all, is this the last night above ground?), but Bonasera believes it is the latter. Funerals are, they say, for the living.

Bonasera's obsession with surfaces (entirely appropriate given his job of giving a lifelike appearance to the dead) carries through in his relationship to Vito Corleone and his understanding of life in America. "I believe in America," the undertaker says in the Don's office, as he asks for "justice" for his brutalized daughter. "America has made my fortune" (*Godfather* 25). He refuses to offer Corleone friendship, although their wives are intimates, fearing trouble. But Corelone says he is hurt that Bonasera did not want his friendship. "You found America a paradise," he tells his supplicant. "You thought the world a harmless place where you could take your pleasure as you willed. You never armed yourself with true friends. After all, the police guarded you, there were courts of law, you and yours could come to no harm" (26-27). Bonasera had squandered money on lawyers, Corelone tells him, who knew he was to be made a fool of, trusted in justice handed down by a judge "who sells himself like the worst whore in the streets" (28). And so Bonasera, reluctantly, offers his friendship to Don Corleone.

SOME HUMBLE GIFT, SOME SMALL SERVICE

Puzo contrasts the foolhardy Bonasera with the pudgy baker Nazorine, a friend since Vito Corleone's Sicilian childhood. Nazorine, too, comes to see the Godfather on his daughter's wedding day, seeking a favor that concerns his daughter. Enzo, an Italian prisoner of war paroled to help the American war effort, has captured the eye of his only daughter, who threatens to run off to Italy if her beloved cannot stay in the United States. Over the years, Nazorine had delivered delicious pastries to the Corleone home for birthdays and holidays, had cheerfully paid dues to a bakers' union organized by Corleone, asking a single favor in all those years: the chance to buy black market sugar. To keep

Enzo from being deported to Italy, he knows he must go to Don Corleone. Despite their friendship, he still needs some prodding, so the Don sets him at ease. “He knew from bitter experience,” Puzo writes, “what courage it took to ask a favor from a fellow man” (18). Nazorine makes his requests, and is delighted when his friend carefully explains that to arrange citizenship for Enzo will take a special act of Congress, which would cost \$2,000. Nazorine, “almost tearful in his thanks,” understands that such a favor would not come cheap and is grateful to have a man like Don Corleone to pull the levers of power for him. The steep price, Corleone’s *consigliere* (advisor) Tom Hagen notes, is actually quite a bargain: “a son-in-law and a cheap lifetime helper in his bakery all for two thousand dollars” (19).

The paired requests of Bonasera and Nazorine provide a fitting introduction to *The Godfather*. The reader learns that Don Corleone and, by extension, the subculture in which he thrives, valorizes the clients offering “friendship” to their patron. This was expressed by:

The respectful title of “Don,” and sometimes the more affectionate salutations of “Godfather.” And, perhaps, to show respect only, never for profit, some humble gift—a gallon of homemade wine or a basket of peppered taralles specially baked to grace his Christmas table. It was understood, it was mere good manners, to proclaim you were in his debt and that he had the right to call upon you at any time to redeem your debt by some small service. (11)

It is not enough for his vassals to recognize the Don’s hold over them; they must demonstrate filial affection. In this, the

Don is not far removed from the Party of George Orwell's *1984*, whose final triumph is not receiving the obedience of its subjects, but in convincing them to surrender themselves completely. The novel ends with Winston Smith achieving victory over himself, embracing the Party in his innermost soul: "He loved Big Brother" (245). The Don, similarly, requires not mere service or fealty, but adoration. His demand that his subjects embrace him shows that the Godfather's magnanimity comes at a steep cost. With a reservoir of brute force and political connections to pry affection from his subjects, he is a weaponized version of *The Office's* Michael Scott who demands that the workers at his branch of a struggling paper supply company love him. "Would I rather be feared or loved?" the Dunder Mifflin regional manager asked in a second-season cutaway interview. "Umm ... easy, both. I want people to be afraid of how much they love me" ("The Fight"). Don Corleone would have wholeheartedly agreed.

Equating the mob patriarch brought to the screen by Marlon Brando with the Dunder Mifflin regional manager is not apostasy, and probably would have had the approval of the author. Puzo himself intended to make the Don a vivid, perhaps sympathetic character, but not a noble one. Certainly Puzo was being deliberate when he noted that the Godfather had been exacting tribute from the baker for years, demanding that Nazorine pay dues to a union that, truth to be told, offered few benefits, and even more, that the baker *love* him for the privilege. And he does not hesitate in levying upon this man, whom he had known since childhood, a sum equivalent to over \$26,000 in 2020 in return for a "favor" (MeasuringWorth.com). And the baker loves him even more.

AS LOVINGLY AS A MOTHER

On the surface, it seems that the reader is meant to be sympathetic to the humble Nazorine and contemptuous of the proud Bonasera. Nazorine understands how the world works: he himself, a barely literate baker, has no chance of navigating them complex legal and political waters that stood between him and citizenship for his prospective son-in-law. Bonasera foolishly assumes that the courts will give him justice and is shown his comeuppance on the novel's first page. But Bonasera, though vain, does not suffer from overweening pride. He is simply timid. He does not spurn the Godfather's friendship because he thinks himself better than the mob boss, but because he is afraid of getting in trouble. This was not an unfounded anxiety. Bonasera does not interfere with his wife's friendship with Godfather's wife. He merely does not want to use that friendship as a springboard to his own business friendship with the Don. His greatest sin is to take excessive pride in his lonely, difficult work.

The favors the Don extends to each man have repercussions in the novel, both concerning himself and his sons. After the Godfather is shot, a corrupt police captain removes the protective detail from the hospital where he is recuperating. Michael Corleone arrives that night to find his father alone. He stands in front of the hospital's only entrance, hoping that his presence might deter the assassins who are en route to finish the job. A young man carrying a package approaches. It is Enzo, the baker's helper and now son-in-law, coming merely to pay his respects, to offer *friendship*, to the stricken Don. Michael tells Enzo to leave quickly, as there may be trouble, including police. And then, the bravest character in the saga rises to the occasion:

He saw the look of fear on the young Italian's face. Trouble with the police might mean being deported or refusal of citizenship. But the young man stood fast. He whispered in Italian, "If there's trouble I'll stay to help. I owe it to the Godfather." (118)

Enzo's presence gives the carload of assassins enough doubt (with two manning the door, is the hospital also filled with gunmen?) to send them moving on without firing a shot. The immigrant is smart enough to leave when the police arrive, but one could argue that he performs the noblest act in the book. Despite having no gun, despite being intensely vulnerable, he offers himself up out of simple gratitude for a favor that the Don had not done cheaply. It is a further measure of Nazorine's love for the Godfather that he has apparently told Enzo that it is the Godfather, not he himself (who paid the \$2,000), to whom Enzo owes his continuing presence in America. The Godfather's friendship with the baker and by extension his helper vindicates Michael's analogy to his girlfriend Kay Adams. His father's "favors," he explained, were like the caches of food left by Arctic explorers behind, left "just in case" they need them. No favor was without self-interest, and each had a string attached. "Someday he'll be at each of those people's houses, and they had better come across" (37-38).

The favor granted the baker saves the Godfather's life and that of his son (a single bodyguard, it is implied, would not have deterred the gunmen). The favor granted the undertaker has grimmer returns. The Godfather assigns to a subordinate the task of arranging a brutal—although not fatal—beating for the two men who had attacked Bonasera's daughter. The Godfather's henchmen are virtuosos of violence—the beat-

ings, which left the young men “pulp of human beings,” put both in the hospital for months and will require plastic surgery (60). For this service, which was far riskier than that asked by the baker, the Godfather accepted no remuneration. Though Bonasera was initially so grateful that he would have done anything for the Don, Puzo notes that, “time erodes gratitude more quickly than it does beauty” (243). So by the time he gets a call informing him that the Godfather is ready to ask for his favor, he complies only out of fear. He fears that he will be asked to secretly bury a body of one of the Corleone family’s victims in the gangland struggle, making him an accessory to murder. “If it came out, he would spend years in jail. His wife and daughter would be disgraced, his good name, the respected name of Amerigo Bonasera, dragged through the bloody mud of the Mafia war” (245). Worse yet, he realizes, if the other Mafia families learn of his service, they may murder him themselves. In his heart, he abandons everything in despair, cursing himself for begging vengeance from Don Corleone, cursing their wives’ friendship, even cursing “his daughter and America and his own success,” the three things dearest to him (245).

Then the Godfather arrives, with two men carrying a stretcher. He motions for them to leave before asking if Bonasera is ready to perform his service. Bonasera whispers his assent. Then, it is revealed:

Don Corleone was staring at the table. “I want you to use all your powers, all your skill, as you love me,” he said. “I do not wish his mother to see him as he is.” He went to the table and drew down the blanket. Amerigo Bonasera, against all his will, against all his years of training and experience, let out

a gasp of horror. On the embalming table was the bullet-smashed face of Sonny Corleone. The left eye drowned in blood had a star fracture in its lens. The bridge of his nose and left cheekbone were hammered into pulp.

For one fraction of a second the Don put out his hand to support himself against Bonasera's body. "See how they have massacred my son," he said. (246)

The Godfather assumes that Bonasera loves him; his appeal to Bonasera's pride ("all your powers") is subtler. It is now the Godfather who is concerned about appearances. Interestingly, both men share lapses at the embalming table; Bonasera gasps at seeing the corpse (shameful for a veteran undertaker) and Corleone, for perhaps the only time in the novel, shows weakness, even if only for a fraction of a second. Bonasera, fearing the Godfather's power above all, naturally prepares the body as instructed.

The language in the embalming table scene is curiously echoed after the Godfather's own death:

Amerigo Bonasera had never done finer work, had discharged all obligations by preparing his old friend and Godfather as lovingly as a mother prepares a bride for her wedding. Everyone commented on how not even death itself had been able to erase the nobility and the dignity of the great Don's countenance and such remarks made Amerigo Bonasera fill with knowing pride, a curious sense of power. Only he knew

what a terrible massacre death had perpetrated on the Don's appearance. (393)

The careful reader, of course, knows that the undertaker and mob boss were not "old friends," that Bonasera only called him "Godfather" reluctantly. The reference to a wedding should remind us of that. Bonasera's focus on appearances renders his final service to the Don an appreciated one. When no longer in a position to demand a favor in return, he worked on the corpse not clinically, but "lovingly." But who does he love? Puzo, with Sicilian subtlety, tells us that it is not the Godfather, but his own ability. The mourners' remarks about the Godfather's noble appearance in his casket fill him not with love for the departed, but with pride. In the end, it was not friendship, not love that drove the undertaker to so exceptionally perform his duties. It was simple vanity.

It may not be a coincidence that the first mourners mentioned by name after this paragraph are "Nazorine, his wife, his daughter and her husband and their children," resolving Enzo's story as well (presumably he remained in America and as the baker's son-in-law and now has children of his own). As at the start of the novel, so at the end, Nazorine and Bonasera, though they never meet, are linked. They show the two sides of the Don's power: that granted willingly by those he rules over, that given transactionally or for self-interest. Both, it is clear, bolster the Godfather's authority. A less cynical author might have had the good-hearted baker's service to his beloved Godfather matter more, but in the end, it does not matter the motivation, but simply that the clients serve their patron.

ALL HONORABLE MEN HERE

Indeed, the Godfather himself is not above using his “friends” misfortunes to advance his own interests, as can be expected in a novel by so cynical an author as Puzo. Relatively early in their careers, Nazorine helped the Don learn a valuable lesson. While still only a baker’s helper, he and his bride-to-be saved \$300 to buy modest furnishings for their apartment. But the wholesaler who had “sold” them the furniture declared bankruptcy, leaving the warehouse sealed, the furniture undelivered. The poor baker’s apprentice would take his place behind the wholesaler’s other creditors, perhaps one day to recover pennies on the dollar. He turns to Don Corleone for help. The Godfather listens “with amused disbelief,” incredulous that the wholesaler, who owned a luxurious Long Island home, could legally keep the sweat money of the poor baker. Yet, thanks to the wholesaler’s legal machinations, it was true. Fortunately for Nazorine, the wholesaler, upon receiving a visit from a representative of the Godfather, immediately gives the baker his furniture (212). A poor man could not turn to the law for justice; only his friends could help him. This episode may have been the genesis of the Don’s oft-repeated truism that lawyers could steal more than stickup men. It is implied that he himself profited from similar schemes. And it opens the Don’s eyes up to the extent to which the law protects the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

Later, the Godfather himself almost falls prey to a scheme. Upon moving into his own Long Island home, a trio of “furnace inspectors” arrives to conduct an inspection. The Don’s bodyguard summons him to the basement, where the “inspectors” had disassembled the furnace and were demanding \$150 to put it back in working order. Corleone referred the

men to his son Santino, who had them held at gunpoint and beaten until they agreed to fix the furnace, tidy the basement, and never to return to the neighborhood (213). Puzo's own family had fallen prey to such a scam. These experiences confirm to the Don the absence of any meaningful protection outside one's own families of blood and circumstance, and that the law was not a bulwark against greed or malice.

Puzo's Godfather held a special contempt for lawyers, even though he put his adopted son Tom Hagen through law school and took the extraordinary step of appointing him, a non-Sicilian, as his *consigliere*. The law was a weapon, not a system of justice. Nazorine's close call with the furniture wholesaler was of a kind with the depiction of lawyers in *The Godfather*. "A lawyer with his briefcase can steal more than a hundred men with guns," he repeatedly said, prompting Hagen to attend law school (46). Later, when trying to persuade his son Santino to finish school and get a law degree after the youth was discovered, at the age of sixteen, to have executed an armed robbery, he declares that "Lawyers can steal more money with a briefcase than a thousand men with guns and masks" (208). After Santino's death, when welcoming a circle of Mafia leaders to a peacemaking parlay, he remarks: "We are all honorable men here, we don't have to give each other assurances as if we were lawyers" (273).

Police, like lawyers, could be only trusted, maybe, to be reliably corrupt. It was a given that, due to the low pay afforded police, payoffs were institutionalized within the department itself. Only a fool would trust in their protection without having made arrangements—and even then, he should be leery. When Vito Corleone consolidated New York's olive oil trade by force, there was one exceptional holdout: "One rash man, an arrogant Milanese with more faith in the police than

a saint has in Christ, actually went to the authorities with a complaint against his fellow Italians,” Puzo writes, making it clear that this was an entirely unprecedented breach, mitigated only by the offender’s egotism and northern Italian extraction (201). Believing that the police would faithfully discharge their duties to protect and serve was a supernatural leap of faith hardly likely to be rewarded. The Milanese importer swiftly disappeared, and his heirs proved far more amenable to Vito’s “reason.”

Indeed, the lack of trust evinced by Puzo’s hardscrabble Italians extended even beyond this world. In his final novel, *Omerta*, Puzo has one character ask another why Sicilians venerate the Madonna so much more than Christ himself. The direct response is given with a shrug: “Jesus was, after all, a man, and so cannot be fully trusted” (173). It is possible that even the son of God, sent to our world to offer salvation, is working an angle. Best to be cautious.

WHY MARIO PUZO WAS A WINNING GAMBLER

Puzo, born in America, knew that the Mafia was an illiberal, repressive force, knew that the United States had allowed incredible opportunities for improvement. While a naïve reading of *The Godfather* suggests that the only hope for the powerless is to trust in the benevolence of Mafiosi, that was not the author’s intent. He knew that the Mafia was awful; it was just that a society that valued corporate profits over all else was worse. “Big business in America,” he wrote in 1976, “has always been more ruthless than our criminal elements” (*Inside Las Vegas* 67). “It’s always irritated me,” Puzo wrote in 1972, “that most critics missed the casual irony in my books” (*The Godfather Papers* 70). Of a 1966 *Cavalier* magazine piece entitled “How Crime Keeps Amer-

ica Healthy, Wealthy, Cleaner, and More Beautiful,” Puzo related that he had used “all the obvious ironies,” and that he was more oblique—but still ironic—in writing *The Godfather*. “So oblique in fact,” he wrote, “that most of the critics missed the irony in the novel and attacked me for glorifying the Mafia” (70).

The Godfather’s treatment of Nazorine and Bonasera during his daughter’s wedding (his lifelong friend he charges for a favor, the distant undertaker receives his *gratis*) should have tipped off readers that Puzo’s sympathies were not with the great Don. And, for all of the high-minded words about how the Don and his fellow underworld leaders are more honorable than judges or lawyers, they are constantly scheming and quick to take advantage of a moment’s weakness. The Don continually declared that friendship was the only buffer against misfortune. Yet he was betrayed by his own bodyguard, who had enjoyed a quick rise in his crime family. At the novel’s end, Michael is betrayed by Sal Tessio, who had stood by his father’s side for decades and prospered incredibly. Michael himself murders his brother-in-law as vengeance for his role in engineering Santino’s murder years earlier and lies convincingly about it to his wife. No moral compasses there.

So, for Puzo the poor and defenseless (including, for him writers making the jump to Hollywood, whose plight he regularly lamented) could not rely on their neighborhood Mafioso for real help. The same mistrust pervades not just *The Godfather*, but all of his written work. Even when others can ride the escalator of self-improvement to the comfortable middle class, his characters feel that this is an option denied them. In *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, Santa Lucia laments that by allowing her family small comforts (meat more than once a week, spending money for treats and movies, allowing them

to attend school instead of work), they would all remain poor and miserable (85).

At the root of Puzo's cynicism, his mockery of institutions, was his fundamental insecurity about money, a trait that defined him and his writing before the 1969 success of *The Godfather*. Brought up in poverty and uncertainty, there was no reason not to trust in something more certain than patient thrift and the benevolence of institutions: gambling which, win or lose, was honest, even when it was crooked. Playing Christmastime card games with his brothers, Puzo simply had to win—so much so, that he taught himself how to double deal (*Inside Las Vegas* 111). He did not do it out of greed, as he spent his ill-gotten gains on treats for his siblings, but as a need to feel the magic of winning. This was a sublime thrill approaching the magical. “What non-gamblers do not know,” he later wrote, “is the feeling of virtue when the dice roll as one commands And that omniscient goodness when the card you need rises to the top of the deck to greet your delighted yet confident eyes. It is as close as I have ever come to a religious feeling. Or to being a wonder-struck child” (*Inside Las Vegas* 110).

Gambling, even more than writing, might have been the force that sustained Puzo through his years of obscurity. Indeed, while Puzo wrote *The Godfather* from “research,” having never met, much less had the confidence, of a real Mafioso, he wrote knowingly about gambling. He shared with Dostoyevsky, whom he read and admired (there are obvious echoes of *The Brothers Karamazov* in *The Godfather*), a deep need to gamble. Puzo gambled because he wanted to “win everything. Is that so different from those religious fanatics who dare to think that after death they will go to their particular heaven?” (*Inside Las Vegas* 110). Sports betting, cards,

and especially roulette were his games of choice. Gambling was the reason for at least some of the debts he had accrued before writing *The Godfather* (*The Godfather Papers* 34). Had Puzo not been a gambler, the world might never have known the Corleone family.

Puzo eventually came to embrace gambling not as a distraction from his writing, but as a fundamental element of it. He spent months researching a *New York Times Sunday Magazine* piece called, “Why Sally Rags Is a Winning Gambler” about a successful professional sports bettor (who has a brief cameo in *The Godfather*). Before and after writing that article, Puzo combined gambling at the Sands’ roulette tables with “research” on the mob, courtesy of dealers and pit bosses who had immediate experience (Walters 36-37). Francis Ford Coppola and Puzo lived at a Reno casino while working on the *Godfather* screenplay (and, ultimately, two other screenplays). When they hit a creative wall, Puzo would depart to the casino, where he would lose masterfully at roulette before returning in good humor. “I’m losing thousands down here but making millions upstairs,” he told Coppola (*Godfather* vi).

And he really did lose thousands. His gambling losses were notable enough to gain mention in Earl Wilson’s syndicated column in 1969 (Wilson 11). Puzo himself admitted to having been a “mildly degenerate” gambler, meaning that he knew the thrill of gambling as an all-consuming passion, but was able to prevent his vice from ruining his life (*Inside Las Vegas* 107).

It all came down to perspective. For Puzo, gambling is bad, but maybe not as bad as religion, which also gives false hope: “No gambling hell,” he writes, “deceives mankind as wickedly as religion deceives mankind about death” (*Inside Las Vegas*, 110).

