

**Editor**

---

Felicia F. Campbell \* *felicia.campbell@unlv.edu*

**Associate Editor**

---

Gina M. Sully \* *gina.sully@unlv.edu*

**Technical and Copy Editor**

---

Gina M. Sully \* *gina.sully@unlv.edu*

**Circulation**

---

Felicia F. Campbell \* *felicia.campbell@unlv.edu*

**Cover Art**

---

Laurens Tan \* *laurens.tans@yahoo.com*

## **The Editorial Board**

---

Julie Barry \* *Independent Scholar*  
Andrew Bahlman \* *Snow College*  
Simone Dennis \* *Adelaide University*  
Michael Green \* *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*  
Amy Green \* *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*  
Gary Hoppenstand \* *Michigan State University*  
Mindy Hutchings \* *Independent Scholar*  
Geta LeSeur \* *University of Arizona*  
Heather Lusty \* *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*  
Scott Melton \* *Bosque School*  
David Metzger \* *Old Dominion University*  
Kenneth Payne \* *Kuwait University*  
Dennis Rohatyn \* *University of San Diego*  
Daniel Ferreras Savoye \* *West Virginia University*  
H. Peter Steeves \* *DePaul University*  
Gina M. Sully \* *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*





**Popular Culture Review**  
**Volume 27, No. 2**  
**Summer 2016**

From the Editor's Desk Gina M. Sully	6
Becoming My Subject's Subject: Susan Sontag's Carl Rollyson File Carl Rollyson	9
The Manhattan Project and Chaos Theory in Popular Culture Dorothy Vanderford	24
Batrovery: Counterpublics and Antecedent Rhetorics in the Casting of Batman Michael Soares	43
The Search for Meaning in the Films of Wes Anderson Brent Gibson	70
This Tractor for Hire: Consensual Cooperation for Pacifist and African-American Farmers, Women, and Gangsters in World War II American Informational Films Steven D. Reschly and Katherine Jellison	80
The Power Is Yours: The Deep Ecology of <i>Captain Planet</i> Robert L. Lively	109
"The Wrong Side of Heaven, the Righteous Side of Hell": Religion, Faith, and Belief in Ted Chiang's <i>Stories of Your Life and Others</i> Tammy Wahpeconiah	130
How Shakespeare Perpetuates the Tudor Myth Reza Parchizadeh	148

Two of a Kind: Love and Romance in <i>The Patty Duke Show</i> Kathy Merlock Jackson	171
From Brecht to Glenn Beck: Performances of Xenophobia in Professional Wrestling Adam Cohen	182
Two Roads Diverged: Interactivity and Identity in <i>Until Dawn</i> Gavin Davies	206
“Representations of Women through Absences in <i>Frankenstein</i> ” Mina Zare Karizi	245

### **Book Reviews**

Kim Idol, Review of <i>The Encyclopedic Philosophy of Michel Serres: Writing the Modern World and Anticipating the Future</i> by Keith Moser	237
Heather Lusty, Review of <i>Our Gang: A Racial History of the Little Rascals</i> by Julia Lee	239
Heather Lusty, Review of <i>Literary Theory and Criticism: An Introduction</i> by Anne H. Stevens	241
Contributors	245

# From the Editor's Desk

Felicia has been kind enough to allow me to compose this note. I hope I haven't disappointed—or (more likely) overdone! The authors in this jam-packed issue all explore aspects of the myriad complexities that emerge when culture and identity collide.

In "Becoming My Subject's Subject," Carl Rollyson describes the motivations and characteristics of the *bad biographer* identity that Susan Sontag's circle of friends attempted to impose on him for their own purposes. Dorothy Vanderford's "The Manhattan Project and Chaos Theory in Popular Culture" simultaneously analyzes atomic imagery and provides a revealing account of some ways public perceptions of family identity can impact an individual's personal identity and interactions with popular culture.

Michael Soares explores the impact of counterpublics' backlashes against casting choices in US superhero films in "Batroversy," showing that actors' public identities influences fandom's acceptance of their casting as superheroes. In his "The Search for Meaning in the Films of Wes Anderson," Brent Gibson demonstrates that filmmaker Wes Anderson's characters' attempts to find meaning in their lives ultimately fail when Christianity and personal identity collide.

Steven D. Reschly and Katherine Jellison's "This Tractor for Hire" traces the role of WWII informational propaganda films in the deliberate construction of publicly patriotic identity possibilities for marginalized American citizens. In "The Power Is Yours," Robert L. Lively discusses Ted Turner's creation of a "green" identity for American children during the 1990s.

"The Wrong Side of Heaven, the Righteous Side of Hell" by Tammy Wahpeconiah explores the intersection of the Judaeo-Christian god's identity, religion, and the (in)ability of Chiang's

characters to construct meaningful lives. In “How Shakespeare Perpetuates the Tudor Myth,” Reza Parchizadeh examines the role of the “residual” in Shakespeare’s construction and perpetuation of an identification of the Tudor era as a “Golden Age.”

Kathy Merlock Jackson’s “Two of a Kind: Love and Romance in *The Patty Duke Show*” considers the seemingly opposed identities afforded to 1960s American girls by the *Patty Duke Show*’s juxtaposition of the “identical cousins.” And, in his “From Brecht to Beck,” Adam Cohen illuminates the co-dependent and fluid nature of the identities of both professional wrestlers and their audiences.

In “Two Roads Diverged,” author Gavin Davies shows that video games can reconstruct and thus re-identify the slasher genre first popularized through film. And finally, Mina Zare Karizi posits that feminine identity in Shelly’s *Frankenstein* emerges out of gaps and *lacunae* in masculine discourse in her “Representations of Women through Absences in *Frankenstein*.”

*Gina M. Sully,*  
*Associate Editor*



## **Becoming My Subject's Subject: Susan Sontag's Carl Rollyson File**

By Carl Rollyson, Baruch College, CUNY

When it comes to writing biography, it is important to know conspiracies actually exist. When James Anthony Froude published his biography of Thomas Carlyle, revealing that the Carlyle marriage did no credit to Carlyle, a concerted effort was made to demean the biographer's work. It did not matter that Froude remained Carlyle's disciple, nor that Carlyle himself had given Froude full freedom to write the biography as the biographer saw fit, or even that Carlyle himself was struck with remorse upon reading the account of his bad behavior that Froude documented in irrefragable detail. What mattered to Froude's attackers was that a great man had been brought low and shown to be, alas, all too human. There could be no greater irony in the case of Carlyle, since he had spent his career ridiculing sanitized biographies of public figures. The opposition to Froude was not merely widespread, it was organized and persistent. The record is quite clear. In effect, the authorized biographer was deauthorized.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I describe a similar instance in my own experience, when my description of the Michael Foot-Jill Craigie marriage offended Michael Foot, as well as many of his friends. Although Foot had given me his full cooperation and declared the project "your book," he still thought that meant siding with his view of his marriage. I detail what happened to me in *A Private Life of Michael Foot*, forthcoming from Plymouth University Press.

Similarly, when the poet Richard Aldington, one of the original imagists, became the biographer of T. E. Lawrence, he confronted an opposition just as malevolent as the Carlyle defense group, who organized a campaign of negative reviews of Froude's book. In Aldington's case, however, the biographer approached his subject's life from the outside as an unauthorized biographer. The term, if taken seriously, puts the independent biographer at a disadvantage, since *unauthorized* implies some kind of ethical breach, an act of theft, the product of a vigilante sort of mentality belonging to one who has no pedigree, no standing, no certification—in short, no authority. The unauthorized biographer is engaging in the impermissible and the unsanctioned—the latter word evoking an irreligious act, performed by one indifferent to what is godly and deserving of reverence. And make no mistake: Carlyle and Lawrence were revered, the former as a sage, the latter as the epitome of the author engagé, the artist as man of action. The literary establishment went out of its way to malign Froude and Aldington.<sup>2</sup>

Not much has changed since Froude and Aldington were traduced. The terrain of modern biography is strewn with carcasses of unauthorized biographies. These books were dead on arrival—dead, that is, to reviewers who begin with the premise that something unseemly had been done to literary figures who ought to be left alone to write their books. Doris Grumbach, a respected novelist, suddenly became a horror when she decided to write a biography of Mary McCarthy. Mark Harris, rebuffed by Saul Bellow, persisted, only to suffer buffets from critics

---

<sup>2</sup> For details of the attacks on Froude and Carlyle, see Rollyson, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?*, pp. 116–27, 129–50. For a discussion of unauthorized biography, see Rollyson, *Biography: A Reader's Guide*, 288–94; *Reading Biography*, pp. 1–16, and *Essays in Biography*, pp. 1–4.

and from Bellow's friends. What is odd is that these same writers, when not writing unauthorized biographies, publish well-received books. Can it be that when they turn to the dark side, the seamy world of the unauthorized, their sense of style deserts them? I remember when my friend Ann Waldron, who had written two highly respected biographies (authorization was not an issue), was stunned when her unauthorized biography of Eudora Welty was almost universally panned. "But I told you what would happen," I said to Ann, pointing out that she had witnessed what had happened to me. One reviewer of my Martha Gellhorn biography, for example, said I should never be permitted to write another biography of a woman. No less than the playwright Marsha Norman adopted much the same tone toward my unauthorized biography of Lillian Hellman. Well, Ann looked at me and confessed, "Yes, I thought it was something about you." The truth is that many biographers, especially literary biographers, believe they are doing something noble—not something underhanded and under the table—and they are aghast when their work is disparaged. In my own case, if you read, say, reviews of my Rebecca West biography—not exactly authorized, but certainly written with her family's cooperation—or of my Dana Andrews biography (written with family support, but not requiring authorization), you might find it hard to believe that the same writer produced those bad biographies of Hellman and Gellhorn.

Many other examples can be added to a modern version of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, the list of books banned by the Catholic Church—including *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon* (2000), the biography of Susan Sontag I wrote with my wife, Lisa Paddock. Let me be clear: Certain literary figures are secular saints. I'll never forget watching Ned Polsky, a Sontag friend, walk

down the Tisch Auditorium steps to the first row to greet Sontag, who had settled in her seat, surrounded by the entourage that had accompanied her to her reading at New York University. Polsky stood before Sontag, then genuflected and kissed her hand. Was it a joke? Perhaps. She smiled and seemed to take his performance as her due. At the time I did not have access to her correspondence, neither the letters written to her, nor her emails. Now I do.<sup>3</sup> And I am here to testify that Polsky was not alone, and that women and men alike abased themselves before Susan Sontag. Actresses, actors, writers, intellectuals of all kinds, were worshipful, adoring—and, yes—sycophantic. It mattered not that her books were controversial and that even her most successful works received critical—even negative—reviews. She occupied a place on Parnassus, and she was well defended.

So quite aside from what you may think about unauthorized biographers, reflect on what it means to be Susan Sontag and to command legions ready to do anything to remain in your favor—indeed to show you that they can be trusted, even consecrated to your cause. Perhaps, though, before telling my story, I should give at least a flavor of what I mean by the Sontag rapture. Here is a specimen of exaltation confected by Michael Silverblatt, the host of KCRW's *Bookworm*, one of the few

---

<sup>3</sup> Sontag sold her archive to the University of California, Los Angeles. Benjamin Moser, her authorized biographer, has had access to her restricted diaries in the UCLA collection. Moser and two other reporters have written about the contents of the digital archive (see Works Cited). Like all other researchers, I was given access to Sontag's correspondence and her e-mails. I am also grateful to Robert Montoya and Jillian Cuellar, UCLA archivists. Cuellar's e-mail to me, January 12, 2015, addressed some of my questions about the contents of Sontag's digital archive. I will be writing my own article about the Sontag archive for *The Biographer's Craft* newsletter.

interviewers truly loved by writers because . . . well, you will see why:

April 9, 2002

Dearest Susan

When I was immobile and in pain, you appeared in my dreams and I experienced the deepest refreshment and joy. I thought about you every day with a kind of foolish ardor, and my affection and admiration turned to love. So this is a love letter, typed, sent by e-mail, composed at wit's end.

You have told me about criticisms that have hurt you . . . As variously admired and awarded as you have been this past year or two, I think you have been consistently underestimated, misunderstood and misrepresented and . . . I feel the highest of appraisals doesn't describe the person I have come to know.

Why this extreme need to praise? Because you have been a brilliant example of being alive in a world of living facsimiles. Because you buoy my spirits when they are bruised and wonderfully lambaste me when I am lazy or frightened. Because I read and reread your work with increasing pleasure and recognition. Because I am never complacent or at ease in your company but love being reminded of the simplest things (to be attentive in a museum, to be startled and astonished by the variousness of people and their projects). . . . your wonderfully phrased explanation of your friendship with Annie on a taxi ride downtown).<sup>4</sup>

And so on. Silverblatt is not, as I say, alone in his extravagance. A lot of Sontag's friends behaved like characters in eighteenth-century novels who were pleased that Lady Sontag had condescended to include them in

---

<sup>4</sup> Silverblatt's complete letter is in the UCLA archive.

her circle. And yet when *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon* appeared, the subtitle was mocked, and its authors dismissed as sensationalizers.

But let's back up to the backstory of the biography, to understand how the Sontagists converged to create, as was done to Aldington, an atmosphere of opprobrium meant to suffocate biographical inquiry and make the work of biographers beyond the pale. Only this cliché will do because it suggests so well the idea that unauthorized biographers have strayed from the decent boundaries of their literary betters.

It came as an astounding disruption of Sontag's very literary life when two biographers, my wife and I, wrote to Sontag in March 1996 announcing that we had obtained a contract from W. W. Norton to write her biography.<sup>5</sup> We reminded her of our meeting with her at a literary conference in Warsaw. We explained why the "time is right for a biography of you." We singled out her role as public intellectual, her independence and freedom from academic sectarianism, her landmark essays and innovative novels, and the need to write a full-scale life "which can only be essayed in a biography." At the time there were only two introductory books that hardly did justice to her evolving sensibility. We did not count on her co-operation when proposing the biography to our publisher, but we would obviously profit from a meeting with her, "not only to gather information, but to help us evaluate what we learn from other sources." We conceded that the biography of a living figure cannot be definitive, but we added, "what biography

---

<sup>5</sup> For more background on the development of our proposal for a biography of Sontag, see Rollyson, "Susan Sontag: The Making of a Biography," in Rollyson, *Female Icons*, 94–107

can ever be definitive anyway?” Instead, we wanted to “establish a ground on which other biographers and critics can build.” We quoted Herbert Butterfield on the importance of first biographies that capture materials otherwise lost to history. We quoted a phrase from my biography of Norman Mailer: “Sometimes one can, with a pen, get a purchase on the future.” We ended our letter by offering to send Sontag copies of our publications and saying we looked forward to hearing from her.

Nothing in Sontag's experience or understanding prepared her for such an approach, one coming from so far outside her range of acquaintance, let alone friendship. Nothing in her comprehension of literature allowed for even the slightest acknowledgement of biography as a respectable, let alone desirable, genre. She summarized her views in her letter refusing an interview to Greg Johnson, Joyce Carol Oates's authorized biographer: “This has nothing to do with your distinguished subject. It is because I don't see the necessity of biographies of living authors; don't like to gossip or make public the private knowledge I have of my friends and acquaintances; and don't think my opinions or ratings of my contemporaries is of much interest.”<sup>6</sup>

When Sontag did not reply to our March 1996 letter, we wrote another note to her, enclosing our original letter and expressing the hope she would find time to reply. She did not. Instead, on September 12, 1996, we heard from Sontag's agent, Andrew Wylie, who said she had asked him to write on her behalf. He reported that they were “intrigued” with the idea of a biography, but that because Sontag was writing a new novel she did not have the time

---

<sup>6</sup>Sontag to Greg Johnson, June 19, 1992, UCLA archive.

for an interview then. For future reference, he wanted to know more about our “approach,” what sources we would use, and how long we expected to work on the book. He looked forward to hearing from us. After consulting with our editor, we replied, “As with other biographies of living figures we have worked on, our approach, proposed sources, and even the amount of time we spend on this project, will depend, in part, on the subject’s availability for an interview.” Wylie did not respond to this riposte. But he had already consulted with lawyers before we had even sent our first letter to her. On January 7, 1996, three months before we wrote to Sontag, Wylie had contacted Russell E. Brooks at Millbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, a Manhattan white shoe law firm. Wylie pointed out that as an independent publishing house, W. W. Norton had limited resources, and he suspected that as a “quite traditional” and “even a bit stuffy” publisher Norton would “want to avoid an arduous legal entanglement. I would like them to feel that this was in store for them, if you agree.” When it became apparent that Norton (which had taken out a libel insurance policy) was not deterred by Sontag’s uncooperative silence, Donald S. Lamm, chairman of W.W. Norton, received a letter on January 10, 1997, from Russell E. Brooks on Milbank, Tweed letterhead. The letter stated that the biographers were “unknown to Ms. Sontag,” and that she had “no reason” to believe we were “qualified to write such a biography.” The letter expressed a concern that Sontag’s privacy and the privacy of her friends would be violated in a book that aimed to “provoke controversy.” The letter put the publisher “on notice.” Their book would be scrutinized and Sontag’s rights “meticulously defended.” On January 29, a vice-president at Norton responded, “We and the authors intend to do a responsible job of publishing the work.” Janny Scott’s *New York Times*

article, “For Unauthorized Biographers, The World is Very Hostile,” had already appeared on October 6, 1996, describing our determination to write Sontag’s biography.<sup>7</sup>

Sontag did her best to thwart her biographers, insisting that the PEN minutes of her presidency not be made accessible to us, even though, as it turned out, a good portion of the minutes were already available in a Princeton University archive. Thomas Fleming, a former president of PEN, was aghast at Sontag's actions: ““We are an organization that stands for freedom-to-write and free access to information. And we're defenders of the First Amendment. We try to strike down censorship. The principle is so glaringly obvious.”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile Sontag continued (through surrogates) to put intense pressure on Norton to send her the manuscript. In December 1999, Martin Garbus, a noted attorney specializing in First Amendment law, called Norton, directly requesting a copy of the manuscript. Norton declined to hand it over, but promised Garbus that he would receive the galleys at the same time they were distributed to reviewers. Garbus then put pressure on our agents, but made no headway with them. In a final desperate act, Sontag’s publisher, Roger Straus, called Starling Lawrence, a novelist under contract with Farrar, Straus & Giroux and an editor at Norton. A *New Yorker* profile of Straus later reported that he had told Lawrence, apropos of the Sontag biography, to “kill the fucker.”<sup>9</sup> When Lawrence did not do so, Straus promptly dropped Lawrence’s forthcoming novel from the FSG list and also urged Andrew Wylie to drop Lawrence as a

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/11/22/specials/welty-unauthorized.html>

<sup>8</sup> See Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, *Susan Sontag*, pp. 334–36, for a full account of Sontag’s effort to deny access to PEN records.

<sup>9</sup> Parker.

client.<sup>10</sup>

Stories appeared in the *New York Observer*, the *New Criterion*, and other publications, emphasizing the effort to suppress our biography. The result was an interregnum, during which we continued our work and Sontag continued to fume over our activities.<sup>11</sup> To poet John Hollander she confided, “They’ve even written twice to a nice young man who used to clean my apartment (ten years ago!), who read me their second letter over the phone.”<sup>12</sup> For my biography of Rebecca West, I had interviewed her hairdresser, and I believe in speaking with anyone who has had interactions with my subjects. To Andrew Wylie, Sontag deplored the work of any biographer who did not seek her approval—precisely what no self-respecting independent biographer would want to do.<sup>13</sup> But to Sontag, we were “rogue biographers . . . who specialized in doing unauthorized biographies (everybody from Marilyn Monroe and Mohammed [sic] Ali to lots of writers).” Although Ali had not been one of our subjects, she repeated this information to Chip Delany, who had described an encounter with me. Sontag responded, “You thought he was nice. Maybe he is, or was (to you).” Unlike her other friends, Delany did not immediately acquiesce to her anathema, repeating his impression that I was “a highly intelligent man, well spoken [sic] and quite sincere,” who had made a careful study of Sontag’s work. In fact, Delany and I engaged in an extensive correspondence, disagreeing about some aspects of biography. But there was no room for nuance in Sontag’s outrage

---

<sup>10</sup> Kachka, 289.

<sup>11</sup> Manus; McGee; Rollyson, “PEN’s Iron Curtain.”

<sup>12</sup> December 5, 1996, UCLA archive.

<sup>13</sup> January 8, 1997, UCLA archive.

The Sontag circle closed ranks, with Stephen Koch assuring Sontag that my previous work was “worthless.”<sup>14</sup> Christopher Hitchens had his fun about the letter from “Rollyson and Paddock, which turns out not to be a firm of Dickensian solicitors.” With her permission, he was willing to talk about certain matters—like Sarajevo—but, he added, “I would, naturally, have kept quiet about ‘The Circle.’”<sup>15</sup> Sontag replied, urging Hitchens to read about us in Janny Scott’s *New York Times* article on unauthorized biographers of living figures: “Do read to the end. I see a divorce in this couple’s future. Or am I just being (as always) romantic?”<sup>16</sup> Why Sontag wrongly predicted a divorce is not clear, except that I expressed no concern about anyone writing about my life, and Lisa said she would not like it.<sup>17</sup> Later Christopher Hitchens wrote to test out what he could say in a biographical profile of Sontag, adding, “As you see, I am not Rollyson nor was meant to be.”<sup>18</sup>

A contest seemed to develop over who could write the most reassuring letter, while also vilifying Sontag’s biographers:

I trust it goes without saying that I would never have anything to do with those *pepenadores* (garbage-pickers) proposing to write a “biography” of you. [Ted Mooney]<sup>19</sup>

I told him [me] that I had known you intermittently since we both were teenagers but that I couldn’t talk with him about this unless I had your

---

<sup>14</sup> January 11, 1997, UCLA archive.

<sup>15</sup> February 27, 1997, UCLA archive.

<sup>16</sup> March 3, 1997, UCLA archive.

<sup>17</sup> Scott.

<sup>18</sup> December 16, 1999, UCLA archive.

<sup>19</sup> March 8, 1997, UCLA archive.

permission—and boy was he pissed off! It suggested to me he did not intend to even try getting your cooperation and just wanted to dig up dirt. [Ned Polsky]<sup>20</sup>

These awful people implied that they would give me a great review if I collaborated with them. [John Richardson]<sup>21</sup>

Of course no professional biographer would behave as Polsky reported, and Richardson, Picasso's biographer, knew better than to suppose that such a promise could be kept, let alone offered.

Of all the commentary on our book, we thought only one piece actually probed the issues we were trying to raise. Carlin Romano, a reviewer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* who had interviewed Sontag several times, did not endorse our viewpoint and did not express an opinion on our book *per se*, but he did recognize its significance. In “Public Intellectuals’ Private Lives: Who’s In or Who’s Out?” (June 16, 2000), a piece on publishing that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, he compared our biography to Saul Bellow’s novel *Ravelstein*, which is based on the life of academic Allan Bloom. Romano recapitulated the harsh criticism both books had received for exposing the lives of thinkers, noting in particular that Sontag had challenged our qualifications, and that Bellow had been attacked for hiding behind the mask of fiction even when his descriptions of Bloom

---

<sup>20</sup> November 22, 1997, UCLA archive.

<sup>21</sup> July 9, 1998, UCLA archive.

seemed virtually photographic to many of Bloom's friends. Romano then concluded:

The Sontag spat suggests that some mulling of tentative conclusions from the *Ravelstein* brouhaha is in order. Would a Saul Bellow novel about Sontag solve that little qualification problem? (He is after all, a somebody). Would a biography of Bloom by Rollyson and Paddock, lacking personal familiarity with Bloom, do more for the culture than Bellow's take?

Romano further noted that there had been fierce debate about how much the public needs to know about the private lives of politicians, but that "no remotely comparable debate has taken place in regard to such matters as outing public intellectuals." Indeed, after considering the reviews of our biography, we continue to be astounded that most reviewers could not even see the issue clearly enough to argue about it.

Two weeks before the publication of our biography, Romano outlined an approach the reviewers of our biography might have deemed worth considering:

Do the details of Bloom's "Athenian" homosexuality and pronounced materialism force us to reevaluate *The Closing of the American Mind*? If so, some may soon argue that we should read Sontag differently—as Edmund White implied we might read Proust differently if we factored in his sexuality—because the Rollyson-Paddock book, whatever the ultimate judgment on its quality, shines light in places its subject preferred to keep in shadows.

Alas, Romano's indication went unheeded. No one took up his suggestion that the "*Ravelstein* debate—and the likely fracas to come over the Sontag biography—will radiate more light if it spurs critics to confront such puzzles."

### Works Cited

- Kachka, Boris. *Hot House: The Art of Survival and the Survival of Art at American's Most Celebrated Publishing House, Farrar, Straus & Giroux*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013. Electronic.
- McGee, Celia. "Susan Sontag Stonewalls Norton's Biographers," *New York Observer*, July 21, 1997.
- Manus, Elizabeth. "Susan Sontag Gets Jumpy," *New York Observer*, January 17, 2000, <http://observer.com/2000/01/susan-sontag-gets-jumpy-pat-conroy-gets-left-out/>. Accessed January 30, 2015. Web.
- Moser, Benjamin. "In The Sontag Archives." *New Yorker*, January 30, 2014. <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/in-the-sontag-archives>. Accessed January 31, 2015. Web.
- Parker, Ian. "Showboat: Roger Straus and His Flair for Selling Literature." <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/04/08/showboat>. Accessed January 29, 2015. Web.
- Rollyson, Carl. *Biography: A User's Guide*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008. Print.
- . *Essays in Biography*. New York: iUniverse, 2005. Print.

- . *Female Icons: Marilyn Monroe to Susan Sontag*. New York: iUniverse, 2005. Print.
- . *A Higher Form of Cannibalism? Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005. Print.
- . *Lillian Hellman: Her Legend and Her Legacy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. Print.
- . *Nothing Ever Happens to the Brave: The Story of Martha Gellhorn*. New York: St. Martins' Press, 1990. Print.
- . "PEN's Iron Curtain," May 1997, <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/pen-notes-3328>. Accessed January 29, 2015. Web.
- . "A Private Life of Michael Foot." Plymouth, England: Plymouth University Press, forthcoming.
- . *Reading Biography*. New York: iUniverse, 2004. Print
- Rollyson, Carl. and Lisa Paddock. *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*. New York: W.W.Norton, 2000. Print.
- Schmidt, Jeremy, and Jacquelyn Ardam. "On Excess: Susan Sontag's Born-Digital Archive." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, October 26, 2014. <http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/excess-susan-sontags-born-digital-archive/>. Accessed January 31, 2014. Web.

## **Local Business: the Manhattan Project and Chaos Theory**

By Dorothy Vanderford, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

What do kitchenware advertisements, a television comedy about scientists, a punk music album cover, and a rustic cabin in the New Mexico wilderness all have in common? They are some of many thousands of visual representations of the Manhattan Project, an American-led, secret military plan that relied on the minds of scientists from around the world to create a weapon to end WWII. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controlled the Project from August 13, 1942 until August 1, 1946 (DOE). Visual references to the Manhattan Project in popular culture from the 1940s to the present offer an example of chaos theory, which, in this paper, is understood as the existence of patterned interconnectedness between apparently random events and ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Many readers will recognize repeated “atomic” patterns in categories such as housewares, toys, music, art, drama, and literature, although few will have my particular sensitivity to the topic: each time I see an atomic image, I recall my family history in relation to its development. I am particularly aware of cultural reflections of the importance

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is constrained to a non-scientific, non-mathematical, brief discussion of chaos theory as Edward Lorenz defines it in his book *The Essence of Chaos* and John Briggs and F. David Peat apply it in their book *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos*.

and global impact of atomic power because my grandfather was J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, NM from 1942-1945. I first approached this paper by considering my own history in relation to the Manhattan Project (*the Project* herein) and observing how small events in the Project have affected major elements of my own life. Although this paper is not the venue to lay bare my life story, it is an opportunity to analyze a select few popular representations of the Project and to consider its influence on the interconnection of seemingly disparate images.

The Manhattan Project continues to iterate in patterns that disrupt any chronological explanation of it as an historical event occurring on a timeline of controlled forward movement; instead it represents an inherently unpredictable system in which initial conditions are highly sensitive to small changes in their cycles. The Project, from inception to execution, was dependent on initial conditions of military and scientific leadership, personality, intelligence, secrecy, and, ultimately, weather conditions in Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16, 1945.

While the Manhattan Project occurred in controlled response to the turbulence of World War II atrocities, it only appears to have been a one-time project with a discrete beginning, middle, and end; in reality, it is a Scheherazadian story that continues every day that people avoid atomic death. The Project is not a predictable system in a closed loop of history—its characters continue to live and affect popular perception of its power. It reaches fractal-like into time simultaneously behind and ahead of itself, birthing fractals of itself in popular imagery. The Project as a whole, and the work at Los Alamos National Laboratories in New Mexico in particular, brought

into being the atomic bomb, the monstrous and magnificent nature of which affects humans in every aspect of their contemporary lives, whether or not they realize it. The Project was the moment of turbulence that changed everything and redefined humanity and defined the modern era. Martin Sherwin, co-author of *American Prometheus*, a biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer, asserts in the PBS film *The Bomb* that, “It is *the* most important issue that we face.” Robert S. Norris, author of several histories of the atomic bomb, comments in the same film, “The bomb has receded in the public’s imagination, but it’s still there.” However, contemporary cultural imagery reveals that the public has not, in fact, forgotten that the effects of the Project that still looms, cloud-like, over our consciousness.

The development and use of the atomic bomb clarified for humanity—in the wake of the Holocaust, Japanese war crimes, and firebombing in Europe—the explicit understanding that human-caused mass destruction is entirely possible. Project scientists believed their work was designed to win WWII. Most people who worked on the Project in any capacity, in every nationwide location that participated in the bomb’s creation, did not know precisely to what they were contributing. Many scientists in Los Alamos did not know exactly how what they were building would be used. Those who did have an awareness that their work was to build a powerful new weapon to help in the war effort were forbidden by the U.S. military from speaking about their work outside the secret confines of the science laboratory in Los Alamos.<sup>2</sup> Scientists were not to explain to their friends or spouses why they had left their comfortable academic positions to move to a high desert

---

<sup>2</sup> This paper does not address Oak Ridge, TN or Hanford, WA.

plateau, where they experienced muddy spring times, cold winters, humble living conditions, and severely restricted and controlled personal freedom of movement and speech beyond the gates of Los Alamos. After the bombs' deployment in Japan, Americans started realizing the impact of the devastating explosions when a 1946 *New Yorker* article by John Hersey exposed the damage the bombs caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After deployment, the form of the Project morphed as each new strange attractor—an event or phenomenon that alters the course of an apparently contained system—caused a change in popular atomic consciousness.

A complete explanation of chaos theory comprises multiple definitions, only a few of which will be discussed here. An important concept for this discussion of visual representations of the Manhattan Project is the fractal as reproduction of an image (e.g., triangle, tree) in which component parts mirror the original but the total number of new iterations, even as they become smaller individually, manifest in a very large number branched from the initial condition. Lorenz calls this phenomenon “self-similarity” (170), by which he means that the repeated parts continue to resemble the whole. He applies his discussion of fractals to a tree drawn by computer or by hand, using measurements to demonstrate what a fractal image might look like as its form branches infinitely—all the while maintaining a similar pattern to the first tree. He demonstrates how fractals can look random when they are not, and appear orderly when they are actually random (174). He asserts that some fractals appear complex but are in fact operating under simple rules, and he finds the connection between fractals and chaos to be the strange attractor, writing, “strange attractors are fractals” (176).

At the 1972 American Association for the Advancement of Science convention, Lorenz presented his paper, "Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set off a Tornado in Texas?," which he reprints in his 1993 book *Essence of Chaos*. He discusses the difficulty of accurately predicting weather patterns, asking,

How can we determine whether the atmosphere is unstable? The atmosphere is not a controlled laboratory experiment; if we disturb it and then observe what happens, we shall never know what would have happened if we had not disturbed it. Any claim that we can learn what would have happened by referring to the weather forecast would imply that the question whose answer we seek has already been answered in the negative. (182)

Lorenz documents how weather forecasters compare two predictive simulations: one based on the "actual weather" and one based on what would have happened owing to "slightly different initial conditions" affecting the outcome (182). He asserts that the weather system is essentially unstable because of its period doubling, which leads to prediction errors (182). He attributes sensitivity to initial conditions and the human error of poor observation to the difficulty of accurately predicting weather patterns. Lorenz accounts for the mathematical, computer-modeled aspects of weather forecasting, concluding that the final purpose is to make "not exact forecasts but the best forecasts which the atmosphere is willing to have us make" (184). Lorenz's query into the limited predictability of weather is significant in the context of this paper because it asks us how we might adequately determine all the strange attractors that were part of the initial Manhattan Project and which have

continued to extend through time. Each time we see an image of the effects of the Project, we witness the birth of a strange attractor that could lead us to new consciousness about the atomic age. Popular representations of atomic energy suggest that the Manhattan Project does not die.

The Project itself is a strange attractor that resulted from and determined the historical system in which it operated: no one can accurately measure what the world would be today had the U.S. atomic bomb project failed. Certain people and places further served as smaller versions of strange attractors within the Project system. For example, General Leslie R. Groves headed the military program and he chose J. Robert Oppenheimer as the scientific director; had anyone else been selected, the Manhattan Project could have, in theory, been an entirely different endeavor. In June 2015, the Atomic Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. held a weekend event to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Manhattan Project and to recognize its upcoming dedication as a National Historical Park. During that time, I had the pleasure of watching a panel of experts, including Oppenheimer's grandson and Groves' granddaughter, hold a good natured debate about which person—Groves or Oppenheimer—was indispensable to successfully completing the Project. The debate ended in a stalemate when neither side could definitely say the other side's man was not critical to the timely development of the atomic bomb. If any one part of the process of convergence that brought Oppenheimer and Groves together had varied, perhaps our current existence might be entirely different—but, as with Lorenz's weather, one cannot absolutely know about other outcomes.

The original image of the mushroom cloud over the New Mexico desert at the first atomic bomb testing on July 16, 1945 reflects the expanding effect of the Project on popular culture over time. The energy pushed out from that test continues psychically into today. Humans still live under the fear of nuclear annihilation, and although the awareness is not as acute as it was in the 1950s through the 1980s, the ongoing cultural discussion of the bomb reflects the importance of its initial condition, the Manhattan Project. The Project affects all future cultural understandings in a fractal-like image extending to politics, history, and the arts, and is reflected in popular cultural renderings such as art, drama, music, and literature.

Popular representations of the Project's afterlife can serve as fun or ironic reports on the sense of lurking danger below the reality of the existence of global nuclear weaponry. To reduce a growing sense of doom created by the reality of what happened to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, people made popular icons with positive connotations about atomic might. For example, in the 1950s and '60s, functional kitchenware appeared with stylized symbols of nuclear fission, propaganda posters suggested that "atomic energy" was useful for average citizens, and children's toys reflected popular infatuation with atomic power and suggested that children should enjoy toys that mimicked atomic power at the individual level (fig. 1).



Figure 1

Recently, advertisements and news stories show the continuing appeal of atomic power (fig. 2). The “atomic wedgie” photo on the left is from a print advertisement for Palladium boots, and the “atomic underwear” figure on the right is from a newspaper article about a man accused of giving an atomic wedgie that killed his stepfather.<sup>3</sup> *Pinterest* and *Tumblr*, popular creative and visual interest applications, have pages devoted to atomic era décor and humorous pages dedicated solely to images of atomic wedgies.

---

<sup>3</sup> An *atomic wedgie* is the pulling up of one’s underwear from his or her pants and the stretching of the underwear as far as possible up the back, including over the recipient’s head.



Photo: print source unknown; [tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com/)



Photo: Reuters, [Brainerddispatch.com](https://www.brainerddispatch.com/)

**Figure 2**

In contrast, recent comics and graphic novels offer grim, violent, and sardonic versions of the Manhattan Project tale. For example, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' epochal graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986, 2014) discusses the atomic bomb project from the point of view of the character Dr. Manhattan, who asserts,

Never before has man pursued global harmony more vocally while amassing stockpiles of weapons so devastating in their effects . . . . The wars to end wars, the weapons to end wars, these things have failed us . . . [n]ow we have a man to end wars. . . . The technology Dr. Manhattan has made possible has changed the way we think about our clothes, our food, our travel . . . Our entire culture has had to contort itself to accommodate the presence of something more than human, and we have all felt the results of this . . . . We are all of us living in the shadow of Manhattan. (pp. 139-42)

The word *Manhattan* stands for the Project, the bomb, and the realities of nuclear power. *Watchmen* illustrates with imagery and language the dismal aftereffects of the

Manhattan Project in a modern world in which humans live in social chaos and violence. Even more disturbing commentary on imaginings of the future of the Project is a recent graphic novel series called *MP: The Manhattan Projects*, which explores the mutation and violence generated from the historical Project. Jonathan Hickman writes and Nick Pitarra illustrates the character of Robert Oppenheimer, who has a sociopathic twin brother, Joseph, who eats people and becomes them while continuing to assert his own destructive agenda. At the series beginning, Joseph kills, eats, and morphs into Robert. I find it challenging to view caricatures of my grandfather's face in a publication that markets itself with the words "Science. Bad." However, as a twenty-first century consumer of graphic novels and a person who lives in the "shadow" of the bomb equally with others, I see the sardonic humor in Hickman and Pitarra's *MP*; it is another popular visual iteration of a cultural fascination with the consequences of the historical Manhattan Project.

Alternatively, contemporary children's literature attempts to offer more measured perspectives about the long fallout of the MP. For example, Rebecca L. Johnson explores in her 2014 book *Chernobyl's Wild Kingdom: Life in the Dead Zone*, scientific enquiry into whether animals of the contaminated Chernobyl district are resilient and thriving, despite being radioactive. Jonathan Fetter-Vorm's 2012 young adult graphic novel *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* illustrates the process of the building of the atomic bomb in an imagistic, documentary tone that avoids adulation or damnation. Adult literature ranges from scholarly research about the life of the Project and the lives of major figures, such as Oppenheimer, to arguments about the reasons for and ethics of having deployed the two atomic bombs on Japan in the first place.

