

EMERGENCE

UCSB English Department's Journal of Undergraduate Research



Volume XI: June 2026

EMERGENCE

A Journal of the Arnhold
Undergraduate Program
2026

University of California, Santa Barbara
Department of English

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to John and Jodi Arnhold for making this program possible.

Thanks also to Professor James Kearney and Professor Jeremy Douglass for their assistance, mentorship, and guidance. Thanks also to Becca Hamilton for her mentorship, guidance, and advice.

Thanks to the staff of the SASC for their assistance throughout this process.

Publication Details:

EMERGENCE: UCSB English Department's Journal of Undergraduate Research, Volume XI: June 2026. compiled, edited, and designed by Shaun Nowicki.

Published as part of the Arnhold Undergraduate Research Program. Published by the University of California, Santa Barbara Department of English

Cover image: Rackham, Arthur, detail of an untitled illustration from Richard Wagner's *Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods*.

Design information:

Created using Adobe InDesign v. 21.4.1

Title Font: Arial

Project Title Font: Baskerville Old Face

Body Font: Times New Roman

Notes: Minion Pro

Contents

<i>Editor's Introduction</i>	6
Shaun Nowicki	
<i>"Am I marble?: Charlotte Brontë's literary self-styling and "Preference"</i>	12
Sophia Benito	
<i>Tragic Oscillations Between Rhizome and Arborescence in 1950s-1960s Countercultural Media</i>	23
Hannah Brard	
<i>The Decline of the American Industrial Midwest & Its Post-Industrial Identity</i>	46
Aldo Cardona	
<i>Engineering Uncertainty: Ursula K. Leguin, Predictive Processing, and Reimagining Social Frameworks</i>	65
Grace Fisher	
<i>Exalting the Fairy Tale: The Power of the Chimerical</i>	81
Ethan Griffin	
<i>Our Hamlets are Too Embarrassed to Be or Not to Be: How Cringe Culture has Stolen Shakespeare from Our Youth</i>	98
Ophilia Hamze	
<i>A Puppet Has Nine Strings</i>	110
Madeleine Mekari	
<i>Love Me, Madly</i>	126
Sebastian Muñoz-Massa	
<i>Unresolved Histories, Untold Narratives: AIDS and the Social Responsibility of Language in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnival"</i>	140
Mia Octavio	152
<i>If You're Cold, They're Cold, Invite Them Into Your House!: Examining Home Spaces and Vampiricism in Interview With the Vampire</i>	167
Dia Kai Singh	
<i>Inside The Minds Of Latiné Poets</i>	
Jeovany Tzilin-Gomez	
<i>Recentering Mrs. Ramsay Through Psychoanalysis: Woolf, Joyce, and the Recovery of Maternal Psychic Power</i>	188
Sophia E. Vogt	
<i>Paratext, Epitext, and Contemporary Media: The Evolution of Literary Culture Beyond the Book</i>	203
Josephine Yario	

Editor's Introduction

I wish to begin with three etymologies, or, thought another way, three stories of origin and transformation.

One. It's an often repeated fact that the essay, as a written form, comes to us first from the 16th-century French humanist Michel de Montaigne. First published in 1580, his *Essais* are quirky explorations of topics, often meandering from one idea to the next before returning us to a deeper, philosophical truth. "Of Names" proceeds in just this manner, starting with a seemingly unusual image, "No matter how varied the greenstuffs we put in, we include them all under the name of salad. So too here: while surveying names I am going to make up a mixed dish from a variety of items," before moving through a series of anecdotal radishes and epigrammatic lettuce leaves covering ancient wisdom about the power of a name. (308) Montaigne is skeptical of this received wisdom—is Socrates truly who is because he has a powerful name? Is there any actual, divinely-inspired force behind the name Henry that seems to make it such a desirable name for English and French monarchs? Montaigne arrives at a conclusion,

It is those who survive who are moved by the sweetness of those sounds stirred by a desire to rival those dead men, without reflection they mentally attribute their own emotions to them and deceive themselves into thinking that they too will be able to feel them in their turn. (313)

It's a powerful indictment of the received wisdom we seek from those who come before, with Montaigne diagnosing the succor we wish to receive from the past as a fundamental human call that relies on self-deception. We might scorn the habit of relying on the past to define our present moment, if only we had courage. Of course, this is not the whole story, as Montaigne, in the very next sentence, quotes Juvenal's "Satire X," giving the last word not to invention but to reception. Montaigne's essays are all idiosyncratic, like this, and offer a space for us to try out our ideas—to test their veracity against our own experience. These are its two original meanings in the French; *essais*: attempts, or tests.

Two. Another idea that obsessed Montaigne was "experience," from the Latin word *experientia*. This word, rendered in another form, gives us the modern scientific term experiment—yet another form of testing the universe to seek out knowledge.

Experience is understood more concretely, more practically; we are said to have experience through the lives we live and through the things that we do. One can gain experience only through trial and activity. When one is *experienced*, one is thought of as having an intuitive knowledge about the world, or about a specific subject matter. Where then does experience come from? Peeling back the word gives us more clues; at the center of experience is the verb *peritus* and its neighbor noun *periculum*. *Periculum* can mean a trial or an attempt, but it can also mean a risk, a hazard, or a danger. There is a sense, then, that if one is to become *experienced*, there must be some risk of failure, some danger that comes with facing the world and seeking out its secrets.

Three. The final word I am interested in is the noun *project*. In the highly-corporatized world, this is a familiar friend. We are always working on projects—developing ideas collaboratively or individually that will, with any luck, be manifested into a product or a new development in the world around us. Again, we find this word's origin in Latin, where we can break it down again: *pro* (forth) + *iectus* (to throw). Projects are that which we cast forth, ideas which we scatter to the winds like seeds with the hope that they will bloom wherever they land. The term is inherently future-forward, demanding that we cast something of ourselves forward in a hopeful manner, potentially risking that we cast it all away for nothing (another potential meaning of *proiectus*).

The following pages contain thirteen brilliant pieces of writing which embody, in different ways, the three words I have just glossed. Written as part of the 2025-2026 Arnhold Undergraduate Program, these critical essays and imaginative creative works each embody the spirit of risk-taking, experimentation, and inquiry that forms the backbone of humanistic study. Some writers try out new or underexplored critical territory—pushing new frontiers with underexplored or novel poetic archives, expanding theoretical frameworks and applying them to different texts, or creating new, exciting worlds that reflect our own inequitable and painful reality. Others re-examine older texts and older paradigms, bringing fresh insights through their own, individual perspectives. Each embodies the spirit of Montaigne's *Essais*, attempting to articulate their own, original ideas while incorporating the best of past and present scholarship.

How did these projects come about? Each fellow in the program, beginning at the end of the Fall 2025 quarter, conceptualized a robust, research-driven project that

they developed over a roughly fifteen-week period. These projects often shifted after initial conceptualization, with some fellows moving away from their first proposals entirely as they encountered interesting ideas in their preliminary reading. The first ten or so weeks featured deep dives into the research process, with fellows initially creating a research plan and a research budget that allowed them to limit the scope of their ideas. From there, they proceeded to set individual goals that allowed them to proceed through the first few weeks of research, some writing initial drafts along the way and others expanding their scope as they worked through their conceptual archives. Some visited actual, physical archives, including UCSB's Special Collections; UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library; the Huntington Library in Pasadena, CA; the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C.; local sites in Erie, PA; and Bethlem Royal Hospital's Museum of the Mind in London. Each project was nourished by weekly collaborative meetings, where fellows discussed progress, frustrations, breakthroughs, and challenges with their peers. Throughout these meetings, the fellows developed ideas that bloomed together. This is reflected, partially, in the resonances that will appear as you read through this volume.

Writers are arranged alphabetically, by last name, but often these projects will speak to one another despite the coincidence of naming. Hannah Brard's essay (the second in this volume) and Aldo Cardona's journalistic writing (the third), for example, speak to the American experience of the 1950s and 1960s, although their source texts and approaches diverge wildly. Other trends emerge nonsequentially. A number of writers deal with current and historical crises of mental health in creative projects (Madeleine Mekari, Sebastian Muñiz-Massa, Jeovany Tzilin-Gomez) while others draw on different theories of mind to investigate major literary texts (Grace Fisher, Ethan Griffin, Sophia Vogt). Others plumb how contemporary shifts in technology shape the way we engage with texts, from Shakespeare (Ophelia Hamze) to paperback publishing (Josephine Yario). Still others ask us to consider how gender and sexuality shape our conceptions of the world, from notions of literary fame and self-styling (Sophia Benito) to infectious or pernicious manifestations of queerness (Mia Octavio, Dia Kai Singh.) These connections arose, organically, in conversation, as each fellow shaped the directions the others took, offering advice and guidance, lending books and reading drafts. While each of these projects are singular creations,

they are the product of an enormously collaborative space and an ethic of community. During Spring quarter, the fellows finalized their drafts, first in poster presentation form (completed about halfway through) and then in final, fully-written versions.

The first of these essays, Sophia Benito's "Am I marble?: Charlotte Brontë's literary self-styling and "Preference"" examines the historical self-styling of Charlotte Brontë, primarily through letters and a direct examination of her poetry. Benito's novel examination of Brontë's poetry unveils a writer in development, seeking traces of her emergent authorial persona as part of a history of women writers.

Hannah Brard's "Tragic Oscillations Between Rhizome and Arborescence in 1950s-1960s Countercultural Media" examines the journeys of Jack Kerouac and the Grateful Dead through the paired lenses of Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari. Brard contends that Kerouac, in his most famous novel *On the Road*, pushes against the strictures of his society in ways that open up the counterculture movement. His incomplete efforts pave the way for the Grateful Dead, whose "tragic" art strikes a balance between structure and freedom.

Aldo Cardona's ethnographic "The Decline of the American Industrial Midwest & Its Post-Industrial Identity" narrates this history of the Industrial Midwest, focalizing on the labor history of Erie, Pennsylvania. Erie provides a "microcosm" for the region, and its current post-industrial identity in formation offers hints at the larger future for the region. Cardona tells this story through a combination of history, visual/photographic elaboration, and on-the-ground reporting.

Grace Fisher's "Engineering Uncertainty: Ursula K. Le Guin, Predictive Processing, and Reimagining Social Frameworks" proposes a cognitive framework for examining literature's ability to manipulate our cognitive processing, thereby allowing us to imagine new worlds. Building on work by Karin Kukkonen and broader neuroscientific understandings of how reading works, Fisher interprets how Ursula K. Le Guin exploits how our brains make meaning through prediction; hijacking those mechanisms in order to interrogate the fabric of our shared social and political realities.

Ethan Griffin's "Exalting the Fairy Tale: The Power of the Chimerical" returns us to the familiar fairy-tales of Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde, praising the storyform for its imaginative power. Griffin draws on queer theory and psychoanalytic theory to unpack these stories positioning of the Other, contending that they offer new

ways of approaching our world, future-forward, and ultimately articulating their value to political and personal imagination.

Ophelia Hamze's "Our Hamlets are Too Embarrassed to Be or Not to Be: How Cringe Culture has Stolen Shakespeare from Our Youth" interrogates the cultural forces that are, at present, turning the younger generations away from the works of canonical writers like William Shakespeare. Thinking through contemporary issues in education and social media, Hamze's insights into our contemporary culture prove useful for considering what is lost in a loss of cultural literacy and what we might do moving forward.

Madeleine Mekari's creative piece, "A Puppet Has Nine Strings" draws on her work in the Bethlehem Royal Hospital archives to craft a world of psychological terror, where mental illness is increasingly stigmatized and criminalized. Her vision of a dystopian future, through the eyes of Tilly Oliver, reminds us of the abusive systems that classify, dehumanize, and imprison based on cognitive difference. Looking to the past violences allows her to articulate a frightening vision of what could be.

Sebastian Muñiz-Massa's prose piece, "Love Me, Madly" presents us with the interior world of Renata as she navigates the intensities and injustices of mental health care. Drawing on research into differential treatments in mental health across race and gender (particularly focusing on black women and mixed-race experiences) Muñiz-Massa provides a glimpse into the conflict that comes with neglectful treatment and the inequities inherent in these systems.

Mia Octavio's critical essay, "Unresolved Histories, Untold Narratives: AIDS and the Social Responsibility of Language" examines the metaphorization of the AIDS crisis, particularly how Samuel R. Delaney uses metaphorical language to articulate the scope and scale of human loss. Reading Delaney's "A Tale of Plagues and Carnivals," Octavio expresses the need for different modes of speaking about crisis, particular when the only other option presented is silence.

Dia Kai Singh's "If You're Cold, They're Cold, Invite Them Into Your House!:" Examining Home Spaces and Vampiricism in *Interview with the Vampire*" discusses Anne Rice's popular novel and her presentation of vampires pervading the haunted spaces of New Orleans. Singh's analysis proceeds through three types of spaces: the cityscape, the domestic, and numerous "third spaces" in the novel, and articulates how the vampiric

transgresses the normative boundaries offered in these spaces, thereby turning them into sites of horror and disorder.

Jeovany Tzilin-Gomez's "Inside The Minds Of Latiné Poets" is a selection from a larger work of poetic anthology. Presenting new, original poetry from local Latiné poets, Tzilin-Gomez curates a readerly experience, while providing extensive commentary on how these poems speak demonstrate these individual writers' experiences of managing their mental health, and how their own embodied identities inform the complexities of their mindedness.

Sophia E. Vogt's "Recentering Mrs. Ramsay Through Psychoanalysis: Woolf, Joyce, and the Recovery of Maternal Psychic Power" uses psychoanalytic paradigms to unpack Woolf's engagement with and elevation of the mother as a central figure. Positioning Woolf alongside her contemporary, James Joyce, Vogt develops a sophisticated argument that draws on Woolf's own knowledge of psychoanalysis while introducing newer strains of psychoanalytic as a critical lens.

Josephine Yario's "Paratext, Epitext, and Contemporary Media: The Evolution of Literary Culture Beyond the Book" turns our attention to the shifting mode of book presentation to understand how our culture's relationship with reading and with literature is shifting. Offering an approach that is grounded in book history, design, and aesthetic theory, Yario's analysis focuses on the relationships that emerge beyond the textual and which influence our larger engagement with the book as a form.

Each of these projects demonstrates an experience with literature (or media or culture at large), one which has its own hazards and risks of failure. They attempt (successfully) something new, drawing on the original perspectives and insights of their authors and their intensive study to present something worth carrying forward. In total, they are a microcosm of the goals of humanistic inquiry, looking creatively and critically at the issues that occupy our moment and approaching them with empathy and curiosity. Read them curiously and see what you, too, may carry forward.

—Shaun Nowicki

2025-2026 Arnhold Graduate Fellow

Santa Barbara, California

June 2026

“Am I marble?: Charlotte Brontë’s literary self-styling and “Preference”

by Sophia Benito

Critical Essay

A scathing 1848 review of *Jane Eyre* by the conservative Elizabeth Rigby read: “If written by a woman, she must be one who had long forfeited the society of her own sex.”¹ This was two years before Currer Bell’s identity became public knowledge as Charlotte Brontë after the publication of the ‘Biographical Notice’ and ‘Preface’ to *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* in 1850, but there was early criticism of *Jane Eyre* tied to the supposed “coarseness” of the novel and accusations of immorality and unconventionality in subject matter. As Carol A. Bock asserts, “If a pen that compelled such a response was in a woman’s hand, the author was especially vulnerable to charges of effrontery and coarseness.” (136) Comments like these demonstrate Victorian perceptions of feminine conventions in writing. In order for Brontë to enter the business of publication and have readers take her seriously, she needed to veil the feminine qualities of her writing. The strategy and mask of a gender-neutral, but decidedly masculine, pseudonym allowed her to break the creative constraints of women’s writing while escaping undue criticism tied to the title of a woman writer. While anonymity was common for women writers and followed an established convention, Charlotte’s breaking of the domestic novel convention, as well as clear assertions of female agency through her use of bold and dynamic female voices in her writing, breaks the shadow of her pseudonymous mask. As an author, she was highly aware of outside perception and meticulous with her own self-styling. In contrast with her first-used masculine pseudonym and thus authorial identity, Brontë is known for her strong female voices. Voices of furtive agency are present in her early writing, and notably her poem “Preference,” which depicts a woman consciously jilting one lover for another.

The majority of Brontë scholarship locates female agency in readings of their prose works, primarily her novels and juvenile writing, much less so their poetry, and even less so Charlotte’s poetry, which is often deemed inferior to her sisters’. To date, there has been no scholarly analysis of her poem “Preference,” which was published in her first foray into professional authorship in 1846 with the publication of the Brontë sisters’ shared poetry collection. “Preference” has a rendering of female agency and resiliency that is present through the protagonists of Charlotte’s novels, most notably *Jane Eyre*, and a

¹ For comprehensive review of *Jane Eyre* criticism see Kelly Harrison. “*Jane Eyre* as Seen Throughout the Times: A Critical Reception History of *Jane Eyre* in the 1850s and the 1960s and 70s.” https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/4596/Harrison%2C_K_1.pdf?sequence=1.

connection to her own assertion of authorship is mirrored in the assertion of agency of the female speakers visible in “Preference” and her other poetry. The function of the pseudonym for the Brontë sisters was to “veil,” not to fully conceal; it “acknowledges the fact that there is something behind it; something to be obscured,” as Caroline Levine writes. It’s a “decorous play of identity,” and incongruous gendered self-styling. (Levine 276-7) Christine Alexander has asserted that Charlotte demonstrated an early ambition and extreme “consciousness” to enter the male-dominated world of authorship and pursue a professional writing career. (Alexander 14-9) Alexander’s focus is primarily on Brontë’s earliest assertions of authorship, and her work posits that these offer a lens into how early juvenile play publication and literary influences shaped her work. In contrast, I focus on Brontë’s first point of professional publication and how assertions of agency found with the female speaker of “Preference” manifest again in the later *Jane Eyre*.

The Brontës’ reading and writing in childhood served as critical groundwork for their early literary ambitions. Charlotte Brontë’s earliest literary pursuits began at the age of twelve with the Glass Town Confederacy, a literary world shared among the four Brontë siblings.² In writings contributing to their paracosmic fantasy world, she simulated the publication of little books and magazines, even creating her own magazine, *Young Men’s Magazine*, at thirteen, which she signed with the initials C.B. Early manuscript writings are all signed with either the fictitious identity of an Angrian character (such as Lord Arthur Wellesley) or Charlotte Brontë and her initials, CB. Her father, Patrick Brontë, afforded her considerable access to literature, but she was restricted to largely male writers. In a critical moment from her childhood, she enjoyed reading her late mother’s *The Lady’s Magazine; Or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, a popular periodical for women featuring works written by women writers, but her father infamously burned them. She remarked in a 1840 letter to Hartley Coleridge, son of the famous poet Samuel Coleridge, expressing a wish that she could have written for the periodical: “One black day my father burnt them because they contained foolish love-stories. With all my heart I wish I had been born in time to contribute to the Lady’s magazine.” (Letter to Hartley Coleridge, 10 December 1840) This childhood event signifies the beginning of a conscious labeling of women’s writing and the creation of an intention to separate herself from that label as a professional writer. While she intentionally separated herself as a writer from contemporary considerations of the woman writer, she does not reject joining the

2 For further information about the Brontë’s early writing see Christine Alexander “Introduction.” *Tales of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal: Selected Writings* pp. xi–xlvii.

circle altogether. Once her identity was unmasked in 1850 in the biographical note to her sister’s work, she readily assumed her birth-given name and public ties to authorship. However, to be published and taken with the seriousness she intended by potential publishers and have more freedom in subject as a writer, she needed to first intentionally present and stylize herself.

Writing with the pursuit of authorship or physical publication, for Brontë, was both a creative and a professional endeavor. She hoped to generate income and treated this pursuit with all seriousness; it was no mere hobby. In a letter exchange with Robert Southey at 20 years old, she asserted herself as an aspiring writer and made clear her intentions of becoming a poet or pursuing writing as a professional vocation. The original letter Brontë sent to Southey is lost, but Southey’s response and Brontë’s reply exist. Southey’s response was dismissive, stating that a woman’s role was domestic and that any inclination toward creative pursuits would fizzle out once she had a family. “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be,” Southey infamously wrote in his reply, which evidently did not deter Brontë. (509) She continued writing and would be the one to spearhead the publication of her and her sister’s work.

The publishing industry was patriarchal; to publish, she had to work with all-male publishers and join a literary canon composed almost entirely of male authors. Charlotte was notably the one who spearheaded and managed the publication of her and her sister’s poetry collection in May 1846, sending manuscripts to several publishers, negotiating revisions, and writing letters to highly-regarded British poets and writers, such as Coleridge and Wordsworth. It’s clear that she aspired to join the ranks of higher literary authority, which was primarily male publishers and male literati. Robert Southey’s remark on women being held to gendered conventions was a commonly held sentiment of the time, and bled into the realm of literature. In the Victorian era, women were ascribed the pursuit of feminine creativity to particular forms, and virtues like docility, submission, domesticity, and other “feminine” traits were harshly opposed to the role of the female writer. The ideology of “separate spheres” originated during the Victorian era, and bled into the realm of publishing; women writers were “measured against a ‘feminine’, rather than a ‘literary ideal’” in a critical double standard. (Chakraboty 296) It was “assumed that certain kinds of writing were natural for women, such as affective, lyrical poetry and novel writing, because both genres were seen to draw on women’s apparently natural capacity for empathy.” (Chapman 75) Women writers were not only restricted in genre but judged more harshly than their male counterparts. Middle-class women writers faced difficulty publishing and were often discouraged from pursuing work outside the domestic sphere.

As Linda H. Peterson argues, women “who chose the literary life often faced social censure, received substandard pay, and fell subject to a critical double standard.” (Peterson) The belief in the women’s role as solely tied to domesticity and those same conventions carried into the realms of publishing and literature.

The strategy of male pseudonyms was an intentional form of masculine veiling used by female authors during the period. It allowed them to publish their work without unwanted criticism tied directly to their sex and bypass a gendered double standard. They could write about politics and other conventionally masculine subjects, and thereby “extending their scope beyond traditional domains of feminine writing.” (Peterson) The Brontë sisters adopted the “positively masculine” names Currer, Ellis, and Acton, respectively, because they “had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice.” (Biographical Notice, *WH*) Their intent was clear; they sought to obscure their gender and defy conventions associated with women’s writing. They used the same first initial as their given first name and last name, arranged from eldest to youngest, keeping ties to their name but effectively concealing their true gender. The Bell pseudonyms “represent a complex negotiation of the relationship between fact and fiction, between truth-telling and outright lies: they kept intact their first initials and sibling relations, they veiled names, and they provoked suspicions and doubts about their gender.” (Levine 276) The names the sisters chose are inherently strange; “Currer” is not a common first name.³ Unlike other female authors of the Victorian era, notably George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë is not continually known by her pseudonym Currer Bell. She shed the masked name after the unmasking of the three authoresses in the 1850 preface to *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. Her subsequent association in the literary world by her given name and not a pseudonym can be tied to the posthumous work of her widow, Arthur Bell Nicholls, to preserve her legacy and Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1857 biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which “suppressed many nonconventional details of Brontë’s life that would have affronted middle-class Victorian morality.” (Peterson) In a September 20th, 1850 letter to W. S. Williams, Charlotte discusses her composition of the posthumous biographical notice to her sister’s work, effectively making their authorship public knowledge. At this point, she appears to have developed a positive confidence in Williams, even after he learned of her true sex, and in correspondence, the pair discussed books and other personal matters. In the September 20th letter, she solicits Smith’s opinion as to whether or not “Notice” or “Memoir”

³ The choice of “Currer” as a first name is believed to be from Frances Mary Richardson Currer, a patron of the Cowan Bridge School and well known to the Brontës.

is most “appropriate” for the title of the forward; she ends up titling the forward “Notice.” She described her intent behind the notice as to “give a just idea of their identity, not to omit any narration of their simple, un-eventful lives.” (HM24396) Brontë works to confirm for the first time Anne and Emily’s identity as women, and also secures their biographical legacies, by absolving them of accusations of denying or betraying gender roles. Brontë’s notice essentially asserts to the public her sisters’ close ties to Victorian ideals of femininity. Charlotte would also famously suppress the publication of Anne’s *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, due to the apparent coarseness of the subject and to protect her sister’s literary reputation.

In letters to publishers Aylott & Jones in 1846 through 1847, Charlotte communicates both through the pseudonym Currer Bell and Miss C Brontë (sic) as two separate persons. Correspondence under C Brontë concerned financials, advertising, proofs, and printing costs, and related matters. The sisters paid £31.10 for the printing of their shared poetry collection in 1846, using their inheritance from Aunt Branwell. She even recommends that letters be addressed to C Brontë at Haworth Parsonage, likely implying that “C Brontë” is acting as an agent on behalf of the “brothers.” In letters to the publishers Aylott and Jones, using both her pseudonym and C Brontë, she clearly styles her writing and uses the “I am gentlemen” or “I remain Gentlemen” letter endings followed by “yours/yrs truly, Currer Bell/C Brontë.” It is unlike other correspondence, such as with her close friend Ellen Nussey and later letters to the publisher of her novels, W. S. Williams. It’s a sign of formality or deference, and could be a sign of intentional masculine letter styling.⁴ In a January 31st, 1846 letter to Messrs Aylott and Jones, she signs the letter “I remain Gentlemen/Yr obdt Servt/C Brontë.” The “I remain, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,” is an archaic letter ending, used most frequently in formal business correspondence. Her usage of variations of this letter ending in letters to her publisher is a sign of professional deference.

In a January 4th, 1848 letter to publisher W. S. Williams, Brontë writes about the advantage of a pseudonym. The letter, signed Currer Bell, at which point her identity was not yet disclosed to Williams, and after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, she recounted an incident in which

⁴ This letter styling is present in multiple letters from 1846-7 to Messrs Aylott and Jones, the publisher of the sisters’ 1846 poetry collection. The frequency of letters written and repetition of letter styling indicate an urgency and professional deference. Dates of letters with this styling: 31 January 1846, 6 February 1846, 15 February 1846, 16 February 1846, 3 March 1846, 11 March 1846, 13 March 1846, 28 March 1846, 6 April 1846, 11 April 1860, 15 April 1846, 7 May 1846, 11 May 1846, 25 May 1846, 10 July 1846, 15 July 1846, 18 July 1846, 23 July 1846, 25 September 1846, 2 August 1847, 7 August 1847, 24 August 1847, 12 September 1847, 18 September 1847, 24 September 1847, 29 September 1847, 8 October 1847, 26 October 1847, 13 November 1847, 1 December 1847, 10 December 1847.

an elderly Yorkshire clergyman recognized fictionalized portrayals of real-life individuals in *Jane Eyre* but did not know the author behind it.

He had known them all: I wondered whether he would recognize the portraits, and was gratified to find that he did and that moreover he pronounced them faithful... He did not recognize "Currer Bell" – What a author would be without the advantage of being able to walk invisible? One is thereby enabled to keep such a quiet mind. I make this small observation in confidence. (HM26008)

The invisibility of the pseudonym gave Charlotte the ability to write on a greater breadth of subjects and to break the barriers imposed by the category and associations of "women's writing." It also allowed her to write on delicate subject matter without fear of negative associations to her lived identity. She could essentially write what she wanted without social repercussions.

Notably, the selection of poems attributed to Currer Bell in the Brontë sisters' shared published poetry collection includes numerous poems with female speakers and voices, a departure from the largely male-centered narratives of her juvenilia. There are thematic undertones of what will inform her later writing. "The Missionary" is reminiscent of the pious St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*, a clergyman and Jane's cousin who unsuccessfully proposes to her before becoming a missionary to India. Rivers proposes to Jane not out of love, but because he believes she will be a suitable missionary's wife. Rivers proposes to Jane even though he is in love with the wealthy patroness, Rosamund Oliver, of the Morton School. He does not propose to Rosamund because of his dutiful adherence to his missionary work. There's a similar rendering of voice in "The Missionary," specifically the speaker's "turning" from their love Helen in a self-sacrificial act in order to "heal the sickness sore/Of those so far off and desolate?" (Brontë lns. 90-91) In the context of the novel, Eyre's rejection of Rivers also spurs her willing return to Mr. Rochester. "The Teacher's Monologue" is evidently inspired by Brontë's time working as a female teacher at the Roe Head school; manuscripts of both portions of the poem date to 1837, when Brontë was employed there.⁵ There are autobiographical elements dispersed through *Jane Eyre*, notably Brontë's harrowing experience at Cowan Bridge School, which inspired the characterization of Lowood School. Brontë's late sister Maria Brontë, who passed away at Cowan Bridge, is said to be the model for Jane's close friend Helen Burns, whose own early death occurred in a similar fashion:

⁵ The first part of the poem in manuscript is held in the Bonnell Collection in Philadelphia and dated to May 5, 1937.

My happiest hours, ay! all the time,
I love to keep in memory,
Lapsed among moors, ere life’s first prime
Decayed to dark anxiety. (17-20)

This particular poem directly reflects the misery Brontë felt during that time of her life. It is a well-established fact that she did not like working at Roe Head School and disliked teaching. There is an overarching dark tone of suffering and a longing for the “moors,” likely the Yorkshire moors, which often serve as the landscape in various Brontë works and are home to Charlotte .

Brontë’s poems are overshadowed by the majesty of her later work, but the resilient and independent heroine she found in Jane Eyre is present in her published poetry. Most notably, Charlotte Brontë’s poem “Preference” demonstrates the harnessing of female agency that Brontë is known for in her prose works. This particular poem features an independent female voice describing her rejection of one man for another. Its message is overt; Brontë wrote the poem in a conversational style, and the “I” voice never wavers. She is steady and resilient; her “preference” for one suitor over another is determined and self-assured. She works to convince the jilted lover of why she chose another over him, and also asserts her independence of choice. The speaker’s voice is willed in a way that appears to break outright Victorian conventionality; it is not docile or evasive. Instead, the female speaker is direct and unyielding. The poem functions as a strong rebuke and rejection spoken to him. The female speaker tells the male subject, whom she calls a “self-deceiver,” to touch her hand, and uses her lack of physical response to his touch as an indication of clear disinterest in this unwanted proposal:

Does it burn? Does my lip quiver?
Has mine eye a troubled glow?
Canst thou call a moment’s colour
To my forehead—to my cheek? (24-7)

She asserts she has never treated him with anything but coldness and never met his gaze with anything but a frozen mask. Brontë’s creation of a dyad between “frozen” and “burning” evokes a longer tradition of courtship and love poetry. She is questioning why he perceived a mutual

interest and burning passion when her body reacts with nothing but cold indifference. It follows the Petrarchan tradition and the form of love lyric, the contrast of “burning” to the unrequited “coldness”⁶ of the other:

Am I marble? What! no woman
Could so calm before thee stand?
Nothing living, sentient, human,
Could so coldly take thy hand? (30-34)

The direct question, “Am I marble?” is almost mocking. There is a tie to a depiction of “woman” as a statue, and a play on the Pygmalion myth, with the scorned male taking on the role of the sculptor, and the idealized female statue is his view of the speaker. He is in shock at her rejection, because he does not view her as a fully formed human being with a will to deny him. It’s reminiscent of Elizabeth Bennett’s firm and serious rejection of her silly cousin, Mr. Collins, even though he insists that her rejection is to increase his love through suspense. The female speaker in Brontë’s poem wants to quench any notion that she returns his feelings. The female speaker even says her consideration of him, if anything, is “sisterly.” (37) It’s a brutal rejection by the female speaker:

Can I love? Oh, deeply—truly—
Warmly—fondly—but not thee;
And my love is answered duly,
With an equal energy. (42-5)

She describes the “rival” and holder of her affections associated with natural elements. He is pictured in a natural glade, in the act of writing and described as a “Man of conscience — man of reason;” (B58). He is ascribed attributes of rationality and higher echelons of thought.

Sits thy rival, thoughtful bending
O’er a stand with papers spread—
Motionless, his fingers plying
That untired, unresting pen; (52-5)

⁶ For more on the literary tradition see Petrarch’s *II Canzoniere* and Thomas Wyatt’s translation of “Sonnet 134,”

It’s striking that the male figure whom the female speaker ultimately chooses is imagined to be writing. Multiple possibilities emerge from this image. There could be a potential strengthening tie between writing and masculinity, and the beholder of the pen as an object of desire. There could also be a desire in the speaker to be the holder of the pen. In the Pygmalion story, the sculptor is the artist and the woman is created by him out of marble, and comes to life. Brontë draws from the Pygmalion myth, but rejects the woman as physically objectified or like marble; instead, she embeds a layer of agency through the voice of the female subject. The rival is the artist, but the speaker is her own separate being and is given the “preference” to choose him. She has the power to choose, and she chooses the rival.

The origins or potential biographical influences of this particular poem are dubious; there is no date or publicly available manuscript to form a biographical tie to its publication. It could be related to her unrequited love for Constantin Heger, her married professor in Brussels, who ultimately severed his connection with her. The depiction of the female speaker in the act of waiting for the “rival” and the resounding line of being true as long as “God reigns in earth and Heaven” creates a strong tie to Heger, who has been cited as the model for Edward Rochester.⁷ Charlotte’s affection for Heger was obscured by biographers, there was no mention of him in Gaskell’s biography, and the letters she sent him were not made public until 1913 when they were donated to the British Library.⁸

“Preference” and its publication in Brontë’s shared poetry collection are a harsh contrast to the authorial identity that Charlotte Brontë first curated. During her lifetime and after her death, she and her successors were highly conscious of public consideration and legacy. As her sister’s literary caretaker, she worked to dispel any notion that her sisters were anything but good, secluded, docile Christian women in her 1850 Biographical Notice. She cites their choice of unconventional subject matter, particularly that of the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as a dutiful warning. Brontë would suppress the publication of Anne’s titular novel and crafted the notice addressing the “misinterpretation” of her sisters’ works because she “felt it a sacred duty to wipe the dust off their gravestones, and leave their dear names free from soil.” (1850 Biographical Notice) This extreme consciousness Brontë applied to her sister’s legacy is reflected in her intentional self-styling as an author with unconventional subject matter and the publication of her poetry

⁷ Brontë’s time at the Heger’s boarding school was used as inspiration for parts of *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Villette*.

⁸ Heger’s letters to Charlotte were all destroyed.

as a pivotal moment in her literary career. As an author, Charlotte's writing is strongly connected to her lived experience, as evident in the parallel subject matter of her poetry. She wrote "The Teacher's Monologue" while working as a teacher, and masculine Heger-like figures haunt her writing. It is not an extreme jump to claim a parallel of agency in "Preference," and the notion of choice to the agency Brontë took hold of as a female author publishing during the Victorian period. The publishing of "Preference" with an overtly assertive female speaker by a presumed male poet, Currer Bell, is a strange but deliberate choice while upholding a masculine pseudonymity. For an individual so concerned with her legacy and public perception, it's a conscious decision. It's also interesting in contrast to the continued perception of other female Victorian writers who wrote under pseudonyms, such as George Eliot, for instance. Brontë unveiled her pseudonymous identity and took hold of her position as an authoress, despite the subject of her writing challenging Victorian conventions of feminine writing.

Later criticism of *Jane Eyre* was tied to increasing suspicion that Currer Bell was a woman and to the challenge it posed to the conventional gender roles of women in Victorian society. Jane Eyre, as a protagonist, is like the female speaker in "Preference": both are resilient and fiercely independent, separate from the docile domestic sphere to which Victorian women were relegated. The poem "Preference" informs her later writing, particularly Jane's harnessing of bold female agency. The female speaker and the agency she exudes are precursors to Jane's, and the "rival" can be likened to Rochester. It's interesting that Charlotte presents an intentional and clear separation from "feminine writing," but surrounds the later narrative of both her prose and poetry around strong and willful women's voices. It's not a rejection of that circle and canon entirely, but an explicit separation from the associations the connection draws, as well as her own adverse view towards authorial publicity. Her first major act of publication, the poetry collection, and the explicit care toward preserving and shaping her authorial identity paved the way for her illustrious career and continuing legacy.

Bibliography

- Alexander, Christine. "Early Ambitions: Charlotte Brontë, Henry Kirke White and Robert Southey." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 14–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2018.1389001>.
- Bock, Caroline. "Critical Reception to 1860" *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*. Anniversary edition., Oxford University Press, 2018.

- Brontë, Charlotte, et al. *Poems*. Smith, Elder and Co., 1846.
- . *Selected Letters of Charlotte Brontë*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*. Clarendon, 1995.
- Chakraborty, Shrabani Ganguly. “19th Century Britain, a Time of Reshaping Women in the Ideology of ‘Separate Spheres.’” *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, pp. 294–97. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.71.40>.
- Flint, Kate. “Women Writers, Women’s Issues.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, edited by Heather Glen, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 170–91.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. 1st ed., Hero, 2022.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxkn74x>.
- Hargreaves, G. D. “The Publishing of ‘Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell.’” *Brontë Society Transactions*, vol. 15, no. 4, Jan. 1969, pp. 294–300. <https://doi.org/10.1179/030977669796498217>.
- Heritage, Barbara. “Authors and Bookmakers: *Jane Eyre* in the Marketplace.” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 106, no. 4, Dec. 2012, pp. 449–85. <https://doi.org/10.1086/680713>.
- Jung, Daun. “Critical Names Matter: ‘Currer Bell,’ ‘George Eliot,’ and ‘Mrs. Gaskell.’” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2017, pp. 763–81. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150317000201>.
- Jung, Sandro. “Currer Bell, Charlotte Brontë and the Construction of Authorial Identity.” *Brontë Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4, Nov. 2014, pp. 292–306. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1474893214Z.000000000125>.
- Levine, Caroline. ““Harmless Pleasure”: Gender, Suspense, and “Jane Eyre.”” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2000, pp. 275–286. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058519?seq=1>.
- North, Julian. “Appearing Before the Public: Charlotte Brontë and the Author Portrait in the 1830s.” *Brontë Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 60–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2015.1123912>.
- O’Callaghan, Claire. ““That Burning Clime”: Charlotte Brontë’s Little Book and *Jane Eyre*.” *Brontë Studies*, vol. 50, no. 4, Oct. 2025, pp. 403–17. *Taylor and Francis*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2025.2538998>.
- Peterson, Linda H. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women’s Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Southey, Robert. *Letters of Robert Southey: A Selection*. Edited by Maurice H. Fitzgerald, Oxford University Press, 1912.
- Whitehead, Stephen. “The Bell Pseudonyms: A Brontë Connection?” *Brontë Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 59–64. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1474893214Z.000000000135>.

Tragic Oscillations Between Rhizome and Arborescence in 1950s-1960s Countercultural Media

by Hannah Brard

Critical Essay

Introduction

Culture is a territory.¹ Coming from a Guattarian and Deleuzian perspective, the ways in which we interact with culture, and it with us, fits remarkably well with this highly abstract theory. Aspects of culture, like art, beliefs, and behavior are continually exerted onto the subject through repetition of these values from the people and objects around them. It forms our way of knowing, thinking, and being; helping to explain various tendencies that the subject may enact. In mainstream US culture, beliefs of individuality and hard work have largely shaped the ethos of the regular American citizen, influencing various movements from the American revolution up to the current Black Lives Matter protests. However, harmful territorial expressions, most notably those who impose caste-like systems of power that privilege the white-Christian-heterosexual male, create arborescent structures: ones that have a rigid, linear logic built into them. The movement between nodes in an arborescent structure are fixed or nonexistent. For example, the movement between the racial social hierarchy in the United States is largely nonexistent: one who is deemed privileged because of their status as white cannot have this dimension separated from their being, while people of color, placed on lower tiers of the social ladder, cannot ascend from their current position. This leads to the solidification of a static culture based around prioritizing some and marginalizing others.