Puzo sees gambling as far from ideal but better than most alternatives. While it would be great if people spent their free time actively working to make the world a better place, that was not happening. So why not gambling? "Gambling is not the right bargain to make in life," he wrote. "Nor drugs. I could even make an argument against art" (*Inside Las Vegas*, 110). Puzo wrote from experience: surely his spending years writing for pulp magazine while chasing the grail of writing a literary masterpiece had hurt his family just as much, or maybe more than, his gambling.

In Puzo's wisdom, it was just as logical and right to have faith in the next spin of the wheel as it was to live for wealth, success, God, or art.

Puzo scorned the pretension of those who held up old women playing slot machines as symbols of American decadence. He himself loved watching those women "intense as little children" waiting for a flood of silver dollars, "oblivious for those few hours to approaching death." Others upbraided them for not evincing a greater concern for the world's problems. Not Puzo. "Why should they give a fuck?" he asked. "They have lived their lives and they have paid their penalties" (*Inside Las Vegas* 111).

Even young people could be forgiven for gambling instead of seeking to make money through sheer willpower and hard work. "Many millions," he wrote, "do not have the talent or pitiless cruelty for making money legitimately and do not have the merciless amorality to make money criminally." Here he was reflecting on his own childhood, the family that had kept him mostly honest. "Come to think of it," he added, "merciless amorality helps legitimate money makers" (110).

Because furnace inspectors, agents, lawyers, priests, and assorted other bugbears stood ready to peel off any money that a poor man or woman might hold onto, because art was almost certainly a disappointment, because misfortune could come at any moment, because there was no trust in any institution, why not gamble?

CONCLUSION: I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES

Mario Puzo became famous writing about the Mafia, of which he had no personal knowledge. There is an irony and perhaps a lesson there. In his writing, nothing can be trusted, except that things will probably go badly for those who do not have an ace in the hole—and even then, they might go badly. Growing up poor, he knew that hardship came easily to good people. The rich were to be mocked, not admired. In *The Godfather*, he wrote of a young doctor, “with the air of one born to command, that is to say, the air of one who has been immensely rich all his life” (39). That contempt came from a childhood of privation.

And yet Puzo, unlike others, did not place his faith in art, or work, or mutual betterment. As a child, he found one thing that gave him the comfort that money and writing never did: gambling. It was the gateway to wonder for children, and a welcome retreat to childhood for adults. And if gambling games could be rigged, why not society itself? As a teenager he had given himself an advantage in curbside card games by dealing from the bottom of the deck; it would be truly naïve to imagine that more powerful and skillful men would not do the same when the stakes were higher. In a world where the only sure thing was the exhilaration that being dealt the perfect card—and even that was subject to more than chance—it made sense to trust in the authority of no one.

His experiences after becoming wealthy vindicated Puzo's earlier mistrust of the system. He was approached by a friend who offered a surefire real estate deal that would save him taxes and allow him to leave a legacy for his children. Puzo hired a top lawyer and accountant to investigate. He then lost more money than he had lost in a lifetime of "foolish" gambling. "I'd have been a lot happier if I had lost that money gambling rather than investing," he concluded. "Give me a deck of cards instead of a tax shelter and I'll take my chances" (*Inside Las Vegas*, 43-44).

Puzo acknowledged that society benefited more when he gained money by hard work than by gambling, but could not help that he felt "more pure happiness winning twenty grand at the casino crap table than when I received a check for many times that amount as the result of honest hard work on my book" (244). With nothing to believe in—no politician that could not be bought, no Mafioso who would not betray out of greed or envy, no business that would put its own profits ahead of the public good—gambling was the only rue cleanliness he could touch. "I think," he concluded, "that the whole magic power of gambling lies in its essential purity from endeavor. No matter what our character, no matter what our behavior, no matter if we are ugly, unkind, murderers, saints, guilty sinners, foolish, or wise, *we can get lucky*" (244).

That faith in gambling alone fortified the cynicism that runs through his writing makes understandable the ironies of *The Godfather*. Puzo's critics charged that he had glamorized the Mafia, but in fact he committed a much greater act of transgression: he had written a best-selling novel based on the premise that every enterprise touched by humanity is irredeemably corrupt. Transgressive, but not at all unexpected

from a writer who fondly recalled dealing the ace of spades from the bottom of the deck as a child. It was the worldview of a gambler, who like all gamblers, had lost far more than he had won, and could not wait for the chance to play again.

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**Hearing Things, Seeing Things:
The Extension of Human Faculty
in Algernon Blackwood's
The Damned (1914)**

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by Kenneth Payne

ABSTRACT

Algernon Blackwood [1869-1951] was a prolific and popular author of tales of the weird and the supernatural, although he resented having become best known as “the ghost man.” He was at pains to clarify that his main interest was not so much in ghosts but rather in what he termed “the Extension of Human Faculty,” in other words (as he put it) in supersensitive “faculties which under exceptional stimulus, register beyond the normal gamut of seeing, hearing, feeling.” Blackwood wrote in an early Edwardian context of growing interest in psychic phenomena and new forms of psychological inquiry. My discussion concerns his story of 1914, *The Damned*, a complex narrative that raises questions about the reliability (or the unreliability) of his narrating character, who is seemingly stimulated into extreme forms of extra-sensory perception. I argue that the story may justly be recognised as a significant contribution to the early modernist movement.

Keywords: Supernatural, terror, clairvoyance, clairaudience, unreliable (narrator), faculties (human), perception (extra-sensory)

Escuchar cosas, ver cosas: la extensión de la facultad humana en *The Damned* de Algernon Blackwood (1914)

RESUMEN

Algernon Blackwood [1869-1951] fue un autor prolífico y popular de cuentos de lo extraño y lo sobrenatural, aunque le molestaba haber sido mejor conocido como “el hombre fantasma”. Se esforzó por aclarar que su interés principal no estaba tanto en los fantasmas sino más bien en lo que él llamó “la Extensión de la Facultad Humana”, en otras palabras (como él lo expresó) en las facultades supersensibles que, bajo un estímulo excepcional, se registran más allá la gama normal de ver, oír, sentir “. Blackwood escribió en un contexto eduardiano temprano de creciente interés en los fenómenos psíquicos y las nuevas formas de investigación psicológica. Mi discusión se refiere a su historia de 1914, *The Damned*, una narrativa compleja que plantea preguntas sobre la fiabilidad (o la falta de fiabilidad) de su personaje narrador, que aparentemente es estimulado hacia formas extremas de percepción extrasensorial. Sostengo que la historia puede ser justamente reconocida como una contribución significativa al movimiento modernista temprano.

Palabras clave: Sobrenatural, terror, clarividencia, clarividencia, poco confiable (narrador), facultades (humano), percepción (extrasensorial)

听见与看见：阿尔杰农·布莱克伍德作品《下地獄的人》（1914）中人类官能的扩展

摘要

阿尔杰农·布莱克伍德（1869-1951）是一位在描

写怪异和超自然方面作品颇多的受欢迎作家，尽管他对以“描写鬼魂的人”而闻名一事感到愤慨。他努力阐述其主要兴趣并不是鬼魂，而是被他称为“人类官能的扩展”，换句话说（依他所言）他感兴趣的是超敏感的“在特殊刺激下会表达超过正常的看、听、感受范围的官能”。布莱克伍德在爱德华时代早期背景下进行创作，超自然现象及新形式的心理咨询在那段时期获得的关注不断增加。我探讨的部分有关于他在1914年出版的作品《下地狱的人》（*The Damned*），一个对他所描述的角色之可靠性（或不可靠性）发起疑问的复杂叙事，这个角色似乎因刺激而陷入了极端形式的超感官感知。我主张，这部作品能被合理地认为对早期现代主义运动作出了显著贡献。

关键词：超自然，恐怖，超视力，超听力，不可靠的（叙事者），官能（人类），感知（超感官）

As a popular and very prolific author of ghost stories and tales of the supernatural and the weird, Algernon Blackwood came to lament the fact that “the classification of ghost-stories has stuck to me closer than a brother, and even when the B.B.C. ask for a story it must be, preferably, of the ‘creepy’ kind.”¹ He resented having become known as “the ghost man” (he called it “almost a derogatory classification”) but that sensationalised *soubriquet* would prove impossible for him to shake off altogether. Writing in 1938 (in his Introduction to a collection titled, *Best Ghost Stories of Algernon Blackwood*) he was at pains to clarify that

1 Introduction to the 1938 edition of *Best Ghost Stories of Algernon Blackwood* published by Secker and Warburg, London (pp. 3-18). The Introduction is reprinted in the Dover Publications 1973 edition under the same title. Page references to the story are given parenthetically.

this alleged interest in ghosts I should more accurately define as an interest in the Extension of Human Faculty My interest in psychic matters has always been the interest in questions of extended or expanded consciousness. If a ghost is seen, what is it interests me less than what sees it? Do we possess faculties which, under exceptional stimulus, register beyond the normal gamut of seeing, hearing, feeling? That such faculties may exist in the human being and occasionally manifest is where my interest has always lain. (xiv)

Blackwood's concern with "the Extension of Human Faculty" was not altogether original, of course. As Sausman notes, it was Frederic Myers in his *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) who had already affirmed that "beyond each end of our conscious spectrum extends a range of faculty and perception, exceeding the known range, but as yet indistinctly guessed."² In many of his stories, as Blackwood put it, "there is usually an average man who, either through a flash of terror or of beauty, becomes stimulated into extra-sensory experience" (xiv). In those circumstances, he insisted, what he called "a common-place mind" may become clairvoyant or "clairaudient" or both, so that seeing things or hearing things (even if only momentarily) may become an expression of a subliminal state of consciousness, an expanded hyper-insight into the deep structure that underlies consciousness and reality itself rather than mere pathological delusion. "And this, I submit," Blackwood added, "travels a

2 See Justin Sausman, "From Vibratory Occultism to Vibratory Modernism: Blackwood, Lawrence, Woolf," in *Vibratory Modernism* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp 30-52).

little further than the manufacture of the homespun ‘ghost story’” (xiv). Blackwood wrote at an early Edwardian stage in the development of the ghost story when new interest in psychic phenomena and new forms of psychological inquiry had begun to redirect the genre into narratives involving different forms of hallucination, extrasensory perception, and ambiguities of meaning. In Blackwood's case, the indeterminacy sometimes extended to the reliability (or the unreliability) of his narrating character. A striking version of this thematic may be found in *The Damned*, one of Blackwood's longest short stories, a remarkable and complex *tour de force* published in 1914.

The Damned is a ghost story without a ghost (in the classic definition, at least), without the spectral encounters or any of the other more lurid paranormal trappings commonly found in more conventional ghost stories of the period. In *The Damned* there is not a poltergeist in sight. Blackwood's ghosts were usually *sensed* rather than *seen*, kept invisibly in the wings or blurred into the background. But, if a ghost-like figure (something not quite ghostly) should be seen, for example, it might come in the ethereal form of something like the silvery and seductive “child of the snow” in *The Glamour of the Snow* (1912), or the mysterious spirit girl in green who leads the narrator towards the stars into his own death in *The Dance of Death* (1927)—one of his most impressive studies in atmosphere and in the subject's “Extension of Human Faculty.” The inspiration for *The Damned* was clearly autobiographical. In his *Episodes Before Thirty* [1924],³ Blackwood describes his father as “a leader in the evangelical movement” who “renounced the world, the flesh, the devil and all their works He became a teetotalter and non-smoker, wrote

3 The text of *Episodes Before Thirty* is available online at algernonblackwood.org.

devotional books, spoke in public, and held drawing-room prayer meetings, the Bible always in his pocket, communion with God always in his heart” (8). According to *Episodes*, it was his discovery of theosophy that freed the young Blackwood from the grip of his father’s evangelical dogma. “Though my father’s beliefs had cut deep enough to influence me for many years to come, their dread, with the terror of a personal Satan and an actual Hell, grew less from that moment” (11). In *The Damned*, the belief in a personal Satan and an actual Hell are embodied in the looming figure of the late Samuel Franklyn, Esq., the wealthy banker-philanthropist and previous owner of the capacious Sussex countryside mansion to which the narrator and his sister (“a humdrum couple of quasi-artists” and “unbelieving vagabonds”) have been invited by Franklyn’s widow, Mabel. The invitation is apparently merely social, but the invitees soon deduce that Mabel has an ulterior motive involving the interpretation and eradication of oppressive and malign energies still active in the house in the wake of Franklyn’s demise. In that particular sense, *The Damned* becomes more specifically the narrative of a house (and especially a garden) haunted rather by “dark and ugly” age-old influences or ideologies than by any one individual—although Bill, the narrator, does refer to them collectively as the Shadow. As he puts it, Franklyn had been a renowned revivalist and a spellbinding public orator who had “spoken fervidly of heaven, and terrifyingly of sin, hell and damnation ... [and who] regarded theaters, ballrooms, and racecourses as the vestibule of that brimstone lake of whose geography he was as positive as of his great banking offices in the City. ... [he] bulked large in the world of doing good, a broad and stately stone in the rampart against evil. And his heart was genuinely kind and soft for others—who believed as he did” (136-137). Lest we should still be in any doubt as to Bill’s hostile opinion of Franklyn, he adds that the great man

was as narrow as a telegraph wire and unbending as a church pillar; he was intensely selfish; intolerant as an officer of the Inquisition, his bourgeois soul constructed a revolting scheme of heaven that was reproduced in miniature in all he did and planned. Faith was the *sine qua non* of salvation, and by 'faith' he meant belief in his own particular view of things 'which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.' All the world but his own small, exclusive sect must be damned eternally—a pity, but alas, inevitable. (137)

In Franklyn, Blackwood presents a figure dedicated to a version of religious belief which is essentially coercive, punitive, vindictive, and sadistic.

On a more superficial level, it might be said, the novella plays out an ideological struggle between the oppressive and suffocating force of the late Franklyn's life-denying evangelical dogma and the narrator's (we know him only as Bill) "artist's point of view that a creed, cut to measure and carefully dried, was an ugly thing, and that a dogma to which believers must subscribe or perish everlastingly was a barbarism resting upon cruelty" (135). To that extent, *The Damned* is an apparently progressive and enlightened text in that the dark residues infecting the house of horror will eventually be detected and expunged (apparently). It should be added that, professionally, the narrator writes and lectures on aesthetics. His present project is the writing of "an absorbing article on Comparative Aesthetic Values in the Blind and Deaf"—a title that will sound ironically apt in view of later events and

the ways in which both faculties will come under scrutiny on the grounds of their potential unreliability. And as far as the narrator is concerned, we should note also that he primes himself in anticipation of the uncanny experience that is to follow, preparing himself mentally for a heightened level of reception of the oppressive and enclosing atmosphere and unsettling suggestions which he soon comes to experience. Even before he has dismounted the motor bringing him from the railway station to the mansion, Bill notes how “ivy climbed about the opulent red-brick walls, but climbed neatly and with disfiguring effect, sham as on a prison ... about the porch it was particularly thick, smothering a seventeenth-century lamp with a contrast that was quite horrible” (146). Inside the house (this is Bill’s second visit), he finds the building “oppressive, silent, still,” and he adds that “great catacombs occurred to me, things beneath the ground, imprisonment and capture” (151). As it turns out, an accurate premonition of the terrifying hallucinations, both visual and auditory—if they really *are* only hallucinations—that he is shortly to experience. It is surely no accident that Bill uses the term “catacombs,” given its associations with death, entrapment, and entombment. The catacombs have somehow lodged themselves already in Bill’s imagination – and this is before anything of the uncanny or the horrific has been seen, heard, or felt.

I have said that *The Damned* is a ghost story without a ghost. But that is not altogether true. Blackwood was a master at subtly blurring boundaries between the natural and the supernatural (as he does most skilfully in *The Willows* [1907], which remains probably his best-known story). The same strategy operates in *The Damned*. Franklyn may have ascended to his personal Heaven, but he remains an oppressive if invisible presence, almost tangibly in occupation of the man-

sion, and has left signs of the grimly fanatical ideology he promoted when alive. There is, for example, the dominating portrait of Franklyn in which he looked like “some pompous Heavenly Butler who denied to all the world, and to us in particular, the right of entry without presentation cards signed by his hand as proof that we belonged to his own exclusive set. The majority, to his deep grief, and in spite of all his prayers on their behalf, must burn and ‘perish everlastingly’” (154). Ten days into his visit, Bill has come closer to an understanding and an explanation of what he describes as “the prison feeling the place breathed out.” The portrait of Franklyn in the dining room “stalked everywhere,” he says,

hid behind every tree, peered down upon me from the peaked ugliness of the bourgeois towers, and left the impress of its powerful hand upon every bed of flowers. ‘You must not do this, you must not do that,’ went past me through the air. ‘You must not leave these narrow paths,’ said the rigid iron railings of black. ‘You shall not walk here,’ was written on the lawns. ‘Keep to the steps,’ ‘Don’t pick the flowers; make no noise of laughter, singing, dancing,’ was placarded all over the rose-garden, and ‘Trespassers will be—not prosecuted but—destroyed’ hung from the crest of monkey tree and holly. Guarding the ends of each artificial terrace stood gaunt, implacable policemen, warders, jailers. ‘Come with us,’ they chanted, ‘or be damned eternally.’ (165)

Bill is nothing if not exceptionally impressionable and acutely receptive when it comes to the malign spirit of place alive

in *The Towers* [as the mansion is known]. We notice how often at different points in the narrative he feels “bewilderment,” has odd “fancies” (“the deepening shadows entered the room, I fancied, from the grounds below”), experiences what he calls “curious flashes” of insight into the existence of the Shadow, denies the evidence of his own senses, or, in broad daylight, finds himself suddenly in what he calls nightmarish “reverie”—including a waking vision in which he “sees” himself and his sister swimming through the water of the overbearing Shadow (“a manifestation of hate”) in order to save his hostess from drowning (actually a clairvoyant preview of a climactic moment of high drama later in the narrative in which Mabel is very near being lured down into the depths by the odious housekeeper, Mrs Marsh) (163). At one early point Bill admits that he “had been but a short hour in the house—big, comfortable, luxurious house—but had experienced this sense of being unsettled, unfixed, fluctuating—a kind of impermanence that transient lodgers in hotels must feel, but that a guest in a friend’s home ought not to feel ...” (150). In the same context, more dramatically, he experiences “a curious sharp desire to leave, to escape” (151). With his finely tuned sensitivity to impression and to atmosphere, and with his seemingly level-headed and sceptical attitude toward the possible sources of the unsettling feeling of “pain and strife and terror” that he finds to permeate the mansion, it seems only appropriate that he should take on the role of investigator and [depending on what he is able to discover] exorcist (159). In the process, I will suggest, the focus of the narrative will shift to questions around the issues of narratorial perception and reliability. Bill will find himself cast as a very unlikely modern/ist figure, increasingly flustered and bewildered, in that his own sense of self will be (permanently) undermined and disrupted by the events that follow.