John Else's 1981 documentary film *The Day After Trinity* records interviews with many Manhattan Project participants, as does the Atomic Heritage Foundation's website. Extending the conversation beyond science and politics, performance works such as John Adams' 2005 opera *Dr. Atomic* and Tom Morton-Smith's Royal Shakespeare Company-produced 2015 play *Oppenheimer* serve as contemporary reminders that the Project is not an in-the-past event that ended with the first atomic bomb attacks. Television shows such as *The Big Bang Theory* explicitly refer to Oppenheimer, and to mention him is to refer to the Manhattan Project. The 2005 episode "The Zazzy Substitution" presents a comic situation in which the main character, Sheldon, collects many cats as a method to alleviate his emotional disturbance after the breakup of a relationship. He names each cat and introduces the first one as "Oppenheimer," followed by names such as Fermi, Frisch, and Feynman—all important physicists who participated in the real Manhattan Project. Without Oppenheimer's work on the development of the atomic bomb, he would have been just another genius among geniuses, but he probably would not be spoofed in a 21<sup>st</sup> century American sitcom about cat-collecting physicists.

Many songs of the last 40 or so years reflect political sentiment about the Manhattan Project. Sting's 1985 song "Russians," written and performed during the Cold War and in the context of the understanding that the proliferation of nuclear weapons was dangerous for all humanity, reflects a popular interest in socio-political reform of the nuclear weaponry threat. Sting writes the following metaphorical lyrics,

How can I save my little boy  
From Oppenheimer's deadly toy?

There is no monopoly on common sense  
On either side of the political fence  
We share the same biology  
Regardless of ideology  
Believe me when I say to you  
I hope the Russians love their children too  
(stanza 2)

This song is concerned with the untenable positions of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to be forever divided in their competition to out-threaten and out-stockpile one another. Sting refers to shared humanity as “biology,” despite differences in political “ideology.” Yet he points to Oppenheimer as a source of the deadly tension between the two unions, referring to the Manhattan Project and suggesting that it was the entertaining pastime of a scientist playing with atomic energy, in the vein of a child playing baseball and unintentionally breaking a window. As I read “How can I save my little boy / From Oppenheimer’s deadly toy,” I must put aside any defensiveness I might experience at the correlation between naively destructive play-experiments and my grandfather, in favor of observing Sting’s suggestion that the effects of the Manhattan Project extend into the future at the macro political level and the micro individual level. “Russians” offers an excellent example of the evolving pattern of how popular culture acknowledges and processes, in fractal-like artistic form, the chaotic power harnessed during the Manhattan Project.

Finally, the modern punk-indie band Titus Andronicus’s *Local Business* album cover offers a particularly poignant illustration of the outcome of the Manhattan Project. The band originally selected for its album cover the graphic shown in Figure 3, similar to the landscape style of 18<sup>th</sup> century painter Thomas Gainsborough (particularly his

1780s “Extensive Wooded Landscape with Peasants on a Path”).



**Figure 3**

The band’s label, XL Recordings, decided that the cover painting, a garage-sale find, might belong to a person who owns copyright and who would sue the band for unauthorized use of an image, so the marketed cover is now different from the one shown here. The image is available on the Internet, and is specifically discussed in a 2013 *Spin Magazine* online article about the album cover.



**Figure 4**

The painting is an ironic commentary on human participation in the lurking danger of atomic bomb power. In the foreground women gather on a dirt path near a red-roofed, whitewashed cottage. They are in a landscape of full branching trees, a carved streambed, and browned grass on gently sloped ground. The trees mirror each other like fractals, but the one closer to the scene's forefront is green and healthy, while its immediate neighbor, which is closer to the background, is brown and dead-looking. The background beyond the pastoral scene is a thick grey cloudy sky behind a mushroom cloud explosion, unmistakably the shape of a detonated atomic bomb. The title "Local Business" is written in script diagonally left to right across the album cover so that the idyllic scene of peasants gathered outside appears divided from the bomb explosion in the background. One figure is watching the explosion, while the other two tend to their business seemingly unaware of background events, suggesting that

a distant catastrophe does affect the “local business” of everyday life of regular citizens even if they are unaware of it. The incongruity of a 18<sup>th</sup> century rustic landscape against a 21<sup>st</sup> century image of catastrophic nuclear violence suggests that all people—past and future—experience the effects of nuclear weaponry, and that even in natural settings we are at risk of annihilation.

To observe how the Manhattan Project affects my “local business,” I include the following photos, reminiscent of the image on the *Titus Andronicus* album, and which are from my collection of Oppenheimer ranch pictures I have taken over the course of 30 years.

The ranch viewed from the west resonates with the landscape of the original “Local Business” album cover art in part because the photo also shows a tree and a house to the right and a path left of center. Although people are not visible in the photo, one is implied behind the lens. Of course no mushroom cloud balloons behind the trees, but the cabin itself is a metaphor for the history of the Manhattan Project. The Los Alamos location for the Project was a result of Robert Oppenheimer’s youthful horseback riding in the area and his subsequent purchase of the old ranch property, where I later lived as a young child. The ranch is a marker of the history of triumph and catastrophe, and it is a home.

An east-facing view of the ranch circa 1991 (fig. 5) parallels similar iconic images that other photographers have published in prominent research books. For example, see Bird and Sherwin’s *American Prometheus*, p. 274, photo 17 for a more recent photo of the ranch, commonly called “Perro Caliente” in biographical literature.



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

Finally, the view from the ranch through the rear-view window as the car drives west, leaving the property, suggests a mutual interconnectedness between the past

and present in which humans face forward while simultaneously looking back to identify the one strange attractor that alters a system. The Manhattan Project symbolizes the influence of past events on future happenings, and allows for iconic representations of the Project, such as the mushroom cloud and the radioactivity symbol. What appears to have been a controlled, finite experiment in wartime crisis has expanded forward in patterns that demonstrate its continuous, unpredictable influence. My business with the Project may be “local,” but it is not isolated from popular culture. Americans look back at the Manhattan Project with pride and horror, and look forward to the future with hope and fear. Whichever direction we face, we are always in the Manhattan Project—we just don’t know exactly where.

### Works Cited

[“Atomic Wedgie.” Palladium boots. Advertisement. Print source unknown. Pinterest. Web.](#)

[Accessed November 2015.](#)

*The Bomb*. PBS.org. [YouTube/stefan](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v'XGfl9uVxsjM>.

Published 4 Aug 2015. Web. Accessed 30 July 2016. Film.

[Brandes, Heidi](#). “Oklahoma man pleads guilty in deadly 'atomic wedgie' case.”

[Brainerddispatch.com](#), May 12, 2015. Web. Accessed 30 July 2016.

[“Franciscan Starburst.”](#) Andrea Kahlenbeck.

[Pinterest.com.](#)

<https://www.pinterest.com/andrea64/franciscan-starburst/>. Web. Accessed 30 July 2016.

Image.

“Franny.” Monimania. [Flickr.com.](#) Web. Accessed 30 July 2016. Image.

Oppenheimer, J. Robert Profile. Atomic Heritage Foundation. [Atomicheritage.org.](#) Web.

Accessed 29 July 2016.

“Russians.” Sting. [LiveNation.com.](#)

<http://www.sting.com/discography/lyrics/lyric/song/220>  
[Web.](#) Accessed 29 July 2016. Lyrics.

“See Titus Andronicus’ ‘Local Business’ Cover Art That Was Too Hot for XL.” *Spin Magazine.*

Apr 11, 2013. Web. Accessed 27 July 2016. Image.

“Timeline of Events: 1938-1950.” Department of Energy. [Energy.gov.](#) Web. Accessed 30 July 2016.

[“What will atomic energy do for me?” Tumblr.com.](#)

[http://mondoworld.tumblr.com/image/35972953018.](http://mondoworld.tumblr.com/image/35972953018)

[Web.](#) Accessed 30 July 2016. Image.

“The Zazzy Substitution.” *The Big Bang Theory.*

[Wikia.com.](#)

[http://bigbangtheory.wikia.com/wiki/Sheldon's\\_Cats.](http://bigbangtheory.wikia.com/wiki/Sheldon's_Cats)

Web. Accessed 27 July 2016.

## Works Consulted

*American Prometheus.* Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Atomic Heritage  
Foundation.

<http://www.atomicheritage.org/article/manhattan-project-national-historical-park-established>

- Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Thebulletin.org.  
<http://thebulletin.org/multimedia/timeline-conflict-culture-and-change>. Web. Accessed 29 July 2016.
- Chaos Bound*. N. Katherine Hayles. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990.
- Chaos and Order*. N. Katherine Hayles. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*. Gar Alperovitz. New York: Random House, 1995.
- The Essence of Chaos*. Edward N. Lorenz. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1993.
- The Forgotten Bomb*. Written and produced by Stuart Overbey and Bud Ryan. Directed by Stuart Overbey. *Free Speech TV*. DirectTV Channel 348. Accessed November 2015.
- The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. Richard Rhodes. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.
- MP: The Manhattan Projects*. Jonathan Hickman and Nick Pitarra. Vol. 1. Berkeley: Image Comics. 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, March 2014. Graphic Novel.
- Oppenheimer*. Dramatic text. Tom Morton-Smith. London: Oberon Books, 2015.
- Seven Life Lessons of Chaos*. John Briggs and F. David Peat. New York: HarperPerennial, 1999.
- Strange Attractors*. Harriet Hawkins. New York: Prentice Hall, 1995.
- Turbulent Mirror*. John Briggs and F. David Peat. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.
- Watchmen*. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. Burbank, CA: DC Comics, 2014. Graphic Novel.

## **Batroversy: Counterpublics and Antecedent Rhetorics in the Casting of Batman**

By Michael Soares, Illinois State University

### **Caped Crusaders**

*Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, scheduled to be released in 2016, is virtually guaranteed to be a major blockbuster. The film, picking up the story from 2013's Superman-centric *Man of Steel*, will introduce the latest film incarnation of Batman since 2012's *The Dark Knight Rises*, starring Christian Bale as the title character. The stakes for this new film are significant, not only for producers who stand to prosper from a triumphant opening but for fans who care deeply about iconic DC Comics characters they have known their entire lives.

Over the last decade, films depicting comic book heroes have demonstrated a momentous and mostly successful rise. 2012's *The Avengers*, which integrated characters from various Marvel Comics franchises into a collaborative narrative, is arguably the pinnacle of this success thus far; according to *Forbes*, the film has generated over 1.5 billion dollars worldwide since its release to become the one of the highest grossing films of all time (Hughes). Its sequel, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, generated a billion dollars nearly two weeks after its release (Mendelson). Attempting to capture similar box office glory with its own stable of characters, DC Comics is

using *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* to introduce members of its Justice League, comprised of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and a host of other super-powered, or at least super-skilled, heroes. During the three-year lead up to its release, the film's production company, director, and actors have promoted the film, tactically using media to create a "public" that does not comprehensively "promote" the film but instead builds interest through periodic and ambiguous online tidbits to whet the appetites of fans. This time out, Batman's cowl and cape is to be worn by Ben Affleck (the eighth actor to do so on film, for those keeping count), and despite the rapid fan desire to see the characters of Batman and Superman interacting in live action on the big screen for the first time, the casting of Affleck has caused an online eruption of fan displeasure that has dogged the unreleased film throughout its production. These online protests demonstrate a dynamic counterpublic that ranges in dexterity from memes to the sale of T-shirts featuring "No Batffleck" symbols, even resorting to a White House petition to remove Affleck from the film.

### **The Batroversy**

The casting of a beloved character will typically generate some controversy, particularly one with a fan-base as massive and devoted as Batman's. When it comes to the transition of seminal comic book characters to the screen, fans are notoriously fixated on details. For example, long before *Man of Steel* was released, a publicity still of Superman's "new look" was released online; immediately, fans complained about Superman's redesigned costume that eradicated his traditional red shorts in favor of more blue. While *Man of Steel* went on to engender other criticisms after its release, the "red shorts" controversy still served to generate exposure for the film

which no doubt contributed to ticket sales. The lesson was not forgotten, and the producers of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (essentially *Man of Steel*'s sequel) have ambitiously leaked photos and rumors of new incarnations of highly recognizable characters from Wonder Woman to Aquaman. Even Jesse Eisenberg as the villainous Lex Luthor has fanned the flames of adverse internet discourse; despite a tweeted photo of his shaven scalp (a concern exasperated by Gene Hackman's refusal to do so for the character in 1978's *Superman: The Movie* or its sequels), fans worry that subsequent online trailers have depicted an unfamiliar and seemingly trivial representation of the character (the revelation that Eisenberg actually portrays Alexander Luthor Jr. has not dissuaded criticism).

Henry Jenkins, in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, describes the "social agency of readers" in the context of Michel De Certeau's concept of "textual poaching" (63). Textual poaching "characterizes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession for the text and for control over its meanings" (Jenkins 24). Jenkins identifies "fan critics" as textual poachers who "display a close attention to the particularity of television narratives that puts academic critics to shame" (86). However, while Jenkins further describes fan critics as "true experts" within the "realm of popular culture" who "constitute competing educational elite, albeit one without official recognition or social power" (86), these fan critics are now armed with unprecedented media tools to muscle their influence and in fact do exert *substantial* social power. What aggravates the "superhero" public can be unpredictable; for example, Gal Gadot, the actress playing Wonder Woman, has been criticized online for being too thin and her breasts not large enough to accurately portray the Amazonian princess.

Gadot, in her own defense, retorted, “The true Amazons had one boob so it won’t bother them in their archery. So it’s not going to be like real Amazons. We always try to make everyone happy but we can’t” (Begley). After Jason Momoa, signed to portray Aquaman in *Batman v. Superman* as well as a stand-alone film, announced that his version of the character would not sport the traditional blond hair and orange and green suit, the online anger spread quickly; ultimately, a photo released online of an imposing and heavily tattooed version of Aquaman seems to have intrigued fans enough to perhaps persuade them to let go of the hair detail. Historically, the backlash to the casting of Batman has often been particularly passionate and at times venomous, forming as powerful counterpublics that have had influence over multi-million dollar film productions. What distinguishes the rhetoric of the casting of Affleck as Batman from other role decisions is the sheer convergence of what I will refer to as “antecedent public rhetoric” embraced by this counterpublic and shaping the media response to the production of the film, as well as feeding the passion of those who vehemently oppose the choice of actor. In effect, the rhetorical history of casting Batman influences the current public rhetoric while relying on antecedent rhetorics to shape the structures of the argument.

### **Why so Serious? Rhetorical History of Batroversies**

A working knowledge of the history of casting Batman in multiple film incarnations is essential to understanding the intricacies of the current online backlash. Powell, Pigg, Leon, and Haas articulate this need in “Rhetoric”:

Working from the concept of rhetoricality as a condition of existence and of discourse means

that from a standpoint in the present, rhetoricians are obliged to look backward and reread texts and recreate/reunderstand narratives as theoretical, positioned. This means looking for and articulating the constraints, ideologies, and positionalities within and against which different texts have been produced. (4554)

The first Batman text, initially *Bat-Man*, was created for DC Comics in 1938 by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger. While the comic book history of Batman is obviously a rich cultural study in itself, for Batman on film, the narrative begins in 1943 and the first live-action portrayal of the character in the fifteen-chapter Columbia film studio serial, *Batman*. Among the most vocal critics of casting choices was Kane himself, who recalled his concerns when writing, “My frustration began with the casting, or should I say miscasting, of Batman and Robin. The actor playing Batman was an overweight chap called Lewis Wilson, who should have been forced to go on a diet before taking the role” (Brooker 84). Kane’s voice in this “first significant case of dissent over the character’s meaning,” although apparently ineffectual in casting matters (yet a counterpublic in its own right), would have long-lasting resonance with fans, particularly when suggesting the propensity of film producers to “misread” the “original texts of Batman” (Brooker 85). Will Brooker, in *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon*, suggests that Columbia “needed to appeal to an audience beyond that of the comic books and to reach a wider viewing public than the established Batman fan-base” (86). Wilson was subsequently replaced by Robert Lowery for 1949’s *Batman and Robin* serial continuation.

In 1966, Adam West, another actor whose bodily frame lacked the muscular physique from the comic book, played the title character in *Batman: The Movie*, which was based on the highly popular television series. Despite the show's enduring success, even boasting a Blu-ray release of the complete series in 2015, the portrayal of Batman by West has been derided by many as comedic and campy, seeking to exemplify a "swinging sixties" feel in what was seen as a fundamental betrayal of the character by fans. The silliness in effect was deliberate; William Dozier, executive producer of the show, wrote, "I had just the simple idea of overdoing it, of making it so square and so serious that adults would find it amusing. I knew kids would go for the derring-do, the adventure, but the trick would be to find adults who would either watch it with their kids, or, to hell with the kids, and watch it anyway" (Brooker 194). Years later, Dozier would admit, "I had never read a Batman comic book; I had never read *any* comic book" (Eisner 4). According to *The Official Batman Batbook*, after a dismal initial preview rating of the pilot episode, networks executives even experimented with adding a laughtrack; furthermore, according to Charles B. FitzSimons, who was assistant to the executive producer for the show and associate producer for the film, "They then asked us to put an introduction on the beginning of the show, informing the audience that this was a comedy and that the audience should hiss the villains and cheer for the heroes" (Eisner 7). Nevertheless, "rules" existed to maintain a "fundamental Batman template"; according to Alan Asherman, DC's librarian in the 1960's, the TV character had to "remain upright and moral, he was not permitted to use a gun, and he was not allowed to kill or cause the death of another" (Brooker 186).

DC was well aware of the impact the television portrayal of the character was making on the “serious” fans, and even addressed the situation in the comics. The cover of 1966’s *Batman* #183 features Batman “reclining in front of a television set showing, ‘The Adventures of Batman,’ while Robin—functioning as a stand-in for the fan—entreats Batman to come out with him and fight crime” (Boichel 15). Ultimately, the legacy of West’s Batman was that the character would lack emotional intensity in popular media, conspicuously demonstrated in subsequent projects like the *Super Friends* Saturday-morning cartoon, until his depiction as a brooding, dark avenger in Frank Miller’s influential 1986 *The Dark Knight Returns* comic book miniseries. Patrick Parsons, in “Batman and his Audience: The Dialectic of Culture,” describes the miniseries as “the most prominent example of a shift in the superhero form from the classic, innocent clash of good and evil to the raw, doubting, often cynical vision of postmodern capitalism” (85). In fact, “DC more aggressively courted the older audience, forsaking comics aimed at the younger reader and establishing a general line of superheroes, including Batman and Superman; a mature line (which included an emotionally-troubled Green Arrow with a drinking problem)...” (Parson 85).

In the late 1980’s, due in part to the resurgence of the “serious” Batman thanks to Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, Warner Bros. studio hired Tim Burton to direct a new feature film. However, when news emerged that actor Michael Keaton, at that time known best for his role in the comedies *Mr. Mom* (1983) and *Beetlejuice* (1988), was cast as Batman, an unprecedented backlash took place resulting in 50,000 protest letters being mailed to the studio. The magnitude of the reaction was immense, especially considering that the letter campaign was pre-

Internet, meaning that letters were physically written, stuck in envelopes, and stamped, suggesting “Keaton’s haters had real drive” (Briggs). The messages of protest letters varied in fervency; one fan worried in *Comic Buyer’s Guide*, “Why would anyone choose a short, balding wimpy comedian to portray the Dark Knight?” (Brooker 282). Another writer, feeling an intense sense of betrayal upon hearing the casting news, wrote, “Remember that empty, hollow feeling that you got in the pit of your stomach when your girlfriend wanted to break up with you? That same lump-in-the-throat yucky feeling which brings on the ‘dark night of the soul’ attacked me this morning...” (Brooker 282).

The voices of fan critics resounded throughout the media. Even Kane, seventy-two years old at the time and given a symbolic “consultant” credit on the film, had reservations about the casting which he expressed to Burton (Brooker 286). In an interview, Kane suggested, “There are the baby boomers who know the TV show; they *don’t* know the dramatic comic book prior to that, so they think the movie is probably going to be a comedy. Then there are readers who *know* the roots from which he came, that he is a vigilante, mysterious, a loner” (Urrichio and Pearson 184). Burton himself exasperated the negative response by responding, “There might be something that’s sacrilege in the movie...But I can’t care about it...This is too big a budget movie to worry what a fan of a comic would say” (Pearson and Urrichio 184). Recalls Keaton, “It baffled me that anyone was thinking about that. I heard about the outrage, and I couldn’t get it. I didn’t understand why it was such a big deal. It made me feel bad that it was even in question. I thought it was half-funny, but it was in the middle of shooting, so the pressure was on. The pressure

was on all of us, anyway, to see if we could pull it off" (Briggs).

The ferocity of reaction did not go unnoticed by producers; in fact, the November 29, 1988, issue of *The Wall Street Journal* reported, "there were financial jitters concerning the Batman feature film because of the vociferous fan backlash to the casting of Michael Keaton" (Brooker 285). Jon Peters, the film's co-producer, remembers, "It just deflated everybody. . . . Nobody wanted Keaton . . . we were ostracized by the Bat-community. They booed us at the Bat-convention" (Pearson and Urricchio 184).

Despite the infuriated response to casting news, which also included concerns to a much lesser degree about Jack Nicholson's take on playing the Joker, the film went on to be a massive success and one of the top movies during the summer of 1989. Keaton went on to star again in *Batman Returns* in 1992, but when Burton dropped out as director for the third film, Keaton followed suit, and Val Kilmer was hired to fill the Batsuit while Joel Schumacher was tapped to direct. For many fans, especially those who had come around to embrace Keaton's version of Batman, Schumacher's 1995 film, *Batman Forever*, was an unfortunate return to the camp and silliness of the 1960's television series. While Kilmer's casting went generally without protest, the film's sensibility, which was a radical departure from Burton's dark and atmospheric Gotham City, embraced absurdities such as the Batmobile's new ability to drive up the side of a building; its most notorious legacy is perhaps the addition of "bat-nipples" on the costumes, a feature that is still easily evoked and ridiculed today among online commenters of all things Bat. Schumacher's next attempt, 1997's *Batman and Robin*, this time starring George Clooney in the title role, exhibited

an elevated campiness which earned almost universal criticism among reviewers and even more robust loathing by fans. Clooney's performance was largely derided; film critic Mick LaSalle, in a *San Francisco Chronicle* review, wrote, "George Clooney is the big zero of the film, and should go down in history as the George Lazenby of the series." Equally venomous were reviews of Arnold Schwarzenegger's rendition of bad pun-spewing Mr. Freeze. The movie was so ill-received that its sequel was canceled and it "forced the Batman film brand into cinematic purgatory for the best part of a decade (Proctor 156).

In 2005, Christopher Nolan directed Christian Bale as Batman in the critically acclaimed *Batman Begins*, a project which did not "continue along the same narrative trajectory as the Burton/Schumacher films, but strived to 'wipe the slate clean' and begin again from 'year one'" (Proctor 60). Its sequel, *The Dark Knight* (2008) had its own counterpublic issues with the casting of Heath Ledger as the Joker, although the actor won a posthumous Academy Award for the role. *The Dark Knight Rises* finished out the trilogy in 2012, and with the exception of minor complaints about Batman's "growl" and main villain Bane's muffled dialogue through his facemask, fans were generally satisfied with the trilogy as a whole. In "Dark Knight Triumphant: Fandom, Hegemony and the Rebirth of Batman on Film," William Proctor writes, "Finally, the Bat-fans got what they wanted: a Batman as dark as the night and as 'real' as plausibility will allow" (61). Undoubtedly, the fan critics would want to protect what they clearly considered the product of their hard-earned public efforts to help steer the Batman franchise.

## Holy Antecedent Rhetorics!

*Antecedent public rhetorics* is an idea derived from a similar concept found in genre studies. In genre studies, identifying and understanding the genres which comprise or inform the creation of subsequent genres are instrumental in its interrogations. According to Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson in “Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation,” “perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows not merely *from the situation* but also from antecedent rhetorical forms” (163, emphasis original). In the case of the Batroversy, the situation was similar (intense dissatisfaction with the casting of Batman to cause a protest which drew media attention), but the times had changed. Thanks to the internet, no one was writing letters anymore as in the Keaton protest; however, it is important to note that fans, previous to the Keaton casting news, *had been given agency* to include their input in at least one major decision affecting the continuity of the Batman narrative, at least as far as the comic book was concerned. In 1988, DC set up a telephone hotline for fans to make the decision to save or kill off Jason Todd who was the second Robin. Thousands of fans voted, and Robin subsequently met his demise at the hands of the Joker. Parsons describes the “telephone poll deciding the fate of a somewhat unpopular Robin” as “one of the more prominent examples of fan power” (86). The trajectory of such empowerment for a specific public, much more invested in a cultural institution than the casual television viewer, demonstrated that, “Serious comic fans are not passive consumers of cultural product; they are in many ways active participants in its creation” (Parsons 86).

Proctor writes, “While it is incredibly difficult to pinpoint what Time Warner [DC’s parent company] actually paid attention to and the effect these discourses had on their response, it can be suggested that fandom played a crucial part in forcing Time Warner to rethink their approach to the Batman brand” (159). So while the spirit of the Affleck protest echoes that of Bat-fan rhetorics past, the methods needed to be updated for the times. Batman, a character nearly eighty years old and whose controversial first film appearance was seventy-two years ago, has much material to draw upon. Continues Jamieson, “Because a long-lived institution initiates a great body of rhetoric, a set of standardized forms for its rhetoric tends to evolve” (165). One such form would take the dastardly shape of . . . the uni-name.

### **What’s in a Uni-Name?: That Which We Call a *Batfleck* . . .**

The concept of the uni-name, the combination of two names into a single abbreviated form, is not new. In fact, the 1966 *Batman* television series is infamous for its use of “Bat-” in front of any number of items from the Batphone, to the Batmobile, to the “Batusi,” Adam West’s ironically funky version of Batman dancing the “Watusi.” Uni-names formed new, synthesized identities for high profile actors like Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball, who combined their names into “Desilu” for their production company (which was responsible in part for the original *Star Trek* series, a contemporary of *Batman*). In the 1970’s, Watergate scandal reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein became known in the media as “Woodstein” as they unraveled the Nixon administration cover-ups. According to Damien Cave of *The New York Times*, during the 1980’s, the names Ronald Reagan and Rambo were combined to make “Ronbo” (Cave). In the 1990’s, and

even today, Bill and Hillary Clinton are often referred to as “Billary” for political expediency. “The combinations,” according to Bonnie Fuller, the editorial director of American Media, “grow from fans' desire to play a role in shaping the stars' image” (Cave). Uni-names also highlight the public’s desire to participate in the conversation of stars’ relationships. Fuller, who at the time had launched the tabloid *Star*, was quoted, “They want to have a nickname for the couples because they feel as if they are part of the stars' extended group of family and friends” (Cave). In a recent example of a uni-name’s trajectory, a member of my student newspaper staff, writing an article about a failed romantic encounter between Jimmy Fallon and Nicole Kidman, opined, “It’s clear to see that ‘Falman’ was never meant to be” (Ping).

Affleck had an unfortunate series of failed high-profile relationships with film co-stars in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s that have made unlikely contributions to the Batman casting backlash. Two relationships, in particular, were destructive to Affleck’s public image due greatly in part to the fact that he was dating celebrities in real-life who were also co-starring as love interests in movies that failed at the box-office, the conflation of the factual and fictional relationships in turn creating intense media scrutiny. The first relationship was with Gwyneth Paltrow (who would, ironically, go on to her own stratospheric heights as comic book character Pepper Potts in the lucrative *Iron Man* and *Avengers* series) and ended around the same time as their collaboration, 2000’s *Bounce*, debuted to scathing reviews. Perhaps even more productive for media coverage and public commentary was Affleck’s courtship and eventual engagement to musician and actress Jennifer Lopez; the media soon christened them together as “Bennifer,” an “effort to

capture the couple's inseparability" (Cave). In an example of uni-name conflation of real life and cinema, the celebrity couple starred together in 2003's *Gigli*, and much like their relationship, it failed spectacularly under concentrated public scrutiny. Although Affleck and Lopez were not destined to be a dynamic duo for long, "Bennifer" (and *Gigli*, for that matter), still haunt Affleck's professional reputation. Regardless, Robert Thompson, director of the Centre for the Study of Popular Television, has suggested, "As silly as it sounds, this new tendency to make up single names for two people, like 'Bennifer' and 'TomKat' is an insightful idea" ("Brangelina"). Thompson discusses the uni-name "Brangelina," a reaction to the high-profile relationship of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, and insists the nickname "has more cultural equity than their two stars parts" so that "You get interested in this whether you want to or not. It's by osmosis" ("Brangelina").

Without question, the uni-name can become a tool of derision when used as a public for criticism, for example "Billary," which Cave suggests grew out of a perception that Hillary Clinton had become too powerful compared to her husband the President. Similarly, the relationship of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, when reaching a publicity oversaturation point in the media, became known as "TomKat" as a "shorthand joke for their outlandishly public relationship" (Cave). In a *Fox News* article entitled, "Blame Bennifer: Celeb Uni-Names Multiply," "the phrase 'Bennifer' was coined, seemingly encapsulating everything the public felt towards the duo: awe, envy, over-familiarity, even disdain." Fay Halberstam, a linguistics expert and Ph.D. candidate at New York's City University, suggests, "The sociolinguistic reason is that the people are trying to make a connection with the listeners with insider information. If you get the reference, you feel smart and

informed” (“Blame Bennifer”). Clearly, the backlash against Affleck’s casting was orchestrated by people who felt smart, informed, and obviously opinionated; the negative use for the uni-name became co-opted by the movement which used this antecedent rhetoric to create a new “identity” against which Batfans could rally. Affleck, already a victim of the uni-name genre with “Bennifer,” had to contend with “Bennifer II” and “Garfleck,” the combination of his name and that of his ex-wife, Jennifer Garner. Soon after the announcement of Affleck’s casting as Batman, the online outcry quickly commandeered the antecedent genre of the celebrity uni-name for its own purposes, combining “Batman” and “Affleck” to make “Batfleck.” As in the case of “Billary” or “TomKat,” the uni-name was not designed to be friendly. According to Bob Thomson, professor of popular culture at Syracuse University, regarding Affleck’s uni-name with Lopez, “Ben and Jen didn’t leave any children, but they did leave us Bennifer, something they were completely unable to control.” More than a decade later, Affleck would be equally unable to control the “Batfleck” protest. In “Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint,” Jamieson identifies the concept of the “chromosomal imprint” of an “ancestral genre” (412). Much like how the murder of Bruce Wayne’s parents creates a superhero in Batman years later, “Bennifer” and “Garfleck,” fearsome foes from Affleck’s past, provide the chromosomal imprint for the “Batfleck.”

### **Batfleck Begins**

As fan critics are acutely aware, Affleck is no stranger to playing superheroes on film, and the public’s long memory of both his personal and professional lives, the details of which prove to possess a trajectory of emphatic online counterpublic response, fuel the Batfleck

controversy's fire. In 2003, he starred in *Daredevil*, a portrayal of the Marvel superhero which played to mixed receptions (and spawned no sequel but did inspire the critically reviled spin-off, *Elektra*, starring Affleck's future spouse, Garner). The experience was unpleasant for the actor, who was quoted after the film's negative reviews as saying, "Wearing a costume was a source of humiliation for me and something I wouldn't want to do again soon" ("Before Batman"). At the premiere of his 2006 film *Hollywoodland*, Affleck continued, "By playing a superhero in *Daredevil*, I have inoculated myself from ever playing another superhero" ("Before Batman"). Despite his dismissals, Affleck still displayed a propensity for superheroes, gravitating towards caped costumes in spite of himself. *Hollywoodland* is a biopic of the ill-fated *Adventures of Superman* TV actor George Reeves. Although Affleck does wear a Superman costume in the film, he sidesteps action in the superhero outfit by only reenacting scenes of the television show's production. Notwithstanding *Hollywoodland*'s generally favorable reviews, Affleck was still mired in a professional slump of box office bombs that would plague him until his resurgence as a director with films like *Gone Baby Gone* (2007) and *The Town* (2010); 2012's Academy Award-winning *Argo*, which Affleck both directed and acted in as the film's main protagonist, was a new zenith for his rejuvenated career. However, in spite of Affleck's rehabilitated credibility, his missteps in the first decade of the new millennium continue to haunt him as fans worry loudly and publicly about whether he has the ability to portray the iconic Batman character.

## The Counterpublic Returns

In late 1980's, the fan reaction to Keaton was enough to make headlines of newspapers; in 2013, the internet-fueled bomb that exploded when the Affleck casting news broke sent vibrations through a multi-modal network of media which prompted *Entertainment Weekly* to acknowledge, "Holy Backlash, Batman!" (Breznican 14). The internet changed the rules, and while antecedent rhetorics help shape the ongoing discourse, the tempo of Batfleck rhetoric rages at the speed of Wi-Fi.

Our high-gloss, sound-bite existence has real consequences for deliberation--we want up-to-the-minute news that takes as long to listen as soup does to microwave, and we would prefer it to be entertaining, thank you very much. The very idea of congregating with others to deliberate social issues is not remotely in the purview of the average person, regardless of how informative and even inspiring that might be. If it does not fit on a bumper sticker, we look for something that does. (Young 31)

The Batfleck backlash demonstrates that internet discourse in such cases does not have to be academic or even particularly coherent; its most important function is to garner attention and encourage others to further the debate. In theory, "The cognitive quality of that attention is less important than the mere fact of active uptake . . . No matter: by coming into range you fulfill the only entry condition demanded by a public. . . The act of attention involved in showing up is enough to create an addressable public. But some kind of active uptake—however somnolent—is indispensable" (Warner 61).

Among the most energetic uptakers are those fans, like the *Batfleck* protesters, who through their cohesion in sheer displeasure form “subpublics, or specialized publics, focused on particular interests, professions, or locales” (Warner 84). What should be noted about Affleck’s detractors is that at the time this article is being written, with the exception of a few seconds of trailer footage, *so far not one of them has seen Affleck acting as Batman*. Instead, “There is a sense in which ‘opinion’ rather than knowledge, even under the most favorable circumstances, is the proper term to use—namely, in the sense of judgment, estimate. For in its strict sense, knowledge can refer only to what has happened and been done. What is still to be done involves a forecast of a future still contingent, and cannot escape the liability to error in judgment involved in all anticipation of probabilities” (Dewey 346). Notable about this particular subpublic is that all criticism of Affleck as Batman thus far has been derived from conjecture based solely on the antecedent rhetorics of Batman casting and public criticism of his personal and professional lives.

In “Publics and Counterpublics,” Michael Warner asks, “But what makes such a public ‘counter’ or ‘oppositional’? Is its oppositional character a function of its content alone—that is, its claim to be oppositional? . . . [C]ounterpublics . . . ‘formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs’” (85). A striking example of Warner’s point was demonstrated by the “Stop *Batfleck*” petition, filed on the White House’s “We the People” website on August 23, 2013, asking for support to “make it illegal for Ben Affleck to portray Batman (or any superhero) on film for the next 200 years” (Permenter). The petition concluded, “I am sure Mr. Affleck is a nice enough guy, but he has a history of ruining films that he

doesn't Ostar, direct, produce, and cater by himself" (Permenter). The White House shut down the petition within hours, citing its "moderation policy." A similar petition at Change.org, entitled, "Remove Ben Affleck as Batman/Bruce Wayne in the Superman/Batman Movie," closed with 97,642 signatures voicing support (Roden). Petitions such as these, as well as other protests, support Jenkins's claim that while fans "have very little say about what happens to their characters or their programs," their power lies in "the right to protest and protest loudly decisions contradicting their perception of what is desirable or appropriate" (118).

### **Memes and The Sad Batman**

The Batfleck counterpublic has seen some of its most productive work in the form of visual rhetorics. For example, the website Teespring.com began selling T-Shirts featuring a Batman symbol in the style of the 1960's television show with the name "Batfleck" centrally emblazoned. The website gives the visitor a choice, "Show your approval of the new caped crusader -- *Batfleck*. When you purchase the BATFLECK t-shirt you are declaring that you *do* support the latest bat-manifestation" at which point a click puts the shirt in the virtual shopping cart. A second option reads, "If you *do not* support *Batfleck* you can cast your vote of opposition with the NO BATFLECK t-shirt - <http://www.teespring.com/nobatfleck>." The page concludes with the emboldening message to the Batman-concerned sub-public: "The choice is yours, citizen."

Memes have taken a central role in the backlash, featuring manipulated photos of Affleck as various representations of Batman. A popular meme posted on Starpulse.com was a photo from the 1960's *Batman* show

featuring Batman and Robin with their faces replaced by those of Affleck and Matt Damon, his acting/writing partner from 1997's *Good Will Hunting*. Posted prior to the release of studio stills of Affleck in the *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* costume, the meme serves as a striking example of an antecedent rhetoric influencing current internet discussion. Memes can appear with textual messages attached, and in the case of Batffleck, the messages often refer to fan criticisms of previous incarnations of the character. One of the more interesting memes shows a photo of Affleck leaning in to speak with Christian Bale at some unspecified function, the message reading, "Whatever you do don't let them give you bat-nipples" in reference to the much-derided costumes in *Batman Forever* and *Batman and Robin*. Several memes feature messages transcribed into an exaggerated Boston-accent, a reference to Affleck's hometown (one example posted at <http://i.imgur.com/KaBv2aJ.jpg> reads, "Don't get me fahkin staadid, Scarecrow") (full disclosure: as a Batman fan and a Boston-area native, I find this meme hilarious). Some memes do not include Batffleck photos, opting instead to feature other franchise-related actors. One such meme on [www.memeshappen.com](http://www.memeshappen.com) features the late Heath Ledger as the Joker, echoing a scene in *The Dark Knight* when he is speaking to Aaron Eckhart's Harvey Dent/Two-Face, shaking his hands in the air, exclaiming, "Chemical attacks kill a hundred people in Syria and nobody panics. Ben Affleck becomes Batman and everyone just loses their minds!" Often, impactful memes will feature less Bat-imagery, as evidenced by a widely circulated photo of a large, scraggily bearded fan, standing in the middle of a large protest unrelated to the Batffleck controversy, but holding a sign proclaiming, "AMERICA IS DOOMED. BEN AFFLECK IS BATMAN."