Countercultures have been created to fight the stasis manifesting in arborescent culture. By exposing different points of views and ways of being, these movements aim to combat the linear hierarchy of the arborescent by integrating the logic of the rhizome: a nonlinear system with no center that grows outward spontaneously. (Deleuze and Guattari 21) The main point of tension between these two systems is dimensionality: while arborescence grows in one direction, indicative of one-dimensional being, the rhizome spreads spontaneously in all directions, residing in three-dimensional space. This makes possibility abundant in the rhizome, creating a system that does not benefit one over another and establishes equality unactualized within arborescent ones. Thus, the way countercultures function is fundamentally anti-arborescent. While people may be inclined to take this idea and immediately run with it, I believe that this argument

1 See Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Chapter 11: 1937: "Of The Refrain."

isn't so cut and dry. Counterculture has the word "culture" within it, again drawing on the importance of arborescence within these movements. Thus, these movements are reliant on some form of territorial expressions in order to counter the mainstream. But, without the integration of the rhizome, linear, hierarchical movements restrain the subject from creating something truly new, causing the individual to reterritorialize. Through this lens, counterculture movements, as we will demonstrate via examination of American media from 1950s-1960s, oscillate between arborescence and rhizome, giving them the ability to create repeated territorial expressions that stem from the ingenuity of nonspontaneous movement within a system. I argue that this fluctuation is beneficially understood in conjunction with Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian. The Apollonian, being a form that prefers reason and harmony, is inherently connected to arborescent, as the arborescent's linearity creates a system of tangible structures that manifest whose relative stasis replicate the Apollonian's characteristics. The Dionysian, being characterized by chaos, spontaneity and ecstasy, connects to the rhizome because the rhizome can be thought of as a web of chaotic and spontaneous nodes. (Nietzsche 15-18)

In some way, the balance between the Dionysian-rhizome and Apollonian-arborescent facilitates what Nietzsche calls "the tragedy," the ultimate form of art that balances the Dionysian and Apollonian. (Nietzsche 28-32) This form of art, being rooted in the real world, allows us to confront our harsh realities from the Dionysian, but softens the blow through beautification from the Apollonian. However, not all 1950s-1960s counterculture media reach this tragic status. Jack Kerouac's novel *On The Road* is a significant example of this. While the novel does fluctuate between the Apollonian-arborescent, showcased by stasis in urban environments, and Dionysian-rhizome, through ecstatic and spontaneous travel, the linear progression of the novel and the reterritorialization of the novel's main character, Sal Paradise, at the end shows the lack of sustainability of this form oscillation. However, the end of *On The Road* becomes a rhizomatic node with which other counterculture groups sprout from. One example of this is Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who, during the 1950s and 1960s maintained notebooks that recorded his various travels to places like Big Sur, the Salton Sea, and Victoria, British Columbia.² His travel style is highly reminiscent of the rhizomatic travel that Sal embarks on throughout the novel. The style of these notebooks are highly reminiscent of the writing in *On the Road*; Ferlinghetti, like Kerouac, focuses on specific details and moments of the journey and their role in reproducing

² Direct source of material can be found in the Lawrence Ferlinghetti Papers at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, Box 22

certain emotions rather than a larger and less specific story and is written in stream of consciousness. Additionally, The Diggers, an anarchist community formed out of the Haight-Ashbury community in the 1960s, follow the Dionysian ethos of Kerouac's novel, completely immersing themselves in the rhizome-Dionysian pairing. Their lack of structure caused this group to largely collapse due to Dionysian chaos, as seen in the nature of the Invisible Circus. This event took place on all three floors at the Glide Church in San Francisco, with the Invisible Circus taking every room of this church and designated each with a purpose.³ While details of this event are largely undocumented, one of the rooms had a printing machine with which members created advertisements and accounts of the event. This happening, projected to be 72 hours, was shut down due to the excessive amount of debauchery coming from drugs and nudity. This and the eventual lifespan of The Diggers, which ended in 1968, showcases a similar trajectory to Dean; the emergence of exhaustion due to the immersion in the rhizome and Dionysian. But, like the end of *On The Road*, their disbandment left behind nodes adopted by later free markets and the newspaper *Kaliflower*.

I argue that, unlike Lawrence Ferlinghetti and The Diggers, The Grateful Dead's live performances are an extension of the oscillation ethos within *On The Road* that reaches tragic status. Through the subjectivity of listening experiences and the collapse of audience-performer distinctions, the Apollonian and Dionysian are consistently balanced throughout the set, creating a tragic form of art that moves between rhizome and arborescence. Using both Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* and The Grateful Dead's live performances, I examine the inner mechanisms of these works that facilitates the fluctuation between rhizome and arborescent, while taking a Nietzschean perspective to show why they may or may not reach tragic status.

Jack Kerouac's On The Road and Its Non-tragic Fluctuation

Jack Kerouac's premiere novel *On The Road*⁴ functions by pairing the Apollonian with the

³ Narrative on the actual event are sparse, but discussions of the event and first hand printed material can be found at *The Digger Archive* website, curated and run by Eric Noble. For more on The Diggers history outside of archival material, see Sean Steele's "Playing For Keeps: The Diggers, Life-Acting and Guerilla Theater in San Francisco's Psychedelic 60's."

⁴ While there are very few articles discussing *On The Road* in a Nietzschean perspective at length, there is an abundance of those connecting Deleuze and Guattari's theory within *A Thousand Plateaus*. Most of these discuss the rhizomatic tendencies of the novel: "The Nomadic War Machine in Jack Kerouac's *Vanity of Du-luoz* and *On the Road*" by Samira Khaladweh discusses the Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic war machine, a decentralized and highly fluid system in opposition to rigid hierarchies, within the novel and how it subverts normative expectations of 1950s American culture. "Speeding across the Rhizome: Deleuze Meets Kerouac on the Road" by Marco Abel discusses the novel as its own rhizome that creates new ways of moving, thinking, and representation.

arborescent and the Dionysian with rhizome, continually fluctuating between these two dynamics. The main impetus of this choice is to explore the societal relations between Apollonian and Dionysian fictional figures/experiences that are representative of 1950s America. During the post-war period American culture was highly arborescent due to its roots in conformity and conservative social values. There were two different types of people who interacted with this form of arborescence: the elite classes, whose identities privilege them in this system, and the marginalized, who largely become oppressed and disenfranchised. This social elite, typically identified as straight, Christian, white, and/or male, operate behind what Nietzsche calls an Apollonian veil, which creates an artificial beauty of the world around the subject while shielding them from the spiritual struggles of the Dionysian. This is where sterility comes from: the harmony and structure of the Apollonian mindset discourages the opportunity for renewal within this culture, causing boredom within its subjects.⁵ On the other hand, the experiences of marginalized bodies, such as women, people of color and LGBTQIA+ people, are labeled as Dionysian because of their lack of an Apollonian identity, making them more vulnerable to the violence that can manifest from within.⁶ For example, African Americans, in the interactions they have with Apollonian logic, often faced immense, societal violence, starting with slavery and continuing with Jim Crow laws of the early 20th-century, and currently living in the form of police brutality and structural racism. This is a trend within the larger sphere of identities pushed to the Dionysian, showing a trend of violence emanating from their lack of coincidence with Apollonian standards.

These dynamics are largely continued throughout the book through analysis of the main characters Dean and Sal. Sal traditionally sits within the Apollonian-arborescent: his education, access to the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, and his aunt's money give him a safety net when things don't work out.⁷ In this light, Sal can be viewed as a benefitter whose Apollonian identity protects him from the chaos of the Dionysian. This is not to say that Sal is immune to the Dionysian; this is often

5 See "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960" by K. A. Cuordileone.

6 From Kim Phillip-Fein's "Conservatism: A State of the Field": "Instead, she argued that conservatism thrived throughout the 1950s, the 1960s, and into the 1970s among affluent suburbanites whose jobs were closely tied to the Cold War defense industry. Anticommunism, in her view, was able to unify a variety of different political concerns, bringing together antistatists, advocates of a free market, and believers in traditional morality. These anticommunist activists were able to capitalize on the era's discomfort about challenges to sexual norms and the racial hierarchy. Ultimately, they made political alliances with conservative Christian groups" (728-729).

7 Various instances occur in Kerouac's *On The Road*, e.g. 57, 101, 109.

not the fact within the novel, as seen in the various stories he tells from on the road. Rather Sal has the ability to move between the Apollonian-arborescent and the Dionysian-rhizome, but total dissolution into the Dionysian/approach to the Body without Organs (BwO), a limit-space of any assemblage characterized by unbounded possibility due to its pre-hierarchical nature, is never fully carried through due to his privilege. On the other hand, the novel presents Dean as a Dionysian-rhizomatic being. Starting from his largely unstable, poor, and passion-fueled background⁸ and continuing throughout the story, Dean's propensity towards the Dionysian-rhizome can be seen through his multiple marriages and affairs as well as his largely spontaneous travelling style. However, unlike Sal, Dean can never access the Apollonian-arborescent due to his lack of privileged characteristics, and thus his life is wholly defined by his Dionysian experiences.

On The Road fluctuates between the rhizome-Dionysian and arborescent-Apollonian. However, the difference of privilege between the Dionysian and Apollonian subject, as seen in the difference of dynamics between Sal and Dean, is interesting for the end of the novel, as part four of the book largely ends in arborescent reterritorialization for Sal and continued rhizomatic living for Dean as a consequence of approach to the BwO. Sal, Dean, and another character Stan, embark on a journey to Mexico to get divorce papers for Dean and Camille, his wife. As a part of their journey, they arrive in a small village, Gregoria, and are taken into a whorehouse by a local named Victor. Within the whorehouse, they observe girls "reclining on couches across the dance floor, some of them were boozing at the long bar to the right" (Kerouac 286). As the three men walk into the room, Kerouac uses the word "instantly" to show how quickly the festivities begin. At this moment, the fast-paced mambo music starts to play, and the three start to drink and dance with the various prostitutes at the bar. The combination of drink, music, dance, and potential sexual conquests lead to the Dionysian: sex, drink and music conjures states of ecstasy and chaos. While not all music is considered by Nietzsche to be Dionysian, he specifically draws on the Dionysian festival and its aura of excess—excess alcohol and sex—which removes man's social inhibitions. Additionally, because mambo is rooted in Latin American culture it figures as Dionysian because of its racial and ethnic marginality in relation to Apollonian white US culture. This is highly reminiscent of the scene that Kerouac is building, as the combination of these factors starts to wither away Dean, Sal, and Stan's inhibitions.

⁸ See Kerouac's *On The Road*, 1-5 for an example.

In these instances, they “dance frantically” with the women around them, with Dean being pulled away by various girls to go have sex and Stan showing interest in an underaged girl (Kerouac 287). In this light, the scene at the whorehouse is a Dionysian festival: one that is congruent with Dean’s Dionysian identity and against Sal’s Apollonian one.

This sense of madness increases throughout the rest of part four of the novel. Even after their money has run dry at the whorehouse, they continue this madness through the rest of their journey to Mexico City. This is more so represented by the increasing heat of the surrounding environment, namely the jungle.⁹ But this increasing sense of “madness” cannot be sustained. This dissolution of self is a characteristic of the approach to the BwO. This dissolution can either end in Dionysian exhaustion or Apollonian reterritorialization, both of which happen in the novel. In the beginning of part five, Sal contracts dysentery and is bedbound, while both Stan and Dean are fine, albeit exhausted. This sickness is a physical manifestation of his Apollonian identity’s rejection of the Dionysian experience. His body, as it was drawn into the Dionysian, is forced to feed off of these experiences, invoking the language of “becoming” from Deleuze and Guattari, which is a process of metamorphosis into something else. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 237-239) But, in the process of “becoming,” the subject cannot totally become the other because of the previous contexts that tie them back to their current identity. Taking this into account, because his identity comes from the Apollonian, he is physically unable to reconcile with his new lifestyle, and thus he starts to reject it via physical expulsion linked to dysentery.¹⁰ The only thing that he can then do to cure his sickness is Apollonian reterritorialization. He gets back to New York City, relies on his aunt’s money and other aspects of his privileged identity, and finds a wife. He fulfills the Apollonian expectations of man at the end of the novel, marking his total reterritorialization into mainstream arborescence.

However, while Sal is fighting his sickness, Dean decides to leave Stan and Sal in Mexico to finish his divorce with Camille and marry his new love interest, Inez. Dean, the consummate Dionysian-rhizomatic being, thrives from this lifestyle that

9 Movement into the jungle is highly reminiscent of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Both narrators, coming from colonial backgrounds, are subject to Dionysian/marginalized experiences. Additionally, as you move into both territories (for Conrad, this is further down the Congo River, and for Kerouac, this is in Mexico) there is an increasing sense of madness.

10 From M.M. Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*, one gets the perspective of degradation via the association between the buttocks/fecal matter and earth: “the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks...Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time” (21). In this case, the ensuing “birth” is Sal’s Apollonian reterritorialization.

ultimately harms Sal and is able to continue with constant travel and romantic/sexual conquests. This creates conflict between the two characters: one that is not only emotional, but one that is spiritual and physical. As Dean leaves Sal, he says, “Gotta get back to my life. Wish I could stay with you. Pray I can come back” (Kerouac, 301). In these words, the audience gets the sense that Dean genuinely wants to stay with Sal, but his state of being cannot physically let him. Again, there is that emotional connection between Dean and Sal, but their ways of being are too different. Thus, Dean leaves, showing how the novel is unable to balance the Dionysian and Apollonian and become tragic.

Dean’s Dionysian exhaustion comes at the beginning of part five. Back in New York and with his new love interest, Sal sees Dean in the dark of night. Sal gives the following description of Dean: “He couldn’t talk anymore. He hopped and laughed, he stuttered and and fluttered his hands” (Kerouac, 304). Dean’s inability to speak is reminiscent of dissolution into the “primordial oneness” of the Dionysian. Nietzsche says of the primordial oneness: “he has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the verge of flying up into the air as he dances” (Nietzsche, 18). Dean directly imitates this: his inability to speak but ability to gesture shows his immersion in the Dionysian via primordial oneness. Additionally, him walking on the balls of his feet, indicating physical separation between himself and the ground, coupled with the fluttering of his hands aligns with Nietzsche’s physical description of one “on the verge of flying up into the air.” In addition, Dean’s illness is largely mental; instead of contracting physical illness like Sal, one that primarily affects the bowels, he develops a madness. The brain, being the vessel that carries the Apollonian life due to its ability to reason, is the location of illness (in contrast to Sal’s bodily illness.) Due to talks about Dean’s romantic affairs and his hopes of settling down, one could connect this to Apollonian proximity. In this instance, his physicality evokes Deleuze and Guattari’s term “line of flight;” its metaphorical dependence on wing-like movement and exit from the ground coupled with Dean’s rhizomatic tendencies convey the idea that his journey is not yet over. Instead, he is embarking on another journey towards a new node in the rhizome of his life. Again, drawing upon the BwO, the immersion in the Dionysian leads to one’s approach to it. In this light, Dean loses all sense of self due to his close proximity to the BwO, and this Dionysian exhaustion causes his sense of self and effability to collapse.

But, the destruction of the rhizomatic organism within the novel does not stop rhizomatic possibilities. The novel gives the audience a very ambiguous end; depicting how Sal is reterritorialized but still wondering and worrying about Dean: “all the time I was

thinking of Dean and how he got back on the train and rode over three thousand miles over that awful land and never knew why he had come anyway, except to me” (Kerouac 307). We have the completion of a circular journey that ends with the reterritorialization of Sal. Despite all of the negative experiences Sal has had to put up with as a result of Dean’s presence, he is still fond of him, shown through his propensity to worry over him. This end leaves room for possibility: if Dean were to re-emerge in Sal’s life, because they ended on good terms, there would be a line of flight, or multiple, that Sal would take that leads him back to being on the road with Dean. Thus, even in the collapse of the rhizomatic structure, nodes of amicability between Sal and Dean remain, creating possibility in the organism’s revival.

The Grateful Dead’s Tragic Fluctuation within Live Performances

The Grateful Dead take this oscillating structure and incorporate it within their music, creating a sustainable rhizome-arborescence relationship within their live performances.¹¹ Throughout their live shows, fluctuation between arborescence and rhizome, facilitated by varying degrees of territory and improvisation, gives them the opportunity to accept the importance of structure but also play with how that structure functions. To account for the variability of structure and improvisation within a Grateful Dead song, we can think of them as milieus, which Guattari and Deleuze describe as a field of tendencies, reliant on code and periodic repetition, that slide and interact with each other to form a larger assemblage.¹² The field of tendencies within a Dead song rely on a balance of arborescence and rhizomatic practices; we gain arborescence from fixed aspects of a song, such as lyrics (which can be improvised, but tend to be static), key, and instrumentation (all codes which define the song through repetition), and rhizomatic instances through improvisation on the general form. We can see these differently expressed in two versions of “Dark Star;” namely the versions

11 Some works have incorporated the ideas of rhizome within the Grateful Dead’s live performances. Jim Tuedio, in “And Then Flew On: Improvisational Moments of Rhizomatic Assemblage in Grateful Dead Musical Experience” writes: “But the improvisational processes at work in Grateful Dead musical assemblages reflect a different mode of production, one “favoring rhizomatic, rather than arborified, functioning” (Tuedio 2). David Malvinni, in “Twilight: Deleuze, Improvisation, and Memories of the Grateful Dead,” breaks down two different types of Grateful Dead improvisational structures. One consists of the “reduction” of the sonic quality of the music to one chord, titled a “type 1” improvisation, and the other is characterized by lead guitarist, Jerry Garcia, improvising at the end of a song and into the segue/the next, called a “type 2” improvisation (Malvinni, 221-222). There is a major focus on improvisation and rhizome in both rather than fluctuation.

12 For more on the milieu, see Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 313-314

played on May 7, 1969 at Golden Gate Park and on May 11, 1972 at Rotterdam Civic Hall. These versions retain a general form. Both share lyrics and similar instrumental motifs such as Jerry Garcia's guitar progression, drawing on arborescent qualities within the "Dark Star" milieu. However, the lengths of these songs' performances vary drastically; the version played at the Golden Gate Park is roughly 22 minutes, while the one in Rotterdam is over double that length at 48 minutes. A majority of both of these performances rely on improvisation, and one can hear clear sonic variance between the two. These differing aspects that come from the band's improvisational creativity contribute to rhizomatic possibility within the general structure of the song. In this light, a song becomes a milieu: the static qualities act as a backbone for potential improvisation, giving rise to a field of tendencies rather than a rigid hierarchy.

The static qualities of a song's milieu are what Deleuze and Guattari would call expressive qualities, which define a territory. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 312) For example, because the tendencies of "Dark Star" have to adhere to some kind of structure, defined by repetition of expressions within various versions of this song, any performance of this song always belongs to this milieu, regardless of form. But, the degree to which each performance is territorialized by the larger song-milieu changes with the manifestation of expressive qualities. For example, a song that has adhered to the general structure of a song closer than others, such as the Golden Gate Park "Dark Star," can be viewed as being more territorialized when compared to ones whose form is more experimented with, like the Rotterdam version. From this perspective, one can see that different expressive qualities indicate different degrees of territorialization of a performance, creating a constant sense of novelty. Qualities that vary minimally across performances, such as instrumental motifs and lyrics, lie at the center of the song milieu and away from influence of others. On the other hand, structures of the song that are subject to improvisation lie closer to the edge, and are more easily changed by other milieus. The aggregation of both fixed and varying qualities of a song determine how territorialized a song may become. In this light, I emphasize that territorialization isn't something that doesn't or does happen to the same degree for all songs: some performances are more territorialized than others.

The fluctuation between rhizome and arborescence transcends the milieu, and manifests in the transitional moments between Grateful Dead songs. A segue is the flow of one song into another, and are heavily used by the Dead in their live performances. We can view this as the process of transcoding, or the interaction between different milieus. (Deleuze and Guattari 313-314) In the case of the Grateful Dead, the segue is not just the interaction between

two distinct song milieus; it is the transcoding of one, distinct song milieu and a larger, composite milieu that comprises all potential songs that the segue may transition into. This process of transcoding usually starts at the least territorial expressive qualities of a song, usually jams, and begins to traverse outside the bounds of one milieu. For example, take the performance of “China Cat Sunflower” in the Grateful Dead’s *Europe ‘72* live album. Most versions of this song close on a jam (a tendency), forcing the song to “end” at the edge of the milieu. For the *Europe ‘72* version of “China Cat Sunflower,” this departure occurs around 3:26, where Bill Kreutzman, the drummer, Bob Weir, rhythm guitarist, and Ron McKernan, keyboardist, start to venture outside the tendencies of this milieu. In this action, the end of the song is situated at a place that is more susceptible to the influence of other song milieus. This contributes to new expressive qualities that are not quite “China Cat Sunflower,” nor any other song, marking our exit from this territory. This enacts a kind of “becoming” or a nonlinear transformation that disrupts fixed identities rather than imitating an existing one. The music is not ‘China Cat Sunflower’ pretending to be another song; it is becoming-other, a passage that cannot be reduced to either its origin or its destination .

The segue takes the experiencer from the territory of the first milieu, and into a middle ground where the first interacts with the composite. I use the word “experiencer” intentionally, as the Dead were often also unknowing of where the segue would take them. While there may be different motifs from different milieus that arise, expressive qualities fail to totally describe the habits of this space, as if they did, this area would be considered its own milieu, and thus be a territory. This space of radical openness channeled through improvisation approaches the BwO. There is no hierarchy of improvisational moves within this space, as there is no structure underlying this system, giving the Grateful Dead total autonomy to enact any line of flight they deem worthy. The work of defining the second milieu as composite holds significant weight here: it forces the performance closer to the BwO due to the indeterminacy and possibility housed within this milieu. Instead of being a defined, single territory, it is a composite of territories, and include expressive qualities from all songs in the Grateful Dead’s discography. This is significant, as instead of the segue being the transcoding between strictly “China Cat Sunflower” and, for example, “I Know You Rider,” it is the interaction between “China Cat Sunflower” and “I Know You Rider,” “Me and My Uncle,” “Dark Star,” and on. Even if the Dead make the decision to go from “China Cat Sunflower” into “I Know You Rider,” the segue between the two can house different

short-lived tendencies of other songs, emphasizing a lack of defined hierarchies and defining other potential connections they could take (*Europe '72; Complete Studio Rarities Collection*). Thus, within this space, the structure of the set is determined by the testing of territorial expressions, leading into different potentials of where the set could go.

While this space of immense possibility created by approaching the Body without Organs, and thus the creation of a radical rhizomatic system, may seem phenomenal, Guattari and Deleuze warn against total immersion. They say that, to create a successful rhizomatic system, you need to retain some aspect of some structure, to move away from total chaos. (Deleuze and Guattari 40) While we have already seen an example of this kind of collapse through The Diggers, the Grateful Dead resist this destruction through the emergence of a stable rhythm. Guattari and Deleuze describe rhythm as the flow of tendencies between milieus as a result of transcoding, making it a byproduct of the segue.¹⁴ At the beginning of a segue, the composite and singular milieus have different rhythms: the singular has one rhythm, and I argue that the composite cannot have one due to it being a space of immense possibility. As the segues continue, motifs and lines of flight are tested, and begin to theorize where the band could take the set. As the testing process takes place, certain expressive qualities start to emerge more than others, highlighting strong milieu connections that the band could reterritorialize into. In this process of evaluating potential milieus, rhythm starts to be negotiated. In the *Europe '72* performance, this negotiation becomes audible around 3:50, where the drum pattern shifts from the syncopated tendencies of “China Cat Sunflower” toward a steadier, more driving pulse. The more milieus that are weeded out, the more the space of possibility begins to contract, and the stabler the rhythm becomes. In this sense, the very rhizomatic testing of song-segue possibilities facilitates in the production of a static rhythm, and thus begins the process of reterritorialization.

Reterritorialization occurs when expressive qualities of the new song milieu start to dominate the auditory characteristics of the song. In this instance, inexpressive qualities residual from our previous state of in-between milieus dissolve, and expressive qualities of a new song start to emerge. For our *Europe '72* example, this happens at the beginning of “I Know You Rider” conveniently. At that point, you hear some of the tendencies of this song milieu placed at the forefront of the song, signified through the congealing

¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari describe the functionality of rhythm in this chapter pretty broadly. However, there are connections within this section to music: “The tom-tom is not 1 -2, the waltz is not 1, 2, 3, music is not binary or ternary, but rather forty-seven basic meters, as in Turkish music” (Deleuze and Guattari 313). They do not restrict this conversation to just music, and have a larger expanse of connections within this section.

of the band around the tested line of flight by drummers Bill Kreutzman and Mickey Hart. But total territorialization is not yet complete, as the Grateful Dead have the possibility to leave this entrance as just a jam due to its definition as a milieu. Total reterritorialization occurs at 0:22, where the most expressive qualities, the lyrics, emerge (*Europe* '72). Thus, the level of territorialization of these qualities affects the stability of the song: the emergence of lyrics instead of tendencies of a milieu's jams creates a stronger backbone for the song, and can contribute to the weight that it has within the set.

This fluctuation between territorialization and deterritorialization becomes the standard roadmap of Grateful Dead sets. This circulation causes the music to have the Nietzschean "tragic" quality, where the chaos and spontaneity of the Dionysian is manifested in the rhizome and the order and structure of the Apollonian is brought back through arborescence. Additionally, these sets play with concepts of unity and individuality: within improvisation of the Grateful Dead, individual lines of flight begin to be taken, as each member plays within the interaction of the stable and composite milieu in their own way, and, within the song milieu, togetherness manifests as each member agrees on a single territory to reside within.²⁰ If the Dionysian tends to rhizome, and breaks down a sense of distinction and creates community, and the Apollonian tends to arborescence, which pushes individuality, then we have an inherent Nietzschean contradiction. But, through this contradiction, the Grateful Dead can often achieve equilibrium between the Apollonian and Dionysian without reaching sonic contradiction. Yes, the rhizomatic quality of the segue opens each individual member to their own line of flight, contradicting the community building characteristic of the Dionysian, but this individuality is a necessary part in the identification of rhythm and reterritorialization. Without this individuality, lines of flight would not be tested and negotiated between the band, causing total rhizomatic destruction. Similarly, the arborescence of reterritorialization creates unity of the band through shared lines of flight, contradicting the emphasis on individuality of the Apollonian. But, without moments of togetherness within territories, the band avoids rhizomatic collapse and successfully transmits something tragic to the audience. Thus, through this cohabitation of Apollonian and Dionysian qualities within live performances, the Grateful Dead become tragic, and constantly fluctuate with how

15 There are times where they may not agree. More specifically, tension between Jerry Garcia/Phil Lesh with Bob Weir emerged because of the former's interest in long improvisations and the latter's adherence to traditional classic rock structures. An important note, however, is that multiplicities exist in rhizomatic moments. While the negotiation happens, band members can sonically argue about where to take the performance, but in order to successfully fluctuate there needs to be an agreement at some point.

the set remains tragic. Most Grateful Dead sets retain this fluctuation between arborescence and rhizome, and by extension, self and community. Our discussion of the segue will involve the Dead's performance on 11/8/1969 at the Fillmore Auditorium, and starts at the first emergence of "Dark Star," which is the third song, and will end after "And We Bid You Goodnight" (*Dick's Picks Vol. 16*). We start within the "Dark Star" milieu at the beginning of the segue sequence through the emergence of musical motifs and lyrics. Our departure from the Dark Star milieu occurs around 7:40, where the form inherited by "Dark Star" starts to dissolve (*Dick's Picks Vol. 16*). This marks our movement outside the Dark Star milieu and into a space where this and the composite milieu interact. In this moment of the song, chaos and formlessness emerge as defining features of the song, symbolizing our approach to the BwO and emergence of total possibility of where the band could go next in terms of song. However, around 11:42 is where rhythm starts to emerge, with drummers Bill Kreutzman and Mickey Hart beginning to find a common rhythm (*Dick's Picks Vol. 16*). This rhythm is reminiscent of the one found in "The Other One," showing how the drummers test a line of flight that soon solidifies into reterritorialization. As the rhythm solidifies, band members who once immersed themselves in the formlessness of the BwO begin to fall back into the order that the drummers set. One interesting note is that, throughout the immersion of formlessness and later emergence of rhythm, guitarist Jerry Garcia keeps his form of improvisation, but retains a level of structure and arborescence through the usage of Dark Star motifs. Thus, in this light, we reside in a space of opportunity without total sonic domination of Dark Star. As the rhythm ramps up and each member begins to join in on structure, we formally enter the "The Other One" milieu around 00:20 of this designated song, where expressive qualities become the main backbone with which the Grateful Dead reference in their almost 6 minute jam. Full arborescence is achieved at 6:33, where the lyrics emerge (*Dick's Picks Vol. 16*).¹⁶

The identification of the Grateful Dead show as tragic causes continuous negotiation between rhizome and arborescence through the use of improvisation within the song and through segues. Recall our main argument with Kerouac's *On The Road*: Kerouac's story defines how the self-versus-community dichotomy of the Apollonian-arborescent pairing is harmonized, but lacks this same agreeance with the Dionysian-rhizome, causing moments of reterritorialization and Dionysian exhaustion. While these dichotomies can be extended to

¹⁶ The rest of the set and others function in a similar way. See Appendix 1 for details of the rest of this set and other sets with various timestamps detailing various qualities of each segue.

the Grateful Dead in their use of these pairings, they do something different than Kerouac, as they create balance between the Dionysian-rhizome. Nietzsche specifically describes the Dionysian as being a force that immerses you in the “primordial oneness” of the world. This concept is rooted in the idea of loss of the individual and immersion of the self in the environment and people around oneself. The use of the word “primordial,” implying a sense of ineffability, is especially interesting. Unlike the structure and support that language gives the Apollonian, the Dionysian is almost rendered nonverbal, which works especially well with the Grateful Dead’s improvisational tendencies. In this reading, the music, which is an inherently Dionysian art form, builds a sense of primordial unity with the performer and the audience through ecstasy. Thus, the very methodology of the literary utilized by Kerouac becomes what inhibits him from creating a tragic fluctuation, as the linear progression of a novel binds it to the Apollonian-arborescent, continually residing in a static space of contradiction. However, because the Dead are continuously fluctuating between the Apollonian-arborescent and Dionysian-rhizome within their sets, they too sit in a space of contradiction, but one that continuously changes and moves towards the tragic. In this light, the movement of the methodologies is what sets apart these two pieces of media: the static being defined by Apollonian-arborescent reterritorialization and the flux continuously reshaping its tragic status.

Appendix 1: Annotation of Two Grateful Dead Sets

Set #1: Grateful Dead Live at the Fillmore Auditorium on 1969-11-08 (Collected as *Dick’s Picks Vol. 16*)

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
	Dark Star	7:28	Phil Lesh deviates from “Dark Star” bass motif; break down of structure of the song ensues; song becomes formless; initial departure from the Dark Star milieu
		7:58	Heavy Lesh part disintegrates and becomes more static; McKernan and Hart/Kreutzman remain; softer and more abstract improvisation
			Guitars (Weir and/or Garcia) join back in; song gets increasingly more chaotic, signifying approach of BwO

W

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
Interesting note for “Dark Star” in this set: the verses are split between songs: The first “Dark Star” has the first verse, then “The Other One” follows in full, and then the second verse of “Dark Star” emerges after (“Dark Star” sandwich!)		9:48	Guitar starts up “Dark Star” motif again (fast and light), which becomes less restrained to the form of this song as it progresses
		10:09	Light cymbal, characteristic of “The Other One,” begins (determined line of flight); not quite in territory, as the song dips back into spacey improvisation
		11:58	Band becomes more structured; not clear where they are going yet; characteristics of “The Other One,” “Dark Star,” and the “Feelin’ Groovy” jam emerge
		13:27	Lesh plays bassline of “Feelin’ Groovy;” band follows suit
	The Other One	0:04	Lesh plays bassline of “The Other One” and band follows suit; at this point we have a jam, so full arborescence is not achieved (improvisation inside the milieu)
		6:33	Lyrics emerge; now at the center of the milieu
		7:44	Form starts to drop; departure from center of the milieu and towards the edges
		8:02	Lesh and drums drop characteristics of “The Other One,” beginning to move out of the milieu (still some tendencies, but new one arise)
		9:22	McKernan introduces “The Other One” motif again (momentary reterritorialization) with which he plays with (leads to improvisation)
		10:45	Back into in-between space; everybody playing with form simultaneously
		10:57	Garcia plays “Dark Star” akin motif (not clearly from “Dark Star,” but similar); clear end point now in the set
		11:45	Fall back into “The Other One” tendencies

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
	Dark Star	0:01	Immediate arrival of “Dark Star” motif; moving towards this territory
		0:51	Lesh starts to play “Uncle John’s Band” bassline
	Uncle John’s Jam	0:11	Back to playing “Dark Star” motif
		0:35	Back to “Uncle John’s Band” (solidification of territory) (territory never reaches full potential, remains at the edges of the milieu due to lack of lyrics)
		1:38	Back to “Dark Star” motifs (approaching territory, too fast to be totally “Dark Star,” but form + notes are reminiscent)
	Dark Star	0:15	Slows down “Dark Star” so we can enter territory
		1:26	Center of milieu approached (lyrics)
		2:50	“Dark Star” dissipates; traditional lead into “St. Stephen” emerges instead of the spacey improvisation seen before
		3:09	“St. Stephen” characteristics emerge; in the territory (solely defined by Garcia)
	St. Stephen	0:52	Band joins deterritorialization
		2:06	Lyrics emerge; at the center of the milieu; slower than some versions
		4:55	Departure from the center of the milieu marked by beginning of improvisation
		6:30	Lyrics emerge again; back in the center of the milieu
Inclusion of “William Tell Overture” changes; for “Live/Dead” it is included at the end of “St. Stephen,” in 11-8-1969 it is in the beginning of “The Eleven”	The Eleven	0:03	“William Tell Overture” emerges; standard transition from “St. Stephen” into “The Eleven”
		1:06	Change of tempo and rhythm [again, standard line of flight into “The Eleven”]
“The Eleven” in this set is slower; long jam		1:11	Entrance into “The Eleven,” lighter sound compared to some versions of this song
		7:47	Lyrics emerge; at the center of the milieu
		8:31	Lyrics end; beginning of improvisational end/ process of moving out of the milieu

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
		12:02	Outside of milieu; in the interaction space between songs; some traits from the traditional ending of “The Eleven” mixed with unknown traits
	Caution	0:03	Drum pattern changes; resembles “Caution,” so we have entered this territory; rest of the band joins suit [cymbals join, then bass, then guitars/keyboard]; long jam
		5:25	Enter the center of the “Caution” milieu because the lyrics have emerged
		7:05	Start of heavy, spacey improvisation WITHIN milieu [mass possibility; breakdown of the song that is a tendency, but manifestation of this dissolve changes with performance]
		11:40	Re-emergence of the lyrics [center of milieu]; lyrics later become main sonic quality of the song [drop-out of most of the band, besides the drums]; lyrics, in this instance, become a conduit for improvisation, as the form of them breaks down [not set lyrics, just tendencies]; interaction with audience via clapping --> affective
		16:23	Logic of “Main Ten” emerges; improvisational lyricism and dominance of this quality subsists, but background music morphs into “Main Ten”
	Main Ten Jam	0:06	Solidification of “Main Ten” via the keyboard and guitar; bass and drums join in gradually
		3:02	Song slows down (deviates from tendencies --> exit from milieu); song logic break down accompanies
	Caution	0:03	Becomes formless; immersion in BwO
		0:09	Bass picks up in speed and plays the motif of “Caution,” marking our entrance back into this milieu
			Same tendencies emerge (break down of song’s logic; emergence of improvisational lyrics); transition into “Feedback” [mainly sound feedback]

Set 2: Grateful Dead Live at Carousel Ballroom on 1968-02-14 (Collected as Road Trips Number 2 Volume 2: Carousel Ballroom, San Francisco, CA 2/14/68 (Live))

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
	Dark Star	0:25	Song opens with a jam from Garcia; This is not the first song in this set ("Morning Dew" and "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" precede). This could be a tendency of "Dark Star" (catalyst for segue progression)
		1:46	Lyrics emerge; at the center of the milieu
Set of segues starts in the middle of "Dark Star"		4:12	Interesting play on the traditional motif of "Dark Star"
"Dark Star" end jams often break down into nothingness. Sometimes (like in this set and the previous set), there is little actual formed improvisation [sometimes it's hard to hear any tested lines of flight. Could degree of rhizome vary with song ("Dark Star"'s potentiality of what it can segue into is massive, so we can consider it as an open space; considering the lyrics, I wouldn't be opposed to this theorization; could be useful for the next project formulation and a concluding point within this paper ["Dark Star" as the ultimate open space and logical connector between songs])		4:37	Lyrics remerge (movement in and out of the middle of the milieu as the song progresses)
		5:40	This is a traditional end to this song; kind of feels like it might transition into "St. Stephen," but again, this may not be the case
	China Cat Sunflower	0:00	Starts with an abrupt entrance of the "China Cat Sunflower" motif, suggested by Weir (?); faster than most performances of the song; the band follows suit

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
		0:08	Emergence of lyrics (at the center of the milieu); fast reterritorialization of this performance; Garcia sings lower pitched usually; normal tendencies of the song ensue
		1:26	Guitar starts to “sing” the traditional lyrical part of the song (improvisation that plays on the lyrics, or the most territorial expressions)
		2:47	Lyrics emerge again (at the center of the milieu, long Garcia solo follows)
	The Eleven	0:08	Traditional progression into the bridge of “China Cat Sunflower” that leads into the exit of the milieu; Garcia starts the improvisation and band gradually joins
		0:32	Traditional jam progression of “The Eleven” starts to solidify, marking our entrance into the “The Eleven” milieu; expressive qualities brighten and dominate the song until 1:03, where Lesh and McKernan joins by changing tempo
		1:25	Rest of the band joins
		2:58	Lyrics emerge (most expressive parts of the song)
		5:01	Exit from the milieu (Lesh and McKernan test new line of flight)
		5:47	Line of flight determined to follow into “Turn On Your Lovelight” (bass solidify our path by playing with form of motif)
		6:19	Call back to “The Eleven” by playing with motif
		6:24	Band transitions into “Turn On Your Lovelight” milieu
	Turn On Your Lovelight	0:25	Lyrics emerge (most expressive qualities signifies our residence in the milieu)
		8:10	Traditional end of “Turn On Your Lovelight;” end of this specific segue transition
	Cryptical Envelopment		Start of the next segue progression (multiple lines of flight appear and disappear throughout a set)
		1:04	Emergence of lyrics (most expressive qualities of a song marks our residence in the middle of the milieu, the area least affected by improvisation)

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
	The Other One	0:01	Immediate testing and actualization of the line of flight into “The Other One;” could this be greater spontaneity within this specific set, or the pre-set intentionality of the set (I’m inclined to think the latter --> arborescence exists before the set is actualized, but the way that the set progresses is rhizomatic, as the band makes the decision IN THE MOMENT how long their segue may be)
		1:22	Emergence of lyrics
	Cryptical Envelopment	0:01	Quick line of flight taken back into “Cryptical Envelopment;” lyrics are immediate (“The Other One” as an interlude?)
		0:35	Start of heavy improvisational section; movement towards the edge of the song milieu
		1:01	Bassline starts to resemble the motif in “The Other One;” marks our exit from the “Cryptical Envelopment” milieu
		3:43	Song starts to slow down to match the tempo of “New Potato Caboose;” reterritorialization process begins (literal negotiation of rhythm)
	New Potato Caboose	0:12	“New Potato Caboose” starts to solidify; marks our entrance into this milieu
		0:31	Lyrics emerge; long jam happens after the lyrics, BUT they are playing with the form within the milieu
		6:35	Garcia emerges with play on traditional “New Potato Caboose” motif
		8:29	Exit of the milieu that leads to the song ending on a suspension of sound
	Born Cross-Eyed	0:02	End of suspension is immediately followed by emergence of the song “Born Cross-Eyed”
		0:33	Lyrics emerge
		1:42	Drum motif tested that is highly reminiscent of that of “Spanish Jam” (which follows next); band follows suit and joins with the drums for a brief interlude (temporary immersion in the in-between space)
		1:57	Back in the “Born Cross-Eyed” milieu through motifs and lyrics