The opening stage of Bill's investigations takes him outside the mansion and into the garden, where, first, he experiences a disturbing distortion of what might be called his normal physiological powers of sight. "Not that facts had changed," he attempts to explain,

or natural details altered in the grounds —this was impossible—but that I noticed for the first time various aspects I had not noticed before—trivial enough, yet for me, just then, significant. Some I remembered from previous days; others I saw now as I wandered to and fro, uneasy, uncomfortable,—almost, it seemed, watched by someone who took note of my impressions. The details were so foolish, the total result so formidable. I was half aware that others tried hard to make me see. It was deliberate. (178)

The references in this passage to a watching "someone" and to "others" attempting to influence his perception offer the first indications of Bill's dawning recognition that he is now personally subject to and threatened by sinister energies, unseen but intrusive and very much *felt*. Also (as per Blackwood's remarks regarding his specific interest in "the Extension of Human Faculty"), Bill is stimulated into what amounts to a form of "extra-sensory experience" (in particular, what Blackwood refers to as a "clairaudient" capacity) whereby he will shortly hear—or *says* he hears—a sound of "a great volume, roaring and booming thunderously, far away, and below me" (186). The subsequent passage confirms both that disconcerting awareness and also the disturbance (or adjustment) apparently undergone by Bill's optical powers:

I saw, as with the eyes of a child, what I can only call a goblin garden—house, grounds, trees, and flowers belonged to a goblin world that children enter through the pages of their fairy tales. And what made me first aware of it was the whisper of the wind behind me, so that I turned with a sudden start, feeling that something had moved closer. An old ash tree, ugly and ungainly, had been artificially trained to form an arbor at one end of the terrace that was a tennis lawn, and the leaves of it now went rustling together, swishing as they rose and fell. I looked at the ash tree, and felt as though I had passed that moment between doors into this goblin garden that crouched behind the real one ...” (179)

Momentarily, the “goblin garden” seems to have become menacingly sentient, the smaller vegetable growth now “impish, half-malicious.” It is now “a monstrous garden,” in Bill’s words. We are also introduced to Bill’s emerging conviction that the upper surface conceals what he describes as “a deeper layer perhaps” which his artist sister had already entered when her garden sketches [which had usually featured a “pagan liberty and joy”] had been strangely tainted and deformed into something “adulterated” and “vile” and “un-pure”—and also most likely obscene (although that is left only suggested, discretely) (170). It had been his sister, in fact, who had earlier maintained that Franklyn’s oppressive influence was only the most recent and that there were other influences in the “deeper layers underneath,” which struggled to dominate the rest (172). Presented with his sister’s preposterous sounding interpretation, the eminently sceptical, rationalis-

tic, and denying Bill had been eager "to shoot the entire business into the rubbish heap where ignorance and superstition discharge their poisonous weeds" (173). Superstition or not, Bill nevertheless confesses to his own sensation of the "prison atmosphere" and his strong impulse "to explain, discover, get it out of me somehow, and so get rid of it" (176). Bill's garden stroll becomes increasingly traumatic, leaving him perplexed and uncertain as to the accuracy of his own perceptions and his state of mind. He says:

life everywhere appeared to me as blocked from the full delivery of its sweet and lovely message ... that trees and flowers and other natural details should share the same deficiency perplexed my logical soul, and even dismayed it ... I stood and stared, then moved about, and stood and stared again. Everywhere was this mockery of a sinister, unfinished aspect. I sought in vain to recover my normal point of view. My mind had found this goblin garden and wandered to and fro in it, unable to escape The place grimaced at me. (180)

Disoriented and intimidated, our hitherto common-sensical and reasonable narrator (although certainly impressionable, too) finds himself deprived of his "normal point of view" (visual and intellectual), now supplanted by a darker and disorienting ocular perception.

Sooner or later, I think, some questions will have to be asked: exactly how are we meant to interpret the many passages like this in a story like this, which veers constantly between the natural and the apparently supernatural until the borderline that usually demarcates them becomes indistinct? Are Bill's

unsettling experiences objectively and literally “true” and so to be taken at face value, or are they only the product of a form of hysteria perhaps, or a brief lapse from objective to subjective perception? Or could Bill be hallucinating? Or is Bill perhaps just not always to be trusted? The same questions will have to be asked about two or three later episodes, in one of which, for example, Bill will actually seem to be contradicting himself as to the terrible sounds he has just heard and which he describes so vividly as being “not actually heard at all” and “felt rather than definitely heard” (186). In other words, Bill has *felt* but not heard the sounds. Shortly after this, in another episode in the garden, he describes how “a large black bird swooped down in front of me,” but moments later will admit that “actually there had been no bird at all ... but my mood of apprehension and dismay had formed the vivid picture in my thoughts” (191). He would seem to be doubting the evidence of his own ears and eyes. In which case hearing is apparently not believing. Bill recalls the close encounter with the bird in some detail, how it “dropped from overhead, swerved abruptly to one side as it caught sight of me, and flapped heavily towards the shrubberies on the left of the terraces, where it disappeared into the gloom. It flew very low, very close” (189). But in his next breath, Bill questions whether there had actually been anything at all—“I am inclined to think now that the large dark thing I saw, riding the dusk, probably bird of prey, was in some sense a symbol of it [the Shadow] in my mind” (191). More particularly, what are we to make of Bill’s bizarre envisioning of the goblin garden itself, in which the extremities of the trees (to his child’s eye) “all drooped and achieved this hint of goblin distortion—in the growth, that is, of the last few years. What ought to have been fairy, joyful, natural, was instead unhomey to the verge of the grotesque. Spontaneous expression was arrested. My mind perceived a goblin garden, and was caught in it” (180).

Inasmuch as Bill is simply re-viewing aspects of the garden which he says he has noted before (but not taken notice of or attached any particular significance to), it would appear that he is neither hallucinating nor experiencing a dream-vision (for want of a less ambiguous term) and that this is in reality a case of his perceiving optical fact rather than optical illusion. If so, then Blackwood is asking us to suspend enough belief to allow us to imagine that the drooping and distorted trees have been directly deformed and thwarted as the result of the late Franklyn's unnatural and joyless influence (the distortion of the garden growth had set in, we are told, in the previous few years following Franklyn's demise) that has persisted after his passing. This is assuredly not the most satisfying explanation of Bill's unsettling experience, but Blackwood was never prepared (in the texts themselves, at any rate) to offer restricting and categorical (and credible) explanations of such highly subjective and indefinable mental phenomena. If the Gothic often generates indeterminacy and is characterized by hauntedness, disruption and excess, then in its own way *The Damned* must stand as a prime example of the *genre*. But I would maintain, nevertheless, that Bill does serve here as something close to Blackwood's "average man" (to quote Blackwood again) jolted on this occasion by "a flash of terror" into "extra-sensory experience" outside "the normal gamut of seeing, hearing, feeling" (*Best Ghost Stories* xiv). All of these faculties in Bill will undergo a magnification and amplification in the course of what ensues.

Eventually, Bill is able to conclude (although it is not explained exactly how) that "house and grounds were not haunted merely; they were the arena of past thinking and feeling, perhaps of terrible, impure beliefs, each striving to suppress the others, yet no one of them achieving supremacy because no one of them was strong enough, no one of them

was true" (192). Bill gropes his way toward a deeper realisation of the meaning of this new perception of "the strife of frustrate impulse, ugly, hateful, sinful" energized beneath the layer next below the goblin (190). In a state of near hysteria, he says, "in some part of me where Reason lost her hold, there rose upon me then another and a darker thing that caught me by the throat and made me shrink with a sense of revulsion that touched actual loathing" (183). Realising that "if I lingered I should be caught," Bill is able momentarily to "glimpse" into this deeper stratum. We are given no details as to what he sees. It is suggested, rather. But it is without doubt horrible, "vile" and "hideous" (183). He refers to "the redness in my thoughts [having] transferred itself to colour my surroundings thickly and appallingly—with blood. This lurid aspect drenched the garden, smeared the terraces, lent to the very soil a tinge as of sacrificial rites, that choked the breath in me, while it seemed to fix me to the earth my feet so longed to leave" (183). This is clearly a critical moment. Although now apparently captured in spite of himself, Bill feels at the same time

a dreadful curiosity as of fascination—I wished to stay. Between these contrary impulses I think I actually reeled a moment, transfixed by a fascination of the Awful. Through the lighter goblin veil I felt myself sinking down, down, down into this turgid layer that was so much more violent and so much more ancient. The upper layer, indeed, seemed fairy by comparison with this terror born of the lust for blood, thick with the anguish of human sacrificial victims. (183)

In a passage such as this, Bill acts as a witness, someone who, at the very least, now finds himself able to describe something of what is on the other side of the threshold. Attempting to account for his shocking attraction to the Awful, Bill can only attribute it to some "atavistic strain, hidden deep within me, [that] had been touched into vile response, giving this flash of intuitive comprehension" which easily overpowers "the coatings laid on by civilization" and which are "probably thin enough in all of us," Bill adds (184). It was by no means exceptional for a Blackwood protagonist like Bill (modern, enlightened, and "having no so-called religious beliefs") to respond to an almost overpowering urge imaginatively to enter into and witness some bloody and occult ancient ritual activated or re-energized by human agency. All the more shocking and unexpected, then, when the ghastly scenes momentarily "seen" by Bill are linked to and embedded in the picturesque and manicured garden landscape of a rural Sussex mansion most recently occupied by a modern Christian cult. In this scene, I would suggest, we find Blackwood's (close to) "average man" becoming "stimulated into extra-sensory experience" by "a flash of terror" (184). It is important to note that Blackwood's Extension of Human Faculty is not always to illuminate the beautiful but sometimes to uncover the horrible. Almost immediately after the revelation, the sun and wind return and "something very atrocious surged back into the depths, carrying with it a thought of tangled woods, of big stones standing in a circle, motionless, white figures, the one form bound with ropes, and the ghastly gleam of the knife. Like smoke upon a battlefield, it rolled away ..." (184). The circle of stones, the "white figures," and the gleaming knife speak for themselves, of course (Frances will explain later that the site on which the modern house is built had been Druid in ancient times). Brief though his

horrific glimpse into the heart of darkness (those “depths of fire and blood”) has been, Bill has been left deeply and permanently marked by it nevertheless. For him “the common world” will be “ominous now for ever ... for the knowledge of what its past had built upon. In street, in theatre, in the festivities of friends, in music-room or playing field, even indeed in church—how could the memory of what I had seen and felt not leave its hideous trace? The very structure of my Thought, it seemed to me, was stained” (184). So much, it would seem then, for what he had earlier ridiculed as merely “ignorance and superstition?” I would suggest that such a passage is actually subversive, for one thing, in the way it contradicts and invalidates the fatuity of belief in any complacent and comfortable assumptions about “the common world” of modern civilization and its purported values. In as much as *The Damned* is a decidedly Gothic text in its bloody excavations and violent narrative extremes, this passage reveals an unstable superstructure as the foundations [of modern civilization] are exposed in Bill’s ghastly vision. Of course, Bill would certainly not be alone among other modern/ist fictional protagonists to have experienced such a jolting shock of recognition and felt the horror, the horror.

As if Bill’s fleeting glimpse down into the “depths of fire and blood” has not been disconcerting enough, what follows immediately elevates the tone and tempo of the narrative beyond the merely odd or bizarre. As he turns from the garden towards the house, he becomes aware behind him

of a tumultuous, awful rush The ugliness, the pain, the striving to escape the whole negative and suppressed agony that *was* the Place, focused that second into a concentrated effort to produce a result. It was a

tempest of long-frustrate desire that heaved at me, surging appallingly behind me like an anguished mob. I was in the act of crossing the frontier into my normal self again, when it came, catching fearfully at my skirts. I might use an entire dictionary of descriptive adjectives yet come no nearer to it than this—the conception of a huge assemblage determined to escape with me, or to snatch me back among themselves. My legs trembled for an instant, and I caught my breath—then turned and ran as fast as possible up the ugly terraces. (185)

It is important to recognise the significance of this moment (which is an instance of Blackwood's "flash of terror" having induced the Extension of Human Faculty and not the "flash of beauty," needless to say). In terms of plot, for one thing, Bill is now able to identify himself as what he calls "the combining link" through which it (the "huge assemblage determined to escape with me") is desperately seeking release from the depths, presumably through Bill's sympathetic intervention. The "huge assemblage," of course, are the Damned themselves, as Bill now deduces (he *thinks* the beginning of what he calls "an awful thing," the first two words of the unfinished phrase being "The Damned!"). For Bill now to reach this conclusion amounts to an admission that what he had earlier dismissed so confidently as "the rubbish heap where ignorance and superstition discharge their poisonous weeds" will no longer quite do as a description or definition of whatever it is that lies beneath and beyond (173). For with whatever it is that does lie in the depths, Bill now finds himself on the very edge of that rubbish heap, metaphorically, an underworld founded on and shaped by the darkness of ignorance

and the violent terrors of superstition. He may not actually *see* the Damned (but in the contrary and shifting dynamics between the real and the illusory that informs the narrative, how can we really be so sure?); the nearest he will come soon after is when he imagines their “beseeching faces that fought to press themselves upon my vision, yearning yet hopeless eyes, lips scorched and dry, mouths that opened to implore but found no craved delivery in actual words ...” (207). But he certainly does *sense* and *feel* their clamouring presence in a powerfully immediate and near-physical way—immediate enough for him to feel their desperate clutching at his clothing and to put him to flight, literally. Bill’s account is so vivid that we too as good as *see* the hopeless and terrified faces like those other sufferers depicted in Breugel’s *The Triumph of Death*, for example.

At this point in the narrative, with his protagonist fleeing in terror as if for his life, Blackwood intensifies the range of Bill’s Extended Human Faculty. Bill acquires a form of clairaudience, so that he can declare that “there was sound in it,” referring to the wild and frantic rushing that he senses behind him (186). “I know full well it was subjective,” he admits,

yet somehow sound was in it—a great volume, roaring and booming thunderously, far away, and below me ... it drove behind me like a hurricane as I ran towards the house, and the sound of it I can only liken to those terrible undertones you may hear standing beside Niagara. They lie behind the mere crash of the falling flood, within it somehow, not audible to all—felt rather than definitely heard. (186)

Bill struggles for a satisfactory definition of a complex auditory experience which seems to defy classification—an experience in which sound is more felt than heard. But there can be no doubt that the source of the sound is subterranean, for Bill adds

it seemed to echo back from the surface of those sagging terraces as I flew across their sloping ends, for it was somehow underneath them. It was in the rustle of the wind that stirred the skirts of the drooping wellingtonias. The beds of formal flowers passed it on to the creepers, red as blood, that crept over the unsightly building. (186)

In a narrative revolving so significantly around a series of ambiguities and prevarications, involving repeated qualifications and evasive rephrasings as to what has or has not literally been heard, this is as definitive as we could expect. What is also certain is that Bill arrives on the veranda to join his sister and his hostess “shaken in my soul,” as he confesses. If Bill expects confirmation and corroboration as to the source of the mysterious noise (and also, therefore, of his own balanced state of mind) Blackwood leaves him frustrated, as all three take part in a form of group denial and collective amnesia, as they cast around for plausible explanations and rationalisations. Bill himself says it must have been the wind, his sister suggests distant thunder, and Bill once again “big guns at sea ... forts or cruisers practising.” It is left to Mabel, their hostess (who has heard the noise before, as has his sister, Bill becomes sure) to liken it to the sound of “huge doors closing ... enormous metal doors shutting against a mass of people clamouring to get out” (188). In other words, exactly Bill's own description during his traumatic experience moments

before. With this image Mabel also echoes Bill's reference to "the clanging of an iron gate" which had earlier seemed to cut short the unfinished phrase as he fled the garden in terror (185).

Significantly, all three characters admit to having heard the Noise at various times. Bill's sister tells him that it was "like thunder. At first I thought it was thunder. But a minute later it came again—from underground. It's appalling" (198). "We said foolish, obvious things," says Bill, "that neither of us believed in for a second. The roof had fallen in, there were burglars downstairs, the safes had been blown open. It was to comfort each other as children do that we said these things ..." (198). Bill certainly seems in no doubt that the Noise was real enough. As he returns soon after from investigating the lower level of the house from which the sound seems to have emanated, he says

the great dim thunder caught me, pouring up with prodigious volume so that it seemed to roll out from another world. It shook the very bowels of the building ... There was strength and hardness in it, as of metal reverberation [...] 'That is the Noise,' my thought ran stupidly, and I think I whispered it aloud; 'the Doors are closing.' The wind outside against the windows was audible, so it cannot have been really loud, yet to me it was the biggest, deepest sound I have ever heard, but so far away, with such awful remoteness in it, that I had to doubt my own ears at the same time. It seemed underground—the rumbling of earthquake gates that shut remorselessly

within the rocky Earth—stupendous ultimate thunder. They were shut off from help again. The doors had closed. (210)

But, moments later, the protective Bill reassures his anxious sister with a necessary lie: “All is quiet and undisturbed downstairs,’ he tells her. ‘May God forgive me!’” (211). More self-contradiction, more discrete denial.

Bill might turn out to be a less than fully reliable narrator but he makes no attempt to hide his own utter confusion when faced with his sister's near-hysterical description of the Noise as she claims to have heard it moments earlier (but which, on this occasion, in the middle of the night, Bill has not heard). Overcome with horror at her description, Bill says, “I believe I clapped both hands upon her mouth, though when I realised things clearly again, I found they were covering my own ears instead. It was a moment of unutterable horror. The revulsion I felt was actually physical” (200). From this point in the narrative, Bill becomes aware of more sounds which contribute to his fear and apprehension in what he calls “the horrid tumult” now surrounding him. Sensing the close presence of the Damned (or the Others, as she calls them), Mabel gnashes her teeth in terror, producing “a hard and horrible sound” (201). Bill refers to the “dreadful little sound” that now accompanies him on his way down to the lower floor.

“I believe my own teeth chattered,” he continues. “It seemed all over the house [...] in the empty halls that opened into the long passages towards the music-room, and even in the grounds outside the building. From the lawns and barren garden, from the ugly terraces themselves, it rose into the night, and behind it came a curious driving sound,

incomplete, unfinished, as of wailing for deliverance, the wailing of desperate souls in anguish, the dull and dry beseeching of hopeless spirits in prison” (202).

Bill relates the dreadful scene with a convincing and near credible precision. And yet, no sooner has he ended his description than he is able to account for the sound in entirely logical and reasonable terms as nothing more than the product of his agitation. “That I could have taken the little sound from the bedroom where I actually heard it, and spread it thus over the entire house and grounds, is evidence, perhaps, of the state my nerves were in. The wailing assuredly was in my mind alone” (202). In other words, it had all been in his head. He had only been hearing things, then. Bill’s explanation is plausible enough, but the “could have” and “perhaps” are worth noting. They would seem to suggest something less than complete certainty.

In the closing stages of the story some of the unresolved issues raised by the narrative are addressed. One of them, of course, concerns the Noise—which all three characters have confirmed that they heard but have offered plausible if unlikely “natural” explanations as to the source, as I have earlier referred to. This is a critical matter, not least because it has a close bearing on Bill’s balance of mind, his psychological condition, and his grip (or lack of) on reality. On a more technical level, it also has to do with his reliability as witness as well as narrator. He adamantly rejects the idea that he may simply have been delusional (not only about the Noise but also about several other incidents—such as the uncanny arrival and disappearance of the black bird and the subsequent sudden appearance of the woman in black, the ominous Mrs. Marsh, the housekeeper, at the very spot in the garden where

the bird had just vanished in the undergrowth). Bill declares that

the entire adventure seemed so incredible, here, in this twentieth century—but yet delusion, that feeble word, did not occur once in the comments my mind suggested though did not utter. I remembered that forbidding Shadow too; my sister's water-colours; the vanished personality of our hostess; the inexplicable thundering Noise ... I shivered in spite of my own 'emancipated' cast of mind. (213)

Listening to his sister's "incredible" assertion that Mabel has "lost her soul" and is "seeking" it below, with the clamouring throng of the Damned, Bill insists in exasperation that Mabel's terror "cannot be transferable to *us* It certainly is not convertible into feelings, sights and—even sounds!" (214). Frances offers a clearly supernatural explanation. If anything, she sounds more delusional than brother Bill (when judged by his "emancipated" twentieth-century standards). In Frances' narrative he finds "so odd a mixture of possible truth and incredible, unacceptable explanation in it all: so much confirmed, yet so much left darker than before" (215). But, he says, "a moment's common-sense returned to me. I faced her" (216). What then follows is a confrontation of sorts, in which the frustrated Bill attempts to corner his sister into an admission that the Noise was the one thing that was indisputably real (after all, it had been Frances herself, "deathly pale" and distraught, who had roused her sleeping brother in the night to listen to the Noise which had woken her but which he had not heard). "And the Noise?" Bill asks her, "the roar of the closing doors? We have all heard that! Is that subjective too?" Bill's questions come as a plea for confirmation of

what has already been collectively agreed on in any case, but Frances does not give him the confirmation he had asked for: “What noise?” she answers, “What closing doors?” (216).

To the very end of *The Damned*, the narrator continues to swerve between overwhelming flashes of terror (to return to Blackwood’s phrase) and banal explanation. Usually, Bill settles for the reasonable and common-sense option, albeit half-heartedly and with misgivings. In this case, as he helps his sister physically to drag Mabel away from the beckoning figure of the dreadful Mrs March waiting to lead her down to the catacombs, Bill will later normalize the “horrible scene” as merely a nightmare vision. He says, “[t]hings that happen in the night always seem exaggerated and distorted when the sun shines brightly next morning; no one can reconstruct the terror of a nightmare afterwards, nor comprehend why it seemed so overwhelming at the time” (220). True, up to a point, and all very comforting. But, nightmare or not, Blackwood’s enigmatic narrative actually derives its energy from those traumatising moments of terror in which Bill comes face to face with the Damned, is pursued by them, and is witness to their intolerable suffering (which Bill is never really able to explain away convincingly with logic or reason, try as he may). As mundane life in what he calls “this house of the damned” returns immediately to normality (without reflection, discussion, or debate) and as the “horrible scene” is never referred to again in another conspiracy of group denial or deliberate amnesia, Bill confesses that “some protective barrier had fallen into ruins round me, so that Terror stalked behind the general collapse, feeling for me through all the gaping fissures” (222). This is a quintessentially Gothic metaphor, it might be said. As far as Blackwood’s narrator is concerned, the “Extension of Human Faculty” has con-

firmed Terror (for Bill, at least) as a permanent if more often
suppressed condition of social reality and of existence itself.