Not all of the internet reaction has been negative. In fact, the skillfully timed photos released to the public have encountered some positive, even playful, reaction. It wasn't until the first photo of Affleck was released online that the first hint of possible support for Batffleck emerged from previously disgruntled fans. Regarding the photo, Mike Cecchini from *Den of Geek* remarked, "It's a cool photo, and Affleck cuts an impressive profile as an older, wiser Caped Crusader." A second photo, this time featuring Affleck in the costume standing next to a newly designed Batmobile, was dubbed "Sad Batman" and quickly taken up for meme parody, even earning its own website at [www.whysosadbatman.tumblr.com](http://www.whysosadbatman.tumblr.com). At first, Sad Batman memes were primarily coloration experiments, altering the black and white photo to resemble costumes of past Batmans, from Adam West's groovy blue and gray to *The Dark Knight Returns'* apocalyptic gray and black. Subsequent memes had more fun with the photo, placing Batman into "humorous" situations such as gravely regarding a "twerking" Miley Cyrus, witnessing the closing of the last Blockbuster video rental store, and even drinking in a bar with Christopher Reeve's Superman in a modified *Superman III* movie still. Antecedent rhetoric strikes yet again as the Sad Batman is pictured embracing Jennifer Lopez in a meme entitled *Gigli* or staring into a mirror reflecting Affleck in his *Daredevil* costume. Often, the memes cross into the absurd, featuring Batman observing the crash of the *Hindenburg* or in the "pebble" scene in the closing moments of *Schindler's List*. Another meme, perhaps attempting to make an argument of the triviality of the casting controversy, shows the Sad Batman with his hand on the shoulder of a firefighter as they watch footage of 9/11 on a television screen.

## **Batfleck Forever**

According to Affleck, “Before I took the role, Warner Bros. gave me a bunch of past reactions to casting and said, ‘Are you sure you want to get into this? This is part and parcel of these movies now. There’s a lot of active fans with a lot of opinions.’ To me, having been through a certain amount of that, it doesn’t really . . . Everyone’s entitled to their opinion. I wouldn’t have taken the part if I didn’t trust my instincts in terms of the filmmaking” (Lee). The actor claims that Warner Bros. actually advised him to stay off-line or a while, but the future Batman shrugged it off with the disclaimer, “I handle shit.” In a 2013 article, Wired.com describes Affleck’s “mindset at the time was that ‘I can handle any snub. I can handle anything.’ Or so he thought. When the online backlash against his casting began, Affleck unwisely decided to scroll down on an article announcing the news to the comment section. ‘I looked at the first comment and it says ‘NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!’ And I was done! We’re going to be Luddites for a while” (McMillan).

While the online response to Batfleck has been intense, no such backlash has emerged from the former wearers of the Batman cape and cowl. In fact, the response from this exclusive Bat-club has been supportive. Keaton, who recently and ironically starred in the 2014 Oscar–winning *Birdman* about an aging actor attempting to recapture former glory after walking away from a lucrative yet unfulfilling superhero series, voiced encouragement to Affleck saying, “He’s going to be great” (“Michael Keaton”). From Val Kilmer, who replaced Keaton in *Batman Forever*, came the tweet, “Give Ben a chance!” (Punchko). George Clooney, the final Batman actor in the pre-Christian Bale era, declined to offer his advice, claiming, “I am the least qualified person to comment on

anyone playing the role of Batman since I so terribly destroyed the part. I tend to look at it like this - let's just see what the movie is before everyone starts beating him up. He is a smart man, he knows what he is doing" (Puchko). Even Adam West spoke up, fifty years later still displaying a proclivity towards the humorous side of Batman, and sent out the following message: "Remember Ben, with the cape and cowl comes great responsibility (and lots of heat). Bring deodorant" (Puchko). As for Affleck's actual portrayal of the caped Crusader, fans across the web will have to wait until *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice's* release on March 25, 2016, to see if this version of Batman pleases or fulfills their worst fears. Either way, when *Entertainment Weekly's* Chris Lee posits, "Fans feel like their vote counts," Affleck replies, "You know what? It's great that people do care that much. They want to see the movie that much. And it is incumbent on you to honor the story. There are the Greek myths and these are the American myths. The American myths are these superheroes. People care about 'em a lot. And it's incumbent on you to do a good job and make it as excellent as you possibly can. At the end of the day, the movie's all that matters."

#### Works Cited

- "Batfleck T-Shirt." *Tespring.com*. 24 Aug. 2013. Web. 31 Mar. 2015.
- "Before Batman, Ben Affleck Said Daredevil 'Humiliated' Him, Vowed Never To Play Another Superhero." *Inquisitr*. 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.

- Begley, Chris. "Batman v Superman: Gal Gadot on Auditioning with Ben Affleck, Her Boobs, and Wonder Woman's Powers." *Batman News*. 22 Mar. 2015. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.
- "Blame Bennifer: Celeb Uni-Names Multiply." *Fox News*. Foxnews.com. 13 Jun. 2005. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.
- Boichel, Bill. "Batman: Commodity as Myth." *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*. Eds. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991. Print. 14-17.
- "The Brangelina Fever." *Reuters*. 6 Feb. 2006. *Theage.com.au*. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.
- Breznican, Anthony. "Holy Backlash, Batman!" *Entertainment Weekly*. Ew.com. 30 Aug. 2015. Web. 31 Mar. 2015.
- Briggs, Michael. "'Batman v Superman': Michael Keaton Discusses His Own Batman Casting Outrage." *Design and Trend*. 6 Feb. 2015. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.
- Brooker, Will. *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon*. London: Continuum, 2000. Print.
- Cave, Damien. "Scalito." *The New York Times*. 25 Dec. 2005. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.
- Cecchini, Mike. "Batman v. Superman: New Photo of Ben Affleck as Batman." *Den of Geek*. 24 Jun. 2014. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.
- Dewey, John. "Search for the Great Community." *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953. Volume 2: 1925-1927. Essay, Reviews, Miscellany, and The Public and its Problems*. Ed.
- Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P., 2008. Print. 325-350.

- Eisner, Joel. *The Official Batman Batbook*. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1986. Print.
- Hughes, Mark. "The Avengers Officially Third-Highest Grossing Movie of All Time Domestically, Worldwide." *Forbes*. 1 Jun. 2012. Web. 29 Mar. 2015.
- Jamieson, Kathleen M. "Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint." *Quarterly Journal Of Speech* 61.4 (1975): 406-415. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.
- . "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6.3 (1973): 162-170. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- LaSalle, Mick. "BATMAN CHILLS OUT / George Clooney Can't Fill Batsuit, so Uma and Arnie Save Lightweight Sequel." *The San Francisco Chronicle*. 30 Jun. 1997. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.
- Lee, Chris. "Affleck on Batfleck: 'I Wouldn't Have Done it if I Didn't Think I Could.'" *Entertainment Weekly*. Ew.com. 18 Jan. 2015. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.
- McMillan, Graeme. "Ben Affleck Reads comments About Batman Casting, Learns not to Read Comments." *Wired.com*. 17 Sep. 2013. Web. 28 Mar 2013.
- Mendelson, Scott. "Box Office: Avengers: Age Of Ultron Passes \$1 Billion Worldwide, How Will Marvel Recover?" *Forbes.com*. 15 May 2015. Web. 28 Dec. 2015.
- "Michael Keaton On Ben Affleck As Batman: 'He's Going To Be Great.'" *Huffington Post*. 29 Aug. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.

- Parsons, Patrick. "Batman and His Audience: The Dialectic of Culture." *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*. Ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991. Print. 66-89.
- Permenter, Cody. "Someone Petitioned the White House to Stop Ben Affleck from Playing Batman." *The Daily Dot*. 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.
- Ping, Jessica. "Pop Culture 2015." *The Chief Online*. Jan. 2015. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.
- Powell, Malea, Stacy Pigg, Kendall Leon, and Angela Haas. "Rhetoric." *Encyclopedia of Library and Informational Sciences* 1.1 (2010): 4548-56. Print.
- Proctor, William. "Dark Knight Triumphant: Fandom, Hegemony and the Rebirth of Batman on Film." *Fan Phenomena: Batman*. (2013): 155-164. *OAIster*. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.
- Puchko, Kristy. "George Clooney Refuses To Give Ben Affleck Batman Advice." *Cinemablend*. 27 Sep. 2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.
- Roden, John. "Remove Ben Affleck as Batman/Bruce Wayne in the Superman/Batman Movie." *Change.org*. 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.
- Uricchio, William and Roberta E. Pearson. "I'm Not Fooled by That Cheap Disguise." *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*. Ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991. Print. 182-213.
- Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 49-90. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.

Young, Anna M. *Prophets, Gurus, Pundits: Rhetorical Styles & Public Engagements*. Southern Illinois UP, 2014. Print.

## **The Search for Meaning in the Films of Wes Anderson**

By Brent Gibson, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

Near the end of director Wes Anderson's only animated film, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, the audience is shown a shot of Mr. Fox's latest newspaper column in *The Gazette*; it's a regular feature entitled "Fox on the Prowl." It takes up the screen for a mere two seconds, only enough for the viewer to see Fox's picture and the title of his column. Narratively, it is intended to show that Fox has gone back to his former profession and put his dangerous days of henhouse thieving behind him. However, in true Wes Anderson fashion, when he could have easily gotten away with a series of fuzzy lines to merely suggest the content of the paper, Anderson has actually written an entire column. A special treat is in store for those who take the time to hit the pause button here; one will find nothing less than a rendering of Anderson's own existential philosophy. Several critics have noted Anderson's existential concerns. But this philosophy that has been played out visually in narrative form throughout Anderson's entire body of work is here written down in words for us to read. Near the end of the column, Fox/Anderson says, "They say things happen for a reason, but they don't. They happen for a lark and from the well-spring of limitless, infinite chaos." The reason I say that this is Anderson's philosophy and not just Fox's is because this is precisely the philosophy that is narratively embodied in all of Anderson's films. Anna

Schaffner notes that Anderson's films are part of a "pop-cultural response to the death of grand narratives." They show a belief in a materialistic, existential, nihilistic universe, where meaning is found in the human and nothing exists beyond human experience. As Michael Martin has noted, Anderson is "staring into the void, believing that it exists" (email exchange). His characters may intuit from time to time that there must be more to life than what they have yet found, but the answers Anderson provides for them never reach vertically toward what director Paul Schrader calls the "Wholly Other" of the Transcendent. As Mark Browning says, "His characters search for a meaning in life but without any sense . . . that their actions carry spiritual consequences" (150). Meaning for his characters only exists on the horizontal level as it can be found or created in human relationships.

In fact one of the things that makes Anderson's films so intriguing is that he takes seriously the search for meaning. His characters' lives follow a similar four-step pattern. First, the characters sense the void, the limitless infinite chaos that they feel life is, without necessarily being able to articulate their existential problem. Secondly, their instinctive fear of the chaos causes them to react by attempting to impose order on or gain control of their lives and by extension, the universe. Third, this attempt to impose order or control fails miserably, leading to a rock-bottom experience. And finally out of this failure the characters are then allowed a measure of grace; they find meaning in their miserable lives through the reconciliation of human relationships.

And this is where the films end—on a comedic note of restoration that suggests that this is the goal for which one should strive. That is, given the limitless chaos of life, any

attempt to impose order on the universe through individual strength of will is doomed, and life is only given structure and meaning through human love, moving toward reconciliation and grace. Yet despite this positive movement at the end of the films, underlying all of them is an ultimate sadness, a despair being held only temporarily at bay. I want to explore how Anderson's philosophic vision, based on his eight full-length films, intersects and overlaps with one of the grand narratives that it supposedly rejects. Anderson's films draw on Christian theological concepts for the meaning that his characters do find, and I intend to show that where his films draw back from those concepts is precisely the source of his characters' ultimate despair.

A place of underlying, of even overt, dissatisfaction is where Anderson's characters are when we meet them. What James Mottram says of the characters in *Life Aquatic* is true for all of Anderson's characters: "all the characters are lost and looking for something" (392). Sometimes we get a glimpse of what has led up to this as when Anthony in *Bottle Rocket* says that he went to the mental health facility on Arizona for "exhaustion" and that he simply "went nuts." As he describes this earlier period of his life to his new love interest, Inez, he says that he was "lost and confused, totally lost, incredibly unhappy." Inez herself understands Anthony's rootless, existence when she describes him as "paper" drifting by in the wind. All of Anderson's characters meet at this place of ultimate dissatisfaction. Herman Blume in *Rushmore* has a loveless marriage, sons he despises, no friends or extended family. He is so lost he actually asks a fifteen-year old boy for advice: "What's the secret, Max?" In a subsequent scene, he jumps into his backyard pool at his sons' birthday party and, in an echo of the pool scene in *The Graduate*, seems

to want to stay under the water forever, to avoid his empty, broken, life above the surface. In *The Royal Tenebaums*, Royal, his three children, and their childhood friend, Eli, all face existential crises that draw them back to the family home. Steve Zissou in *The Life Aquatic* states near the beginning of the film, "I'm right on the edge. I don't know what comes next." Francis Whitman, the elder brother in *The Darjeeling Limited*, admits to attempting suicide, and Jack, the youngest, says, "I don't feel good about myself." Fox, in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, as he faces his own mortality and dissatisfaction says, "I'm seven. My father died when he was seven and a half" and then says, "Who am I? I'm saying this more as like, existentialism, you know?" Laura Bishop in *Moonrise Kingdom* says that she sometimes asks herself, "What am I doing here?" And finally in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, the writer seeks out the aging Zero because he notices that Zero is "truly and deeply lonely, a symptom of my own medical condition as well."

Because Anderson's characters sense that existential despair is near at hand, that the chaos and meaninglessness of the universe threatens to overwhelm them, they seek to impose order on the universe as a way of combatting its random nature. As Sartre says, "Man is the being whose project is to be God" (63). Each character tries to impose order in his or her own way. But each response is, at bottom, the *same* response. Dignan in *Bottle Rocket* forms a seventy-five year plan, so that not a single moment of the rest of their lives will lack order. The same impulse underlies Max's frantic activity in *Rushmore* to organize and establish clubs. As Mark Browning says, "Max is fundamentally quite a lonely, isolated boy, whose frenetic social activities seek to hide this lack with only partial success" (18). The writing and directing of plays represents another of Max's attempts to impose order on a

chaotic world. Chas Tenenbaum running fire drills and coordinating disaster plans and Margot in writing plays and keeping closely held secrets, represent their attempts to deal with a universe spinning out of control. For Royal Tenenbaum himself, the tales he spins, the stories he tells about himself are an attempt to reorder his life the way he wants it to be. Steve Zissou uses his position as director of documentaries to order and shape his life. One of the reasons he feels so threatened by Jane the reporter is that she is going to tell a story about him that he is afraid he will not be able to control. And instead of dealing with his son as an actual human being, the only way he can interact with him is as a character in his film—forcing Ned to essentially try out for the role of his son. An actual son is unpredictable, but a character, he can control even telling his son not to call him dad in this scene. Francis Whitman in *The Darjeeling Limited* makes a series of laminated schedules detailing what the brothers will do each day in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Fox's master plans to raid the neighboring farms are in the same mold. The Bishops in *Moonrise Kingdom* use the law in their desperate attempt to impose order on their lives and the lives around them, and Scout Master Ward takes running a tight ship to military heights, attempting to order not only his life but the lives of the Khaki scouts under him. Gustave in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, with his emphasis on courtesy, service, and taste, represents what even he recognizes as a failing attempt to keep chaos at bay. Zero of course is his protégé and follows in his footsteps as much as possible, and the writer who meets him at the end of his life, is the latest in a series of Anderson characters who attempt to use art to impose order.

One of the things Anderson does so well is to show how these fear-based attempts at ordering our world

ultimately come crashing down. As Jean-Paul Sartre says in *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, “The existentialist . . . thinks it very distressing that God does not exist because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him . . . and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to” (22). Each of the characters ultimately hits rock bottom and the nadir of their lives is typically manifested by these forlorn feelings of rejection, loneliness, and despair. In *Bottle Rocket*, Dignan’s plan of a life of crime falls apart when Bob leaves with the car, Anthony gives the last of their money away, and he breaks with his one remaining friend. The failure of the crime spree hits Dignan all the harder because he was hoping to use it to impress Mr. Henry and gain re-admission to the small-time crime syndicate that had been his only real family. The next time we see Dignan, he is humiliated by Futureman and admits in a small, defeated voice: “I’m not always as confident as I look.” Herman Blume in *Rushmore* reaches his nadir standing in the street in front of Mr. Fisher’s barber shop. He has lost his wife, his family, his friends, and his girlfriend, and as he stands there, of course a passing car splashes him with water. His disheveled appearance bespeaks his pathetic existence and is also characterized by an acute loneliness: “I’m a little bit lonely these days” he tells Max. In fact the need to stave off existential isolation is achingly apparent in all of Anderson’s films. In *The Royal Tenebaums*, Raleigh St. Clair says that he wants to die, and Richie Tenenbaum comes to the same conclusion as he slashes his own wrists. Royal gets caught in his lies and kicked out on the street, broke and estranged from his family. Steve Zissou in *The Life Aquatic* falls down the stairs, literally and metaphorically a low moment for him as he describes

himself with “no friends . . . wife on the rocks . . . people laughing at me.” Jane the reporter perhaps best articulates the existential despair of the characters in the two phone messages that she leaves. In the first one she simply says, “What am I doing here?” and in the second says, “I feel as if life is . . .” and has no idea how to finish the sentence. In fact none of the characters seem to know what they are doing or what life is. In *The Darjeeling Limited*, the brothers get kicked off the train just as they receive a letter from their mother asking them not to visit her. Mr. Fox loses his home and everyone else’s while getting trapped underground and having his nephew kidnapped. And who can forget Walt Bishop, shirtless, in his pajama bottoms, in the dead of night, with an axe in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other announcing, “I’ll be out back. I’m going to find a tree to chop down.” In *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, a lonely, aging Zero sits in his hotel realizing that he cannot avoid talking about Agatha anymore; he must confront his own loneliness, something that he had been refusing to do for decades. And this is what each of the characters ultimately faces, his or her own crushing loneliness.

But once the characters have reached the point of despair, just as their attempts to order their lives have spun hopelessly out of control, they receive a moment of grace, what theologian Robert Johnston calls transcendence with a small “t” as the characters “experience . . . the human possibility of achieving wholeness within brokenness” (243). The characters discover that their lives gain meaning not through their individual attempts to order their existence, but through community, through the reconciliation of relationships, and through love. As C. Ryan Knight says, “Their lives all seem to be empty and meaningless; it is only their relationships and engagements with one another that achieve any sort

of authentic and legitimate meaning in their lives” (71-72). Each of the films ends on a hopeful note—a comedic restoration of community punctuated by an upbeat soundtrack. One of the most poignant moments comes just after Richie has checked himself out of the hospital after his suicide attempt; he rides alone on the bus at night. He doesn’t yet know that his love for Margot will be reciprocated, but the soundtrack plays “Fly” by Nick Drake which begins with the line “Give me a second grace.” The audience is clued in before the character that everything is going to be all right.

But is everything all right? The existential concerns that lie at the root of the characters’ crises have still not been dealt with. They have only been staved off temporarily. Anderson’s diagnosis of the ills of society hits dead center. This is part of the power of his films. And his solutions to the problems are good as far as they go, but prove ultimately to be lacking in dealing with the ultimate questions that brought about the despair in the first place. He asks ultimate questions but only offers penultimate answers. He uses Christian theological concepts of reconciliation and grace to move toward meaning in his films but draws back from the ultimate hope that these concepts offer. He is not yet willing to engage in gestures toward capital “T” Transcendence. As Schaffner again notes, Anderson’s films are part of the “twee revolution” which “entails a disenchantment with the present . . . and a lack of optimism about the future.” But if Anderson continues to mine Christianity for its virtues of reconciliation and grace, he may ultimately find the virtue of hope as well.

## Works Cited

- Browning, Mark. *Wes Anderson: Why His Movies Matter*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011. Print.
- Johnston, Robert K. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. Print.
- Knight, C. Ryan. "Who's to Say?": The Role of Pets in Wes Anderson's Films." *The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indiewood Icon*. Ed. Peter C. Kunze. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 65-75. Print.
- Martin, Michael. "Wes Anderson-thon." Message to the author. 21 May 2014. Email.
- Mottram, James. *The Sundance Kids: How the Mavericks Took Back Hollywood*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2006. Print.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. New York: Citadel, 1957. Print.
- Schaffner, Anna Katharina. "The Twee Tribe." Rev. of *Twee: The Gentle Revolution in Music, Books, Television, Fashion, and Film*. *Times Literary Supplement*. 18 February 2015. Web. 26 March 2015.
- Schrader, Paul. *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1972. Print.



## **This Tractor for Hire: Consensual Cooperation for Pacifist and African-American Farmers, Women, and Gangsters in World War II American Informational Films**

By Steven D. Reschly and Katherine Jellison

All combatant nations during the Second World War made increasing use of mass media to inform and motivate their civilian populations and military personnel to support the war and fight the war. Film proved a particularly effective medium, and the United States produced, by far, the greatest number of movies and documentaries among the Allied nations. The War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry distributed 118 films, produced by a variety of Hollywood companies and government agencies. Great Britain released 86 films, Canada made 91, and the Soviet Union produced 15. Nazi Germany made a great many films between 1933 and 1945 as Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels perceived the potential of film to reach and motivate mass audiences. *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl and released in 1936, is often considered the greatest propaganda movie ever made. Estimates of Third Reich feature films produced between 1933 and

1945 range from 1,150 to 1,350.<sup>1</sup> For their part, Hollywood executives, producers, directors, and actors enlisted wholeheartedly in the film wars.

Effective propaganda is a mix of persuasion and reassurance. Persuasion usually involves convincing an audience that an outsider or enemy is false, while reassuring the audience that its own views and values are true. In the American productions of wartime films, one can perceive both messages with varying emphases. Persuasion led to calls for sacrifice and commitment, while reassurances conveyed messages that little needed to be changed and the American way of life would continue. A particularly striking example of continuity and security is a film featuring a Mennonite farmer in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. *Farmer at War* was released in March 1943. In the context of other wartime films, both feature films and documentaries, the war is almost invisible in *Farmer at War*. The main message is that farmers, and by extension American citizens in general, did not need to adjust their lives radically in order to support the American national wartime agenda.

The primary theme of almost all World War II movies and documentaries was inclusiveness. It was everyone's war, and everyone must fight and work to win the war for freedom and democracy. The themes of inclusivity and shared effort were certainly obvious in the title of an Office of War Information (OWI)-Twentieth Century Fox coproduction that Henry Fonda narrated in 1942, *It's Everybody's War*, and in a similar 1943 film entitled *No Exceptions*. Explaining the necessity of conscription and

---

<sup>1</sup> David Weinberg, "Approaches to the Study of Film in the Third Reich: A Critical Appraisal," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19 (1984): 105–126.

rationing were obvious needs, as was raising money through war bond drives. Total war involved total populations, and communicating war aims to everyone was high on the government's agenda. The core message of mobilizing all sectors of society and all individuals appeared in nearly every wartime film, whether made for documentary or entertainment purposes. Mobilizing emotions is what films did with special power. There were motivational films for college students, doctors, Negro colleges, nurses, and many more categories of American citizens.

There are other messages in these films, however. Sometimes the contradictory themes are less obtrusive, but present nonetheless. In some films, cooperation, or at least the absence of active opposition, was defined as sufficient support for the war, even if done inadvertently or in the normal course of everyday life. The line between communicating the necessity of all-out commitment and effort and the simultaneous assurance of continuity could be a tricky one to trace. Government officials, and thus wartime filmmakers, emphasized reassurances that the fundamental institutions of American society would remain intact despite the presumably temporary dislocations of war. Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black observed in their book, *Hollywood Goes to War*, "Propaganda is a bit like pornography—hard to define, but most people think they will know it when they see it."<sup>2</sup> Propaganda need not convey a consistent and unwavering meaning in order to be considered propaganda.

---

<sup>2</sup> Gregory D. Black and Clayton R. Koppes, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987), p. 49.

Many American films were sponsored and produced by government agencies. However, the Hollywood film industry turned out many war-related feature films without direct government involvement, such as Howard Hawks's *Sergeant York* (1941), for which Gary Cooper won a Best Actor Oscar, *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), and, of course, *Casablanca* (1942). Escapist entertainment films and screwball comedies, often depicting women torn between love and marriage or career, prevented the war from total domination of the industry. The war did demand attention, however.

The "Why We Fight" series of seven films, directed by Frank Capra, is doubtless the best-known of these government-sponsored American films. Capra defined the war as "us" versus "them" by reframing Axis films to make fascism seem dangerous and threatening rather than inviting and in line with human destiny. Defending American individual freedom raised the question of who "we" might be. Fighting fascist collectivism (and, after the war, communist collectivism) meant demonstrating that all individuals had a stake in the outcome of the war. Capra finessed this paradox of collective action to preserve individual liberty by focusing on choice; that is, Americans would choose to fight by understanding the stakes rather than being forced to fight by oppressive dictatorships. The films were made for military personnel, but were popular enough for general audiences. By the end of the war, some 54 million Americans had seen some of the "Why We Fight" films. Capra's much-beloved 1946 film, "It's A Wonderful Life," continued the wartime theme of the impact one individual could have on a town in contrast to

fascist or communist collectivism or, for that matter, unrestrained capitalist greed.<sup>3</sup>

Feature films intended for home front consumption often featured messages of continuity. Citizens could, for the most part, carry on with their normal lives. For example, the feature film *This Gun for Hire* was released in May 1942, directed by Frank Tuttle. Principal photography was completed on December 6, 1941, from a script by Albert Maltz and W. R. Burnett from the 1936 novel by Graham Greene, *A Gun for Sale* (US Title *This Gun for Hire*). Paramount bought the rights for \$12,000 in 1941. The main character in the film served his country by serving his own quest for revenge, with only a very small change from novel to script in the way he carried it out.

The script shifted the setting from Europe to the US west coast. In the novel, the murderous and dark main character, appropriately named Raven, has a cleft palate that is a physical mark of his psychological twistedness resulting from a painful upbringing. The script changed the physical mark to a damaged wrist from childhood abuse. In the film, Alan Ladd as professional killer Phillip Raven carries out a hit on a blackmailer and recovers a stolen chemical formula, and thereafter collects his \$1,000 fee from effeminate fifth-columnist, peppermint nibbler, and nightclub owner Willard Gates (Laird Cregar). Raven soon discovers that Gates double-crossed him by paying his fee in marked bills. Gates reports the stolen money to Michael Crane (Robert Preston), a Los Angeles detective visiting

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter C. Rollins, "Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American Dream," *Journal of American Culture*, 19 (Winter 1996): 81-86. On American wartime film production, see M. Todd Bennett, *One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

San Francisco to see his girlfriend, blonde nightclub singer Ellen Graham (Veronica Lake). Gates acts as intermediary for a traitorous industrialist, the president of Nitro Chemical, Alvin Brewster (Tully Marshall), who wants no loose ends that might connect him to his scheme to sell poison gas to Japan. The Raven case is assigned to Crane, and Graham is recruited by a senator to find out by working at Gates's nightclub who is manufacturing deadly gas for the Japanese, not yet an enemy but with war drawing nearer in the Pacific.

Raven eludes Crane at his flophouse and takes the train to Los Angeles to kill his way to the top of his betrayers. He finds the only empty seat, which happens to be next to Graham. In yet another coincidence to advance the shadowy noir plot, Gates is on the same train and happens to see Graham and Raven sitting together. Gates suspects the two are cooperating and wires ahead to the police in LA. Raven and Graham elude the police, then Graham barely escapes from Raven and goes to the Neptune Club for rehearsal. Gates invites her for dinner at his mansion and arranges for his boy, Tommy, to fake her suicide while he returns to the club. Tommy puts off Crane and gets him to leave the mansion, but Raven breaks in and saves Graham. Raven takes Tommy's car and Tommy warns Gates at the club, as he is being questioned by Crane, that Raven and Graham have escaped. Raven takes Graham to the Neptune Club to find Gates, but meets Crane instead. Raven escapes with Graham again, leaving Crane to wonder if his girlfriend has been kidnapped or is a willing accomplice. Raven and Graham end up surrounded by police in a railroad yard, and the police make plans to rush the shack in the morning when the fog lifts.

The key dialogue takes place in the dark, shadowy, claustrophobic shack where Raven and Graham are trapped. Raven showed a soft spot for children and cats earlier in the movie, and he picks up a stray cat through the shack window, naming him “Tuffy.” Graham tries to draw out Raven’s humane side and quiet the killer’s quest for revenge. She listens to Raven explain how his signature deformed wrist was broken by an abusive aunt who beat him from age 3 to 14, when he snapped and killed his abuser. Graham is empathetic, but Raven refuses to “go soft” for her. Then comes the climactic exchange of the film:

Raven: (looking out the window) They’ll move in in the morning. Every flatfoot in town.

Graham: You know, I’ve been figuring something. That chemical formula.

Raven: Yeah?

Graham: I bet I know what it is.

Raven: What?

Graham: Gas. Poison gas. They’re selling it to our enemy.

Raven: So?

Graham: So tomorrow they’ll ship it back in bombs. Japanese breakfast food for America. (Raven stares blankly away from Graham.) Did you hear what I said? It’s important. This war is everybody’s business. Yours too.

Raven: Mr. Gates is still eating his peppermints. That's my business.

Graham: Why don't you stop thinking about yourself for a minute?

Raven: Who else is gonna think about me?

"This war is everybody's business. Yours too." But Raven does not see it that way, and refuses Graham's appeal to patriotism even after she reveals that Gates is an executive by day at Nitro Chemical, the company doing business with Japan. As morning dawns, Graham agrees to help Raven escape on condition that he kill no one else. Raven reluctantly kills a police officer while taking advantage of Graham's diversion, and escapes the dragnet by jumping on a train from a bridge. Raven heads for Nitro Chemical headquarters to find Gates.

The movie winds down quickly from here. Motivated by revenge, Raven takes down the traitorous industrialist and shoots Gates for trying to kill the blonde. He carries out a request from Graham first, however, by extracting a signed confession from Brewster and Gates. He chooses not to shoot Graham's fiancé, Crane, when he has the chance, and dies in the shootout with police. Dying, he asks Graham, "Did I do all right for ya?" She nods.

Raven served his country's interests, albeit unintentionally, by pursuing his personal revenge agenda. The lines blur to some extent because of his connection to the blonde, but in the end, he did the right thing for her and for America. In the moral universe of the film, men who knew how to handle guns, such as urban gangsters, needed to have their guns trained on the enemy instead of other Americans. There are larger issues at stake than

personal problems, and muddled motivations can still lead to positive national outcomes. In fact, by being most clearly who he was, Raven most clearly served the national interest. Hired killers, such as soldiers, could also be human.

Women, just over half the population and far greater in number than urban assassins, were high on the list of priorities for general mobilization. Before Pearl Harbor, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote the script for *Women in Defense* and Katharine Hepburn narrated. This 10:35 minute documentary was produced by the Office of Emergency Management and distributed by the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry, and was released on Christmas Eve in 1941. The film features dramatic and stirring music and references to frontier and pioneer women, connecting pioneer martial readiness and wartime sacrifices. The film title is superimposed on the Bryant Baker sculpture located in Ponca City, Oklahoma, "The Pioneer Woman." Roosevelt's narrative described various jobs available through the Office of Civilian Defense, and encouraged women to train and participate in the science and industry fields, and to build on existing homemaking skills. The film shows women sewing silk parachutes, testing chemicals, giving blood, and manufacturing munitions. Wartime films often made the point that women made good factory workers because of their homemaking skills. Anyone who has seen the documentary *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980) likely recalls the dissolves from kitchen appliances to industrial machinery. A parallel point, however, was that women's most important job had always been nurturing and protecting home and family. The film closes with a statement written by the First Lady asserting that home and children always came first:

Our history is full of the inspiration which our pioneer women left us as a proud heritage, and again today American women are stirred by that heritage – serving their country in the laboratory, on defense production lines, in the civilian defense services, and in the home, which is after all, the first line of defense.

Women have always been the guardian of the home and the children – the future of our country – and they are determined that our democracy shall survive and that our precious freedoms shall be preserved.

The preparation for sending women back home again after the war is quite clear in retrospect.<sup>4</sup>

Women also served in military positions, as depicted in a nine-minute 1944 film *It's Your War, Too*.<sup>5</sup> The film focuses on the Women's Army Corps (WACS) in response to two men sitting on a front porch at the beginning of the film and agreeing with one another that "It's a man's war." The men make fun of "petticoat soldiers." But the narrator says, "Oh yes, it's your war too, Miss and Mrs. America." The film was produced by the Signal Corps and distributed by the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry. The film quotes General Dwight D. Eisenhower: "In many jobs, WACS do the work of two men. The Army needs and can use all it can get." Later in the film, General George C. Marshall reads a long statement on camera:

---

<sup>4</sup> This film is available online at <http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/collections/warfilm/women-in-defense.html>, accessed 18 July 2014.

<sup>5</sup> The film is available online at <http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/collections/warfilm/its-your-war-too.html>, accessed 18 July 2014.

The Women's Army Corps is an integral part of the Army of the United States, and its members, who are soldiers in every sense of the word, perform a full military part in this war. There are hundreds of important army jobs that women can perform as effectively as men. In fact, we find that they can do some of these jobs much better than the men. As more and more American soldiers engage the enemy in combat, women must replace them at overseas bases and at posts in this country. In view of the urgency of the situation, enlistment in the military service should take precedence, in my opinion, over any other responsibility except imperative family obligations.

Despite the emphasis on military service, the film assures viewers that femininity is preserved, with images of women putting on hosiery, having their hair styled, applying makeup, and going to church. Women did not need to change their true natures in order to serve the national war effort.

Farmers were another group addressed by World War II informational films. The main message encouraged farmers to continue farming with minor changes, such as adjusting crop choices and sharing scarce labor and machinery. *Farm Battle Lines* (1942) focused on cotton and peanuts in the South, crops already grown in the region. Government-produced films that encouraged American farmers to do their part for the war cause included titles such as *Food for Freedom* (1941), *Food for Fighters* (1943), and an animated 1942 coproduction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Walt Disney Productions entitled *Food Will Win the War*.

Two wartime films addressed marginal farmers who, on the surface, may not have seemed to have as much at stake in the outcome of the war: African-American farmers in the South, and Pennsylvania Dutch farmers in Lancaster County. Befitting the pattern, the principal message was that the war effort needed everyone, but also that these farmers did not need to change their traditional practices significantly in order to fulfill their citizenship responsibilities. The first six minutes of *Henry Browne, Farmer* (1942, directed by Roger Barlow and narrated by Canada Lee) depict an African-American farmer in Georgia who is aged 38, has three children, cultivates 40 acres, and owns two mules. The issue of race is ignored completely, and only the males in the film have names. The women in the family are simply called “Mother” and “Sister.” The wife and mother in “Henry Browne, Farmer” is shown as a productive farmer. She tends a Victory Garden, picks corn, chops cotton, and raises chickens. “Young Henry” milks the cow and works in the field. “Sister” tends chickens and also works in the field, chopping cotton with her mother. The mother serves a meal to her family, and “Young Henry,” says the narrator, “grows like Johnson Grass.” Farmer Browne listens to the Government Man and plants 15 acres of peanuts, “to make up for the fats and oils the Japs got.” The element that moves the film beyond the daily routines of farming is Farmer Browne’s elder son in the nation’s military forces.<sup>6</sup>

The family loads the wagon on a Saturday for a trip to town, a typical market day for farmers, perhaps “to sell a few eggs.” They hitch the mules, but the whole family goes along, and the narration extends the question of where

---

<sup>6</sup> The film is online at <http://www.archive.org/details/HenryBro1942>, accessed 18 July 2014. The film was produced by Republic Pictures and the USDA, and distributed by the War Activities Committee.

they could be heading? They are shown riding into Macon, Georgia, but instead of staying, they go through town, all the way to Tuskegee Air Field, where older brother is training with the 99th Pursuit Squadron of the Army Air Forces.<sup>7</sup> The 99th Pursuit Squadron (later, 99th Fighter Squadron) was the first black flying squadron, and the first to deploy overseas (to North Africa in April 1943, and later to Sicily and Italy). The family watches as the black pilot puts on his gear, climbs into his T-6 Texan training plane, and then they watch as a formation of three planes flies by.<sup>8</sup>

*Henry Browne, Farmer* was nominated for a Best Documentary Oscar in 1943. The film shows both a farmer doing ordinary work, and his older son serving as a member of the Tuskegee Airmen. The clinching line at the end of the film is, “Every American has an important job to do.” Not once does the film mention Farmer Browne’s skin color, or his rural southern poverty. Workers and farmers doing ordinary work support the war, but there are reasons for extraordinary sacrifice in dangerous military service.

---

<sup>7</sup> Although the film’s narration clearly locates Henry Browne’s farm near Macon, Georgia, the Tuskegee Air Field was located in Macon County, Alabama. Either the filmmakers compressed the amount of time it took the Browne family to travel by mule-drawn wagon from one location to another or otherwise manipulated facts to serve dramatic and propaganda purposes. This of course raises the question of whether or not the airman shown in the film is really the “older brother” of “Young Henry” and “Sister.” If 38-year-old Henry Sr.’s oldest child was indeed the airman, the Brownes had obviously become first-time parents while still in their teens—a common phenomenon among rural African Americans in the early twentieth-century South.