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
		2:10	Emergence of bass and drum motifs similar to those in “The Other One” alongside various motifs from “Born Cross-Eyed;” current interactions between the “Born Cross-Eyed” milieu and “The Other One” milieu
		2:26	Suspension of music that leads into feedback typical of the beginning of “Spanish Jam,” which emerges after (a very spacey version of “Spanish Jam”)
	Spanish Jam	0:00	“Spanish Jam” starts to solidify (real substance to the song now; not as spacey); starts to pick up a little in tempo during this
		2:24	Songs starts to disintegrate back into spaceyness
		3:11	Logic of the song starts to break down; in the inbetween space, approaching the BwO
		3:48	Drums start to play a driving rhythm, keeping the backbone of the song that causes the band to solidify back into “Spanish Jam”
		4:26	Drums dissolve; back into spaceyness
		4:54	Drums again provide a backbone that the group solidifies with; still heavy improvisation, but the band is now concrete
		6:18	Drums and co stop; reimmersion into the in-between space, as song becomes very spacey (occasional motifs from guitar or bass)
		7:04	Percussion comes in again to provide more of a backbone. The band solidifies around it (dip in and out of spacey, percussion becomes a constant)
		7:58	Very spacey; whole band practically drops out; end of this segue sequence
	Alligator	0:00	Start of new segue sequence; mic check followed by immediate presence into the “Alligator” milieu at 3:03
		3:43	Emergence of lyrics; (Garcia dominates sonic quality of this version)
		5:15	Improvisation of lyrics (meaning lyrics CAN be a sign of high territory, but not always)

Notes	Song Title	Time Stamp	Description
		6:11	Change of the song motifs marks our exit from the milieu
		6:18	Percussive improvisation (whole band drops out; percussion is the only thing that remains)
		7:35	More improved voice occurs
	Jam	0:02	Garcia emerges; starts to jam out (in between; substance of jam does not resemble any one song)
		0:48	Band joins in; in the key of E, which is the same key as "Turn On Your Lovelight" and "The Eleven." Some motifs, specifically the bass lines, start to resemble some of the traditional territorial expressions of these songs
		7:28	Improvised lyrics come back; resembles earlier improvised lyrics in "Alligator" milieu
		7:59	Bass starts to play motif common to "Caution" and band follows suit
	Caution	0:00	Heavy improvisation happens throughout the song
		2:55	Harmonica improvisation occurs (not standard for most plays of this song; new element)
		3:29	Lyrics emerge
		5:14	Heavy feedback occurs and the improvisation becomes more spacey; drums keep motif, but it slows down
		5:51	Bass starts the "Caution" motif again, and the band solidifies around it
		9:13	Spacey sound starts; band starts to join in; will eventually cause the lead into "Feedback"
This song is VERY spacey; lots of sonic feedback and motifs without real structure; is the "Feedback" milieu just the Body without Organs? Has a formal end to the segue progression. "In The Midnight Hour," which the set ends on, is not a part of the segue progression.	Feedback	0:00	Sonic logic of the band's playing largely dissipates (Weir, on rhythm guitar, is the only one that keeps rhythm)
		0:16	Weir loses rhythm

Bibliography

- Abel, Marco. "Speeding Across the Rhizome: Deleuze Meets Kerouac *On the Road*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2, June 2002, pp. 227–56. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2002.0012>.
- Bakhtin, M. M., et al. *Rabelais and His World*. The MIT Press, 2025.
- Cuordileone, K. A. "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2000, pp. 515–45. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2568762>.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1st ed., University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- The Diggers. *The Invisible Circus*. 1967. *The Digger Archives*, edited by Eric Noble, <https://www.diggers.org/diggers/incircus.html>. Accessed 22 May 2026.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. *Lawrence Ferlinghetti Papers, 1919-2010*. Lawrence Ferlinghetti Papers, Box 22, Bancroft Library Special Research Collections, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Accessed 13 February 2026.
- Grabbe, Hans-Jürgen. "Playing for Keeps: The Diggers, Life-Acting and Guerrilla Theater in San Francisco's Psychedelic '60s." *ASJ Occasional Papers*, 10 Nov. 2020, <http://op.asjournal.org/playing-for-keeps-the-diggers-life-acting-and-guerrilla-theater-in-san-franciscos-psychedelic-60s/>. Accessed 22 May 2026.
- Grateful Dead. Complete Studio Rarities. Rhino Entertainment, 2013.
- . *Dick's Picks Volume 16*. Grateful Dead Records, 2000.
- . *Europe '72*. Warner Bros., 1972.
- . *Road Trips Vol. 2, No. 2: Carousel Ballroom, San Francisco, CA 2/14/68 (Live)*. Grateful Dead Records, 2009.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On The Road*. 8th ed., Signet Books, 1960.
- Kherif, Sonia. "The Nomadic War Machine in Jack Kerouac's *Vanity of Duluoz* and *On the Road*." *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 2021, pp. 105–24. <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.21.2.6>.
- Malvinni, David. *Grateful Dead and the Art of Rock Improvisation*. Scarecrow Press, 2013.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Penguin Classics, 1994.
- Phillip-Fein, Kim. "Conservatism: A State of the Field." *Journal of American History*, vol. 98, no. 3, December 2011, pp. 723-43. <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article/98/3/723/684892>.
- Tuedio, Jim. "And Then Flew On: Improvisational Moments of Rhizomatic Assemblage in Grateful Dead Musical Experience." *Texas/Southwest Popular Culture Association/American Popular Culture Association Joint National Conference*, Feb. 2006, Albuquerque, NM. Conference presentation. California State University, Stanislaus, <https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/2022-07/gd-improvisation.pdf>

The Decline of the American Industrial Midwest & Its Post-Industrial Identity

by Aldo Cardona

Critical Essay and Field Notes

Introduction

This research paper is archival work and a continuous chronological narrative from the 1800s to April 2026 about the American Rust Belt or Industrial Midwest. The intent of this paper is to educate the reader about the union and general history of this region that used to encompass a third of the American population to now 15% using my conservative definition of the Industrial Midwest.¹ Erie, Pennsylvania is the perfect microcosm of the Rust Belt to tell the region's story since it was once an industrial powerhouse that now has to reinvent itself that's faring well. Using the University of Pittsburgh U.L.S. Digital Collection of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America UE Records, James Jeffrey Higgin's *Images of The Rust Belt*, and my own archive as my primary sources, I argue that the transition from the industrial core represents more than the loss of proud and stable jobs; it represents a transformation in the region as a whole. My approach applies theory to different sets of archival work to show how a historical period can be associated with another historical period since the region's history as a whole is fairly recent starting 200 years ago and with some workers still alive to tell tales of the industrial precipice period. This paper defines shared history as a collective socioeconomic trajectory of the Great Lakes and other selection regions characterized by a mid-20th century industrial monoculture. Such identity is defined by both the physical presence of manufacturing (steel, automobiles, coal, etc) and the labor structures that made the high union industrial middle class. A consistent gap I have noticed in conversation of the region is the absence of the coverage of the overall narrative when focusing on localized places or states. With this paper, I hope to cover the macrocosm of the whole region as a whole with microcosm comparisons. By documenting the landscapes and lived experiences of Erie in the modern age in an archive of my own, I show how industrial disappearance and remanence show the resilience and shape of the Industrial Midwest today. Such factors shape the social, political, and everyday realities of an undiscussed region that I seek to inform people about.

¹ I categorize the Rust Belt as a continuous swath that stems from portions of New York to small parts of lower Wisconsin. This boundary and acknowledgment doesn't encompass the entirety of every state in the region and is Great Lake orientated. For example, I don't recognize much of inland Illinois as Rust Belt like Davenport and St. Louis. However I do recognize Illinoisian cities that border the Great Lakes. The Virginias and Kentucky aren't included in this definition, as that is Appalachia.

An Industrial Midwestern Narrative

The long history of the American “Rust Belt” is defined by two major factors: the push westwards from the original colonies and the Second Industrial Revolution. The majority of the region consisting of the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin were created out of the ceded British Northwest Territories during the 1783 Treaty of Paris after the American Revolutionary War. Western Pennsylvania, including present-day Erie, while not part of these original territories, was adjacent to these newly ceded territories and was not yet settled and surveyed. The Midwestern region of the nation rapidly industrialized in the late 19th- and 20th-centuries as railroads expanded and factories rose. Mass production and some of the aforementioned migrations reshaped major metropolises like Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, as well as smaller, urban centers like Erie. Historian Daniel Watson describes how Fordism, with its developments in mass production and consumption remains “a central concept in American labour history,” and shaped the history of the region post-1910s (Watson) In the Industrial Midwest, Fordism extended outside of Henry Ford’s Detroit’s factories into the broader social American order which reimagined labor after the first gilded age with the undying promise that repeated industrial work could sustain an entire family on a single income for generations of workers across these industrial cities. We can see elements of this new class identity in contemporary images of workers at work. One such image titled *Product Development* (c. 1950s-60s) shows two individuals, “William E. Kolakawski and Carl Berry” at work developing a new home freeze unit in the Building 63 model shop. (ULS Digital Collection 000039.UE) These images, taken from union newsletters, depict workers as united in hands-on, dignified labor. Carl (right) and William (left) are dressed in similarly colored clothing, indicating either a shared uniform or union attire. Their posture is engaged and they are focused on the development of complex machinery, indicating their pride and purpose at work. It is especially significant that this image is of two men, either working together or working as mentor and mentee, creating an impression of labor as a potentially masculine enterprise. Carlo Rotella argues that industrial era cultures and social orders were reshaped by varying transformations, “In Erie...the wandering on the principle of industrial urbanism destabilized the edifice of masculinity built on the principle of being good with one’s hands at work..,” here an unstable market eroded a long standing regional masculine cultural value of craftsmanship and physical labor that was simply lost to external factors than to time. (7) This decline mirrors a symptom of a larger problem in the region where the disappearance

of manufacturing fractured not only economies but entire social identities leaving those people to feel left behind and nostalgic for manufacturing prosperity. The wider deindustrialization of the region had dismantled systems of labor that long existed as sources of masculine identity, regional pride, and social stability. While this is only a single fleeting moment, it can be interpreted as an encapsulation of the region's skilled industrial labor and intergenerational mentorships. Such lineages would be disrupted once these jobs disappeared.

Images like these of workers in collaboration were a backbone of union advertising, but also speak to the importance of unions in identity formation. Newsman and Skocpol argue that "being a union man was about more than outward appearances," but offered workers a meaning and belonging. (22-23) As much as the union worker is "archetypal" in the 20th-century, solidarity in labor movements gave many a sense of community and peace even beyond the grave. Unions today are arguably not as strong as they were decades ago because of modern legislation and loopholes. Companies can easily export production to other nations and states to find weaker labor and organization laws. Companies who do so are often responding to Midwest's labor robust laws, which are a result of their rich history of union activism. Another image from the ULS Digital Collection, titled *Mass Demonstration in Erie* (1952), shows an organized protest of workers demonstrating against the 1952 G.E. layoffs at the East Plant Gate and gives some insight into the strength of unions during this period. (ULS Digital Collection 000066.UE) Hundreds of workers occupy the lower half of the image, with the sky (upper half), a series of large buildings (left), and wired posts and lamps (center) as the only other visible landscape features. The sheer scale of the protest demonstrates the worker's commitment to class solidarity, as they organized to protect their own jobs and other workers from unemployment. Protests like these came at a moment when the United States was simultaneously advancing an ideology of American exceptionalism, and the Industrial Midwest was competing with European manufacturers. Lars K. Christensen writes that, "While Danish workers and union leaders were fascinated by what they saw coming from the USA, in terms of productivity and material goods, they also maintained a critical eye towards other aspects of the American society." (306) Danish people and workers were observing Fordism in practice which was a very predominant industrial ideology in the

American Midwest that allowed Americans to match and compete with European industrial areas, though this did not come without its flaws:

The high level of productivity and the corresponding high wages in industry featured prominently in the report. But the working conditions in American industry were a cause for concern. The report specifically refers to the strikes that the UAW “had to establish” at Ford earlier in 1949, in order to prevent the work-speed becoming “too unreasonable” (Christensen 306)

With the net positives of higher income and production of Fordist industrial philosophy also came with negatives of worse labor conditions and quotas that unions like the U.A.W. (United Auto Workers) had to deal with the possibility of minimal fixes even with massive demonstrations. U.E. in Erie like U.A.W. in Detroit had to deal with organization worker action against a higher factory management whether that is layoffs or working conditions. Protecting workforce numbers is not only class solidarity but worker productivity rather since more workers assist in diluting work burdens, assembling more productions quicker, and unions become stronger when there’s more workers making it easy to negotiate and operate within these factories.

Another image, titled *Erie Strikers* (1946), gives us a further sense of worker solidarity and worker endurance. (ULS Digital Collection.). The image shows Thomas Rizzo, Angelo Calamita, and Arthur Clark outside during the cold days of the G.E. 1946 strike. (ULS Digital Collection 000035.UE) If I had to assign blame for deindustrializing, and NAFTA was not an option, General Electric would be a main culprit. General Electric’s continual appearance in these images is not coincidental, as they are one of the largest manufacturing enterprises of this period and one of the larger proponents of Fordism. In the 1980s, C.E.O. of General Electric, Jack Welch, orchestrated the dismantling of G.E. at a period where the company had excellent employee benefits and manufactured high-quality products. He started firing people, slashing pensions, and outsourcing domestic labor. Even as quality fell, stock prices rose. This business model wasn’t contained and spread amongst other companies. America stopped producing things but made ideas like specialization and the concept of outsourcing which started in the 1970s. Outsourcing decimated wages as companies turned to foreign markets to cut costs. Union jobs that fed entire families were faded out by niche specializations and niche jobs. G.E.’s push for deregulation coincided with the rise of Ronald

Reagan, who served as a G.E. spokesperson, to the presidency, where he defended the company's practices, advocated for deregulation, and pushed for lower taxes for corporations for the whole nation. Thomas, Angelo, and Arthur were willing to protest that group on a cold day years predating the large group protest. Two of them wear trench coats as one wears a leather jacket to bear with the Midwestern cold that can freeze the Great Lakes. The three stand quite stern regardless of the outside conditions showing this masculine image of blue collar workers that endures for their labor even when their labor might be physical labor. Even as the Steel Belt began to fracture, these workers are good representatives of the type of worker across the nation who manned these industrial jobs, reaped their benefits from their profession, and organized to protect their fellow and future workers.

While some manufacturing jobs left Erie forcing it to transition, essentially everything and everyone left Centralia within a similar timespan. Beneath Centralia rages an eternal inferno fed by an infinite source of fuel for all time. This literal hell was once the town's only sustenance where generations of men worked in the mines until jobs slowed down and disappeared. It is known throughout the state of Pennsylvania that more men died in the mines than in Vietnam. From the mines oozes a constant white smoke that rivals or matches the white clouds above. The fragmentation of the place was apparent even decades ago as neighbors turned against each other creating a hostile local culture where, as one resident denotes in a peer reviewed journal, "It's your own townspeople that are hurting you the most. You can go out of town and people have compassion for you, but not in Centralia." (Kroll-Smith and Couch 29) Whilst the 1,000 Centralia residents sued each other, fearmongered, did not trust each other, and left as a whole, many communities within Rust Belt emulate the example of Erie with them being tightly knit communities nearing 100,000 residents that are all very friendly. The Centralia residents mostly vacated in the 1980s to 1990s, but those remaining dozen fought for their zip code, representation, and against eminent domain status in the 2000s (the initial fire started in the 1960s). They fly the American flag even as they acknowledge the government is waiting for the older residents to die and the young to give up. This is metaphorical for the region as a whole because despite economic neglect and governmental failure, the Industrial Midwest still persists, is there, and fights for presence and resurgence everyday. The case of Centralia is an extreme case both it shares the themes of governmental neglect, flight of employment before the decline, resilience, and population reduction which is surreal to witness in person. The votes of 4-5 in Centralia don't appear worthwhile to the state but the region as a whole is very

politically important due to the governorships, senate seats, and elector college votes there. The present day irony of Centralia is that more residents arrive there as permanent residents in caskets than as living visitors or residents. There's also an element of disaster tourism there though famous graffiti roads are now covered up to deter more temporary visitors.

As we shift to the second half of the 20th-century, we see a shift in the external identity of the region from the people who made up the industrial core of the region to a newfound focus on the abandoned landscapes of the postindustrial. The end of the 20th-century marked the rise of the term "Rust Belt" as this was the Industrial Midwest beforehand. Who coined the term "Rust Belt" is ambiguous; it is widely attributed to Walter Mondale, former Democratic Presidential Candidate, (although mentions of the term from many newspapers from as early as 1904 and it appears across the 1900s) but the actual term picked up its modern definition around the 1980s in reference to the Industrial Midwest decline. (BuffaloResearch) It is wordplay on these factories, machinery, and mills physically rusting as they are abandoned. This term captures more than that as it encapsulates the lost jobs, plant closures, and places left behind to corrode. James Jeffrey Higgin's, in *Images of the Rust Belt*, captures both this imagining of the Rust Belt city and the reality of urban design for industrial life with the "30 minute city." One image, titled Alleyway in East Liverpool, taken in East Liverpool, Ohio speaks to the livability of the Rust Belt city and its industrial history." In the image, we see a city with the two story wooden houses, slightly fractured paved walk/driveway, colored cars, utility wires and posts, and the brick factory in the distance. (Higgins n.p.) Many cities and towns in the region were built around a principle where a worker could visit your workspace, educational areas, medical areas, and stores within 30 minutes of your house. The reason for this layout is so a factory worker can walk to work in a factory from his house while their family can walk to the store or school from the same residence.¹ The factory in Higgin's photography shows this proximity, and gives a clear sense of the potential of these cities for robust, community-engaged life. Before the factories left, workers of the region gained enough wealth to regularly afford automobiles and other manufactured goods previously inaccessible to them. They did not need to live near their factories so they relocated farther out. Some left the communities entirely, which dropped the amount of taxes paid in the region thus leading to a decline in civil services. Some did not willingly leave either as when factories closed down, many residents had to search for jobs elsewhere in the Industrial Midwest. These are

² This holds true in Erie where I could walk to a Family Dollar, primary school, medical specialist, and the factories on 12th street within 30 minutes of the former worker house I stayed at.

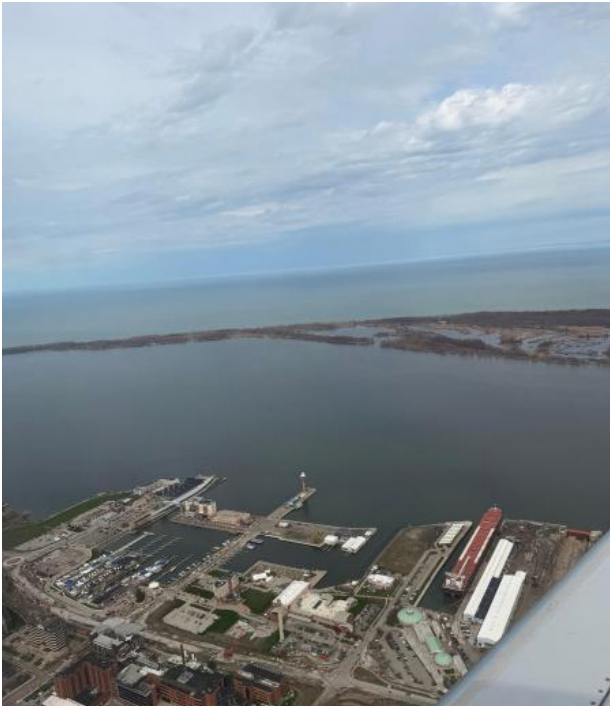
the factors that lead to population decline in the overall region and this is made apparent by being in person seeing the vacancies in real life and hearing them from the natives.

A Modern Post-Industrial Midwest Narrative

After an Overwatch esports tournament called GGBeach, I drew attention by not dying as a support in two matches against some Californian champion team which had multiple top 500 people in the northern hemisphere. I was able to get in communication with some UPENN students post-game. In a live post-game call, I asked these Pennsylvania residents about their thoughts on Erie County. “It’s boring,” “there’s a lake,” and, “it is safer than Pittsburgh.” were the snippets I remember verbatim. These rather plain descriptions piqued my interest, especially after the player who described it as boring also stated that it was somewhere where someone would go for research. What isn’t transcribed is the UPENN alumni and students’ utter confusion about me wanting to do research in Erie. This is an example of why I do the research I do. I seek to educate and inform people about this historical region of the nation in silent plight that you can visit in person to see this living archive where history literally manifests itself in front of you in Centralia or throughout the region. A lot of people are unaware of the rich history and resilient people of this large portion of their fellow Americans. When I was in Pennsylvania, I met a lot of very friendly and talkative people that just wanted to be heard because I got a lot of my needed dialogue and information I needed unprompted.

I visited Erie from April 15 to 18 2026 to see and experience the current state of the region. My goals were simple; photograph the city, hear the stories of Erie natives, and gain an understanding of a region I wouldn’t otherwise get from 2,200 miles away. I got my first impression of the Great Lakes region in the air and saw just how enormous the second-smallest Great Lake Erie was. It stretches endlessly into the horizon like the Pacific with Canada not visible at all.

My experience of Erie on the ground aligned with my sense of the thirty minute city concept. The city was perfectly walkable, and I took over 100,000 steps during my brief trip. A universal factor of Erie was its well kept long roads and sidewalks that were mostly vacant of foot traffic besides mine with the city skewing more car centric as there were always cars driving past me in Western and Eastern Erie. I started on foot in Western Erie from the airport at 11:00 am. The west differs from the rest of the city because it has trees, long strings of telephone wires on each street, small businesses, one story houses, motels, inns, and large billboards. There seemed to be a lot of focus on longevity in Erie where billboards advertised housing, decades



Aerial view of Downtown Erie with the harbor and Preque Isle off of Lake Erie.



Western Erie has long roads and sideways with small businesses and one story houses.

in business were visible everywhere, temporary lodging had no vacancies signs lit up, and small businesses promoted how long they were in business and largely were open. I noticed a lot of Christ and Christianity advertisements. The name Erie is used in promotion everywhere in the city with the area using the terms of city, hometown, and town interchangeably.

I walked along 12th street and at some point it merged into a highway so I pivoted and made a left to a CVS to a McDonald's near a cemetery. Before entering the McDonald's, I saw a lot of modest headstones often with one surname or description like "Husband" with them dating from the 1800s to 1900s but some recent from the 2000s with some people walking around though I was locked out. In the McDonald's, it was largely elderly customers, with three young men, and two boomer-ish blue collar workers just waiting. In retrospect, I did not see a lot of 30-50 year olds in the city. It was more children, young adults, and elderly people but largely no middle aged people which puzzled me. Why was that age group missing? One answer came up casually in conversations, as I learned how fierce competition in the area was since other major urban areas like Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Cleveland were all nearby, likely pulling working professionals of that age away from Erie. There was a highway with a Pittsburgh sign near 12th street which I saw and that city is farther south.



Erie Harbor was under construction with the bare tree covering a lighthouse.

I coincidentally found my rental which was in a neighborhood formerly built for and occupied by factory workers as the city became more residential. These houses were similar in design but they were neither colonial or townhouse style but they reminded me of houses in Virginia though I never been there. My host, a local realtor, described how the surrounding neighborhood was built so that “people could walk to work from there.” Most of the homes that I passed during my visit were two stories with porches but had small open front lawn spaces. During my walks around this neighborhood, I spoke to folks on their lawns and struck up conversations. Many were friendly and encouraging with some verbatim statements being, “Go on,” “How’s it going,” and “Good luck, man.” Throughout my visit, many people waved at me as I passed giving the area a small town feel. I would later ask more Erie natives if some houses were abandoned since I saw some boarded up windows and couldn’t see many people around during the day. At night, some porches and windows light up but some don’t at all. The most notable reply to potential vacancies was, “They are just really big houses.”

After checking-in at 3 pm, I proceeded again downtown by foot. Downtown was a charming area with a university, houses, a literal Great Lake, docking port, restaurants, parks, repurposed buildings, and people. The area seemed more progressive than I initially thought, with pride flags, mental health advertisements, dispensaries, and young students. This stood in stark contrast to my own conservative Californian hometown of Bakersfield which would not have any of that messaging downtown. Their downtown was largely made of red brick buildings as were all the factories and industrial centers throughout the city so that is a universal factor there.



Modern Tool Co. is a repurposed factory made into apartment units.

While downtown, I found the Modern Tool Co. building, a repurposed factory turned into rental apartments. Rotella describes this as the fate of many factories in the post-Industrial Midwest, describing how “The factory buildings and warehouse may have been shuttered or converted into loft apartments or offices.” (Rotella 7) Often these repurposings preserve the aesthetics of the factory on the outside, as with the Modern Tool Co. and its red bricks, and large factory windows; a sign of its former glory as a metalworks around a hundred years ago. The repurposing of these spaces, while economical, is appropriative and signals a greater loss. That building began in 1901 as a prominent manufacturing factory, first dealing with tools and later with automobiles. What was once a space of production downtown is now residential, giving up a core space to showcase the city’s identity as a manufacturer, healthcare center, educated, and as touristic. Exposed brick and industrial architecture become decorative characters for tenants rather than reminders of production. The building is safe from demolition, becoming dead space, and supplies housing at the same time, but there are other buildings that achieve the same purpose without that historical precedent and local significance. It is more of a sign of how Erie has had to reinvent itself which resonates with the larger trends across the Industrial Midwest.

As I progressed through downtown, I saw further evidence of the city’s revitalization efforts, including an “Erie Downtown Development Development Corporation” construction site with the barebones and a projected image on the wall. Some businesses echoed the history of industrial work, with one construction business’ slogan claiming both their year of origin and their methods, “1984, hands-on expertise, and exceptional



A glimpse into downtown Erie from a park near Gannon University

work.” Even as the construction businesses connect themselves to the industrial labor of the past, the shifts in downtown move into a post-industrial moment. Tracy Neumann describes the major shift in urban planning that occurs in these revitalization efforts,

When elected officials and civic leaders in North Atlantic manufacturing centers set out to make postindustrial cities, their activities followed the same general pattern. They typically focused earliest and most intensively on CBD redevelopment projects designed to meet the physical needs of the corporations and commercial services on which their economic visions were dependent, with some attention to neighborhood planning as urban renewal fell out of favor” (108)

These downtown redevelopment efforts focus on revitalization of central business areas through construction efforts intended to attract tenants, retail activity, and investment framing vacant spaces as problems that need repair. This was visible in the language of GoErie’s reporting of this specific space as a “yawning gap” and “missing tooth” to be filled with the \$25 million effort to bring restaurants, offices, and retail areas. (Martin) Part of this revitalization effort in Erie includes healthcare. I saw many medical buildings and specializations throughout downtown, including a vibrantly colored orange and black hospital, and a medical ground

sponsored by an arena. Healthcare is the new rising industry of the city and throughout the Industrial Midwest. Other industries, like education, were prominent in downtown Erie, and during my time in the area I saw a lot of yellow school buses with the “CITY OF ERIE” on their sides. I blended in around Gannon University with my drawstring bag. The college students were very similar to the UCSB students I am around; they wore tank tops to show their arm muscles, gossiped, listened to rap and emo. music, and walked about campus buildings.

The next day, I took an uber with an Erie native to WABTEC Corporation’s Factory formerly G.E’s plant and we conversed the longer drive there to the East. My Uber driver was a returning Erie native who now works in healthcare and drives part time. This is a general trend across the region as whole, as Gabriel Winant describes in their discussion of shifting economic trends in the wake of the Rust Belt, “As growing numbers of people fell out of the net of economic security provided by industrial employment and the social institutions that surrounded it, people turned to their health care coverage to meet their changing social needs.” (181) As industrial employment disappeared, many communities lost not only wages but stability tied to unions and labor benefits forcing residents to rely more and more on healthcare systems as deindustrialization occurred. My driver told me of the time of steel mills and when you could just graduate high school and get a union job afterwards. The reason for the rise of healthcare in the region and all the specializations I saw there was because of unions. Healthcare became the employers of the union workers who created the very healthcare systems and caretake the now elderly. Winant describes that “As organized labor consolidated benefits and constructed its private welfare system, supported by the liberal state, providers became able to deliver a higher standard of care. They expanded facilities, upgraded equipment, and incorporated more cutting-edge science into the care they provided.” (146) I cannot classify my duration at WABTEC as fruitful outside of the uber conversation and the geographical starting point I had. The factory itself spanned multiple residential blocks and was fortress-like as it was fenced off, gated, full of no trespassing signs, brick buildings, trees to obscure vision, lawns, fences within fences, grey metal railings, and there was no one there besides a worker and I in pouring rain. The sheer irony of such an impregnable defense is that it all relies on a checkpoint with an honor system rather than a barring rail you could ignore and drive by. Before I was turned away and walked elsewhere, I saw a large opening beyond the checkpoint with the buildings where there was a mural of an



I traversed Eastern Erie while raining and it is very similar to Western Erie's residential area.



Erie Mill and Press Company Inc. occupies an entire block by itself.



See visible damage and underpass of Erie Mill and Press Company Inc. by the highway.

American flag that I am almost certain a mass demonstration and modern protest do take place at though I cannot verify it. Labour in WABTEC is noted by some people as not consistent with layouts being regular as of the past year with some suspecting of a hiring freeze.

As I left WABTEC behind, I first came across Lakeside cemetery, which seemed more modern, and in contrast was very flat, with plaques instead of headstones, and more flowers and American flags. From there, I managed to find the Erie Mill and Press Company INC. factory alongside a highway that is walkable and barred. The site still appears functional and you can order from the site. On my initial previews online, I saw that it was a red brick building with long windows. The windows are enormous with them either being glass or boarded up. From the highway, my view was more interesting as a combination of boarded up windows and broken windows uncovered. This “eye sore” and decay wasn’t recent with disputes about the hazards of falling bricks and boards dating back at least to 2013. (Thompson) The tragedy of this building is that the damage would cost hundreds of thousands to fix but the fines are minimal in comparison. The site still has minimal fixes now with boarded up windows and some roof



A scrapyard east of Erie Mill and Press Company Inc. which serves as a recycling site.



This was my first chance to observe people interacting with each other from a distance in real time.

fixes but damage is still visible 10 years later. The site is functional and you can order from their site with someone telling me they are highly regarded and good at their work. There are trail tracks and cars driving about the nearby recycling site. Further east, there is a scrapyards and I even stepped on metal while typing in my notes which I thought was funny and poetic.

I heard an announcer blocks away and I remembered NPR's podcast and journalistic approach, "you're always looking for someplace to talk to voters, right? And we started out at a minor league hockey game right downtown, and it was a playoff game - so added bonus. game," so I took the same approach through sheer coincidence (Gonyea et al. 2024) There was a local baseball game where the local Erie Seawolves were playing the Senators on April 16th around 6:40 pm. Initially I was watching the people, the sponsor wall, and the game, but it became more and more difficult to not listen to the students behind me. They talked about the game, high school, and then prospects of going pro before taking a random turn. One mimicked the speech and mannerisms of Donald Trump and started saying things I would consider mocking him with such an accuracy it must've been rehearsed. Then there was a false enthusiasm and sarcasm about the prospects of a Benjamin Netanyahu bottlehead which caught me off guard as that foreign war was a current controversial issue with both sides being vocal. I was in the swing state with the most electoral votes and in an

important swing county. Both the state and county had voted for Reagan twice, Trump in 2016, Biden in 2020, and Trump again in 2024 accurately predicting the election results better than the polls so I would consider discussing those topics in that mannerism would be risky but no one cared. The region has always been politically charged, especially with the strength of the unions as a voting block. In an interview with Newsman and Skocpol, Herman, an 80-year-old steelworker residing in Charleroi, west of Erie in Pennsylvania, said, "Back in my day, you couldn't find a single union guy who'd vote Republican." (1) Unionsmen were reliably Democrat until there arose grievances like NAFTA and other trade deals so they became a swing electorate. Trump would largely continue most of Reagan's policies but more aggressively while promising to bring back manufacturing. Both slogans carry the connotation of returning to old glory days of industry examined earlier in this paper. The industrial Midwest felt forgotten for a long time until Trump promised to remove free trade deals and this gave hope that generational manufacturing jobs might return. Trump actually lost manufacturing jobs through the region despite what he claims of resurrecting with reports as recent as March writing, "President Trump has promised a manufacturing boom in both of his terms. While he has been able to get pledges for more factory investment, the real job numbers tell a different story so far." (PBS) On the ground, people's political concerns were often more practical and immediate; people seemed to care about taxes and affordability³ with union and industrial paying better historically. They also did not know of Centralia only by name until I elaborate on it despite it being four hours away. One notable reply was, "The place with the fire beneath?" followed by, "There's nothing there." That's the more memorable part rather than the past feuds and politics.

Sometimes when I was in Erie I wondered where all the industry was at times. However on my last full day, it became apparent it was all around me the whole time. Three minutes away from my rental was the Reed Manufacturing Company which recently celebrated 125 years in business and still had active Fedex deliveries. The place was still functional with lights on and glass windows still intact. As I walked along 12th street I found another industrial area that was buzzing with activity. I saw active brick style factories and warehouses in operation as traffic passed by me. Underneath utility poles and alongside literal factories, I stepped on shattered glass, saw rusted pipes and manholes, and saw boarded up painted windows with

³ As I left the game and ventured through the downtown, I saw an advertisement for "ONE BEDROOM & STUDIOS AVAILABLE starting at \$800.00" (picture available) I initially thought it was affordable coming from California but that's 70% of a \$7.25 their state's full time minimum wage untaxed.



Reed Manufacturing Company shipping area where Fedex trucks arrived.



Took a right from my rental on Weschler Ave. and found W 12th street buzzing with industry.



Streetview from W 12th Street farther in.



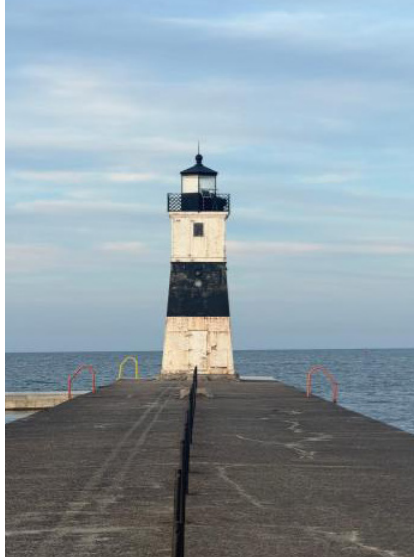
One of the few repurposed industrial sites now a storage unit on W 12th Street and Chestnut.



Presque Isle Park trail where I occasionally encountered joggers alongside a road and Lake Erie.



One of Presque Isle's 13 beaches.



North Pier Light at the end of Presque Isle Park.

the American flag. There were train tracks that lead nowhere, job sites with a lot of cars, boarded up windows, overgrown dead plants on the walls, cool murals, windows you can look into, and a lot of spotlights on streets named after food like Chestnuts and Raspberry streets. The most impactful sight was when I saw a factory being repurposed for a UHAUL storage unit because I knew that building was not designed for that purpose. It had some glass windows intact but some were boarded up and painted over with UHAUL advertisements that looked fresh. It was a smaller two story building in comparison to the larger warehouses and sites nearby. This factory has now become “your storage place,” “climate controlled,” and “open 7 days.” I could only imagine the size of the place inside from the sheer size of these massive factory windows.

I concluded my journey around Erie by heading to Presque Isle Bay and walking the entirety of Peninsula Drive. On the left are beaches with sand, benches, and lifeguard posts. On the right side, it is a long continuous paved pathway where I saw the most pedestrians I had seen on my trip there. I saw a lot of young joggers and people with their dogs. I was completely alone for like the last 30 minutes of sunset in the lighthouse. There is graffiti on the backside, boats in the distance, and even here you cannot see across the lake to Canada. During manufacturing and the industrial revolution, the Great Lakes would have been used for their ease of transportation across their water bodies. The lighthouses in the region guided ships, ultimately contributing to rapid population and manufacturing booms as these industrial centers formed. Now they may serve a new purpose as a recreational, tourist spot, a sign that Erie and the Industrial Midwest still persist in new ways, with new purposes.

Bibliography

- “Centralia, Pennsylvania - Full Documentary.” YouTube, uploaded by *Documentary Central*, 16 May 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6S_E9pxW7I.
- Christensen, Lars K. *Between Denmark and Detroit: Ford Motor Company A/S and the Transformation of Fordism 1919–1966*. Aarhus University Press, 2021.
- “Erie Strikers.” 9 Mar. 1946. *UE News Photograph Collection, 1933–1998*, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) Records, University of Pittsburgh Library System, <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A000035.UE>
- Higgins, James Jeffrey. “Alleyway in East Liverpool.” *Images of the Rust Belt*, Kent State University Press, 1999.
- Kroll-Smith, J. Stephen, and Stephen Robert Couch. “A Chronic Technical Disaster and the Irrelevance of Religious Meaning: The Case of Centralia, Pennsylvania.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1987, pp. 25–37. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1385839?seq=5>
- Martin, Jim. “New \$25 Million Erie Building Will Have Space for Restaurants, Offices and Retail.” *GoErie (Erie Times-News)*, <https://www.goerie.com/story/news/local/2025/07/25/eddc-begins-25-million-building-development-north-park-row-erie-pa/85338934007/>.
- “Mass Demonstration in Erie.” 6 May 1952. *UE News Photograph Collection, 1933–1998*, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) Records, University of Pittsburgh Library System, <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A000066.UE>
- Neumann, Tracy. *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Newman, Lainey, and Theda Skocpol. *Rust Belt Union Blues: Why Working-Class Voters Are Turning Away from the Democratic Party*. Columbia University Press, 2023.
- “Product Development.” ca. 1950–1960. *UE News Photograph Collection, 1933–1998*, United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) Records, University of Pittsburgh Library System, <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A000039.UE>
- Rotella, Carlo. *Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt*. University of California Press, 2002.
- Solman, Paul. “Trump Promised a Manufacturing Boom, but Factory Jobs Continue to Decline.” *PBS NewsHour*, 20 Mar. 2026, *PBS NewsHour*.
- Thompson, Lisa. “Erie Judge: Repair Industrial Eyesore.” *GoErie (Erie Times-News)*, 13 Apr. 2016, <https://www.goerie.com/story/news/local/erie-next/2016/04/13/erie-judge-repair-industrial-eyesore/24787626007/>.
- Watson, Daniel. “Fordism: A Review Essay.” *Labor History*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2019, pp. 457–466. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/0023656X.2019.1537031>
- Winant, Gabriel. *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America*. Harvard University Press, 2021.
- “Who coined the phrase ‘Rust Belt?’” *BuffaloResearch.com*, 21 Dec. 2025, <https://buffaloresearch.com/who-coined-the-phrase-rust-belt/>.

Engineering Uncertainty: Ursula K. Le Guin, Predictive Processing, and Reimagining Social Frameworks

by Grace Fisher

Critical Essay

Introduction

In a classroom, a group of children question their history teacher about something called a prison. “But why didn’t they just leave the place?” the children ask, baffled by the concept of a locked door (Le Guin 34). This scene from Ursula K. Le Guin’s speculative fiction novel *The Dispossessed*, depicts children, who have grown up on the anarchist planet of Anarres. Thus, they are unfamiliar with systems readers take for granted, like incarceration, hierarchy, and private property. For readers who are familiar with these systems, what purpose does this scene serve? Why does Le Guin force her readers into an uncomfortable and unexpected confrontation with their own assumptions? What happens to a reader after becoming defamiliarized from their own social reality? In her works of speculative fiction, uncertainty itself becomes a structural feature of the reading experience. Rather than allowing readers to passively consume an imagined world, Le Guin engineers moments of confusion, contradiction, and defamiliarization that require readers to continually renegotiate their understanding of the text and of their broader social and cultural situations. I argue that this process mirrors and utilizes the predictive mechanisms through which the brain perceives and interprets reality itself, with the potential to alter them.

Building upon work by current literary theorist Karin Kukkonen, this paper aims to investigate the way Le Guin’s speculative fiction work, specifically *The Lathe of Heaven* and *The Dispossessed*, engage the brain’s predictive mechanisms. Firstly, I turn to contemporary cognitive neuroscience to understand the way the brain processes sensory information from the world around us, and , by extension, from literature. By applying these predictive views of the brain, whereby new and contradictory information can inform and expand mental models, neuroscience empowers the space of the literary text. Literary theory, such as reader-response theory and Jauss’ horizon of expectations theory, can be interpreted in new ways and with a stronger biological relevance. Le Guin’s work acts as a valuable case study for this mental expansion in action, as she intentionally violates real-life expectations readers bring both within the scope of literature and outside.