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“Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in”: *American Psycho* and the Pictures Generation

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by Todd Giles

ABSTRACT

Marking the twentieth anniversary of Mary Harron’s film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (2000), this paper examines the artwork in Patrick Bateman’s apartment to explore the ways in which this iconic 1980s Pictures Generation art reflects the same issues Bateman himself struggles with: the anxiety caused by the wholesale loss of identity and originality that plagued yuppies as they sleepwalked their way through the commodity fetishization and conspicuous consumption of 1980s America.

Keywords: *American Psycho*, serial art, Patrick Bateman, Pictures Generation, film, photography, alienation, Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo, Richard Prince, Allan McCollum, 1980s, conspicuous consumption

“Superficie, superficie, superficie fue todo lo que la gente encontró significado en”: *American Psycho* y The Pictures Generation”

RESUMEN

Con motivo del vigésimo aniversario de la adaptación cinematográfica de Mary Harron de *American Psycho* (2000) de Bret Easton Ellis, este artículo examina la obra de arte en el apartamento de Patrick Bateman para explorar las formas en

que este icónico arte de la generación de imágenes de 1980 refleja los mismos problemas con los que Bateman lucha: ansiedad causada por la pérdida total de identidad y originalidad que plagó a los yuppies mientras caminaban dormidos a través de la fetichización de los productos básicos y el consumo conspicuo de los Estados Unidos de los años ochenta.

Palabras clave: American Psycho, serie de arte, Patrick Bateman, Pictures Generation, cine, fotografía, alienación, Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo, Richard Prince, Allan McCollum, 1980, consumo conspicuo

“表象、表象、任何人只在表象中发现意义”：
《美国精神病人》与图片一代

摘要

标志着玛丽·哈伦对布雷特·伊斯顿·埃利斯作品《美国精神病人》改编的电影之20周年纪念，本文检验了帕特里克·贝特曼公寓里的艺术作品，以探究这一标志性80年代的图片一代艺术以什么方式反映一系列问题，这些问题也是贝特曼所试图战胜的：即由身份认同和原创性的大幅损失而产生的焦虑，这种焦虑折磨着以梦游的方式度过20世纪80年代美国的商品迷恋和炫耀性消费时期的雅皮士。

关键词：《美国精神病人》，系列艺术，帕特里克·贝特曼，图片一代，电影，摄影，异化，辛迪·舍曼，罗伯特·隆戈，理查德·普林斯，亚伦·麦可兰，80年代，炫耀性消费

2020 marks the twentieth anniversary of Mary Harron’s film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis’s 1991 much-maligned novel of 1980s excess and greed, *American Psycho*. Patrick Bateman, brilliantly portrayed by Christian Bale, is still a modern day American corporate Jekyll & Hyde figure for the ages, a coked-up Gordon Gekko from the era of no-holds-barred corporate raiding. Mergers & acquisitions Master of the Universe by day/psychopathic serial killer by night, the twenty-seven year old Bateman is emblematic of the heartless Reagan Era neoliberalism in the 80s which espoused free markets, deregulation, privatization, tax cuts for the wealthy, and shrinking social programs. He is also a psychopathic serial killer who happens to collect some of the most important serial art of the decade produced by the Pictures Generation, a group of hip young New York artists working in the 1980s who, surely unbeknownst to Bateman himself, critiqued the very consumer-saturated world he himself so brilliantly exemplifies.

A theoretically rich body of critical work exists on both the novel and film versions of *American Psycho* which explores everything from serial masculinity and consumerism, to serial murder, pornography, voyeurism, and neoliberalism, just to name a few. Of particular interest on the literary side of the scholarship in relation to this essay are Donia Baelo Al-lué and Berthold Schoene’s articles on seriality in the novel. Schoene argues that “traditional masculinity [is] an ideologically motivated gender construct that ... promotes a type of male subjectivity that displays conspicuous similarities to Asperger’s Syndrome and high-functioning autism ... [which] perpetuate[s] itself through an endless sense of coercive acts of psychic self-(de)formation” (379). What Ellis does in *American Psycho*, according to Schoene, is “provide us with a case study of postmodern male hysteria, intricately recording

his protagonist's increasing nervous implosion as he wards off imminent self-disintegration by violently pulling himself together and repeatedly—that is, serially—asserting himself over and against the other” (394). Similarly, for Allué, Ellis's novel denounces “consumerism from within, from the mind of its most extreme representative, he who serially consumes objects and people: the serial killer.” Bateman, immersed in consumerist values, equates his killing with “his consuming in series” and his “capacity to buy everything, to own anything he wants,” thus his “personality is constructed through the images and messages he receives through mass and consumer culture” (88).

On the film studies side of the scholarship, Jaap Kooijman and Tarja Laine argue that in “striving to embody both the image of a yuppie Wall Street stockbroker and a serial killer, Bateman becomes a dark double of the 1980s New York yuppie subculture that reveals nothing but meaningless” (48). And more recently, Peter Deakin situates *American Psycho* alongside *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*, placing them within the framework of Susan Faludi's massive tome on American men and masculinity, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (1999), suggesting that “representations of a certain kind of ‘masculinity lost’ in this cinema collided with the fallout of a contemporary elegiac gender politic that suggested that in some way life for the modern male was (almost) irreparably damaged by accelerated forces of consumer culture and image- and commodity-fetishism” (86). Even today, vestiges of Bateman continue to haunt cyberspace with a masculinist vengeance that is apparently not lost on consumers; witness the interactive 3D model of his apartment on archdaily.com that “invites you to experience the apartment from the inside—without fear of an axe to the head” (Babey). And with a quick scroll through the crafty etsy.com, one finds hun-

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dreds of Bateman-related home décor and fashion accessories ranging from Pierce & Pierce coasters, bloody Bateman coffee mugs, business card lapel pins, night lights (seriously), and even numerous one-of-a-kind painted portraits of the man himself.

Rather than attempt to add a sharp-edged new theoretical approach to the blood-soaked discourse on *American Psycho*, my goal here is to explore some of the iconic 80s artwork showcased in Bateman’s penthouse apartment and discuss the ways in which it thematically reflects the same issues Bateman and his counterparts struggle with throughout the narrative--the anxiety caused by the wholesale loss of identity and originality plaguing yuppies as they sleepwalked their way through the commodity fetishization and conspicuous consumption of 80s America. In much the same way that Allué suggests Ellis adopts the “seriality characteristic of mass cultural production in his own artistic language and style ... [to] channel and reflect contemporary consumer culture,” set designer Jeanne Develle and production designer Gideon Ponte took this move a step further in the film adaptation by bringing a particular set of artworks together not only to decorate Bateman’s apartment in the latest artistic 80s avant-garde, but more importantly to feature artworks that accurately mirror Bateman’s own insecurities and neuroses (88).

All of the artworks under discussion here were produced by the loosely-knit group of artist known as the Pictures Generation, which included, among others, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and David Salle, who were working together in New York from the mid-70s to the mid-1980s. Influenced by their Pop, Minimalist and Conceptual Art predecessors, the younger generation simultaneously reveled in and critiqued the ways in which mass media construct and manipulate the

images that bombard us on a daily basis. One of the modes of production the Pictures Generation appropriated from their artistic forbearers was the employment of serial art. Not only are nearly all of the artworks in Bateman's apartment the products of the Pictures Generation, they were also produced in discrete series of similar works—not *one-offs*, but *one ofs*. In this essay, I use the term “serial art” in its broadest sense—that is, artworks conceived of as part of a larger group or series—as opposed to the more art historically specific modules making up Minimalist sculptures from the 1960s as seen, for example, in the work of Carl Andre and Donald Judd.

While individual works in a series can indeed stand on their own, they are often regarded as somehow incomplete until seen in context with the whole. For example, think of the short stories comprising Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek* or Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*--great stories on their own, certainly, but so much richer in connection with the other stories surrounding them. Likewise, seeing all of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* hung together in a gallery setting provides an entirely different experience from seeing them individually. Bateman's small but exemplary collection of serial art by Pictures Generation heavy-hitters Cindy Sherman, Allan McCollum, Robert Longo and Richard Prince, explores, like *American Psycho* itself, issues of false identity, appropriation, inauthenticity, staged reality, surface veneers, and the consumption of mass media.

As viewers step into Bateman's apartment, their eyes are naturally drawn through the foyer to the beautiful, sleek lines of the furniture in his sitting room—one of Cassina's 1973 reboots of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Hill House Chair, which was originally designed in 1900, situated against the

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blank back wall; a pristine example of Ludwig Mies Van de Rohe’s Barcelona Suite, complete with matching ottomans; and one of Paola Piva’s Alana coffee tables, which were produced for B&B Italia around 1980. Bateman’s furniture is all very chic, even by today’s standards, and, like Bateman himself, is distinguished by its crisp, clean lines with a minimum of extraneous adornment. Indeed, the entire living space is hyper-clean, uncluttered, and looks all but un-lived in. Everything is hard, industrial, modern; nothing, including Bateman, looks comfortable.



Fig. 1: Allan McCollum
Plaster Surrogates, gallery view
(upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/3/3a/Mccollum)

Taking a few cautious steps back into the foyer (as every unwitting entrant into Bateman’s lair surely wishes they had done), viewers see a series of what appear to be six empty picture frames clustered together along the left-hand wall. These inauspicious frames are Allan McCollum’s *Collection of*

200 *Plaster Surrogates*, which were produced between 1982 and 1985 (see fig. 1).¹ According to Douglas Eklund, McCollum's *Surrogates* exhibition at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York in 1983 was "considered by his colleagues to be one of the best exhibitions of the decade," so for Bateman to own several examples of this series speaks to his acumen as a collector of contemporary art, as does his possession of the other artworks in his collection, including his furniture (271).

As with all of the artworks under discussion here, the *Surrogates* are rather disconcerting. Artist-critic Paul McMahan wrote of the exhibition at the time, "McCollum's pieces look all right at first, then you realize they aren't all there" (qtd. in Eklund 275). These are surrogates, stand-ins; they aren't the real thing. They are disconcerting because one usually expects to see something in picture frames. In Bateman's apartment, though, the first thing viewers see are what appear to be empty frames awaiting their absent pictures/identities, an apt metaphor for Bateman himself. However, these aren't even actual picture frames; they are plaster molds covered with enamel paint—no frames, no canvas, no pictures, no referents, no identities.

Trevor Strake points out that the *Surrogates*, which he refers to as "blank paintings cast from an absent original," raise some interesting questions that also relate to Bateman and his friends: "How to engage with 'paintings' from which all content has been emptied and in which formal variation has

1 According to production designer Gideon Ponte in an interview with Gwynne Watkins of Yahoo Entertainment, these are actually replications of McCollum's *Plaster Surrogates*, not originals. <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/american-psycho-production-designer-gideon-ponte-116482969982.html>.

been reduced to minimal difference? How to distinguish between the authentic and the performed, between the genuine and the artificial?” (n.p.). Or, one might ask, how do you engage someone whose personality and appearance is nearly identical to everyone else’s around them? How do you distinguish between when they are being authentic or faking it? When is Bateman Bateman, not, say, Halberstram or Davis? Even with the perfect body, perfect skin, perfect apartment and wardrobe, Bateman has no frame, no canvas, only empty surface. As he says in voiceover at the beginning of the film while peeling off a clear facemask in front of his bathroom mirror, “There is an idea of Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory I simply am not there.” His “content has been emptied,” and the “formal variation” between Bateman and the other 20- and 30-somthings who continuously confuse his identity with that of others, “has been reduced to minimal difference.” They are “blank[s] ... cast from an absent original.”

As Bateman says towards the end of the novel, “Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in ... this was civilization as I saw it ...” (375). This is why he is constantly narrating what everyone is wearing, eating, and carrying in the form of high-end accoutrements—with no originality, they can only be defined through the products they purchase, wear and consume. McCollum himself says that the *Surrogates* have “reduced attributes and ... relentless sameness,” much like the characters in *American Psycho*. The latter are, like the *Surrogates*, empty signifiers; they are copies of copies of copies, all having lost any semblance of uniqueness. Indeed, one might go so far as to suggest that Bateman and his friends are 1980s surrogates of our lost humanity. McCollum, once again: “[I]n our world, we are always working to protect the integrity of the unique against its debasement by

the replica, to make defense against the threat of plentitude by retreating into the solace of scarcity” (qtd. in Auping 120). It is this “solace of scarcity” that perpetually punctuates Bateman’s product-riddled narrative as he so desperately strives for some semblance of identity-integrity through his purchases in a world of copies, fakes and surrogates. As he tells his fiancé while riding in the back of a limo, he just wants to fit in.

Cindy Sherman’s work, like that of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, critiques the impact of culturally-driven images of gender and power. What distinguishes her work from her fellow 70s & 80s feminist colleagues is that all of her photographs focus on images of her own body. Sherman is best known for her iconic black & white *Untitled Film Stills*, which were produced between 1977 and 1980. In these photographs, Sherman poses as different characters in a variety of familiar yet unidentifiable locations, appearing as everyone from 1940s film femme fatales, 50s housewives, career women, and damsels in distress. Inspired by film clichés, these images bring to mind scenes from black and white movies. They are not replications of specific scenes; rather, they are imperfect replications that momentarily seem something other than themselves, when in fact they are merely surface without depth, much like McCollum’s *Surrogates* and Bateman’s Wall Street yuppie set. In staging her photographs, Sherman’s visage always embodies someone else, leaving observers free to construct our own narratives for each character, while at the same time implicating them in the voyeuristic nature these images set out to critique. At the same time, in offering so many different characters, Sherman undermines her onlookers’ attempts to affix specific identities to them because, although meticulously staged, they have no backstory to help tease out their deeper narratives.

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Fig. 2: Cindy Sherman
Untitled Film Still #56, 1980
Gelatin silver print
8 x 10 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

Bateman owns a poster-sized print of Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #56* from 1980 which shows one of Sherman's many characters intently gazing at her own reflection in what appears to be a mirror, something Bateman does repeatedly throughout the film (see fig. 2). Not only does he look at himself in the mirror several times while allowing the viewer to become privy to his morning bathroom routine, his reflection also appears in shiny objects such as the metallic menu during his dinner with Stash and Vanden, the stainless steel axe blade he uses to hack Paul Allen to death, and his framed *Les Misérables* poster, the latter of which appears throughout the book and film as a kind of economic counterbalance to Bateman's world of privilege. What Kooijman and Laine refer to as Bateman's "Janus-Face" is particularly relevant in this scene because "Bateman's identity is as illusory as the one of

the sublime beggar of Victor Hugo, but whereas the latter has emotional and psychological depth, Bateman is merely a psychic void" (53).

As Sherman and Bateman (both of whom are play acting) look at themselves in mirrors, viewers voyeuristically stand breathlessly close behind them just out of sight. In this position, the voyeurs not only see the characters seeing themselves, they also see the backs of the characters' heads, which creates a strange doubling effect that comes about as close as possible to situating themselves within the mirror-gazers' own perspectives. This is particularly intriguing in Bateman's case because were the viewer to fully subsume his ocular perspective, they would see that there is no Bateman there to begin with, only an empty mirror, like the empty reality of Bateman's serial killer fantasies.

Sherman's work is brilliantly, albeit very briefly, highlighted during the key scene when Bateman has just brutally hacked up his body-double, Paul Allen, who he so jealously wishes himself to be; though he and Allen look alike, wear similar clothes and hair styles, Allen is in possession of the illusive Fisher account, owns his own tanning bed, and has no problem getting reservations at Dorsia, the one restaurant Bateman so desperately wants to crack by year's end. Even though Allen and Bateman appear like identical copies of one another, he has, at least in Bateman's distorted vision, achieved what Bateman himself has not—superyuppiedom. Thus he must die. Bateman, blood splattered in his gray pinstripe suit, blue suspenders, blue French cuffed shirt and black wingtips, sits facing his felled foe, who is a mirror image of himself in this scene, right down to shoes, slacks, suspenders and slicked-back hair. Just like Sherman's double image hanging on the wall just off center behind Bateman,

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here witnesses of the murder see the back of Bateman’s dop-pelganger’s felled corpse reflected in Bateman himself as he sits facing the viewer—both of whom “themselves are fakes of fakes,” just like Sherman’s staged images of herself posing as someone else (Karnes 169). It is truly a fascinating scene, particularly because Bateman’s face is at the same level as that of Sherman’s image, right next to her—viewers get the back of Sherman’s head, her face reflected back, Bateman’s blood-soaked face, all in immediate procession.

Another member of the Pictures Generation is Robert Longo, who created one of the most famous series of portraits in the 1980s—*Men in the Cities*—which were composed between 1979 and 1982 (see figs. 3 and 4). These iconic oversized charcoal and graphite drawings on paper measuring eight feet high by five feet wide depict the artist’s friends—including Cindy Sherman—twisted into exaggerated freeze-frame poses that don’t jibe with their conservative black & white business attire. Photographed as one-person performances on a New York City rooftop, Longo provided his subjects with various forms of stimulation to get them to move unselfconsciously—for example, playing music, tugging ropes tied to their limbs, or pelting them with tennis balls. They were photographed from low angles so the viewer would feel like they were looking up at performers on stage or on screen. As with the work of Richard Prince below, *Men in the Cities* are pictures of pictures, and, like McCollum’s *Surrogates*, were produced with the help of several studio assistants.

Like the ever-uncomfortable Bateman in social situations, the *Men in the Cities* figures look pained, contorted, anxious, flailing out of control with no reference to space—no ground, no background, no depth—nothing to situate where they are other than floating in a white void of emptiness. With nothing to support them, they are bereft of any kind of



*Fig. 3: Robert Longo
Untitled (Gretchen), 1980
Charcoal and graphite on paper
108 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.*

“Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in”:



Fig. 4: Robert Longo
Untitled (Frank), 1981

Charcoal and graphite on paper
96 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

personal narrative beyond what viewers can extrapolate from their 80s business attire. Just seconds after murdering Paul Allen, Bateman, himself an unhinged man in the city, stands in front of one of his prized Longo's, whose model is likewise engaged in her own untethered dance. Both Bateman and the woman suggest a radical alienation, but as Carter Ratcliff suggests concerning *Men in the Cities*, their twisting and writhing in emptiness highlights the fact that the burden they bear is not one of any real weight or consequence, but is due rather to the fact that they are, to quote Howard Fox, "the products of a hollow mass culture of inauthentic values and unreal images" (27).

It is precisely these "unreal images" and "inauthentic values" that Richard Prince also so interestingly explores in his art. Unlike Longo and Sherman, Prince's postmodernism harkens back to his Cubist and Dadaist predecessors like Picasso, Duchamp and Man Ray in that much of his work centers on found objects. Like his Modernist forefathers, Prince relocates popular mass-produced images, moving them from the realm of advertising and mass culture to artistic artifacts. Here's a helpful quote from Prince: "The great thing about an appropriation is that even though the transformation reads as fiction, everybody knows that the source of the appropriation was at some point non-fiction, (magazines, movies, etc.), and it's these sources, or elements of non-fiction, that gives the picture, no matter how questionable, its believable edge" (qtd. in Auping). A prime example of this is found in Prince's most well-known series, the *Untitled Cowboy* photographs produced between 1980 and 1984. These are indeed photographs, but Prince's *Cowboys* were produced by re-photographing and blowing up advertising images from Philip Morris' "Marlboro Country" cigarette ads which started appearing in 1963.

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Prince cropped out the slogans, leaving the cowboys dissociated from their products, and thus from their advertising context. The original Marlboro ads harken back to earlier Westerns starring the likes of John Wayne as the archetypal American cowboy, alluding to our national mythos of innocence, justice, and the self-reliant loners of the Old West. Prince, in re-appropriating cowboy imagery that was itself appropriated by Marlboro to sell their products, comments on the way in which marketers willy-nilly appropriate, through pastiche, whatever it is they want to sell, while we in turn as consumers create our own façade-like identities as we graze our way through the myriad of images before us. In Bateman's case, his pastiche appropriations include everything from his business attire and kitchen couture to his fantasy of being a serial killer through his consumption of films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Body Double*, as well as the daily revolving freak show of his favorite morning television program, *The Patty Winters Show*.