<sup>8</sup> The 2012 feature film, “Red Tails,” dramatizes this story of the first African American fighter squadron (director Anthony Hemingway). For further discussion of the Tuskegee Airmen and other breakthroughs for African Americans in the World War II military, see Marvin Fletcher, *America’s First Black General, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., 1880-1970* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

Still, wartime is not an occasion for changing race or class relations in the South.<sup>9</sup>

Even further afield from mainstream American wartime society were the Mennonite and Amish farmers of south central Pennsylvania. A Mennonite farmer, Moses Zimmerman, is featured in *Farmer at War*, released in March 1943. This nine-minute film was produced by Columbia Pictures Corporation and the US Office of War Information, and distributed by the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Association. With *Farmer at War*, the OWI and Columbia Pictures created a film that appeared to combine aspects of both the entertainment and “documentary” genres, with far more emphasis on reassurance than sacrifice. The film begins with images showing the deep rootedness of Germanic citizens of the county, such as gravestones engraved in the German language from the Ephrata community in northern Lancaster County and a rural German Lutheran church building. The film shows the inscription on a Revolutionary War monument in Ephrata, a German communal society. The cornerstone was laid in 1845 on the anniversary of the Battle of Brandywine, after which some 500 wounded soldiers from Washington’s defeated army were tended in Ephrata cloister buildings, and the monument was finally dedicated in 1902. It was estimated that approximately 150 of the soldiers died of their wounds and an outbreak of typhus. The inscription reads:

More than a century the remains of these patriots rested in this hallowed spot without any commemoration except the following words on a

---

<sup>9</sup> In the introduction to *We'll Always Have the Movies*, the authors observe that the African-American piano player Sam disappears during the crucial “Marseillaise” scene in *Casablanca*.

plain board: Here [sic] *ruhen die gebeine von viel soldaten* [Here rest the remains of many soldiers].<sup>10</sup>

After several images of the “gentle rolling hills” and prosperous farms of rural Pennsylvania, the film moves to showing “real farmers, not actors.” First up is Pennsylvania Dutch farmer Harry Schaeffer from Manor Township, located southwest of Lancaster City along the Susquehanna River. The narrator introduces him with another reference to the long history of Germanic immigrants to North America: “His ancestors were brought to America by the Dutch West India Trading Company in 1623.” He works his farm alone. When news of Pearl Harbor came to the county seat, young men enlisted and “farm labor seemed to melt away.” Schaeffer “has no sons to help him” at age 62, and his two farm hands are now in the US Army, one in Australia and the other in Hawaii. As a result, he must work “at least sixteen hours a day” in order to “keep every acre of our land in production.” A neighbor down the road has a daughter aged 12 who is shown driving a tractor, and the narrator notes that urban young men and women “are being trained in our towns and cities” to “aid farmers.”<sup>11</sup> The main focus, however, is on “another neighbor,” Moses Zimmerman, a Lancaster Conference Mennonite farmer whose wife wears a traditional Mennonite head covering. The final seven minutes of the nine-minute film are devoted to Zimmerman’s farm and his family.

---

<sup>10</sup> The inscription should read *Hier ruhen die Gebeine von vielen Soldaten* in High German. An image of the inscription may be found at <http://www.horseshoe.cc/pennadutch/places/pennsylvania/lancasterco/towns/ephrata/ephrata.htm>, accessed 18 July 2014.

<sup>11</sup> For discussion of urban women and girls recruited as farm laborers, see Stephanie A. Carpenter, *On the Farm Front: The Women’s Land Army in World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

In the person of Zimmerman, the filmmakers seemingly found a latter-day Sergeant York. Like the World War I hero that Gary Cooper portrayed in *Sergeant York*, Zimmerman was a pacifist farmer. In contrast to York, however, he never reassessed his religiously motivated aversion to bearing arms. Like other Mennonite residents of the county, Zimmerman was the descendant of German-speaking Anabaptists—or “re-baptizers”—whose embrace of adult baptism and rejection of armed resistance placed them at odds with other Reformation factions in Europe and caused them to seek refuge in colonial Pennsylvania. Even before Germany’s September 1939 invasion of Poland launched the war in Europe, the Roosevelt administration frequently employed visual images of Pennsylvania Anabaptists to promote its political agenda. Several reasons existed for this fascination with the Anabaptists of Pennsylvania. In segregated America, Amish, Mennonite, and other white farm families were safer subjects for New Deal celebrations of the nation’s “common man” than were members of the racially diverse urban working class. The Anabaptist division of labor between male farmers and female homemakers appealed to New Dealers eager to prop up traditional gender roles at a time of high male unemployment. And with their theologically based commitment to nonconformity and agricultural self-sufficiency, Anabaptists neatly reflected the national creation myth. Like the Puritan founders, these thrifty, hard-working, Christian agrarians were admirable role models for depression-weary Americans of the 1930s. *Farmer at War* was thus following in a tradition established several years earlier in Works Progress Administration posters and Farm Security Administration photographs featuring Amish and Mennonite subjects.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> David Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns

When Zimmerman, his wife Amanda, and other family members participated in the making of *Farmer at War* in late 1942, they presented an image of American farm life straight out of a Norman Rockwell portrait. Zimmerman attends a local farmers' meeting where participants rise to speak their minds. The family prays for the safety of American servicemen. The stout Mrs. Zimmerman brings a plump roast turkey to the Thanksgiving dinner table. And Zimmerman—newspaper in hand and wife by his side—ascends the stairs to the attic bedrooms where the couple's young nephew, Ray Rutt, is already peacefully sleeping.<sup>13</sup>

---

Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 11-12, 22, 49; Janet Galligani Casey, *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 28-29, 37. For overviews of New Deal era interest in the Amish and Mennonites of south central Pennsylvania, see Steven D. Reschly and Katherine Jellison, "Production Patterns, Consumption Strategies, and Gender Relations in Amish and Non-Amish Farm Households in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1935-1936," *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 134-162; Steven D. Reschly and Katherine Jellison, "Research Note: Shifting Images of Lancaster County Amish in the 1930s and 1940s," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 82 (July 2008): 469-483; Katherine Jellison, "Research Note: Amish Women and the Household Economy During the Great Depression." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 88 (January 2014): 97-105; as corrected online at <https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/Jan14Jellison.pdf>; Katherine Jellison, "Chosen Women: The Amish and the New Deal," in Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly, eds., *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 102-118; and Katherine Jellison, "An 'Enviably Tradition' of Patriarchy: New Deal Investigations of Women's Work in the Amish Farm Family," in Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 240-257.

<sup>13</sup>. *Farmer at War*, Records of the Office of War Information, 1926-1951, Record Group 208, National Archives II, College Park, MD; Ruth Zimmerman Hershey, interview with Katherine Jellison and Steven D. Reschly, Lititz, PA, 5 December 2010. Hershey was Zimmerman's oldest child and died only three months after recording her oral history narrative.

Within the religious conscientious objector communities, cooperation with an agency such as the OWI was normally highly suspect. The historic peace churches—Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Quakers, and Church of the Brethren—have typically had a problematic relationship with the modern nation-state. Members of these groups have not objected to being citizens, unless citizenship required military service, jury duty (which could result in violent coercive power and possible death penalty cases), or voting (which supported state violence). They were not anarchists: they paid taxes and supported government functions that did not require their direct participation in activities that violated their religious consciences. In supporting war, members of these churches might risk removal from their congregations, isolation, and shunning. For instance, in the same month that the Zimmerman family participated in the filming of *Farmer at War*, OWI photographer Marjory Collins visited a former animal trap factory in the Lancaster County community of Lititz, Pennsylvania, where workers were now making “armor-piercing bullet cores and other war essentials.” Among the workers Collins photographed was a young man named Raymond Newswanger, described in the photo’s caption as “a Mennonite, about thirty, . . . [who] hopes his church won’t find out he’s doing defense work. Most Mennonites are farmers, and Newswanger used to be.”<sup>14</sup>

The caption for Collins’s photo is instructive. By carrying a gun—or even working in a munitions plant—Newswanger violated the teachings of his church. According to the government, however, he had already been “doing defense work” long before he took a job in a

---

<sup>14</sup> Captions for photographs LC-USE6-D-004655 and LC-USW3-011777-D, FSA/OWI Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

munitions factory. To the federal government, farmers were homefront warriors who produced essential war materials and helped America achieve *Freedom from Want*. As Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard told Congress in September 1942, “Food is just as much a weapon in this war as guns.” But the caption for Collins’s portrait of Raymond Newswanger reflects the man’s own opinion—and that of his church—that farm work was not necessarily war work. It was simply the traditional way of life for Lancaster County Mennonites.<sup>15</sup>

According to his descendants, Moses Zimmerman participated in *Farmer at War* not to promote participation in the war but to promote the farmer’s mission of feeding the masses. Shortly before her death in March 2011, Zimmerman’s last surviving child, 95-year-old Ruth Zimmerman Hershey, confirmed that her father was considered a progressive farmer and was the “biggest dairy farmer” in his neighborhood, facts that help explain why the Office of War Information chose Moses Zimmerman to represent “The American Farmer” in this film. Hershey also noted, however, that her father was a prominent member of the Masonville Mennonite Church, located near his Lancaster County farm home, and that he taught Sunday school there. His congregation even placed his name “in the lot” for a possible calling to serve his church as a minister. Zimmerman was thus a Mennonite in good standing and remained so even after his participation in the film. In fact, his identity as a devout Mennonite was

---

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Women Against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941-1947* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 87.

perhaps another reason why the OWI chose Moses Zimmerman as the nation's representative farmer.<sup>16</sup>

The film depicts a typical day in the life of Moses Zimmerman that starts at 4:00 am. Zimmerman is shown dressing for work, then milking, feeding chickens, feeding hogs, and harvesting corn. The narration juxtaposes these intimate agrarian images with staggering national statistics: farmers produced a record quantity of milk the previous year, and were planning to produce two billion more pounds in 1943 since “we have to send so much powered milk overseas.” Goals were set by the Department of Agriculture for 28% more chickens to eat, 9% more eggs “and still not enough,” 10% more meat in “100 million hogs with 10 pounds more on every one of them. Corn fed, too.” In comparison to his neighbor, Harry Schaeffer, “Zimmerman was fortunate,” the narrator notes. “He still had his son with him last harvest.” Above all, Zimmerman “concentrated on fighting food” by consulting his County War Board and shifting some land to soybean production, a new crop for him, but one that would provide necessary oils and protein for America's British and Soviet allies.<sup>17</sup> The climactic line of the film follows this description of Zimmerman working with his County War Board to meet Department of Agriculture production goals: “Thus Zimmerman cooperates.” And further, “he

---

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Zimmerman Hershey interview, 5 December 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Cut off by the Japanese from Asian soybean sources, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the US itself relied heavily on American farmers to provide soy protein and oils for the manufacture of margarine, waterproof soybean glue, and a variety of other soy-based products. At the urging of the Department of Agriculture, US soybean production was 77% higher in 1942 than it had been in 1941. See “Farming in the 1940s,” Wessels Living History Farm web site, [http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/crops\\_03.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/crops_03.html), accessed 18 July 2014. On crop changes in the South, see <http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/collections/warfilm/farm-battle-lines.html>, accessed 18 July 2014.

cooperates with his neighbors, too,” accepting a telephoned request from one of them to help husk corn since Zimmerman’s son, Vernon, will “be taking care of things” at home. As the narrator puts it, “in a pinch, a neighbor will always lend a hand.”

About one-fourth of America’s food production had to be shipped overseas “to our troops and to our allies.” However, “with production way up,” the narrator reassures the viewer, “that still leaves us with almost as much as we used to have for ourselves before the war.” Rationing does not mean eating less. It only means “eating differently,” like the farmer, who eats “what there is in plenty.” The narrator lists fresh vegetables, canned fruit, and other fresh foods that cannot be shipped. “We can help the farmer and his wife raise such easy crops,” says the narrator, “in our Victory Gardens.” The Zimmerman family is shown during this narration sitting down to a hearty meal served by Amanda to Moses and nephew Ray Rutt, with the scene ending as they bow their heads in prayer before the meal.

On Sunday after church, Zimmerman and his neighbors meet “to solve their labor and machinery problems.” The meeting takes place at Stehman’s Church, a United Brethren congregation a short distance from the Zimmerman farm.<sup>18</sup> Zimmerman sits at the head table taking notes, apparently as recording secretary of the discussion and vote. Four men stake out contrasting positions, addressing them to Mr. President, and the vote

---

<sup>18</sup> The United Brethren were another denomination with mostly German-speaking membership. In 1946, the United Brethren and the Evangelical Church merged to become the Evangelical United Brethren; in 1968, the EUB denomination merged with Methodist churches to become the United Methodist Church. This congregation is now Stehman Memorial United Methodist Church.

results in a decision to use machinery cooperatively rather than in small groups, with two dissenting votes.<sup>19</sup>

The final two minutes of the film begin with a flock of turkeys, with one large bird fading to Amanda carrying a cooked turkey to the Thanksgiving table. The final 90 seconds depict a lengthy Thanksgiving prayer by Zimmerman as head of the household. His grandchildren insist that the length and language of the prayer were typical of Moses Zimmerman. In fact, the prayer does not appear in the script for the movie in OWI files. Seated at the family dinner table with his wife Amanda, nephew Ray, and his grandson Donald Hershey, Zimmerman prays for the safety and health of those engaged in “fighting for freedom.” He specifically prays for “our boys, the marines, the sailor boys, the soldiers,” a significant list since two of Amanda’s brothers were ignoring Mennonite teachings and serving in the US Navy during the war.

To Donald Hershey and the other surviving Zimmerman grandchildren, their grandfather’s participation in the film and the words of his prayer do not stand in contradiction to Zimmerman’s religious beliefs and his commitment to preserving and sustaining life. According to his survivors, Zimmerman subscribed to the philosophy that “people need food whether they’re soldiers or not.” These insights from Zimmerman’s descendants indicate that perhaps the government chose to focus on Moses Zimmerman as the *Farmer at War* not only because he was a progressive and successful small farmer but also to drive home an important argument: If even a religious non-

---

<sup>19</sup> Howard R. Tolly, head of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in the Department of Agriculture, also discussed many of these themes, such as sharing farm machinery for efficiency and to deal with shortages, in a wartime book. Howard R. Tolly, *The Farmer Citizen at War* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 22.

resister like Zimmerman could cooperate with the farm-front war effort, there was no excuse for other farm folks to be slackers.<sup>20</sup>

Faith, family, and patriotism all support the farmer at war. In one sense, the film continued a long-standing agenda of the Department of Agriculture, that the best way to increase food production and to stabilize rural communities was to promote a gendered division of labor in the farm family. The husband/father produces food and works very hard outdoors, the wife/mother keeps house and processes food, and young children are not shown working in the field. Allowances for wartime exigencies included sharing farm equipment, cooperating with neighbors in a microcosm of national democratic decision-making and task-sharing, and shifting crops to meet wartime needs on the advice of the County War Board. In this film, Amanda Zimmerman is not shown working in the field, nor are the children. Moses and Amanda live in the Grossdoddy house while son Vernon and his family live in the main house.<sup>21</sup> As plain people, they are not isolated from their neighborhood, but are fully part of planning meetings and sharing machinery and labor. Zimmerman actively consults with his Government Man and cooperates by raising soybeans. Above all, he heads a stable family characterized by productive work and humble faith.

The OWI intended its portrait of Moses Zimmerman as a device to encourage other farmers to increase production as part of the nation's necessary war work. To Zimmerman and his co-religionists, however, he was

---

<sup>20</sup> Donald Hershey, conversation with Katherine Jellison and Steven D. Reschly, Elizabethtown, PA, 7 December 2010.

<sup>21</sup> In Pennsylvania Dutch culture, the Grossdoddy House was often constructed for retired elderly family members as an addition to an existing farmhouse. In this case, it was part of the farmhouse and not a separate building.

simply fulfilling his divinely sanctioned duty to till the soil and feed the hungry. The OWI's myth of the Mennonite farmer-warrior was not Zimmerman's reality, a fact not lost on at least one film viewer. In an April 1943 memo sent to the OWI shortly after the film's completion, Naum Jasny of the federal government's Office of Economic Warfare Analysis criticized *Farmer at War*, noting that he "regretted that there was little connection with the war in it."

Mr. Farmer starts his day by milking the cows, feeding the chickens and the hogs, and collecting the eggs. This is exactly what was done before the war. The big turkey served for a small family on Thanksgiving Day also does not remind one of big war sacrifices.<sup>22</sup>

The only connection with the war, in fact, was the machinery discussion in the church and the vote to use the machinery collectively.

Jasny's analysis was perceptive. In order for Zimmerman and his family to participate in *Farmer at War*, the film had to portray the pacifist farmer simply going about the daily tasks he performed whether or not the nation was at war. Zimmerman contributed to the war effort, whether or not he realized it, by living his daily life. For the Zimmermans, a commitment to farm productivity was a constant reality. For the OWI, however, it was a reality that could be spun into a "good war" myth promoted by wartime filmmaking.

---

<sup>22</sup> Naum Jasny to Office of War Information, received 12 April 1943, *Farmer At War* Folder, Box 1549, Records of the Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

Pacifist farmers, African-American farmers, wives and mothers, and even Hollywood gangsters had a role to play in supporting the American war effort. According to the movies, Americans from all walks of life could help win the war—and often with little disruption to their peacetime routines. The nation’s cinematic military-industrial complex reassured Americans that total war did not necessitate a total upending of traditional values and practices. The American Way of Life—whether experienced in the kitchen, the field, the factory, or the back alleys of Los Angeles—would continue and prevail, even during the greatest global crisis of the twentieth century.

## Works Cited

### Films

*Farm Battle Lines*. 1942.

<http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/collections/warfilm/farm-battle-lines.html>, accessed 18 July 2014.

*Farmer at War*. 1943. Records of the Office of War Information, 1926-1951, Record Group 208, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

*Women in Defense*. 1941.

<http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/collections/warfilm/women-in-defense.html>, accessed 18 July 2014.

*Henry Browne, Farmer*. 1942.

<http://www.archive.org/details/HenryBro1942>, accessed 18 July 2014.

*It's Your War Too*. 1944.

<http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive/collections/warfilm/its-your-war-too.html>, accessed 18 July 2014.

*Red Tails*. 2012. Director Anthony Hemingway.

*This Gun for Hire*. 1942. Director Frank Tuttle.

## Articles and Books

Bennett, M. Todd. *One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Captions for photographs LC-USE6-D-004655 and LC-USW3-011777-D, FSA/OWI Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

"Farming in the 1940s." Wessels Living History Farm web site.

[http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/crops\\_03.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/crops_03.html). Accessed 18 July 2014.

Black, Gregory D., and Clayton R. Koppes. *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. New York: Free Press, 1987.

Casey, Janet Galligani. *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Carpenter, Stephanie A. *On the Farm Front: The Women's Land Army in World War II*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003.

Fletcher, Marvin. *America's First Black General, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., 1880-1970*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989.

Goossen, Rachel Waltner. *Women Against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941-1947*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Hershey, Donald. Conversation with Katherine Jellison and Steven D. Reschly, Elizabethtown, PA, 7 December 2010.

Hershey, Ruth Zimmerman. Interview with Katherine Jellison and Steven D. Reschly, Lititz, PA, 5 December 2010.

Jasny, Naum, to Office of War Information, received 12 April 1943. *Farmer at War* Folder, Box 1549, Records of the Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

Jellison, Katherine. "An 'Enviably Tradition' of Patriarchy: New Deal Investigations of Women's Work in the Amish Farm Family." In Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 240-257.

---. "Chosen Women: The Amish and the New Deal." In Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble,

and Steven D. Reschly, eds., *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 102-118.

---. "Research Note: Amish Women and the Household Economy During the Great Depression." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 88 (January 2014): 97-105; as corrected online at <https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/Jan14Jellison.pdf>.

McLaughlin, Robert L., and Sally E. Parry. *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

Reschly, Steven D., and Katherine Jellison. "Production Patterns, Consumption Strategies, and Gender Relations in Amish and Non-Amish Farm Households in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1935-1936." *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 134-162.

---. "Research Note: Shifting Images of Lancaster County Amish in the 1930s and 1940s." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 82 (July 2008): 469-483.

Rollins, Peter C. "Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American Dream." *Journal of American Culture* 19 (Winter 1996): 81-86.

Tolly, Howard R. *The Farmer Citizen at War*. New York: Macmillan, 1943.

Weaver-Zercher, David. *The Amish in the American Imagination*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Weinberg, David. "Approaches to the Study of Film in the Third Reich: A Critical Appraisal." *Journal of Contemporary History* 19 (1984): 105–126.

# **The Power Is Yours: The Deep Ecology of *Captain Planet***

By Robert L. Lively, Arizona State University

## **Introduction**

Using children's programming to teach environmentalism is nothing new. Over the years, both television and movies have targeted children in an attempt to raise environmental awareness and promote environmental concepts such as preservation and conservation. Although most of these programs and films were either one shots, or short lived television series, *Captain Planet*, broadcast on Turner Television from 1990-1996, was the second longest-running children's television show of the 90s which explored a variety of environmental themes over the course of its run. With a multiracial team of children protecting the planet with their power rings, *Captain Planet* was one of the most successful children's programs of the 90s, as well. In this essay, I argue that the television show *Captain Planet*, with its roots in Deep Ecology, offered children a more radical view of environmentalism than other successful environmental children's programming and routinely suggests a more radical response to environmental issues. Using Deep Ecology as a lens offers a new way of examining the messaging of this extremely popular environmental cartoon.

## **A Brief Overview of Environmental Children's Programs**

One of the earliest and most successful of these early works is Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*. Originally a children's book, in 1972, *The Lorax* appeared on CBS as a 30 minute cartoon exploring and critiquing the affect that rampant consumerism has on our environment. While promoting a message of preservation, conservation, and ultimately re-vegetation, this children's program was extremely controversial.

*The Lorax* has been heralded by the National Education Association as one of the top books and TV shows for children, and by the School Library Journal as one of the best picture books of all time. However, *The Lorax* has also been banned for offering a pro-environmental perspective. In the Pacific Northwest, several logging district have banned the book from schools because of the anti-timber message of cutting down the Truffula trees. Moreover, in 2011 for the fortieth anniversary of *The Lorax*, the critique offered by Emma Marris in the journal *Nature* described *The Lorax* rather harshly: he is the “parody of a misanthropic ecologist” (149). Furthermore, she claims the book “became a kind of *Silent Spring* for the playground set” (148). But regardless of the controversy, the message was out there, and it has been changing the consciousness of environmentalism in children ever since.

*Ark II* is another such show, albeit with far less influence. This live action, Saturday-morning program was aimed at children and showed the effects of an environmental apocalypse. The show's opening voice over states,

For millions of years, Earth was fertile and rich. Then pollution and waste began to take their toll. Civilization fell into ruin. This is the world of the 25th century. Only a handful of scientists remain, men who have vowed to rebuild what has been destroyed. This is their achievement: Ark II, a mobile storehouse of scientific knowledge, manned by a highly trained crew of young people. Their mission: to bring the hope of a new future to mankind. (*Ark II*)

Each week the crew of Ark II would take on challenging social issues in the aftermath of the environmental apocalypse, usually reinforcing a strong environmental message of conservation or preservation. The series showed a racially diverse cast, and showed how people could get along to promote science and environmental well-being. However, the series was rather short lived. The show ran from 1976-79, and only fifteen episodes were made, so the impact was rather limited.

*Ferngully: The Last Rainforest* was a joint Australian-American movie endeavor released in 1992. Set in an Australian rainforest, a group of fairies battle loggers and polluters, driven by an evil pollution creature known as Hexxus. The fairies, along with a logger named Zak, defeat Hexxus and save part of the forest. At the end, Zak has been converted to a pro-environmental disposition, and he buries a seed to symbolize forest reclamation and explains to his logging superiors that things “gotta change.” The film was even viewed by the United Nations General Assembly on Earth Day (April 20th) 1992. The producers and directors even pledged four percent of box office receipts to address rainforest preservation. While this movie was generally reviewed favorably when it was

released, the environmental message was often critiqued as preachy and didactic. This film is important, however, because critics of James Cameron's 2009 film *Avatar* often argue that his movie is a direct translation of *Ferngully* to a more action oriented, adult viewership, film. Whatever the case, *Ferngully: The Last Rainforest* challenged children to think about deforestation by personifying the denizens of the forest.

In 2008, Pixar joined the group of animated films addressing environmental disaster. *Wall-E* was hailed with critical acclaim. It won the Golden Globe award that year for Best Animated Feature Film; it won both Hugo and Nebula awards for film and screenplay, and the Academy Award for Best Animated Film. Additionally, *Wall-E* was named *TIME* magazine's best movie of the decade. And for all of this critical acclaim and awards, *Wall-E* is driven by a strong environmental message.

The plot of *Wall-E* is simple. Humans polluted and destroyed the environment so much from lack of regulations and consumerism, they were forced to flee the planet until the planet has time to restore itself. Enter Wall-E. He is a small robot tasked with cleaning up a large metropolitan area of all the trash--until one day he finds a sapling. This starts a chain of events which still condemns consumer capitalism which treats both robots and people as commodities. The environmental message is direct and heightened by its use of minimal dialogue and sweeping vistas of a ruined planet. The tone of the film is hopeful with humans and robots ultimately joining forces to regain a presence on a revitalized Earth.

## **An Examination of Deep Ecological Principles**

In 1973, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess introduced the term Deep Ecology into the environmental movement. Naess's new view offered a new way to critique the environmental degradation by corporations and government industry. For Naess, the main cause of the environmental crisis was anthropocentrism. Basically, the idea that nature is there for man to use. Naess surveyed his own experiences in Norway, as well as environmental literature by Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Rachel Carson and came to the conclusion that mankind's myopic view was the reason for environmental crisis. He settled upon the Gaia Hypothesis which argued that an ecocentric or biocentric view, where humans and nature have equal value and interact as a complex, regulatory system to help maintain life on Earth, could help rethink the way societies all around the world view the natural environment. To encapsulate his early ecosophy, Naess developed the ideas of Deep Ecology and Shallow Philosophy in his seminal 1973 essay, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement." In the essay, Naess differentiates the ideas of Shallow Ecology as a consumer-oriented, anthropocentric view of the ecosystems of Earth, while Deep Ecology de-centers humans, developing a ecocentric, living system for looking at ecology.

The main tenets of Deep Ecology expressed by Devall and Sessions articulate the systematic philosophy of Naess:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are

independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes. (70)

Naess's ecosophy stresses several important factors: most importantly, nature is a spiritual place; mankind is causing extreme environmental degradation; human population must be controlled; and consumer capitalist mentality must be changed or stopped to protect the environment. Therefore, Devall and Sessions posit, "Deep Ecology is emerging as a way of developing a new balance and harmony between individuals, communities, and all of nature" (7). Naess himself often spoke of peaceful means of enacting Deep Ecology. Naess believed that separation from, not engagement in, society would bring about meaningful change.

However, tenet eight suggests that those who use more radical means have the moral high ground to engage in more radical forms of environmental activism, from protests, to civil disobedience, to full blown monkey wrenching. Unlike the reform minded Sierra Club (established by the pioneering environmentalist John Muir in 1892) environmental activist groups, such as The Greenpeace Foundation (established in 1971), have spun off of earlier environmental factions as they became disillusioned with what they perceived as ineffectiveness. Greenpeace "Emphasized 'bearing-witness' against the wrongs of social practice, arguing and standing for the elimination of social acts deemed immoral or unjust" (Killingsworth and Palmer 194). Greenpeace's mission calls for non-violent protests against environmental destruction. However, The Sierra Club's and Greenpeace's tactics for environmentalism soured with some who fled the group to form Earth First!, a more radical organization informed by Naess's tenet of directly acting to stop environmental degradation. Earth First!'s philosophy statement makes a more action-oriented organization:

Earth First! formed in 1979, in response to an increasingly corporate, compromising and ineffective environmental community. It is not an organization, but a movement. There are no “members” of EF!, only Earth First!ers. We believe in using all of the tools in the toolbox, from grassroots and legal organizing to civil disobedience and monkeywrenching. When the law won’t fix the problem, we put our bodies on the line to stop the destruction. Earth First!’s direct-action approach draws attention to the crises facing the natural world, and it saves lives.

Guided by a philosophy of deep ecology, Earth First! does not accept a human-centered worldview of “nature for people’s sake.” Instead, we believe that life exists for its own sake, that industrial civilization and its philosophy are anti-Earth, anti-woman and anti-liberty. Our structure is non-hierarchical, and we reject highly paid “professional staff” and formal leadership.

To put it simply, the Earth must come first.

This philosophy is informed by a much more radicalized agenda. The Earth First! website regularly posts pictures of attacks on construction sites and other industrial sites which are causing environmental damage around the world. The group makes a point, however, not to injure people in their protests. But even this movement was not radical or successful enough for some. In 1992, The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) was formed to carry out world-wide forms of violent protest against capitalism and environmental degradation. Self-proclaimed as anarchists on their website, ELF points to the Edward Abbey novel,

*The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), as the inspiration for their movement.

Tracing the non-violent ideas of Naess's Deep Ecology through the various iterations shows a clear trend in radicalization of the environmental movement. The ones who were too radical for the Sierra Club left for Greenpeace. Those who were too radical for Greenpeace started Earth First!, and those who were too radical for Earth First! left to found ELF. Methodically, the environmental movement radicalized through the belief that the previous group was less effective than the new group.

Which leads to the cartoon, *Captain Planet*, an environmentally conscious children's television program which ran for 113 episodes in the mid 1990s. Captain Planet originated during this radicalization of the environmental movement, and the messages delivered are explicitly radical in their scope. Each week a different environmental issue was explored in a thirty minute Saturday morning cartoon. The show was extremely popular, and the characters represented children of different ethnicities, so there was widespread appeal across many diverse viewing demographics. The TV show eventually launched a children's environmental non-profit which still exists today.

How does the show markets and explains environmentalism to children? What type of environmentalism does the show teach? The non-profit website uses the terms preservation, conservation, and sustainability interchangeably, yet major differences separate these ideas. Moreover, the episodes often show the Planeteer children fighting against corporate greed

with their magic rings and destroying company machinery to protect the environment with the blessings of the Earth Spirit, Gaia, clearly a radicalized form of environmentalism based on Deep Ecological roots-- a form of radical environmentalism which evolved during the 1990s. *Captain Planet and the Planetees* seemed to have adopted the more radical environmental agenda in the foundation of the program.

Since the show ran for six seasons and ending the run with well over one hundred episodes, it is impossible for me to trace the entire series in the essay, but I have used several episodes which represent fairly typical examples of the Deep Ecological philosophy shown in the series. While the term "Deep Ecology" never appears in the series, the underlying philosophy is clearly influenced by Naess's view of the environment and the more radical elements of the American Environmental Movement which has appropriated Naess's philosophy.

### **Gaia, the Spirit of Nature, Come Alive**

When Ted Turner suggested in 1989, "We need a super hero for the Earth. Let's call him Captain Planet" (Captain Planet Foundation), little did he know he would be launching "the world's first ever edutainment eco-toon" (Ibid). Turner's multimedia empire began production on the cartoon which would have a world-wide focus to save the planet and raise consciousness of the young viewers on environmental issues. The creators of the show used the Romantically-inspired idea of personifying nature as Gaia, the spirit of the Earth to serve as a benefactor and mentor to Earth's protectors.

Viewers first see Gaia in the episode “A Hero for the Earth”(1x1). The episode begins with a voiceover exclaiming, “Our world is in peril. Gaia, the spirit of the Earth, can no longer stand the terrible destruction plaguing our planet. She sends five magic rings to five special young people.” The visuals for the episode show an underground chamber with a woman sleeping soundly. Above, the evil Hoggish Greedly is using a giant machine to drill down into the ocean floor looking for oil. Besides creating an oil spill along the coastline, he drills into the sleeping chamber and the dripping water awakens the Earth Spirit. Gaia grants five children of differing ethnicities and nationalities power rings-- corresponding to earth, air, fire, water, and heart. Gaia gathers the young people and tells them that if their powers aren't strong enough to save the planet, then they can combine their powers to summon Captain Planet, an avatar of the Earth.

Once the children, called Planeteers, arrive to combat the oil drilling machine, they use their powers to destroy sections of the machine, but it is too big and powerful for them to beat using individual powers, so they summon Captain Planet who arrives and battles the rig and Hoggish Greedly, destroying the machine and sending Greedly scurrying away. In the aftermath of a massive explosion of the rig, Captain Planet tells the Planeteers his work is done, but theirs is just beginning. He has started these children on a radical environmental crusade.

Throughout the show's run, they explored many environmentally important topics ranging from clean air and water, to deforestation, to pollution. However, the way they approach this environmentalism is a bit troublesome. In many episodes, they do not sit down and seek conservation regulations or work in the parameters of

diplomacy to achieve their ends. More often, these young people use their power rings to blow up stuff-- and if they cannot defeat the environmental polluters, they summon Captain Planet to blow up stuff. The conflict resolution strategies shown in the series are interesting because the demographic of children, which the show is clearly targeting, are learning violence as a way to stop environmental destruction. A message embraced by the more radical elements of the environmental movement.

By developing Gaia as patron of the Planetees, she is the physical manifestation of the spiritual aspect of nature that Naess writes about in his Deep Ecological principles. Moreover, the acts of destruction against environmental damage are shown to be appropriate and condoned-- methods clearly in line with environmental groups such as Earth First! and ELF. The Planetees never see consequences for their acts of property destruction or flaunting the law. Gaia has given them permission to act outside the law, to act against the anthropocentric view of the world. The Planetees are sponsored by the Earth spirit, and she has a higher moral law which supersedes those of man. A moral law which condones destruction of polluters and greedy developers. While Naess would clearly disagree with the violent action against these groups, he would agree with the sentiment. And groups like Earth First! and ELF would clearly associate with the methods and practices of Captain Planet and the Planetees-- stopping these polluters at any cost by any means necessary.

### **Environmental Apocalyptic Narrative**

Environmental apocalyptic scenarios in environmentalism are nothing new. Over the Years,

several films have picked up on this type of narrative as a driving force: *Silent Running*, starring Bruce Dern (1972); *The Day After Tomorrow* starring Dennis Quaid (2004); and Chris Nolan's environmental apocalypse as the driving force behind *Interstellar* (2014). However, all of these movies owe a slight nod to Rachel Carson who mapped out a believable disaster years before Hollywood could envision it. In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson lays out a vision where ecosystems are negligently destroyed through the overuse of toxins and pesticides. Her use of rhetorical flourishes in the essay work well to move the audience to action. According to Killingsworth and Palmer, "The agonistic rhetoric of the expose, of which *Silent Spring* is a fine example, must ever rest on the assignment of praise and blame in an effort to influence decisions about public ends and means...thus mobilizing citizens for a quick decision one way or the other, as is required in moments of crisis" (76). Carson's use of this rhetoric forces the readers to challenge the way they have always done things and ask which ways they can make a difference.

*Captain Planet* often uses environmental apocalyptic narrative as a means of affecting the children viewing the show, in effect making them ask the difficult questions about how they can affect change. *Captain Planet* writers are playing the long game here. They are attempting to affect the way these children see the world. To make them consider the Earth in their decisions from childhood. How can they prevent catastrophe? By following the tenets of Deep Ecology, question over consumption, see nature as needing balance, and look at a fundamental ideological change in the way we view the environment.

For instance, in the Captain planet two-part episode “Two Futures” (1x23, 1x24), Wheeler questions whether he should be a hero for the planet, a Planeteer. Gaia sends him into the future where he can see the environmental collapse because of his refusal to become a Planeteer. Wheeler even argues that only one person cannot make a difference, yet in a Capra-esque way, Gaia shows him that one person can make a difference. The episode itself is bleak in images--over-pollution, sea-level rise, massive storms, deforestation, poverty, and disease. He visits his other Planeteers in the future, and they have become resigned to the fate of the Earth. Wheeler eventually realizes that he was wrong and returns to join the Planeteers.

In episode 4x8, “Future Shock,” environmental enemies come back from the future to stop environmentally friendly technology entering the marketplace and ruining their profit. They attempt to stop (read: “kill”) a young woman who will eventually save Earth from environmental catastrophe with her invented technology. The villains have futuristic helicopters for traversing a blighted landscape, but the Planeteers get even with them by summoning Captain Planet who destroys the helicopters and saves the woman who can then save our future.

And in episode 4x19, “Planeteers under Glass,” a scientist helps create a simulation for an eco-experiment very similar to the classic Biosphere experiment. The seemed utopia quickly changes as the scientist shows them the dangerous effects of pollution, but the sinister Dr. Blight hacks the program and traps the Planeteers in an apocalyptic environmental experiment. By the end of the episode, Captain Planet has rescued the Planeteers and vanquished Dr. Blight.

These apocalyptic narratives fulfill a very direct view held by radical environmentalists. First, everyone must act. Those who don't help with the environment are an enemy. Everyone must fight for the environment. Further, since defending the planet is a moral imperative, then not taking action can be seen as a crime. And Finally, the villains responsible for creating these disasters on these episodes are thoroughly wicked and irredeemable. To destroy them is not a crime because there is no hope of redemption. These are telling lessons to show children about differing environmental views. Violence against someone who disagrees with you on the environment is not only moral, it is expected.

The writers of the show were attempting, as Weisser further elaborates, to build a “green” sense of identity. Weisser points out that “our current conceptions of identity are *pre-ecological* (emphasis in original); we have not yet recognized that the whole spectrum of the nonhuman physical environment is embedded in each of our identities” (81). In watching *Captain Planet*, the words and images are creating a palate which will green the identities of the children watching the episodes-- to make them consider the nonhuman and the anthropomorphized elements in their conception of the environment. Thus, when the environment is being damaged, they might consider their identities under attack as well. I believe this was the intent of Turner's in the conception of the show.

In the Afterword of *Ecosee*, Killingsworth and Palmer sum up the totality of the collection. In the concluding remarks, “Morey notes, the institutions that 'control what the images “say,” the pictorial manipulators that give picture-speech acts their illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects are hegemonic structures that

determine what gets shown” (300-01). Ted Turner developed the Captain Planet show as a “Hero for the Earth” as an outgrowth of his own view of environmentalism which he wanted to impart to younger viewers. The message of the show is clearly radical and explicit.

### **Overpopulation Bomb**

Overpopulation has been a topic explored in many Science Fiction (SF) stories and films. Charlton Heston wading through an endless sea of humanity in *Soylent Green*, John Brunner's classic novel, *Stand on Zanzibar*, and even J.G. Ballard's famous short story “Billenium” speculate on the rising human population on Earth. Popular culture of the 1970s picked up on this as the population was beginning to grow at an alarming rate. Paul Erlich's book, *The Population Bomb* (1971), became a rallying cry for controls on population growth. Critics panned the work because he sought controls on growth. Capitalism's very core relies on unstoppable growth, so business and government highly criticized his findings.

However, the idea of overpopulation challenged the status quo thinking, and so in 1972, John Calhoun developed the now famous “mouse utopia experiment.” He placed eight mice, four male and four female, into a “rodent utopia” with multiple levels, plenty of space, and abundant food in water. At the end of two years, there were 2,200 mice living in the utopia. By year three, they were all dead. The mouse colony had collapsed, and the utopia was at an end.

Calhoun witnessed that as the colony's population rose, the mice lost interest in protecting the population. Mother mice let their babies die. Mouse killed mouse. The few alpha male mice holed up in sections of the habitat which were easily defensible, but even they lost interest in living. The protected mice, called "the beautiful ones" by Calhoun, eventually lost interest in reproducing even though they had security and ample food supplies. In effect, when nature became out of balance in the utopia, the society collapsed.