Framework

How exactly does the brain move from sensory perception to cognition and internal representation? Modern neuroscientific understandings conceptualize the brain as an entity that creates mental models based on previous experiences, and perceives the world through the use of these models. Rather than building the world anew from sensory information taken in, the brain stitches sensorial input into a preexisting framework, comparing it along the way. “To perceive the world is to meet the sensory signal with an apt stream of multilevel predictions,” neuroscientist Andy Clark writes, “[t]hose predictions aim to construct the incoming sensory information ‘from the top down’ using stored knowledge about interacting distal causes.” (Clark 6)¹ These mental models are constantly optimizing themselves, seeking to minimize “prediction errors,” which occur when incoming stimuli do not mesh with predicted input. When these unpredicted inputs occur, there is a measurably larger burst of neural activity and our models update themselves, allowing our predictions to be more accurate in the future. (de-Wit 2)

Reading, being a cognitive process, occurs using the same predictive mechanisms as perception. Our brains do not enter a separate “literary mode” when we read literature, rather they continue to minimize neural work by attempting to predict what comes next. As Stanislaus Dehaene puts it, “letter and word identification result from an active top-down decoding process whereby the brain adds information to the visual signal.” (Dehaene 48) Textual input thereby runs through the same schema that the rest of our sensory input does, and “what we see depends on what we think we’re seeing.” (Dehaene 49) Literary theorist Karin Kukkonen calls the input received through literature “*a designed sensory flow* that replaces the sensory flow of the real world.” (Kukkonen 5) This sensorial input, coming from a text rather than from the wider world, is processed in the same way and therefore authors can exploit these mechanisms to impact readers and potentially shape their internal models of the real world. This understanding of literature as an affective art form with grounded cognitive impacts has been explored by Paul Armstrong, who argues that, “the ways in which art’s harmonies reinforce or rewire neuronal assemblies may have an impact on modes of perception and cognition in everyday life.” (Armstrong 47) Not only is literature processed using predictive hypothesis testing, it has the capability to impact these internal models.

¹ This process allows the brain to have the processing speed it does, enabling higher-level cognitive processes and decision making by reducing the comparative amount of brain power required to take in the world.

Literature poses a unique space for the testing and expansion of models. The extent to which a reader is impacted by a text and allows it to revise their hypotheses about the way the world functions depends on their openness to the text, their embodiment and participation within the textual structures, and their confidence in the author. In a neuroscientific view of prediction error's impact, "if there is confidence in a signal then it should be allowed to revise the hypothesis and if there is less confidence then it should tend to carry less weight" (Hohwy 66). In order to maintain a stable framework, the brain deals with uncertainty through prediction error minimization, often disregarding these contradictory stimuli. The space of a literary text requires sustained engagement with the author and the opportunity for errors to carry enough weight to alter mental hypotheses. Crucially, the internal models of the world on which we base our understanding of literature and the larger world around us, are not neutrally constructed. The models are based on the ideological systems a person is raised in and inhabits. For example, an individual that grows up in a society with a gender binary, approaches the world expecting for others to fall into either gender category. Encountering nonbinary or transgender people produces repeated prediction errors within this model, potentially prompting it to expand and become more flexible.

Therefore, these predictive models are built from experience, both that within our personal lives and from the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which we are raised. Hans Robert Jauss's concept of a "horizon of expectations" is what neuroscience considers a predictive model of reality, conceived independently and almost 40 years prior. This "horizon" consists of cultural, political, economic, and intellectual expectations specific to the location and time of a work of literature, inaccessible to those who have not lived it. Jauss argues that all of the socially constructed frameworks within a reader are brought to a text and shape our interactions with it. Current work on neuroaesthetics, such as that done by Jacopo Frascaroli, makes the link between Jauss's "horizon of expectations" and predictive processing as a way to interpret the phenomenological experience of reacting to art. Importantly, Jauss extends his view to theorize the impact that a text may have on readers in shaping their frameworks:

The experience of reading can liberate one from adaptations, prejudices, and predicaments of a lived praxis in that it compels one to a new perception of things. The horizon of expectations of literature distinguishes itself before the horizon of expectations of historical lived praxis

in that it not only preserves actual experiences, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience. (Jauss 41)

By making the connection between literature and sensory experience sharing neural processing frameworks and having similar potential in effecting these frameworks and subsequent social behavior, the role of literature and of the author gains significant influence.

Today, attempting to bridge the two worlds of cognitive science and literary theory, Karin Kukkonen, a literary scholar, writes *Probability Designs* as an argument outlining how authors purposefully violate our predictive mechanisms. Kukkonen outlines the ways that structural elements within a text can violate our expectations and alter the reading experience. She outlines three orders of “probability design”, which categorize the different levels of prediction violation that reading literature operates on. In the first order, the plot and narrative structure of a text is designed by an author to systematically violate expectations or confirm them. For example, an unanticipated character death surprises the reader and makes them reimagine their predictions for the rest of the text while also likely affecting them emotionally. The second-order level is especially concerned with embodied experiences and readers’ precision expectations, especially as they are modulated by word and sentence structure as they move through a text. Readers engage affectively with the “designed sensory flow” of the words on the page, experiencing the world of the literary work and adjusting expectations in a minute way. For example, a long, winding sentence full of meandering verbs that carry a reader through a setting, lingering on certain objects in the surroundings and brushing past others, engages a reader in the experience of wandering within a text. A writer might then end this experience abruptly. This prediction violation is carefully designed by an author to modulate both reader affect and experience within a text. Kukkonen’s third order remains inside of the sphere of the text, focusing on how authors utilize intertextual and genre expectations. When hearing a fairy tale, a listener will expect a series of quests and a happy ending where the princess gets married at the end, based on their knowledge from other fairy tales they have read. An author can choose to confirm or subvert these genre-based expectations.

Kukkonen’s third order also acknowledges that readers “move beyond intertextual references directly mentioned in the text and supply their own generic and cultural background

when sampling for relevant precision expectations.” (134) While this is reminiscent of Jauss’s horizon of expectations and Kukkonen has directly acknowledged this theory in relation to her third-order framework in an interview, she limits it to the literary sphere. She says “it is perhaps close to what has been called a sort of horizon of expectation. And it’s a horizon of expectation that’s based on basically all the other things that you’ve read.” Therefore, her theory stops at the bounds of literature and genre, and leaves out larger societal and cultural expectations present within a reader as they interact with a text. What also remains untheorized within her model is what happens to these expectations that a reader brings after they are brought into sustained interaction with a predictively violating text. In other words, the “effect on social behavior” brought up by Jauss is not included, and literature’s potential to expand mental frameworks is unacknowledged.

With the knowledge of both cognitive science’s prediction error minimization and model updating as well as theories of literature’s social possibility in mind, I propose a fourth-order literary framework, extending Kukkonen’s theory. This fourth order postulates that sustained engagement with uncertainty and predictive error within a text provides a space for predictive model updating, creates conditions for the expansion of what is deemed possible in social and cultural contexts, and “*broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience.*” (Jauss 41) What readers bring to literature beyond the scope of the text can change within their interaction with a novel and readers may leave with an altered model of the world. While Kukkonen remains within the sphere of the text, the fourth-order I propose concerns itself with what happens outside of that sphere, and therefore the possibility that carefully designed texts hold for social reimagination. Speculative fiction novels such as *The Dispossessed* and *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula K Le Guin illustrate this fourth order in action and how reading becomes a site for the updating and extension of predictive models regarding social possibility. Through close reading of both novels, this paper will first demonstrate Kukkonen’s three orders at work within *The Lathe of Heaven* before proposing and illustrating the fourth order through Le Guin’s narrative and formal choices in *The Dispossessed*.

Lathe of Heaven

Published in 1971, Ursula K. Le Guin’s speculative fiction novel *The Lathe of Heaven* follows a man, George Orr, whose dreams alter reality and depicts his therapist Dr. Haber’s attempts

to control Orr's dreams and change the world according to his own vision. Kukkonen's conceptualization of three discrete levels of probability designs within a literary work provides a language and basis for analysis of *The Lathe of Heaven*, a novel which purposely destabilizes readers on multiple levels. On the first-order level, probability design refers to the awareness and manipulation of a reader's expectations about plot and narrative order. Le Guin structures the plot of *The Lathe of Heaven* to be purposefully unpredictable, causing readers' expectations to collapse. As George Orr's dreams change the fabric of reality within the world of the story, the past events of the plot get actively rewritten for the reader, leaving them without a stable foundation from which to assume cause-and-effect. Therefore, her narrative insists on keeping the readers uncomfortable, not allowing predictions to come true, and entering readers into an active experience of revision. The order in which details are presented, what Kukkonen calls a designed sensory flow, traps us in a stream of contradictory information. This is directly related to Wolfgang Iser's description of "reading as an anticipatory and retrospective process of building consistency and constructing patterns." (Armstrong 56, Iser 274-294) When the patterns refuse to be easily constructed, the reading brain must work harder and remains in a state of uncertainty, something both cognitive neuroscientists and literary theorists agree on.

This destabilization is more than just an aspect of the plot, but instead a central component of the meaning of the novel. As Stanley Fish argues, the experience of reading the novel contains within it the meaning. In other words, the uncomfortable emotion generated through the unpredictable plot furthers LeGuin's very message of the inherent unpredictability of human nature, and the fallacy of attempting to control it. The novel's opening provides a striking example, as it opens on page two with a seemingly out of place paragraph about a character dying under the rubble of a collapsed building, looking at a dandelion.

His eyelids had been burned away, so that he could not close his eyes, and the light entered into his brain, searing. He could not turn his head because blocks of fallen concrete pinned him down and the steel rods projecting from their cores held his head in a vise... He was on the cement steps; a dandelion flowered by his hand, growing from a little cracked place in the steps. (Le Guin 0)

This moment appears nonsensical and disconnected, as the narrative then continues with Orr

waking up and continuing with the rest of the events of the “real” story. Readers do not linger on this passage as it does not seem coherent with the events which follow, but are later coerced into a circuitous reading when they are reminded of the dandelion. It is only one hundred pages later that this scene is again referenced and reframed, with Orr explaining that he was dying during the end of the world and dreamed himself to safety. (107) Thus, it is revealed that the reality readers grounded themselves in as the “true” course of events is in itself a dream. Readers undertake the physical act of flipping to the front of the novel to make sense of the twist, and the mental act of reframing their grasp on reality. This double movement, both physical and cognitive, enacts the instability that the novel represents and makes readers aware of their limited and easily manipulated perspectives. By bringing awareness to the expectations we operate off of to make sense of the world and demonstrating the ease with which they can be demolished, the reader’s sense of uncertainty increases. Dr. Haber’s attempts to use Orr’s dreams to “fix” the future and benefit himself rest upon the assumption that his unconscious mind is rationally controlled and can be manipulated with a simple cause and effect idea. However, each of Haber’s attempts has unintended consequences, such as his request for Orr to dream of “a world at peace with itself,” which results in an Earth united in a space war against alien attackers. To Le Guin, reality is not rationally governed, and she exposes uncertainty as its base state, not a failure of human knowledge. The reader is pulled into this state along with her, and the first-order probability design of the novel serves as a critique of the human desire for predictability and control.

At the level of second-order probability design, we can see how an author’s word choice modulates the precision of readers’ predictions and contributes to their embodied experience of a text in the moment. Le Guin often employs unconventional and repetitive sentence structure to again facilitate an unclear and circuitous reading. Dialogue such as “The wall was *there* now but it wasn’t *there* now.... How do you live with this going on all the time?” exemplifies this. (98, emphasis in original) A reader of this sentence predicts to find a modifying or clarifying clause after the word “but,” but instead finds a repetition of the first half with no clarification revealed. Readers must enact the stresses in the words denoted by italics within their heads, experiencing the dual meanings and confusing themselves when the sentence fails to produce a resolution. This is directly related to “openness to surprise,” and therefore “to be surprised by a work is to have responded to it.” (Attridge 84) Being surprised by literature involves coming in contact with an

internal framework of the way the world, and literature, works and therefore “prediction error bounds the creature’s surprisal.” (Hohwy 55) In order for surprise to be purposefully engineered by an author, they must be aware of their readers’ models and choose in what way to upend these predictions. By violating predictions of sentence structure and word order, *The Lathe of Heaven* not only describes confusion, but actively reproduces it.

The Lathe of Heaven is equally destabilizing to readers when viewed from the lens of Kukkonen’s third order, that of intertextual and genre expectations. Readers enter the novel with the knowledge that it is a science fiction book, bringing what Kukkonen calls a “mental library” of expectations based on previous interactions with the genre. Among these predictions is that the world will be meticulously crafted, with complex and sustained world-building. As previously discussed, *The Lathe of Heaven*’s world continually changes. Additionally, when more “traditional” sci-fi elements are introduced, like the aliens and the World Planning Center, they are only briefly and incompletely explained, leaving a reader intentionally unmoored from their expectations. (131) By omitting the coherent and detailed stability often associated with science fiction, Le Guin destabilizes the genre expectations readers rely upon to orient themselves. Thus, she extends the uncertainty beyond plot and into broader associative and interpretive conversation with other texts.

Beyond genre, Le Guin embeds a specific intertextual reference within her novel in the protagonist’s name, George Orr. This is a reference to the dystopian fiction author George Orwell and his novel *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, which was, and is, widely known by readers. Kukkonen notes that “intertextual references to a single text have the strongly predictive dimension that is usually accorded to genre.” (Kukkonen 110) In this case, the single text referenced sets up an expectation for readers that *The Lathe of Heaven* will involve state control of individual minds, as in *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, but instead flips that expectation completely by giving us a situation where a single mind inadvertently controls an entire world. By recentering the power dynamic regarding individual autonomy, power is reclaimed and Le Guin complicates the idea that an individual can be controlled as thoroughly as Orwell claims. Additionally, Dr. Haber, the character reminiscent of O’Brien and Big Brother in *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, fails to successfully manipulate George Orr, making the overall message of the novel more about imagination’s power than its weaknesses. The reader’s intertextual expectations about content, set up by the reference to another novel, collapse and thus Le Guin ensures this thematic departure is more keenly noticed.

The Dispossessed

While *The Lathe of Heaven* is a novel that can be understood as enacting violation within the textual sphere and can be understood using Kukkonen's three orders of probability design, Le Guin's later novel, *The Dispossessed*, extends predictive violation beyond the literary realm and into reader's social frameworks themselves. In this novel, a physicist named Shevek travels from his anarchist home planet of Anarres to the capitalist planet of Urras. As he travels, he confronts fundamental differences in the societies, engrained in members from birth, and readers are subsequently faced with a view of the systems in which they live from a different light. Le Guin, an American author, was writing in English to a primarily Western audience in the 1970s, one raised under capitalism from birth. These readers, and readers today, hold deeply entrenched beliefs about society being hierarchical out of necessity, with property as something that can be owned and understanding anarchist society as a violent, unorganized system. All of these ideas comprise our "horizon of expectations," and modulate the ways in which we view the world. *The Dispossessed* exposes these expectations and relies upon them structurally, as without conflicting input from existing frameworks and proposed ones within the novel, the key meaning is lost.

Le Guin literalizes these two different frameworks of social possibility as the ideological gap is enacted by the physical space between the planets. This geographic localization allows her to create a space for discussion through Shevek, and the reader's, comparison. Each society has its own clear social and cultural codes which she exposit naturalistically, and readers build two sets of frameworks off of which they base predictions, switching contexts.² While building this predictive flexibility within the scope of the novel, Le Guin creates a link between our world with Urras. The first concrete explanation we have of Sheveks' perceived unfamiliarity with the Urrasi ship happens as he says,

In your world, in Urras, one must buy things. I come to your world, I cannot buy, therefore I should bring... I am an Anarresti, I make the Urrasti behave like Anarresti: to give, not to sell. (12)

Here, readers immediately and unconsciously align their own perspectives with that of the

² This dual-context model forces the reading brain to switch frameworks in order to understand the meaning of each simultaneous plot. In this way, Le Guin engages the mind's predictive framework and builds the ability for cognitive flexibility, as this skill is dependent on being able to switch frames of reference and discriminate cues (Butz). In this manner, she primes readers for flexibly switching frames of reference

Urrasti, as they are familiar with the need to participate in commerce. In creating a link between a real, familiar world and a fictional one, the reader forms expectations about what each society is like based on contexts from outside of the book, drawing on frameworks from both inside and outside the text. This process directly mimics our brain's function outside of a literary realm, as Dehaene argues that, "[c]ultural acquisition rides on this fringe of brain plasticity. Far from being a blank slate that absorbs everything in its surroundings, our brain adapts to a different culture by minimally tuning its predispositions to a different use." (Dehaene 7) Neural plasticity reframes Le Guin's narrative choices as more than causing her readers to use external knowledge to relate to and predict the text. In causing neural predispositions to be used in different contexts, she literally changes her readers minds.

These external knowledge readers bring, especially the view that anarchism is violent, is initially confirmed during the very first scene taking place on Anarres. We see an angry mob protesting against Shevek's departure, eventually killing a law officer with a thrown rock. Anarres is not expositied as a peaceful utopia, although the violent scene is complicated with lines such as "If the foreman had no experience bossing a mob, they had no experience being one" and "they did not expect commands to be arbitrary, so they had no practice in disobeying them." (3; 4) This follows her pattern of first building a recognizable, stable framework, such as in *The Lathe of Heaven*, and then undercutting it in order to heighten the experience of destabilization felt by a reader. This confusing instability does not last long, however, and readers are introduced to Shevek as a toddler and taught the pedagogy of anarchism along with him. "Nothing is yours. It is to use. It is to share. If you will not share it, you cannot use it." And she picked the knobby baby up with gentle inexorable hands and set him aside." (Le Guin 26) In this moment, Le Guin demonstrates how a horizon of expectations is shaped, through lessons given to us by the adults and institutions within our lives. More than just exposing the formation of ideology, she enacts this same experience in her readers, teaching the basics of anarchism as one would to a new baby. Le Guin deeply understands that what one is exposed to as a child is what shapes one's understanding of truth, as a young Shevek and his friends look up at the moon of Urras from their home planet; "'Where, then, is Truth?' declaimed Bedap, and yawned. 'In the hill one happens to be sitting on,' said Tirin." (Le Guin 39) In the hill, or more broadly, in the society and culture within one is reared, a specific set of ideas are espoused as true. As Tirin points out, this has no relation to their intrinsic or moral accuracy but rather is a label put upon them. In this gentle way, Le Guin puts forth

the project of *The Dispossessed*, to have us sit on a different “hill,” on a different world with different ideals, and simply consider for ourselves where truth lies.

This goal of her writing the novel, and another reference to a larger fourth-order project, is laid out, somewhat contradictorily, in a passage about the failure of language in expressing truth;

Nothing said in words ever came out quite even. Things in words got twisted and ran together, instead of staying straight and fitting together. But underneath the words, at the center... it all came out even... You saw the foundations of the world. (29)

In order to expose the “foundations of the world”, or the frameworks of expectation in which we are all embedded, one must look beyond the words on the page, beyond the science fiction planets of Anarres and Urras. She says in her introduction to an earlier work, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, that “science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive.” and that novelists “don’t tell you what you will see and hear... only what they have seen and heard.” (xv) She does this within *The Dispossessed* by describing Urras, the capitalist world, through Shevek’s eyes, thereby making her readers strangers to their own reality. In moments as simple as Shevek’s disbelief and incomprehension at glimpsing a donkey outside of the window upon his arrival, readers become outside observers to their own daily lives. This technique, commonly used by speculative fiction authors and by artists in general, is defined by Viktor Shklovsky as defamiliarization,

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (3)

Le Guin moves from defamiliarizing simple, mundane things, like pajamas and donkeys, into larger, more deeply entrenched systems, like that of carceral justice. This move works by first introducing errors involving things with little ideological weight, building a sense of openness and confidence within her readers. When she then escalates to larger, more fundamental systems, the prediction errors carry enough weight to impact these

frameworks, thereby enacting the fourth order expansion of reader's social models.

The most striking illustration of Le Guin's fourth order probability design at work occurs when Shevek as a child is introduced to the concept of a prison. Baffled by the concept, having never seen such a structure, the Anarresti children question their teacher profusely, asking questions like:

But why didn't they just leave the place? They couldn't leave, the doors were locked. Locked?
... But what did they do inside one room all the time? There was nothing to do... Sometimes prisoners were sentenced to work. Sentenced? Well, that means a judge, a person given power by the Law, ordered them to do some kind of physical labor. Ordered them? What if they didn't want to do it? (34)

By leading us through the lines of questioning from a child, Le Guin defamiliarizes readers with the carceral institution taken for granted as a fact of life. The experience of reading this scene is jarring and destabilizing, and one calls into question the cruelty we regard as just a fact of life, seeing it with new eyes. The scene progresses further, and, with the root of their questions unanswered, Shevek and the other children decide to create a prison and go inside of it in order to understand it. "Imagination does not suffice some people," Le Guin writes, "they must get into the cell, they must try to open the unopenable door." (34) When we read *The Dispossessed* and act with Shevek, divorced from our own reality, as prison wardens, are we simply imagining or are we sitting inside the prison and trying to open the door? While, objectively, the scene does occur within our imaginations, the sensory flow of the words of the page has hijacked our external sensorial input, immersing us within the world of the text. As we read, we are led to question the justification of incarceration ourselves, as we feel its strangeness within a world where it is incomprehensible. This action, undertaken by the reader, is a necessary component in predictive perception and neuronal updating. A reader, and a human being interacting with the world in any capacity, "is able to use action upon the world to reduce the complexity of its own inner processing." (Clark 8) While it may not feel like Le Guin is reducing our complexity of processing, rather the opposite, this reduction refers to the increase of accuracy of mental models in order to streamline future perceptual input processing. Le Guin takes advantage of the fact that "perception and action are thus locked in a kind of endless circular embrace" and induces her readers to act

out questioning of social orders through their perception of her words on the page, therefore increasing the cognitive impact. (Clark 7)

This fourth order move on the part of Le Guin does not occur separately from the other orders of probability design. At the second order, the lack of quotation marks in the paragraph increases the affective experience of reading the text, immersing us in a stream-of-consciousness type line of questioning and echoing what is happening within our own minds. Here, we are both the child looking at a system with new eyes and confusion, and a resigned adult attempting to supply justification. By omitting quotation marks and other punctuation which would break up the flow, Le Guin traps us within a line of questioning that exists both within the text and beyond it, inside of the minds of her readers. Readers embody the questioning of Shevek “embodied reader can (to some extent) elope from the limits of real-world embodied experience.” (Kukkonen 69) The orders of probability design are deeply interconnected and the prediction-expanding effects are heightened through their combined use.

Another moment where Le Guin engineers defamiliarization in the minds of her readers occurs as Shevek, newly arrived to Urras, goes shopping for new clothes. Le Guin begins by explaining that “the whole experience had been so bewildering to him that he put it out of mind as soon as possible, but he had dreams about it for months afterwards, nightmares.” (123) This exposition of Shevek’s response to shopping sets up the reader to expect a comical anecdote, as the experience of shopping is such a mundane one that nightmares seem drastic. Le Guin then continues in a stream of items with few sentence breaks where she lists off “Coats. Dresses, gowns, robes, trousers, breeches, shirts, blouses, hats, shoes... clothes to wear while sleeping, while swimming, while playing games...” (124) This continues for nearly a full page, finally concluding with “acres of luxury, acres of excrement,” leaving the readers with a definite impression of the excess. (124) By labeling the emotion evoked in the reader as a response to the overwhelming list, Le Guin is able to leave a stronger impression on her readers. Scenes like this, where form and content collide to render familiar items and concepts unfamiliar, are utilized often throughout the course of the novel, ensuring a consistent and prolonged engagement with predictively violating material with an affective component.

In doing this, Le Guin exposes how readers’ habituation to their own realities becomes so deeply entrenched that alternative ways of being seem completely impossible, something

she calls “the improbability of the real” (43). A potentially viable and peaceful form of anarchism is so far outside of our predictive frameworks, so improbable, that it seems as untouchable as a different planet despite its reality. Importantly, Le Guin chooses to represent this society as fully realized, with flaws, the potential for violence and corruption, and the stagnation of bureaucracy. It is not depicted as an untouchable utopia but rather as a legitimate alternative framework which can be tested throughout the course of reading and engaging with the novel. Le Guin seeks not to write a manifesto about the corruption of capitalism and the viability of non-hierarchical society, but to enact a “revolution [that] begins in the thinking mind” (311). By working with and upon the predictive mechanisms of our brains, Le Guin begins the first steps toward this revolution, planting the seeds within each of her readers.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that reading is not the passive reception of an author’s language but the active construction of an imagined world, created with the same predictive mechanisms we use to perceive the world around us. When reading, we draw upon information from our own cultural and social horizon of expectations to inform our internal interpretation and construction of events. I argue that the space of the literary text is not only a locus for engagement with these frameworks but a site of revision and expansion. Karin Kukkonen’s three orders of probability design begin to explain how authors can systematically violate readers’ prediction, but remains bounded within the textual and intertextual sphere. Moving beyond this, I propose a fourth order of probability design whereby extended confrontation with predictively violating material within a literary text provides an opportunity for predictive models and expectations to be expanded, with consequences reaching into the broader world. Ursula K. Le Guin’s novels depict this progression, with *The Lathe of Heaven* demonstrating textual and intertextual expectation violation, and *The Dispossessed* operating on a larger scale, relying on subverting entrenched societal ideologies. In her affective engagement with her readers through defamiliarization, embodied language, and continually unexpected elements, Le Guin moves her concept of social change out of the pages of her novels and into the minds of her readers.

While Ursula K. Le Guin’s novels provide an illuminating use case of a fourth order design, the engagement and expansion of predictive mental frameworks is not exclusive to

speculative fiction. From middle-grade books featuring disabled protagonists to queer romance novels with happy endings, literature provides a space full of potential for expectations about the world to be adjusted. The proposed cognitive literary theory explains literature's affective power using neural mechanisms and empowers this art form for its particular ability to enact these changes. The sustained nature of the engagement by readers with an author's work, as well as the opportunity for embodied experiencing of a text uniquely situates it. Future interdisciplinary work utilizing fMRI and other neuroscientific techniques may help further elucidate this fourth order mechanism. Yet, Le Guin's fiction already reveals the broad power literature has to engage and change us. By reconsidering how the construction of literary texts engages the brain, the role of a text extends beyond a reader and into their imagined social and political worlds, thus beginning a revolution in the "thinking mind" of the reader.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, Paul B. *How Literature Plays with the Brain: The Neuroscience of Reading and Art*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
- Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature*. Routledge, 2004.
- Clark, Andy. *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Dehaene, Stanislas. *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read*. Penguin, 2010.
- de-Wit, Lee, et al. "Predictive Coding and the Neural Response to Predictable Stimuli." *The Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 30, no. 26, June 2010, p. 8702, <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.2248-10.2010>.
- Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Frascaroli, Jacopo, et al. "Aesthetics and Predictive Processing: Grounds and Prospects of a Fruitful Encounter." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, vol. 379, no. 1895, 2023, p. 20220410, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2022.0410>.
- Hohwy, Jakob. *The Predictive Mind*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The reading process: A Phenomenological Approach*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1974, 274-94.
- Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Translated by Timothy Bahti, University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
- Kukkonen, Karin. "Designs on Consciousness: Literature and Predictive Processing." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, vol. 379, no. 1895, Dec. 2023, p. 20220423, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2022.0423>.
- . *Probability Designs: Literature and Predictive Processing*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- "S2 – 5. Karin Kukkonen: Probability Designs." *Literature, Cognition and Emotions Podcast*, hosted by Stijn

Vervaeke, University of Oslo, 5 Aug. 2022, <https://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/research/centre/lce/news-and-events/podcast/>.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed*. 50th anniversary ed., Harper Perennial, 2024.

—. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ace Books, 2010

—. *The Lathe of Heaven*. Scribner, 2024.

Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, University of Nebraska Press, 1965, pp. 3–24.

Exalting the Fairy Tale: The Power of the Chimerical

by Ethan Griffin
Critical Essay

Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? The moneylenders, the know-nothings, the authoritarians have us all in prison; if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can.

— Ursula K. Le Guin

Is reading not an act of escapism in and of itself? Literature is a passport to travel across space, time, and culture; fantasy is simply an exaltation of these qualities, as it also transcends the prison of reality. Why then, is the genre often dismissed from academic discourse as unserious, with fantastical stories like fairy tales trivialized as children's stories? Following Ursula K. LeGuin's theorization of escapism as a glorious obligation, I argue that the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde offer a vital departure from reality's imprisonment. My argument is not rooted in historicity, as relying on the past to justify importance feels misaligned with fantasy's innate futurity. Fantastical writing is one of the purest expressions of creativity. The fantastical works of Andersen and Wilde can be understood as their response to uncertainty or adversity; their tales, in turn, are an accumulation of the information available to their imagination that looks into a future beyond what is known. (Olmo 103) I aim to demonstrate that fantasy and fairy tales are inherently speculative, requiring an alternative lens about the future for their creation. As such I contend that the typical association of fairy tales and mediocrity is overstated, as these tales look more towards hopes of a better future than to a continuity with the past.

The stories of these authors, both of whom were "othered" during their lifetime, used fantasy as a coping mechanism for grief, a tool for subversion, and a space to reimagine inherited norms. Fairy tales are significant because they allowed these writers to preserve imagination, and, in turn, safeguard creative expression from the tyranny of conformity. The power of fantasy and fairy tales is not defined by their longevity, but by their ability to invite audiences to imagine new and better realities that are perhaps inconceivable now, but achievable in the future. They help us to push against what Jose

Esteban Muñoz calls the “prison house” of “the here and now,” towards new futures:

We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. (Muñoz 1)

The fantastical genre, through its commemoration of the glory of creative expression, opens us to Muñoz’s new worlds. What can’t be appreciated about the marvelous tale of a band of heroes who conquer tyranny against all odds? Fairy-stories are a vital reminder that regardless of the divisive rhetoric that elites inflict upon us, we all love, hope, dream, and share the power to redeem ourselves and craft our own legends.¹

The fantastical genre is not a cowardly retreat from reality, nor should it be relegated to discursive spaces of folkloric and children’s literary study. The genre grants liberation to those shackled by the stratifying confines of a society that worships conformity and prizes a negative peace over genuine equality and justice.² Beyond this, the unique tendency of the fantastical genre is its ability to characterize alterity outside of binary convention. Because fairy tales and fantasy transcend reality, they simultaneously deviate from the traditional portrayals of othered identities. The imaginary beings in these stories are not written as an opposing entity. Instead, they resist uniform categorization; these identities are not defined by a “normal” and “abnormal” system, but invite us to reflect on the reductive nature of definition by negation. They broadly adhere to Lucy Irigaray’s conception how patriarchal society inherently casts women not as equal coparticipants in the gender binary, but as “generic” others against the masculine. These fantastical beings are always singular, exceptional, excessive, much like

1 It’s regrettable that the dominating fairy-tales popular in modern culture, with little scrutiny, overtly perpetuate patriarchal norms. They dictate the harmful categorization of women as defenseless, objectified damsels, demonize them as ghastly, or equally harmful, as seductive monsters. Moreover, they champion a domineering gender binary that stratifies men and women into not simply diminishing roles, but positions that serve to perpetuate misogyny and further demean women. Take Snow White (originally published as “Schneewittchen” by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm) or Sleeping Beauty (originally published as “Sun, Moon, and Talia,” by Giambattista Basile), where our subdued female “heroines” are kidnapped from their home in their sleep, or sexually assaulted while unconscious to only be woken by the pain of childbirth in their respective tales. I find it troubling that the most ubiquitous fairy tales in popular culture conform to androcentric, heteronormative conventions given their potential as spaces of ultimate imaginative freedom.

2 “Negative and Positive Peace Framework,” *Peace Studies Wiki*, George Washington University, <https://blogs.gwu.edu/ccas-panamericanos/peace-studies-wiki/peace-studies-wiki/approaches-to-peace/negative-and-positive-peace-framework/>.

how “(The/a) woman refers to what cannot be defined, enumerated, formulated or formalized.”³

In the context of fairy tales, Irigaray provides an alternative framework to understand identities of alterity. Her sentiment exposes the error of preemptively considering othered entities on a binary system of “you’re not this”(the norm), “therefore, you are that”(outside the norm). This predetermined separation is imbued with elitism—the act of abjection is inextricable from some form of hierarchy—which causes these othered identities to suffer a greater pressure to prove themselves as “worthy” despite their peculiarities. Furthermore, they are contracted to conform to a condition of success that is the very source of their oppression: convention! The talking birds, mermaids, and other magical creatures of these tales are not intended to be valued by their ability to achieve normalcy. They are neutrally adverse, not meant to be seen as victorious if they can assimilate the standards that categorize and oppress them, but as significant for their capacity to self-realize, to be morally righteous, and to go beyond the confines presented to them. Cumulatively, the “Other’s” primary similarity is their deviance, and therefore, can never be limited in interpretation to categorization’s singularity.

Alongside Barbara Claire Freeman’s work on the feminine sublime, the importance of approaching these fairy tales without relying on hasty categorization is further emphasized. The feminine sublime:

is neither a rhetorical mode nor an aesthetic category but a domain of experience that resists categorization, in which the subject enters into relation with an otherness—social, aesthetic, political, ethical, erotic—that is excessive and unrepresentable. The feminine sublime is not a discursive strategy, technique, or literary style the female writer invents, but rather a crisis in relation to language and representation that a certain subject undergoes. (Freeman 4)

Freeman refutes Kant’s framework of the sublime as man’s reason triumphing over nature’s majesty;⁴ synthesizing the commentary on Irigaray, the connection between the “Other,” the feminine sublime, and fairy tales is illuminated. The sublime is not a contest of will, but an occasion for embodied understanding; the “Other” cannot be considered binarily, as

3 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, quoted in Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2199n7mq/>.

4 For more see, Rachel Zuckert, “Kant on the Sublime,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Kant*, ed. Anil Gomes and Andrew Stephenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), Oxford Academic, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780198854586.013.33>.

their value is merited by alternate experiences; fairy tales deserve exaltation in academic study, given that they carry these concepts and the spirit of transcendence forward. study, given that they carry these concepts and the spirit of transcendence forward.

The “Other” figure is not simply constrained to the monsters animated by Victorian greats like Shelley, Stoker, and Stevenson that reflect the anxieties of a stifling, patriarchal society; the Other is excess, sublime, and most significantly, hope for those whose alterity is wrongly condemned by traditional norms. The monsters, mythics, and magical beasts of fantasy are not intended to surrender themselves to the reality’s confines. They are not meant to be mastered or submit to man’s assumed dominion over nature. (Freeman 5) Rather, their literary subjugation generates empathy for the misunderstood, and their literary exaltation invites us to reflect—if monsters in literature can elicit compassion, then how are we to think of those labelled as monsters in our own world. Ultimately, fairy-stories warrant commemoration because they catalyze the imagination, reminding us to never be content with just the way things are. “Good” literature is not defined by its universality or sophistication, but by its ability to give audiences “something to know.”⁵ Therefore, the power of fairy-stories is not in their rationality, but in their capacity to instill a feeling of affect that challenges us to forge a more accepting, loving, and magical reality.

In what follows, I utilize psychoanalytic frameworks of Freud, Maurice Sendak, and Jung to expand upon Freeman’s feminine sublime, exploring how these characters are not to be interpreted by reality’s conventional means. In particular, these theories of imaginative creativity, individuation, childhood memory, merging the conscious and unconscious, and beyond elucidate the deeper significance of these fairy tales to their respective authors. Finally, I deploy Heather Love’s commentary on negative affect and queer melancholia to resolve tensions between these psychoanalytic frameworks and articulate how the darker aspects of queerness in these stories act as tacit forms of protest.

Andersen & Rehabilitation: Grief, Longing, and the Journey

“Truthfulness to Life, both fantasy life and factual life, is the basis of all great art.”

—Maurice Sendak in “On the Importance of Imagination”

⁵ For more, see Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda, “On Whiteness and the Racial Imaginary: Where Writers Go Wrong in Imagining the Lives of Others,” *Fence*, April 9, 2015, <https://fencemag.com/v18n1/on-whiteness-and-the-racial-imaginary/>.

Before examining his tales, it's necessary to contextualize (lament) Hans Christian Andersen's own tragic story. While the world is graced by his dazzling fairy-stories, his personal life was plagued by ostracization, loneliness, and unrequited desire. (Rictor) Irrespective of the discourse surrounding his precise orientation, it is evident that Andersen was a queer individual—existing outside of heteronormative conventions of his historical moment.⁶ Some of his idiosyncratic behaviors included never owning a home, choosing to only board with others, and the sensitivities and neurotic tendencies detailed in his diaries. Given that his reality was rife with anguish, it's reasonable to assume that “he learned to rely on his artistic instincts as a means of escaping from these preoccupations.”⁷

His abundant (love) letters reveal his affections towards several other men, particularly his adoration for Edvard Collins. These letters provide important context for understanding many of Andersen's tales, especially in thinking of them as a coping mechanism for processing the grief tormenting his lived experience. Beyond the temporality and explicit nature of his romantic declarations—endearments such as “our friendship is like ‘The Mysteries,’ it should not be analyzed” and “I long for you as though you were a beautiful Calabrian girl—” the queer sentiments in his letters reflect in the tropes, morals, and experiences of his protagonists throughout his fairy-tales. (qtd. in Norton) Here, the “Mysteries” can be understood as the indescribable affections Andersen felt for Collins. Society and his community may have wrongly labelled these feelings as taboo, but that should not take away from the ineffability of his sentiment. Andersen did not desire for his emotions to be analyzed because to do so—considering the historical context—would demonize the purity of his love. These stories were his reliquary.

Imaginative writing can be understood as Andersen merging his conscious actions and subconscious desires. It is his vanguard of truth; expressing the vastness of one's imagination in the written word is a way one embraces the otherness that pulses inside them. Embracing childhood imagination is not simply reminiscence, but the revitalization of the wonder, curiosity, and freedom we once were encouraged to exercise. By extension, “fantasy, synonymous with imagination, is a delightful and freewheeling vehicle which a child may ride to experience beauty, as well as catharsis.” (Sendak 17) Sendak further explains the misconception that children are

⁶ For more, see “Andersen, Hans Christian (1805–1875),” in *Children's Literature Review*, Encyclopedia.com, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/children/academic-and-educational-journals/andersen-hans-christian-1805-1875>.

⁷ “The Life and Times of Hans Christian Andersen,” *Wild Swans*, Meridian, <https://meridian.org/wildswans/lifeandtimes.html>.

“innocent.” Rather, they are vulnerable; children use fantasy seriously, and as a “healthy outlet for corrosive emotions such as rage and impotent frustration—the positive and appropriate channeling of overwhelming, and to the child, very inappropriate feelings.” (17) This parallels Freud’s theory on creativity, which argues that the child and the poet (author) are linked by their play, as both engage with imagination and fantasy as an obligation to process reality’s grievances. (35)

We can see these dynamics in Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling.” The tale offers insight into the queer experience and recuperates the misconceptions staining escapism. The story is rather straightforward—a young bird hatches among ducklings and is subjected to wanton aggression and criticism, isolating him from his family and community. Like the ugly duckling in his tale, Andersen’s life was plagued by melancholy and isolation. However, through the lens of negative affect offered by Heather Love, the duckling’s story reveals itself as a touching allegory about social alienation and the trials of living outside cis-heteronormative conventions.

Love draws attention to the political, social, and emotional implications of historically negative emotions—melancholy, shame, despair—in the literature of queer authors. She argues that these emotions, traditionally written off as inconsequential or counterproductive to queer politics, rather offer ways of rehabilitating our understanding of these authors and their works within their own social and cultural moment. Considering Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling” through Love’s framework exemplifies the importance of departing from constrictive prejudices and exalts the power of “ugly” feelings. Both good—more significantly, bad—feelings expressed through these stories are inextricably linked to the experience of living in social exclusion, “describ[ing] what it is like to bear a “disqualified” identity, which at times can simply mean living with injury—not fixing it.” (4)

Andersen’s story about the ugly duckling is an epitome of Love’s sentiment. His journey through various communities does not end with a sardonically grandiose allowance back into a society that persecuted him. Instead, his denouement is a pensive contentment with his suffering alongside a fully-realized, sublime transformation into a swan. From before he was born, our estranged duckling was destined to exist by a different set of rules. His mother, though at times doting towards him, expresses frustration that the ugly duckling’s egg is the largest, and thus, the last to hatch while simultaneously requiring more incubation. (Andersen 214) This suggests both the inherent disadvantage that the ugly duckling would suffer—mirroring

Andersen's experience as a queer man in the Victorian era—after his birth, but, alternatively, the vast potential imbued within the duckling's aberration. In spite of his victimization, the duckling had always possessed the possibility of something greater than the reality imposed upon him.