As art critic Jonathan Fineberg says that for Prince, “the mass media provides a stock catalogue of contemporary desires (symbolized in advertising images, for example) which he can appropriate as vehicles for his own experience. He dislocates the images by projecting his own fantasies into them, superimposing and recoloring them” (456). Along these lines, after giving up on trying to have sex with his antidepressant-numbed fiancé in the novel, Bateman goes home and masturbates to the memory of the picture of a model he saw earlier in the day in a Calvin Klein ad (24). Even his solitary bedroom fantasies are, to reference Allué's more broad point about serialism, “inextricably linked to the concept of seriality since ... mass culture products [are] consumed in a serial and repetitive way” (71). As Bateman's narrative progresses, he becomes more daring in his sexual behavior, dis-

carding his fiancé's bedroom for an affair with his colleague's fiancé, while at the same time hiring and physically abusing two prostitutes he films while having sex. As Fineberg says of Prince, Bateman "dislocate[s] the images by projecting his own fantasies into them," eventually going so far as dislocating his fantasies through bodily dismemberment as he progressively moves from one "product" to the next.

According to Fineberg, "Prince is a kind of passive witness, yet he controls the camera, so he can manipulate the images in his own way. In this sense, he reclaims authority over his own identity in the depersonalizing world of mass media" (456). Something similar occurs when Bateman films himself with the two prostitutes in an attempt to reclaim his lost identity. In this scene, Bateman scripts all of the action for his video recorder, lustily looking both at himself in the mirror while in the act, as well as flexing his muscles and pointing directly towards the camera, inviting his own gaze and that of his paid actors. Like Sherman, he becomes a voyeur of his own gaze in the form of a made up character—in this case, Long Dong Bateman. As Karnes says of the Pictures Generation, "Photography, with its ability to seem real even when what it depicts is manipulated by the decisions of the artist/photographer, was the perfect medium to blur these lines between fact and staged reality" (162). For Bateman, who progressively feels himself spiraling out of control like the posers in his Longo drawings, the only place he feels any sense of control is behind the camera or in front of the mirror, which, unfortunately for his victims, progressively leads him into taking up the directorial role behind the wire hanger, knife, chainsaw, and finally behind the kitchen utensils he uses to cook and eat parts of some of them. Just like Paul Allen's body dissolving in a vat somewhere in Hell's Kitchen after Bateman hacks him to death, the threat of having his identity dis-

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solved in a culture so steeped in conspicuous consumption and inauthenticity threatens Bateman himself. Rather than fight this “threat of dissolution,” as Fineberg puts it, Prince “seeks a route into individual authenticity through media culture rather than against it” (456). Likewise for Bateman.

Similar to Bateman’s prepackaged media-saturated vanilla pop musical tastes—Huey Lewis and the News, Genesis, and Whitney Houston—the postmodern art he collects appeals to a much wider audience than the more “cerebral” Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art collected by the previous generation of the moneyed class. Though he is collecting on the cutting edge of the 80s art world, Bateman is likely oblivious to the fact that artists like McCollum, Sherman, Longo and Prince were radically rethinking the relationships between works of art and other consumer goods in new and interesting ways which moved beyond their Pop predecessors. In doing so, they recognized that all cultural production is involved in complex social relations; that artists exist within society, not outside the world of commodification. The Pictures Generation was able to distance themselves against the concept of the unique art object, while at the same time critiquing concepts of representation in art, as well as those incessantly sold to us through the media. For Bateman, really, all of this is irrelevant, because he simply sees art as just another commodity like his Toshiba VCR, Charles Mackintosh Hill House chair, and Clinique beauty products. Art, for Bateman and his Wall Street yuppie friends, is for name-dropping. His lack of interest in art itself is seen in the novel, for example, when he mentions in passing some “spooky” photographs by Cindy Sherman and a painting by Eric Fischl in a friend’s apartment, none of which he shows any aesthetic appreciation for (279-280).

The only artist Bateman seems interested in is David Onica, whose painting titled *Sunrise with Broken Plates* he proudly owns in the novel. Here's how he describes it: "It's a six-foot-by-four-foot portrait of a naked woman, mostly done in muted grays and olives, sitting on a chaise longue watching MTV, the backdrop a Martian landscape, a gleaming mauve desert scattered with dead, gutted fish, smashed plates rising like a sunburst above the woman's yellow head, and the whole thing is framed in black aluminum steel" (23-24). Perhaps he likes it because it is more easily digestible than the other artworks he owns—a nude woman, a TV, a stereo, bones. He likes all of these things, especially bones, as highlighted in the film when viewers see that the crossword puzzle he is filling out is populated over and over again with the words "meat" and "bones." And the Onica is an actual painting, not a blown-up photograph of a mass produced photograph from a magazine, nor a surrogate of a picture frame, nor is it even a drawing of a staged photo. It is what it is, a painting. Simple. Really, though, his true interest in the Onica comes to the fore when, early in the novel, he tells a group of friends at dinner that he paid \$50,000 for the painting when he actually only paid \$12,000 (98).

What *American Psycho* does so well—both the novel and the film adaptation—is the same thing that Douglas Crimp, the curator of the 1977 exhibition titled *Pictures* who coined the generational moniker said about the artists under discussion; here is Karnes paraphrasing Crimp: they turned "a mirror on the world around them, sometimes critically, other times humorously ... [to] exaggerate life and reflect it back onto viewers in ways that ignite potent questions about how we view ourselves" (162). This is precisely what Ellis's dark comedy does—it exposes, through biting humor and exaggerated violence, what a certain set of Americans became in the 80s.

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Another way to “view ourselves” is through the words of philosopher Christy Mag Uidhir’s article “How to Frame Serial Art,” in which she says, “[m]ost artworks ... appear to be singular, stand-alone works. However, some artworks (indeed, perhaps a good many) are by contrast best viewed in terms of some larger grouping or ordering of artworks, specifically as either the parts or the sums thereof” (261). One could say the same about Bateman and his colleagues in *American Psycho* who fit together serially as a whole to exemplify 80s American yuppie-dom. Ellis provides readers with characters who hardly possess any individuality on their own; their identity, which is “best viewed in terms of some larger grouping,” is intricately tied to those around them. Without his narcissistic ability to deconstruct everyone’s fashion ensembles down to their shoes and socks he comes into contact with, Bateman would have no reference points to distinguish his own place in the larger whole. Ellis’s novel, like the artwork of the Pictures Generation, highlights the fact that there tends to be nothing behind the slick surface to identify with; rather, we are all constructed through mass media-driven stereotypes of popular imagery—any semblance of authenticity is merely a fleeting memory of what never was to begin with. To quote Bateman one last time: “Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in” (375).

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Mother Earth: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Aronofsky's *Mother!*

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by Isa Rehana Flores

ABSTRACT

This essay explores Darren Aronofsky's *Mother!* (2017) through an ecofeminist lens. The psychological horror film serves as an allegorical exploration of themes involving religion, gender, and environmental issues. Ecofeminism examines the complex ways in which environmental issues are interwoven with gender issues, combining two of some of the most significant movements today. Analyzing the ecofeminist aspects of *Mother!* brings to light how the exploitation and abuse of Earth reflects the experiences of women under a patriarchal society.

Keywords: *Mother!*, Darren Aronofsky, feminism, ecofeminism, horror, earth, gender, Enuma Elish, Tiamat, religion

Madre tierra: un análisis ecofeminista de *Mother!* de Aronofsky

RESUMEN

Este ensayo explora *Mother!* De Darren Aronofsky (2017) a través de una lente ecofeminista. La película de terror psicológico sirve como una exploración alegórica de temas relacionados con la religión, el género y cuestiones ambientales. El ecofeminismo examina las complejas formas en que los problemas ambientales se entrelazan con los problemas de género, combinando dos de algunos de los movimientos más importantes en la actualidad. Al analizar los aspectos ecofeministas de *Mother!*, se saca a la luz cómo la

explotación y el abuso de la Tierra reflejan las experiencias de las mujeres en una sociedad patriarcal.

Palabras clave: *Mother!*, Darren Aronofsky, feminismo, ecofeminismo, horror, tierra, género, *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat, religión

地球母亲：对阿罗诺夫斯基作品《母亲！》的生态女性主义分析

摘要

本文透过生态女性主义视角探究了达伦·阿罗诺夫斯基的电影作品《母亲！》（2017）。该心理惊悚片以寓言的方式探究了包含宗教、性别和环境问题的主题。生态女性主义检验了环境问题与性别问题相互交织的复杂方式，将当前最显著的运动中的其中两个进行结合。通过分析《母亲！》的生态女性主义方面，暴露了开采和滥用地球一事如何反映女性在父权社会下的经历。

关键词：《母亲！》，达伦·阿罗诺夫斯基，女权主义，生态女性主义，惊悚，大地，性别，《埃努玛·埃利什》，迪亚马特，宗教

Mother! is a psychological horror film directed by Darren Aronofsky released in 2017. While on the surface, it is about a young woman whose peaceful home with her husband is interrupted by the sudden arrival of a problematic couple and their family, *Mother!* is a Biblical allegory for the abuse and mistreatment of Mother Earth. Analyzing *Mother!* through an ecofeminist theoretical lens provides an insightful look into how this film combines cri-

tique of how women are treated in present society with a presentation of the environmental issues that are being fought today because of climate change. The film also serves as a feminist look into family dynamics and gender roles in marital relationships. *Mother!* uses Biblical allegory to compare the mistreatment of women in society with the mistreatment of the environment by humans.

According to a *Pacific Standard* interview with ecofeminist and ecologist Susan Griffin, Darren Aronofsky was inspired by her book *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, which “draws from myth and literature to show how the patriarchy has often connected women with nature, and sought to dominate them both” (Kilkenny). Griffin explains that her book was written in 1978, which was a significant time for both the environmental movement and the women’s movement. According to Karen J. Warren, “Ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other” (3). Although environmental issues and feminism are usually perceived as separate issues, ecofeminism combines these issues and often compares the mistreatment of women to the mistreatment of the environment.

The film *Mother!* almost exclusively follows its protagonist, who is referred to as “mother” in the credits but does not have a name throughout the movie. It begins with the startling sound of fire burning, followed by a graphic shot of a woman’s face who is on fire. She boldly stares directly into the camera, her hair stiff and ablaze surrounding her badly scorched face. A close image of her vacant eyes is followed by her shedding a single tear. It is important to note that this

woman is not the protagonist, mother. She is an unnamed woman that does not appear again in the film, and this opening scene serves as a foreshadowing to the protagonist's eventual fate, which seems to be a cyclical process. A man is shown placing a crystal on a small pedestal, and the burnt, ruined house transforms into a beautiful new home. Because the film is also a Biblical allegory, the home could be compared to the Garden of Eden. The man is later revealed to be mother's husband, who symbolizes God and who is referred to as Him. Aronofsky emphasizes this by only capitalizing Him's name, just as it is capitalized in the Bible. Everyone else's name, including mother's, is not capitalized.

The scene transitions to mother waking up in bed alone, and the first thing she does is reach out to the other side of the bed to search for her husband, Him. Mother walks around the house in a white, translucent nightgown that reveals her breasts, introducing her as a symbol of fertility and purity. It is clear from the beginning of the movie that mother cares deeply for Him, although he is distant and pulls away from her when she tries to kiss him. This scene establishes that Him is a poet who has writer's block, which is a significant source of tension in their relationship throughout the film. Talcott Parsons' gender-role theory asserts that men are "instrumental," or rational and task-oriented in the role of breadwinning, while women are typically assigned the "expressive" or emotional and nurturant tasks of family maintenance. Parsons claims "... the husband's occupation was to link the family to the socioeconomic system, whereas the wife was to adapt her roles to the husband's occupational identity" (Goldner 4). It is clear throughout the film that Him is the one who makes money, while mother is constantly seen cleaning and renovating the house. The tension in their relationship comes from Him not performing his role, which is the "breadwinning."

The first clear indication that mother is meant to represent Mother Nature comes from the next scene, when she is seen painting a wall in the house. After she puts her hands on the walls and feels a heartbeat, she becomes inspired and begins painting the wall a new color. This scene shows that mother initially has control over the appearance of the house, which is symbolically the Earth or the Garden of Eden. Her gradual loss of control over the house begins with the arrival of a stranger in the middle of the night, who is referred to as man. This stranger introduces himself as an orthopedic surgeon who thought that their house was a bed and breakfast. To mother's surprise, Him invites the stranger in, and mother begins to experience a sharp pain in her chest and abdomen area that occurs throughout the rest of the film. Her physical pain often occurs when strangers invade the house and shows her deterioration, as her home is mistreated and invaded. A clear imbalance of power in their relationship shows itself when Him invites the stranger to stay the night without first discussing it with mother. While Him is explaining to the man that mother renovated the house by herself, he exclaims, "Wow. So you're not just a pretty face" (Aronofsky). Mother is constantly objectified throughout the film in similar manners, which serves as a portrayal of how women are treated in society. This scene also indicates that the crystal from the beginning of the movie is the only object left from Him's brutal house fire.

The sudden arrival of man's wife, woman, causes even more distress for mother. Woman is a brutally honest character who often questions mother's decision to not have kids yet and makes rude comments about mother and Him's sex life. While doing laundry, woman finds a pair of mother's comfortable underwear and says, "You're gonna have to try harder than this" (Aronofsky), indicating that it is woman's fault

that she does not have kids by not dressing provocatively enough. Women are often expected in relationships to perform sexuality in a way that caters to her partner instead of in a way that is comfortable for her.

Despite mother and Him's constant warnings not to touch the crystal object in Him's study, woman eventually breaks the crystal, enraging Him and causing Him to kick them out of Him and woman's house. This is a clear allegory for Eve eating the forbidden apple in the Garden of Eden, a Biblical story that introduces women as inherently reckless and sinful. Before man and woman leave, their two sons, who represent Cain and Able, unexpectedly show up at the house and have a fight over man's will. The fight ends in one of them violently dying, ensuing a chaotic atmosphere for the rest of the film. Their physical fight destroys some of mother's house. Notably, before the fight takes place, one of the sons objectifies mother by making an inappropriate comment about her body. Their mistreatment of the house and of mother shows how misogyny and mistreatment of the environment can be linked, as the house is a representation of Earth. Following this fight, mother finds an irreparable bloody hole in the floor of the house that indicates the gradual deterioration of the house and of the environment. The "heart" of the house is shown to be turning black and ruined.

Again without mother's permission, Him invites man and woman back to their house to have a gathering to honor their dead son. They invite their friends and family, who constantly disrespect the home despite mother's constant reminders and pleas to stop invading private parts of their house and mistreating the furniture. In an interesting dialogue between mother and woman, mother expresses her condolences and woman ironically replies, "You can't imagine what it feels like

if you don't have a child. You give, and you give, and you give, and it's just never enough" (Aronofsky). When mother says that she does understand, woman still argues with her that she does not. This dialogue both serves as an observation of how mothers are treated and of how the earth is treated. It is ironic that woman accuses mother of not understanding because mother constantly allows these people to use her house as a haven, and the guests keep taking from her and exploiting the house disrespectfully, just as humans exploit the earth's resources without respect for the environment. A.E. Kings states that "... the liberation of women cannot be achieved without the simultaneous liberation of nature from the clutches of exploitation" (70). Mother furiously kicks all the guests out of her house after they break the sink that she kept asking them not to sit on.

After all the guests leave, mother finally addresses Him and accuses him of being selfish and not caring about her wants. After an argument about his lack of writing and intimacy, they engage in aggressive sexual intercourse that causes mother to be pregnant. Their power imbalance shows itself in the way he basically forces himself on her despite her pushing him away. Her pregnancy and the presence of the guests inspires Him to finally write a wildly successful poem that gains him fans from all over the world.

Mother's short period of happiness is interrupted when her house is invaded again, this time by crazed fans who treat Him as if he is a god to be worshipped because of his poem. Far along in her pregnancy, mother frantically pleads Him to make the guests leave. Clearly enjoying the attention and ignoring her worries, he allows the guests to continue to mistreat mother and her house. When mother asks a man not to lie down in her kitchen, she tells him, "This is my house"

(Aronofsky). He laughs and replies with, "My house? The poet says it's everyone's house" (Aronofsky). Him's crazed fans treat the house as if it is a spectacle that they can steal from and destroy, and the rest of the movie consists of mother pleading with the guests to stop. As both a religious allegory and an ecofeminist film, the situation symbolizes how the typically male-presented God allows humans to mistreat Mother Earth. She screams at them to stop stealing from her house and they accuse her of being stingy, telling her that she needs to share. This is a critique of how humans exploit the earth's natural resources. This part of the movie is reminiscent of how colonizers invade and exploit land, claiming that the Earth is a free planet that can be explored by everyone. Although these colonizers treat the land as if its free for them to claim, they do not consider the wellbeing of the indigenous people who lived there before them, just as the guests do not have any regard for mother's feelings and her house which she worked so hard on renovating.

The rest of the film serves as a critique of how destructive mankind is to the environment and to each other. As the situation in the house becomes more chaotic and violent, military forces intervene and mass executions occur. The crazed fans engage in obviously Christian rituals such as communion and putting ashes on their forehead. Although they worship Him, they constantly destroy and steal from his house. This serves as a critique of how hypocritical Christianity can sometimes be. Although Christian colonizers worshipped God, they did not always respect his creation, which is the earth. They exploited the Earth and its people even though they believe that it is God's creation. The crazed fans worship Him but destroy his house, all at the expense of mother, or Mother Nature.

While hundreds of people destroy her home, mother eventually goes into labor, and Him ushers her into a safe room to give birth. Her screams shake the entire house, symbolizing how important mother is to the wellbeing of the house, just as women are important to the wellbeing of Earth. Him refuses to make his fans leave even after mother gives birth to their son. He insists that the fans want to see the baby and waits until mother falls asleep to take the baby from her. A violent scene following mother's birth depicts the murder of her baby at the hands of the crazed fans in an act of sparagmos, symbolizing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Mother begins to stab the fans in a frenzied rage, and they collectively begin to beat her and call her common misogynistic slurs. Him saves her, but after he says, "We need to forgive them" (Aronofsky), symbolizing the concept of God's forgiveness in Christianity, she screams in defiance and it cracks the floor of the house. This shows that no matter how much the fans and Him destroyed the house, she is still inherently in control of the house and can destroy it whenever she wants, as she is Mother Nature. The destruction of the environment causes the destruction of humankind. This idea is further developed when mother runs to the basement and starts a fire, destroying the house and the fans. Before starting the fire, mother tearfully says to Him, "You never loved me. You just loved how much I loved you. I gave you everything! You gave it all away" (Aronofsky). This line clearly indicates how this film can serve as both an environmental story and a story about the patriarchal dynamics of relationships. Women keep giving and are taken advantage of, just as Earth is taken advantage of and harmed by humankind. As Kings states, "Ecofeminism explores the twin oppressions experienced by women and nature in an attempt to understand their shared destiny" (71). The destiny of the house, or the en-

vironment, is tied to the destiny of mother, who represents women. Both are destroyed by the end of the film. Notably, Him is unscathed by the fire, indicating his God-like status. Him carries the badly scorched mother, who asks him, "What are you?" (Aronofsky). He replies, "I am I. You? You were home" (Aronofsky). He tells her that he must start the creation process all over again, indicating that this is a cycle of trial and error by a God-like figure who is figuring out how to create a perfect home. Him pulls mother's heart out, which is now a precious crystal object they put on a pedestal in the study. The presence of the heart signifies the rebuilding of the house and shows that the world is not possible without women.

The abuse that the protagonist, mother, suffers from her guests is comparable to the abuse Tiamat suffers in the Mesopotamian creation myth *Enuma Elish*. *Enuma Elish* and *Mother!* are both creation stories of some sort, with *Mother!* beginning with the renewal of the house, or Earth, after a destructive fire. Tiamat is depicted as a motherly figure who becomes irritated when the gods in her stomach make too much noise and disturb her. This can be compared to the way that mother becomes irritated and enraged by the guests who invade and destroy her house. Both Tiamat and mother are ridiculed for their anger and are perceived to be villains. The end of both stories sees the destruction of Tiamat and mother at the hands of a male figure. *Enuma Elish* ends with Marduk replacing Tiamat as ruler of the earth, signifying the transition from a matriarchy to a patriarchy. *Mother!* is a patriarchal system, with Him making the money and making major decisions for the household without asking for mother's input. The end of *Mother!* shows the renewal of the patriarchal system that is built off the suffering of the main woman, mother.