Deep Ecology stresses a nature in balance. Humans and nonhumans having equal parts to play in the environment. As tenet 4 points out, "The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease." But as populations have swelled, over seven billion at this point and estimates put the world at over nine billion by the year 2100. So this begs the question, is our world an equivalent of the mouse utopia? Some radical environmental groups think so. The group The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement asks humans not to reproduce. They advocate zero population growth to wipe out humanity naturally, so the Earth can return to a natural state before humans began their environmental degradation. Their motto, reminiscent of Star Trek, is "Live Long And Die Out." Their basic philosophy is that everyone can live a long and fulfilling life, but do not reproduce. They are attempting to stop the precipitous collapse of the mouse experiment by choosing not to breed.

Captain Planet episode "Population Bomb" (1x21) recounts this experiment on a secluded island, called Miceland. Wheeler, who wears the fire ring, ends up

washing ashore during a storm. He is mistaken as a possible food source for the mice (who look much more like rats) living there. When it is discovered he could talk, Piebald, the food processing technician, spares him, and then he tells Wheeler about how the island became overpopulated. The description is eerily similar to the mouse utopia experiment--overcrowding, a few with prestige isolated and given preferential treatment, a tyrant mouse by the name of Klaw. Basically, a tropical island paradise turned into a dystopian nightmare.

We learn that Piebald used to be a scientist warning of overpopulation-- a Paul Erlich type of character. As punishment for his prediction, he was sent to the food processing. As the episode unfolds, major riots start across the island from disaffected mice. To quell the riots, Klaw fires a prototype cannon on the population. It starts an earthquake which sinks the island killing everyone except Wheeler who has been saved by Captain Planet. Captain Planet destroys the Miceland military hardware as he flies to rescue Wheeler. While the island sinks, Piebald tells Wheeler not to let overpopulation destroy the rest of the world. At that moment, Wheeler wakes up with the Planeteers surrounding him. He was knocked on the head during the storm and dreamed the Miceland incident. But he is convinced of the dangers of overpopulation.

This episode shows the dangers of overpopulation on our ecosphere. In the ending summation of the episode, the Planeteers make the point that the population is growing exponentially, but the earth is the same size. We need to limit our population growth or become like Miceland.

## Conclusion

*Captain Planet* was an immensely popular environmentally conscious cartoon. It may be easy to dismiss children's programming as not important, but the identities children develop from watching these shows can have a deep and lasting impact on them. An examination of these cartoons shows that the influence of the Deep Ecology and the radical environmental movement based on Naess's philosophy created a show that elevated a pro-environmental message coupled with violent action as a moral imperative. These lessons seem more in line with the radicalization of the environmental movement near the time of the show's creation, and a far cry from Naess's vision of a peaceful, spiritual view of ecology. By aligning the cartoon's ethos to that of the more radicalized environmental movement, like Earth First! and ELF, the series writers could potentially have affected millions of children to a greener identity, albeit a more revolutionary one. As *Captain Planet* often declared, "The Power Is Yours." Let's hope the viewers of the series find the wisdom to act responsibly.

## Works Cited

*Ark II*. Dir. Martin Roth. Perf. Terry Lester, Jean Marie Hon, Jose Flores. CBS programming. 1976. 14 Apr. 2015. Youtube.

*Captain Planet Foundation*. Captain Planet Foundation, Inc. 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2015.

Devall, Bill, and George Sessions. *Deep Ecology*. Salt Lake: Peregrine Books, 1985. Print.

Document 129: Arne Naess on Deep Ecology (1982, 1984). *The Environmental Debate: A Documentary History*. Eds. Peninah Neimark and Peter Rhoades Mott. Amenia: Grey House Publishing, 2011. *Credo Reference*. Web. 29 Mar 2015.

*Earth First! Media from the Frontlines of Ecological Resistance*. Earth First! 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2015.

*Earth Liberation Front*. n.p. n.d. Web. 16 Apr. 2015.

"Future Shock." *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. WTBS. 14 Apr. 2015. YouTube.

Glasser, Harold. "Naess's Deep Ecology Approach and Environmental Policy." *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*. 39.2 (1996): 157-187. Web. 25 March 2015.

*Greenpeace*. Greenpeace, USA. 2014. Web. 17 Apr. 2015.

"A Hero for Earth." *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. WTBS. 14 Apr. 2015. YouTube.

Guisel, Theodore (Dr. Suess). *The Lorax*. New York: Random House, 1971. Print.

Killingsworth, M. Jimmie, and Jacqueline S. Palmer. Afterword. *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature*. Eds. Sidney I. Dobrin and Sean Morey. Albany: State U of New York P, 2009. 299-309. Print.

- . *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1992. Print.
- Lauer, D. W. "Arne Naess on Deep Ecology and Ethics." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36.1 (2002): 111-15. *ABI/INFORM Complete*. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.
- Lebduska, Lisa. "Rethinking Human Need: Seuss's The Lorax." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 19.4 (1994): 170-176. *Project MUSE*. Web. 18 April 2015.
- Marris, Emma. "In Retrospect: The Lorax." *Nature* 476 (August 2011): 148-49. Web. 19 April 2015.
- "Mission to Save Earth" (Parts I&II). *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. WTBS.14 Apr. 2015. YouTube.
- "Planeteers Under Glass." *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. WTBS.14 Apr. 2015. YouTube.
- "Population Bomb." *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. WTBS.14 Apr. 2015. YouTube.
- Sierra Club*. Sierra Club. 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2015.
- "Two Futures" (Parts I&II). *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*. WTBS.14 Apr. 2015. YouTube.
- The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement*. vhemt.org. Creative Commons. Web. n.d. 16 Apr. 2015.
- Weisser, Christian R., and Sidney Dobrin, eds. *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2001. Print.

**“The Wrong Side of Heaven, the Righteous Side of Hell”: Religion, Faith, and Belief in Ted Chiang's *Stories of Your Life and Others***

By Tammy Wahpeconiah, Appalachian State University

How is God in the world? Is He, according to Christian theology, both transcendent and immanent? In other words, is He distant and separate from the world and humanity while at the same time working within both? Or, did He create the universe and then remove Himself from it? Are we able to comprehend certain aspects of God through our understanding of the order and beauty of the universe? Or, do humans seek a God who is no longer interested? Many science fiction writers have asked and responded to such questions including Ted Chiang in his collection, *Stories of Your Life and Others*. Several of his stories deal directly with these questions and we can read them as a critique of faith, religion, belief, and the nature of God. Chiang questions whether God has a role in our lives, what that role may look like, and the ability of religion to provide meaning. Furthermore, these stories are apocalyptic in nature, especially if we think of apocalypse as *revelation*, the Greek definition.

Frederick Krueziger further defines apocalypse as “an unfolding; hence a revelation through unfolding” (5). Such unfolding always takes place within a story; thus, we must consider the inherent connection between apocalypse and

story. As Krueziger says, “Apocalypse as story first of all reveals story as that which shapes our search for meaning” (5). The revelation, the unfolding, therefore *is* the story itself as well as *what* the story means. We can read Chiang’s stories as apocalyptic because they reveal our disillusionment with our world and our inability to find meaning in religion alone. For Krueziger, science fiction as apocalypse illustrates our disillusionment with “the failure of the promise of technology and science to deliver the world from poverty, ignorance, disease, war, famine, plague, and death. . . .”(6). Although I agree that many science fiction works address these particular disillusionments, Chiang’s stories, I would argue, have a certain similarity to the apocalyptic writings of John. People disappointed at the failure of the Second Coming to occur during their lifetime lost faith in the promise of God. John’s writings deal with crises of both history and faith. Thus, Chiang’s stories are similar to John’s writings in that they deal with the disillusionment and failure of faith and religion.

Before discussing the stories, it may behoove us to consider the definitions of *faith*, *religion*, and *belief*. Although we may feel we know what these words mean, and may even think they are synonymous, the distinctions among them are of importance to this essay. As John Bishop states, “. . . at its most general, ‘faith’ means the same as ‘trust’.” Greg Popcak defines faith more narrowly, asserting that faith “is merely the innate drive to search for meaning, purpose and significance.” Religion, at its most basic, can be defined as a specific form of human activity as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement. However, this form of human activity is often cultural because it is a system of behaviors and praxes uniting a community. Belief, according to Eric Schwitzgebel, refers

“to the attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true.” Interestingly, many define *faith* as belief without proof. Although many use these three terms interchangeably, Chiang employs them in specific ways in his stories.

In the “Tower of Babylon,” Chiang uses the biblical story of the tower of Babel as his premise. His focus is not on God’s creation of various languages as punishment for defying Him, but on humanity’s desire “to see what lay beyond [the earth’s] borders, all the rest of Yahweh’s creation” (5-6). This story juxtaposes science with faith and religion as the Babylonians are building the tower so they can break into the vault of heaven. They desire knowledge about their world, but also desire knowledge about God, believing that the tower will enable them “to ascend to see the works of Yahweh” while allowing Yahweh to “descend to see the works of man” (6). In this story, Ted Chiang combines the above definitions of religion as a “search for meaning, purpose and significance” as well as the desire for material and spiritual improvement (Popcak).

In addition to religion as a thematic focus, Chiang also incorporates geocentrism: a specific, albeit outdated, “scientific worldview” (Smith). As Alexander Robishaw explains:

The envisaged structure is simple: Earth was seen as being situated in the middle of a great volume of water, with water both above and below Earth. A great dome was thought to be set above Earth (like an inverted glass bowl), maintaining the water above Earth in its place. Earth was pictured as resting on foundations that go down into the deep. These foundations secured the

stability of the land as something that is not floating on the water and so could not be tossed about by wind and wave. The waters surrounding Earth were thought to have been gathered together in their place. The stars, sun, moon, and planets moved in their allotted paths across the great dome above Earth, with their movements defining the months, seasons, and year. (60)

Chiang brilliantly describes the geocentric worldview through the protagonist of the story, Hillalum, who is an Elamite miner contracted to dig into the vault of heaven. He, along with other Elamite miners, spends four months climbing to the top of the tower. Along the way, he discovers how his world and his universe functions. He comes to know that night is “the shadow of the earth itself, cast against the sky” (“Tower” 11). He and the others reach a point on the tower where they see “storms from above and from below” and where people “[harvest] crops from the air” (14). After climbing a number of weeks, the miners find themselves “at precisely the same level as the moon when it passed; they had reached the height of the first of the celestial bodies” (14). When they reach the level of the sun, the intense heat forces them to travel at night. Passing this level, Hillalum finds that the sun shines “*upward*, which [seems] unnatural to the utmost” (15, emphasis in original). When they are level with the stars, the miners discover that a star has hit the tower, leaving “a knotted mass of black heaven-metal, as large as a man could wrap his arms around” (16). Finally, they reach the vault of heaven itself, “a solid carapace enclosing all the sky (16) that “[seems] to be made of fine-grained white granite, unmarred and utterly featureless” (18-19). Hillalum’s travels to the top of the tower allows him to discover both the meaning and significance of the physical

world, not through religion or faith, but through his own observation.

Since, in the geocentric view, the Earth is “situated in the middle of a great volume of water,” the Babylonians and the Elamite miners fear that breaking into the vault of heaven will release another Great Flood (Robishaw 60). They believe Yahweh caused the Great Flood, or the “Deluge,” by releasing “the waters of the Abyss . . . from the springs of the earth, and . . . [from] the sluice gates in the vault” (19). Concerned that they may hit one of these reservoirs, the Babylonians enlist Egyptian masons who design a system using large blocks of granite that will “slide down until [they] rest in the recess of the floor” and will completely block any opening (22). Using this design, they are able to safeguard the world from another flood when their worst fear is realized and the miners accidentally dig into a reservoir. Hillalum and two others are trapped within the vault, but only Hillalum survives. The rising water forces him upward and the current of water carries him until “the walls [open] out away from him” (25). He awakens in a tunnel, but is able to see light ahead. He comes out of what he discovers is a cave and finds himself in the land of Shinnar, which is south of Babylon. Hillalum’s return to earth from the vault of heaven forces him to realize that the world is shaped like a seal cylinder, “wrapped around in some fantastic way so that heaven and earth [touch]” (28). Thus, Hillalum’s journey is in itself apocalyptic—as his story unfolds, the world reveals itself through his experience.

The scientific worldview Chiang incorporates is fascinating; yet, what is even more fascinating is the way the inhabitants view God and their attempts to connect with Him. The people fear God’s displeasure and Hillalum

feels uneasy at the thought of breaking open the vault of heaven (4). Standing at the base of the tower even Hillalum's senses rebel, "insisting that nothing should stand so high" (6). He and the others continually wait for a sign from God "to let men know that their venture was approved," yet God is silent (14). When the star mentioned above first hit the tower, "everyone descended . . . , waiting for retribution from Yahweh for disturbing the workings of Creation. They waited for months, but no sign came" (16). God never acknowledges their efforts, either blessing or damning them for their attempts. Their overwhelming desire for knowledge of God's workings cause them to give "thanks that they [are] permitted to see so much" while at the same time they "beg forgiveness for their desire to see more" (18). Their reactions show lack of surety regarding their purpose as Yahweh fails to respond.

The inhabitants debate how God may perceive their attempts to reach Him. Qurdusa, one of the tower's bricklayers argues that "if the tower were sacrilege, Yahweh would have destroyed it earlier" causing one of the Elamites to counter: "If Yahweh looked upon this venture with such favor there would already be a stairway ready-made for us to use in the vault" (19). Hillalum, however, takes a more Deistic viewpoint, saying, "Yahweh may not punish us, but Yahweh may allow us to bring our judgment upon ourselves" (19). The God in this story creates the world but does not actively intervene. When Hillalum and the others hit a reservoir, he believes "his fate had come at last. Yahweh had not asked men to build the tower or to pierce the vault; the decision to build it belonged to men alone, and they would die in this endeavor just as they did in any of their earthbound tasks. Their righteousness could not save them from the consequences of their actions" (24). In this world, the

focus is on the choices one makes and the consequences one must pay for those choices. Yes, God exists, but He does not intervene in human lives, nor does He care if they are virtuous or sinful, or if they worship or ignore Him.

Hillalum's realization of how the world is structured leads him to an understanding of why God never responds to humanity's attempts to reach him:

It was clear now why Yahweh had not struck down the tower, had not punished men for wishing to reach beyond the bounds set for them: for the longest journey would merely return them to the place whence they'd come. Centuries of their labor would not reveal to them any more of Creation than they already knew. Yet through their endeavor, men would glimpse the unimaginable artistry of Yahweh's work, in seeing how ingeniously the world had been constructed. By this construction, Yahweh's work was indicated, and Yahweh's work was concealed.

Thus men would know their place. (28).

Hillalum comes to understand that faith does not provide meaning or significance to his life. He glimpses "the unimaginable artistry" of the world through human endeavor, not through worship or religious ritual. As Alan Gregory states, while all "apocalyptic texts reveal human life in its precarious contingency," apocalyptic "science fiction finds the contingency of life before immanent powers" (161). The inhabitants of this world find "a sense of wonder at the complexity of creation" that comes from their own exploration of the world (Smith). Yahweh does not open their minds or increase their understanding of

their world and their place in it, only an individual's desire for knowledge does so. Chiang's story is apocalyptic in that it is the story itself that reveals our search for meaning. We do not need religion to achieve spiritual or material improvement; what we need is our continuing desire to discover and understand the physical world.

The "Tower of Babylon" is a story illustrating the existence of God through the reasoning and observation of its characters, but not by supernatural manifestations. Such is not the case in "Hell Is the Absence of God." In the world of the story, the idea of faith as belief without proof is not an issue. Angels make frequent appearances and inhabitants witness the dead ascending into Heaven or descending into Hell. Hell itself becomes visible on occasion, allowing the living to see a place very similar to their world as going to Hell means "permanent exile from God, no more and no less" ("Hell" 208). Angelic manifestations can lead to miracles but can also lead to indiscriminate death and birth defects because of the destructive power of their visitations. Furthermore, anyone caught in "Heaven's light," which appears "only when an angel [enters] or [leaves] the mortal plain," go to Heaven, even if they are wicked or evil (226).

The protagonist of the story, Neil Fisk, believes in God (as do all in this world since there is no question of God's existence), but he does not love God. Neil views "God's actions in the abstract," believing that "circumstances were fully capable of unfolding, happily or not, without intervention from above" (206). Because Neil is devoid of either positive or negative feelings about God, he fully expects to go to Hell since, "for people like him, Hell was where you went when you died" (209). Permanent exile from God holds no fear for Neil as it means "living without

interference” (209). His wife, Sarah, however, is devout, a fact that surprises Neil since “there weren’t many signs of her devotion” such as church attendance. Yet, he sees in her “the best argument for loving God that he had ever encountered. If love of God had contributed to making her the person she was, then perhaps it did make sense” (218). The years spent together even improved Neil’s view of God and given time, Neil “probably would have reached the point where he was thankful to God” (218). However, he is not given that time.

Unfortunately, Sarah is one of eight casualties during a visitation from the angel Nathanael; she is “hit by flying glass when the angel’s billowing curtain of flame [shatters] the storefront window of the café in which she was eating” (206). Witnesses see her ascension to Heaven, and while Neil “could have seen Sarah’s death as a wake up-call,” he instead becomes “actively resentful of God” (218). He wants to be reunited with Sarah, and the only way to achieve this reunion is for Neil to learn to love God. However, he finds himself in a paradox: “Sarah had been the greatest blessing of his life, and God had taken her away. Now he was expected to love Him for it? For Neil, it was like having a kidnapper demand love as a ransom for his wife’s return. Obedience he might have managed, but sincere, heartfelt love? That was a ransom he couldn’t pay” (218-19). He joins a support group of those who witnessed the visitation but is bothered by the suggestion that he should “[accept] his role as one of God’s subjects” (208). Unlike those who have discovered a “newfound devotion to God”, Neil is unable to accept his loss and make peace with God (208).

Unable to find a way to love God, Neil finds a loophole when “Barry Larsen, a serial rapist and murderer who,

while disposing of the body of his latest victim, witnessed an angel's visitation and saw Heaven's light. At Larsen's execution, his soul was seen ascending to Heaven, much to the outrage of his victims' families" (225-26). Neil decides to become a "light-seeker," one of those who go to sites where angels either arrive or depart the mortal plane. When the angel Barakiel appears, Neil attempts to follow him but ends up crashing his truck into a boulder. However, a shaft of Heaven's light passes over Neil, blinding him. At that moment, "the light revealed to Neil all the reasons he should love God" (232). As he now loves God "with an utterness beyond what humans can experience for one another," he confidently assumes that he will go to Heaven since "he [is] truly worthy of salvation" (232-33). Yet, "God [sends] him to Hell anyway" (233). In Hell, Neil's sight is restored and he has a perfectly formed body; nonetheless he experiences "more anguish than was possible when he was alive, but his only response is to love God. . . . He knows his being sent to Hell was not a result of anything he did; he knows there was no reason for it, no higher purpose" (234). His love for God, the narrator tells us, "is the nature of true devotion" (235).

In "Hell Is the Absence of God," Chiang brilliantly critiques a fundamental tenet of those who espouse a religious belief: that God rewards those who love Him. Chiang forces the reader to grapple with a deeply philosophical question: why would a loving God impose suffering on the innocent? Chiang believes this "is one of the fundamental problems of religion," accepting and making peace with "all the terrible things that happen in the world" (Solomon). Faith Mendlesohn reads this story as "Chiang's consideration of an ontological world in which the miraculous is a daily event [that] directly challenges the comfortable assumptions of the religious Right that

miracles are always good things” (274). While I do not agree that it is just the religious Right who believe miracles are always positive, I do agree that many who would define themselves as religious have such beliefs. In the world of the story, supernatural visitations can have both profoundly negative and profoundly positive effects on people.

However, we see characters on whom these visitations have no effect at all. Ethan Mead, a witness to the angel Rashiel’s visitation, believes God has a purpose for him and longs for “an encounter with the divine to provide him direction” (214). However, Rashiel’s visitation does not change Ethan either spiritually or physically. He witnesses Neil Fisk’s death and descent to Hell, which leads Ethan to a recognition of God’s ambivalence: “He tells people that they can no more expect justice in the afterlife than in the mortal plane” while encouraging them to worship God, just not “under a misapprehension” (234). Whether one worships God or not seems to have no effect on whether one ends up in heaven or hell. Therefore, the reader is forced to question the benefits of religious faith.

In many ways, “Hell Is the Absence of God” is a commentary on Pascal’s Wager. In the world of the story, the inhabitants know God exists; therefore, there is no infinite gain or infinite loss in choosing to believe or not to believe. The infinite gain or infinite loss is situated in the love one has or does not have for God. If one loves God and goes to heaven, then one receives infinite gain. However, if one loves God and goes to hell, as does Neil Fisk, then one experiences infinite loss. There is no “best bet” in this world as one cannot trust God to reward the righteous.

Rudy Busto argues that “Chiang is asking us to take a religious belief and make it a real, statistically measurable thing-in-the-world, and by so doing, he forces us to think about ways religion can be so abstracted and ‘unreal’ in our lives” (398). Many of us feel comfortable pronouncing certain events as either a blessing or a scourge from God, yet few of us would feel comfortable definitively pronouncing a birth defect, for example, as one or the other. Chiang brings us into a world where the inhabitants do not have such options, a world where “God is not just, God is not kind, [and] God is not merciful” (“Hell” 234). This God is the God for those who do not see religion as a means of achieving any kind of spiritual improvement. Chiang lays bare the mystery and the incomprehensibility of God’s purpose. We never know why God sends Neil Fisk to Hell and Barry Larsen to Heaven. “Hell Is the Absence of God” is an apocalyptic story that reveals a crisis of faith, the disillusionment of those who no longer (never?) believe in the promise of God to reward the faithful.

The disillusionment of faith affects those who do not see God as a way of improving their lives. If belief is, as Eric Schwitzgebel defines it, something we regard as true, what happens when one proves that something incorrect? To return to Pascal’s Wager, what if one can prove that God does not exist? Moreover, what happens when the one to prove it is the one for whom religious belief fundamentally structures one’s life? In “Division by Zero,” math professor Renee and her husband, Carl metaphorically represent what happens when the devout seek and find unexpected answers to the questions surrounding religious belief.

Renee's understanding of herself and the universe centers on her certainty of the consistency of mathematics. For Renee, mathematics "is the sacred language of the high priests, the scientists and the technicians. As a sacred language, mathematics . . . is all-inclusive, timeless, transcendent, and incapable of being misinterpreted. . . . To think and speak the sacred language of mathematics is to think and speak the truth" (Kreuziger 38). Math has always provided Renee with a "sense of rightness"; she discovers this "rightness," when she is a child and the epiphany grounds her understanding of the universe (74). However, Renee's research leads her to a theorem that proves mathematics is inconsistent and thus meaningless. She discovers "a formalism that lets you equate any number with any other number," thus proving that any two numbers are equal (80). Her discovery, which disproves "most of mathematics," engenders in her the same sense of rightness that has structured her world up to this point, but this sense of rightness leads to her realization that the language of mathematics is neither sacred nor true (81). Her encounter with apocalypse reveals that mathematics can no longer provide meaning or structure to her life and she attempts suicide.

Carl's understanding of himself and the universe centers on his certainty that "compassion [is] a basic part of his character" (87). Carl's suicide attempt twenty years earlier allows him to become a person who knows "the difference between sympathy and empathy" and he finds his identity in his ability to "offer comfort in similar situations" (87). Just as mathematics provides "rightness" to Renee's world, helping others, "[sitting] in the other seat, and [playing] the other part" provides rightness to Carl's world (87). Therefore, Carl is stunned to discover he has no empathy for Renee's predicament: "Whatever was

bothering Renee, it was something he couldn't fathom" (79). In fact, he feels "no more than a sense of duty toward her" (74). Similar to a devout person when faith and religion no longer provide structure and meaning, both Renee and Carl lose their bearings when they discover that what they have always taken as the truth of themselves and their world can no longer be trusted.

Chiang's structure of "Division by Zero" adds further context to the effects of loss of faith. The story is laid out in eight numbered tripartite vignettes, with the exception of the last one, which only contains two sections ("9" and "9a'9b"). The first section is numbered one through nine and provides a mathematical concept; the other two sections are based on either Renee's perspective (the "a" section), or Carl's perspective (the "b" section). Each initial section details a discrepancy in mathematical logic and we can read each one as a metaphor for faith and belief.

For example, in section six, the narrator tells us that "In 1931, Kurt Godel demonstrated two theorems. The first one shows, in effect, that mathematics contain statements that may be true, but are inherently unprovable. . . . His second theorem shows that a claim of the consistency of arithmetic is just such a statement: it cannot be proven true by any means using the axioms of arithmetic" (79). In other words, mathematical truth and mathematical proof are not the same thing: we can know certain things to be true while not having the ability to *prove* they are true. Such is one of the definitions of faith: belief without proof.

Chiang provides us with an intimate look at what happens when what we believe "[imposes] meaning onto the universe" is proven false and the proof comes, not from the outside, but from ourselves (86). As Renee tells

Carl, the fact that she develops this theorem is analogous to a “theologian proving that there was no God. Not just fearing it, but knowing it for a fact” (88). For Renee, mathematics was something she “believed deeply, implicitly” and she is “the one who demonstrated” that it is not true (88). At the same time, Carl discovers his ability to empathize, his belief that imposes meaning onto his understanding of the universe, does not extend to Renee for whom “he couldn’t feel anything” (85). He feels exactly as she does, that he, too, has discovered the falsity of something he “believed deeply, implicitly,” which is why the last section of the story is titled “9a’9b.” However, this empathy, this connection, Carl feels for Renee divides rather than unites. Both Renee and Carl lose their faith and both do so through their intellect and insight.

Ted Chiang’s apocalyptic stories are commentaries on our own search for meaning. Many science fiction writers often consider “what religion may become under vastly altered circumstances” (Reilly 6). Chiang, however, creates places and characters where religion and faith are somewhat altered, while at the same time appearing familiar to the reader. As the stories unfold, we recognize our own disillusionment and loss. Like many of us, the characters in the “Tower of Babylon” are forced to ask themselves whether they put “ultimate trust in knowledge or faith” (Frisch and Martos 18). Hillalum’s discovery and understanding of the world reveals to him that meaning is found in scientific exploration, not ritual or faith. Neal Fisk, on the other hand, lives in a world where proof of God is a given fact, yet he comes to know that God dispenses justice, kindness, and mercy arbitrarily. We, too, may question why God, like the God in “Hell is the Absence of God,” rewards the unrighteous and damns the righteous seemingly without rhyme or reason. In “Division by Zero,”

religion is, for Carl and Renee, “the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as humanly significant”; yet, they find their universe not only insignificant but false (Berger 28). Chiang’s story speaks to those whose belief structure has crumbled under intense scrutiny and whose search for meaning leads them not to a structured and orderly universe, but only leads them further into chaos.

As with all science fiction, Ted Chiang’s stories reveal more of our present than our present reveals to us. We are not given definitive answers to God’s role in our world; instead, his stories force us to question our own beliefs. Chiang’s apocalyptic literature is born out of our own profound disillusionment that is centered “not on the world, but on the promise of God . . . which has dimmed, flickered, and for some expired” (Krueziger 11). Yet, these stories do not leave us with, or lead us to, despair and nihilism. Ted Chiang’s apocalypse reveals and reaffirms that meaning and therefore, life, come out of death—the death of falsely-held beliefs.

#### Works Cited

- Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1967.
- Bishop, John. “Faith.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Fall 2010. Web. 9 February 2016.
- Busto, Rudy. “Religion/Science/Fiction: Beyond the Final Frontier.” *Implicit Religion* 17.4 (2014): 395-404. Print.

- Chiang, Ted. "Division by Zero." *Stories of Your Life and Others*. Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press, 2002. 71-89. Print.
- . "Hell is the Absence of God." *Stories of Your Life and Others*. Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press, 2002. 205-235. Print.
- . "Tower of Babylon." *Stories of Your Life and Others*. Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press, 2002. 1-28. Print.
- Frisch, Adam J. and Joseph Martos. "Religious Imagination and Imagined Religion." *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Ed. Robert Reilly. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. 11-26.
- Gregory, Alan P.R. *Science Fiction Theology: Beauty and the Transformation of the Sublime*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2015. *ebrary*. Web. 8 February 2016.
- Kruezigler, Frederick A. *The Religion of Science Fiction*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986. Print.
- Mendlesohn, Farah. "Religion and Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 264-275. Print.
- Popcak, Greg. "Faith, Spirituality, Belief, Religion . . . What's the Difference?" *Patheos*. 5 May 2014. Web. 8 February 2016.

- Reilly, Robert. "Introduction." *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Ed. Robert Reilly. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. 3-8.
- Robishaw, Andrew. *The Esoteric Codex: Dynamics of the Celestial Spheres*. Lulu Press, 2015. Web. 22 February 2016.
- Schwitzgebel, Eric. "Belief." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Summer 2015. Web. 10 February 2016.
- Smith, Jeremy. "The Absence of God: An Interview with Ted Chiang." *InfinityPlus*. September 2002. Web. 27 January 2016.
- Solomon, Avi. "Ted Chiang on Writing." *BoingBoing*. 22 July 2010. Web. 18 February 2016.

## How Shakespeare Perpetuates the Tudor Myth

By Reza Parchizadeh, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

*The Tudor Myth* was the tradition of English historiography concerned with the elevation and deification of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Tudor monarchs of England by contrasting their “Golden Age” with most of the previous century as a dark age of lawlessness, war, and carnage. Some of the more famous mainstays of that tradition of historiography were Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III* (1513), Edward Hall’s *Union of the Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), and Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Wales* (1587).

William Shakespeare, as a poet and playwright under the patronage of Queen Elizabeth I<sup>1</sup> also greatly drew upon and in turn contributed to the Tudor Myth through his cycle of history plays regarding the Matter of England, including *Richard II*, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Henry IV, Part 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI, Part 1*, *Henry VI, Part 2*, *Henry VI, Part 3*, and *Richard III*. In these plays, Shakespeare, whether directly or indirectly, depicts the immediately pre-Tudor England as such a turbulent and distressing era that logically necessitates the Tudor takeover and pacification of England. As such, through his History Plays, the Bard,

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth was herself as a descendant of Earl of Richmond, who later became the founder of the Tudor Dynasty as King Henry VII

perhaps mostly subliminally, promotes and perpetuates the Tudor Myth.

There are many instances and pieces of evidence that confirm that claim: Shakespeare uses themes, motifs, images, etc. that in general and as a whole advance the Tudor Myth. To include all those instances in this article will be an impossible feat. As such, the concept I would like to concentrate upon in this paper is the “residual” in Shakespeare’s History Plays. As defined by the key cultural critic Raymond Williams in his *Marxism and Literature* (1977):

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual, which may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture, from that active manifestation of the residual (this being its

distinction from the archaic) which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture. (122)

Simply put, the residual is whatever trace of the past, i.e. in culture, literature, politics, etc. that has lingered on up to the contemporary times and thus affects the present. That definition holds true for almost all of Shakespeare's History Plays regarding England: there is always a presence, whether good or evil, from the past that haunts and demarcates the present. In other words, there are moments when one can glimpse a "continuance of the past into the present;" more precisely, the tendencies to remember, to repeat, and to follow up on what has been pushed out of favor, whether culturally or socio-politically, through Bolingbroke's (later King Henry IV's) deposition of King Richard II and presumably his murder.

While it seems that with Richard II gone all that was associated with him must also be logically gone, the case, in effect, is not so; as Richard, or whatever is associated with Richard, effectively continues to haunt not only King Henry IV and his times but also generations of King Henry's successors, whether friends or foes. Resentments and feuds arise over King Richard's heritage and succession, and many crimes are committed and ferocious wars are fought to settle those issues. As such, it can be said that all the subsequent Shakespeare History Plays following *Richard II* are haunted not only by Richard's blood but also by his sociopolitical and cultural presence.

I must state that the residual in these plays is not necessarily immediately recognizable as the residual; and it is neither always the same thing/idea/phenomenon, nor

is it always depicted in one way or from a single perspective, but it is almost always embedded in there, i.e. in the text of the play, in one way or another. Indeed, it is only when we study these plays as an entire corpus and not just discrete dramatic pieces that we realize how coherent they are in some fundamental respects, especially with regard to the residual.

The Herculean Task that Shakespeare undertakes in the cycle of his History Plays is to resolve the effects of that “residual” through a rather biased reading of history, with different degrees and in different forms in different plays, in favor of his patrons, the Tudors; as well as to direct Queen Elizabeth and her courtiers towards those residual presences that are “positive” and so should be emulated and those residual elements that are “negative” and should be discarded. And that is what I would like to map out as much as possible in this article.

The most salient manifestation of the residual in the History Plays is the members of the contending houses’, that is, Lancaster’s and York’s, continuous drawing on their respective hereditary claims to the throne of England. According to the primogeniture tradition customary in feudal times when these plays are set, the firstborn male child of the king – as well as any other noble – would inherit the family estate. In case of death of the firstborn before he inherited the estate, his firstborn son would perpetuate the family line. In other words, none of the siblings of the firstborn son were eligible to inherit the main family estate and title(s) as long as he had a living son. That was the law. Period.

Now, that is exactly the fundamental concern around which Shakespeare’s History Plays revolve. King Edward

III had seven sons, namely, Edward (the Black Prince), William of Hatfield, Lionel of Antwerp (Duke of Clarence), John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster), Edmund of Langley (Duke of York), Thomas of Windsor, and Thomas of Woodstock (Duke of Gloucester). His heir-to-the-throne was Edward, the Black Prince. When the Black Prince died of disease before his father, his firstborn son, Richard, inherited the kingdom.

After his grandfather's death, Richard became King of England. As a youth who had ascended the throne rather early in his life, King Richard II demonstrated signs of incompetence, profligacy and rashness as well as an inclination to discrimination, as Shakespeare attempts to partly show to his audience in *King Richard II*. Over a rather minor dispute between his cousin Bolingbroke, the firstborn son of John of Gaunt, and Thomas Mowbray, Richard banishes both, later confiscating the dying John's property – that was supposed by law to be handed down to Bolingbroke – in order to fund a war in Ireland. And that, as Shakespeare shows us, was the cause of Bolingbroke's return, rebellion against and overthrowing of Richard.

That Richard was an incompetent king is masterfully and memorably laid out by Shakespeare in Act 3, Scene 4 of *Richard II*, where he has a gardener and his servant, through the use of a set of botanical metaphors and plant imagery, prove that Richard has been a poor gardener for the garden in his care, namely, England. As the Gardener instructs the Servant how to weed out the Duke of York's garden, he reveals the political moral of his botanical metaphorizations as such:

[Bolingbroke] Hath seized the wasteful king.  
O, what pity is it

That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land  
As we this garden! We at time of year  
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,  
Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood,  
With too much riches it confound itself:  
Had he done so to great and growing men,  
They might have lived to bear and he to taste  
Their fruits of duty: superfluous branches  
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live:  
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,  
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown  
down.<sup>2</sup>

Had Richard taken care of England as the Gardener and the Servant are going to take care of their garden, i.e. elevating individuals but also being aware of their faults and thus giving them punishment when it is due, and not letting them grow in power and prestige while they were not worthy of it, “justice” would have been done to all, and Richard himself would have benefited from it, reaping the fruit. But Richard proved to be a poor gardener, and look what has happened to him and his garden now. Beyond *Richard II*, Shakespeare’s intention might have been to warn Queen Elizabeth that profligacy and rashness do not pay, and that she should be more careful about whom she lowers and whom she lifts.

As a result of Richard’s incompetence, Bolingbroke, as the issue of John of Gaunt, King Edward III’s fourth son and head of House of Lancaster, and under the pretext that Richard had no issues, claimed the throne of England for himself. This was true, but Richard had already named

---

<sup>2</sup> For all the Shakespeare citations in this paper, I have referenced the MIT online version of Shakespeare History Plays accessible via this link: <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>

a “successor-by-law” – in contrast to successor-by-blood – namely, Roger Mortimer, Earl of March. This Roger followed his ancestry back to the Lionel of Antwerp (Duke of Clarence), the third son of King Edward III. Lionel had only one child, Philippa, who had married Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March. When their granddaughter and eventual heir, Anne Mortimer, married into the family of Edmund of Langley, i.e. Edward III’s fifth son and the Duke of York, a marriage whose issue was Roger, what later became the House of York’s claim to the throne of England came to life.

Therefore, we can see that the Lancastrians, basing their claim upon John of Gaunt (fourth son), had a weaker claim to the throne in comparison to the Yorkists who drew their claim from Lionel of Antwerp (third son) and Edmund of Langley (fifth son) together. As such, right from the start, the claim of Bolingbroke – who crowned himself King Henry IV – to the throne and his issues’ claims were disputed in respect to both blood and law. Those disputes and their consequences constitute the main subject matter of Shakespeare’s History Plays, as claims to the throne by both the Lancastrians and the Yorkists recur in the texts of these plays. In other words, Richard II’s curse reverberates in all the plays and haunts England and the English.

This curse, or rather, the residual, already begins to unfold and affect England somewhere in the beginning of the history cycle, i.e. *King Henry IV, Part 1*. In Act 1, Scene 1, King Henry IV states that “It seems then that the tidings of this broil / Brake off our business for the Holy Land.” What he says here is in direct reference to what he had promised at the end of *Richard II*: to go on a military pilgrimage, i.e. a crusade, to the Holy Land in order to

atone for the wrongs he had done against the person of Richard. These two lines at the beginning establish and portend what will come next and to the end of not only this particular play but also the rest of the cycle: an ongoing struggle over Richard's heritage.

On the other hand, when the Percys, King Henry's former allies and adversaries-to-be, talk among themselves while resentful of Henry's unfair treatment of them, they draw upon the residues of the past to counter Henry: they intend to make king Edmund Mortimer (Roger's son), Earl of March, whom Richard had proclaimed his heir-presumptive in case he died childless. Therefore, Mortimer is supposed by law – the very law that was in practice during Richard's reign – to become Richard's legitimate successor. By raising the political chances of Mortimer, the Percys in fact intend to re-attain their own glorious past. Thus, Earl of Worcester (of the Percys) lays out a plan for the future and expresses a grievance of the past that will continue to unfold and be reiterated throughout not only this play but also the whole cycle:

And 'tis no little reason bids us speed,  
To save our heads by raising of a head;  
For, bear ourselves as even as we can,  
The king will always think him in our debt,  
And think we think ourselves unsatisfied,  
Till he hath found a time to pay us home:  
And see already how he doth begin  
To make us strangers to his looks of love. (Act 1,  
Scene 3)

Interestingly, in Act 3, Scene 1 we can see another aspect of the sociopolitical and cultural continuance of the

past into the present. In this scene, the rebels against King Henry are planning to divide England in three parts: the west goes to the Welsh, the north to the Scots, and the rest to the Percys. This can be very well regarded as the continuance of the centrifugal forces that had been threatening to partition the realm at least since the coming of the Angevins to power in England. By extension, it can also be applied to the time of Elizabeth, when England was still struggling with not only the Welsh and the Scots but also with the Irish, and as such constitute a warning to Elizabeth.