The duckling's mother, beyond her aforementioned diligence to hatch his egg, initially defends her odd son with ardour, "Let him alone... I think he will grow up strong, and able to take care of himself." (216) Despite her initial care, the duckling's mother quickly grows tired of her son's deviance. From his earliest days his torment persisted and grew worse, as "The poor duckling was driven about by everyone; even his brothers and sisters were unkind to him... his mother said she wished he had never been born." (217) This reflects the hardships ailing Andersen and his mother's relationship.⁸ The duckling—symbolizing Andersen's own departure to Copenhagen at 14⁹ — had only one realistic choice: to fly, "they are afraid of me because I am ugly... closed his eyes, and flew still further... here he remained the whole night feeling very tired and sorrowful." (217) The duckling's bedevilment can be interpreted as Andersen's own anxieties about his appearance and abjection from his community. Negative affect vindicates the duckling (Andersen); they're not degenerates, but victims of conformity's tyranny.

Further along the duckling's journey, after he leaves home, the moor he takes a tainted refuge in is attacked by huntsmen. However, he emerges unscathed, grateful "for being so ugly; even a dog will not bite me." (218) Applying Love's work again, the ironic and symbolic significance of ugliness is exposed. Ugliness creates repulsion—seen in the duckling's familial treatment and homophobia—yet it also establishes distance. Regardless of the negative connotation of ugliness, and its effects on Andersen and the duckling, it is also a site of resistance and personal cultivation. Being ugly (subordinated by dominant society) can have apotropaic uses, as it divides dogmatic populations from the subjugated which, in turn, grants room for the oppressed individual or group to transform. This is further cemented

⁸ Freud's commentary on phantasy helps to understand how the ugly duckling symbolizes the discord in Andersen and his mother's relationship. He explains that adult's play becomes private phantasy—only creatives can express their fantasy (Id) because it's an art form—so the allusivity of Andersen's becomes indubitable, as the tension between the duckling and his mother echoes the author's own (Freud 37). While ducks may not drink alcohol, the duckling's mother and Andersen's share a sappy affection toward their queer children; they are also alike in their volatile cruelty. For more on Andersen and his relationship with his mother, see Margaret Boe Birns, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/hans-christian-andersen>, and Andersen's "She Was Good for Nothing," (1853), http://hca.gilead.org.il/good_for.html.

⁹ For more, see Birns, "Hans Christian Andersen," <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/hans-christian-andersen>.

by the duckling's confrontation with the cottage hen: "You don't understand me... I believe I must go out into the world again." (220) This time, the duckling's departure isn't a last-though obligatory-resort, but his sole conviction.

Eventually the duckling's pilgrimage begins its final act when he witnesses a flock of elegant, white-feathered birds glide above. The duckling is mystified, "he knew not the name of these birds... but he felt towards them as he had never felt for any other bird in the world. He was not envious of these beautiful creatures, but wished to be as lovely as they." (221) The duckling's unfamiliarity with swans, alongside his unparalleled fascination with them, directly aligns with Freeman's feminine sublime. The duckling did not seek to conquer or imprison the unknown beasts to an inferior status, but entered into a relation with them that sought unity and sensitivity. This moment where the duckling's emotions are not a disguised slip of repression, as Freud would suggest, more closely aligns with Jung's notion of self-realization. It is an occasion embracing the undying desire of queer individuals for acceptance. This is supported by the duckling's physical behavior, as his awestruck remark follows a dive beneath the water and an unshakeable excitement about his observation. (Andersen 220) By seeking visibility and emotional connection with the swans after literally and figuratively reaching deeply, the duckling approaches "What" he is in entirety. (Stein)

At the tale's conclusion, our duckling has initially resigned himself to suicide. However, his decision to confront unpredictability, given the systemic inefficacies for his happiness in conventional society, grants him a radiant redemption. Gazing at his reflection in a stream, the duckling is elated to see a magnificent swan looking back at him. (Andersen 223) The physical reflection in a natural element further aligns the duckling's transformation with Jung's argument concerning individuation, as the "shadow-self" had always resided inside the duck, and nurturing it fostered a more complete self(swan). This happily-ever-after is gratifying for both the duckling and the reader, but his subsequent reflection is paramount when considering negative affect. He finds reconciliation with his birthplace, as farmyard (oppressive) circumstances are inconsequential for aberrations like him, and "he felt glad at having suffered sorrow and trouble, because it enabled him to enjoy so much better all the pleasure and happiness around him." (223) Struggle and resilience are central aspects of queer history. Therefore, for the duckling to not abandon his despair, but to extol it demonstrates that queer suffering is equally as important as blissful amnesty. This is particularly significant as we turn back to Andersen himself, as regrettably, fairy-tale endings

in his life were confined to his pen. His protagonists may have arrived at a new and better tomorrow, but Andersen was tragically stunted by a society that didn't seek to champion its ugly ducklings. Therefore, "The Ugly Duckling" is a cathartic reflection of Andersen's reality—plagued by anguish, isolation, heartbreak—and warrants a greater esteem than infantilization. Ultimately, his fairy tales are a time capsule of queer melancholy in the Victorian era. They remind us that historical disadvantages for queer individuals intertwine hardship with queer experience, and that forgetting this struggle is a graver crime than memorializing it, as not all deviants get the chance for liberation.

Wilde: Subversion & Sedition

"Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws."

—Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

Like Andersen, Oscar Wilde was a deviant. Sexually, morally, and likely in most aspects, Wilde was passively and actively in contention with Victorian society. Primarily acclaimed for his singular novel and critical essays, it's lamentable that his fairy tales are considered so esoteric. This paper considers "The Fisherman and His Soul," from his anthology titled *A House of Pomegranates*. There is explicit and implicit evidence of his fairy-tales' allusivity to his more critical works in *De Profundis*. He notes that while he doesn't renounce his previous pleasure-driven lifestyle, he "had to pass on. The other half of the garden had its secrets for me also. Of course all this is foreshadowed and prefigured in my books. Some of it is in *The Happy Prince*, some of it in *The Young King*." (*De Profundis* 11) Despite Wilde's confirmation, I would argue that his fairy-tales were overlooked in the defamation case wrought by 9th Marquess of Queensberry, Douglas's father.¹⁰ The unique abilities of the fantastical genre go beyond their transcendence of the laws that govern humanity—they enjoy an innate subversiveness that requires a subversive lens to be fully appreciated. Therefore, they are both a site of refuge for those who suffer from an intolerant reality and a beautiful secret among those who are brave enough to imagine critically.

Wilde's letter, developed during his imprisonment from 1895 to 1897, was written to his

¹⁰ For more, see Britannica Editors, "De Profundis," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/De-Profundis>.

lover, Lord Alfred Douglas. Published posthumously in 1905, the letter contains a disapprobation of the shared, immoral proclivities of Wilde and Douglas, Wilde's personal turmoil—and subsequent catharsis—over his depravity, juxtaposed against a sublime appreciation of suffering, and commentary on his nuanced relationship with Christ. The work provides insight into Wilde's enigmatic personality, "he was at once sceptic and believer, cynic and sentimentalist, snob and anti-snob, pagan and admirer of Christ." (O'Mahoney, 26) Moreover, there are distinct connections between *De Profundis* and "The Fisherman and His Soul," explicable through Jung and other theorists I have considered above. Curiously, in contrast to the endings of the ugly duckling and Andersen, Wilde emerges in triumph while the Fisherman's coda serves as a memento mori for those that allow external forces to govern their heart and soul. Scrutinizing these works comparatively encapsulates Wilde's personal and artistic evolution. For him, the ultimate bliss became finding clarity in sorrow and the unbridled integration of heart and soul, love and thought, righteousness and sensualism. (*De Profundis* 1-28)

Recalling LeGuin, her argument regarding reality's imprisonment by dogma accumulates a greater meaning. Synthesizing Wilde's literal imprisonment, the inherent subjugation of deviants in society is satirized. Wilde existed in three prisons from 1895-1897: his isolated cell, the societal prejudices hindering homosexuals, and the internal cage within him produced by the external forces that were anathematic to his existence. Paradoxically, however, the most corporeal of these prisons revitalized his nature, as he sought "a fresh mode of self-realization," liberating him from his other two unjust incarcerations. (*De Profundis* 3) Therefore, perhaps even the physical confinement of queer identities offers an escape to a solitary enlightenment, as the chains on the mind weigh heavier than those on the body.

The tale begins when the Fisherman comes across a Mermaid on one of his ventures out to sea. He is enamored with her, "So beautiful was she that when the young Fisherman saw her he was filled with wonder... but he held her tightly to him, and would not suffer her to depart." ("Fisherman" 35) While the audience is already disturbed by the Fisherman's callous disregard of the Mermaid's desire to escape, his decision to take dominion over her highlights the inadequacy of the Kantian sublime. The Fisherman's attempt to reduce the Mermaid to property against her wishes for freedom ultimately serve to catalyze his downfall, marking her as a figure embodying the ineffable, feminine sublime. We are reminded that the wondrous is not meant to be controlled or bound by

the external forces that torment humanity, but can only be appreciated when met with empathetic understanding. His inability to experience the mermaid as a sensation prompts the commercialization of his soul, which in turn, leads to the destruction of the self.

However, it's important to note the Fisherman's decision is not entirely his own. Ruthlessly regulated by the external powers of religion, social status expectations, and heteronormative morality, his sacrifice is almost commendable, as it challenges these rigid Victorian conventions. He blatantly disregards the priest's advice, ignores the merchant's appraisal, and exploits faith to deceive the witch who helps him. (38-44) Despite the public ridicule the Fisherman faces, there's an element of brave heroism in his endeavor, for "what doth my soul profit me, if it stand between me and the thing that I love?" (39) Therefore, the discarding of his soul—however catastrophic—is an act of defiance. In *De Profundis*, Wilde advocates for the rejection of prescribed notions of living as well, emphasizing the relationship between this philosophical reflection and the Fisherman's tale. However, while both the protagonist and author should be celebrated for their courageous deviance, the suffering caused by abandoning their soul is equally inflicted.

The Fisherman, consumed by his passion, uses the witch's knife to cut away his soul after his trickery. However, once the surgery is complete, the Fisherman's soul pleads with his origin to be sent off into the world with a heart. Regrettably, the Fisherman refuses, indifferent to his Soul now that its transactional purpose has been served. Still, his Soul reasons "Should I not love also?" (46) This concern captures both the tragedy and impossibility of fragmented love, but also foreshadows the consequences of permitting the division of the self even when external influences are thwarted. Wilde's declaration regarding the harm caused by obeying extraneous norms mirrors the Fisherman's own denouncement of the obstacles to attaining his love: "Morality does not help me... Religion does not help me... Reason does not help me." (*De Profundis* 4-5) Adhering to presented stipulations of society is incompatible with othered identities, yet the struggle against them cannot cease by simply living by other standards. Irrespective if the Other must mutilate their spirit under the confines of dominant society, or if the Fisherman believed dismembering his soul was the only way to satisfy his desire, it is illuminated that neglecting the parts that make us whole warrants greater sorrow. The Fisherman and Wilde are testaments to this, though only the latter realizes this before he can act upon it.

The Fisherman's Soul, confident that his owner will need him again someday,

promises to visit the Fisherman annually to regale him with stories of its travels. In the first two visits, his Soul tells of his adventures to distant lands where he learned the mysteries of knowledge, faith, and riches. Unsurprisingly, the Fisherman is aloof, claiming that “Love is better than Wisdom... Love is better than Riches.” (51, 57) On his Soul’s third visit, we see the consequence of elevating desire above all else, as did Wilde. Bewitched by the promise of a beautiful maiden that possessed qualities his Mermaid lacked, the Fisherman accompanied his Soul on a journey to quench his lust. This connects to Wilde’s own castigation of he and Lord Douglas’s own pleasure-seeking temperaments. Wilde remarks that he “deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation... I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.” (*De Profundis* 3) Cumulatively, this questions if even the most fervent passion can be considered righteous if thought and the soul are neglected. The Fisherman’s love cannot be entirely pure—beyond the nonconsensual element of the Mermaid’s position—because he has no wisdom to balance the heart and no soul to generate empathy for others. This is further cemented by the tasks set before the Fisherman by his Soul on their journey to the mystical woman.

Venturing through foreign lands, his Soul commands the Fisherman to steal, strike an orphan, and murder a hospitable merchant before confronting his Soul for its treachery. Though outraged at his Soul’s malevolence, he’s met with biting apathy, as his Soul answers “When thou didst send me forth into the world thou gavest me no heart, so I learned to do all these things and love them.” (61) As idealistic as love solely based on passion is, it’s exposed that love is irrevocably marred when extricated from the mind and spirit. Although the Fisherman’s Soul was inept to recognize his actions as immoral, the Fisherman lacked the wholeness of self to understand that his passion was corrupted the moment he severed his soul. Therefore, Wilde uses the Fisherman’s story to advocate for creating an identity outside of society’s stipulations, but moreover, to critique the separation imposed upon deviants who seek this radical individualism. He suggests that resisting norms comes at the cost of compartmentalizing the self, embodied by the Fisherman’s decline into melancholy after he is unable to relocate the Mermaid.

For two years—mirroring Wilde’s own time in prison—the soul torments the Fisherman. The first year, with acts of depravity; the second, with acts of goodwill. However, the Fisherman is abject, blinded by his longing for the Mermaid’s return. Still, his Soul is determined to be reintegrated, praying to the Fisherman “to enter thy heart, that I may be one with thee even

as before.” (64) The Fisherman, in his despair, finally concedes. While the reunion is hindered by the Fisherman’s overzealous passion, his acquiescence also prompts the Mermaid’s reappearance. This indicates that true desire can only be satiated through the unabashed exaltation of the whole individual. Furthermore, it demonstrates that this synthesis of heart and soul is inevitable, and to resist individuation will only engender further harm. The Fisherman may have had this revelation too late, but Wilde’s own discoveries offer a hopeful contrast, for his imprisonment revealed to him that “the artist is always looking for the mode of existence in which the soul and body are one and indivisible... in which form reveals.” (*De Profundis* 9) This not only refers to rejecting external forces or embracing all fragments of the individual once distanced from these forces, but finding power in all forms of feeling.

Wilde also displays immense gratitude for sorrow. Recalling Love’s notion of the negativity of queer affect, “there is nothing that stirs in the whole world of thought to which sorrow does not vibrate in terrible and exquisite pulsation.” (*De Profundis* 1) Rather than resist the entirety of his being and linger on the misfortune of his choices, like the Fisherman in his two years of isolated desperation, Wilde esteems his melancholy. He takes pride in the rebellious nature of those who refuse to be content with their imprisonment and finds merit in all the sensations that constitute the individual. When put into prison, literal or psychological, it is imperative that one does not forget themselves so as to avoid ruin. Above all else, Wilde recognized that “there is not a single degradation of the body which I must not try to make into a spiritualising of the soul... to regret one’s own experiences is to arrest one’s own development.”(5) Struggle may be imbued within queer history, and that of all marginalized groups, but this struggle fosters connection and there is enormous power in community. Therefore, the Fisherman’s inability to reunite with his Soul until his death is not merely a selfish delusion, clinging to a tainted love, but a tragic failure to transcend the shame ingrained into othered identities and reach unrestricted individualism. While he is rewarded catharsis upon witnessing the Mermaid’s corpse, as “bitter, bitter was his joy, and full of strange gladness was his pain,” an individual who lives solely for love cannot survive if their object of affection is revoked. (“The Fisherman” 64) Ultimately, for deviants to act upon their passion, they must first free their individualism of external influences unconditionally, not as a contingent exchange. While the Fisherman was unsuccessful, we must follow in the footsteps of Wilde: “The external things of life seem to me now of no importance at all. You can see to what intensity of individualism I have arrived... for the journey is long and ‘where I walk there

are thorns.” (*De Profundis* 4)

At the tale’s conclusion, the Soul is finally able to find its way back into the Fisherman upon his death. The priest, who admonished the Fisherman’s desire to sever his soul earlier in the story, returns. Unwavering in his distaste for the Fisherman and Sea-folk, he initially refuses to bless the sea or its inhabitants. (“Fisherman” 66) However, three years following his denial of a proper burial, the priest is moved by the sublime beauty of strange flowers growing from the grounds he had previously desecrated. Originally set on preaching about God’s wrath on that day’s service, the priest reconsiders, instead extolling the immeasurable vastness of God’s love. Superficially, this seems to be a redemptive resolution for the Fisherman and the Mermaid, yet Wilde’s intent is far more subversive. Even though the priest “rectified” his error by blessing the Fisherman’s and Mermaid’s burial grounds, the sea, and all wild things that day, this action is inconsequential. The priest blessed all the things in God’s world, “yet never again in the corner of the Fullers’ Field grew flowers of any kind... nor came the Sea-folk into the bay as they had been wont to do, for they went to another part of the sea.” (67) Instead of a perfunctory “happy-ending,” Wilde concludes his story with a subversive bitterness towards the Church. It is irrelevant whether or not the priest blessed those grounds, for the Fisherman and the Mermaid were not deemed part of God’s kingdom in their life, so to believe that they would in their death is both hypocritical and cruel. This echoes Wilde’s views on Christ discussed in *De Profundis*, “Christ is the most supreme of individualists... we owe to him the most diverse things and people.” (14-17) To Wilde, Christ served as a blueprint for deviance. Therefore, the conclusion of “The Fisherman and His Soul” encapsulates the shameless hypocrisy of the church in the Victorian era, as those who embody Christ’s multiplicity are permanently punished in life, and in death.

Together, Wilde’s fairy tale and *De Profundis* illuminate the tragedies inflicted by conformity upon othered identities. Like the metaphorical closet forced upon homosexuals and their activity, societal convention and other external forces subjects all deviants to a ruthless fragmentation of the self. Even when the barriers of normativity have been shattered, those othered by dominant society cannot allow their individualism to be conditional. The Fisherman’s tale and Wilde’s reflection remind us that shackles are still shackles even if they are forged from diamonds and flowered with jewels. Therefore, the duty of the deviant is to escape, but to also use that escape to champion their individual freedom. They must unburden themselves of the confines that’s very existence antagonizes them and achieve euphoria

Conclusion

“Pleasure—the things that give us pleasure—is subversive... We are thrown off balance (out of bounds, outside the normal rules) by delight, terror, by beauty, by humor. And sometimes we dismiss the kind of work that evokes these responses in us, because it seems undignified, out of our control, unserious, unadult. Unruly.”

—Kelly Link, “Introduction” to Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*

In sum, fairy tales are important because they memorialize individuals and communities that struggle for acceptance in the physical world. Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde wrote to survive; their fairy tales are a manifestation of their necessity to imagine. Their escape into the realm of imagination is not an act of cowardice, nor is it an act dedicated to amusing children. Wilde and Andersen’s fairy tales provided a haven to process the traumatic discord of their lived experiences. Therefore, their creative expression warrants greater acclaim, as they challenge inherited frameworks of society, religion, and even the tyrant named Time—these authors valiantly resist the calamitous loss of contact with the child self caused by adulthood. (Sendak 18) We celebrate the play of children, yet ridicule or infantilize the fantasies of adults. The tragedy here is not the preservation of childlike wonder, but the malicious prejudices against those who defend their right to be unapologetically creative.

If nothing else, we continue to write and read fantastical stories because we *enjoy* them. For Andersen, Wilde, and their audiences, fairy tales symbolize a garden of possibilities safeguarded by the indelibility of the individual’s imagination. The genre requires a departure from reality’s constrictions, and that is its glory. It demands a lens of understanding that does not rely on binary categorization or historically dominant frameworks of interpretation. Unjustly, this has led to its dismissal. However, through my scrutinization of “The Ugly Duckling” and “The Fisherman and His Soul,” fairy tales are vindicated as outlets for emotional expression, havens for oppressed identities, and mediums for subversion for those who dare to embrace deviance.

The push towards a better reality begins with the unrestricted distillation of experience. Whether it be the loneliness endured by Andersen, the defamation faced by Wilde, or the subjugation of anyone who’s deemed “Other,” how can their escape in the hopes of an uncertain better be considered shameful? Moreover, conforming to the prejudices regarding

those who have no choice but to escape makes us accomplices to convention's dominion over those labelled as different. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all deviants to escape in order to rebel against the laws made to dictate us. Social systems, heteronormative morality, and Western religion have no reservations to enslave us to uniformity, so to transcend their apocryphal rules is the paramount victory for queer futurity. The money-lenders, the know-nothings, and the authoritarians will never cease their effort to diminutize peculiarities, so we must never relinquish the freedom of our imagination, our hopes, and our individualism.

"Everything you look at can become a fairy tale and you can get a story from everything you touch."

—Hans Christian Andersen

Bibliography

- Andersen, Hans Christian. "She Was Good for Nothing." (1853). Translated by H. P. Paull. *Hans Christian Andersen: Fairy Tales and Stories*. http://hca.gilead.org.il/good_for.html
- . "The Ugly Duckling." In *Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales*, 213–24. London: Arcturus Publishing, 2025.
- "Andersen, Hans Christian (1805–1875)." In *Children's Literature Review*. *Encyclopedia.com*. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/children/academic-and-educational-journals/andersen-hans-christian-1805-1875>.
- Basile, Giambattista. *The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*. Translated by Nancy L. Canepa. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007.
- Birns, Margaret Boe. "Hans Christian Andersen." *Research Starters: History*. EBSCO, 2023. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/hans-christian-andersen>.
- Britannica Editors. "De Profundis." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 14, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/De-Profundis>.
- Freeman, Barbara Claire. *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1995. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2199n7mq/>.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Relation of Poet to Day-Dreaming." In *Character and Culture*, edited by Philip Rieff, 34–43. New York: Collier Books, 1963.
- Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen [Children's and Household Tales]*. Vol. 1. Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1812.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Jung, C.G. (1950/1969) "A Study in the Process of Individuation." In *Collected Works*, vol. 9i, (1961). Memories, Dreams, Reflections. New York: Vintage Books.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Edited by Susan Wood. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979.
- Link, Kelly. Introduction to *The Bloody Chamber*, by Angela Carter, vii–xiv. London: Penguin Classics, 75th Anniversary Deluxe Edition, n.d.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- “Negative and Positive Peace Framework,” *Peace Studies Wiki*, George Washington University, <https://blogs.gwu.edu/ccas-panamericanos/peace-studies-wiki/peace-studies-wiki/approaches-to-peace/negative-and-positive-peace-framework/>.
- Norton, Rictor. “Hans Christian Andersen.” *Gay History and Literature*. Last modified June 15, 2008. rictornorton.co.uk/andersen.htm.
- Olmo, Barbara G. “Fantasy and Futurism: Strategies for Creative Teaching.” *The High School Journal* 61, no. 3 (1977): 99–104. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40365314>.
- O’Mahony, Noel. “Oscar Wilde and the Church.” *The Irish Monthly* 79, no. 931 (1951): 26–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20516302>.
- Rankine, Claudia, and Beth Loffreda. “On Whiteness and the Racial Imaginary: Where Writers Go Wrong in Imagining the Lives of Others.” *Fence*, April 9, 2015. fencemag.com/v18n1/on-whiteness-and-the-racial-imaginary/.
- Sendak, Maurice. “On the Importance of Imagination.” In *On Imagination and Creativity*, 17–21. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Stein, Murray. “The Concept of Individuation in Analytical Psychology: A Brief Snapshot.” *International Association for Analytical Psychology*. <https://iaap.org/jung-analytical-psychology/short-articles-on-analytical-psychology/individuation-2/>.
- “The Life and Times of Hans Christian Andersen,” *Wild Swans*, Meridian, <https://meridian.org/wildswans/lifeandtimes.html>.
- Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis*. Wilde-Online, 1905. <https://www.wilde-online.info/de-profundis.html>.
- . “The Fisherman and His Soul,” in *A House of Pomegranates*, 35–67. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018.
- Zuckert, Rachel, ‘Kant on the Sublime’, in Anil Gomes, and Andrew Stephenson (eds), What is the Human Being?, in Anil Gomes, and Andrew Stephenson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Kant*, Oxford Handbooks (2024; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Oct. 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198854586.013.33>.

Our Hamlets are Too Embarrassed to Be or Not to Be: How Crime Culture has Stolen Shakespeare from Our Youth

by Ophilia Hamze

Critical Essay

The Modern Student's (Dis)interest in Reading

If you asked anyone between the ages of 18-24 in the year 2026 about how they feel about Shakespeare, they probably wouldn't have much to say outside of the fact that they read Romeo and Juliet in high school once but can't remember much of it. There is no assumption that there is even the slightest projection between the modern student and the character, instead there is a palpable distance; purposeful and excruciating for everyone involved. There is a question whether the reason for this simply comes from a disparity in the interest of reading in younger audiences or if it comes from an aversion to Shakespeare's works themselves. Perhaps Shakespeare's formerly rewarded qualities are now what drives away the interest and understanding of the modern student. I am of the belief that any piece of classical literature can resonate with the modern youth depending on how it is taught, but therein lies the problem, how are these texts being taught?

There is much concern surrounding modern student's receptions to early modern literature and the classics alike, namely that their comprehension is weaning and they are refusing to engage willingly with these older works of literature and poetry. We can go even further to say that the average modern student is refusing to willingly engage with any literature *at all*. There are many factors that lead a student to picking up a literary work, something that attracts them to the work, but similarly there are many things that can deter a student from reading. In our current society, it is becoming more and more true that the education system may in fact be pushing students away from interests in early modern, Shakespearean literature. In a study of readership practices amongst students Leon Carnovsky describes the contours of this situation:

But one fact is clear, namely, that the factors which have been mentioned as influencing reading are, with one exception, independent of the reader and are thus objective. Accessibility, advertising, authenticity, readability, can all be controlled for the benefit of the individual. The exception cannot so readily be controlled. This is, of course, interest in the subject. (80)

We see how marketing, language, and accessibility are all employed as an attempt to compel

the student to read a specific work, but what happens when the end goal is the comprehension of the language and the literary devices used in the text so that the student's scope of accessibility can expand into a higher realm of understanding? Isn't this the purpose of teaching? More specifically, isn't this the purpose of teaching Shakespeare?

"Interest" is the most essential keyword in this topic when it comes down to a student's willingness to attempt to comprehend what they are reading. (Estes and Vaughan) Without this crucial interest in the material, the student has no cause to believe that this work will affect their life in any significant way. It is from this failure onward that the student refuses to engage in the text and instead has now created a barrier between themselves and the potential commentary on the world that a given text may provide, as well as any understanding of the historical context this material gives them. Delegating resources and time to ensuring students form a personal connection with the material they are assessing should be the main focus of teaching, but often gets put on a backburner in favor of more "tangible" sources of learning. As Michael Lomonico puts it, "What worries me is that sometimes, in teaching all the elements of a literary work and the author's life, we end up teaching *about* the novel instead of teaching the novel itself." (14) In this case, what's in it for the student? Why should *they* care that Shakespeare had three children and came from Stratford-upon-Avon? It has ended before it even began, the student has no stake in understanding whatever play their teacher will assign because "No one even talks like this anymore. Why do I have to read this?"

Then we must consider: must the text be directly correlated to the machinations of the modern day to be truly comprehended? Even in Shakespeare's day, the theater was not perceived to be a high class activity. The language of his plays were actually very colloquial and understandable to the average audience member, but now the text is almost impossible to understand for the modern audience.¹ There is the question of how to proceed in the modern era with a text that was written with the 16th century citizen in mind now that that language itself has become a symbol of complex and higher learning rather than colloquial, everyday speak. Developing a method to present Shakespeare colloquially in the 21st century is a crucial contusion that teachers have to address when teaching, but unfortunately it's not as simple as it seems. Teachers have to find a way to modify or translate this text without compromising its integrity, while also defining what it is that is integral to Shakespeare's writing in the

¹ For more on Shakespeare's language to his own audience, see Barroll, Leeds. "A New History for Shakespeare and His Time." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1988): 441-64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870707>.

the first place. The danger here lies in the transformation of expectations that lean more towards translation and simplification rather than relatability and familiarity.

Modern expectations of teaching may centralize the importance of comprehension and the recognition of literary devices, but they mistakenly neglect the crux of what makes literature arguably the most significant facet of human creation: relatability and congruence. Neal M. Cross refers to this affliction in terms of Shakespeare, for example, by recognizing that “We have taught the play *Hamlet* as a piece of fine writing, not as the young man faced with momentous problems, perplexed and vacillating, seeking the right course among the many avenues which he might take to bring about consummation or escape.” (502) Through reading literature, there is a desire to be understood through words that are not your own. There is a need to witness your struggles or celebrations verbalizing with words you may not have yet and through relatable experiences. While we do use literature to reflect reality, it is meant to mimic the world around us in a form that offers solace and relatability rather than thorough realism and exact replications. The young heartbroken teen may fall into “Romeo and Juliet” to cure their heartache, the young adult going through a parental divorce may find solace in Hamlet’s story of anger and betrayal. Which is why advertising (let’s be honest, teaching is a constant attempt at marketing interest to the students nowadays) these works in a way that does not convince the young student of its importance to them is how modern education begins to “lose the plot” so to speak, but it is not only a personal relation to the student that is necessary for the material to resonate, it is a personal relationship with the modern culture the student is being raised in.

It’s All Shakespeare? Always Has Been.

In *Shakespeare in Modern Culture*, Marjorie Garber repeats her chiasmus “Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare,” giving her audience a rudimentary definition of what she believes Shakespeare’s position in the Western world to be: a reflection of us, a reflection of everything. (xiv) She specifies that her decision not to put the second “Shakespeare” in quotation marks was made because she believes that the line between Shakespeare and our culture has been significantly blurred. There is a red string tying most of our pop culture iconography all the way back to a Shakespearean reference in one way or another. We see him in Broadway shows such as *West Side Story*, *Do Your Own Thing*, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and beloved films like *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999),

She's the Man (2006), and even as a character in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998).² Shakespeare becomes more than a poet or a playwright in this case, he transmutes into a concept representative of Western culture. Sometimes Shakespeare becomes fictionalized or mythicizing; a character as real as Romeo, which is to say that he isn't real at all. (Cunningham 295) If Shakespeare himself is devolving, or arguably evolving, into a concept rather than a playwright and poet then what makes something Shakespearean? What makes something un-Shakespearean? What does that mean to the average student?

When I was in high school from 2016-2020, I had my fair share of run ins with Throughout all the readings of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, I paid close attention to the engagement of my peers. I distinctly remember students rushing to raise their hands in class so they could read the Romeo to their crushes Juliet, knowing and hoping that this love story would ignite a spark between them as well. It was all of our first time reading the play, but we already knew it was the most epic love story in the English language just from its impact on the world around us. Many kids born before 2012 are no strangers to a loverboy being referred to as a "Romeo," even before any of us had read the source text. (Garber xiv) Before we even understood what it was we were reading, we knew that it had a direct influence on us and on our lives. There was an understanding that Shakespeare has always been a connoisseur of emotion and vulnerability; our teachers always reminding us that there was a reason a play was considered "drama." In high school, students are typically shown both Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) so that they are able to form personal opinions and attachments to the two famous characters in which they are meant to be represented. In Zeffirelli's 1968 adaptation, the young lovers are represented as naive, impulsive, and innocent, showing young love in a soft light. (Martin 43) There was an urgency in Zeffirelli's casting to cast unknown or non-actors to represent these characters in the most authentic way possible. Not only was it intentional for their annunciation of Shakespeare to seem almost improper, it was crucial to Zeffirelli that these actors' tones of voice resembled that of the teenagers of their day and age. (Deats 62-63) In Luhrmann's 1996 adaptation, not only does the student get to witness a more mature and serious perception of their emotions in love through Romeo and Juliet, they are now able to witness it in a world that more closely resembles the one that they live in. Alongside the TMZ themed

² For more on Shakespeare's popular influence, see Abele, Elizabeth. "Introduction: Whither Shakespop? Taking Stock of Shakespeare in Popular Culture." *College Literature* 31, no. 4 (2004): 1-11.

cinematography, heartthrob actor Leonardo DiCaprio, and '90s Venice Beach aesthetics the youth of the era were witnessing their hearts' desires portrayed back to them with the pinnacle of 90s Shakespearean melodrama. This brings us back to the formative and crucial topic of relatability. Our eagerness was founded on the desire to represent our emotions through this text, knowing that its impact on our lives and our world was no small thing.

There was once a time where the modern student would have told you that the Luhrmann adaptation was much preferred over the Zeffirelli adaptation with those opposing opinions being boiled down to a mere preference in aesthetics. There was something about the TMZ camera movement, the campy acting choices, and the emphatic melodrama that intrigued the youth and portrayed a realm of possibilities, tying together early modern prose and the reality we experience every day. What separated Leonardo DiCaprio's Romeo from a 16 year old boy in the San Fernando Valley going through a heartbreak? Nothing, really, in the end they both understood where the other was coming from; they're both loverboys, "Romeos," simps. This mirrorlike quality that Shakespeare can imbue in a reader when they are shown how to really see through the language and into the heart of the prose is how teachers used to guide their students' interest into the realer, more tangible aspects of the work. A student who relates to Juliet will begin to understand the true, yearning desire behind her famous "Wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.2.860) and can now, miraculously, express herself more wholly.

So if all these things hold true to this day, what is it that is causing the students of today to lose their connection to Shakespeare? A lot can be attributed to the failure of modern literature curriculums, but there is another shift happening here too, and this one is cultural. The students are losing Shakespeare because they are losing touch with themselves and their emotions. The world has become a panopticon of embarrassment and anyone who fails to assimilate can and will be ostracized.

From the Haunted Stage to a Haunted Youth

Once upon a time, it was cool to be in love. It was cool to be unapologetically human. The culture we were raised by was one modeled by ever so authentic influencers showing us how real they were by posting all their hardships online for everyone to see. (Gault) Many of us youth from early Gen Z remember the countless images we posted ourselves to our friends online of us crying and all of our raw, uncensored thoughts being willingly shared on our social media pages. There was almost pride in being able to feel your emotions loudly in front of the entire world,

it made you into someone others considered to be honest and trustworthy. What has happened to the youth since then? What makes them so disconnected from one another and themselves? The answer is regrettably pretty simple: cringe culture has infested their minds.

Embarrassment is not a new feeling to anyone, although it is an extremely unexplored and almost taboo topic. Being embarrassed is one thing, but *telling* someone that you're embarrassed is considered a whole different story. While some people are more prone to feeling shackled by their embarrassment, others are capable of bypassing the emotion in favor of leading their preferred life regardless how abnormal it may be. Things have changed in such a short amount of time, now fulfilling your own personal desires can no longer come at the cost of your social image. We are each other's worst enemy, and the perpetrator of this all is the internet.

J. Logan Smilges examines this shift in emotional vulnerability in recent years with their own theory on how cringe culture has infested the world we live in. They label the two pivotal characters in the relationship that creates the environment of embarrassment that we have all learned to dread as the cringer and the cringee. (Smilges) By definition, the cringer is the scrutinizing force that everyone online has the power to enforce onto the other and the cringee becoming the direct victim of this scrutiny for any reason netizens deem probable cause. In the online spaces we inhabit, we are all appointed the role of the cringer, and live under constant pressure that at any moment, any of us could become the cringee. With the way the internet works now, nothing is ever private and no one is ever really alone with themselves. Any public mistake can be turned into a month long smear campaign garnering millions of views on the internet, even being recorded dancing freely at a nightclub could have you become a niche TikTok thinkpiece before you can even call the Uber home. In a world that punishes you for any minute expression of humanity, how are the youth expected to bypass their already fragile sense of self and conquer the behemoth that is cringe?

What happens instead is the shift towards a new culture, a culture where one is lauded on their impressive distinction from the masses and the mainstream is that there comes the other side of the coin. The youth begins to define themselves as someone who is "nonchalant" and "unaffected" but by doing this, they are instead camouflaging themselves to slip into the crowd because that is where they are safe. (Olson) Any outward expression of emotion is seen to be "doing too much" or "extra" and is subject to criticism from anyone who may believe they have a say in the matter (the anonymity of the internet ensures that *everyone* thinks they

have a say in the matter, unfortunately). This translates into the academic and literary world in more ways than one. Younger people are determined to establish a separation between themselves and the adult culture that came before them in which they have become subordinate to. (Garber xvi) Culture begins to move faster and faster with the development of social media, and modernity waits for nobody. So what happens when you introduce Shakespearean melodrama to a bunch of late Gen Z teens? Not only is reading Shakespeare now regarded as pretentious and useless, it is now embarrassing how affected the writing even is. As Richard Halpern states, “If these lines have a cryptic appeal, it has little to do with their ability to generate any flash of sympathetic recognition.” (1, qtd. in Keilan and Orgel) Gen Z wants nothing to do with Shakespeare from here on out, the emotional connection has been severed and the average student fails to understand why any of these characters would react and present their emotions in the ways that they do at all.

Nowadays, when a student is shown Hamlet, they cannot see themselves in his shoes, a damaged teen suffering through his own woes to fulfill the hero’s journey. No teenage boy is outwardly showing his affections to a girl such as in *Romeo and Juliet*. The most willing a student would be to even slightly entertaining *Twelfth Night* is by watching *She’s the Man* (2006) and even that movie has become dated to them. At best, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) can cause slight interest in reading *The Taming of the Shrew*, but I wouldn’t count on it.³

Shakespeare? Wasn’t that, Like, a Thousand Years Ago?

Even the act of learning itself has become a victim of cringe culture and a concept to be embarrassed of. Online, you’ll see teens championing their low GPAs that somehow still earned them their degree. (@sqvrxxx TikTok) Videos go viral of students in high school unable to pronounce “gauche” or “extraordinary,” so how can it be expected for them to entertain the language in Shakespeare? (@WhatTheVek TikTok) The act of reading a play moves too slowly for the ever devolving teenage attention span to be able to resonate with, and the language of the early modern period becomes completely inaccessible so long as the student doesn’t want to willingly engage with the material or if a teacher is unable to articulate to the student the context of the language in a way that interests them. So how can students be attracted to Shakespeare? Does he have to lose all his periodic qualities?

3 For more, see Fernández, José Ramón Díaz. “Teen Shakespeare Films: An Annotated Survey of Criticism.” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (2008): 89–133. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26347692>.

Take the Japanese storytelling artform manga, for example. Gabrielle Malcolm and Kelli Marshall describe how manga has become a popular medium for Shakespearean adaptation. (*Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*) For example, we have Chie Kutsudawa's rendition of *As You Like It* or Ryuta Osada's *Othello* which have both amassed a decent following online. I've even had one of Kutsudawa's adaptations presented to my peers and I in an undergraduate Shakespeare course I had taken. Over the last six years, manga has grown immensely popular in western Gen Z expanding far past its Japanese audience. Its appeal is mostly sourced from its easy to read format and fast paced plot development. In their book, authors Malcolm and Marshall describe this appeal, "In this frenzy of movement, readers become participants in the conflict stages on the pages". There is a certain desire within Gen Z to be involved in some way with the events transpiring on their screens or in their reading. Reading or watching a Shakespeare play seldom invites opportunity to self-insert yourself, especially in a classroom setting where the main purpose of indulging in this material is to comprehend its technical language. Through manga, the student is able to witness the action take place on the page and it gives them a sense of involvement and authority.