Mother! was and is a controversial film because it is an honestly brutal depiction of many aspects of society that need improvement. Climate change and sexism are some of the most significant and controversial issues internationally. Addressing them together in a movie via an ecofeminist perspective shows how intricately interwoven the exploitation of the environment is with the patriarchy. Combining these issues in a biblical allegory also addresses the patriarchal issues in Christianity, proving how much of an impact religion has on our treatment of the marginalized and of the environment. Kings writes that although damage of nature affects all of humankind, "... ecofeminist intersectionality recognizes that women are likely to be amongst those most affected by environmental degradation, with those at the margins of society often experiencing these effects earliest and to the harshest degree" (71). Ecofeminism is an honest way of addressing the terrifying truth that climate change affects the marginalized significantly worse and faster than it affects the privileged.

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William Faulker's Film of Redemption: *The Left Hand of God*

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Redime me et miserere mei

by Carl Rollyson

ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's 1951 adaptation of William Barrett's inspirational novel, *The Left Hand of God* (1950), never made it to production, but it is superior to the 1955 film. Faulkner's screenplay reflects a spiritual journey that he explored in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *A Fable* (1954), works revealing a hierological intensity that is absent from his earlier fiction. In the process of adapting the novel's themes and characters, he articulated his own suffering and search for salvation.

Keywords: William Barrett, William Faulkner, Humphrey Bogart, Hollywood, Howard Hawks, Nobel Prize, Catholic Church

La película de redención de William Faulker: *La mano izquierda de Dios* *Redime me et miserere mei*

RESUMEN

La adaptación de William Faulkner de 1951 de la novela inspiradora de William Barrett, *La mano izquierda de Dios* (1950), nunca llegó a producción, pero es superior a la película de 1955. El guion de Faulkner refleja un viaje espiritual que exploró en *Réquiem por una monja* (1951) y *Una fábula* (1954), obras que revelan una intensidad hierológica ausente de su ficción anterior. En el proceso de adaptación de los temas y personajes de la novela, articuló su propio sufrimiento y su búsqueda de la salvación.

Palabras clave: William Barrett, William Faulkner, Humphrey Bogart, Hollywood, Howard Hawks, Premio Nóbel, Iglesia Católica

威廉·福克纳关于救赎的电影：《上帝的左手》

Redime me et miserere mei

摘要

1951年威廉·福克纳对威廉·巴雷特的启发性小说《上帝的左手》（1950）进行的改编作品从未成功出版，但作品质量高于1955年的改编电影。福克纳的剧本反映了他从1951年作品《修女安魂曲》和1954年作品《寓言》中所探索的一次精神旅行，这两部作品揭示了他此前撰写的小说中所没有的宗教力度。在对小说主题和角色进行改编的过程中，他阐述了自身的痛苦和对救赎的追寻。

关键词：威廉·巴雷特，威廉·福克纳，亨弗莱·鲍嘉，好莱坞，霍华德·霍克斯，诺贝尔奖，天主教堂

William Faulkner's 1951 adaptation of William Barrett's inspirational novel, *The Left Hand of God* (1950), now available in a collection of his Twentieth Century-Fox screenplays (Gleeson-White), never made it to production, but it is superior to the film starring Humphrey Bogart and Gene Tierney, released in 1955.¹ Faulkner's screenplay reflects a spiritual journey that the reticent novelist explored in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *A Fable* (1954), works revealing a hierological intensity that is absent from his earlier fiction. In *The Left Hand of God*, a soldier

1 The film is available on DVD, release date November 8, 2011.

of fortune, Jim Carmody, masquerades as a Catholic priest while on the run from the Chinese warlord he had served for three years. Carmody, a lapsed Catholic, revives his belief in the Christian mission in a recidivistic community of believers seeking a redeemer. Faulkner's screenplay reveals, I believe, his own reaction to the Nobel Prize, and how that award became his own absolution, transforming him from a writer dedicated to his art alone to a figure who obligated his achievement to the world that honored him. There is an irony here. Initially, Faulkner did not think *The Left Hand of God* would make a good movie (Wilde 320), but as soon as he began his studio labor, he reported in his laconic fashion: "fantastic work" (Blotner 312). Like Carmody, the soldier of fortune, Faulkner thought of himself as an imposter, a hack in Hollywood, playing the role of great writer that the world had foisted upon him, yet in the process of adapting the novel's themes and characters, he articulated his own suffering and search for salvation.

The Faulkner who arrived in Hollywood in early 1951 had begun to doubt himself and worried that Hollywood had harmed his style. On April 24, 1947, already three years into writing his magnum opus, *A Fable*, his version of Christ's second coming, he confided to his agent, Harold Ober: "I have just found another serious bug in the ms Seems to have taken me longer than I imagined to get movie scripting out of my reflexes" (Blotner 248-49). *A Fable*, supposed to be the summa of his faith that man would not merely endure in the atomic age, but prevail, continued to test his own resilience. In a draft of his Nobel Prize speech, he directly addressed his trying Hollywood years, writing for producers who talked incessantly of story angles instead of the truths of the human heart in conflict with itself that Faulkner had spent more than twenty years exploring in his fiction.

In *Requiem for a Nun*, the devout Nancy Mannigoe exhorts her employer, Temple Drake, a relapsed sinner, to allow her to return to her family. Nancy exclaims “just believe” (213). Faulkner, a faithful family man, had periodically run away from family commitments, and even from the Nobel, by drinking himself nearly to death just weeks before his travel to Stockholm to accept his prize. Even so, he recovered in time to accept his honor and his responsibilities, a part of which, paradoxically, he could only fulfill by the piecemeal work in Hollywood that had given him no peace.

What was a Nobel Prize winner doing in Hollywood anyway? Much of his award money had been given over to good works, and his dependable friend and frequent collaborator, the director Howard Hawks, knew that work on *The Left Hand of God* would compensate the novelist well (\$2,000 a week for three weeks) and that Faulkner was the right man for the job, always capable of delivering a script on time and with redoubtable professional dedication.² While in Hollywood, no reporter was able to get Faulkner to open up about his work on the screenplay. This inscrutable writer rarely revealed the pride he took in his scripts or the despair that came after so many of them failed to reach the screen. The taciturn Faulkner would usually dismiss his Hollywood years (1932–1955) as mercenary work for hire.³ So it was, and yet the emotional

2 I provide the details of the extensive Hawks-Faulkner collaborations in *The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 1* (300, 355-58, 359, 361-63, 379, 381, 383, 384, 385, 387-88, 395, 401-02, 409, 439n34, 441n7) and *The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* (3-4, 8, 11, 23-27, 29, 31-33, 35, 37-38, 43-44, 46, 48-49, 73, 138, 209, 216, 228-30, 236, 239-40, 243, 244-46, 248, 254-55, 260-61, 264, 266, 270, 279, 318, 358-61, 365, 375, 393-94, 397-98, 407-08, 549n24, 542n25, 546n100, 559n24, 560n23).

3 See Faulkner's comments on his years in Hollywood in Gwynn and Blotner (102); Meriwether and Millgate (240-43; 13-14, 20, 27, 48, 52, 54, 56, 70, 86-87, 100, 161, 169).

and thematic residue of his scenarios showed up in his novels, with fleeting and fugitive references to Hollywood in the Snopes trilogy⁴ and elsewhere, signaling a subtext of anxiety and even anguish that biographers have left undetected.

Often teamed up with other writers, which was the Hollywood way, a relieved Faulkner welcomed opportunities to work alone with Hawks as a twosome, who had at one time considered forming their own production company. Hawks was Hollywood all over, but also an educated reader of Faulkner who prodded and rewrote his partner's work after first allowing Faulkner to write what he wanted. Faulkner relied on Hawks, a kind of second voice in Faulkner's best screenwriting—a worldly and sometimes sarcastic commentator. Faulkner never explained what Hawks meant to him, telling his mother early on his career that there were trade secrets a writer ought not divulge to anyone (*The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 1* 108), as though saying too much would spoil the impact of his work and contaminate the source of his inspiration—in this case, his transcription of Hawks' manner, hectoring, but always supportive, directly into the script.

Knowing the existential crisis Faulkner confronted makes it possible to imagine how he read and related to the novel that he transformed into his own testament: "I decline to accept the end of man," he wrote in his Nobel Prize address, affirming: "I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance." But Faulkner decried commercial forces no longer concerned with "problems of the spirit."⁵ He excised from his address his

4 See, for example, *The Town* (14-15).

5 James B. Meriwether, "Address Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for

contempt for Hollywood expressed by a producer, “the man in charge talking of ‘angles,’ story ‘angles,’ and then I realized that they were not even interested in truth, the old universal truths of the human heart without which any story is ephemeral—the universal truths of love and honor and pride and pity and compassion and sacrifice” (*The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* 358-59). Those words still resounded when he read on the first page of Barrett’s novel about a mission hospital, half-occupied because those who needed care had “lost faith... Something vital was missing from a mission that had no priest” (1). Father Coleman has died and his replacement, Father O’Shea, on the way to the mission is murdered by a soldier in service to the warlord, Mieh Yang, who relies on Carmody, a rugged sort of overseer executing orders ruthlessly, but also a psychically wounded man, like Faulkner, despairing over the loss of his first love (16), as Faulkner did when his childhood sweetheart married someone else. Carmody loses himself in fishing and hunting, as Faulkner often did. Carmody is a restless man “yearning to escape from all of it” (23)—as Faulkner did, no matter where he lived or what he did. Carmody is, in fact, the ace pilot Faulkner had always wanted to become, the hero on his own in the firmament.

After O’Shea’s murder, a disgusted Carmody rejects his humiliating fealty to Mieh Yang, much as Faulkner rebelled against studio mogul Jack Warner, who insisted on Faulkner’s fulfilling a long term contract that paid him a pittance (\$300 to \$500 a week) compared to the \$2,500 weekly salaries of far less-talented writers. After his own three years of bondage, Faulkner walked away from the contract, worrying that Warner would come after him, although the powerful agent, Charles Feldman, eventually interceded on Faulkner’s behalf (*The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* 358, 360). Warner

Literature,” Stockholm, December 10, 1950.

claimed an absolute authority not that different from a warlord: "Warner has threatened me verbally through the studio man who manages the writers dept. that that studio owns everything I write and that anyone else buys it at his or her peril," Faulkner wrote to his publisher on February 18, 1946, lamenting his "biblical seven years servitude" (Blotner 223). By 1951, extricated from the Warner regime, Faulkner remained sensitive to how he had been broken on the wheel of what he considered to be a criminal-like enterprise.

The disparity between Faulkner as Hollywood hack and Nobel Prize winner flying to Stockholm, dressed in formal wear at his award ceremony, is akin to Carmody's transformation when he dons a priest collar and cassock and escapes to the Christian mission, instinctively making the sign of the cross when he is met by village converts: "The life and the moment of the mission were suspended because he chose to stand for a moment quietly in the sun" (74). Much the same had happened to Faulkner in Stockholm during the Nobel ceremony, which he performed with a profound dignity that several observers commented on. In his letters, Faulkner revealed that he was quite aware of his impact, which resulted in a religious-like reverence for the grace of his presence. Similarly, Carmody realizes: "This was his stage, and when eyes watched him, he must give those eyes a good show" (80). If the world in such moments bowed to Faulkner, he in turn, bowed to the world, just as Carmody, when approached by a peasant for a blessing, says, "I, too, seek blessings" (80). This is the beginning of Carmody's covenant with a community just as surely as Faulkner acknowledged, in his modest fashion, that he "did the best I knew to behave like a Swedish gentleman, and leave the best taste possible on the Swedish palate for Americans and Random House" (Blotner 311). But it was more than that. More for Faulkner than for Carmody in

becoming a public cynosure, a wearing and even terrifying role, both men suffer in their effort, in Barrett's words, to remain gracious, "to answer smiles with smiles, to speak softly [as Faulkner habitually did], to listen patiently" (90). What began as a reluctant sojourn to Stockholm became for Faulkner, as the flight to the mission does for Carmody, a transformative understanding of his place in the world, which was looking to him for guidance.

Anyone familiar with Faulkner's polite post-Nobel interviews can read his circumspect behavior in Carmody's reaction to his sacerdotal masquerade: "It was easy, even interesting, to guard his language and to speak as a priest might speak, and amusing to think his own thoughts behind the mask" (105). But having run from servitude to Mieh Yang, Carmody discovers, as did Faulkner on the lam from Hollywood, that the new role is a "new trap" (107). Both Faulkner and Carmody want to feel in charge—not beholden to what Faulkner called "the man in charge," and yet their pride in independence is severely checked. Carmody, having arrived at his mission, realizes: "They had waited for a priest, and now that he was here, they made a priest out of him, hammering him into the shape of their desiring" (115). Could Faulkner have felt otherwise? On February 28, 1951, even as Faulkner was in Hollywood working on *The Left Hand of God*, Perrin Lowrey, Jr. wrote to Phil Stone, Faulkner's mentor: "[A]s a young writer, I wanted to tell someone close to him how much his speech of acceptance in Stockholm meant to those of us who are trying to turn out something good. The dignity and selflessness and awareness of that speech must have been particularly meaningful and encouraging to all the young writers of my generation So I wanted him to know I simply wanted to thank him for doing so generous and so fine a thing" (*Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, Volume*

IV 63). If such tributes were gratifying, they were also inhibiting, provoking in Faulkner frequent relapses into drinking and sometimes surly and even shocking public statements and private laments that he could not be the vagabond poet of his dreams and his own soldier of fortune, a character he had written about in his early days as a writer in New Orleans (*The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 1* 37, 302).

Yet Faulkner could not renounce his public role any more than Carmody can, as he recites in the mass: "*Redime et miserere mei* [Redeem me and be merciful unto me]" (128). In the last decade of his life, Faulkner submitted himself to frequent trips abroad, to classroom sessions and tutorials with students, all in a quest to achieve, it would seem, a kind of redemption through what Carmody calls a "personal sacrifice The only thing that gave meaning to human lives" (129). What is said of Carmody is repeated in numerous accounts of Faulkner: "He was so deliberate, so reverent. He never hurried" (131). When Faulkner did a United States Information Service tour of Japan in 1955, the Japanese revered Faulkner nearly as much as the Chinese venerate Carmody. Like Carmody, Faulkner appeared to be a dedicated man with a ceremonial sensibility carried over from his home life, where he insisted on the strict observance of table manners, holiday customs, and his authority as "Pappy," a down home honorific he took as seriously as his Nobel Prize.⁶

What Faulkner wanted, what people watched him wanted, is what Carmody feels when the people "garlanded him with virtue," seeking what Faulkner also sought: "something in which to glory."⁷ That kind of reciprocity to men like Faulk-

6 As Pappy, Faulkner even wore a Chinese gown. See *The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 1* (218).

7 Faulkner on glory: *The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* (238, 327, 343, 407).

ner and Carmody who had thought of themselves as their own authorities frightens Carmody as a kind of danger that Faulkner sometimes ran away from when he drank too much on his good will tours: “The realization” comes to Carmody that “these people served him that he might, in his turn, serve them—and that this was the pattern of all life, not in China alone, but whenever men met men, in pride and humility” (163). Barrett’s words, which Faulkner followed so closely in his script, sound Faulknerian, as does that pattern of Carmody’s life in which Carmody reads “the story of his growing reputation” in the people to flock to him. How uncanny as well for Faulkner to read that Carmody “wanted a drink. He told himself he wanted only one, but he knew better than that. He had never stopped at one when he started” (205). Swearing off alcohol had been as habitual with Faulkner as drinking itself was.

Even the incidentals of Carmody’s character hit home—like his love of song and singing Faulkner’s favorite, “Water Boy,” which Faulkner, by all accounts, sang perfectly well (Barrett, 207; *The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 1* 191). In short, the Nobel Prize winner was assigned a hack job that became a work of redemption that he continued to perfect even after he was off salary, creating a structure and a new character that fulfilled the mission that he and Hawks had been on for twenty years in Hollywood.

That mission included a gritty realism set against the camaraderie of men and women—a rugged sort of idealism verging on spirituality that was expressed in the hardboiled dialogue of film adaptations like *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*, both of which the two men tore into by rewriting the script on set. The director and screenwriter perfected a demotic style not usually associated with Faulkner, but which

immediately comes into play in the first words of the script for *The Left Hand of God*. Hank, a character absent from the novel, cancels out Barrett's bland piety with a direct voice-over address to the audience: "China, 1951 right under the edge of Tibet a thousand miles from nowhere and for my nickel you could have had the country and the job both two years ago, and by now even Jim too was going around to that idea" (Gleeson-White 762). In the produced film, Faulkner's Hank is missing—mainly because Darryl Zanuck, who bought the film for Fox, found the voice-over device too talky. But without it—at least in a stripped down version—the significance of Carmody's return to Catholicism, in the midst of the impending communist takeover of China, is a vapid story that lacks the friction and perspective that Hank, a kind of Walter Brennan sidekick, or a Howard Hawks interlocutor, can contribute to the action. You need a character actor to tell off the hero every so often, as Brennan does in *Red River* and *Rio Bravo*, and that Hawks did with actors and screenwriters alike on his sets.⁸

Barrett acknowledges Carmody's part in the warlord's violence, but Faulkner went much further—in terms that made his screenplay problematic for Zanuck, who wanted his audiences to root for the hero. Right at the beginning of the screenplay, Hank describes an atrocity: Mieh Yang's gang attacks a village "shooting until everybody is dead," with Carmody doing nothing about it. Hank says, "even if he had wanted to because after three years, what was one more Chinese more or less even to us?" (Gleeson-White 762-63). That

8 Faulkner understood Brennan's importance, having turned in on March 10, 1936 a treatment for *Banjo on Knee*, in which Brennan plays the kind of Mississippi River denizen Faulkner was familiar with. Then Faulkner built up Brennan's role as Eddie in *To Have and Have Not*. See *The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* (247-49). For Hawks's behavior on *Red River* and *Rio Bravo*, see *A Real American Character* (123-27, 158-61).

is a grim sentiment that neither Darryl Zanuck nor William Barrett could abide, but that was absolutely essential to William Faulkner, who had written about just such inhumanity in his Civil War novel, *The Unvanquished*.

Both Hank and Jim have degraded themselves. Jim recognizes just how debased he has become when the warlord orders him to whip Hank simply because Jim whipped one of Mieh Yang's men for murdering the priest. The warlord loses face because Jim has taken it upon himself to punish one of his men. Hank explains how Jim saved him after their plane crashed in the warlord's territory. Jim wrested Hank from the plane's wreckage and carried his injured co-pilot on his back to safety. This personal bond is what makes Hank root for Jim, who cannot do without Hank any more than Bogart's character in *To Have and Have Not* can pilot his own ship without the rummy Eddie, a disabled character (another Faulkner original) who shows that the hero's strength is inherent to his humanity. Hank does not blink at the evil they have become a part of, but his very candor is what makes their redemption possible.

When Faulkner introduces lines that do not appear in Barrett's novel, the new words invariably define Carmody's plight and what is missing from his life. "I only have time for what comes along," Carmody says, rationalizing his opportunism that will give way to the time of meditation that will be available to him when he dons his priestly garments (Gleeson-White 768). "What have I done?" Carmody asks Hank, who predicts the whipping for himself that his friend and savior has not the wit to anticipate (Gleeson-White 770). But Carmody's question also anticipates his reckoning with the self-defeating behavior that Hank has pointed out. Carmody has a need for salvation that his bravado of self-sufficiency

is meant to suppress: "Religion is for children," he sneers, believing he has recanted his Catholic upbringing, telling the dying Father O'Shea he was a Catholic (Gleeson-White 779). "There is no such thing," Shea replies, echoing the words of Gavin Stevens in *Requiem for a Nun* that there is no such thing as "was," an assertion repeated by Carmody to a Buddhist monk after O'Shea dies: "I was a Catholic once. Maybe it would be better if he had been right, and there is no such thing as 'was'" (Gleeson-White 781, 783).