Back to King Henry's camp, we see King Henry likening his prodigal son, Henry, the Prince of Wales, to King Richard. Reprimanding his son for the dissolute lifestyle he has chosen for himself and the company he mingles with, King Henry enumerates the virtues that brought him the crown and contrasts them with the vices that took it away from Richard, concluding that he sees in his son not himself but Richard. It is an irony that can affect the whole realm in a bad way: when the prodigal king returns, the realm will fall into ruin once more; which could also constitute a message to Elizabeth whose "Golden Age" has come after a century of civil war and bloodshed. Even worse, King Henry sees himself in Hotspur, i.e. the enemy, and not in his son: "For all the world / As thou art to this hour was Richard then / When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh, / And even as I was then is Percy now" (Act 3, Scene 2).

Shakespeare concentrates on a different aspect of the residual in *Henry IV, Part 2*, as this play mostly recounts a story of "malaise." In this play, the person of King Henry is sick from the beginning to the end, and his sickness can be and certainly is meant to be extended to the whole

country: England is sick. The evidence for this sickness is abundant in the text, and Shakespeare uses a lot of “malaise imagery” in this play, so much so that we can say malaise is the dominant motif in this play. Indeed, by exclaiming that “O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows” (Act 3, Scene 1) on his deathbed, King Henry himself emphasizes the significance and effects of malaise in this play.

We can see that the divisiveness in the land is paralleled with the king’s sickness by Hastings, implying that the king’s malaise is the cause of the land’s disease:

For his divisions, as the times do brawl,  
Are in three heads: one power against the  
French,  
And one against Glendower; perforce a third  
Must take up us: so is the unfirm king  
In three divided; and his coffers sound  
With hollow poverty and emptiness. (Act 1,  
Scene 3)

Immediately following Hastings, the Archbishop of York states that “The commonwealth is sick of their own choice; / Their over-greedy love hath surfeited.” Now, the “commonwealth” itself is sick due to its “over-greedy love,” of power, of course. It has chosen, metaphorically speaking, an abode made of spider-web for itself: a “giddy” and “unsure” habitation as the Archbishop would later say.

In the same scene, we see King Henry troubled and sleepless, for “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!” Though he believes that this insomnia afflicts only him and not his subjects, the truth is, all England is sleepless, but Henry is too consumed by his own misery to be able to

see that. Henry's sleeplessness is in fact England's as well. Henry also refers to the land's sickness as if it is indeed the human body afflicted with plague: "Then you perceive the body of our kingdom / How foul it is; what rank diseases grow / And with what danger, near the heart of it." To which Warwick, again using the body imagery, replies: "It is but as a body yet distemper'd; / Which to his former strength may be restored / With good advice and little medicine." England needs a remedy.

However, it is the Archbishop of York who represents the motif of malaise at its most artistic by giving an excellent speech containing all kinds of images and metaphors of sickness and whatever related to it. This speech in effect contains a "cluster of images" of malaise. The practical outcome of the disease is also notable, for York believes that we must all "bleed" – both as a medicinal and a military practice – to get rid of the disease that killed King Richard and is now afflicting us all; a painful prognostication/diagnosis that will be adhered to for the rest of the century through the gory Wars of the Roses:

Briefly to this end: we are all diseased,  
And with our surfeiting and wanton hours  
Have brought ourselves into a burning fever,  
And we must bleed for it; of which disease  
Our late king, Richard, being infected, died.  
But, my most noble Lord of Westmoreland,  
I take not on me here as a physician,  
Nor do I as an enemy to peace  
Troop in the throngs of military men;  
But rather show awhile like fearful war,  
To diet rank minds sick of happiness  
And purge the obstructions which begin to stop  
Our very veins of life. (Act 4, Scene 1)

*Henry V* is the play in Shakespeare's history cycle where the residual is demonstrated at its weakest. But that is only natural, as Shakespeare seems to be proposing – in most probability to Elizabeth and her courtiers – that Henry V, his time and his ways be taken as an antidote to the residual and as such be set as a model of good government in their contemporary England. Henry, a Lancastrian by blood, is a good king because he takes strife and war away from home by fighting abroad. Thus, *Henry V* in a sense is an account of the domestic benefits of overseas war; and it conveys the claim that a good English king is the one who maintains peace at home by engaging in overseas adventures.

Neither of the English kings since Edward III had either the time or the means to make considerable gains abroad, which, by implication, might have been the cause of civil unrest. Henry V is the first in many years to do so and, coincidentally, during his reign, as depicted in this play, England mostly enjoys peace at home. Therefore, *Henry V* in a way also advances imperialistic plans to which Elizabeth and her courtiers were apparently amenable. This fact is obvious in the direct reference to Essex's campaign in Ireland to put down the Irish rebellion.

In this play, Shakespeare attempts to demonstrate the capability of King Henry by depicting the clerics supporting Henry's war effort abroad on the one hand and by making the semblance of "unity" between the British of different social strata and national origins as a result of an overseas war on the other. We can see that the prospect of war overseas has inevitably pushed the king to assume supremacy over both state and church, of course with the clerics' consent and cooperation. This can have contemporary repercussions for Elizabeth as supreme

head of church and state under the Anglican Law, as her war effort abroad and against the Continental Catholic powers like Spain and France and their satellites called for the absolute loyalty of the church and the unity of church and state. In addition, Henry's war abroad has brought the English from different classes, social strata and nationalities together.

Thus, I assume *Henry V* is supposed to be read as a rather anti-residual play, at least in an Elizabethan context. However, the character of Henry V and what he achieved in turn become some of the main sources of the residual in the chronologically consequent plays. Indeed, it is against the immediate backdrop of and in contrast to *Henry V* that the *Henry VI* trilogy unfolds. *Henry VI, Part 1* begins with the Lord Protector, Humphrey of Gloucester, mourning the demise of Henry V, presumably the symbol of chivalry and tactfulness, and raising doubts as to the capability of his religious and "effeminate" son to hold the realm together under the sway of the clerics: "The church! where is it? Had not churchmen pray'd, / His thread of life had not so soon decay'd: / None do you like but an effeminate prince, / Whom, like a school-boy, you may over-awe" (Act 1, Scene 1). Soon after, a messenger arrives from France, declaring the loss of a great portion of the English territories there that Henry V had gained and held. On hearing this news, Bedford and Gloucester, both old-school nobles, grieve over Henry's departure:

Bedford: What say'st thou, man, before dead  
Henry's corse?  
Speak softly, or the loss of those great towns  
Will make him burst his lead and rise from death.

Gloucester: Is Paris lost? Is Rouen yielded up?

If Henry were recall'd to life again,  
These news would cause him once more yield the  
ghost. (Act 1, Scene 1)

Later, Joan of Arc, apparently England's enemy, will also boast that the English ascendancy comes to an end with Henry's death:

Glory is like a circle in the water,  
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself  
Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.  
With Henry's death the English circle ends;  
Dispersed are the glories it included. (Act 1, Scene 2)

These two passages on Henry's demise, one expressed from the perspective of friends and the other from that of foes, prepare the background against which the events in the *Henry VI* trilogy, especially *Part 1* and *Part 2*, unfold, as these two parts are mainly concerned with the decline of the old-school English values, majorly associated with King Henry V, that had presumably made England the paradise and the powerful nation that it used to be.

In *Part 1*, these old-school values find their manifestation in the person of Talbot "the noble warrior" whose fall forebodes the fall of England into chaos. He is a brave and loyal subject of the king and a patriotic noble. As such, what he represents is the old chivalric attitude most apparent in the Order of the Garter, established by none other than King Edward III, the patron of chivalry and the admirer of King Arthur and the crusading knights, as well as in the person of the deceased King Henry V. Talbot himself, by giving a glorious account of the history of the

Order of Garter, concludes by implication that chivalry has become but a shadow of its former self: “He then that is not furnish’d in this sort / Doth but usurp the sacred name of knight, / Profaning this most honourable order” (Act 4, Scene 1). Therefore, Talbot’s fall in this play works as an omen for the fall of the old-style chivalric attitude in England and thus the rise of a greedy class of nobles with nothing on their minds but self-seeking and self-promotion, of which the Yorkist Richard Plantagenet is the supreme example. As old-school nobles like Talbot fall and as nouveau riches like Plantagenet rise, England tumbles into chaos and civil war.

In *Henry VI, Part 2*, Shakespeare continues with the theme of the decline of the old values, this time by foregrounding Gloucester “the noble politician.” This play is first and foremost the tragedy of Gloucester. What is prefigured in the tragedy of this individual by Shakespeare is the tragedy of England as a nation; for in Gloucester’s fall and the fall of individuals like him it is England that falls. Like Talbot in the previous installment of the play, Gloucester is an old-school gentleman who places the good of the community and the honor of the realm above his own personal gain. While almost everybody else around him is bustling to gain something for themselves as the country is disintegrating, Gloucester is the only one who really pities the situation and tries to do as much as he can to save England from devastation.

However, unlike Talbot who is a warrior and spends almost all the time allotted to him in the previous play on the battlefield, Gloucester is a politician and courtier with the court as his proper domain. That is why his fall is expedited at court and not abroad. It seems that through characters like Talbot and Gloucester, Shakespeare is

attempting to encourage Elizabeth to see the older values that they represent as the ones the Tudors should emulate. In the process that leads to the downfall of this “Good Humphrey” of Gloucester, England is reduced to a jungle (emphasized through recurring use of animal imagery) where all are at one another’s throats for survival and self-sustenance.

Gloucester’s last words will reverberate throughout the rest of the cycle. For one last time, he warns his nephew, King Henry VI, that by throwing away his “crutch” before he can walk on his own he is asking for a nasty tumble. As the “shepherd” goes absent, the rapacious “wolves” will tear the flock apart. Doom hangs over Henry’s and by that England’s head:

Ah! thus King Henry throws away his crutch  
Before his legs be firm to bear his body.  
Thus is the shepherd beaten from thy side,  
And wolves are gnarling who shall gnaw thee first.  
Ah, that my fear were false! ah, that it were!  
For, good King Henry, thy decay I fear.(Act 3,  
Scene 1)

*Henry VI, Part 3* and *Richard III* constitute the climax of the history cycle by demonstrating the effects of the residual in different but also similar ways. *Henry VI, Part 3* is the story of a horrendous civil war which takes place first and foremost as a result of the eponymous king’s incompetence mostly stemming from his religio-philosophical introversion as well as his lack of a strong claim to the throne as a residue of what his grandfather did a couple of generations before. Through this play, it seems that Shakespeare is trying to say to Elizabeth that the peace and stability of the realm are heavily invested in the

soundness of the person of the monarch as well as his/her strong claim to the throne, and that instability which leads to tragedy is a corollary of the monarch's incompetence and lack of ancestral/legal legitimacy.

This can be easily seen in what unfolds throughout the play: as a result of Henry's inefficiency and ineffectuality, the way becomes open for the rise of – in Shakespeare's view – the illegitimate Yorkists to power and their ascension to the throne for a couple of decades – a theme that continues through to *Richard III* – when England falls into chaos and despotism and becomes overwhelmed with misery and fear, until the rightful and righteous Richmond of the House of Lancaster returns to salvage it.

I see King Henry in this play as a parallel of some sort to King Lear: both, being inefficient and ineffectual, have to helplessly watch the disintegration of their kingdoms and the havoc wrought upon their people by greedy and murderous others while it is they who bear the greatest shame and torment, only for being "king." This, I think, can tell us and also Elizabeth something about the responsibility of those who hold high offices. No matter what they themselves "do," it is in their name that history and its events are written. In this regard, King Henry is a very tragic character, and he keeps telling us about it and lamenting for himself and for England throughout the play: "O piteous spectacle! O bloody times! / Whiles lions war and battle for their dens, / Poor harmless lambs abide their enmity" (Act 2, Scene 5). As a result, the whole country falls into chaos, which affects all and in turn calls for a massive ritual purging or bloodletting of the nation, which culminates and is – supposedly – resolved in *Richard III*.

*Richard III* is the play where the concept of the residual is demonstrated at its strongest in the cycle. It is in this play that the sins of the fathers and forefathers are visited upon their sons and the nation as a whole, and bloodletting and expiation is supposed to draw a new, clean slate. In order to make that slate, Shakespeare makes a scapegoat of the person of Richard in this play. To Richard is attributed any possible abhorrence: he is a murderer, a regicide, a fratricide, a murderous and incestuous uncle, and so on and so forth. The self-seeking Richard of Gloucester, as Lord Protector, also stands in stark contrast to his dead namesake in the previous trilogy, the Good Humphrey of Gloucester, who fell exactly because he was a selfless man in an age of rampant self-seeking.

As a matter of fact, Shakespeare seems to be needing this crooked and deformed – both inward and outward – monster as the sum total of all anti-Lancastrian fears in order to justify Richmond's cause and takeover of England. As such, I believe King Richard in this play is very much the incarnation of that archetypal "scapegoat king" upon which James George Frazer has elaborated in his monumental classic study in comparative anthropology, *The Golden Bough* (see Chapter 1, "The King of the Wood").

According to Frazer, in short, an aged, worn-out and fruitless king in olden times, when cults of fertility thrived and worship of nature was common, was supposed to be sacrificed every once in a while so that the land would prosper again. Richard definitely plays the part of that scapegoat, although with apparent political twists and implications. However, I must say that King Richard's placement as scapegoat is an extension and culmination

of King Henry VI's incompetent rule as well. In other words, it is not only the evil Richard who has brought down the land to chaos and ruin, but also the good but incapable and illegitimated Henry.

In order to scapegoat Richard, among other things, Shakespeare especially focuses on three phenomena: one is the coming of the women of the two warring houses together as a result of Richard's crimes against their beloved husbands, sons, brothers, etc.; another is the emergence of the supernatural against Richard and in favor of Richmond, manifested in the rise and union of the dead of the two houses, again supposedly as a result of Richard's evil, as well as the natural omens that bode badly for Richard; and another is through constructing an indirect dialogue between Richard and Richmond, in effect contrasting them with each other, exposing the evil of the former against the good of the latter. These phenomena, of course, are all rooted in the concept of the residual; and this is the play in which all the residual grievances of around a century come to a head. In other words, while the residual is pretty much present in this play, it is eventually resolved through the Lancastrians' cooperation with the Yorkists against the person of Richard.

With regard to the women, Shakespeare portrays an elaborate scene in Act 4, Scene 4. As Queen Margaret, Henry VI's widow, is lamenting for her loss in the background, Queen Elizabeth, King Edward VI's widow, and Duchess of York, Richard Plantagenet's widow and King Edward and King Richard's mother, enter in the foreground, starting to lament the death of King Edward's sons, the Princes in the Tower, and Richard Plantagenet's sons, Rutland and Clarence. As they mourn and shed tears, Margaret in the background counts the Yorkist dead

for the Lancastrian dead. As the counting continues, Margaret comes forward and sits with Elizabeth and York. At first Margaret is not willing to give up on her cursing of the Yorkists, but then when she understands Elizabeth's and York's pain and they in return sympathize with her, she finally gives in and her voice becomes one with theirs in cursing Richard:

Duchess of York: O Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes!  
God witness with me, I have wept for thine.

Queen Elizabeth: O thou well skill'd in curses, stay awhile,  
And teach me how to curse mine enemies!

Queen Margaret: Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the days;  
Compare dead happiness with living woe;  
Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,  
And he that slew them fouler than he is:  
Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse:  
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (Act 4, Scene 4)

Elizabeth even promises her daughter's hand to Richmond who is about to embark upon the conquest of England from France, an act that is supposed to resolve the bicameral dispute and unite the two warring houses in peace.

Near the end, in yet another elaborate scene that resembles ritual, Shakespeare raises the dead to advance the Tudor Project. On the night before the Battle of Bosworth Field, the dead of both the Lancastrian and the

Yorkist sides enter upon the sleeping Richard and Richmond in their respective tents on opposing sides of the field, cursing the former for their deaths and commending the latter, bidding him good luck in the imminent war. In addition to these supernatural beings, Shakespeare makes sure that nature is also against Richard. Right before the final Battle of Bosworth Field, omens rise that bode badly for Richard:

Richard: Who saw the sun to-day?

Ratcliff: Not I, my lord.

Richard: Then he disdains to shine; for by the book  
He should have braved the east an hour ago  
A black day will it be to somebody. Ratcliff!...  
The sun will not be seen to-day;  
The sky doth frown and lour upon our army.(Act 5,  
Scene 4)

Shakespeare also invests a lot in comparing and contrasting of Richard and Richmond. For instance, Richmond's return is depicted in a very similar manner to that of Bolingbroke's hopeful and triumphant return, and Richard is by implication likened to his incompetent and rash namesake, Richard II. Richmond even sounds like Henry V in France:

Fellows in arms, and my most loving friends,  
Bruised underneath the yoke of tyranny,  
Thus far into the bowels of the land  
Have we march'd on without impediment....  
In God's name, cheerly on, courageous friends,  
To reap the harvest of perpetual peace

By this one bloody trial of sharp war. (Act 5, Scene 2)

Continuing on likening Richmond to Bolingbroke and Henry V, in Act 5, Scene 3 Shakespeare has Richmond calling all his captains by name, indicating that he, being a good and competent commander, knows his soldiers intimately. Richard, on the other hand, only communicates with Ratcliff, and through him seeks the news of his other captains. This shows us that while Richard is alienated from his followers, Richmond is popular among his. Richard also dwells on the fear of his followers while Richmond dwells on their love. As a result, Richard so offends and disgusts everybody around him that by the end of the play almost all Yorkists, even the dead ones, have defected to Richmond's side.

The final and perhaps most important contrast comes when we see Richmond genuinely praying in private. Set against the background of Richard's dissembling of praying for the eyes of the public before his coronation, Richmond is again elevated, in most probability with a hint at the importance of religion in Elizabeth's time. Richmond is supposed to be the God-chosen champion who saves England from the evil Richard. Queen Elizabeth, his granddaughter, is head of state and church in Shakespeare's time. Thus, Richmond prays:

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,  
Look on my forces with a gracious eye;  
Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,  
That they may crush down with a heavy fall  
The usurping helmets of our adversaries!  
Make us thy ministers of chastisement,  
That we may praise thee in the victory!

To thee I do commend my watchful soul,  
Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes:  
Sleeping and waking, O, defend me still! (Act 5,  
Scene 3)

As such, I can say that *Richard III*, as the coda to the cycle of Shakespeare's History Plays, is more than just a "political" play, as God, culture, nature and the supernatural come together to banish Richard, presumably the sum total of all the residual evil, and bring in Richmond the savior, who as King Henry VII will become the founder of the Tudor Dynasty as well as grandfather to Queen Elizabeth. Therefore, to sum up and reiterate my initial point, what is promoted and perpetuated by Shakespeare's History Plays regarding the Matter of England, especially *Richard III*, is in effect a timeless legend that fares beyond the mere drama of the plays: it is an ideological myth, the Tudor Myth.

#### Works Cited

Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*. New Zealand: The Floating Press, 2009. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

## Two of a Kind: Love and Romance in *The Patty Duke Show*

By Kathy Merlock Jackson, Virginia Wesleyan College

When actress Patty Duke died unexpectedly on March 29, 2016, many women remembered a song. Over fifty years after *The Patty Duke Show* first appeared, its catchy theme song remains embedded in minds of those who were girls in the mid 1960s. A few years ago Shout! Factory released boxed sets of the three seasons of *The Patty Duke Show*, generating new interest in the series. However, in a widely distributed wire story written at the time for the *Denver Post*, Joanne Ostrow dismisses *The Patty Duke Show* saying, “Individual episodes are not as memorable as the theme song. The conceit gets old . . . The sound effects are vintage ‘waa-waa-waa,’ to indicate a scene winding down (6).

Other critics have been equally uncharitable. Susan Douglas writes in *Where the Girls Are* of Duke’s character’s “nauseating” level of “perkiness” that enables her to take an active role in the world while remaining properly submissive (108) and notes, “Rarely has such a talented young actress been more poorly served (except when Sally Field got stuck with *The Flying Nun*)” (109). Ilana Nash, in *American Sweethearts*, categorizes *The Patty Duke Show* with Field’s earlier series, *Gidget*, saying

that both shows “emphasize that girls’ lives, consciousness, and sexuality were not only the agents driving the rampant baby-boom consumerism, but were in fact the items *to be consumed* by a patriarchal society fraught with conflict in its attitudes toward its daughters” (186).

A product of its time, *The Patty Duke Show* contains production techniques and social values of a bygone era. Nevertheless, there was more to it than a clever jingle. It played a useful role for its original audience of teen and pre-teen females who had moved beyond Barbie dolls and were trying to grow up, suggesting to them that their problems with love were important and paving the way for other girl-centered television series. More importantly, it provided strategies for negotiating romantic relationships, proving through trial and error how rationality really wins the day.

*The Patty Duke Show* premiered on ABC on September 18, 1963, at the time when those born in the peak years of the baby boom were in elementary school and television viewing had risen to more than five hours a day (Rollin 209). Duke, who held the distinction of being the youngest person to win an Academy Award in a competitive category, had already garnered an Oscar for her performance as best supporting actress for her 1962 role as Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker* after playing the same part for two years on Broadway. She became the first juvenile actress to have her own show named after her during television’s Golden Age. Enormously talented, she was sometimes compared to Lucille Ball for her physical comedic ability, and audiences, especially young girls, loved her. *The Patty Duke Show*, which ran for three years, until May 4, 1966, featured Duke in two teen roles:

as the boisterous, bubbly, fun-loving Patty Lane from Brooklyn Heights and her reserved, intellectual, cosmopolitan, Scottish identical cousin Cathy Lane, who moved in with her Uncle Martin, Aunt Natalie, and cousins Patty and younger brother Ross, in order to finish high school in America. The more popular Patty wore her hair casually flipped up, and the more quiet Cathy wore hers demurely turned under. The two became fast friends, emphasizing female bonding.

A smart show for its time, it used a sophisticated split-screen technique and was created by writer Sidney Sheldon, who had won the Academy Award for best screenplay of 1947 in another teen saga, *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer*, starring Cary Grant, Myrna Loy, and Shirley Temple. Patterned after this successful effort, *The Patty Duke Show* sent messages to young audiences about teen life and its day-to-day crises in a palatable sitcom formula. Using narrative techniques such as the double, mistaken identity, and miscommunication and attractive male celebrity guests, the show captured the attention of the youth audience, making it the surprise hit of the 1963-64 season and the cornerstone of the 8:00 to 9:00 “teenage block” on ABC, coupled first with *Shindig* and then with *Gidget* to constitute “girl appeal” (Luckett 99).

In *The Patty Duke Show*, identical cousins Patty and Cathy function as two sides of the same personality: Patty, emotional and Cathy, rational. In her autobiography, *Call Me Anna*, Duke writes that Sidney Sheldon, who claims to have written all 104 episodes of the series, invited her to Los Angeles to spend time with his family in the hope that her presence would spark an idea for the TV show. “And though he tells it jokingly,” Duke writes, “I think it’s pretty

much true that Sidney based the series on the me he got to know in those last few days: he felt I was schizoid and that's how he came up with the concept. There was the perky me and the corporate executive me and rarely the twain shall meet" (111). Sheldon should know: like Duke, he suffered from bipolar disorder, and he used opposing temperaments and behaviors as the basis for the series. He was also interested in delving into the female mind, creating characters of femininity and power that girls could relate to.

*The Patty Duke Show* typically addresses what research shows are the main topics of teens' lives, thoughts, and conversations: romantic relationships and emotional feelings (Berger 130). Each episode begins with some everyday teen crisis, often involving existing or budding romance. Patty has a steady boyfriend, her sweet and loyal but goofy high school beau Richard, but both occasionally dates others, a concession to the conservatism of early-1960s-network programming that avoided hot and steamy teen romances. Sociable and driven by emotion, Patty treats Richard like her best buddy and falls for a different "dream" guy each week. Cousin Cathy, by contrast, reads books, enjoys cultural events, reflects, and generally plays the wallflower, relegating romance to a less important place in her life. Each cousin is the other's confidante and friend, doling out advice—except when they're competing—and both interact with unlikely suitors. Because the two look exactly alike, explained as a result of their fathers' being twin brothers, appearance—except for a new dress now and then—doesn't matter, an important message for the young female audience grappling with image concerns. Rather, personality is key, enabling youthful viewers to explore the issue of identity. As Patty and Cathy "try out" different

relationships, they present possibilities and problem-solving strategies to girls in the audience fantasizing about future relationships, and they show adaptability and resilience when things don't work out. In a nutshell, Patty is concerned with which guy to choose, Cathy with whether any guy will choose her.

Patty, on whom most of the show's episodes focus, has two main problems: how to get a new guy she has a crush on to like her and what to do with Richard. In "The French Teacher," Patty drastically improves her grade in French when she develops a crush on her attractive substitute teacher. In "Patty and the Cut-Rate Casanova," she drops Richard for a smooth, flashy dancer, only to find out he's not what he seems. In "Don't Monkey with Mendel," she falls for her new handsome genetics teacher, played by guest star Robert Goulet, and determines that he, rather than Richard or the other boys in her school, is the best choice to be the father of her future children. In "The Greatest Psychologist in the World," she makes plans to spend the weekend at Harvard and attend the prom with a sophisticated college man. In "Patty and the Newspaper Game," she meets the new college graduate that her father thinks is being groomed to take over his job as the managing editor of a newspaper and decides that he is the guy for her. In "High Society," she competes with another popular girl in school, Sue Ellen, for the newest heartthrob at Brooklyn High. In "Pen Pals," she flips for a unknown guy she exchanges letters with, prompting her father to remark to her, "I don't like you building up fantasies like this." In all of these cases, Patty acts impulsively, swept off her feet by the initial impression of the new flavor of the week. "He's the most sensational thing I've ever laid eyes on," she claims of the new guy in her father's office. "A dreamboat is a dreamboat," she coos after meeting a new

student at school. “Oh, Richard’s all right. But Paul has that certain something,” she opines, “something that Richard doesn’t.” Of another love interest she says simply, “He’s beautiful.” Patty’s spirit, outgoingness, and passion for life are not to be discounted: she lands a recording contract for the British rock duo Jan and Dean, gets Sammy Davis, Jr. to come to her high school to perform for a dance, and makes a lot of money for her local charity. But in the ways of love, these qualities don’t always serve her well. She acts on her impulses, often with older men she doesn’t know, and gets herself into foolish situations. It’s Cathy, sometime along with Patty’s bemused parents, who advises her to act more rationally and not to disregard Richard.

And then there’s Richard. One of the great mysteries of the series is what the vivacious Patty sees in this lanky, none-too-smart guy, who eats her family out of house and home. But Richard is likable and loyal, and he’s always willing to help Patty out with her newest project, whether it’s starting a babysitting service in order to make some money or participating in a church event to raffle off her boyfriend. Sometimes, though, Patty’s and Richard’s relationship takes its own twists and turns, often triggered by jealousy. In “Going Steady,” Patty and Richard decide to make their relationship exclusive, with disastrous results. “I don’t like what’s happening to Patty,” warns Cathy. “She and Richard seem to be fussing at each other all the time.” Cathy expresses a voice of reason, prompting Patty to reach her own decision: “I’m not ready to go steady.” In “Patty and the Cut-Rate Casanova,” Patty acts immaturely and lies to Richard, and he laments to Cathy, “As far as Patty’s concerned, I’m a doormat, something to be kicked around.” Richard asks Cathy out, and at first she declines, but after seeing Patty further

mistreat him she reconsiders and goes. All the while, though, she chides them into talking through their differences, and when they begin to reconcile, she steps quietly aside, allowing Patty, who is not really mean-hearted, to see the error of her ways and apologize to Richard. Both Patty and Cathy change their hairstyles and mannerisms to impersonate the other, but Patty generally does so to manipulate and get her own way, while Cathy does so to help Patty, as when she tries to patch up a misunderstanding between Patty and Richard. Cathy emerges as a more mature and less self-absorbed version of the American teenager.

In her own relationships, though, Cathy appears more unsure than Patty. In “How to Succeed in Romance,” Patty tries to find a date for Cathy. “I’m sorry to be such a goon,” apologizes Cathy for her unpopularity. Patty asks Richard to bring a shy new guy, Chris Hubbard, to the local hangout, The Shake Shop, after school to meet Cathy. Afterwards, Cathy seeks romantic advice from those around her. “Be open and direct,” says Uncle Martin. “Men are attracted by the unpredictable. Be aloof and mysterious,” says Aunt Natalie. “If you want to hook this guy, you have to be feminine and clingy,” says Cousin Ross. Patty’s advice to her cousin is to be proud, haughty, and cruel. Cathy even reads a self-help book on relationship building. Unlike her impulsive cousin, she does research and gathers information, ultimately making her own decision as to how to pursue Chris—with kindness. It works.

In another episode, “Block That Statue,” Rock, the star of the Brooklyn Heights High School football team, locks eyes with Cathy and becomes enamored. “He just isn’t my type,” observes Cathy, but instead of dropping him, she

takes him to an art museum and gets him so interested in sculpture that he wants to quit the team. “There are five hundred girls in this school,” complains the football coach. “Why does he have to fall in love with a culture nut?” Patty pretends to be Cathy in an attempt to get Rock to play in the big game, which he ultimately does and wins, but Cathy feels content to have “found another side to him.” Whether pursuing or being pursued, Cathy may not have experience, but she exhibits grace and maturity.

Some of the most telling episodes of *The Patty Duke Show* pit Patty against Cathy for the attention of the same love interest. In “Princess Cathy,” a dark, exotic prince from a foreign land arrives at Brooklyn Heights High School, and both cousins, as well as a bevy of other girls at the school, vie for him. Although Patty is the popular one, he falls instead for Cathy and asks her to marry him. “Believe me, she won’t go through with this,” says Uncle Martin. “She’s too sensible.” Cathy researches the prince’s Third World country and does want to marry him and conduct humanitarian service after graduation, but she changes her mind when she learns she will only be his “first wife” in a country where princes customarily take many. “When I get married, it is going to be for keeps,” she vows. “One man, one wife.” Disappointed with the turn of events, Cathy is deeply saddened but becomes philosophical. “I was almost a princess,” she recalls, and goes bowling with Patty and Richard. In another episode, “The Boy Next Door,” Patty and Cathy again become enamored with the same guy, a new neighbor named Scotty. Patty is wandering around dreamily, says her mother, “with both feet planted firmly in the clouds.” When Martin Lane expresses surprise that Patty and Cathy could be mooning over the same guy, his astute wife supplies the answer: “Patty sees him as an athlete, and Cathy sees

him as an intellectual.” Once again, when push comes to shove, Cathy wins him through thought-out techniques. Her rational side, rather than Patty’s emotional side, carries the day.

Most critics who have commented on *The Patty Duke Show* have focused on Patty, and with good reason: she demands attention and occupies the most screen time. Patty is the teenager who acts impulsively, makes mistakes, and creates problems. What teenager isn’t? Cathy, however, is her essential other side. She gains knowledge and maturity. What teenager doesn’t? In essence, *The Patty Duke Show* enabled young audiences to identify with two parts of the same whole: mirror-image females who confront romantic situations and play them out, trying various strategies, learning from trial and error, and solving their own problems with bemused adults watching from the side. Cathy imparts wisdom in a series that is, at its core, about growing up, learning effective strategies, and developing understanding.

When *The Patty Duke Show* first hit the airwaves in 1963, there was nothing like it on television. In her book, *Prime-Time Hits*, Susan Sackett characterizes 1960s television as “silly.” “Cowboys were still reaching for the sky and top 10 ratings,” she writes, “but witches, monsters, Munsters, Martians, and a man who thought he was a bat were giving chase. And their southern cousins were soon a-hankerin’ for some o’ them Nielsen ratin’s” (98). Among the top shows of the first half of the 1960s: *Andy Griffith*, *Rawhide*, *Candid Camera*, *The Untouchables*, *Bonanza*, *Hazel*, *Dr. Kildare*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Lucy Show*, *Ben Casey*, *Petticoat Junction*, *My Favorite Martian*, *Bewitched*, *Gomer Pyle*, *The Fugitive*, *Peyton Place*, and *Combat*: none explored the lives of teen girls. The closest

thing to it, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, ran on CBS from 1959 to 1963 and featured teens Dobie Gillis and his beatnik best friend Maynard G. Krebs as they contemplated life, love, and money. However, the musings of girls were absent. *The Patty Duke Show*, by contrast, established female concerns as important and made Patty Duke a teen idol, consolidated by her recording career and hit single “Don’t Just Stand There” and her teen movie *Billie*. Later there would be *Gidget*, *That Girl!*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and most recently, Disney-Channel fare with Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Selena Gomez, but by featuring identical teen cousins with different personalities, concerns, and techniques, *The Patty Duke Show* broke ground in presenting contrasting aspects of youthful femininity. Girls in the audience, looking for cues on how to negotiate romantic relationships in a changing society, found useful scenarios and solutions, making *The Patty Duke Show* the water-cooler topic--or in the parlance of mass communication, the conversational currency for young females. The show remained popular for three seasons until 1966, when ABC made the decision to cancel it rather incur its costly conversion to color at a time when teen culture was moving toward psychedelic images and harder, British-inspired rock and roll. From 1988 to 1993, *The Patty Duke Show* reruns aired on Nick at Nite, in 1999 CBS ran a reunion show, and in the past year the original cast reunited for advertisements urging baby-boomers to register online for Social Security. *The Patty Duke Show* continues to resonate with those who remember its lessons about love and romance, providing them with much more than a memorable theme song.

## Works Cited

- Berger, Lauren, Dana McMakin, and Wyndol Furman. "The Language of Love: Romantic Relationships in Adolescence." In *Talking Adolescence: Perspectives on Communication in the Teenage Years*, edited by Angie Williams and Crispin Thurlow, 129-145. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Douglas, Susan J. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Random House, 1994.
- Luckett, Moya. "Girl Watchers: Patty Duke and Teen TV." In *The Revolution Wasn't Televised*, edited by Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, 94-116. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Nash, Ilana. *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Ostrow, Joanne. "And Rewatching." Reprinted in *The Virginian-Pilot* "Daily Break" 13 July 2010: 1, 6.
- Rollin, Lucy. *Twentieth-Century Teen Culture by the Decades: A Reference Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999.
- Sackett, Susan. *Prime-Time Hits: Television's Most Popular Network Programs*. New York: Billboard Books, 1993.

## **From Brecht to Beck: Performances of Xenophobia in Professional Wrestling**

By Adam Cohen, Marymount Manhattan College  
and CUNY

Although professional wrestling is generally overlooked by rigorous cultural studies criticism, the exaggerated storylines and the characters that are portrayed can be highly meaningful dimensions of culture. Wrestling's staged performances present aspects of culture in their most saturated forms to increase the entertainment value of the event, while at the same time often undermining and satirizing those aspects of culture. Because professional wrestling is populist in nature, more often than not, it uses negative stereotypes which reaffirm racism and xenophobia in order to stage a spectacle that entices an audience. This seems to be the case with the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) tag team, *Los Matadores*, who perform exaggerated stereotypes of Latino culture to a predominantly Anglo-American audience. However, the storyline and characterization of The Real Americans, led by their manager and spokesman, Zeb Colter, appear to undermine the negative stereotyping of Latinos in the United States and of groups such as *Los Matadores*. Particularly, by engaging what Leo R. Chavez calls the "Latino Threat Narrative,"—a set of media tropes that portray Latinos as invaders—The Real Americans satirize the hegemony of nationalism and patriotism in the United

States that produces such xenophobic anti-immigration rhetoric as is generally seen in right wing politics.<sup>1</sup> Keeping in mind, again, that professional wrestling works to engage a mostly white-dominated nativist audience, it is interesting to see this satire as a gauge for how times have changed—that perhaps a populist American society is ready for this hegemony to be openly mocked.

This essay will look at how professional wrestling normalizes xenophobic attitudes in regards to Latinos. The work of Gerald W. Morton and George M. O'Brien will provide the foundation for how wrestlers engage their audience by performing exaggerations of socially recognizable characters, for example, the U.S. patriot and the “evil” foreigner. These staged performances are always tied to real social conditions; they *must* be, generally speaking, in order for the wrestlers’ performances to evoke a reaction from the crowd. I will then examine the social forces that surround Latino angles of representation in professional wrestling, such as the Latino Threat Narrative, and analyze their prevalence in professional wrestling, and how the performances of these social forces work to reaffirm the logic of xenophobic hegemony in the United States. However, this discussion will also explore the possibilities for how professional wrestling disrupts or resists the logic of xenophobia. Camp studies will be useful in contextualizing how professional wrestling presents an exaggerated demonstration of hegemony which the audience recognizes as an absurdity. The absurdity of wrestling works to defamiliarize the representations of white nativism and xenophobia, becoming both entertaining and instructive to the

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the work and scholarship of Michael Dowdy in the field of Latino studies, and thank him for his generous guidance in helping me write this article.

audience. Understood particularly via a mode of exaggerated performances of social gestures akin to Brechtian theater and camp performances, the wrestling stage can become a form of resistance against hegemonic forces in the United States. Most importantly, however, this form of resistance, although rooted in the aesthetics of the wrestling performance, is germinated by the *audience*, not the wrestlers. In order to see the wide spectrum of the audience's role in interpreting the performances of professional wrestling, this essay will conclude with an anecdote from the polarizing and infamous right-wing commentator, Glenn Beck, who became (perhaps unintentionally) an audience member for whom Zeb Colter and The Real Americans' mocking performance of U.S. patriotism elicited a jarringly bitter response. Glenn Beck's response, in my opinion, affirms the effectiveness of The Real Americans' performance in disrupting the logic of xenophobia.