But at what point does adapting Shakespeare count as reading Shakespeare at all? Does a 100 page manga rendition of *As You Like It* still count as Shakespeare if half of the content of the play is missing? What about when the language is completely translated into a modern interpretation of what Shakespeare originally wrote? (LoMonico 13) It raises the question, what are we asking people to learn and understand while we are teaching Shakespeare - the broadest version of the story or the intensity of the original language? What is essential and valuable in these plays? If the only way to engage the youth with Shakespeare is by removing, enhancing, or limiting the aspects of the story that are *Shakespearean*, then there is no point or benefit to teaching him at all. (Veidemanis 243) The student cannot get past their lack of relation and involvement in the language, history, and melodrama, and therefore cannot bring themselves to care about Shakespeare in the slightest. Not unless it is given to them in the format of short form media such as manga or SparkNotes, or in the form of a seemingly unrelated film.¹ Even the earlier mention of "sufficient" adaptation, such as the film adaptations, can arguably only truly be considered sufficient if they are able to supplement or encourage a desire to delve into the original text. It is not enough to know that

4 For more, see Rothwell, Kenneth S. "How the Twentieth Century Saw the Shakespeare Film: 'Is It Shakespeare?'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2001): 82-95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43797025>.

She's the Man (2006) is a rendition of *Twelfth Night* without having ever read the play itself. There is a leniency in our culture now to throw your hands up when an adaptation is close enough to the source and an absolvment of responsibility for the interpreter to have an understanding of the original material.

Even on a university campus, most students will opt for the SparkNotes version of whichever play they were assigned to read. Frequently, you hear the complaint, “There’s no way I’m expected to read an *entire* play? It’s, like, over a hundred pages! And who cares about Shakespeare anymore, wasn’t that a thousand years ago?” Teaching assistants find themselves at a loss on how to assign classwork and homework based on the fact that most students are completely disengaged from the content. If a professor asks a question regarding the reading in class, they are more often than not met with complete, resounding silence. Nowadays, it’s funny when you and your friend both haven’t done the reading and it’s lame to actually *enjoy* Shakespeare or to be passionate enough to express your opinion on the reading in a 300 person lecture hall. As a matter of fact, it’s lame to enjoy *anything* school related, at least outwardly. Most frequently, a student is embarrassed to be wrong about something or to obviously have not understood it, and will trap themselves within their own fear of trying. Other times it is simply the watchful eye of their peers that will deter them from passionately participating in class, especially in disagreement with another student for fear that they will be seen as a tryhard or “doing too much.” It doesn’t help that embarrassment is a severely underexplored emotion, and post-pandemic lack of accountability and socialization in online classes destroyed many student’s ability to even think about something like participation. (Martin 280-285)

To Be Cringe is To Be Free

While right now, at this exact moment in time, this thesis provides context to the detriment of our current cultural standards and learning standards, I believe that this bubble is going to burst. In fact, I have to believe this as an aspiring professor myself. There cannot exist a world in which the youth despises their own history, their own intellect, their own emotions and creativity. As a society, we have no other choice but to lead our youth back to their humanity in any way possible. Many teachers have begun to throw their hats down in a resolute abandonment of the modern student, but another way is possible and it begins with all of us.

Shakespeare is a spearhead of Western iconography, and he lives within the vocabulary of the English speaker regardless of whether we are fully aware of it or not. Entire words such as “cold-blooded,” “fashionable,” and “lackluster” originated from various Shakespeare plays. (Hope 84) We even can attribute common idioms to him as well, including “breaking the ice,” “wild goose chase,” and “heart of gold.” There is a way to bring the youth away from their dark and convoluted perceptions of themselves and back towards the literature that was created for the purpose of understanding them and their woes. It starts with an individual appreciation for art, media, and literature, and a purposeful disregard for the watchful eye that requires us all to surrender ourselves to the banality of Western culture as it is right now. The panopticon of cringe and embarrassment can only be dismantled if everyone collectively agrees to stop watching, to stop making a spectacle of our youth and ourselves, and to appreciate the world and its melodrama for what it truly provides for us.

Bibliography

- Abele, Elizabeth. “Introduction: Whither Shakespop? Taking Stock of Shakespeare in Popular Culture.” *College Literature* 31, no. 4 (2004): 1–11.
- Barroll, Leeds. “A New History for Shakespeare and His Time.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1988): 441–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870707>.
- Carnovsky, Leon. “A Study of the Relationship between Reading Interest and Actual Reading.” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 4, no. 1 (1934): 76–110. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4302040>.
- Cross, Neal M. “Classical Literature in Modern Life.” *The English Journal* 30, no. 6 (1941): 501–3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/806379>.
- Cunningham, Karen. “Shakespeare, the Public, and Public Education.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1998): 293–98. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2902260>.
- Deats, Sarah M. “Zeffirelli’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’ Shakespeare for the Sixties.” *Studies in Popular Culture* 6 (1983): 60–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45018106>.
- Estes, Thomas H., and Joseph L. Vaughan. “Reading Interest and Comprehension: Implications.” *The Reading Teacher* 27, no. 2 (1973): 149–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20193427>.
- Fernández, José Ramón Díaz. “Teen Shakespeare Films: An Annotated Survey of Criticism.” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (2008): 89–133. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26347692>.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*. Pantheon Books, 2009.
- Gault, Grace. “Authenticity’s “TikTok”-Ing Clock: Exploring the Implications of Sophisticated Tools for Performing Authenticity on TikTok.” Undergraduate Thesis. Muhlenberg College, 2022. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.33037100>.
- Hope, Jonathan. “Shakespeare and the English Language.” *English in the World*, edited by Phillip Seargeant

- and Joan Swann, Routledge, 2012, pp. 83–92.
- Keilen, Sean and Orgel, Stephen. *Postmodern Shakespeare*. Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.
- LoMonico, Michael. “High School Matters: ‘These Words Are Not Mine’: Are We Still Teaching Literature When We Use Adaptations?” *The English Journal* 102, no. 2 (2012): 13–15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23365392>.
- Malcolm, Gabrielle and Marshall, Kelli, Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century. *Cambridge Scholars Publishing*, 2012.
- Martin, Jennifer L. “Tights vs. Tattoos: Filmic Interpretations of ‘Romeo and Juliet.’” *The English Journal* 92, no. 1 (2002): 41–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/821945>.
- Olson, Greta. “Love and Hate Online: Affective Politics in the Era of Trump.” In *Violence and Trolling on Social Media: History, Affect, and Effects of Online Vitriol*, edited by Sara Polak and Daniel Trotter. Amsterdam University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1b0fvrn.11>.
- Rothwell, Kenneth S. “How the Twentieth Century Saw the Shakespeare Film: ‘Is It Shakespeare?’” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2001): 82–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43797025>.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. Rev. ed. Edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. Simon and Schuster, 2011.
- Smilges, J. Logan. “Cringe Theory.” *Lateral* 13, no. 1 (2024). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48826797>.
- sqvrxxx (@sqvrxxx), “straight A’s senior year tho,” Video, *TikTok*, May 21, 2026, <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTBHS5hxt/>
- Veidemanis, Gladys. “Shakespeare in the High School Classroom.” *The English Journal* 53, no. 4 (1964): 240–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/810320>.
- WhatTheVek (@whatthevek), “Should I Do a Part 2?” Video, *TikTok*, April 27, 2026, <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTBHS8Ygf/>
- Wilfred B. W. Martin. “Students’ Perceptions of Causes and Consequences of Embarrassment in the School.” *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l’éducation* 12, no. 2 (1987): 277–93. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1494907>.

A Puppet Has Nine Strings
by Madeleine Mekari
Short Fiction

I skipped the sweetener this morning. No vanilla, no mocha, no double crunch caramel. Just a straight black, unsweetened cappuccino... with almond milk... Trust me, nobody wants to meet me for the first time with real dairy moving through my system. Even coffee was a risk. I am the true picture of sophistication. No matter how much I secretly want some sort of sweetener in this bitter cup. Reading *The Bell Jar* in a bustling coffee shop, I sip my mug of coffee with maturity and it tastes like pure competence. I am unmistakably dignified and nobody would dare say otherwise.

I had to look the part since I picked a public place to meet this shrink.

And I had to keep it on the low since I knew this meeting had to stay a secret. I didn't even tell my mom I was meeting with him. I can remember when Mathis was marked as a Class Three for symptoms of bipolar. My mom was the first to call me after they realized where she might have gone missing. I'll never forget the shake in her voice as she tried to be strong for me while simultaneously explaining that my other half might be gone forever. Since then, everyone in my family has been on edge about the government and this new radical movement to cleanse the minds of its people.

They call it W.A.R.D.. It stands for the Welfare Administration for Relief & Discipline. Their headquarters are on the edge of town. It's just a simple, large, brick building with hardly any windows. It's no more than two or three stories, but the property is massive. I once knew a boy in middle school who tried to snoop around the property and get as close as possible to prove his bravery to this girl named Ellie, who he had a crush on. He only stopped after about 20 yards onto the property and then came back with the most absurd stories. I mean, hell, he claimed that he saw zombies on the lawn. I don't know how much I really believe, though. He came back to school with quite the new found confidence. I'm sure it didn't hurt that Ellie kissed him as soon as he returned. She claimed she was so scared something had happened to him, yada, yada.

All I know is that they take people who are struggling to control their own mind to W.A.R.D. facilities and *supposedly* work on rehabilitating them.

It goes like this...

Class One: Anxiety Disorders and Major Depressive Disorders. These are the least

threatening of the five classes. The only thing required of them is to get a little tattoo on the inside of their wrist of a circle with a wave in it and a little number 1 below it. It's supposed to represent a ripple in a holistic and healthy society. Sometimes kids at school hype it up. When you're young, it's exciting to be different, stand out, or be rebellious. Right before I graduated high school, there was this girl that was marked as a Class One and she was the shit for the last couple weeks. She was the most popular girl in school. Everyone was fascinated. She didn't care for the attention much though. I actually haven't heard from her since that last week before we graduated and moved on.

Class Two: OCD and social anxiety. Basically disorders that have the possibility of affecting other people, but in a non-threatening way. They are required to get the same tattoo as Class One, but with a number 2 instead of 1.

Class Three: PTSD and Bipolar. This is when it starts getting more complicated. Class Three and above have to go to W.A.R.D. facilities. They locked up Mathis for symptoms of bipolar. The thing is, she had no symptoms at home, none that I noticed. When W.A.R.D. took her, the only examples they used as evidence of her bipolar episodes at her hearing were images taken of her at an anti-W.A.R.D. protest that she attended. Recently it seems like any act of defiance against W.A.R.D. is seen as pure 'lunacy.' It wasn't always like that, though. There used to be due process in order to be committed. Most people would try medicine or even therapy first. Now it's all or nothing I suppose.

Class Four: personality disorders and or coexisting disorders. They also get taken in by W.A.R.D.. Not much is known about class four, but because of their peculiar disposition to multiple mental disorders, many suspect these are the patients they use to educate the new W.A.R.D. officers and doctors; The patients they'll experiment on and use to teach the new medical students how to perform adequate lobotomies to control their unpredictable minds. It's all just speculation, though of course.

And lastly, Class Five: Psychotic disorders. Supposedly the most threatening of all. We are reminded everyday on the government sponsored billboards to 'Beware of Raving and Melancholy.' These are the two distinct extremes that have classified the symptoms of Class Five for hundreds of years. The most opposing mental disorders and the most uncontrollable. There are even times when Class Five people don't even know they are experiencing symptoms. That's why they try to warn us about them all the time. They could be walking among us. It's important to be vigilant and beware like they tell us to be.

The thing with the W.A.R.D. facilities is that they never expand, but they always seem to accept more patients.

W.A.R.D. acknowledges, but doesn't bother with other forms of neurodivergence, such as autism or down syndrome. They are insanely rare to come by nowadays after the last radical eugenics movement where they'd euthanise the 'genetically damaged.' That form of radicalism was more accepted back then. You know, genetic lottery and all. It's part of what inspired Mathis to join those protests so often. I was never quite as civil-minded as she was. I've always been wrapped up in my own things, I guess.

Afterall, here in the city of New Bedlam, the whole allure is that there are no threats. If you eliminate the threats walking amongst us, it's a safer society for all. It's part of the reason entering and leaving this city is damn near impossible. The visa is only available for the extremely wealthy and purest of mind. That's why I'm so lucky to be born here. I don't have to worry about all that. It didn't seem real to me, my friends, or family until they got Mathis. It seemed so out of reach; so otherworldly. Just another wild legislative proposal that you see on the news while you mindlessly eat your morning oats. It just didn't affect us until it did. I haven't seen my twin in eight months because of it and I don't know when or if I will ever see her again.

That's part of the reason I reached out to a shrink.

It cost a fortune, but my only other option for an assessment would be to reach out to a government officer. It's pretty well known that if you can afford a shrink, you go the shrink route for assessments. Shrinks are there to help you, but government officers, otherwise known as W.A.R.D. officers, nine times out of ten are just looking for more people to mark and send to W.A.R.D. facilities. Rumor is they get paid on the numbers they bring in.

I used some of the money my grandma left me when she passed away to pay for the meeting. I gained access to my inheritance just a few months ago on my eighteenth birthday. My parents have been under enough stress as it is, and I know they're trying to act like everything is okay, so as to not frighten me, but it's killing them. I can tell. I want to help myself so I can help them relax. They're scared that because Mathis and I are twins, I'll start exhibiting similar symptoms. They've expressed it passively a couple times. You know, a couple 'how are you feeling?'s here, and a few 'have you felt any Class Three through Five psychological symptoms like Mathis?' there.

I'm fine obviously. This is just for their peace of mind. The government has been

advertising the importance of carrying around your papers. They're non-essential as of now, but you're definitely better off with them in case you have an interaction with W.A.R.D.. It's like a clearance form to show that you've passed a psych evaluation and are non-threatening. I'll get cleared by a shrink and tell them the good news when the examination is all over, so they don't have to stress in the meantime.

Consider it an early Mother's day present.

The thing is, I know I'm fine, I'm just a bit anxious. Maybe I overthink a bit and maybe I experience minor levels of anxiety on a day to day basis, but I'm fine. That's normal. Everyone gets that way.

Besides, the absolute worst case scenario is that I have to get marked as a Class One for anxiety. It's just a cool little tattoo. Only Class Three through Five get taken to W.A.R.D facilities, so I'll be just fine.

But all of this aside, I knew I had to keep this meeting with Dr. James on the low.

Sitting in front of my boring cappuccino, feeling like the epitome of class and sanity, I was taken aback to see a double mocha latte with extra whipped cream and caramel drizzle set down carefully on the other side of the small round table I was sitting at by gorgeous manly hands. Manly hands with no knot tied around a very special ring finger, might I add.

Shit, maybe I should have just gotten the fun, sugary latte that I actually wanted.

"Hi, I'm James. And you must be -"

"Tilly!" I interrupted bluntly, standing up, bumping the table, and blowing my mysteriously elegant cover.

Jesus, he's hot. I wasn't expecting a Greek god to join me this morning. Tall, with an athletic build. Fluffy brown hair that slightly droops down near his delicious chocolate brown eyes. A jawline that could cut steel and a smile that made me bump the table obnoxiously and spill his drink.

Oh. My. God. Damn it, Tilly, get your shit together.

He jumped back a bit at the spill and tried to clean it up casually. Most of his latte was still intact, but I can't say the same about my ego.

"Shit, I am so sorry! Let me order you another coffee. Do you want me to grab you a rag? Did any of it spill on you?"

I scanned his pants for any stains I might have caused from the spill and realized it must look like I'm observing, well... him through his linen pants.

SHIT. SHIT. SHIT. ABORT.

God, I wasn't expecting him to be hot. When I agreed to meet him here I thought he'd be old and fuggly, and well... not this. He was no older than 24. *Young* for a shrink.

Shrinks are supposed to be old and fuggly. If they all looked like this guy maybe they wouldn't be so taboo around here.

I knew I had to keep this meeting a secret, but honestly, keeping this a secret makes him all the more sexy.

He laughed a bit under his breath.

Shit, I hope he can't read my mind. I can't control these thoughts, damn it, I mean come on. Look at him!

My face mimicked a tomato as I scanned the rest of the room to catch all of the wandering eyes that definitely just witnessed this disaster of an introduction. I can hear them all whispering. *They're definitely making fun of me. Oh, god.*

I palmed my face, utterly embarrassed and questioning my entire existence.

He gently placed a hand on my shoulder as if to steady me and smiled as he calmly said "There is nothing to worry about." My forehead lines relaxed a bit and the tension in my shoulders slightly released. "Let's forget about this minor spill" he winked charmingly and suggested that we go down to the river to talk some more with fresh air. "Want anything for the walk?" He smiled gently with the offer and gestured to my empty cappuccino cup.

"I'm okay, but thank you. I don't think caffeine would benefit me at the moment."

I didn't need to share that, damn it.

He laughed under his breath endearingly. "Okay, I'm just going to grab another quick coffee for the walk. I'll be right back."

I waited by the table, collecting my thoughts and regrouping when I noticed the barista hand Dr. James a cup of pure black coffee. The antithesis of his previous latte. I wasn't sure what to make of it, but I also didn't have time to dwell on it, because before I knew it I was being guided out the door and distracted by this gorgeous man and his meaningless small talk as we walked down to the river together.

He was easy to talk to. The kind of person you didn't have to try around. No effort needed. I guess that's why I'm paying him the big bucks. James doesn't make it feel that way though. He doesn't make it feel like I'm paying him for his services. He looks at me with genuine interest and curiosity behind those beautiful oak eyes. I felt comfortable. I felt alive. I felt heard.

I felt understood.

He understood me.

“So tell me a bit about your sister.” He looked at me with darting, pensive eyes like he was penetrating my mind and soul. “How has her absence made you feel? Mathis was her name, right?”

At her name I snapped out of my trance. “Yes, Mathis.”

He nodded and stiffened his back while he sipped his coffee. I suddenly noticed my empty hands and didn’t know what to do with them. I cracked all of my knuckles and took a deep breath before continuing. “She’s my twin, you know? She’s my other half and now she’s gone.” I paused to tame the scratch in my throat. “I don’t know how to feel about it. The W.A.R.D. officers tried to reassure us that this was for everyone’s betterment... including my own; said her presence was dangerous, unstable, and could interfere with my life and the life of everyone I loved.” I looked down at my shoes and noticed how dirty they’d become from this walk. “But she was my sister. My other half. Hell, we shared a face. How dangerous could she be?”

I looked up at James to find him staring straight ahead, stoically peering at the river.

“James?” I prompted.

He looked back at me and locked back into the conversation insistently. “Sorry, just thinking. That must have been pretty hard on you, huh?”

It felt like such a stupid question after everything I just said, but one look at him and I conceded to his simplicity. “Yeah, it wasn’t easy.”

“But the W.A.R.D. officers, they were probably right, you know. Class Three can be especially complex and dangerous. They used to let Class Three through five just roam the streets. The crime rate was through the roof and the people with these disorders just kept procreating. It was a broken system before W.A.R.D. was around.”

I furrowed my brow and scratched my head trying to make sense of his words. I get it, the system wasn’t perfect before and it’s dangerous for everyone in our society for Class Three through five to be on the streets with everyone else... but Mathis wasn’t dangerous.

“I’m really more curious about you, though, Tilly,” James jumps in, interrupting my stream of thought. “You wanted to get in touch because you have anxiety, is that right?”

“No!” It felt like such an accusation. “I mean, I get anxious, like everyone else, but I don’t *have* anxiety.”

“No, no, of course not. I didn’t mean to put you on the defense. I’m here to help. You can trust me. I promise.” He put a hand on my shoulder for comfort as we walked, and the contact of his skin on mine sent a shiver up my spine.

It was electric.

My nerves oddly relaxed after that jolt of electricity. Like the limp body of a criminal after an execution. It felt like he held the strings that controlled me in his hands... and I trusted him with them.

“I know you’re here to help, I’m sorry. It’s just after Mathis, I’ve been guarded.”

“Guarded? How so?”

“Exhibit A. I was really hesitant to meet you here. There’s so much stigma around all of this and obviously the fear of being marked myself -”

“Why would you be scared of being marked if you don’t feel like you have symptoms?” he interrupted.

He’s a young shrink. Probably inexperienced, I have to remind myself.

“Mathis.” I stated frankly. Her name has turned into a symbol. She reminds me that anyone can be marked. If W.A.R.D. tells you you’re struggling or you’re dangerous, you are. They are the judge and jury. Once you’re marked, you can’t trust your own mind. They pull the strings. But ‘Mathis’ felt like a good enough answer for me. I could see that he understood.

He looked down at his watch and noticed the time. “It was an absolute pleasure getting to know you Tilly. I think we should have one more session together, to finish our talk and finish up the assessment.”

He winked and placed a hand on my lower back to guide me towards the park exit, and then pulled me in for a tight hug before departing. It was strange, being hugged by a shrink, but his skin was soft and his embrace was warm. He smelled like pinewood and manliness and I didn’t want him to let go. It felt nice being listened to and understood by people who weren’t trying to tell you how to act or behave in public to reduce suspicion or attention. It’s better to fly under the radar than be seen as damaged. I didn’t feel like I had to act around him.

He pulled away (sadly) and with both hands lingering on my shoulders said “tomorrow. Right here. Seven p.m.” So rugged and assertive. I liked it.

We definitely could have finished this assessment today, but... I think he wants an excuse to see me again. Which is good because *I* definitely want to see *him*

again. We connected. I've never felt that electricity or those nervous butterflies before. It's like my unconscious is screaming at me with excitement in muffled voices.

I ran home and contemplated the likelihood of me keeping this a secret.

Spoiler alert: unlikely.

My mom is my best friend, as sad as that might sound. Mathis and I were both so close to her. It felt like we were triplets.

Plus, this was a gift to my parents, so naturally I wanted to share it anyway. It's like being so proud of a birthday gift, that you have to make them rip open the packaging weeks before their actual birthday.

I burst through the front door. My mom was making guac for taco Tuesday and my dad was sitting on the couch with a beer. He's been really sad since Mathis was taken. It's like he's been a shell of himself for the past eight months. I haven't gone a day, since she was taken, where I haven't seen a drink glued to his left hand.

"Hi dad" I say as I throw my purse on the couch next to him and lunge toward the kitchen island for a seat close to my mom.

"Hi Sweetie" he replies with a melancholy drawl.

"Mom! I have a surprise for you!" I turn around quickly to face my dad, "Dad, this is for you too, so listen in!" He slowly turns his attention toward me and my mom leans in with anticipation.

"What is it Til?"

"Don't freak out..." I pause for dramatic effect. "I saw a shrink today."

"What?!" My dad stands up and marches to the kitchen in anger.

"Tilly Anna Oliver, what in the hell were you thinking?!"

"Guys, guys, it's fine, I'm fine I promise! This... this reaction right here," I gestured grandly to both of them and their tense demeanor "This is why I saw a shrink. I didn't want you guys to worry about me anymore. But don't take my word for it, take the shrink's!"

"How the hell did you afford a shrink?" My dad questioned. In fairness, that's a pretty valid question to ask, considering I have no income of my own yet.

"I used a bit of the money grandma left me" I admitted honestly.

"Oh good God," my mom muttered. "Do you know how dangerous that was? And without telling either of us?!"

Anger forced tears into her eyes and as they leaked onto her face her expression turned

turned to a soft sadness. She pulled me in tight. “Tilly, I couldn’t survive if they took you, too.”

Her words struck a guilty chord in my chest. When my mom released me from her grasp my dad pulled me in for a hug of his own. He really is a gentle guy. Just a bit sad and absent right now.

I pulled away from both of them and stared at their creased, pained expressions. I wiped the tears building in my eyes and tried to consciously control the flush I felt warming my cheeks. I decided it was just best to preemptively tell them the good news. I knew James would clear me on the assessment anyway.

“You guys are freaking out before I even tell you the results.” Their faces sobered up and they seemed to hold their breath. “I’m cleared. I passed the assessment. No need to worry for me anymore. I’m safe.”

I didn’t feel the need to tell them that I hadn’t officially passed yet. I was picking up James’s vibes and I knew that technically, the assessment and clearance would be done tomorrow. And If I get my way, this definitely won’t be the last time I see his gorgeous face.

“Plus, the shrink was hot!” I told my parents with exaggerated seriousness.

“Too soon Tilly, too soon,” said my dad.

I was anxious the whole next day. The butterflies in my stomach felt caged and unruly. I couldn’t wait to see James again. By the time seven rolled around, the sun was already going down. I found a bench at the park that looked over the river where he told me to meet him. I waited there patiently for him to show up. I was wearing my scoop neck top with a pair of white jeans that hugged my butt in all the right places. I had to send vibes back, obviously.

When James showed up in all of his glory, I was awestruck. His beautiful hair was fluttering in the breeze and his pensive eyes glistened in the golden-hour rays. He was wearing slacks and a collared button down shirt. Very professional. Very handsome. I got up to greet him and he embraced me with a long hug. It was an unspoken affirmation that he sees me as more than a patient. We then sat down next to each other on the bench and there was no denying that the energy was radiating between us.

“So you wanted to meet up again today? What’s left in this assessment?” I smirked

flirtatiously. He responded with a sharp lift in his chin and a devilish smirk right back.

“Ah yes, yes, the assessment.” He paused to think.

He was obviously trying to figure out a good excuse to continue the assessment. I mean there was no denying the vibes now. He wanted to see me. I wanted to see him.

“I just have one more final question for you before we can officially conclude the assessment.”

I nodded eagerly with scandalous anticipation.

He leaned in and whispered gently “do you hear that?”

I ruffled my brow trying to figure out what he meant.

“Close your eyes Tilly. Do you hear the birds chirping and flocking to their nests?”

“Yes,” I said. And I did. Each chirp sounded musical.

“How about the river hitting the rocks? Each splash a slightly different hum than the next”

The sound was so comforting. “Yes, I do,” I replied with ease.

“How about the family on the other side of the river? Do you hear them laughing together?”

I listened closely. Through the birds and the river I could hear the faint laughter of children with their family. “Yes,” I said with a soft smile on my face.

“Tilly?” he prompted.

I opened my eyes and met his soft sweet gaze.

“There is no family across the river.”

I pulled back from him at that moment and quickly scanned the river.

Nothing and no one.

We were alone, there was nobody around. And suddenly I realized that nobody knew where I was.

The expression on his face had shifted, I just hadn’t noticed. His brown eyes darkened menacingly and the corner of his lip turned upwards in a smirk. It was the look you see in your opponents eyes at the end of a chess match right before they take your queen.

My heart sank into my stomach as I frantically scanned the river bed some more to find the family I heard laughing. The sound echoed between my ears like a siren. A reminder that I had fallen into a trap. My breath came quick, shallow. James was looking at me with a sinister smirk. His kind eyes shifted as I sat there greedily inhaling all of the oxygen in the air.

He just crossed his legs and watched.

I scrunched my forehead to aid my incoming headache. I rubbed my eyes. I held my queasy stomach. The wind ripped the leaves from the trees and a forest of green spun in my vision. Somehow the noise around me silenced to a hum. The kind of silence you hear only after an explosion has rattled your brain and ears. Each breath felt more shallow than the next and my throat began to constrict like there was a string that had been tangled and wrapped around it, slowly choking me and stealing my bodily control.

James took a deep breath of boredom and spite and grabbed my shoulders to steady me. He turned me towards him with ease. Through the daze of my panic, I looked up into his mischievous eyes.

“Don’t worry, Tilly. Everything will be okay.”

With that I felt something cold and sharp on the back of my neck and everything went dark.

I don’t know how much time passed, but I woke up in a white room. Sterile. Stark. A room that killed creativity and left you alone with your own thoughts for entertainment. There was a window, but it was too high for me to see out of. The only thing I was able to see through the thin bars was the grey and cloudy sky.

I sat upright on my bed and rubbed my head. I had a massive headache.

Then to make my headache worse, there was an aggressive pound at the door followed by the formal entrance of a large lady with thin blond hair. She was dressed in white. She kind of looked like Nurse Ratched with her organized clipboard.

“Oh good you’re awake. You need to come with me now.”

“Where am I?” I asked.

“Come with me now.” She ignored me. I felt invisible.

“I said, where am I?” I demanded with more force. The kind of force that’s frowned upon and draws attention in public.

But she just ignored me again, and kept on with her tasks.

I was her task, it seemed.

“Please, come with me Miss Oliver.”

There was no use in fighting it. I wasn't going to get answers.

I stood up and followed her steady pace down the white corridor.

It was boring, nothing to see but white walls, white tiles, and bright white lights. The silence was deafening and the sterility was blinding.

She led me to the entrance of another room and ushered me in. As I followed her lead, in big red paint, was a circle with a wave in it.

The W.A.R.D. symbol.

In the center of the room was a table with a tall woman sitting on the other side of it. As I sat down across from her she asked me if I knew where I was.

"A W.A.R.D. facility" I said with a sick tranquility. I felt eerily calm for the situation I was in.

I scratched my neck to think and felt a small scab below my ear. Only then did I remember the prick I felt earlier. He must have tranquilized me. The lady solemnly nodded at me and then looked towards the door and snapped her fingers.

Suddenly, behind her, the window to a small gallery became visible. The kind of viewing gallery you watch a surgery being performed in or a death sentence being fulfilled.

Except I wasn't in the gallery. I was on display.

In the gallery I recognized three very important faces. My mother who was crying into my father's arms, and James. James was observing like a vulture from the back corner, but my parents were as close to me as they could get. My dad's eyes were bloodshot and the creases on my mom's face looked to age her twenty years.

"Tilly." The woman started, snapping me out of my thoughts. "You are here today, because a W.A.R.D. officer has recognized explicit and undeniable evidence of Class Five behavior from you." Class Five? W.A.R.D. officer? My mind felt like jello and I couldn't fully comprehend everything being explained to me. "You have been documented as having signs of visions and delusions that include making romantic passes at our W.A.R.D. officer. Officer James is married, Tilly. Have you no dignity?"

Delusions? Married? I swear he wasn't. I'm fairly certain there was no ring on his finger.

Officer James? I thought he was a shrink. How could I have gotten that wrong?

"I'm sorry, what?" I questioned in a dazed fog. "I'm not delusional? And James isn't married, he didn't even have a ring on."

The lady turned to the partition and James walked over to raise his hand to the glass. Sure enough there was a ring on his finger.

I felt nauseous. I looked at my parents with an apologetic expression. Words were escaping my mind like patients from a psych ward. I couldn't control my own thoughts and everything felt unpredictable. I attempted to gasp for breaths again, renewing my panic.

As my anxiety grew, the lady on the other side of the table officially declared me Class Five for symptoms of delusions and psychosis. I heard a loud cry from my mother through the glass, and then a sharp prick in my neck again.

The next thing I knew I was back in the white room.

My days were all the same after that.

They gave me a pill, let me pick a book or two, gave me basic food, and then put me back in my room. It was quiet. I only had the company of my own thoughts and the voices in my head. I learned a lot, though. I read books. I read one about old French entertainment, puppetry, that particularly piqued my interest.

A puppet has nine strings, you know. A marionette puppet that is. Attached to a wood cross, pulled and played cavalierly by mysterious hands, hidden from the show. The masterminds behind the curtains, never to be seen. I think most people are puppets. And most puppeteers are also puppets in their own right. I was James' puppet, and he was W.A.R.D. 's puppet. They're controlled, told what to do, told how to play with their toys. In fact, a puppet is all I can see when I look at James now. Though most see him as a puppeteer, as the job intends, I think his strings are being pulled just the same. I have realized only now, locked up in this cage with nothing but my own thoughts and a couple of books, that I am finally free of the puppeteer's strings. No expectations restrict me anymore. I am but merely a person behind bars, and I am free.

Artist's Statement

In 2024 I was fortunate enough to spend a quarter abroad in London studying a range of disciplines including history, psychology, and creative writing. During this time, one class, titled "Madness and Medicine in Modern Britain," had a focus on Bethlem Royal Hospital, the

oldest operating psychiatric institution in the world. I took a particular interest in this hospital and the rich history associated with it. When it was time to choose my topic for this research fellowship, I knew I wanted to combine both of my major disciplines at UCSB, Psychological and Brain Science and English, and dive into the rich psychological history that Bethlem Royal Hospital offers.

There are two specific patients that inspired the short story I wrote. A patient from the 18th-century, named James Mathew Tilly and a patient from the 19th-century, named Richard Dadd. These patients both suffered from delusions, but because of the time period, their diagnosis stopped there. Today, historians concur that these patients likely suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. I was fortunate enough to travel to London recently to visit the archives of Bethlem Royal Hospital where I was able to research primary artifacts preserved from these patients. Some of these sources include sketch books, letters, and architectural plans. Through diligent research and a passion for evaluating and destigmatizing mental health, I attempted to write from the perspective of a patient set in a dystopian future that resembles the 17th and 18th century psychiatric approach. The question I ventured to answer while there was “To what extent does governmental and social influence have the power to affect the stigmatization of mental health?”

My primary goal while at the archives was to get into the minds of these patients and try to figure out what they were feeling and how others were viewing them before and after their diagnosis. The most powerful documents that I observed for my goal were letters written by Richard Dadd and his family members after he murdered his father because he believed he was the devil, and secondly, but equally as important to my project, were proposed architectural plans by James Mathew Tilly on how a new Bedlam Hospital should be built. These gave me valuable insight into the minds of these two specific patients and those who were around them frequently.

These patients manifested in the story in several ways. One example is the characters’ names. Each name in this story has significance. The most notable being the main three characters James, Tilly, and Mathis. These names are supposed to be representative of one of the primary patients I studied, James Tilly Mathews. Other names in this story are representative of other figures that I studied as well including Richard Dadd, his sister Maria Elizabeth Dadd, and Anna O. I chose to hide these names in my piece because most of my production is an abstract idea derived from the research that I did.

I chose to use Mathews' names for the main characters because he inspired the true premise of this story. In the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives I was able to study architectural designs of a proposed new Bethlem Hospital that Mathews designed himself. In this architectural proposal he segregated patients based on their mental cognition, placing the "filthiest" patients in the "lower gallery," or bottom floor of the building, and the best patients, or the patients in recovery, on the top floors. This idea inspired the "Class System" in my story. Holistically, there are many intentional nuances, easter eggs, and references to the history of mental health and Bethlem Royal Hospital.

Subsequently, I did remote research on eugenics and governmental control over people who are neurodivergent in countries including the United States, Sweden, and Germany. I wanted my story to be as historically rooted as possible. As improbable as the dystopian world I describe is, it is mainly derived from historical facts. Many countries have made drastic efforts to use eugenics to "protect" the mental health of its people by sterilizing people with mental health issues. This governmental overstep that I describe in my short story is not too far-fetched considering it was less than fifty years ago, in 1976, when Sweden's sterilization programme finally came to an end.

Additionally, I took inspiration from a number of novels including, but not limited to Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Overall, this project is intended to be an explication of the social and governmental stigmatization of mental health. By the end of the story, I hope to leave the decision on the fairness of the main character, Tilly's, sentence in the reader's hands.

Bibliography

Alighieri, Dante, et al. *Dante's Inferno*. Salem House Press, 2014.

Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives. (12 August 1809 - 6 June 1811, 12 Aug 1809 - 2 Dec 1809

and 4 Feb 1811 - 6 Jun 1811). *Correspondence and affidavits relating to the sanity of James Tilly Mathews, and correspondence concerning his designs for the new hospital at St George's Fields* [Archival manuscript]. PPJ-01, London, England.

Black, W. (1811). *A dissertation on insanity* [Manuscript]. Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives, Rare Books Collection, London, England.

- Dadd, R., Dadd, R. (father), Dadd, S., & Philips, T. (n.d.). *Letters to David Roberts from Richard Dadd, Robert Dadd, Stephen Dadd, and Sir Thomas Philips* [Correspondence]. Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives, PPJ-05, London, England. Dadd, R. (1842 - 1843).
- Dadd, R. (1842 - 1843). *Sketchbook kept during tour of the Middle East and modern map showing the journey* [Sketchbook]. Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives, PPJ-04, London, England.
- Day, W. H. (1846). *Observations on insanity* [Manuscript essay]. Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives, SPB-03, London, England.
- Freud, S., & Breuer, J. (2004). *Studies on hysteria* (N. Luckhurst, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1895)
- Haslam, J. (1798). *Observations on insanity* [Rare book]. Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives, London, England.
- Hyatt, S. (1998). *Shared history of shame: sweden's four-decade policy of forced sterilization and the eugenics movement in the united states*. Indiana International & Comparative Law Review, 8(2), 475-504.
- Jay, M. (2014). *A visionary madness: The case of James Tilly Matthews and the influencing machine*. Yale University Press.
- . (2003). *The air loom gang: The strange and true story of James Tilly Matthews and his visionary madness*. Bantam Press.
- Kesey, K. (1962). *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Viking Press.
- Plath, S. (1963). *The Bell Jar*. Heinemann.
- Tromans, N. (2011). Richard Dadd: *The Artist and the Asylum*. Tate Publishing.

Love Me Madly
by Sebastian Muñoz-Massa
Short Fiction

Chapter 1

I think I have always felt this way. I am tracing over every memory that presses into my mind, ones clear enough to remember anyway, and I see that she was always with me. When I was a young child sleeping through torrid summer nights and choking on dusty desert winds, I had a dream. I stood alone in the middle of a lake, though I did not dare look into the deep black abyss below. Instead, I looked up to a shadowed night, darkened by the new moon and ornamented by distant pale stars. I was transfixed by their pale light bleeding down; I became consumed by the obscurity of that night, and all at once I no longer felt alone. I have tried to run from that memory. I don't dare return because I fear that if I look closer, I will soon reveal the grotesque details of her face. It is getting harder to look away. It is no longer enough to avoid her eyes, and her coiling tongue, as it outspills liquor thick timbre. It pours into the depths of the lake which now runs like a river and floods into my every memory, and into my waking life. It has since become the duty of men in white coats to find the source of that river. Her voice is the essence of my misfortune, yet we emerge into life born from the same depths.

Trust when I say; there was once a time I could tell you what I desired, and exactly how I intended to get it. For example, I once stole an orange, as it hung from its mother tree, distanced only by a near partition. The fence separated the neighbor's land from ours, but the ambrosia beckoned to me. Beckoned me to reach past the threshold, pluck it, tear open its flesh, and drink the sweet nectar of my desire. So I did, but that innate, singular falsetto that is my volition no longer renders in solitude. She has shrunk to make room for another because, you see, I am Renata. I was her but there is something forming, growing in my belly. She pushes aside my organs and fills me with new blood. Sometimes I feel her bursting from my womb, and pressing against my naval. I must come to know her again but I am not prepared to bring her into this world. For now, I must survive. For now, I must escape this hospital.

I expect my escape to be simple especially on account of my clarity of mind. An ability my peers could only master in their delusions and if I am being candid, I am very embarrassed to be

here. The others here do not look like me because those who do, are never afforded the foolish mercy of a hospital. I have not spent much time mulling over the events leading to my duress, but I know I am lucky. Many in my case would not get a second look before being sent to the labour camps far in the desert country. Whatever transpired that brought me here must have been so beside myself, so inconsequential to their greater lives, that it was not worth sending me to the desert. I am lucky and with my appointment nearing it is best I focus on presenting myself very succinctly. I am honestly quite charming, and even the tools who are entrusted with my confinement cannot help but sympathize with my incidental predicament. I know myself. At least enough to realize I've been outside my right and true mind, but it is truly a secondary event in my life that I see no sane reason to dwell on it.

In the hospital, the suffocating air wraps around my body. My skin, sticky with sweat, clings to itself as I shuffle down the hall. There is no circulation and each breath exhaled stays stagnate, trapped behind the yellow stained cement walls as my hospital issued slippers slap and echo against the chipping linoleum. I cannot be certain how long I have spent here. It must be a while seeing as I know most of the corridors and edges to my enclosure. There is a nurse walking ahead of me who I follow, but as I do there is a peculiar unfamiliarity beginning to creep in. Parts of this involuntary labyrinth I've never seen; a staircase here, a turn there, a sinister looking closet lurking just up ahead. It is an endless network with no clear rhyme or reason, and if it were not for the nurse a few paces before me, I would have been lost a while back. If it so happened that during this winding route we were to be separated I could lose myself; even end up trapped in that very cavernous looking closet. The nurse, this entity, this person who knows me only by my name and the notes left on a clipboard, has become my only lifeline in this world. How long have our steps been inextricably linked, that I now rely so heavily on her presence? Yet, I have never seen her directly due to her tendency to shy her face away from us patients. I did not need to, though, I know she is kind and maybe mixed, like me, with freckles and a sad smile.