Although the explicit theme of the novel and screenplay is Carmody's struggle with his Catholicism, religious belief is a subtext for Faulkner's concern with human identity and the forces abroad that may stifle the individuality that Faulkner so prized. "Are you afraid of the Soviets?" Carmody asks Mrs. Sigman, wife of the radical Dr. Sigman, who has fled fascist Europe (Gleeson-White 802). Ostensibly his question, which is not in Barrett's novel, is addressed to her growing concerns over how the only reliable sources of supply come from communists. Although she does not answer Carmody, he takes her silence as a no—to which he responds: "Then you are braver than me because I am" (Gleeson-White 802). His answer heralds the staunch anti-communism Faulkner would express in his US-sponsored trips abroad. He believed that a conception of God and an understanding of how the past shaped one's identity were lacking in the collectivist agenda. Only by acknowledging the weight of the past could one, paradoxically, respond to change and exert free will.

That Faulkner's thrust was far more political than Barrett's is evident in his treatment of Dr. Sigman, whose views presage exactly what Faulkner would say about race five years later in the midst of the Civil Rights struggle. Sigman has given up on the mission because "we—the white men—have lost

face What else can these people think of a foreign god who cannot even keep aspirin in his dispensary." He tells his wife: "I'm not going to keep you here until there are communist troops hammering at the gates" (812). Faulkner could be as despairing as Sigman—telling critic Malcolm Cowley "man stinks the same stink no matter where in time"—and yet the doctor holds out a Faulknerian hope for the "human race, which for all its baseless and folly, is still capable of fidelity and sacrifice for the sake of love" (Blotner 185; Gleeson-White 813). Without love, as Faulkner showed in novels like *Absalom, Absalom!*, a father, Thomas Sutpen, rejects his son, Charles Bon, because he is of another race; Henry Sutpen, Thomas's son, rejects his half-brother Bon for the same reason, but their sister, Judith Sutpen, rears Bon's son, out of the love she felt for her half-brother. The anti-clerical Dr. Sigman concedes: "I respect priests. Because a man who gives his life for anything, has given all he has" (Gleeson-White 842). This sacrifice of self paradoxically results in Carmody finding himself, as Faulkner did by eventually making peace with himself, his marriage, and his world in the final years of his life (*The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* 518).

The difference between Sigman and Carmody is that the latter, like Faulkner, did not remain in the compound of his own conceits, but could stand outside himself, so to speak, as he did on Oxford, Mississippi's public square, listening and attending to black and white alike. Mrs. Sigman is astounded at the bond between Carmody and the Chinese villagers and farmers. "You might have lived among these hill people for years," she tells Carmody, who becomes a Faulkner character who would not be amiss among the poor white Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* and the peasant-like Griens (Gleeson-White 843). Carmody learns to speak a hill dialect that Faulkner perfected in "Two Soldiers" and "Shall Not Perish,"

his World War II stories, which echo Lincoln's Gettysburg faith that a "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth," a faith that Faulkner also drew on for his ambitious World War II film, the unproduced *Battle Cry*, which included scenes set in China (*Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, Volume IV* 126-62, 257-86). What Carmody learns is what Faulkner practiced, listening to and drawing his strength from his community. Hank, who scoffed at Carmody's growing sense of mission, eventually capitulates and begins to call his co-pilot "Father" (Gleeson-White 890). Carmody draws the community around him like a family, just as Faulkner did with his characters and kin (*The Life of William Faulkner: Volume 2* 218-19, 241, 268-69).

But the role Carmody plays fits as uneasily as it did for Faulkner: "there is too much in him that's is not a priest" (Gleeson-White 887), Mrs. Sigman observes, sounding like Estelle Faulkner, who wrote to his editor: "Truly, he has too much to do here—It is bad, I know, for an artist to undertake all Bill does—but how it circumvent it? I am at loss" (*Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, Volume II* 95). But Faulkner kept returning to his responsibilities, like Carmody saying he cannot forsake those who patiently await his appearances in "hope, but above all the trust" (Gleeson-White 899).

Ultimately it is Carmody's faith in himself and in his ability to serve the greater good that saves himself and his mission. The novel's denouement suited a screenwriter who exhorted his daughter's high school graduation class to change the world one individual at a time.⁹ In *A Fable*, it is said, "even just one

9 James B. Meriwether, "Address to the Graduating Class University High School," Oxford, Mississippi, May 28, 1951.

will be enough," when the mutiny of a French regiment in World War I is led by Faulkner's Christ figure (90). Refusing to resort to violence against Mieh Yang, Carmody, as in the novel, convinces the warlord that he would gain little from destroying the mission, and even less by torturing Carmody, who would only remind Mieh Yang's followers of how much face he lost in employing Carmody in the first place. This nonviolent resolution of conflict is reminiscent of the ending of *The Unvanquished*, in which an unarmed Bayard Sartoris outfaces his father's killer, who, Bayard realizes, has exhausted the need for vengeance. Bayard exposes himself to a higher morality, as Carmody does by submitting himself to the discipline of the Catholic Church for impersonating a priest. What Faulkner took from Barrett, and what Faulkner struggled to embody in his own life and career, was the recognition that individuals can only fulfill themselves as individuals by recognizing a code of values that is superior to their own impulses and desires.

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The Return of the Repressed (and Oppressed): A Freudo-Marxian Analysis of Jordan Peele's *Us*

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by Seth Vannatta

ABSTRACT

What are the necessary conditions for middle class life? This is the central question of Jordan Peele's horror movie, *Us*. I argue here that Peele's answer is both Freudian and Marxian, that these are interrelated, and that the tethered doubles of the Wilson family in *Us* represent their dynamic unconscious drive structures, the return of the repressed, and the revolutionary return of those oppressed by destructive effects of capitalism on a working underclass.

Keywords: Marx, Freud, Jordan Peele, *Us*, class-consciousness, psychoanalysis

El regreso de lo reprimido (y oprimido): Un análisis freudomarxista de *Us* de Jordan Peele

RESUMEN

¿Cuáles son las condiciones necesarias para la vida de clase media? Esta es la pregunta central de la película de terror de Jordan Peele, *Us*. Sostengo aquí que la respuesta de Peele es a la vez freudiana y marxista, que están interrelacionadas y que los dobles atados de la familia Wilson en nosotros representan sus estructuras dinámicas de impulso inconsciente, el retorno de lo reprimido y el retorno revolucionario de aquellos oprimidos por destructivos. efectos del capitalismo en una clase baja de trabajo.

Palabras clave: Marx, Freud, Jordan Peele, *Us*, conciencia de clase, psicoanálisis

被镇压者（与被压迫者）的回归：关于乔丹·皮尔作品《我们》的弗洛伊德-马克思式分析

摘要

中产阶级生活的必要条件是什么？这是乔丹·皮尔执导的惊悚电影《我们》的中心疑问。我论证认为，皮尔对该疑问的回答结合了弗洛伊德与马克思的观点，必要条件是相互关联的，并且《我们》中威尔逊一家所面对的束缚式困难代表了其动态的无意识驱动机制、被镇压者的回归、以及那些受资本主义对工薪底层阶级造成的破坏性影响的被压迫者的革命式回归。

关键词：马克思，弗洛伊德，乔丹·皮尔，《我们》，阶级意识，精神分析

What are the necessary conditions for the possibility of a contented, middle class life? I take this to be the central question of Jordan Peele's horror movie, *Us*. I argue here that his answer is both Freudian and Marxian and that these analyses are interrelated. For Sigmund Freud, civilization itself is not possible without our collective repression of our libidinal and destructive instincts. Further, our sense of autonomous agency, which is responsible for working our way through school and succeeding in the marketplace, is, in reality, an effect of a dynamic unconscious. Next, Freud's concept of ego resounds of the atomic individual of classical liberalism constructed to justify the politico-economic nexus that can give rise to mid-

dle-class existence. Therefore, for Freud, both civilization and consciousness are the collective and individual results of repression. Karl Marx shows that the individual is an historical accretion built upon both primitive accumulation and the deformative effects of industrial labor under capitalism. The ego, as an atomic individual, is one lynchpin between Freud and Marx: the alienated industrial labor of an invisible and forgotten proletariat is necessary both to construct the atomic individual and to produce the capital deployed by the middle class. Thus, I argue that the tethered doubles of the Wilson family in *Us* represent their dynamic unconscious drive structures, the return of the repressed, and the revolutionary return of those oppressed by destructive effects of capitalism on a working underclass.

FREUDIAN THEMES IN *US*

Sigmund Freud's central claim is that consciousness is neither the whole of psychic life nor coextensive with the seat of agency in the world (*The Ego and the Id* 3). Rather, both a latent preconscious and a repressed unconscious exist, and consciousness itself is the effect of this structured unconscious. Our consciousness is "tethered" to our unconscious. The repressed unconscious contains the traumas of our sexual development, including our working through the Oedipal complex and our growth through the oral, anal, and genital stages of sexual desire. Freud showed us that our id, the non-moral locus of mental life, contains the libido, the pleasure principle, and *Thanatos*, the death drive. These unconscious drives relate to the ego in ways that motivate much of our behavior. The pleasure principle drives the libido, and the death drive, *Thanatos*, strives to lead animate life back to its inanimate state. The ego is seat of our relationship with and control over our external world. It me-

diates between the desires of the id and, as we will see below, the harsh moral commands of the super-ego.

The Wilsons, Gabe, Adeleide, Zora, and Jason, appear to be a contented, middle-class family. They have the disposable income for a vacation to the beach and for the purchase of a boat. Common to middle class families, they constantly compare their relative wealth to their peers. The film reinforces this tendency as the Wilsons envy their louche white friends, Kitty and Josh, whose pleasure principle drives them even more than the Wilsons' does. While on the beach, Adeleide does not drink, while Kitty says that it's "vodka-o'clock." Gabe dons a Howard University sweatshirt. Hunter Harris writes that the sweatshirt is "a constant reminder of exactly what kind of guy he is: smart, honorable, probably a little bougie" (pg). These are qualities we attribute to successful middle-class folk. They stay out of trouble, refrain from drugs and alcohol, get the grades and the degree, and provide for their families. They stay out of trouble by inhibiting their sexual and destructive instincts. Insofar as the system *qua* civilization works, we all do. By a displacement of the libido, Gabe and Adeleide can sublimate their instinctual drives and take pleasure in intellectual endeavors—those that produce forms of culture, such as arts and science, in a civilized world (*Civilization and its Discontents* 29-30).

Freud writes that we narcissistically turn ourselves into our own object, thereby developing a super-ego, the moral dictator that replaces the powerful father figure, that turns its cruelty inward to our egos, that polices our instincts, and that results in guilt complexes. We can see Adeleide's ego ideal governing her behavior on the beach when she refrains from alcohol. However, we also see her PTSD memories of her childhood trip to the same boardwalk and beach. When her

doppelganger, Red, shows up in the driveway of her vacation home, we see the return of her repression.

Religion, for Freud, is one of the “mass-delusions” of humanity constructed to secure happiness through a “delusional remoulding of reality” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 32). The ultimate father figure, God, and thus ultimate super-ego, posits moral law and retribution for transgressions. The Bible verse, Jeremiah 11:11, a recurring number pattern in the film, reads: “Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them.” Its reoccurrence in *Us* announces the ominous doom awaiting the Wilsons. The retribution for the consumerist idolatry in middle-class existences presages the Marxian analysis below.

Freud explains repression as follows: “in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances ... it can once more be brought to light” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 16). Freud uses an archeological and architectural analogy to illustrate the unconscious and the possibility of the return of the repressed. He describes Rome as a modern city built up over and around an ancient city. One can excavate its history intentionally, or it discover accidentally (*Civilization and its Discontents* 17). He describes Rome as “not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past—an entity ... in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 18). Similarly, the past is preserved in mental life, and psychoanalysis represents the intentional mining of the unconscious, while Freudian slips or seemingly unimportant memories of a Bible verse, Jeremi-

ah 11:11, illustrate its accidental coming to light. Peele represents the repressed in *Us* architecturally as well, as a series of tunnels beneath the surface of the civilized, known, and conscious world. The Wilson's contentment depends on the repressed—a forgotten but not lost—underworld.

Concerning the operation of the pleasure principle and its relationship to the death drive, Freud writes, “The feeling of happiness derived from the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed but the ego is incomparably more intense than that derived from satiating an instinct that has been tamed” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 29). Thus, we desire forbidden things. Wild instinctual impulses include our destructive ones, and the tethered dog chilling smiles as they terrorize the Wilsons. While all of the tethered doubles wield scissors and carry out bloody murders, Jason's double, a dog-like pyromaniac named Pluto, represents *Thanatos* at work. He is the manifestation of the self-destructive instinct, even as he wears a mask to conceal self-inflicted burns on his face. He is closer to the animal world, *qua* dog-like, thus uncivilized. Both Jason and his double wear masks throughout the film, representing that there is something, the unconscious, under the mask, *qua* consciousness, driving the actions of the mask. Jason's double even self-immolates at the end of the film, holding his arms out, making a cross, a self-sacrifice necessary for Jason's continued existence.

That they are tethered illustrates another Freudian theme. As Herbert Marcuse wrote, “Freud's hypothesis of the death drive and its role in civilized aggression shed light on one of the neglected enigmas of civilization; it revealed the hidden unconscious tie which binds the oppressed to their oppressors” (270). Jason must conquer his death drive, manifest in his double, for civilization, *qua* middle class life, to survive.

Freud sees “repression as the necessary concomitant of civilization” (Robinson 203). Freud illustrates how the evil is in *Us*: “Some of the things that one is unwilling to give up, because they give pleasure, are nevertheless not ego but object; and some sufferings that one seeks to expel turn out to be inseparable from the ego in virtue of their internal origin” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 14). Individuals in the middle class both fetishize pleasurable commodities, such as fancy boats and AI servants, and contain internally the drives of their own suffering. Beneath our consumption of, for example, meat, are rows and columns of corporate cages of animals, represented as white rabbits in *Us*.

MARXIAN THEMES IN *US*

For Freud, we falsely think of the ego “as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 12). If the atomic individual, *qua* ego, in Freud, is a function of a dynamic unconscious, for Marx, it is a function of collective historical and social forces. Marx historicizes the ego of the autonomous and self-determining agent in the course and progress of history. He uncovers the social relations that serve as the substratum of individual consciousness, and this involves uncovering the history of the social institutions treated as unchangeable by bourgeois political economy. Georg Lukàcs writes that the laws that govern the individual will be functions of a specific historical structure. This priority of historical force over individual denies individual consciousness the significant role in history attributed to it by liberal economists and political theorists (Lukàcs 49). Similarly, Frederick Engels claimed that individual control of actions is really false consciousness. According to Marx, individual consciousness is a function of the capitalist social

organization that hinders its self-realization and misdirects it as “false consciousness” (Fromm 21).

Marx asserts that the bourgeois conception of individuality, a function of alienation, is not the advance from previous forms of individual dependence as claimed by some political economists. Opponents of Marx claim that in capitalism, the interconnection of world markets and the indifference with which they act on individuals has a certain benefit over and above previous social connections of a local, feudal, or master-servant nature. The Wilsons could have descended from enslaved people in the United States, and liberal political and economic theorists view their emancipation as a triumph. Emancipation removed the personal ties of dependence and enslavement, so they, as individuals, seem independent and free. Marx calls this independence a mere “illusion” (Fromm 163): “The golden age for labor in the process of becoming emancipated” was only golden from the bourgeois perspective (Fromm 510). Individuals “free” to sell their labor in the “free” market are supposed to be better off than enslaved serfs on the manor or slaves on the plantation. Bourgeois political economists hailed this independence as the harbinger of a “free” economy. Rather, the absence of extra-economic force, as was the case in a previously militarized rural aristocracy, became the presence of economic force, as is the case with market imperatives (Wood 99). The impersonal relations of production and exchange act upon individuals as imperatives, not freedoms. In Marx’s terms, what was personal dependence gave way to objective dependence. That is, the entirety of social relations in capitalism become independent and then act upon and in opposition to “seemingly independent individuals” (Marx 164). The relations of production and exchange become autonomous over individuals, who were then “ruled by abstractions” (Marx 164).

That the Wilsons are a black middle class family is notable. They represent the thin veneer of the black middle class that separate the oligarchs from the black working and non-working underclass. They are the only social difference between the Baltimore uprisings in 1968 and those in 2015. The historical forces that made their lives possible also over-determine the underclass in the film, the tethered souls. The Hands across America theme mocks the way that thin calls for charity toward this underclass mask and defend the economic structures that created them. Winston Duke, the actor playing Gabe, said of the Wilsons: "They are attached to the American Dream, a construct that has oppressed them, and they've been on the bottom half of that in their lives [and in their repressed historical memories]. Once you attach yourself to that construct, you then become responsible for its sins. And when Judgment Day comes, you have to pay for it" (Harris). This Judgment Day is the revolutionary return of the repressed and oppressed.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx lays out the history of the social relations of capitalism that lead to a misconstruction of the individual. In capitalism, individuals become more socially indifferent to each other the more their subsistence depends on the creation of exchange-value in production. This includes the alienation of the workers to those benefitting from the work and the alienation of the middle class from those on whose backs their consumerist lives depend. Mutual dependence in capitalism is only a universal dependence of each individual's production upon all others' production and consumption (Marx 156). This is an economic and atomized dependence, rather than an organic one. Because of this mutual and universal economic dependence, activity and production have a social character. The individual's role in and share of production confronts him as something

alien. What replaces subordination to previous social and political institutions is subordination to a set of relations. Because for his very subsistence, the individual is dependent universally as described above, the set of relations, arising “out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals,” confronts him and subordinates him. Subordination to this set of relations is part of Marx’s assertion regarding the fallacy of individual power. Social production subsumes individuals rather than individuals controlling social production. Freud’s ego and Marx’s abstract individual are effects, rather than causes.

CONCLUSION: WHAT ABOUT THE TWIST?

So far, the present analysis has ignored the fact that Red is, in fact, Adeleide, and has been performing the role of Adeleide, the protective parent. Therefore, the person we thought was a manifestation of the return of Adeleide’s repressed childhood trauma in the House of Mirrors is in fact Adeleide herself. Red’s lifelong performance of Adeleide, however, strikes a powerful Freud-Marxian theme. Individually, Freud’s reality principle governs Red’s maternal and spousal performance. Her ego defers immediate gratification of the desires of the id when faced with the obstacles of her reality. The collective correlate to this is Marcuse’s performance principle, which corresponds to Marx’s qualitative depiction of existence under capitalism in alienation. Marcuse writes, “Under the performance principle, body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor; they can function as instruments only if they renounce the freedom of the libidinal subject-object which the human organism primarily is and desires” (46). Red is, as are all of the tethered, a representation of id, but she operates under the performance principle, doing what Adeleide is supposed to do, which is to act

according to Freud's reality principle. Marcuse writes, "The performance principle, which is that of an acquisitive and antagonistic society in the process of constant expansion, presupposes a long development during which domination has been increasingly rationalized: control over social labor now reproduces society on a large scale and under improving conditions People] do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions" (45). Red performs the pre-established function of Adeleide. Peele's film inscribes the notion of performance into Red performing Adeleide as a dancer. Her dance is her performance of the role of a contended, middle class child.

Freudian and Marxian analyses commingle in Peele's *Us* in significant ways. Freud's consciousness, the seat of the ego, is an effect of a dynamic structured unconscious to which we only have indirect access. The atomic individual, as a construct necessary for a capitalist economy, is an effect of historical and social forces. Both operate under the illusion of control. Beneath the guise of control are the shadows of repression and oppression, both of which violently return in *Us*. The American Dream of middle-class life—that the Wilsons have tethered themselves to and that Red performs as a mother, spouse, and dancer—is founded on the displacements of our instinctive desires, the repression of our traumas and drives, and the oppression of an alienated working and non-working underclass.

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Review of Reel Latinxs Representation in US Film and TV

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Reel Latinxs Representation in US Film and TV. Frederick Luis Aldama and Christopher González. University of Arizona Press, 2019. 192 pp. ISBN: 9780816539581.

With reboots like *Party of Five* and *Charmed* casting Latinx characters as leads and the growth of Latinx representation on *Netflix* among other streaming sites, a text like *Reel Latinx Representation in US Film & TV* written by Frederick Luis Aldama and Cristopher Gonzalez will be a useful addition to courses invested in exploring these shows in the context of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century representation on Latinx community members on screen. While Latinx representation on screen, in print, and on stage continues to spark debates regarding authenticity and quality of representation, Aldama and Gonzalez provide critical tools for scholars and educators looking to contextualize some of those debates.