In the United States, the populist genre of professional wrestling often serves as a means to gauge the sensibilities of mass culture. In this discussion, particularly, I will be analyzing professional wrestling's representations of Latinos in order to gauge the exclusion of Latinos in mass society, with the exception of their conflicted inclusion based only on commodified stereotypes. What is mass culture? The term seems to signify the act of consumption in contemporary capitalist society, but becomes trickier to pin down when discussing race and gender. The dominant culture in the United States is produced with an image of American whiteness, an image that the dominant culture must constantly disseminate and consume in order to maintain its dominance.

Professional wrestling stages a demonstration of a public debate, both in live performances and on television. It is an art form that, I would say, is rich in exhibition value. What wrestling puts on exhibition, though, is not just a staged sporting event, but also the sensibilities of white American nativism. In their book-length analysis of professional wrestling, *Wrestling To Rasslin: Ancient Sport to American Spectacle*, Morton and O'Brien emphasize this point by stating, "[wrestling] is low drama, drama for the masses, and the masses want to see villains they can recognize and therefore more easily hate" (128). The spectacles that professional wrestling stage must be relevant to the widest mainstream U.S. audience, shaped by the same socioeconomic and political ideologies that constitute and reinforce the white status quo.

In order to be successful, professional wrestlers need to be more than just ordinary individuals. Wrestlers use exaggerated means of portraying their character's personality, oftentimes using specifically recognizable ideologies. For example, Morton and O'Brien state, "[t]he most distinctive of the villains is the evil foreigner ... represent[ing] a justification of American distrust of foreigners" (130). Although this essay won't be focusing on examples of "evil foreigners" in wrestling, this is an important point, in that it shows that wrestling has a strong tradition in using xenophobia and patriotism to mark its audience.

This type of conflict representation functions in a way that points to the social conditions as a cause of the conflict rather than simply the innate qualities of individuals. Morton and O'Brien contextualize this relationship between wrestling and newly emergent social forces caused by immigration to the United States:

[W]restling and boxing as immediately intelligible contests quickly attracted the immigrant hordes as participants and spectators. The new arrivals were changing both the ethnic mix and the labor force in America. For these reasons, the ruling set saw wrestling and boxing as manifestations of forces in America they disliked, feared and could no longer control. (32)

By recent example, Zeb Colter's Real Americans tap into this same exact social condition, using politically right wing anti-immigration rhetoric against their opponents, *Los Matadores*, who perform exaggerated stereotypes of Latino culture to a predominantly Anglo-American audience.

In order to stage a spectacle that entices a white populist audience, professional wrestling traditionally uses negative stereotypes which reaffirm and legitimize xenophobia. The Real Americans tag team, led by their politically-outspoken conservative manager, Zeb Colter, align themselves with staunch anti-immigration rhetoric in order to instigate their feuds with Latino opponents, stating continuously in their promos that, "people from other countries are sneaking across *our* borders, and stealing jobs from *real* Americans," and so they believe that "if you're in *our* country illegally, then you should leave" [my transcription, italics added for emphasis] (Meltzer). All this occurs while a Gadsden flag hangs in the background, and white text that reads "The First Amendment" flashes across the bottom of the screen, both signifiers of white American sovereignty and solidarity. Colter's speech uses an exclusionary rhetoric that divides Latinos from "real" Americans via terms of the U.S.-Mexico border.

In *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, Chavez describes how the social construction of Latinos in the United States is shaped by irrational fear and racism. Chavez points out that “Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation,” but instead are demonized as an “invading force” that is “unwilling or incapable of integrating, of becoming part of the national community” (4). Colter’s use of the term “illegal” represents a dimension of the Latino Threat Narrative, in which Latinos, but particularly Mexicans, are “represented as the quintessential ‘illegal aliens,’ which distinguishes them from other immigrant groups” (5). The term “illegal” works to recast Latino attempts of integration as acts of moral transgression. Colter believes that “illegal” immigrants are bankrupting the U.S. “both financially and morally” (Meltzer). The repetition of this term, “illegal,” throughout public discourse, to paraphrase Chavez, works to continuously reaffirm the social identity of Latinos as criminals who are unfit for citizenship (5). Colter’s performance stages this narrative very accurately—because a promo angle in professional wrestling generally happens more than once, it is repeated several times on many separate occasions, in order to help solidify that wrestler’s or manager’s character angle. Colter might give a similar version of this promo several times a week, repeating the same rhetoric in the same way that the Latino Threat Narrative uses repetition to continuously reaffirm itself.

Colter reconstructs Latinos as racialized Others not only by performing anti-immigration rhetoric, but by intertwining this rhetoric with symbols of American nationalism and patriotism. Nationalism and patriotism are common tropes in professional wrestling, used to affirm

allegiances with the crowd and other wrestlers as either heroes or villains. In the 1980s and 1990s, hero wrestlers would often enter the ring waving an American flag, while the villainous heels waved either Japanese, Iranian or Canadian flags. These portrayals help to reinforce the ties between America's national identity and citizenship on a moral level. If you were a wrestler who wore a pattern of stars and stripes, you were essentially an automatic hero in the eyes of the crowd. Regardless if this may still be the case in many current WWE storylines, it is not consistent with regards to The Real Americans, who are villain characters. Interestingly, they are able to use patriotic symbols like the Gadsden flag and allusions to the Constitution as vehicles to undermine their racist views. Their performance becomes a satire of American patriotism, in which these symbols are seen as artifices that legitimize hatred, racism, and exclusion through dominance and power. In her essay, "Professional Wrestling as Conflict Transformation," Ashley Souther discusses the potential of professional wrestling to be "used as political satire or even a rallying cry for community mobilization" (271). As far as I am aware, The Real Americans are the first example in professional wrestling in which American nationalism and patriotism are satirized, reversing the moral order that generally intertwines white Americanness with justice and good.

Colter also satirizes the political arm of U.S. anti-immigration policies with his repeatedly used closing remark, "my name is Zeb Colter, and I approve this message" (Stan). This phrase parodies political candidate advertising campaigns that are seen commonly throughout the election process. Colter's speeches demonstrate with irony that although overtly villainous, his xenophobic politics have an actual presence in U.S. conservatism.

Although it may be considered a stretch to envision such a villainous character as Zeb Colter actually running for office, his ideologies are, in fact, shared by the present base of right-wing politics.

The Real Americans' recent opponents, *Los Matadores*, are not villains, but due to the lack of respect that they garner, it would be hard to classify them as heroes. Their ring attire includes flamboyantly colored matador outfits and facemasks, and they are accompanied by a "bull" mascot named *El Torito*, a Little Person in a full body suit and mask. They are caricatures of Spanish and Mexican bullfighters meant for comedic relief, not to be taken seriously. Souther argues that this type of negative stereotyping in professional wrestling works to reaffirm hegemonic forces, a process that "normalizes latent racist attitudes and presents a very sectarian social stance as neutral or natural" (274). Professional wrestling does have the ability to normalize racism and the practice of exclusion, to "rall[y] the community against the supposed 'threats' of minorities, feminists, intellectuals, gays, foreigners—or whatever other villains can be created from the day's headlines" (Souther 273). In this case, *Los Matadores* reaffirm the objectification of Latinos as racialized caricatures. *Los Matadores* do not speak; they simply wrestle. They are objectified in the sense that because they are silenced, they are identified merely by their surface appearances, which as I stated earlier, are very silly, exaggerated and cartoonish caricatures of Latino culture. In the United States, "this powerful populist imagery is often used to protect the social order" (Souther 274). The populism that *Los Matadores* aim for is an audience that is predominantly white, for whom the objectification of Latinos has been normalized and therefore unlikely questioned.

Another part of this objectification is the bull mascot, *El Torito*, a person who is hidden underneath an animal costume. In “Not Quite Heroes: Race, Masculinity, and Latino Professional Wrestlers,” Phillip Serrato argues that professional wrestling in the United States uses physical stature as a basis of asserting the dominance of white masculinity. The depiction of Latino wrestlers as “pathetically ineffectual,” he writes, suggests “the (re)subordination of Latino masculinity to its more powerful white cousin” (248). *El Torito*, in this context, is an unabashedly offensive delivery of this model of hegemony. *Los Matadores* may not be the smallest wrestlers currently in the WWE, at 5’10” and 6’ tall, however, they are not built like their opponents, The Real Americans, at 6’7” and 6’5”. *El Torito* is drastically unequal in physical stature, and the WWE is, of course, intentionally capitalizing on this. On an episode of *Monday Night Raw* that aired September 30th, 2013, one of WWE announcers sings excitedly off-key, “olé, olé, olé!” and says in reference to *El Torito*, “I love this little fella’, look at him! I wanna get me one of those!” [my transcription] (“*Los Matadores* vs. 3MB”). What occurs here is a repackaging of Latino culture for an Anglo-American audience, an audience that the announcer represents as he ineffectually appropriates the “olé” chant out of context and simultaneously mocks with his off-key singing. His reference to *El Torito* is an obvious brand of objectification, through which he jokingly expresses his desire to own a bull mascot of his own. Connecting back to Serrato, as well, the announcer’s commentary also reaffirms the subordination of Latinos in terms of masculinity. What completes the objectification is that the audience, even a child, knows that *El Torito* is a person, not a bull, not a toy, not something that anyone

can own—and yet they, a predominately white audience, are unquestionably accepting of this depiction.

The role of announcers is crucial in relating the drama to the audience. Morton and O'Brien state that there is a "real parallel ... between the function of the Greek chorus and the function of the wrestling commentator" (121-122). In Greek drama, the chorus provides a context and conceptualization for how the audience should interpret the conflicts in the play. The wrestling announcers, such as seen in the above example, contextualize the dramatic conflict to the audience by way of reinforcing a xenophobic logic. These announcers, commonly referred to as "color commentators," are simply trying to intensify the audiences' response that has already been initiated by the wrestlers. Their roles in the spectacle, however, are not the same as the wrestlers', for whom there is a sense of distance from the audience. The announcers' role is, by comparison, a step closer to the audience—the announcers view the wrestling performance, but also assign a final context to which the audience will receive that performance. Serrato points out that throughout the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s, commentators played a crucial role in helping to popularize Latino wrestlers with the predominantly white Anglo audience, stating, "[i]f fans had any questions about the wrestlers' moral character, they had commentators to vouch for them as fine men and fine athletes" (239). However, the more recent examples of WWE announcers and their interactions with *Los Matadores* show how announcers can function to reinforce the dominant ideologies that marginalize and subjugate Latino groups.

It is also important to note that the announcers' role works to contextualize the hegemonic social forces at play

regardless of the in-ring outcome. For example, if *Los Matadores* pin The Real Americans to win the match, some viewers might argue that this proves that the WWE does not hold a grudge against Latinos, or more specifically, that the WWE doesn't reinforce the logic of xenophobia. To be clear, *Los Matadores* have beaten The Real Americans in some of their matches together. However, the outcomes of these staged competitions do not matter in this discussion, for even when *Los Matadores* win a match, the announcers will still be there to contextualize them as a socially powerless group, foreign to the United States, and as fitting subjects for objectifying humor.

So far, we've discussed how wrestlers, managers and announcers perform in order to create the spectacle of professional wrestling, but what is the role of the audience in the making of this spectacle? In most scholarship on the spectacle and performative aspects of professional wrestling, a key aspect that is overlooked is the extent to which the audience is *also* performing. Critics have examined how audiences play participatory roles in the spectacle of wrestling, but only as to how the wrestlers' performance entices the audience in order to elicit a response, and how that response validates the wrestlers' actions and influences their future performances. Morton and O'Brien lay the groundwork for the discussion of performance in professional wrestling, examining how a particular fan boos and taunts the wrestlers whose poor athletic performance has jarred him out of his suspended disbelief. This examination, however, only speaks about the athletic performance and the phenomenon that wrestling fans are aware and yet do not *care* that the outcomes are predetermined, as long as the athletic performances are believable to a degree. Morton and

O'Brien go further to explain how wrestlers perform certain social roles as villains or heroes, the purpose of these roles being that "the audience immediately [knows] the role of the actor and what to expect from him [sic]" (116).

Sharon Mazer takes this examination further, positing that the audience is actually an active member of the performance: "Instead of leaving passive onlookers in the dark, wrestlers, through their play, make spectators an integral and essential part of the performance" (97). She points out that "[t]radition has it that a wrestler becomes a 'good guy' or a 'bad guy' because of the audience's response to him" (108). Although it is true that the wrestling performance is completed by the audience's participation, I think that there is more to say about the audiences' role in the spectacle. It has already been founded and discussed by critics that wrestlers perform social gestures in order to entice a reaction from the crowd. I would add to this discussion that the audience, as well as the wrestlers, is able to perform a socially constructed role. As we have seen, professional wrestling stages a performance, a spectacle of xenophobic stereotypes and images of American whiteness that exclude racialized Others, and now we will discuss how the audiences' role in consuming and participating in this spectacle in *also* performative.

The question now is not, *Why do fans who understand that wrestling is "fake" still enjoy the show?*—but, rather, What makes an audience cheer and often even imitate the social gestures that continue to structurally disempower them? Souther discusses this disconnect, and how the crowd mentality is fraught with false consciousness, characterized by "unquestioning loyalty to group authority and uncritical acceptance of the status quo, a status quo

that leaves them underserved” (274). As a recent example, large members of the WWE crowd chant in response to The Real Americans’ catchphrase, “We, the People!” and mimic the patriotic hand-over-heart gesture that usually follows the Pledge of Allegiance. The gesture invites a mimicked response that draws a visual comparison between U.S. patriotism and the Nazi appropriation of the Bellamy salute. The call and response mechanism between The Real Americans and the audience is an ugly reminder of how ideologies are spread contagiously throughout public and political spheres. Both the audience *and* the wrestlers participate in this image of the spectacle. Here it can be seen that an interpretation of the audiences’ participation as a simple judge and jury, via cheering heroes and booing villains, is oversimplified, and that the audience performs not as individuals, but as a *mass population* that includes the wrestlers on stage and in the ring. This goes beyond booing or cheering; it establishes the audiences’ performance of hegemony in the United States.

Of course, a wrestling crowd in the United States is not a monolith of race, ethnicity, gender, or class. Research done by the Nielsen Media Research shows that WWE’s weekly program, Monday Night Raw, is “USA’s [television network] most watched program among Hispanic viewers” and “the #3 most watched program on ad-supported cable among Hispanic viewers” (“Company Overview”). We could say that those fans chanting The Real Americans’ catchphrase are only the white Anglo-Americans in attendance, but that possibility is doubtful. We could also chalk this phenomenon up to an occurrence of false consciousness on the part of any audience members imitating The Real Americans who may also identify with an ethnoracial minority group. However, I think it is

problematic to make broad assumptions about an entire wrestling crowd's social status and political affiliation. Instead, I think it is more appropriate to analyze the wrestling crowd as a *performance* of the homogenized American societal ideal. Included in the spectacle of professional wrestling is the image of an American society akin to the melting pot myth, a society of homogenized "Americans," and the ideal of allowing outsiders to seamlessly assimilate into the status quo. The wrestling audience is, in reality, not a monolith, and comprises an array of individuals—and the melting pot myth of American society is often complicated by practices of exclusion. In "The Multicultural Paradigm," Guillermo Gómez-Peña explains how "multiculturalism" in the United States can become a dirty word, in which marginalized outsiders are required to "sacrifice their particular identities" (27) in order to assimilate. "Multiculturalism," he writes, "is a dangerous notion that strongly resembles the bankrupt concept of the melting pot with its familiar connotations of integration, homogenization, and neutralization. It is why so many Latino organizations are so distrustful of the term" (27). In other words, the melting pot myth of a multicultural American society is a social construction based on practices of exclusion and cultural whitening, and we must remember that although the wrestling audience consumes, participates in, and performs images of whiteness, it is, in actuality, an audience that comprises a spectrum of racial, gender and ethnic backgrounds.

Yet, the staged spectacle of wrestling allows the audience to perform this idealized construction of American society. This aspect is illustrated clearly by the fact that WWE takes its product on international tours—reaching Canada, Europe, the Middle East and throughout Asia, Africa, and South America. Of course, the content of

their shows overseas remains basically the same as it does in the United States. Zeb Colter gives the same speeches overseas about how immigrants are illegally crossing borders and threatening the moral fabric of society. Audiences overseas, just like in the United States, are enticed to chant, “We, the People!” along with The Real Americans—and this is where the point becomes clear, because those crowds are *not* American, and yet the wrestling stage allows them to perform and join into the mass culture. During a show in Belfast in November 2013, for example, Zeb Colter told the crowd how happy he was to step off the plane and hear everyone speaking English, a statement which is met with rousing applause. He then tells the crowd that he would like to “give everybody in this building a chance to *become* [my italics] an honorary ‘Real American’” by joining him and his tag team in a “We, The People” salute, to which the crowd complies (Stan). The audiences’ performance is not fixed to their political affiliations or social status; they are capable of performing *outside* of their individual identity, just as much as the wrestlers themselves are capable. Whereas most scholarly criticism of professional wrestling focuses on the symbolic interpretations behind the in-ring (wrestlers, managers, announcers, etc) performers, this essay also inspects closely the cultural implications behind the performance of the audience. Mazer points out that “[b]ad guys or good, as wrestlers violate the order represented in and by the ring, they temporarily liberate the spectators from the constrictions of everyday social proprieties” (116). The “constrictions” of everyday social proprieties, in this case, is the conventional disapproval of speaking so openly bigoted against immigrants. Liberation from these constrictions allows both for the truly bigoted audience members to perform this bigotry in a safe environment,

and for audience members who are truly disempowered by this bigotry in their everyday lives to perform as the oppressing power. I would only make a slight distinction to Mazer's point, that wrestlers don't simply liberate spectators, but that spectators actively liberate *themselves* from these social proprieties by performing as white American nativists.

By looking at professional wrestling's connections to Brechtian and camp aesthetics, it is possible to explore how the wrestling spectacle presents just such a form of resistance to hegemonic social forces. Again, I would argue that this is due to an ideological shift, in which Latinos have been afforded inclusion into the United States' mainstream culture, yet only as commodified Others. The Real Americans' reappropriation of the Latino Threat Narrative is evidence of this change in cultural production. In "Uses of Camp," Andrew Ross examines how camp aesthetics derive from this change. Once hegemonic forces lose their power, he writes, "to produce and dominate cultural meanings, [they] become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste" (58). Although the WWE still relies heavily upon racialized stereotypes in their representations of Latinos, their representations of racism and exclusion in American constructions of whiteness are a veiled (or open, depending on the audiences' disposition) mockery of U.S. nationalism and patriotism.

Similarly to the concept of *defamiliarization* in Brecht's alienation effect, camp is also a method in which "the whole relationship of form and content within a cultural setting can be seen with new eyes" (Long 79). Camp accomplishes this through its type of humor, "a system of laughing at one's incongruous position instead of crying.

This is, the humor does not cover up, it transforms” (Newton 49-50). This provides some space to interpret The Real Americans and *Los Matadores with new eyes*. *Los Matadores* could be interpreted as a form of camp that parodies not just Latino culture, but the ridiculousness of how Latinos are depicted in popular culture. Personally, I find *Los Matadores* to be ineffective at disrupting the logic of xenophobia because neither they themselves nor the commentators ever acknowledge the team’s adherence to negative Latino stereotypes or the effects that these stereotypes have on Latinos. However, on the other hand, The Real Americans are a parody that *does* seem to transform the dominant perception of undocumented immigrants. Through their use of humor, The Real Americans defamiliarize the legitimacy of nativism that subjugates Latinos.

This, however, is where audience viewership becomes so important, “[p]recisely because camp commits its ultimate act of creation so completely to the spectator, it makes no real difference whether it is deliberate or naive ... the spectator *creates* camp by observing from a camp attitude, one that questions the serious and the absurd. Camp is found in the final dialectic, in the observer” (Long 80). Just as Mazer emphasizes the role of the audience in creating the spectacle of professional wrestling, Long attributes the practice of social criticism in camp, as well, to the role of the spectator:

All energies in the camp object are directed toward bringing about such a moment in the consciousness that views it. More than almost any other aesthetic, camp thus turns continually outward. The camp moment is incomplete, it is not camp, without

the satisfactory response from its audience.  
(79-80)

The relationship that professional wrestling has with its audience as a performance of hegemony is unique, in that not only does the relationship allow for the audience to perform, as discussed earlier, but it also allows for the audience to determine whether or not this spectacle is a form of resistance to the hegemonic forces being performed.

This aesthetic of absurdity and exaggeration produces a Brechtian dramaturgical quality of epic theater referred to as the “alienation effect,” which defamiliarizes the performance for the audience, enticing them to take an active, critical standpoint on the social forces being demonstrated on stage. The function of the Brechtian alienation effect is to cause the audience to question something that has become familiar by making it unfamiliar. As I’ve discussed, wrestling operates on artifice and predetermined established roles. I would argue that the vast majority of wrestling fans are aware of this artifice; after all, the WWE and its chairman Vince McMahon have openly outed the wrestling industry as “sports entertainment” rather than a legitimate competition (WWE “Mr. McMahon ushers in the Attitude Era”). When wrestling “fails” to convince the audience, i.e., when the artifice becomes visible, it forces the viewer to question (and ultimately reject) the validity of wrestling as a sports competition, and instead entices the viewer to pay closer attention to the social movements that are being demonstrated.

Brecht tells us that subjects in epic theatre should demonstrate social “gestures,” that these subjects “must

be arranged according to the mutual relationship of men or groups of men” (“Last Stage: Oedipus” 25). What social gesture is Colter performing? Why is it crucial that his performance be authorized by groups of society? Colter’s character signifies an older generation, a Vietnam war veteran, someone who has *earned* the right to defend his country. Also, as we already discussed, his catch phrase, “my name is Zeb Colter, and I approve this message” (Stan) can be seen as a performed behavior of political candidates. His performance as an *authorized* social actor is important because if he *wasn’t* qualified, his political rhetoric could be interpreted as the ramblings of a delusional nutcase and simply written off. In this sense, I think the WWE rightly legitimizes Zeb Colter enough that it forces the audience to take a more critical standpoint to his positions. Rather than delegitimize Zeb Colter *the individual*, the storyline works to delegitimize the social conditions of xenophobia and anti-immigration rhetoric that are embedded in Colter’s character. Zeb Colter’s character is a performance of right-wing anti-immigration ideology, and his “utterances are verbal performances that take place in highly codified conventions; their power stems from the legitimacy invested in authorized social actors (priests, judges, presidents, etc.) rather than in individuals” (Taylor 1417). This functions very much like Brechtian epic theatre, in that it asks the audience by way of absurd representations to (re)consider something that the spectator has become familiar with, in the case of *The Real Americans* and *Los Matadores*, the objectification of Latino culture. If the purpose of professional wrestling is to evoke a reaction from the crowd, then in this way, the audience takes on a participatory role in the spectacle of professional wrestling, allowing the spectator “to criticize

constructively from a social point of view” (Brecht “The Street Scene” 125).

However, as previously discussed, this characterization of the audience is *also* a staged representation, a role that the audience performs. This, I think, is the point where the entire spectacle can be opened up and seen as social criticism: a process of alienation, in which the concept of the audience itself is defamiliarized enough to reveal the absurdity of the social forces of hegemony that drive the spectacle. Unfortunately, the mode of defamiliarization can either unsettle the audience towards a self-awareness that works to resist the logic of xenophobia, or the spectacle can *reinforce* this logic—it all seems to depend on the audience’s attitude. All that can be said for sure is that professional wrestling points at these forces of hegemony; it stages and performs them in often contradictory ways, a performance with the *potential energy* to either disrupt or reinforce them.

To conclude this essay, I would like to look at a ripple effect of this potential energy. As I’ve discussed, professional wrestling is a unique art form, in that it allows its audience to participate in the spectacle not only via applause or jeers, but in some cases, to actually *interact* with the characters. In early 2013, Zeb Colter’s anti-immigration promos caught the attention of the right-wing political commentator, Glenn Beck, who feels that Colter’s persona unjustly “demonizes the Tea Party” (MrCensorMe) and its conservative American values. Glenn Beck’s criticism of Colter’s parody of right-wing politics becomes a prime example of how a wrestling storyline functions: by integrating significant sociopolitical reality into the staged storyline, the response from the audience (in this case, Beck) transcends the obvious fact that this is a staged

melodrama. Glenn Beck was able to respond publicly to the *fictional* character Zeb Colter, *not* to Wayne Maurice Keown, the real person and performer behind the fictional character. Beck's response perfectly depicts the potential energy of professional wrestling to either disrupt or reinforce xenophobic hegemony. On one hand, Beck's outrage and complete disregard for WWE as a performance can be seen as a failure of professional wrestling to produce any critical awareness against the logic of hegemony. On the other hand, however, Beck's response unknowingly gives us more examples of how The Real Americans' gimmick successfully satirizes U.S. conservatism and hegemonic ideologies. On his radio show, Beck himself exposes the artifice of The Real Americans' performance. He points out that the name "Colter" may in fact be a parody of the popular and controversial right-wing commentator, Ann Coulter. Before playing an audio clip of a Real Americans' performance, Beck asks his radio listeners to note how "stupid" the performers sound, mimicking the early *Homo sapiens* ancestral lisp of Jack Swagger, one half of The Real Americans tag team. He also pays insult to Zeb Colter's appearances, stating that he looks "absolutely like Charles Manson" (MrCensorMe). These insults can actually become pointed insights into the cognitive dissonance of Beck and his followers, for he does not make the connection that The Real Americans may not be dumb to their own fault, but that their "dumbness" mocks the exact social gestures for which Beck and his ideologies stand.

In an untelevised response to Glenn Beck, Zeb Colter breaks character halfway through a Real Americans' promo to address Beck directly, introducing himself as Wayne Keown. The background, on which a Gadsden flag hangs, reverts to a green screen, and the camera pans

back to reveal a film studio surrounded by boom mics and lighting fixtures. Keown explains to Beck that what he has just seen is called a “promo,” recorded to “elicit a positive or negative response from our fans,” further stating that in order to elicit a response, their characters, Zeb Colter and Jack Swagger, are using “the current, relevant and topical story of immigration” (Meltzer). Keown acknowledges that professional wrestling relies on the performance of public debates to engage their audience, comparing the WWE’s product to dramatic and popular television shows like *NCIS* and *Glee*, which similarly use “good guys” and “bad guys” to tell stories, and argues that the audience understands “the difference between reality and entertainment” (Meltzer). By laying bare the artifice, Keown elucidates the same point that I, myself, and other cultural critics have made, that professional wrestling is not just an ignorantly staged athletic competition, but a deliberate performance of social gestures. These social gestures, although frequently offensive and controversial, are not simply the byproducts of a populist artform appeasing its ignorant audience, but a complex social performance and exaggerated demonstration of cultural forces.

### Works Cited

Brecht, Bertolt. “Last Stage: Oedipus.” *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964. 24-26. Print.

---. "The Street Scene." *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964. 121-29. Print.

Chavez, Leo R. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2008. Print.

"Company Overview." *WWE Corporate*. WWE, 30 June 2013. Web. 02 Dec. 2013.

<<http://corporate.wwe.com/company/overview.jsp>>.

Long, Scott. "The Loneliness of Camp." *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Ed. David Bergman. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. 78-91. Print.

Mazer, Sharon. "The Doggie Doggie World of Professional Wrestling." *TDR: The Drama Review* 34.4 (1990): 96-122. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 28 June 2013.

Meltzer, Dave. "Stupid wrestling people explain how wrestling is fake." Online video clip. *YouTube*, 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.

Morton, Gerald W., and George M. O'Brien. *Wrestling To Rasslin: Ancient Sport to American Spectacle*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985. Print.

MrCensorMe. "Glenn Beck\_ WWE Gimmick Tea Party Racist Wrestler Jack Swagger & Zeb Colter." Online video clip. *YouTube*, 24 Feb. 2013. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.

- Newton, Esther. "Role Models." *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Ed. David Bergman. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. 39-53. Print.
- Ross, Andrew. "Uses of Camp." *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Ed. David Bergman. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. 54-77. Print.
- Serrato, Phillip. "Not Quite Heroes: Race, Masculinity, and Latino Professional Wrestlers." *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling*. Ed. Nicholas Sammond. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. 232-59. Print.
- Souther, Ashley. "Professional Wrestling as Conflict Transformation." *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 19.2 (2007): 269-75. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.
- Stan. "WWE Live Tour Zeb Colter Speach [sic] Belfast 6 November 2013." Online video clip. *YouTube*, 10 Nov. 2013. Web. 30 March 2013.
- Taylor, Diana. "Remapping Genre through Performance: From 'American' to 'Hemispheric' Studies." *PMLA* 122.5 (2007): 1416-30. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.
- WWE. "Los Matadores vs. 3MB: Raw, Sept. 30, 2013." Online video clip. *YouTube*, 30 Sept. 2013. Web. 21 Sept. 2013.
- . "Mr. McMahon ushers in the Attitude Era." Online video clip. *YouTube*, 6 Jan. 2014. Web. 5 April. 2014.

## **Two Roads Diverged: Player Choice and Genre Analysis in *Until Dawn***

By Gavin Davies, Independent Scholar

Robert Frost's contemplative 1916 masterpiece "The Road Not Taken," with its quiet lines about paths diverging in a yellow wood, was the perfect voiceover for a two-minute trailer in 2015 advertising *Until Dawn*, an interactive slasher film on PlayStation 4 based around choice and consequences common to the cinematic genre. The creepy spot, filmed in the wilds of Vancouver over two recent steamy summer nights, plays out like a scene from a fever-dream – or a horror flick. A young woman dashes from a cabin in the misty forest. Clearly running for her life and immensely afraid of an unseen pursuer, she must choose between two paths that wind through twisted trees. As she mulls her options, Frost's words – "And sorry I could not travel both / And be one traveller, long I stood / And looked down one as far as I could / To where it bent in the undergrowth" – take on an eerie menace. The poem becomes a kind of inner monologue to potential players, giving voice to the woman's tortured thoughts as she struggles with a decision that could spell life or death.

Games ostensibly about these kinds of choice often focus instead on consequences. Examining choice and

examining consequences both have a lot of value but, for game designers and players, it is crucial that the experience supplied by each is clearly defined. Games about choice encourage players to reflect upon what they are doing as they do it; about thinking through your actions as you commit. Games about consequences, instead, force players to realize the effects of an action *ex post facto*. In this sense, games about choice and games about consequences mainly differ by when they get the player to consider the action that causes the result. Choice makes you think pre-emptively, while consequences work in retrospect having seen the results. These can both be interesting, but they have different effects and thus require different approaches to game design. If priority is given to choice itself, engagement is found in giving the player a number of different vectors to weigh their choice on without reducing it to a calculation. If the focus relies otherwise on consequences, on revealing to the player the effects of their actions, the designer needs to consider what statement is made through that reveal. Simply thwarting players or showing that actions resulted negatively does not necessarily mean anything. Rather, designers have to figure out the chain of causality linking the player's initial action, the results they plan to show, and what that change exemplifies about the narrative.

Most interesting in either case is the expectation of consequence that motivates players to continue making choices. The existence of consequence is one of the core characteristics of all games, but video games differ significantly in their use of consequence in various respects. Not only is the range of consequence unprecedented in any other game; as dynamic rule-bound systems, they can also temporarily withhold clear gameplay information about consequence, and thus have

a special relationship to the way that players are forced to accept responsibility for their choices.<sup>1</sup> It should be clear from the outset that when discussing the consequences of choice in video games, the frame of reference is strictly limited to the narrative onscreen. *Consequence* in this manner always refers to *in-game consequence*. It is one of the defining features of all games that the consequences of a player's in-game actions are independent of the consequences in the real world.<sup>2</sup> But video games are especially efficient at presenting seemingly significant choices because they can keep track of consequences, enforce resulting changes within the narrative, and present them to the player in a way that is easily accessible.

*Until Dawn* is one such video game featuring the consequences of choice, but, as an interactive slasher film wherein players become directors, it subverts genre tropes through decisions couched on false premises to create a disconnect between player expectation and player choice. The signs which cue the recognition of a particular film as belonging to a certain genre are many and varied. The visual style of the title graphics, the accompanying music, the cast of the film, its setting, story structure, narrative style including its lighting patterns, color system, types of discourse in the dialogue, emphasized camera shots, can all offer the audience a set of expectations which inform the coding systems brought to the film by the audience.<sup>3</sup> As well as placing a film in a certain genre, it is even possible to position films by raising generic expectations which will not be met, so that the film reacts against

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 460.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction, Second Edition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 199.

generic expectations by raising them in the first place.<sup>4</sup> It is clear in either instance that identifying a film's genre relies on identifying particular signs within a film, the relationship between signs, and their membership of one or more codes. These codes and conventions which enable audiences to make sense of the narrative largely defines player interactions within *Until Dawn*, hence its choice-based gameplay is specialized insofar as it is heavily predicated on subverting expectations built around critical genre analysis.

Supermassive Games' *Until Dawn* opens with an explanation of its central gameplay mechanic – the butterfly effect – which establishes the dynamic nature of the interactive cinematic experience. Much like the chaos theory coined by philosopher Edward Lorenz, whereby a slight change in reality causes a ripple effect significantly altering the chance of a future event, each decision the player makes creates a chain of potential events branching the narrative down a specific path or scene, potentially allowing for a revelation or character development.<sup>5</sup> This effect can allow for completely different gaming experiences between players, sometimes even including different characters, scenery or, in the case of *Until Dawn*, scares and deaths. These narrative systems based on the consequences of player choice create an intimately personal journey but, more importantly, they situate players as directors of their own screenplays. While the illusive distance between film and audience must be maintained for effect, camera and spectator are linked through the experiential and participatory nature of

---

<sup>4</sup> Honglin Chen, *Learning in New Times: Writing Through the 'Eyes of Genre'* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong, 2008), p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Kautz, *Chaos: The Science of Predictable Random Motion* (Oxon: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.145.

interactive choice-based narratives.<sup>6</sup> The supportive binary opposition at work here is not only that utilized by Laura Mulvey – an opposition between passivity and activity, but also an opposition between proximity and distance that challenges how traditional spectatorship exists within the hybrid context of interactive cinema.<sup>7</sup>

From the outset, *Until Dawn* introduces a central theme – the close relationship between memory and media. For instance, the game’s initial chapters abide by what Vera Dika referred to as “stalker cycles,” formulaic plots set during a time of ritualistic teenage celebration unfolding inside the frame of an insular community – to which the killer was once intimately linked.<sup>8</sup> This role of media in the archiving, circulation, and construction of both individual and collective remembering has been identified by many scholars within the field of memory studies. Joanne Garde-Hansen writes of the symbiotic relationship between media and history, engagement with the past being mediated and mediatized through print, film, photography and digital media.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Freud uses two media metaphors: the magic writing pad and the screen. The latter, Alison Landsberg argues, indicates an understanding of the role of mass media on processes of memory; something reflected in the opening assertion of Russell Kilbourn’s examination of memory in transnational art and film, that cinema is constitutive memory in its most meaningful

---

<sup>6</sup> Amir H. Ameri, *The Architecture of the Illusive Distance* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings Third Edition*, ed. by Gerald Mast (Oxon: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 806.

<sup>8</sup> Vera Dika, *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 25.

sense.<sup>10</sup> This implied intertextuality and self-reflection places *Until Dawn* in its generic space for the audience to build their expectations accordingly. Moreover, opening the prologue with an emphasis on choice suggests an awareness of the significant role played by film genre in determining how players will choose to interact with previous conventions.

The potentially treacherous ways in which slasher films constitute a collective and individual sense of ideal choices, and the extent to which memory itself depends as much upon the player's current situation, is reflected throughout the game. In contrast to the status of media as a source of authenticity which can be excavated and relied upon by the player, this game mobilizes the sense Nicola King identifies in *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*, of memory as revision and rewriting.<sup>11</sup> Following a prologue wherein two sisters meet their deaths resulting from an ill-conceived prank, the next scene begins in a psychiatrist's office where the player, as an unseen first-person protagonist, answers a series of questions to a malcontent analyst serving as surrogate for the game developers and writers. The design of spaces, cut-scenes and character behaviours are notably determined by players' responses to the analyst's tests throughout the game. The protagonist's memories, narrated to the increasingly sardonic councillor, therefore appear inflected by their current personality and psychological state as chosen by the player. Responding differently to these questions produces a different narrative and, by implication, a different version of the remembered

---

<sup>10</sup> Russell Kilbourn, *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 36.

past. In contrast to the static media of slasher films, memories appear as an interactive experience which can be potentially transformed through repeated sessions.

These issues related to authenticity and memory come to a head towards the conclusion of *Until Dawn*, where it is revealed that the unseen patient in the office is not a traumatized victim, but rather the perpetrator of events. The analyst's unsympathetic attack on the player, implicit in his insinuation that the game is not being played in good faith, echoes Christian Metz' distinction between primary identification (with the camera) and secondary identification (with the characters) in cinema. Both are fluid gazes: character-identification on the psychoanalytical grounds that competing figures resonate with competing parts of audience psyche (e.g. masochistic victim and sadistic monster), and camera-identification on the cinematographic grounds that audiences can entertain different positions with ease – not just character perspectives, but omniscient ones too.<sup>12</sup> This type of identification is not a kind of empathy grounded in the way spectators feel and share the emotions of the characters onscreen, rather it is an act by which the spectator sees (and believes) what the camera shows them. Players identify not so much with what is represented, that is the narrative content, but with what creates that narrative; the cinematic apparatus. Primary identification with the camera and the branching narratives of the butterfly effect provides surveillance over all things. But the presence of intertextual material reaffirms that the implied player of *Until Dawn* is one primed to utilize psychoanalysis and

---

<sup>12</sup> Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 56.

genre knowledge as part of their interpretive framework.<sup>13</sup> The implied player therefore identifies with the first-person camera, not the characters, in an operation that is fundamentally interactive yet necessarily assaultive.

Assaultive gazing, a position in which the audience is invited to collude with the camera and to experience sadistic pleasure in a character's physical or emotional torment, has been tellingly contrasted with reactive gazing that witnesses, and empathizes with, the pain of the onscreen victims seeing itself as the target of cinematic horror. These categories, also known as the *projective gaze* and *introjected gaze*, have been shown by Carol J. Clover to be resolutely gendered – with the assaultive gaze figured as masculine/sadistic and the reactive gaze figured as feminine/masochistic.<sup>14</sup> Clover further observes that, in slasher films, assaultive gazing is by and large the minority position and that the real investment comes from the audience's reactive or introjected position, figured as both painful and feminine.<sup>15</sup> This argument suggests that pleasure, for a masculine-identified viewer, oscillates between identifying with the initial passive powerlessness of the terrorized victim and their later empowerment. Clover's theoretical elaborations, though they do not take into full account means by which these positions are reversed once audiences are no longer passive observers but active participants, nevertheless assist with defining the degree to which interactive artistic representations of violence imply a double assault, first for the characters

---

<sup>13</sup> Ken Hyland, 'Genre-based Pedagogies: A Social Response to Process', *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12 (2003), 17-29 (p. 21).