A strange thing began happening after the lake. After she arrived. I can communicate with some people in the absence of any words spoken. From time to time the nurse tells me these details in the privacy of our minds, away from the rot and the filth. Away from any spectating eyes watching from beyond the walls. Those looming eyes, how they have become a nuisance as I've gotten closer to my discharge day. Some have even begun to speak, issuing vile warnings, calling out in the echo of my slippers, ricocheting off the walls and whispering

back in my ears the names of people I've yet to meet.

I want to linger on the nurse's looks but I cannot because today I'll see the doctor. The only man who possesses the key to my release; an apathetic scratch of a pen to tear the border between my escape or my surrender. All this time, and the only thing standing in the way was an old, tired man with mustard stains on his coat and who couldn't be bothered to keep his office tidy.

Finally, we arrive. The nurse enters first leaving me alone to listen from just beyond the door frame.

"Doctor, I have Miss Robinson for you". I enter quickly, passing by the nurse but still trying to catch a glimpse of her face. Again it is turned just slightly so that I cannot see. I walk down the windowless room, and it seems to be expanding the farther along I get, but at last I make it to my seat. The chair sits opposite the doctor, its worn leather cracked, and I sink into it as I sit. The doctor seems startled when I do and it takes him a moment to gather his papers. Files lay strewn across his desk in no particular order while the names of patients look up, exposed at every corner.

"Miss...Eh?"

"Robinson."

"Yes, Miss Robinson... Ah, here we go", he picks up a thin file and half heartedly flips through, "do you happen to remember when's the last we met?" I try to think back but cannot call to mind the last time I saw the psychiatrist. I am sure I have seen the nurses a few times over the course of my commitment for various physical reasons. I had a yeast infection; my cramps were so painful on certain meds, and frequently, there was the sensation of a hand pushing under my skin, gripping hold and pulling out my intestines. During those times, a litany of faceless professionals visited me trying to convince me that my ailments were nothing more than hallucinations. Then at night, a faceless white coat would enter from the darkness, administer a sedative, and strap me to my bed until I tired myself into unconsciousness. That was the extent of my medical care, and I have heard little better from the others. Once, a young woman-- maybe slightly younger than myself--slipped in the shower and landed right on her shoulder. She complained of searing pain for weeks as it migrated down the arm. She

would scream in her sleep any time she would roll onto the wrong side. The pain became truly unbearable for the poor thing, and her howling would last late into the night. That is when we would hear her room open, and a few pairs of feet shuffle in. Then there would be a muffled struggle, the footsteps would usher back out, and finally a sustained silence would follow. This went on for weeks before the aides were finally forced to bring her to the physician. When she returned her arm was wrapped in a sling and her eyes were sunken from many sleepless nights. The arm never healed correctly and even now she cannot extend it fully. She's had to relearn how to do everything with the other arm, including how to wash herself.

"I don't remember the last time I visited, doctor," I finally respond.

"I see, then it must have been when we started you on your current medications. How have those been working?" The best description I can give of my stay at the ——— Psychiatric Hospital, to this point, has been a cacophony of drugs served and fed at my bedside.

"Very well, I think. They've been regular... I mean I've been regular. It's working I think", as convincing as I could make myself sound. The truth is they have been working, but it is always a challenge for me to say what I really mean. Everyone makes conversation seem so simple all the time, but it has never come naturally for me. I am always interrupted by her voice; interrupted in my own mind; invaded in my waking self. The lulls of conversation leaves too much a gap for the mind to exist in.

"Good, then I suppose you'll be thinking of going home soon?" Home? Soon. She wants me buried here. She wants the dark lake to pour like thick blood, my blood, into the suffocated river beds in the high desert. I cannot stay here, where the sand chokes me and white hot fists bare down to smother me. I want my body to feel an air wet with life, a breeze that passes over and dampens the ground. I want my blood to soak and mix with teeming soil, and I even want a chance for Her to escape. A chance for Her to grow out of me. She deserves at least that despite the anguish she brings me. I want a land where there is no acid to scathe her skin, and where the Tunas can grow new flesh, my flesh for her to nourish upon. The land here is ravaged, made sick by the same white hands that hold me, but they are loosening their grip.

"Miss Robinson?"

"Yes, I'd like to go home. It will be better for me there, a new climate if you will." He is giving away what he is thinking, I see it in his eyes. He is not convinced by my voice, but he is intrigued by my body. For the first time he picks up his gaze to see me fully, and I see him

tracing my edges. He is making note of the things he likes, and the features he can look past. No, he does not believe my tone but he wants me to stay longer so he can look harder. With his eyes, I feel his hands pulling on my skin, his fingers are pressing into me and the surface of my being warps around them. It is painful.

“This is very exciting, Renata. I have here your discharge papers...” he lingers, tearing away at every part of me. He wants to taste me. I know he does because I can hear him.

“... a simple swipe of my pen, and you’ll be released in the morning. But you know, I always recommend for graduating patients to stay close to the hospital, even when they leave. I’d hate for this to be the last time we meet.” See! There! He craves it like a blood lust for me and he’ll stop at nothing to cut me apart. I hear the truth between his words, and that is how I know what this place really is. It is a meat market. The girl from the shower, they only fixed her so as not to spoil the meat. If they waited any longer to tend to it they would have had to amputate the arm and waste a whole section. What then, if the right arm was someone’s favorite cut? The arm muscles are tough, gamey, and even slightly sweet and if that were spoiled, there goes a good sale. They need us because it is easier to consume our bodies than it is to help us. The doctor scratches the metal tip of his pen over the blood soaked paper between us. His name carves into me with its swooping and winding letters, wrapping around and pulling tighter with black ink. What have I done?

Chapter 2

I fled. My plan worked better than I anticipated and before I could register, I was dressed in someone else’s clothes. They had raised the cage door and I just stood there, frozen, peaking forward. The border edges of the labyrinth had opened and yet I am still its animal. The night before they released me, my last night as a patient, I heard a few of the nurses’ aides talking a short ways away from my room. Their voices rendered in a sinister tone only audible to my ears, and they were speaking just for me. Sure of what they were doing, they poked and prodded, torturing me for one last night knowing they had gotten away with it all this time. No one else along the row would have been able to make out what they were saying, and much of it I did not understand. Though, I managed to catch a few things and heard something about an “excess of bodies.” Now mine would be exposed to the elements, and so I fled. I needed to put as much distance between myself and the bottomless waters we were born in.

The long way was over. What would have taken my grandparents years of their lives,

was over in a span of 30-something hours. So many traveling souls boarded and departed the bus, looking for life in the desert. Looking for work. The ground here is parched, its lips are peeled and thirsty, and her dusty brown face blurs in my mind as I now think back. Exhaustion is stained on my bones but finally I can stand, I can move, and stretch into this small Central California town called ——. Yes, there is life here. Albeit slow moving, and subtle, from what I can see there are not many to occupy ——, and they have an abandoned town center to show for it. Standing here at the bus terminal at one end, I can see just a few blocks down the opposite end of the main thoroughfare. It seems that there are not many corners in this town to hide. The surrounding residential portion of the town is much larger, yet more rugged and rural than the constructed facade around its heartcenter. Chaffed and cracked streets run through the quiet neighborhoods, with dried out lawns in front of wide one story homes. She will not find me here, at least not yet. Nor are there any eyes to watch me move, to judge me as I take up space in this town.

I am looking for someone that I do not remember. I do not know if she is still here, or if she is still alive for that matter. She is my cousin, and much older than myself. I thought of her a lot in the hospital, but not once before then did she ever occupy my mind. One night while strapped down to my bed, she came to me as if in a premonition. I remembered her moving away from —— when I was little. She told me the name of the town she was going to before she left. The name of this town I now find myself in. After that, no one ever talked about my cousin. It was not like she was dead either, because dead people get remembered in words. They are talked about for years after, brought back to life in stories, but not Andalucia. No, for my cousin it was like she never existed. Someone whispered to me that she preferred it that way.

I am headed for the town center. I can feel the hunger wrung up and twisted in my stomach and I am afraid she will wake. There are only a few people out as the sun bares down, and I am beginning to feel sick with each passerby. The warm air is rushing over, my skin is becoming sticky with sweat; a horrible notion seizes me. I never escaped. I ran so far and for so long from that hospital, circling back to the same place, returning to her history's cold embrace. This new world around me is thrilling in a terrifying sort of way, but could it be any different? It must be. I will make it different for us. Each step I take forward is my final throe, and some day you will know this familiar, new world. The dizzying feeling is sweeping over me, and in another instant it is like lightning has struck a decaying corpse. In a flash the town

became animated, jolted awake from her rigor mortis. Vibrant colors are flooding the streets from the bright painted dresses on girls with dark black hair wrapped into braids. Suddenly, I am in the midst of a mass of spectators watching as the young women twirl, and spin through the main street to the echoes of drums and guitar. Again I am standing frozen, looking on at an unraveling scene set in motion with no end in mind. My paralysis is interrupted by a steady beat banging out from somewhere in the procession and I follow a mellifluous sound to its source. Her aches are in my breath when I inhale her melody, and my eyes follow finding a perfect instrument dressed in the same ritual red as her peers. She is kissed deeply by the sun, and possesses the softness of the moon. I know she is tied to my thread, I feel her pulling. Proceeding the ladies, come the men atop their horses wearing wide brimmed sombreros drawn over their eyes and, for a moment the street is terrorized by blind vaqueros. I am pinned down by waves of warm bodies pushing their way to the front lines, and despite my scouring I cannot find a banner or sign to sooth my curiosity. Then in an instant, the murmur of the crowd hums out and rattles along my spine to spell out the reason for the ceremony:

“Old Spanish Days”

The resonant gullet of the throng closes while each individual head turns in unison toward something in the distance. I, the only hen in the flock out of step, follow suit so as not to bring attention. For a town gauded in the garb of a repugnant past there is no mention of the painful cloth over our gauded skin. The townsfolk have chosen to muddle the origins of this land leaving them violently possessed and evermore blood hungry. Each year they resurrect restless ghosts to round up those who are left. My beautiful mired feathers demarcate the short distance between peer and prey.

We look west. I am following the hollow gazes up the road and to the hills, there perched above us looking back down is the brown adobe Mission. Vitriol radiates into the valley from its steeple and my sinuses fill with a dull burn. I am thrown into a fit of coughing and mirthless laughter while the church bells blare out and bring me to my knees. They chime noon and the raucous around has fallen deathly silent, lending me only their eyes to pull myself back to the surface. The whites surrounding their beady black pupils blind me before I can reach out, and just as quickly as the parade appears, it is gone in the next instant. The bells are silent. The streets are quiet. Once again I am left piecing together the memories of what goes wrong.

The —Times

Sunday, May 5th 1997

OLD SPANISH [DOG] DAYS

It is once again that time of year when the last of the town's offers are drained to fund the dimming, gasping, sputtering celebration that is Old Spanish

Days. Once a beloved town holiday, Old Spanish Days holds on by a thread due to the dwindling crowds and aging population. There was a time that crowds were drawn not only from the local population, but the towns adjacent, and even some big city spenders.

Alas the well has run dry, the times a keep on comin' and the masses continue to flock to metropolitans galore. The small country town is dead, they say and if our beloved holiday is any indication, then the signs are true.

Sparsely filled street corners, quiet spectators, minimal performers, this year's festivities felt more like a funeral procession. The last embers of a time immemorial now fading away into obscurity...

In the end, Analucia was lost to me. I did, though, find a remnant of her memory. A woman approached me. It is strange how these small farm towns have a sort of magnetism to them. A melodic repetition that binds and braids thread together. They were close, at least from what Katrina says I was standing at the entrance of a café, waiting to take a seat at the bar. Then she walked out from somewhere behind the counter. She came to me first. She is beautiful in the sort of way a family heirloom might be, when it is passed down, shared, stolen, replaced, and finally settles at the back of my mind. Her skin looks lived in, worn, and shows signs of the sun's indifference. What lies beneath age and ashen dust is soon revealed by nature. Hers is proving to be kind. She introduced herself,

"My name is Katrina, I knew your cousin, you're her spitting image." I would have turned and walked away, walked back out but I stayed to sit with her. A wisp of the puffing smoke of her cigarette pleaded for me to sit, and so I did. She told me stories of Analou, ones that would fill some of the voids she had left behind. Memories of her that became my own and allowed me to feel the kind of woman she was.

“How did you know who I was?” I asked hoping to reveal in her answer a way to bring my cousin back.

“She always talked about you. About how one day you’d come looking for this town. When you realized her is where you were meant to be.” At this point the cafe had long been closed and it was just her and I, and good thing too. My torrential tears would not have been much good for business. Katrina does not seem to mind, though, and in fact she has helped me find a place in town to live. She even hired me as a server at her cafe so I can save up some cash since I spent the last of what I had on the bus ticket. I still have enough pills to last a while longer, and everything this time feels all right. Everything but the horrors waiting just up the hills. I live with an old woman named Minerva. She is a widow and her memory is going fast. Katrina had since been assisting around her house and caring for her but it was eating up her time for running the cafe. In exchange for my room I take care of Minerva, though I sense her disdain for people who look like me. Sometimes I catch her muttering slurs beneath her breath, funny that of the remaining pruned memories she still remembers how to call me a mulatto. In any case we get along fine, that is at least she puts up with me. She is a stout woman, kind of funny looking really with her short legs and long-wide torso. Her breasts take up much of where her mid sections should be, her frizzy, kinked hair hangs down past her shoulders to round out her shape. My one grievance with the lady is her obsessive preaching. Her extreme devotion to an aryan, blond, blue eyed God who’s plastered on every wall, of every home, shop and restaurant –with the sole exception of the cafe. I have no cruel sentiments to those who worship and submit to His will, in fact there are times I wish I possessed such blissful ignorance. But I have felt real power. It is much more horrifyingly imminent. I speak as a girl raised in the Lord’s might, and schooled in the church’s tongue. There is no worldly God can convince me of my salvation, when She has been ripped from a womb much more ancient and unforgiving. I take pity on the poor old woman, though. Most days she is in a fit, rambling on about her knight-like son who plans to return to the town of his birth to rescue his poor mother. He is supposed to take her to the city where she can live with him and his wife and spend her final days around the only man who has ever loved her. Except God of course. In reality it does not seem to me that this valiant son cares too much for his own mother. If he did he would be the one caring for her as she grows sicker. Instead it is a brown girl who has known her for all of a week, and that very fact will never be a good enough consolation, but so be it. I will show her the love and affection that she never received

and does not deserve.

I am leaving Minerva's side now to work my shift at the cafe. Katrina is not there, she seized the opportunity to leave town for a week. She has left her trust in the ladies who have served the same folks for decades. The same ladies that watched Minerva's son grow up and leave her behind. Then there are the young servers, which include two other girls and myself. I have come to enjoy the company of the people I work with, and I hope they think the same of me. Their trust has not come without tests of my character in their own clique-ish ways. Just a day ago one of the ladies, Susan, switched out one of my plates knowing I was on my way to deliver it to a notoriously fussy regular. Luckily, I noticed the shifted weight of the plate at the last moment and when I turned I caught Susan's approving eye. Other times during lunch rushes, if one could call it that, the cold bitter nature of the serving industry rears its head and makes itself known through barked orders and snappy responses. Scowls are a regular attire and arguments a regular occurrence. But, once the aprons are off and we are gathered in the alley behind the cafe, the cool puffs of shared cigarettes closes the gaps between us just a bit more.

She is here. I thought I felt her heart beat before she came in. The beautiful dancer from before, who wore the deep red skirt in the procession; she is here. Sitting with someone who is most likely her mother and they know Rebecca, one of the other young waitresses. It is slow in the cafe and so they are chatting, and laughing together. I am trying not to stare but the atmosphere between the three is intoxicating, it seems so easy and light. I crave such simplicity and as their conversation draws on I am reminded of the widening lake inside of me. My chest fills with a murky current and I am struggling to breath, but I must be still.

"Renata, come here!" Rebecca beckons me over with a wave of her hand. Did she hear my cries? Where did my name arrive in their gleeful chatting? My mind ablaze as I near the table, but trained enough to play along, "...this is my friend Dolores, and her mother Eugenia," Dolores' smile penetrates me with a steadiness my body has never known.

"Hello it's a pleasure to meet you, Renata," She reaches out her golden hand, mine goes numb as it comes to rest in her softness, "I was just explaining to Rebecca that I am celebrating my birthday this weekend. We're gonna drive out to the beach."

"How far is that," there is a look of surprise across everybody's face.

“About an hour and a half, a few of us are driving. There’s plenty of space for you.” I do not sense an agenda in her invitation, but still I cannot convince myself to commit. I have desired little more than the company of individuals I admire.

“I’ll have to think about it. Depends on how Minerva is doing.” Eugenia who has been silent to this point, finally chimes in,

“Pobrecita, que dios bendiga.” What a funny thing to say when he is clearly punishing the spiteful woman.

The weekend came quickly with little regard for my festering angst. For a town doused in mistrust and molasses, this section of my life has moved with little impeding it. The pit in my stomach never goes away, but in moments like these the sensation is unbearable. I can feel my body tensing for what lies in succession and when there is no resolve my mind will create catastrophe. I am too excited for this, too ready for what is to come and I feel Her beginning to bend my insides, twisting and forcing them into places they should not be. Why do I want this? This communion of strangers who do not know me, and could not find me if they tried. Except for her, Dolores. She knows me already and I could not stay away if I tried. So I am going tomorrow, it is marked set in perpetual motion and I am forced to go. My absence would reveal more of me than my unseen presence, and I do not intend to distort my fleeting fortunes. My new life that I have somehow created and will create with Dolores.

I did not have a bathing suit. I have never owned a bathing suit so I had to buy one. I went to the only department store in town and to my relief the aisles and rows resembled the streets and avenues of town. I had no idea what I was looking for and the only attendant was a young man who wanted to be there even less than me. I sifted through the bikinis, more pushing around cloth than really looking for anything in particular. I wanted to expedite the princess so I picked the first few to take back to the fitting rooms. Placing myself in one of the vacant stalls, I began trying on the different options. The first fit too tightly around my waste, the second revealed too much; or did it? Was it my goal to parade the curves and contours of my skin that wraps around the flesh that makes me? I do not know what my body is supposed to look like and looking too long can be dangerous, so I sped through the next sets and settled on a suit that provided the most coverage. I am not ready for her to see all of me, but I do hope she notices

I had been up most of the night and now I was washing last night's dishes. I made Minerva, her favorite dinner; mortadella sandwiches made with crispy fried mortadella, melted provolone, and a fresh dijon mustard on a warm roll. I could not eat so we sat while she watched TV, and I watched her. Now I was peeling the melted cheese off of the plate and preparing for an arduous day at the beach. When my hands are in motion my thoughts come to rest, so I begin preparing breakfast. Despite my every effort, though, I cannot keep away from my mind and soon it folds in and mixes. Images of an unknown life, myself accompanied by Dolores and our child. Our child, who shares both of our blood

Artist's Statement

I wanted to write this for the same reason I remember the faces of the many houseless, abandoned, and mentally uncared for individuals I grew up seeing every day in my neighborhood. These people are just as important as my memory of them. My ultimate goal in this piece is to do justice to their memory and speak about a topic that has been so formative in my understanding of life. I am inspired most frequently as a script writer and for me, the medium of film is one of our best ways of instigating empathy. The act of story telling itself has the power to start a ripple effect of social change and the growth of social consciousness. It is a form that is adaptable to whichever story needs telling in the moment and the art is inherent to the social evolution of our culture. Human culture. Now in time there is no denying the global interconnectedness of the world and with a platform such as story telling there is the opportunity to emit an echo that can be heard collectively by millions of souls. The control of the story's creation is what weaponizes the act. Which stories are being told, by whom, and at what times, serves to influence and manipulate common culture which echoes into public opinion and topples into painfully real consequences. Our words are more powerful than we could imagine and that is something I have come to find as an undergraduate fellow. The depiction of psychosis is no contradiction to the norm, as the schizo-affective, psychotic, schizophrenic mind is termed 'unwell' and therefore treated as an unjustifiable truth in society. A piece that does not fit that many wishes could be ignored and swept away, and my intention with this piece is to challenge that apathy. In no way is my aim to diminish the often debilitating severity of these mental conditions, but my point is to instead confront and dismantle the language of sickness that is used to vilify and marginalize people who are suffering. What authority dictates whose mind is labeled

‘unwell’? Why do some cultures respect these mental states as spiritual abilities? I would not claim to know the answer to these questions, but my hope is that by telling stories we can come closer with our spirits to predict what those answers might feel like.

Equally as important, is understanding the unconscious inception of language. We as artists and writers are not drawing from a neutral, sanitized well of words. There is a blood soaked history in the English language, as it has been used for centuries to subjugate and dominate. Historically speaking, English as written language has been a flash in the pan and it is a novel way of augmenting conscious experience but the act of storytelling has existed much longer. When looking at modernity in the west the compounding narrative that is human history is almost exclusively viewed through eurocentric, christian literary frameworks. Our modern examples of great literature and explorations of self have resulted from a domino effect, which we can trace to the Age of Enlightenment of the 1700s. The era that defined intellectual superiority as white and male. Of course this supremacist artifice has shattered and slowly crumbled over the last 300 or so years, but the ruins of such a devastating institution remain. They are the same distorted plains that can allow scientific inquiry and medicine to be used to harm and control non-white, non-male bodies. It is the same genesis that allowed for malicious diagnosis of hysteria to be forced onto women who refused a subservient role. The same sin that changed schizophrenia from being accepted as a disease afflicting “non-violent, white, petty criminals,” to instead being disproportionately diagnosed in black revolutionaries during the civil rights era.

In all, I am not claiming that my story will change the way people with psychotic disorders. I will get a lot wrong in this piece, and I will enter it into the colosseum of public opinion so it may be ripped apart. What I hope will come of it is a conversation about our scientific and humanistic practices. I hope it will challenge readers into questioning why they hold certain beliefs about psychosis and schizophrenia. My goal with this piece was to add to the conversation and not be afraid to be wrong, but instead be ready to learn with care about those people who inspired me as a boy.

Bibliography

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Meztiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
Bosky, Bernadette Lynn. “Mental Disorders Portrayed in Literature | EBSCO.” *EBSCO Information Services, Inc.* | www.ebsco.com, 2023.

- <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/mental-disorders-portrayed-literature>. Claridge, Gordon, Ruth Pryor, and Gwen Watkins. *Sounds from the Bell Jar*. Palgrave MacMillan, 1990.
- Copeland, Valire Carr, and Kimberly Snyder. "Barriers to Mental Health Treatment Services for Low-Income African American Women Whose Children Receive Behavioral Health Services: An Ethnographic Investigation." *Social Work in Public Health* 26, no. 1 (January 2011): 78–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911350903341036>.
- Fineberg, S. K., S. Deutsch-Link, M. Ichinose, T. McGuinness, A. J. Bessette, C. K. Chung, and P. R. Corlett. "Word Use in First-Person Accounts of Schizophrenia." *British Journal of Psychiatry* 206, no. 1 (January 2015): 32–38. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.113.140046>.
- Jarvis, G. Eric. "Cultural Variations in Psychosis: Recent Research and Clinical Implications." *Transcultural Psychiatry*, March 25, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634615251324088>.
- Kane, Sarah. *4.48 Psychosis*. 2000. Reprint, Methuen, 2015.
- Lane, Christopher. "How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease: An Interview with Jonathan Metzl." *Psychology Today*, May 5, 2010. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201005/how-schizophrenia-became-black-disease-interview-jonathan-metzl>.
- Louis Arnorsson Sass. *Madness and Modernism : Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Melegkovits, Eirini Aikaterini, Rui Tang, Olivia Pounds, Katie Ashcroft, Paul Jung, Helen Kennerley, Peter Fonagy, and Michael Bloomfield. "The Experience and Role of Dissociation in Psychosis Following Developmental Trauma: A Systematic Review." *Clinical Psychology Review*, February 26, 2025, 102564. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2025.102564>.
- Pernas, Breeana. "Cultural Competency Training and Clinician Decision-Making in Involuntary Psychiatric Holds" *Imagine: A Promise & McNair Scholars Undergraduate Journal*, 2025. <https://imagine.sa.ucsb.edu/issue/68/2026/cultural-competency-training-and-clinician-decision-making-involuntary-psychiatric>.
- Woods, Angela. "Rethinking 'Patient Testimony' in the Medical Humanities: The Case of Schizophrenia Bulletin's First Person Accounts." *The Journal of Literature and Science* 6, no. 1 (September 8, 2013): 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.12929/jls.06.1.03>.
- Woods-Giscombe, Cheryl, Millicent Nicolle Robinson, Dana Carthon, Stephanie Devane-Johnson, and Giselle Corbie-Smith. "Superwoman Schema, Stigma, Spirituality, and Culturally Sensitive Providers: Factors Influencing African American Women's Use of Mental Health Services." *Journal of Best Practices in Health Professions Diversity : Research, Education and Policy* 9, no. 1 (2016): 1124. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7544187/#R45>.

Unresolved Histories, Untold Narratives: AIDS and the Social
Responsibility of Language in “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”
by Mia Octavio
Critical Essay

What is AIDS? What does AIDS mean to those who do not have the voice to express their experience with it? These are the questions that have, ironically, plagued Samuel R. Delany in his consideration of language and the impact of signification when it comes to the condition. AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is a chronic health condition caused by HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). The medical field additionally classifies AIDS in three stages: Acute HIV, then Chronic HIV, and, finally, AIDS (NIH). Language is a power in and of itself, especially through the medium of writing. Within the history of AIDS specifically, this appeared in media ranging from medical terminology and broadcast television, to activist pamphlets, each telling their own specific narrative about the condition and the context surrounding it. It has called many names over the course of its existence, such as “GRID” (Gay-Related Immunodeficiency), the “4-H” disease (referring to its supposed special impact on homosexuals, heroin users, hemophiliacs, and Haitians), and even “gay cancer.”¹ These names not only delineate the context, effects, and meaning of the condition, they also create a space of metaphoric meaning-making, upon which anyone involved with this language is able to project their own cultural and social interpretation onto it. In this way, AIDS as a metaphor provides multiple mirrors into life at this time, providing medical professionals, politicians, and everyday people with ideas to grasp onto when so much was unknown about the condition.

However, these ideas were not necessarily correct and thus sowed even more misinformation about the true impact and experience of AIDS. In this way, AIDS as a term itself, as well as a physical condition, became and continues to be a source of stigma through its various metaphorical connotations, each stemming from those projected initial interpretations (which, in turn, contained and projected their own biases). How, then, can we think about and deconstruct metaphor so that the voices that truly need to be heard and understood can finally be put forward? How might we view “objectivity” differently when it comes to previous and even current definitions of our world and the people within it? Many scholars have attempted to create a discourse around the linguistic significance of AIDS metaphors. Susan Sontag identifies this issue directly in her works, *Illness as Metaphor*

¹ “Gay cancer” and “4-H” emerged into medical and public conversation in 1981, while “GRID” was created by the New York Times in 1982. “Haitians” were only taken off of disease centers’ AIDS high risk list in 1985.

and *AIDS and its Metaphors*: she decries the use of metaphor when referencing illness, especially those which have generated numerous losses and are relatively unknown in terms of medical research. With AIDS in particular, Sontag argues that metaphors around it should be completely eliminated, as they only lead to stigmatization and further harm toward people with the condition. (Sontag 3, 4) However, Delany's own work complicates this argument, instead pointing out that metaphor is an inevitable part of life, as it provides a collective understanding of concepts ("How can one make a recognizable pattern that isn't a document of its times?"). (Delany 249) In this way, the real issue and struggle lies within finding the correct metaphors to use and critically examining the ones already embedded within the public consciousness. Leo Bersani similarly positions himself against current narratives around AIDS, arguing that gay joy and pleasure, especially as it pertains to the rectum, become acts of self-annihilation due to the constraints and stigma that society holds. However, it does not take into account the liberatory nature of queer pleasure. Samuel R. Delany's story, "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals," offers an alternative to previous conceptualizations of AIDS and proves that accurate delineation is a linguistic responsibility of those who have the power and ability to define.

Delany demonstrates the ubiquitous and ever-changing nature of language within his own fictional world of Nevèrÿon by presenting multiple narratives that are connected to and represent the central plot in their own perspective, but whose voices and stories are not equally visible. Narrative and perspective thus become linguistic and literary tools which individuals and groups can utilize to forward their own interpretation of the past; crossing temporal boundaries and informing future readers their versions of history. This has severe implications for those who are not allowed this visibility, who may hold differing opinions or play a key role in discursive conversations but are not allowed to assert their own subjectivity within it.

AIDS as Plague

One of the defining metaphors attributed to AIDS is that of plague. The word "plague" itself derives from the Latin *plāga*, meaning 'stroke' or wound,' as well as from the Middle Dutch *plāge*, or *plāghe*, meaning 'wound,' 'divine affliction,' and later linguistically moving into 'punishment' (OED). In metaphorical considerations, Sontag notes that plague has long been used as the "highest standard of collective calamity, evil, scourge." (132)

This definition mainly refers to mass epidemics; however, instead of being characterized by its sheer number of casualties, it is considered on the basis of its dehumanizing, defiling, destructive nature. Considerations of these ills were then turned inward, specifically through examinations and social critiques of the marked, or ‘contaminated’ body. Along with the direct physical symptoms of HIV/AIDS, AIDS can also lead to increased lesions, scarring, etc. due to the body’s increased receptiveness to opportunistic infections (OIs) (Altman, Vanness, and Westergaard). Many have seen this body as a representation of the mutilation that society has gone through, a visual and visceral map of divine punishment. In these, the body becomes a central site of discourse and examination, especially as medical research attempts to identify the physical (and, unintentionally, the social) illness that is HIV/AIDS. In placing the emphasis on the body and not the person, people with AIDS increasingly became isolated and dehumanized.

Delany first includes the metaphor of plague as Sontag describes it: an indicator of the “ills” that society has manifested through poor social organization and behaviors. He mentions that AIDS is “connected with...perverted sex” in order to metatextually comment on how it has been popularly characterized, and his characters have their own inherent biases against certain groups in their own definitions of their “plague”:

“‘Is that what *they’re* talking about...?’ She looked up at the ceiling. ‘All those poor, sick men Lord Vanar brought back here to talk? He must have twenty-five of them in there with him! And the two women. Are they really ill with it too? Women aren’t supposed to get it. That’s what I heard anyway. That would be just horrible, if *everybody* could get it...’” (Delany 253)

This conversation takes place between two female members of Lord Vanar’s kitchen staff, who know he has a mysterious condition and wants to connect with others who have it as well. This type of speculation ultimately demonstrates just how deeply one’s moral judgements and personal biases can get, especially with the italicized “*they’re*” and “*everybody*”—while Larla, the kitchen girl, may appear to be worried about her and her conversation partner’s health, this language still reflects an othering of the characters with the condition and positions her as supposedly above them, physically and morally.

Delany also comments on and critiques the language associated with various solutions to the so-called “plague,” such as medicine, religion, and social improvement. Through

grouping the narratives within his story into a numbered list, Delany reflects a clinical attitude that is characteristic of the language of the medical field at this time. What first seems like an ambiguous amalgamation of past and present, fiction and reality, ultimately turns into a logical flow from one idea to the next. The numbers in this list seemingly provide a sense of rationality and reassurance, which the actual content of the narrative heavily contradicts. The characters' (and Delany's) experiences are complicated, confusing, and muddled even in their own retellings; yet, they are all brought together into a narrative of his creation.

This intentional manipulation of narrative is the very thing Delany seeks to address: when done via historical or political retelling, people's diverse and nuanced experiences become flattened and reshaped into a narrative that best suits the institutions that are creating such information. Delany attempts to reflect how complex and even contradictory historical experiences get rearranged and retold in ways that feel much more linear and cohesive than they actually might have been. This ultimately harms marginalized people, as their voices get subsequently diminished and their stories eventually fade out of collective memory (if they were ever remembered in the first place).

As can be seen with narratives around AIDS, this resulted in real and damaging consequences for many, largely including Black and brown members of the queer community. In his work, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," Leo Bersani similarly identifies that power comes from the ability to control and define narrative, regardless of whether it accurately represents majority opinion or not. For example, he notes that much of the media surrounding AIDS at this time focused on exposing the identities of people with AIDS as part of a "'moral' fury" toward homosexuality and intravenous drug use. (201) To him, this ultimately served as a social 'testing-point' of the public's willingness to tolerate real acts of violence toward people with AIDS:

...such things as the Justice Department's near recommendation that people with AIDS be thrown out of their jobs suggest that if Edwin Meese would not hold a gun to the head of a man with AIDS, he might not find the murder of a gay man with AIDS (or without AIDS?) intolerable or unbearable. (201)

Ultimately, these narratives contained what Paula A. Treichler identified as an "epidemic of signification," which brought to light the fact that pure scientific objectivity is not the only

construction of AIDS that exists and is taken in by the public; instead, what is more impactful within the public consciousness is its social and symbolic nature that pervade all other forms of knowledge about it. (35) Ultimately, it is the social atmosphere around which AIDS as a term was constructed that shaped and cemented the public cultural imagination of AIDS even into today. In “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals,” this power is wielded similarly to our known world, with a bureaucratic political elite controlling the dominant cultural narrative surrounding what many in the fictional community of Nevèrÿon are calling a “plague.” Through his idiosyncratic narrative structure and metafictional approach to this language, then, Delany ultimately displays the pitfalls and hypocrisies of targeted language through demonstrating how it operates, then dismantling it in front of our very eyes.

Delany also critiques Sontag’s push to eliminate all metaphors associated with AIDS, acknowledging that metaphor is an inevitable and inescapable facet of life. (226) Metaphor creates common meaning and allows for information to be effectively shared with others; to Delany, it is less about abolishing it altogether than it is about finding accurate, respectful, and nuanced language to supplement the pre-existing stereotypes that already exist. Moreover, he additionally introduces the concept of the “radical reader” as being more successful in interpretation than the “radical metaphor”, which refers to the capabilities of the reader’s own form of meaning-making. (348) In the case of the text itself, there is only so much information it can provide, but in the reader, there are countless possibilities for what meaning can be derived from a certain work or piece of language, many times going far beyond what the creator initially intended. When it comes to metaphors around AIDS, then, it becomes even more crucial to interact with the language critically and purposefully in order to alleviate this “epidemic.”

AIDS as Carnival

AIDS is also commonly seen as a result of hedonistic pleasures and practices, of openly identifying and/or living outside of ‘traditional’ societal norms (e.g. being non-heterosexual in the US or being an injection drug user). The condition itself, being so closely linked to death, and its supposed active causes, became synonymous with evil or moral undoing. It was thought of not only as a physical condition but a moral contamination, becoming a marker of stigma and social exile for those who simply contracted the condition. This metaphorical fear of contamination was simultaneously heightened by the way in which health centers identified

AIDS symptoms in patients at the time: the search for symptoms that led to a diagnosis of AIDS or HIV led to heightened medical surveillance overall, which in turn, created an atmosphere of increased paranoia and gave individuals with AIDS more incentive to suppress their symptoms. For example, the CDC initially required all AIDS patients to disclose their names to a public database, essentially making them an easily-accessible target for social scrutiny. (Fairchild et al.) The initial fear about AIDS that arose among the general public was eventually aimed toward the people who were most acutely suffering from it.

The miasma theory of illness—the theory that one’s environment can lead to either illness or health, and that a ‘bad’ or ‘filthy’ environment is more likely to cause disease—has perpetuated culturally even after germ theory was proven. In the throes of the AIDS crisis, misinformation about the condition led many people to believe that it could be caught anywhere; in the television film *An Early Frost*, for instance, the main character’s family refuses to come into physical contact with him on the sole basis of him having HIV. (Erman) Additionally, the idea that individuals received AIDS due to promiscuous or illegal behaviors pervaded the public consciousness and ultimately painted individuals with AIDS as physically and morally corrupting, especially through the use of terms such as “AIDS carrier,” when in reality, AIDS itself cannot be “carried” or “brought over” to others. (Wald)

As Delany describes it, this theory not only perpetuates peoples’ psyches, it also may engender certain physical reactions. This is evident when an unnamed man comes up to the Bridge of Lost Desire and begins smashing it to pieces with a sledgehammer, arguing that it is “[t]o protect [him]self and the other good people of the city from this sickness that kills all who catch it” (264). Eventually, it is revealed that he has a male lover who has contracted the disease, alluding to the fact that this act of violence is really just his manner of expressing his shame and complicated feelings toward himself and his lover. The stigma that specific popular narratives shaped around AIDS ultimately propagate the public’s fear and allow for violence to occur.

Additionally, the Calling of the Amnewor in Nevèrÿon is the spiritual and physical manifestation of this violence, actively expressing the anxieties that its society holds onto; one of the members of the Calling describes the ceremony as “deeply consoling to those too troubled or too cynical to celebrate the political positivism celebrating above in the streets.” (261). A manifestation of the Bakhtinian Carnival, it is the actions and ideology of this underground cult that ultimately express the closest truth to the inner thoughts of aboveground society.

Throughout this story, Delany's inclusion of multiple narrators reflects a larger commentary on the issues that metaphor can bring. The use of multiple perspectives on both the same and different realities demonstrates that while everyone is connected together in this larger story (and as humans), the titles and names that these characters hold makes readers question which reality they are witnessing at a single moment. Delany has the tendency to introduce the subject of the numbered 'part' of the story only midway through their first sentence or phrase, such as with this line: "At nineteen, the Master explained." The ambiguity created then challenges readers' assumptions and asks them to critically consider the role and purpose of certain narratives, as well as to examine their own initial assumptions of whose narrative this belongs to. Ultimately, the plethora of unknowns surrounding HIV/AIDS at the time became the source of misinformation and gradual discrimination against those who needed the most support.

Although traditional media painted homosexuality as horribly excessive, indulgent, and carnivalesque, the carnival also became a form of resistance, defying both the demands of the popular prophylactic attitude towards queer people and the respectability politics within the queer community.² Cynthia Barounis labels this work as "antiprophyllactic citizenship," which refers to the radical acceptance of openness, of permeability, and of weakness in order to build a more comprehensive and supportive community (Barounis 1). This works to undo the idea of individual success and meritocracy, which capitalism encapsulates, and places power into the hands of the historically disadvantaged: queer and disabled individuals. Because of this, antiprophyllactic citizenship becomes an inherently carnivalesque political tactic.

Within the larger gay liberation movement, an ideological schism began to emerge between the 'homosexual' (a person who indulged in same-sex, promiscuous fantasies) and the 'gay' individual (a political and social identity that in every way defied the normative ideation of personhood and fought actively for their rights) (Bersani 1987). The 'carnival' nature of homosexuality and of queer activism seeks to upend traditional social, political, and cultural structures and create a space which is loud, unapologetic, and active in embracing pleasure. This intentional act of embracing pleasure is what Delany's works are firmly centered around. Delany first explores this notion of the carnivalesque through directly referencing Bakhtin's work, *Rabelais and His World*, which explores the notion of carnival as "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and...the temporary abolition of all hierarchical relations, privileges,

² A notable example of this is with the work of Gran Fury, an AIDS activist group that self-produced bold, striking, and confrontational pieces of art that were then distributed across New York City.

norms, and prohibitions.” (Bakhtin). In “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” specifically, the Bridge of Lost Desire functions as a known spot for cruising and prostitution, becoming a central site of unregulated, unrestrained public sex. Just as in real life within the “free sex” mentality of the late ‘60s and most of the ‘70s, locations such as the Bridge of Lost Desire became spots of unabashed desire and pleasure, free of social restrictions around sexuality, queerness, or even the notion of shame.

The idea of the carnival and carnivalesque as inherently upturning social conventions and rules on its head is especially utilized in Delany’s frank and open retelling of his (and others’) varied sexual encounters. In an interview about the novel by VISUAL AIDS, Delany stated that people “had to be specific and honest about sex” and if they were not, “people were gonna die” (VISUAL AIDS 34:15). The inclusion of sexual desire and sexual experiences in such detail serves as a tool for better and more accurate understanding of the realities that people most surrounded by AIDS face.