Aldama and Gonzalez write that “we have to be proactive about how media affects our lives” (3) in their introduction. The “we” they articulate as proactive are not the media content creators that mobilize to address the limited and stereotypical representation of marginalized communities and, indirectly, the audiences that consume the media that recycles negative stereotypes of the characters of color they consume. Throughout the text, they synthesize twenty-first shifts in Latinx actors’, writers’, and producers’ experiences in/direct in response to Latinx media activists’ call for better/increased representation across film and television in chapters

that provide a historical survey and tackled on the concerns that are emerging in the racialized and gendered representations of Latinx characters in television and film. Short in length, accessible in language, the text would be useful introductory text to courses on Latinxs in US TV & Film and/or courses that survey dilemmas and opportunities in race and representation on television and film.

The introduction provide theoretical and methodological insight into the institutional concerns that any marginalized group has when it comes to how dominant institutions like established streaming sites and major networks approach writing about their community. They explain that dominant media's "first impulse is to diversify by throwing out as many cultural objects as possible, and then the one that sells becomes the one that's backed and promoted and reproduced ad infinitum until it no longer sells" (9). In their focus on Latinx onscreen representation, the writers situate that investment, acknowledging that the success and efforts of Black and Asian American content creators are significant to the inroads and/or lack thereof made in relation to the growth and layered complexity or lack thereof of Latinx character and show content creation.

The growth of the Latinx population in the United States in addition to the political realities various Latinx communities are currently experiencing warrant critical attention to how fictional representations reinforce or dispel the dehumanization of a growing segment of the US population. The extent to which the text surveys actors like Anthony Quinn and Eva Mendes, as they speak to the limits and opportunities Latinx actors have had in the evolution of their careers, which showcases how television and film tends to reinforce negative stereotypes more often than not. In examining what sells, the

authors ask why the media that tries to be the exception to the norm does not. Their brief mentions of *Jane the Virgin*, among other more recent pieces of media, warrant greater attention given how Netflix has developed Latin American and US Latinx media projects, as well as the Latinx representation CW has produced in the wake of *Jane the Virgin's* series finale. *Reel Latinx* provides a brief overview that could, in a television studies class, provide a critical lens by which to view shows like CW's *Charmed* and *Roswell New Mexico* and Freeform's *Party of Five*.

In historicizing Latinx media representation, they begin with Anthony Quinn considering how his career serves as “example of what Latinxs can do if given the chance even if the system in which he found himself compelled him to make many rather difficult choices concerning his heritage and ancestry” (35). His light skin afforded him the ability to change his name and pass as ethnically ambiguous, which may have helped him build and sustain his career, albeit relegated to ethnic white roles that would serve as a precursor to Latinx stereotypes. Reading his career in contrast to their discussion of Zaldana, however, showcases both the dominant media's limited understanding of who can be Latinx and Latinx Studies crises regarding how to discuss blackness within a Latinx cultural and political imaginary. I remember, as a child, watching Christina on Univision tell Jennifer Lopez that she could be cast into any role. In contrast, Zaldana's Latina roles have been few because her Blackness is read as separate, if not as a replacement to her Latina identity. The only exception was a makeup commercial she did in Spanish.

In assigning *Reel Latinx*, it will be important to delve into the racialization of “what Christopher Gonzalez has called the “barrio *bildungsroman*,” which is exemplified by some of the

significant roles Anthony Quinn has played (35). Returning to the conversation regarding Zaldana's career, we can ask what are the ways that independent and dominant media are contending with how colorism and racism shape the barrio bildungsromans that continue to be packaged and sold as the permissible form of Latinx representation. Aldama and Gonzalez write that "[s]tudio executives don't understand what Latinx can look like, or rather, the *possibilities* of what they *can* look like" (30). As much as that is true, it would be useful to assign articles and texts that engage with Latinx audiences regarding who we perceive as representing us to further unpack the ways in which Latinx audience members are complicit and/or critical of our limited forms of representation.

Aldama and Gonzalez do address what is unique about Latinx representation in terms of the transnational flow of Latin American soap operas rebooted into an English-speaking dramedies like *Ugly Betty* and *Jane the Virgin*. While these transnational reimagining create an avenue for Latina actors to lead a show, they also reinforce the virgin/whore binary that US-created media continues to reconstruct in US-based shows and film. Scholars looking at these shows more critically would benefit from how they discuss these concerns, although more attention is needed on Latinx dominant shows that are not reboots, such as *Vida* and *Pose*.

In my own work, *Reel Latinx* has revealed a gap in discussions of LGBT representation that moves beyond AIDS narratives and/or coming out narratives that racialize Latinx as more homophobic or that frame acceptance through cultural assimilation. Part of the limited scholarship and footnoting stems from the absence of queer Latinx writers, producers, and consultants on shows like *Pose*, *Vida*, *Charmed*, and *L Word Generation Q*, among others. With shows like these

having more than one season and prompting still other shows like the upcoming *Gentefied* to have a Latina lesbian, we now have the opportunity to further tease out the nuances of Latinx culture in media narratives. *Reel Latinx* provides a gateway to move beyond the barrio bildungsroman pulling from the headlines and the struggles our communities face in culturally responsive ways.'

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Review of *Remembrance of Things Present: The Invention of the Time Capsule*

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Nick Yablon, *Remembrance of Things Present: The Invention of the Time Capsule*. University of Chicago Press, 2019. 407 pp. ISBN: 978-0226574134.

Historians usually trace the origins of the time capsule to the one that Westinghouse Electric promoted at the 1938 World's Fair in New York. This sleek metal canister stuffed with human ephemera, weighing eight hundred pounds and resembling a ballistic missile, was lowered into a fifty-foot hole and left for the instruction and delight of the denizens of the year 6939. In his excellent new book, *Remembrance of Things Present*, historian Nick Yablon reveals that while Westinghouse's public relations consultant George Pendray may have coined the term *time capsule*, this was hardly the first "intentional deposit with a preconceived target date" (4). Yablon instead locates the beginnings of this specific tradition—of filling a container with present-day materials and sealing it for a scheduled opening in the future—in the United States Centennial celebrations of 1876. Exploring the creation of numerous such "time vessels" (time capsules *avant la lettre*) between 1876 and 1938, *Remembrance of Things Present* is about attempts to take some control over what will be remembered and memorialized about a lived historical moment. Examples of these time vessels offer us a different view of how history might be made.

The notion that nineteenth-century Americans were obsessed with the thought of how future historians would char-

acterize their era is also a theme in Yablon's terrific first book, *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819–1919* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), which examines the many fictions and fantasies through which Americans imagined their cities and monuments destroyed and decaying in the not-so-distant future. If ruins suggest that time is somehow off-kilter, the “time vessel” indicates what Yablon calls a “crisis of posterity” (16). As Americans approached the end of the nineteenth century, a strong desire to speak to future ages without mediation was coupled with a profound concern about the potential disconnection between a present *now* and a future *then*. Those invested in time vessels increasingly worried that gradual progress (social, scientific, and technological) would halt and perhaps reverse—and that future generations would know little or nothing about the past. The Proustian title *Remembrance of Things Present* therefore conveys a modernist anxiety regarding both the catastrophic course of history and the fragile agency of memory—or in this case, what Yablon calls “prospective memory” (9).

This anxiety can certainly be found in the work of Louis Ehrich, a prominent businessman and art dealer who designed a “century chest” in Colorado Springs in 1901. Ehrich focused on local rather than the national or international circumstances, overseeing a project that directly involved his community; he encouraged his neighbors to contribute photographs and handwritten letters to his vessel. These missives to the twenty-first century supported a philosophy Ehrich called “*posteritism*,” which, Yablon explains, was “an ethics of posterity” (115). The century chest project encouraged contributors to form an affective bond with, and a sense of duty to, the future. Ehrich, who was also an early proponent of national parks and a member of the Anti-Imperialist League,

worried that his contemporaries were rashly promoting their own interests and ignoring the long-term consequences of their actions. His century chest was an attempt not just to speak to the future but to make a better future possible.

As a product of the Gilded Age—a time of a growing divide between rich and poor, when social unrest often seemed to be at the boiling point—time vessels were “transtemporal expressions of hope” that civilization would still be around to protect and eventually open the capsule in the future (296). Yablon traces how the specific purposes of these vessels changed over time. The first vessels in 1876 generally conveyed civic pride and were designed to speak directly to their urban descendants a hundred years later. At the turn of the century, worries that future historians might lack access to accurate data led to a more international focus, and vessels functioned to preserve newspapers, photographs, and guides to the textured reality of life in the year 1900. By the 1930s (the era of the Great Depression), general fears about the potential collapse of civilization led capsule curators to imagine a postapocalyptic future in which those unearthing these vessels might have no knowledge at all of the culture that designed them—even a future in which the capsule could be the sole record of human life in the universe. It may not come as a surprise that the Westinghouse capsule of 1938 left a powerful impression on a young Carl Sagan, who would go on to design the famous golden record of human achievement that accompanied the 1977 Voyager space probes.

Remembrance of Things Present is the result of an impressive amount of research; the book concludes with seventy-seven pages of scholarly endnotes. At the same time, Yablon’s prose is straightforward rather than technical, and while the book will be valuable to professional historians of the late nine-

teenth- and early twentieth-century United States, it should also appeal to a general audience interested in the topic. Furthermore, this work should be recommended to students of American literature. Alongside Yablon's examinations of actual time capsules are readings of fictional preservation vessels, such as those that appear in Van Tassel Sutphen's *The Doomsman* (1906), Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), and George Allan England's *Darkness and Dawn* (1914). These early examples of science fiction and fantasy are themselves part of a turn-of-the-century culture that was increasingly considering how the future would understand history. Mark Twain, for example, to whom Yablon devotes considerable attention, willed that his manuscript autobiography be sequestered in the University of California's Bancroft Library for one hundred years after his death in 1910, becoming itself a sort of time capsule. (The first volume was promptly published in 2010.)

Of the tens of thousands of time capsules buried in the United States, Yablon notes, the vast majority have been lost or forgotten. And even when they are preserved and opened on schedule, their contents have generally failed to interest professional historians. Yet while support seems to have gradually disappeared for major capsule projects of national or international significance, the practice has become far more common among individuals and small groups. Digitization has given us more opportunities than ever before to archive the quotidian details of our lives. But as with the archival endeavors of the past, the question is whether the citizens of the future will desire what we choose to save.

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Review of *In the Balance: Indigeneity, Performance, Globalization*

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In the Balance: Indigeneity, Performance, Globalization. Gilbert, Helen H., JD Phillipson, Michelle H. Raheja, Editors. Liverpool University Press, 2020. 304 pp. ISBN: 978-1786940346

The world of Indigenous cultures is an untapped trove of unique insights into the human experience. Although native societies all across the globe have already conceded vast amounts of land and other natural resources to more powerful colonizers, relatively little is known about their individual ways of life. Helen Gilbert, an Australian working in theatre and performance studies, Michelle H. Raheja, a Native American who specializes in cultural and especially literary studies, and Dani J. Phillipson, a Canadian living in London who works on creative research, all provide very perceptive observations of these cultures, allowing for a deeper appreciation of the lengths that Indigenous people have to go through in order to remain prominent in a world of increasing globalization.

In the modern day, it has become increasingly evident how war, poverty, and discrimination disenfranchise Indigenous peoples. These groups receive fewer protections than their colonizers and are constantly taken advantage of. Globalization seems to have only accelerated this process, as more and more people fall prey to the Western ideals of capitalism and greed. However, with expanding interconnectedness and dependence, there comes visibility as well. Worldwide

integration seems to have maintained its ability to inspire optimism as the “vast transnational information and entertainment industries and ever more sophisticated communications technologies [are] mediating relations of power quite as effectively as trade agreements, diplomatic alliances or military adventurism” (3). The advent of video cameras and the internet has allowed those displaced by corporate interests and other socially fragmenting forces to rekindle connections with others taking on the same struggles. In the words of Stuart Hall, “the most profound cultural revolution has come about as a consequence of the margins coming into representation in art, in painting, in film, in music, in literature ... in politics, and in social life generally” (4). This collection of essays delves deeper into how many different Indigenous peoples have taken to the stage in order to be seen and heard in the public sphere and to be validated, especially on matters that are of most consequence to their respective communities.

In the first chapter, “Inside the Machine: Indigeneity, Subversion, and the Academy,” speaker Michael Greyeyes gives a performative keynote address reminiscing about his time spent as an actor and professor. Throughout the entire chapter, Greyeyes switches between Chief Bromden from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and himself, enlightening the audience on his personal history. When he saw this film for the first time as a young boy, he immediately felt a connection with Bromden since he was “the only brown face visible” in the entire movie, and he was also “surrounded by that which was not me” in his predominantly white neighborhood of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in western Canada (26). Greyeyes recounts how much of his identity is based upon difference, which is a reality that anyone of a non-European descent faces, as fair skin had been subconsciously adopted as the

“norm” by much of Western society. He was later asked to teach a course on intercultural theatre, which surprised Greyeyes, an Aboriginal man, as it gave him the opportunity to provide a new perspective on “colonialism, identity, the colonial gaze, interculturalism,” which provided his class with “a clear urgency—an authenticity” that no other professor had (32). He then closes out his speech by talking about how Malcolm X had a brief encounter with Islam. His embrace of the religion beyond what had been previously accepted allowed him to slowly unravel his hatred, which helped him move towards a “richer, more complex understanding of his religion and his purpose as a human being” (42). Greyeyes then draws a parallel to his own life, demonstrating the fact that by slowly extricating himself from the colonial mentality, separating himself from his learned grammar, narrowness, and arrogance, he too could find the validity of existing as an equal human being.

In the third chapter, “Assimilating Globalization, Performing Indigeneity: Richard Loring’s *African Footprint*,” Arifani Moyo contemplates the largest running musical from South Africa and how it gave the entire globe a chance to observe the beauty hidden within the continent’s Indigenous peoples. He remarks that this play has been the “most salient attempt at making the diversity of indigenous South African cultural heritages visible within the global theatre market” (65). Its inaugural performance occurred in front of statesman Nelson Mandela and other world leaders on Robben Island, and through its fusion of rhythms from both ancient and modern Africa, it empowers its audience to be proud of their culture and rich history. It depicts scenes from the ordinary life of both Indigenous people and the proletarian population to some of the extraordinary moments shared by both to the beat of “Afro-fusion dance,” which merges “rock,

pop, and jazz influences with world music, drawing on local traditional, folk, and urban genres” (66). Moyo states that *African Footprint* is “not special because of what it does, or even how well it does it, but because it best epitomizes a particular, replicable method of cultural value-creation in South Africa” (67). This is emphasized by the fact that African indigeneity is a unique concept, as the entire notion is pluralistic within the boundaries of pan-African political agreements, and thus, “ethnically heterogenous black majorities are considered indigenous,” which is in stark contrast to Western mindsets (67). This point only further supports the idea that bringing indigeneity and its politics into contemporary talks allows for a more wholesome and complete picture of the world. Bringing into light the vitality and cultural importance of these tribes, including the Zulu and Xhosa majorities and especially the Ndebele, Venda, and Tswana minorities, allows those who were once invisible to the political discourse the chance to publicly defend their freedom and history. *African Footprint* is thus demonstrated to be a critical display of art as it celebrates the diversity of the South African people and asserts the power and beauty to be found in collectivism.

Chapter 8, “Following the Path of the Serpent,” written by Amalia Cordova, follows the evolution of Indigenous Film Festivals across Abya Yala, which is the Kuna name for North and South America used to evoke a sense of belonging (164). The earliest recorded festival was the American Indian Film Festival, which took place in Seattle, Washington, in 1975. Similar festivals started popping up across the Americas, such as the Festival Latinoamericano de Cine de los Pueblos Indigenas in Mexico City, and the Dreamspeakers Festival in Edmonton, Canada. Because of the popularity, visibility, and impact that these celebrations had on native populations, several organizations were founded with the sole mission to

“foster understanding of the culture, traditions, and contemporary issues” of Indigenous people (165). Organizations like these create spaces where an otherwise dispersed transnational community can gather and share their ideas and allow outsiders a chance to observe a once foreign lifestyle.

This book is a very eye-opening collection of essays that are meant to highlight the issues unique to Indigenous cultures, especially those concerning how Indigenous peoples present themselves on a global platform. Throughout each chapter, the audience can come to appreciate the differing perspectives of not just the essay authors, but also the book’s editors as a whole, as each brings a refreshing new angle on a field that has been historically undervalued. As a scholarly journal, this would be an excellent source to draw insights from, as each chapter contains its respective citations, and altogether helps minimize biases that can come from a Eurocentric viewpoint, all while allowing readers to draw up their own conclusions about the validity of Indigenous peoples and their works of art.

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Review of *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection*

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Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection. Fernando Orejuela and Stephanie Shonekan. Indiana University Press, 2018. 144 pp. ISBN: 978-0253038418.

Over the past couple years, the Black Lives Matter movement has emerged. Gaining lots of media attention, the movement is led by African Americans who are tired of the murder of innocent blacks and the general racial inequality that still occurs in the United States. As a result of this movement, there has been an influx of music made by African Americans artists. Ethnomusicology professors Fernando Orejuela and Stephanie Shonekan have crafted a book, *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection*, about the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. As both authors work at college campuses, there is a great deal of time spent on how the movement has impacted universities. Throughout the rest of the book, there are explanations of certain staples in black culture; the authors also address criticisms of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The first chapter discusses one of the more prominent colleges in the Black Lives Matter movement, the University of Missouri, or Mizzou. Shonekan explains that the “young black student activists finally grew tired of the racist environment in which they had to study” (16). For the past few years, African American students have dealt with subtle microaggressions and being called the n-word when walking to

class. Shonekan described how students protested by doing peaceful marches, sit-ins, the football team sitting out on practices and games, and even going to extreme lengths, such as Jonathan Butler going on a hunger strike until the requests were met (17). The chapter shows just how serious the students were and the lengths they were willing to go to get equal treatment. Because of all the protests, Mizzou's president was forced to resign after downplaying the racism on campus, showing that the young members of the Black Lives Matter movement have the power to make serious change in the world. The first chapter also makes it evident that the students are supporting this cause, and sometimes leading it, because they have their entire future ahead of them.

The book then delves into how hip-hop and other African American styles can be taught in the classroom to help connect racial issues. Orejuela teaches classes about hip-hop and African American culture. He describes how "students are introduced to an ethnomusicological methodology to assess the emergence of hip-hop as part of African American and African diasporic expressive cultures" (37). Hip-hop gives insight into issues in the black community. Artists such as Kendrick Lamar and Angel Haze sing about these issues. Orejuela provides many examples of songs, such as Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" and The Game's "Don't Shoot (Mike Brown Tribute)," that he teaches in his class. Orejuela shows how black issues are being taught in the university setting and how they can also promote discussion between readers of the book.

The next few chapters discuss certain aspects of African American culture and other insights into the Black Lives Matter movement. Chapter three goes into a great deal about SLABs, which are "a vernacular vehicle culture that devel-

oped among working-class African Americans” (55), which are then connected to music and African American folklore. After this brief chapter, there is a spot that highlights what Black Lives Matter hopes to achieve. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley mentions how Black Lives Matter works to end “structural racism, saving the planet, and transforming the entire nation” (73). There is a discussion of how African American culture throughout the decades has shaped where the community is today in terms of music and protests, allowing the reader to connect the dots between all these issues, rather than dealing with them separately.

The fifth chapter, which centers on Detroit, explains the violence that goes on in the city and answers the criticisms around the Black Lives Matter movement. It details the lack of oversight by a corrupt government, which results in poverty and a lack of basic necessities (90). There is then a discussion of the violence within in the black community, mainly the “black on black violence” statistic that conservatives like to throw around, explaining why the logic is faulty. Even though Detroit does have a lot of violence and poverty, the end of the book describes how it is the perfect place for African Americans to make music, as there is a lot of black history there, and shows the struggles of the community.

Overall, *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection* provides a great glimpse into the African American community. It provides history of what blacks have been going through for the past ten years and provides a gateway to discussing this material in the classroom setting. While the book might be short, there is plenty of information that spreads across different cultures from high-ranking universities to impoverished cities. There is input from other scholars and there is a works cited section at the end of every chapter,

making everything that Orejuela and Shonekan write more credible. The easy reading and discussion of popular culture in modern times mixed with the academic research makes this book great for both leisure reading and academic discussion and research purposes.

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Contributors

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