<sup>14</sup> Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Rikke Schubart, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970-2006* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2007), p. 113.

onscreen, then on the participating audiences for whom they are actually intended.

Whereas the assaultive camerawork of slasher films invites the viewer to identify with the killer, these subjective interludes are offset in *Until Dawn* by the presence of eight playable characters, with whom the viewer can form alliances. While visually the archetypal roles of the traditional slasher roles fit the actors, their initial characteristics are in conflict with audience expectations. For example, Chris (Noah Fleiss) initially fulfils the role of the immature practical joker, whose tricks provide the first false scare, yet his character is definably protective and methodical. Likewise, Matt (Jordan Fisher) appears superficially to be a jock character typical to the genre, at once the object of desire for women, and the object of envy for men. However, he only ever demonstrates prudence and his exploitative girlfriend Emily (Nichole Bloom) makes his position far from enviable. This narrative element plays with Andrew Tudor's observation that horror movies routinely function by placing stereotypical characters into cumulatively eventful situations.<sup>16</sup> *Until Dawn* instead takes non-stereotypical characters and pushes them into typical roles to enable them to seemingly provide familiar kinds of actions and purposes within the story. This subversion of genre convention requires audiences to recognize these character archetypes and identify that in-game as being atypical of the slasher film.

As observed by Daniel Barnes, characterization in the slasher genre typically follows a four-movement structure common to urban legends: Interdiction, Violation,

---

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxon: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 112.

Consequence, and Attempted Escape (I-V-C-AE).<sup>17</sup> The interdiction phase informs the characters not to do something although, in most urban legends, this phase is often implicit and relates to teenage social fears. The interdiction is then violated, and the consequences are outlined. These stories then conclude with the protagonists' escape, sometimes unsuccessful, sometimes not, from the consequences of violating the interdiction. Urban legends such as "The Hook" and "The Boyfriend's Death" are often used to discuss the social issues in which young people find themselves, either at college or at summer camp, as both are liminal contexts between childhood and adulthood, where young people are forced to accept adult responsibilities while still maintaining their childhood.<sup>18</sup> This social-script theory of storytelling molds stock characters, such as the bitch, the practical joker, and the athlete, whose express purpose in the slasher narrative is to be dispatched. Their purpose is contrasted with what Clover defined as the final girl, who is presented from the outset as the slasher film's main character and sole survivor.<sup>19</sup> She is not sexually active and is therefore vigilant; the first character to sense something amiss and the only one to deduce from accumulating evidence the pattern and extent of the threat; in other words, the only

---

<sup>17</sup> Daniel R. Barnes, 'Interpreting Urban Legends', in *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*, ed. by Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (New York, NY: Garland, 1996), pp. 1-16.

<sup>18</sup> Mikel J. Koven, 'The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film', *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and TV Studies*, 40 (2003), Retrieved from <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2003/may-2003/koven.pdf> [accessed 06.21.16].

<sup>19</sup> Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 45.

one whose perspective approaches the privileged situational understanding of the audience.<sup>20</sup>

The crux of slasher films is audience identification with this final girl, who possesses the resilience and virtues necessary to survive. Sam (Hayden Panettiere) is ostensibly the final girl of *Until Dawn*, yet she shares her traditionally exclusive connection with the audience between seven other characters, all of whom can potentially escape regardless of their gender or interdictions. Underlying that discussion is the misassumption that the sexes are what they seem; that men onscreen represent the Male and the women, the Female; that this identification along gender lines authorizes violent impulses in men and encourages victimization in women.<sup>21</sup> However, the observation that final girls tend to be masculine in dress, behavior and name, and that male victims are shown in supine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the final girl role – that there is something about victims warranting manifestation in the feminine, and something about the killer or protagonist demanding masculine expression. As theorized by Clover, sex proceeds from gender, not the other way around. In this sense, all of the playable characters found in *Until Dawn* can fulfil the role of final girl as survivors, which in turn contradict genre norms and affects traditionally clear-cut choices.

The combination of learned genre response and player input can lead to occurrences wherein in-game characters

---

<sup>20</sup> Rhona J. Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> William Schoell, *Stay Out of the Shower: 25 Years of Shocker Films Beginning with Psycho* (New York, NY: Dembner, 1985), p. 79.

defy the expectations of how they should behave in the context of a slasher film. For example, Jessica (Meaghan Martin) is quickly introduced as an archetypal provocative cheerleader, whose current relationship with her boyfriend Mike (Brett Dalton) is largely defined in carnal terms. She is also the second least playable protagonist, only reinforcing her apparent place as a sexualized victim whose choices are made on her behalf by other characters. This becomes apparent when Jessica and Mike seclude themselves in a cabin separate to the group on a midnight tryst, all of which the player directs from Mike's perspective. Of particular note in this chapter are the choices made determining whether Jessica acquiesces to Mike's sexual advances and, consequently, how clothed she is towards the game's finale. However, the journey is an unusually harrowing one involving traversal through an abandoned mine and a breathless chase through the woods as the couple escape from some unknown pursuer. In a manner almost conscious of Barnes' urban legend morphology, Jessica suffers from the ordeal and expresses vulnerability, acting like a human being rather than a vapid cliché. Her dialogue with Mike (or rather the player) acknowledges that she deliberately plays into the trope as a means of attracting attention and masking her personal insecurities. Once again, generic expectations are raised in light of preceding choices only to be swiftly undermined in the following scene.

This same level of subversion is also applied to the audio direction. Almost the entire soundtrack for *Until Dawn* is edited in a traditional film sense: stems fitted to picture augmented with bespoke edits to run off into stems or loops driven by various game parameters, the most crucial being player choice. Music subsequently reflects the narrative branches and emotional curves to force

diegetic player positions to affect otherwise non-diegetic stem mixes. For example, the volume of a violin stem could increase or decrease as players approach a door, a technique frequently used to pre-empt a scare or deceive the player into expecting one. There are basically two models related to the role and function of film music. According to Claudia Gorbman, who wrote one of the models, music provides referential and narrative cues.<sup>22</sup> It provides rhythmical and formal continuity, and aids in the construction of formal and narrative unity. Nicholas Cook, who wrote the other, explains that, while words and images concern the specific or objective, music deals primarily with responses – that is, with values, emotions and attitudes.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the connotative qualities of the music complement the denotative qualities of words and images. Hearing non-diegetic music in scenes where players do not expect to hear diegetic music allows them to more readily become lost in the drama and rely on learned genre response.

Only video games can situate the single player into a game, provide them with a choice situation, but deny any clear information about the type of consequence that the different options will have. As noted by Sebastian Domsch, it is important that this qualification is made, because video games operate according to probabilities, that is, they do give the player information about a finite set of possible outcomes, but only a probability about which of these outcomes will be fully realized.<sup>24</sup> This provision of extrinsic information exists in *Until Dawn* through totems which

---

<sup>22</sup> Claudia Gorbman, 'Narrative Film Music', *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 183-203 (p.186).

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Sebastian Domsch, *Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 130.

signify potential outcomes sensitive to earlier decisions made through the game's core butterfly effect mechanic. These collectible items are found in the game randomly and offer players the opportunity to avoid or follow seen fate via brief precognitive glimpses into future events. Totems in this way serve a vital function in *Until Dawn* because, without trust in the coherence of a game's fictional world and the willingness to base choices on information about that world, all choice situations would appear as arbitrary to the player, regardless of whether they are or not. Semantics and gameplay are therefore constantly at strife, and as the game progresses, the player as director will often learn to narrow their expectations (that were initially based on real-world analogy to genre) by analysing what the game actually does offer as options, and deriving possible rules and consequences from their personal experience.

These new consequences are then based on inferences about game design, not genre, and they can gradually override the more narratively derived player expectations. The main feature of game design is the prioritization of victory states, the explorative attitude synonymous with the idea that one can complete a game, that is actualize all of its available nascent options.<sup>25</sup> When a video game presents an option, left or right for instance, choice is intended to create narrative content specifically for the player; to let them be included in the storytelling process. However, extrinsic awards incentivizing alternative ways of playing video games, known as trophies, fundamentally distance the player from their

---

<sup>25</sup> Sabine Schenk, *Running and Clicking: Future Narratives in Film* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 191.

stories.<sup>26</sup> Trophies are often included within games to extend their longevity and provide players with the impetus to do more than simply finish the game's narrative, but to also discover all of its secrets and complete various challenges. They are effectively arbitrary challenges established by the game developer to be met by the player, occasionally coinciding with the inherent goals or narrative of the game itself. In either case, trophies are permissive, and thus encourage the player to explore choices, rather than make them. When playing *Until Dawn*, this extradiegetic approach can be seen in trophies such as 'Four Daughters of Darkness' and 'The Quicker Man' which reward players for completing the game with specific combinations of characters. While the inclusion of goals defined outside of the game's parameters might influence player choices, *Until Dawn* features only hidden trophies whose conditions remain concealed until they are otherwise fulfilled in-game.

Overall, *Until Dawn* presents a unique corollary between player expectation and player choice as an interactive cinematic experience. On the one hand, *Until Dawn* adheres to the generic slasher formula, wherein characters are killed according to an almost folkloric social-script theory of storytelling based on moralistic lessons about consumptive behavior and personal responsibility. Conversely, the incorporation of permissive albeit concealed extrinsic rewards for completion demonstrate how video games are fundamentally intended to be won. Game design cannot function without the prospect of players as active agents learning to overcome or master formal challenges. Victory conditions are explicit

---

<sup>26</sup> Justin Hodgson, 'Developing and Extending Gaming Pedagogy: Designing a Course as Game', in *Rhetoric/Composition/Play through Video Games: Reshaping Theory and Practice of Writing*, ed. by R. Colby (Berlin: Springer, 2013), p. 57.

and derive from procedural systems inherent to games, rather than players. To this extent, video games condition players into making decisions optimal to a desired outcome. Systems such as the totems in *Until Dawn*, warning of potential dangers, necessitate that players discover the solution for their chosen narratives and consequently exist to be solved. *Until Dawn* as a film expects everyone (with the exception of the final girl) to die, but as a game it challenges the player to make choices ensuring the characters' survival. Occupying this almost hybridized space as an interactive slasher film, in which the narrative relies heavily on interactions with a multitude of horror genre tropes, *Until Dawn* reconsiders how it is that the introduction of choice and consequence unique to video games as a narrative and gameplay device affects how generic tropes can be manipulated, challenged, and even perpetuated. More importantly, it exemplifies the potential of gaming as a discursive form to not only comment on players, but also on the cinematic legacy of traditionally passive media.

#### Works Cited

Ameri, Amir H., *The Architecture of the Illusive Distance* (London: Routledge, 2016)

Bennett, Gillian and Paul Smith, eds., *Contemporary Legend: A Reader* (New York, NY: Garland, 1996)

Berenstein, Rhona J., *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic*

- Horror Cinema* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996)
- Bignell, Jonathan, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction, Second Edition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)
- Chen, Honglin, *Learning in New Times: Writing Through the 'Eyes of Genre'* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong, 2008)
- Clover, Carol J., *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- Colby, R., ed., *Rhetoric/Composition/Play through Video Games: Reshaping Theory and Practice of Writing* (Berlin: Springer, 2013)
- Cook, Nicholas, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)
- Dika, Vera, *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990)
- Domsch, Sebastian, *Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013)
- Flanagan, Mary, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009)
- Frost, Brian J., *The Monster with a Thousand Faces: Guises of the Vampire in Myth and Literature* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989)

Garde-Hansen, Joanne, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

Gorbman, Claudia, 'Narrative Film Music', *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 183-203

Hyland, Ken, 'Genre-based Pedagogies: A Social Response to Process', *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12 (2003), 17-29

Juul, Jesper, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012)

Kautz, Richard, *Chaos: The Science of Predictable Random Motion* (Oxon: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Kilbourn, Russell, *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2013)

King, Nicola, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000)

Koven, Mikel J., 'The Terror Tale: Urban Legends and the Slasher Film', *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and TV Studies*, 40 (2003), [accessed 06.21.16]  
Retrieved from  
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2003/may-2003/koven.pdf>

Landsberg, Alison, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013)

- Mast, Gerald, ed., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings Third Edition* (Oxon: Oxford University Press, 1985)
- Metz, Christian, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982)
- Nutt, Christian, *Until Dawn YouTube's top trending game of August*, (London: UBM TechWeb, 2015)  
<[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/253268/Until\\_Dawn\\_Youtubes\\_top\\_trending\\_game\\_of\\_August.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/253268/Until_Dawn_Youtubes_top_trending_game_of_August.php)> [accessed 14 June 2016]
- Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004)
- Schenk, Sabine, *Running and Clicking: Future Narratives in Film* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013)
- Schoell, William, *Stay Out of the Shower: 25 Years of Shocker Films Beginning with Psycho* (New York, NY: Dembner, 1985)
- Schubart, Rikke, *Super Bitches and Action Babes: The Female Hero in Popular Cinema, 1970-2006* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2007)
- Tatar, Maria, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997)

## Representations of Women through Absences in *Frankenstein*<sup>1</sup>

By Mina Zare Karizi, Islamic Azad University  
and Payam-e-Noor University

On the face of it, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) reduces or completely excludes the feminine element. However, in line with the theory of *écriture féminine*, I believe that the feminine in *Frankenstein* is to be located "in the gaps, the absences, the unsayable or unrepresentable of discourse and representation" (O'Neill 290). *Écriture féminine* is a space in the textual production that can be entitled "feminine" and is located under the surface of the masculine discourse and only occasionally appears above the stage in the form of distractions of masculine language. In her *Frankenstein*, Shelly shows signs that spring from those distractions through which feminine figures try to obliquely express themselves.

The stories of Victor, the Being, Henry, Robert Walton, and to some extent Alphonse Frankenstein are apparently categorized as the "dominant" ones in *Frankenstein* whereas the life stories of Caroline, Elizabeth, Justine and

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the writer's M.A. thesis, *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Frankenstein in Light of Feminism*, September 2005.

the rustics are considered as the “muted” tales told by the figures of the dominant group. The female figures are silenced in this method of treatment but it does not mean that they are completely incapable of speaking. However, they are under patriarchal social and cultural pressures that undermine their confidence and make them hesitant about speaking and revealing themselves.

Caroline, Elizabeth, Justine, and Safie, the heroines and female figures of *Frankenstein*, are introduced and known only through the eyes of the masculine figures, and as such are limited to the confines of a male-idealized society: by having no active social role, these women strengthen the 19-Century kind of femininity that sacrifices itself for the sake of male idealization. Caroline, Alphonse Frankenstein’s wife, is cast in that light in the first chapter of the novel. She becomes Alphonse’s wife after the death of her only familial pillar, her father, in the world. Further on, Caroline’s “tender caresses” (Shelley 16) are regarded as Victor’s “first recollections” (16). Throughout the novel, Caroline is not given a space and a voice to speak personally about her ups and downs in life.

Similarly, Elizabeth Lavenza is completely presented through Victor’s letters or narration. The letters have an important role in the plot of the story as well as constructing the *feminine* part of *Frankenstein* where Elizabeth can implicitly express some of her passions. When Victor becomes extremely ill as a result of facing his creation, the Being, Elizabeth expresses her regret for “not being able to perform” a journey to Ingolstadt in a letter: “I figure to myself that the task of attending on your sickbed has devolved on some mercenary old nurse, who could never guess your wishes, nor minister to them with the care and affection of your poor cousin” (Shelley 40).

Meanwhile, Justine Moritz's character is developed via the indirect narration of Elizabeth reminding Victor that "Do you remember on what occasions Justine Moritz entered our family?" (16) Safie also comes to the stage by the Being's account and is designated as Felix's "sweet Arabian" (82) who is "endeavoring to learn their [Felix's] language" (83).

Thus, Shelley sheds light on the concept of *woman's text*. Women's writing is a double-voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the "dominant," i.e. men who control the forms in which consciousness can be shaped, and the "muted," i.e. women who must mediate their beliefs in the language of the dominant structures. Therefore, *Frankenstein*, and women writers' texts, can be read as a double-voiced discourse, containing a "dominant" and a "muted" story that Gilbert and Gubar call a "palimpsest" (Lodge 326).

The humanist wing of feminism, though, would argue that women under patriarchy are misrepresented and that their images which appear in literature, the media and elsewhere are often false and misogynistic. Women find it difficult to give expression to their true selves and can feel invisible or marginal in a male-dominated culture, in society and even in their literary productions. This also holds true about *Frankenstein* where dominance of the male is constructed and strengthened. What would happen if the creator of the Being was a female instead of a male? Culturally speaking, a "she" is not expected to enter the active realm of science as girls and boys since childhood learn to possess different characteristics and skills for their future lives.

For instance, although Elizabeth is interested in nature, she cannot delve into its depths and thus settles on the shallow appearances of things. She is only allowed to empower her imagination by reading “the aerial creations of the poets” (Shelley 18) and not learning “the secrets of heaven and earth” (19) that Victor longs for. In a way, since their childhood, they are taught to fit the domestic and public realms their society will later allocate to them: Victor learns that he is a *he* and Elizabeth is assigned her femininity by the society.

Therefore, being marginalized by a male-dominated society in the household chores and the domestic sphere, Shelley’s women shape their “selves” and “identities” through the “lapses” and “absences” that leave some space for their oblique self-expression. Being cooped up in the domestic sphere and playing the role of the “angel in the house,” these women endeavor to discover and explore their identity while they are drawn out of themselves, left without any energy, perception, affects, gestures or images to relate them to their authentic identity.

Gender identity is “socially constructed” and gender inequality begins very early in the patriarchal culture. Identity, considering feminism, is not an end but the starting point of each process of self-consciousness, which demands the understanding of one’s place in society. Elizabeth as a feminine creature is put under the heading of inferior category in her chauvinistic society. She is obliged to bear a split pseudo-identity for her diverse roles throughout her short life: she is first a cousin living in her uncle’s house, then a sister and playmate to Victor, and finally a wife.

As such, Elizabeth's identity is confined to the unified moral idea of a decorous femininity being the central focus for the impulses of Victor and his family. Possessing no space in the society of the novel, she cannot achieve an individuality and subjectivity to experience a self-made identity; she is not an *I* or a *self* but a *she* throughout the story. Her beliefs of individuality and individual abilities as a female along with her understanding as a member of women's community are not touched upon, which is why she has not accomplished an authentic self and as a result an authentic identity.

Women in the patriarchal era of the novel have attained this fake self since they have become alien to the original experience. Only when that fake self is shattered, their authentic self can be revealed through a spiritual rebirth. Thus, Elizabeth has a fake self in that patriarchal era, dominated by Victor as a cousin, a playmate, a fiancé, and a husband so that she is not able to attain a spiritual renewal.

Living in the absences, *Frankenstein's* women's only way to have a role is as the *Other*. Therefore, Elizabeth takes the role of the *Other* for Victor. He is the Subject and the Absolute; she is the *Other*. She does not possess an independent and authentic identity. Right from her first acquaintance with Victor, Elizabeth is introduced as a "promised gift" (Shelley 18) whom is "looked upon ... as mine—mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on her, I received as made to a possession of my own" (18).

As such, Elizabeth functions as the location of Victor's desires, fears and anxieties due to being brought up and trained in her family as an inferior feminine possessing a

split identity whose whole being should be cooped up in the same institution of family. They are both playmates and nearly of the same age, while one is able to explore the world and the other is merely a *Hestia*, one is *self* and the other is *other*, one is the center and the other a *supplement*, one is a *man* and the other a *woman* which is why there exist all those differences.

It can be said that the feminine figures of Shelley, breathing in an androcentric society without having any prominent presence or space, are portrayed in a way to function as the *other* to provide sufficient space for men to construct a positive identity for themselves as masculine. Elizabeth and Caroline, accordingly, act as if they were so fragile that they would not be able to survive without Alphonse' or Victor's support. Being masculine, they are rational, assertive and strong enough to control these irrational, unassertive and fragile women.

Consequently, Elizabeth exists only through the absences in order to fulfill the role demanded from her for the sake of Victor: a sister, a playfellow, a sweetheart, and a wife. She is but a "promised gift" (18) whose being is bound to Victor's ambitions and speculations. Throughout the novel, she "lives" either via letters to Victor or conversations with Victor quoted by him. Eventually, Elizabeth *is* only because Victor *exists* so that she can pave the way for Victor's illusions and desires. She is a scapegoat victimized both for being a woman first and then as a means of revenge for the Being to atone for Victor's misdeeds. It seems as if her life is a blank sheet which is colored merely by Victor's presence.

To such a degree, the public and domestic spheres are devoted to their owners throughout *Frankenstein* through

which self and otherness is exercised to achieve identity. The angels of the house suffer from the fake identity while the public travelers possess subjectivity and selfhood due to their masculinity.

Interestingly, the Being's identity, in spite of being masculine in gender, is portrayed as the *dark Other* like the female characters. Marginalized in the public sphere, the Being is a wanderer whose location is neither in the public nor in the domestic sphere so that he can be able to construct his self and identity. Despite all his attempts to communicate with the human race, he is rejected firmly by either gender. He is considered an *Other* and is labeled a demon or monster for his facial difference which he himself discovers by looking at his face:

In a transparent pool! At first I started back,  
unable to believe that it was indeed I who  
was reflected in the mirror; and when I  
became fully convinced that I was in reality  
the monster that I am, I was filled with the  
bitterest sensations of despondence and  
mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know  
the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.  
(80)

The Being's deformity and otherness is so strongly embedded in his mind that he dares not reveal himself to society and the De Lacy family so that he can bestow "happiness" (81) on them by his robust physical strength. He is the *other* because he is not *normal*. This abnormality, along with the fear of the *other*, is the cause of his failure in venturing into the human community. However, this so-called monster is not an "inarticulate, stupefied hulk. He is an eloquent, sensitive and discerning

creature” (Morton 56). The Being is a sensitive creature who seeks to undo all his misdeeds through “the love of another”:

If I have no ties and no affection, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing of whose existence every one will be ignorant. My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded. (106)

Mary Shelley’s Being, nevertheless, is born in Victor’s laboratory, metaphorically a male womb for him, without either a memory or a family history and background, after two years of unremitting study, which seems like a longer pregnancy than women’s. Succeeding in his prolonged labor, Victor refers to his product as a “catastrophe” (35) from whom he flees. Thus, Frankenstein is defeated in creating a perfect being without the presence of a woman *in* the public sphere. Victor touches on his “mother’s tender caresses and my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure” from his earlier “recollections” (16) while he has not been able to create such a memory for the Being, whose mother and father are summed up in but one pseudo-mother. As such, Victor is eventually defeated in taking the prime role of a woman from the domestic sphere to the public one.

But what about the Being? Does he not deserve to be an idol for his parents? Does Victor not have to teach lessons of *patience*, *charity*, and *self-control* to the Being to make him prepared and adaptive to the values of the public arena? Does Victor not have to *guide* the Being? Does Victor not have any *duty* toward the Being to help him achieve a *Becoming* in his community?

Frankenstein, thus, deserves all the blame for all the misdeeds done by the Being, for he has not *mothered* the Being in the domestic domain. If he had trained the Being properly, he could have achieved his goal of creation because the Being would have had a capacity for *becoming* a superhuman in case he had not been marginalized in the public sphere and had gained a proper identity and not treated as the *other*. And these all can also be true in the case of the female characters of the novel.

Mary Shelley echoes the voicelessness and absence of female figures of the Victorian era in her *Frankenstein*. Elizabeth, Caroline, and Justine are spoken of by the active voice of male characters. Shelley does not present an active participation and presence of women in the progress of *Frankenstein*. They are merely allowed to be expressed through the words of the males or indirect ways of expression, i.e. the letter in the case of Elizabeth. Female figures of Shelley are given the right to speak as much as they own that right in their real lives, which is tantamount to silence.

Influenced by literary works written by male figures, such as William Godwin and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley seems to experience a kind of “patrilineage” in composing her masterpiece. Nonetheless, according to *écriture féminine*, female authors are expected to follow

the traces of a “matrilineage” instead in order to bring to existence feminine literary precursors.

Generated by a female author, at first sight the readers of *Frankenstein* accordingly anticipate feminine experiments, whereas female characters exist merely in connection with other male figures. These women are portrayed as “beautiful, gentle, selfless, boring nurturers and victims who never experience inner conflict or true desires” (Morton 111). They are the emblems of lady-like characters whom are victimized for the ambitions and aspirations of vigorous male figures.

Consequently, these feminine characters barely survive in a patriarchal aura in which culture draws a partition between men and women with men at the top. Elizabeth and Caroline are victims of such a community where their feelings and human rights are not considered at all. Their experiences as women are not expressed in order to help them find an authentic self and identity. Their self is all but the product of a prolonged silence and absence from which they are originated and on which they are brought up.

Being obliged to play the role of a “shrine-dedicated lamp” (Shelley 19), feminine figures are but goddesses of homes, cooped up in household chores and not allowed to venture out to the public sphere practicing an active presence. These codes of femininity are conveyed to them from their society, allowing men more power and control over women.

In the end, as we saw, not only do women suffer from the socially constructed norms of masculinity and femininity, but also does the Being whom is exiled from the

dominant group's public sphere as a common treatment with the *others*. He is neither allowed to enter the public sphere, nor is he welcomed in the domestic sphere. Female figures, like the Being, are also the *other* in relation to men. They have only achieved a fake identity under the authority of their patriarchal culture that merely allows them to breathe through lapses and absences in the dominant narrative.

Therefore, Mary Shelly does reflect women's desires and demands in the gaps of *Frankenstein*. However, her women are looked upon through the eyes and spoken about by the tongues of the men, and as such exist merely in attachment to men, so much so that even their oblique presence cannot affect the main trail of the story, i.e. the creation of the Being.

### Works Cited

Humm, Maggie. *Feminisms: A Reader*. Harlow: Longman, 1992.

Lodge, David, and Nigel Wood. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. United Kingdom: Longman, 2000.

Morton, Timothy. *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. London: Routledge, 2002.

O'Neill, Micheal. *Literature of the Romantic Period; A Bibliographical Guide*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998.

Ruthven, K.K. *Feminist Literary Studies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.

Warhol, Robyn R., and Diane Price Herndl. *Feminisms*. Rev. ed. Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd.: 1997.

## Reviews

Keith Moser's *The Encyclopedic Philosophy of Michel Serres: Writing the Modern World and Anticipating the Future*. Augusta, GA: Anaphora Literary Press, 2016. By Kim Idol

In his assessment and presentation of the work and worldview of renegade French philosopher Michel Serres, Keith Moser gives us such an energetic and engaging view of this modern philosopher that readers will feel compelled to read all of Serres's works. This is a comprehensive introduction to a philosopher who has confronted common definitions of *humanity* and reinvigorated the study of the symbiotic relationships admired by human beings at their own peril. Serres's philosophy is smart and entrancing in its own right, but so is Moser's take on what he has read and what he hopes you will read in the future. In his description of Serres's interdisciplinary intentions Moser sets standards of his own. He encourages you therefore, to move beyond the scope of this book as he presents his arguments.

Moser first defines what is wrong with contemporary epistemology in general. He defines *philosophy*, in his and Serres' terms, as an organic and lively mix of ideologies comprised of conclusions drawn from a wide variety of intellectual disciplines. But Moser's book is not stuffy, and in fact offers easily digestible access to complicated ideas that general readers and academics both will appreciate. Notably, it posits and defends the position that human beings must live in concert with the world they now "command" and offers a complex view of stewardship that is intelligent, frightening, and heartening.

In terms of presentation Moser does an excellent job of setting up the chapters, by providing frameworks and conclusions that keep to the main ideas without losing track of the ideological connective tissue, the stray pieces, that need to be included in the arguments presented in the book. As Moser weaves together the webwork of philosophers who inspire Serres, he also keeps the reader in the loop so that we see not only Serres's conclusions, but also his process, as we learn why understanding these ideas is a critical task. Mosley attaches abstract ideas to practical realities and then offers a very readable text that invites us to keep reading. Before finishing this book I had already started a list of works (included in the book) that I need to read in their original language because this book had stimulated my curiosity. I read it, marked it up, reread passages, and will keep it by my side as an important reference. It is an informative and immensely enjoyable read.

Julia Lee's *Our Gang: A Racial History of the Little Rascals*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2015.  
By Heather Lusty

Julia Lee's new cultural history of *The Little Rascals*, one of the most popular TV shows of all time, is a striking, thorough investigation into the complexities of racial relations of early twentieth-century America. *The Little Rascals*, an American short film comedy featuring poor neighborhood children's misadventures, was the first television show to put girls and boys, blacks and whites, together *in situ* – an uncommon picture of American childhood, one that showed interracial children playing together as friends. Launched as a franchise in 1922, converting to sound in 1929, the production enjoyed an unusually long life span—twenty years in an original run, with 220 episodes and a feature film, and syndicated for television from 1955 onward. During its original production (pre-Universal Pictures' 1994 reboot), it featured 41 child actors. *Our Gang's* most important contribution to American culture, in a time rife with racism, Klan activity, and Jim Crow laws, was its influential shaping of perceptions of black-white relations.

Lee highlights the ways stereotypical tropes of grotesque and abysmal in *Our Gang* presented a contradictory and radical revisionist portrayal of American race relations that set the bar for American television shows. Lee concentrates on the gang's four African-American stars: Ernest "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison, Allen "Farina" Hoskins, Matthew "Stymie" Beard, and Billie "Buckwheat Thomas;" drawing attention to both their studio lives and external social experiences, Lee underscores the importance of the show's groundbreaking portrayal of a racial utopia, which encouraged black

activists to envision African-American headway and acceptance in 1930's society. Despite that fact that *Our Gang* embraced distasteful articulations of racial stereotypes, Lee emphasizes the "idealized, hopeful vision of the nation's future," a nostalgia for the innocence of childhood, and an imagined space in which black and white children could join hands and play as equals.

Despite the book's central focus on the personal and professional lives of the series' African-American actors, Lee skillfully draws in the fascinating, troublesome culture of the time: American society, the Hollywood film industry, the political landscape, public race relations and sentiments. The narrative is tightly woven with a variety of contemporary sources: interviews from the then-adult actors recounting their fondest memories and inevitable disappointments; reflection by W.E.B. DuBois, who noted on his 1910s visit the "beautifully housed [Negro of black Angelenos]," who were "an aggressive, hopeful group ... full of push and energy." The cultural tapestry of turn of the century Los Angeles was one more relaxed, more integrated than its neighbors. Yet within that utopic town, other African-Americans recounted segregation at the beaches, in upscale restaurants, public transportation.

In addition to being a fascinating read for fans of the TV show, Lee's book is an excellent, balanced, and important contribution to cultural studies, history, race relations, and the history of the film industry, which managed to develop and sustain an idealized fictionalization of American society to come.

Anne H. Stevens's *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Introduction*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2015. By Heather Lusty

Anne Stevens' *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Introduction* offers a fresh take on a towering subject. Intended for a broad audience, the book provides succinct overviews to the major historical eras and their respective great theoretical treatises. A thorough introduction addresses the typical misgivings about the weighty field – often dismissed as heavily theoretical and largely subjective. As Stevens points out, every day “we perform countless acts of reading, writing, interpretation, and evaluation [...]”; literary theory provides a vocabulary and tools for thinking about reading, writing, and criticism, both everyday acts of evaluation and more academic studies of literature and culture.”

A chapter on the ancient world sets the foundation for the development of Western tradition. Plato's seminal works on speech and writing provide an introduction into literary theory and the first dialogues, or discussions, on a wide variety of subjects important to the Greeks. Aristotle's contributions to narrative form come next; our understanding of the elements of poetry: comedy, tragedy, and epic, are defined by his *Poetics*. Horace, Quintilian, and Longinus round out the approaches to exploring and analyzing the art, speech, and aesthetics that define Western civilization.

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance are next; Stevens outlines how the development of religion and Biblical interpretation influenced the establishment of a literary canon. Medieval scholasticism, a Christian intellectual movement, applied Aristotelian studies to

Christian subject matter; Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* outlines the four levels of interpretation still used today. The Enlightenment is characterized by the development of print culture, modern reviewing, the dictionary and encyclopedia—all contribute giant strides towards analyses of political rhetoric, feminism, and aesthetics. The rise of Romanticism in the nineteenth century is swiftly followed by Realism, Nationalism, seminal texts by Arnold and Nietzsche, and reactionary fin-de-siècle fictions.

Chapters 6 through 9 encompass twentieth- and twenty-first century Formalist, Historicist, Political, and Psychoanalytic approaches. Stevens does an excellent job of breaking down the nuances of various approaches from French Linguistics, Russian and Anglo-American Formalisms, Structuralist anthropology and semiotics, Narratology, and Deconstruction. Historicist approaches include notable figures like Foucault, Greenblatt, and Bourdieu, as well as book history and the rise of digital humanities. Political approaches start, naturally, with Marx's theory, and branch out into schools and studies that define the twentieth century: post-colonial and ethnic studies, Orientalism, the African-American tradition, feminist theory, sexuality and queer theory, and disability and environmental studies. Freud and his disciples round out the chapters on contemporary approaches.

The final chapter pragmatically moves from theory to practice. Stevens takes two canonical examples of literature—*Hamlet* and *Frankenstein*—and highlights how the various approaches can be applied to these works to read and understand them through different lenses. It is this last chapter that is most universally useful; through two well-known works of literature, the vast array of interpretation available to readers, as consumers of

knowledge and culture, are clearly and entertainingly illuminated. The book is a handy, accessible entry into academic theory, and an enjoyable read.



## Contributors

**Adam Cohen** is an adjunct lecturer in New York City. He teaches at Marymount Manhattan College and within the CUNY public university system. His courses focus on graphic novels, multicultural American literature, and topics such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity within commodity culture.

**Gavin Davies** is an MA History graduate, whose topics of interest for future doctoral research include the archiving of video games as historical objects and representations of history in participatory media. He hopes that those determining the successes of his applications for funding are secretly ardent gaming fans at heart.

**Brent Gibson** is Professor of English at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. He has published articles on nineteenth and twentieth-century American literature, and his interests lie at the intersections of popular culture, American literature, and theology. He teaches an interdisciplinary Honors course and regularly presents papers at SWCCL and PCA.

**Kathy Merlock Jackson** is a professor of communication at Virginia Wesleyan College, where she specializes in media studies, animation, and child and youth culture. She has published many articles, reviews, and chapters and eight books, four of them on Disney-related topics. A former president of the American Culture Association, she edits *The Journal of American Culture*.

**Katherine Jellison** is Professor of History and Department of History chairperson at Ohio University. Her most recent book is *It's Our Day: America's Love Affair with the White Wedding, 1945-2005* (University Press of

Kansas, 2008). She's collaborating with Steven Reschly on a book about Amish women during the Great Depression.

**Mina Zare Karizi** is an English Instructor at Islamic Azad University, Alborz (Karaj) branch, Tehran, Iran and Payam-e-Noor University, Alborz (Karaj) branch. She has been teaching English for about 10 years academically and has a B.A. and an M.A. She has written some manuals for Payam-e-Noor students as well.

**Robert L. Lively** is a Ph.D. student at Arizona State University and an English Instructor at Truckee Meadows Community College. His main research interests are Viking Literacy and Rhetoric, as well as Science Fiction and Fantasy in popular culture.

**Reza Parchizadeh** is a political theorist and activist. He is the co-editor-in-chief of Tahlil Rooz, a Persian-language think-tank. Reza has authored five books and many articles, both in English and Persian. At the moment, he is a doctoral candidate in the English Literature and Criticism program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

**Steven D. Reschly**, from Truman State University, holds a PhD from the University of Iowa. His current research examines gender and rural consumer culture in 1930s Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His first book, *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840-1910* (Johns Hopkins, 2000), won the 2002 Communal Studies Association Book of the Year.

**Carl Rollyson** is Professor of Journalism at Baruch College, CUNY. He has published biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Lillian Hellman, Martha Gellhorn, Norman Mailer, Rebecca West, Susan Sontag, Jill Craigie, Michael Foot,

Sylvia Plath, Amy Lowell, Dana Andrews, Walter Brennan, and *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*.

**Michael A. Soares**, currently completing his PhD at Illinois State University, has taught English for over twenty years. His dissertation analyzes the impact of dystopian literature in the secondary classroom. Soares recently published “The Man of Tomorrow: Superman from American Exceptionalism to Globalization” in *The Journal of Popular Culture*.

**Dorothy Vanderford** has a BA from the University of Oregon and an MA from the University of Nevada Las Vegas, where she is working on her PhD in early modern English drama while she teaches and serves as an editorial research assistant. She likes to take naps in her free time.

**Tammy Wahpeconiah (Sac & Fox)** is an enrolled member of the Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri and an associate professor of English teaching courses in American, American Indian and Ethnic American literatures at Appalachian State University. She received her Ph.D. in American Literature from Michigan State University. Her research interests include early American Indian writers and contemporary American Indian literature.

## ***Popular Culture Review***

*Popular Culture Review*, the refereed journal of the Far West Popular and American Culture Associations, is published twice yearly by Westphalia Press and widely indexed in sources including the MLA Bibliography. Subscriptions are included as part of membership in FWPCA/FWACA.

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

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

*Popular Culture Review* gratefully acknowledges the contributions and support by the UNLV College of Liberal Arts and the UNLV Department of English.

Articles published do not necessarily represent the opinions of and are not the legal responsibility of *Popular Culture Review*.

ISSN 1060-8125

-----

*FWPCA/ACA* 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, February 24-26, 2017  
Palace Station Hotel, Las Vegas

## Call for Papers

Now accepting papers on all aspects of Popular Culture worldwide and American Culture. Send abstracts of 75 words to [felicia.campbell@unlv.edu](mailto:felicia.campbell@unlv.edu) before December 15, 2016. Please include your institutional affiliation, if any, and a postal mailing address. We encourage early submissions. Visit us at [fwpca.org](http://fwpca.org), and please “Like” *Far West PCA* on Facebook.