In a much more literal sense, the carnival within the world of Nevèrÿon is held by the government in order to create a distraction against the real horrors of the development of what its citizens call a “plague.” It is a political maneuver used as an excuse to lead citizens and politicians away from the reality of the situation and redirect their attention and efforts elsewhere. This is exemplified in the language used around the minister’s implementation of the carnival, in which they exclaim, “And that...should get their minds off this unbearable plague!” (Delany 224) The minister is the embodiment of the state, of the bureaucratic process that, through its languid pace of enacting real change, ultimately fails its most disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens. Ironically, the very notion of carnival that Delany himself hopes to impart on audiences is warped and appropriated, a very intentional critique on the part of the author of the way in which the political administration failed to act quickly enough within the AIDS crisis and instead attempted to turn the public’s head and heart elsewhere.

AIDS as War/Revolution

In the early years of what would be termed the AIDS crisis, war was rampant. Specifically, this was with cultural wars, such as the “War on Drugs,” or the “War on Crime,” and especially the “War on Cancer.”³ While these were all intensive government projects to reshape policy,

³ To situate these in a larger historical context, the “War on Drugs” began in 1971 and went on until about 2009, the “War on Crime” was officially declared in 1965, and the “War on Cancer” began in 1971 with President Nixon’s signing of the National Cancer Act into law.

economics, and science, what would largely be remembered in this period is their influence on culture. This supposed ‘War on AIDS’ was similar to these other cultural conflicts in terms of messaging but differed in approach. Throughout the AIDS crisis, queer people experienced two different types of violence: passive neglect and active targeting.

Passive violence toward people with AIDS in the early 1980s happened mainly through silence. While AIDS was medically recognized in 1981, it took President Ronald Reagan four additional years to even mention the term publicly. (Boffey) Instead of a typical act of warfare, in which places and people would be actively destroyed, the government effectively eliminated people and targeted spaces by neglecting to mention them at all. If these groups were not brought to the public’s attention, then there would be no incentive from the public to attend to them or provide them with resources. Because of this, willful omission of even the word “AIDS” did irreparable damage to its most vulnerable victims.

Additionally, initial language defining and contextualizing AIDS painted certain groups as deserving of social stigma. The colloquial term “4-H disease” or “4-H club” ultimately targeted queer people, intravenous drug users, and Africans, making them appear as invading attackers who intentionally and insidiously spread their AIDS to others (Gonsalves and Staley). While these groups became ostracized, other groups were then seen as being outside labeled criteria for HIV/AIDS and thus tragically remained outside medical awareness. The initial term of “GRID,” for instance, implies that HIV/AIDS could only be attributed to homosexuals; however, this was later proved to be medically inaccurate and could be transferrable to anyone, regardless of sexuality (CDC). In turn, this term created a false sense of security that the virus would only be passed onto those outside ‘normal’ (straight) society and thus further devalued the motivation to fund AIDS research, ultimately becoming a liability to all potential recipients in the process (‘normal’ or not).

A similar type of rhetoric can be seen with Nari’s reaction to Pheron’s condition in “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals”: she cannot believe that someone she is close to has obtained this disease, especially being in close social proximity to herself, who she considers to be “normal” in comparison (Delany 188, 189). However, as Delany insinuates that this unnamed disease functions similarly to HIV/AIDS, then Nari is as much susceptible to getting it as Pheron was. By scapegoating certain groups and ignoring others, AIDS metaphors resulted in different types of violence toward virtually the entire public population and contributed to unnecessary fear and paranoia.

A different type of violence arose (or, in reality, was just justified in happening) as a manifestation of the fear that was built up through years of misinformation and targeted language. This violence was wide-ranging across its targets, affecting prominent queer leaders and everyday people alike, and was also wide-ranging in the sense that violent acts occurred at the macro and micro levels of society. This was aligned with a supposed “moral fury” coming up during moments of crisis, which engendered and justified violence at multiple levels (Bersani). This increased presentation of violence, whether hypothetical or real, also served as a testing-point for the “general public” (meaning mainly middle-class, white heterosexuals) to gauge if they were willing to tolerate or express indifference towards violence targeting queer people (Bersani).

Sontag comments on the dichotomy of the AIDS patient as either ‘sufferer’ or ‘attacker’: in this language, a person with AIDS becomes either a passive victim of a condition that weakens them physically and socially (also taking away male patients’ masculinity, making their body fragile, thin, and weak) or an active participant in activities that ‘give’ them the condition (unprotected sex, IV drug use, etc.), making them ‘deserving’ of it (Sontag 125). This theory shines light onto the harmful reality of narratives around AIDS, especially those that dehumanize and fearmonger.⁴ These descriptions tend to center around violent and military-like language (such as referring to the body’s “defense system” in “fighting off” the condition), which implicitly work to reinforce a masculine standard of ‘normalcy’ (Kruger 42)

Delany addresses the real war: signification. He does so in part with his use of metafiction, demonstrating that it is a responsibility to ensure that one is telling a version of history that benefits and represents all. The Master’s discourse that occurs throughout the story describes how “monsters” can be created from others’ interpretations and additions of bias into larger narratives (Delany). Throughout the telling and retelling of his own narrative, as well as telling the narrative of his personal hero and finding that is it anything but fixed and linear, the Master ultimately comes to understand the true stakes and purpose that language can hold, especially as it comes to define a past and present that are rapidly changing.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Delany recognizes the power and potential of metaphors around AIDS and

⁴ It is important to note, however, that Sontag’s commentary on the emasculating nature of AIDS does contradict Cynthia Barounis’s concept of vulnerability as power and paints the muscular male body as the epitome of positive empowerment. Critically examining which bodies are given agency, respect, and power is essential to this work, even and especially within other theorists’ works.

recontextualizes them in his work in order to promote the voices that have historically been left out of conversations about the condition. He does so specifically through examining and then reimagining AIDS as plague, as carnival, and as war, each time emphasizing the complexity and nuance within these labels and the simultaneous role they played in queer identification and subjugation. Furthermore, Delany notes that the fight for adequate representation, this “epidemic of signification,” is not over. The rhetoric seen representing AIDS is emblematic of a much larger trend in past and future events, where the dominating group in power capitalizes on moments of crisis in order to define unknown entities as they wish, maintaining their positions of authority and finding a more marginalized group to scapegoat. Even calling the AIDS epidemic an epidemic is false and limited in scope; in labeling this period of intense loss and grief within the US as an all-encompassing “era” or “crisis” that is applicable to history does a great disservice to those who are still facing AIDS as a death sentence abroad.

AIDS is still prominent and deadly in the Global South, and many people who live in it are fighting to get basic resources and medicine that US citizens have largely had access to for decades now. The ‘crisis’ of AIDS did not get eradicated; it simply shifted locations. AIDS did not simply ‘end’ in 1995, with the creation of HIV medicine; instead, we must shift our efforts and gaze to those who are in need of support, whose voices need to be spotlighted. It is through active retelling of the past and learning from it that we might make a better future, but only if we do the work to remember and remember well.

Bibliography

- Altman, K., Vanness, E., & Westergaard, R. P. (2015).” Cutaneous manifestations of human immunodeficiency virus: a clinical update.” *Current infectious disease reports*, 17(3), 464. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11908-015-0464-y>
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2025). *Rabelais and his world* (S. Sandler, Trans.). The MIT Press.
- Barounis, C. (2020). *Vulnerable Constitutions: Queerness, Disability, and the Remaking of American Manhood*. USA: Temple University Press.
- Bersani, L. (1987). “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*. Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press.
- Boffey, P. (1985). “Reagan Defends Financing for AIDS.” *New York Times*.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1982). “Current Trends Update on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) --United States”. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001163.htm>.
- Delany, S. R. (1985). “The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals” in *Flight from Nevèrjôn*. New York, USA: Bantam Books.

- Erman, J. (1985). *An Early Frost* [Film]. NBC Productions.
- Fairchild, A. L., Gable, L., Gostin, L. O., Bayer, R., Sweeney, P., & Janssen, R. S. (2007). "Public goods, private data: HIV and the history, ethics, and uses of identifiable public health information." *Public health reports* (Washington, D.C.: 1974), 122 Suppl 1(Suppl 1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549071220S103>.
- Gonsalves, G. & Staley, P. (2014). "Panic, Paranoia, and Public Health — The AIDS Epidemic's Lessons for Ebola." *New England Journal of Medicine* 371(25). Massachusetts, USA: Massachusetts Medical Society.
- Kruger, S. F. (1996). *AIDS Narratives: Gender and Sexuality, Fiction and Science*. USA: Routledge.
- National Institute of Health. (2025). "The Stages of HIV Infection." Retrieved May 17 from <https://hivinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/stages-hiv-infection>.
- Oxford Dictionary. (n.d.). Plague. In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved May 17 from https://www.oed.com/dictionary/plague_n?tl=true&tab=etymology.
- Sontag, S. (1988). *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York, USA: Picador USA.
- Treichler, P. A. (1987). "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification." *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*. Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press.
- VISUAL AIDS. (2022). "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals: Samuel R. Delany with Tavia Nyong'o." New York City: VISUAL AIDS.
- Wald, P. (2008). *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. New York, USA: Duke University Press.

If You're Cold, They're Cold, Invite Them Into Your House!: Examining Home Spaces and Vampiricism in *Interview with the Vampire*

by Dia Kai Singh

Critical Essay

The vampire haunts the thresholds of the Western literary imagination, with each iteration warning us not to let the monster in (or, at least, to let the right one in). In this injunction against the monstrous figure, we can read our fears about the invasion of the domestic space, the boundaries of our communities, and the acts of violence that pervade our most intimate spaces. Anne Rice's southern Gothic *Interview with the Vampire*, imagines the boundary-violating figure of the vampire as a natural feature of the New Orleans landscape. In her transposition of the vampire from its folkloric home across Europe, Rice retools the vampire in ways that speak to the specific relationships of American southerners to space, ownership, community, and domestic life under colonialism, slavery and Reconstruction. With the vampire figure, Rice interrogates not only the instability of the domestic sphere, but the very definitions of home, family, intimacy, and belonging under Gothic modernity. In the novel, thresholds cease to function solely as physical boundaries and instead become deeply interpersonal and ideological ones, governing relationships between lovers, parents and children, masters and dependents, humans and monsters. I argue that the vampire's invitation into the home symbolizes more than simple physical access; it represents the collapse of normative social structures that traditionally sustain domestic life. Rice's vampires infiltrate and reconstruct these spaces from within, transforming bedrooms, coffins, and familial units into uncanny sites suspended between life and death, love and violence, desire and consumption.

Through Louis, Lestat, and Claudia's distorted family structure, *Interview with the Vampire* presents the domestic sphere as something perpetually vulnerable to corruption, yet equally capable of producing alternative forms of intimacy outside heteronormative and religious expectations. The vampire thus emerges not merely as a supernatural predator haunting the edges of society, but as a disruptive domestic force that exposes the fragility of the systems meant to define humanity itself. By examining the thresholds present throughout the novel—between human and monster, guest and intruder, family and performance, life and undeath—Rice reveals how the southern Gothic vampire consumes the very spaces designed to contain it, transforming the house into a liminal site where social anxieties surrounding sexuality, death, race, and kinship are made disturbingly visible.

Part One: The City Scape

Interview With The Vampire maintains a heady, heavy, sibylline atmosphere that can be directly associated with its setting in 1791 New Orleans. New Orleans in the late 18th-century was an untamed swamp, undergoing major shifts from French colonial rule to a Spanish colonial port city with a predatory economy built on sugar plantations. Its dense vegetation and uncomfortably high humidity levels were major points of contention for colonial powers, who, in turn, brought in massive cohorts of African slaves to build New Orleans from the ground up. This sultry atmosphere was also a point of controversy for white homogeneity in totality.¹ With its inaccessible nature to foreigners, hidden predators, and capacity for concealing both dangers and goods, the swamp acts as a physical manifestation of the European crisis and confusion — assuming a form like the racialized “jungle” environment. If the jungle space was simply a space of crisis however, it would not be settled and exploited.

On the contrary, the tantalizing, “forbidden desire” of the jungle comes from its paradoxical nature and informs colonial desire. As Tracy Ann Watts explains, “in [the] extreme conditions that ultimately promised the transformation of the European newcomer, New Orleans, as the capital of the Louisiana colony, was created even in its initial history to include the simultaneous possibilities of Eden and destruction” (Watts 10). This double-sided coin is more properly distilled in the ideas of primitivism, which emphasizes the exotic, the unknown, and the pre-colonial world. The primitive made manifest, New Orleans looks to consume whiteness into denigration. Rice’s vampires are able to look to primitivism as a blessing and a curse—New Orleans acting as the bestower of both.

Rice is drawing on a history of vampires as primitivist figures in Europe. Dracula,² the first popularized vampiric figure in media, exists in the liminal space of colonizer and colonized. The fact that Dracula is specifically Romanian also deepens the nuances of his disruptiveness, as Romanian immigration into English society in Victorian times had skyrocketed due to the failed Wallachian revolution of 1848.³ Romania returns in *IWTV* as

1 For more, see Watts, Tracey Ann “New Orleans as an American jungle| Colonial roots and capitalist representations.”

2 In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the count’s Romanian heritage informs his vampiricism, marking him as a foreign figure who threatens the European main characters both physically and socially. Dracula’s deviance from the austerity of Victorian moral norms and conventions signals him as a disrupting force to English society, with his desire to be in England making him a creeping, queer threat. Stoker’s calling out of Dracula’s Romanian origins allows him to physically embody the Victorian anxiety of “blood-sucking” immigrants taking British jobs, contaminating society, and straining the welfare state.

3The history around this is fascinating! For more insight on this, see Matiuta, Cristina “Romanian Diaspora in the Middle 19th Century and its View on Modernization”

vampire Louis and his adoptive daughter Claudia travel to Europe in order to find more vampires. During their search they go to Romania and Hungary, where the vampires prove to be disappointing, “mindless corpses” consumed by hunger and wrath. As they grow more despondent with each mindless vampire, Louis and Claudia attempt to rationalize their existence as possibly the only intelligent vampires on Earth. Rice hints at Dracula as a similarly mindless vampire, correlating Romanian vampiricism with senseless animalism. The disdain for Dracula’s primitivism then begs the question: what is the ‘right’ kind of primitivism that allows for a mindful vampire?

Rice’s answer is simple. Not only must whiteness be conflicting with the primitive, but it cannot be a whiteness that is already deemed primitive. Louis manages to establish himself in this space of whiteness through his family history of plantation farming. However, by doing so, he also sets himself up as vulnerable to vampiricism. We see in the beginning of the novel Louis remarking on his origins as

both luxurious and primitive. And we ourselves found it extremely attractive. You see, we lived far better there than we could have ever lived in France. Perhaps the sheer wilderness of Louisiana only made it seem so, but seeming so, it was. (Rice 4)

For Louis to champion New Orleans as “far better...than France” (Rice 4) therein foreshadows his own primitiveness, which enmeshes within him the contradictions necessary for the vampire to exist. The same liminal space between primitivism and civilization is, for Louis—and on a larger scale, the vampire—the same space that New Orleans is placed in, allowing for both vampiricism and the “jungle” to re-enforce each other.

Rice therefore isolates Louis and Claudia as the only true vampires, casting aside the vampire’s ‘peasant foreigner’ roots in favor of the intellectual, Machiavellian, colonial vampire. The colonial vampire is then presented as singular in its intelligence, fitness, and capabilities, enhancing the dichotomy between a primitive, mindless world and an intelligent, civilized world. The framework of primitivism continues as Louis and Claudia’s journey takes them to France. Their entrance in France begins with a sense of awe and rejuvenation, marking a new beginning for both of them. In the modern day interview, Louis reminisces on his first view of Paris by comparing it to New Orleans:

Paris overwhelmed, and lightened and rewarded more richly than any promise. It was the mother of New Orleans, understand that first; it had given New Orleans its life, its first populace; and it was what New Orleans had for so long tried to be. But New Orleans, though beautiful and desperately alive, was desperately fragile. There was something forever savage and primitive there, something that threatened the exotic and sophisticated life both from within and without. Not an inch of those wooden streets nor a brick of the crowded Spanish houses had not been bought from the fierce wilderness that forever surrounded the city, ready to engulf it. Hurricanes, floods, fevers, the plague—and the damp of the Louisiana climate itself worked tirelessly on every hewn plank or stone facade, so that New Orleans seemed at all times like a dream in the imagination of her striving populace, a dream held intact at every second by a tenacious, though unconscious, collective will (Rice 120).

Within Louis's observations lies the fundamental notion of becoming and unbecoming. The emphasis on the Spanish houses within a duplicated Paris forces Louis himself to acknowledge the cultural hybridization of New Orleans, with the variety in architecture aesthetics houses serves as a physical marker of New Orleans's wild and unmanaged diversity that is not caught up in the homogenized sophistication of Paris. The primitivistic view of New Orleans is paired with a sense of decay and duplication; a clone of Paris made inherently wrong and forever suspended in a liminal space. By establishing the setting in this decayed space, the novel points not only to the fragility of society, but the delicate nature of Western civilization itself. Fragility also acts as a stepping stone for racialized considerations of population. France is described to have birthed New Orleans and provided it with "its first populace," but fails in reproducing itself in New Orleans completely, leaving behind a tense space ultimately lacking strength and conviction due to the forever savage and primitive nature that threatens the sophisticated life both externally and internally. The inclusion of an "internal" savagery ties the New Orleanians with an inherent weakness and wild nature; a frank claim that the diverse, majority black and brown inhabiting New Orleans are a necessary factor in demarcating it as "savage."

Watts notes that "[b]ound by swampland that resisted development... New Orleans was perceived from its earliest colonial days as a community bound by unconquerable wildness and threatened by baleful conditions potentially capable of consuming the city." (7) The consuming nature of New Orleans parallels the consuming nature of vampiricism

wherein a similarly predatory, unconquerable wilderness overshadows Louis's will. Louis's struggle throughout the novel against this dissolution poises him as the martyr of colonialism; dying for the sins of New Orleans, and returning as the physical manifestation of the city.

Part Two: The Domestic Household

The corruption of the domestic household and relations throughout the novel becomes central for vampirism to destabilize human social order. Rice repeatedly situates horror not only within acts of violence, but within the desecration of the familial home itself. The house, traditionally associated with safety, childhood, and generational continuity, instead becomes a site of rot, predation, and emotional decay. Vampirism infiltrates the domestic sphere and transforms it into something parasitic, where the structures meant to preserve life and kinship instead consume them. This corruption of the childhood house mirrors the corruption of the family unit itself, as intimacy becomes indistinguishable from domination and violence.

Further, this corruption replicates what psychoanalyst Erich Fromm describes as the "wound of love." Fromm argues that alienation begins when a child is separated from their mother and grows through the process of individuation. Humans attempt to alleviate this wound through orgiastic rituals, romantic love, and engagement with great works. Yet each ultimately functions as a substitute for genuine connection.⁴ The vampire depends particularly on orgiastic rituals and great works: immortality ties it to vast historical movements, while bloodlust requires the consumption of others. What the vampire cannot achieve is authentic romantic connection with humanity, because intimacy with mortals inevitably results in violence and death. Consequently, any attempt by the vampire to experience love becomes an undying perversion of mortal desire.

This tension appears most clearly through Louis's failed attempts at human connection, particularly in his relationships with his brother and Babette Freniere. Louis's relationship with his brother establishes his tendency toward unstable family dynamics. Following their father's death, Louis attempts to support his increasingly religious brother, but dismisses his visions of Saint Dominic and the Virgin Mary as fanaticism. Shortly afterward, his brother dies after falling from a balcony in Louis's room (Rice 6). Although unnamed, the brother haunts the narrative throughout the interview. His death serves as the catalyst for Louis's vampiric transformation and removes the final source of mortal love and hope in his life.

Fromm argues that the only way to address the wound of love is through the active

⁴ For more, refer to Fromm, Erich "The Art of Loving."

practice of loving. Although Louis claims to love his brother, his dismissal of him suggests a failure to engage in that practice when it becomes difficult. By beginning the novel with the collapse of a seemingly ordinary family, Rice foreshadows Louis's inability to sustain meaningful connections. His transformation is born from familial collapse itself, as the death of his brother creates the emotional vulnerability that drives him toward Lestat. Rice therefore presents vampirism not as an external invasion of the household, but as something emerging from familial trauma and emotional failure.

After his transmogrification, Louis struggles to balance his human morality and the morality of a vampire. He dutifully kept to feeding off of animals, while Lestat would hunt humans frequently. Lestat, Louis explains, favored feeding on young men as they "represented the greatest loss to Lestat, because they stood on the threshold of the maximum possibility of life" (Rice 25). Lestat's bloodlust turns him to the Frenieres' plantation; namely, the brother who managed not only the plantation but also the care of his five sisters, the oldest name Babette. Louis, who "felt for the Freniere women," (Rice 25) attempted to foster connection and aid to Babette. His advice to Babette empowered her to take control of the plantation in her brother's stead and arrange the marriage of her and her sister's marriage, an uncommon feat in the patriarchal society and household.

Yet this connection is ultimately corrupted by the same spiritual and existential anxieties that plague all of Louis's relationships. Babette gradually comes to understand that Louis is not wholly human, interpreting his supernatural nature through a religious framework that casts him as demonic. After the destruction of Pointe du Lac, she directly associates him with the devil (Rice 42). For Louis, this realization is devastating; the one woman he admired from a distance, and who attempted to offer him genuine compassion and companionship, ultimately recoils from him in fear and moral condemnation. Her response reinforces Louis's growing conviction that vampirism renders authentic love and connection impossible.

Although Louis removes himself from Babette's life, the consequences of their relationship continue to haunt him. Later, he learns that "Babette had died young, insane, restrained finally from wandering toward the ruins of Pointe du Lac, insisting she had seen the devil there and must find him" (Rice 79). Babette's tragic end further solidifies Louis's belief that his existence inevitably produces destruction in the lives of those around him. Much like the death of his brother earlier in the novel, Babette's psychological collapse becomes another example of how Louis's attempts at intimacy and care are inseparable from ruin, reinforcing the

novel's broader meditation on the instability of love, morality, and human connection under vampiric existence.⁵ At the same time, Babette's eventual horror toward Louis foreshadows the novel's larger conflation of love, violence, and death within vampiric existence. Claudia later articulates this collapse when she associates vampiric killing with acts of intimacy and affection, blurring the boundaries between murder, desire, and erotic fulfillment. Within the vampiric world Rice constructs, emotional closeness becomes inseparable from consumption and destruction—as Candace R. Benefiel states, “lest anyone doubt that sex, death, and sustenance are linked for these creatures, Louis, asked by Claudia to describe what making love as a mortal was like, eventually responds, “I think that it was the pale shadow of killing”” (Benefiel 264). Lestat, in particular, embodies this dynamic through the eroticized nature of his violence. His preference for feeding on young men, whom Louis claims represented “the maximum possibility of life” (Rice 25), frames killing as both aesthetic and desirous, revealing the deeply queer undercurrents of his hunger. Lestat's vampirism destabilizes heteronormative structures of intimacy by transforming desire into predation and reproduction into vampiric creation.

Louis's relationship with Babette thus exists in tension with the queer and destructive forms of intimacy represented by Lestat and Claudia. His desire to preserve, comfort, and emotionally connect with Babette reflects an attempt to maintain a recognizable form of human affection, yet the vampiric condition continually corrupts these efforts. Babette ultimately cannot separate Louis from the violence and spiritual contamination he represents, just as Claudia later cannot separate love from killing. In this sense, Babette serves as an early indication that within Rice's novel, all forms of intimacy—whether familial, romantic, maternal, or queer—are destabilized by vampirism and transformed into relationships structured around dependency, consumption, and ruin.

Anne Rice also explores the instability of vampiric love through the construction of unconventional vampiric family units. Prior to *Interview With the Vampire*, the vampire traditionally existed as a solitary apex predator, haunting and hunting humans as a substitute for sex, intimacy, family, and emotional connection. Rice's vampires depart from this tradition by attempting to recreate the structure of the human nuclear family, yet in a deeply distorted form.

⁵ Louis's attraction to Babette is notably rooted not in physical desire, but in emotional admiration, caretaking, and sympathy. Rather than approaching Babette through masculine domination or erotic conquest, Louis attempts to nurture and guide her, helping her assume authority over the plantation and secure stability for herself and her sisters. This impulse reflects Louis's persistent attachment to human compassion and domesticity, traits that the novel codes as feminine in contrast to Lestat's predatory masculinity and violence.

In doing so, Rice subverts the heteronormative domestic sphere and challenges conventional ideas of kinship, reproduction, and romantic love through alternative familial structures. As Benefiel observes,

Oddly, [Rice's] vampire family is so close to the norm as to constitute a parody. In Interview With the Vampire, two handsome, young male vampires, Louis and Lestat, together create a daughter. This beautiful child-vampire, named Claudia, will never physically age. And this ménage exists with apparent happiness and harmony for some sixty-five years, far beyond the length of most mortal marriages. This family has no marriage license, no college savings plan for the kids, and exists by killing unsuspecting victims. (4)

The vampiric family is rendered inherently unstable because reproduction occurs outside the bounds of heterosexual biology. Vampires create children without the need for a biological mother, collapsing traditional distinctions between parenthood, sexuality, and creation. Consequently, the relationship between creator and created becomes psychologically and emotionally blurred, as the elder vampire simultaneously occupies the roles of lover, parent, sibling, and companion to their progeny. Rice further destabilizes the family unit by paralleling the familiar trope of a couple having a child in an attempt to repair a failing relationship. Claudia's creation emerges not from love or stability, but from emotional desperation and mutual dissatisfaction between Louis and Lestat. Rather than healing their fractured relationship, Claudia's presence intensifies the violence, resentment, and possessiveness already embedded within the household. The family thus becomes a performance of domestic normalcy built upon suffering and predation, exposing the fragility and artificiality of both vampiric and human constructions of love and family.

Rice then continues to destabilize normative domesticity through the construction of the vampire household as a corrupted nuclear family. Louis, Lestat, and Claudia outwardly resemble a domestic unit, yet every role is inverted or rendered unstable. Louis occupies the position of provider-turned-emotionally-absent-male-figure, incapable of sustaining the family structure he inhabits. Rather than functioning as patriarchal protector, Louis becomes detached and feminized within the household, defined more by emotional longing and guilt than authority and ultimately exposing the fragility of the heteronormative domestic ideal itself. At the same time, Lestat's presence violently perverts traditional patriarchal authority.

He is simultaneously father, lover, and tyrant within the household, collapsing distinctions between erotic intimacy and familial power. The relationship between Louis and Lestat queers the domestic sphere by positioning homoerotic attachment at the center of the family unit, yet Rice refuses to romanticize this structure as liberatory. Instead, vampiric domesticity becomes defined by coercion, dependency, and emotional consumption. Claudia's position within this dynamic intensifies the discomfort of the household arrangement, since she exists as both daughter and companion, child and murderous adult consciousness. The result is a family structure that cannot stabilize itself within human categories of gender, sexuality, or kinship.

Through these inversions, Rice presents vampirism as a force that exposes the artificiality and instability of normative domestic structures. Gendered roles within the vampire household become mutable and corrupted: Louis embodies emotional vulnerability and maternal care, Lestat performs an excessive and violent masculinity, and Claudia destabilizes the boundaries between daughterhood, womanhood, and monstrosity. The vampire family thus operates as a grotesque parody of the human nuclear family, reproducing its hierarchies while simultaneously revealing their violence and fragility. In this sense, the horror of the novel emerges not simply from bloodshed or immortality, but from the realization that the domestic household itself already contains the potential for domination, alienation, and decay.

Part Three: The Vampire and the Third Space

Throughout *IWTV*, Rice also repeatedly constructs what can be understood as a “third space,” a liminal realm that exists between life and death, humanity and monstrosity, intimacy and violence. These spaces are neither fully living nor fully dead, and because of this instability, they become areas where normative social structures lose their authority. The vampire exists within these thresholds, occupying spaces that distort the meanings traditionally attached to the home, the body, and the bed. Rice transforms these intimate spaces into uncanny sites where identity dissolves and the boundaries between self and other become increasingly unstable.

One of the clearest manifestations of this third space is the coffin itself, which functions as both grave and bedspace. Traditionally, the bed symbolizes rest, intimacy, sexuality, and human vulnerability, while the coffin signifies death and bodily finality. Rice collapses these meanings together so that the vampire's place of sleep becomes suspended between eroticism

and burial. The coffin is not fully a tomb because the vampire still exists within it, yet it is not fully a bed because it denies the possibility of ordinary life or regeneration. Louis's initial stages of transformation and first time sharing a coffin forces him to come face to face with this realization:

All my life I'd feared closed places. Born and bred in French houses with lofty ceilings and floor-length windows, I had a dread of being enclosed. I felt uncomfortable even in the confessional in church. It was a normal enough fear. And now I realized as I protested to Lestat, I did not actually feel this anymore. I was simply remembering it. Hanging on to it from habit, from a deficiency of ability to recognize my present and exhilarating freedom. ...Then I asked him if I was completely dead. My body was tingling and itching all over. 'No, you're not then,' he said. 'When you are, you'll only hear and see it changing and feel nothing. You should be dead by tonight. Go to sleep.'"

"Was he right? Were you... dead when you woke up?"

"Yes, changed, I should say. As obviously I am alive. My body was dead. It was some time before it became absolutely cleansed of the fluids and matter it no longer needed, but it was dead. And with the realization of it came another stage in my divorce from human emotions.

(16)

As Louis grapples with the loss of his mortal, alive identity, he finds that the freedom of death means freedom from life. Fear in itself is a biological mechanism intended to promote survival. Without life, there is no need for survival, and therefore, no need for fear. The coffin acts as a physical manifestation of this reassurance, where death and decay provide Louis with a new life freed from the arbitrary fears of social norms and primitively animalistic conditioning of survival. In fact, this liminality allows the vampire to temporarily escape human social structures altogether. Within darkness and death, social hierarchies lose their coherence. The darkness of the coffin erases distinctions imposed by society, including class, morality, and even conventional gender roles, replacing them with the horrifying equality of the undead.

The most significant aspect of Louis's transformation then is not simply that he dies, but that he loses the very psychological structures that once defined his humanity. His realization that he no longer fears enclosed spaces reveals that vampirism fundamentally alters his relationship to embodiment and survival itself. Rice's language here is crucial

because it frames humanity itself as habitual performance rather than stable essence. Fear, once biologically necessary, becomes vestigial after death.⁶ Louis's exhilaration stems from realizing that vampirism frees him not only from mortality, but from the bodily compulsions that govern human existence. The coffin therefore becomes paradoxically liberating. Though traditionally associated with claustrophobia, decay, and burial, it grants Louis relief from the anxieties that structured his mortal life. In this sense, the coffin functions as a third space because it collapses oppositional categories: confinement becomes freedom, death becomes life, and burial becomes intimacy.

Rice further complicates this liminality through Louis's conversation with Lestat concerning whether he is "dead." Lestat's response—"When you are, you'll only hear and see it changing and feel nothing"—separates bodily existence from emotional and sensory humanity. Louis's body continues to function physically, yet it is emptied of ordinary human processes. The body becomes neither fully alive nor entirely dead, existing instead in an uncanny intermediary state. Louis's statement that "my body was dead" while he himself remains conscious exposes the fracture between selfhood and corporeality that defines vampirism throughout the novel. His body is transformed into something simultaneously animate and corpse-like, a contradiction that destabilizes the body as a reliable site of identity. Rice thereby reframes death not as an ending, but as a grotesque continuation. The vampire occupies a state beyond biological life without ever escaping embodiment, trapped within a corpse that still hungers, desires, and consumes.

This destabilization extends into Louis and Lestat's relationship within the coffin itself. Louis's observation that "In the dark, we were both equals" initially suggests that vampirism erases social hierarchies. Darkness obscures distinctions of class, morality, and even humanity itself, creating a space where conventional social structures no longer apply. Importantly, however, this equality emerges only through shared exclusion from human life. The equality of the vampire is therefore deeply ironic because it is founded upon mutual monstrosity rather than liberation. Louis admits that before his transformation, Lestat represented "the most overwhelming experience" of his life, a figure of terrifying superiority.

⁶ Before transformation, Louis associates enclosed spaces with suffocation and confinement, explaining that he had always dreaded "closed places" because he was "born and bred in French houses with lofty ceilings and floor-length windows." This attachment to openness reflects both aristocratic privilege and human vulnerability, where spaciousness signifies freedom, breath, and life. Yet after drinking Lestat's blood, Louis recognizes that this fear persists only as memory rather than instinct. He admits that he is merely "remembering it," "hanging on to it from habit."

Only through death can Louis approach equality with him. Rice thus presents vampirism as both democratizing and violating: Louis gains proximity to Lestat only by surrendering his humanity. Equality is achieved through corruption rather than emancipation:

The first thing which became apparent to me, even while Lestat and I were loading the coffin into a hearse and stealing another coffin from a mortuary, was that I did not like Lestat at all. I was far from being his equal yet, but I was infinitely closer to him than I had been before the death of my body. I can't really make this clear to you for the obvious reason that you are now as I was before my body died. You cannot understand. But before I died, Lestat was absolutely the most overwhelming experience I'd ever had. (16)

The theft of the coffins further reinforces the profane collapse of sacred meanings surrounding death. Coffins traditionally symbolize reverence, mourning, and ritualized respect for the dead, yet Louis and Lestat casually steal them as practical objects necessary for survival. This irreverence strips death of its sanctity and transforms the coffin into a utilitarian domestic object. Simultaneously, the image of Louis and Lestat sharing the coffin evokes unmistakably erotic imagery. Rice therefore queers domestic space by replacing heterosexual reproductive intimacy with vampiric consumption. The coffin becomes both marriage bed and grave, collapsing eros and death into the same spatial experience. In doing so, Rice appropriates the symbolism of heterosexual domesticity while fundamentally hollowing out its reproductive function.

This corruption of reproductive space becomes even more pronounced through Claudia's creation. Claudia grotesquely imitates the structure of childbirth while perverting its meaning entirely. Rather than producing life, the vampire family reproduces death through violence and consumption.⁷ Because Claudia remains permanently trapped within the body of a child, she embodies a horrifying contradiction between psychological maturity and physical immobility. Rice thereby exposes the instability underlying the idealized nuclear family. Louis, Lestat, and Claudia visually replicate domestic roles of husband, wife, and daughter, yet their family structure cannot generate life or future continuity. Instead, it endlessly reproduces trauma, violence, and death. The marital bedspace, once associated

⁷ Claudia is not born biologically but created through feeding, blood exchange, and murder. Her existence transforms the child—traditionally symbolic of innocence, futurity, and growth—into a figure of stagnation and monstrosity.

with fertility and renewal, becomes instead a site of infanticide and arrested development.

Rice ultimately extends this idea of the haunted space to the body itself. In the novel, the body ceases to function as a stable home for the self and instead becomes something violated, controlled, and estranged. Vampirism destroys bodily autonomy by forcing transformation upon the victim through penetration and blood exchange. Louis repeatedly experiences his vampiric body as alien to him, simultaneously heightened and imprisoned by its unnatural desires. His immortality intensifies his consciousness of embodiment while stripping him of agency over it. Hunger governs him, violence sustains him, and immortality traps him within a static physical form incapable of meaningful change. The experience of sucking blood is visceral, a “dull roar at first and then a pounding like the pounding of a drum, growing louder and louder, as if some enormous creature were coming up on one slowly through a dark and alien forest, pounding as he came, a huge drum.” (12-13)

Louis’s description of drinking blood emphasizes sensory excess and loss of control. The repeated imagery of “drums” pounding through his body evokes both primitive ritual and involuntary bodily compulsion. Importantly, the sensation overwhelms not only his hearing but “all [his] senses,” throbbing through his veins until desire becomes physically inescapable. Rice presents feeding as simultaneously ecstatic and violating, an experience where bodily pleasure annihilates autonomy. The vampire body therefore ceases to function as a stable home for the self. Instead, it becomes governed by compulsions external to conscious control. Louis remains intellectually aware of his actions while being physically dominated by unnatural desire, producing a profound estrangement between mind and body. In this sense, the vampire body itself becomes a third space: neither fully self nor entirely other, neither autonomous nor completely controlled.

Through these liminal spaces, Rice portrays vampirism as a profound violation of embodiment and control. The coffin, the marriage bed, and the body itself all become destabilized sites where human meanings collapse into monstrosity. These spaces reveal that the horror of vampirism lies not only in death, but in the inability to fully inhabit any stable category of existence. The vampire is forever suspended between states, trapped within spaces that imitate life while remaining irrevocably haunted by death.

Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, the anxiety surrounding the vampire’s entrance into the home reflects a broader

cultural fear regarding the collapse of stable social norms and the unreliability of domestic space itself. The house, traditionally understood as a site of protection, intimacy, morality, and familial order, becomes destabilized through the vampire's presence, revealing how fragile these structures truly are. The vampire does not simply invade the home from the outside, but exposes the corruption, repression, and instability already embedded within it. In this way, the threshold of the house becomes symbolic of the threshold between order and disorder, humanity and monstrosity, safety and vulnerability.

Within *Interview with the Vampire*, the setting of New Orleans intensifies these tensions by situating the narrative within a postcolonial Southern landscape haunted by slavery, racial hierarchy, religious anxiety, and shifting understandings of gender and sexuality. Rice's vampires move fluidly through these unstable structures, embodying the fears and desires that emerge from a society struggling to define itself after the collapse of rigid colonial authority. Through Louis, Lestat, and Claudia's fractured domestic unit, the novel demonstrates how family itself becomes mutable under vampirism, capable of both reproducing and dismantling traditional systems of power.

The house therefore emerges not as a fixed or sacred structure, but as an inherently mutable space shaped by those permitted to enter it. Bedrooms become tombs, coffins become marriage beds, plantation homes become haunted monuments to decaying social orders, and the domestic sphere transforms into a liminal site where categories of life and death, love and violence, humanity and monstrosity continuously blur together. By positioning the vampire within the home rather than outside of it, Rice ultimately reveals that the true horror of vampirism lies not in the monster at the threshold, but in the unsettling realization that the boundaries defining the home were never stable to begin with.

Bibliography

- Alvarado, Ariana. *Written in Blood: The Cultural Work of Family, Sexuality, and Race in Adaptations of Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire*. 2024. Bellarmine University, Undergraduate Honors Thesis. COinS, https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/ugrad_theses/137.
- Ardanuy, Jordi and Romero, Luis "The Journey of the Damned Coffin," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 7, 2003. DOI: 10.70013/91d8e9f0. <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol5/iss1/7>

- Benefiel, Candace R. "Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 38, no. 2, Nov. 2004, pp. 261–73.
- Craft, Christopher. "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Representations*, no. 8, 1984, pp. 107–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928560>.
- Doane, Janice, and Devon Hodges. "Undoing Feminism: From the Preoedipal to Postfeminism in Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles." *American Literary History* 2, no. 3, 1990, pp. 422–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/489948>.
- Groom, N. (2024). John Polidori, "The Vampyre," and the Rise of the Aristocratic Vampire. In: Bacon, S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36253-8_114.
- Laporte, Claire. 2025. "At the Edge of Death: Safety Coffins, Poe, and Dracula." *Substack.com*. *The Duck-Billed Reader*. May 2025. <https://clairelaporte.substack.com/p/at-the-edge-of-death-waiting-mortuaries>.
- Martínez Vega, Àlex "Epistemology of the coffin : An Analysis of the Queer intersections in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat*." 2025. 35 pag. <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/318404>.
- Matiuta, C. (2014). "Romanian Diaspora in the Middle 19th Century and its View on Modernization." *Studii Europene*, 1, 93-100. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-418828>.
- McColl, Caitlin. 2026. "The Truth about Coffins." *FYI*. 2026. <https://vocal.media/fyi/the-truth-about-coffins>.
- Reid, B.R. 2016. "THE FANGED EMASCULATOR: TRADITIONAL GENDER and SEXUALITY under ATTACK in BRAM STOKER'S 'DRACULA'." *The Albatross* 6 (April): 52–58. <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/albatross/article/view/18145>.
- Rice, Anne. 1976. *Interview with the Vampire*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Shmoop Editorial Team. "Babette Freniere in Interview with the Vampire Character Analysis | Shmoop." *Shmoop University*, Inc. Last modified November 11, 2008. Accessed May 20, 2026. <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/interview-with-the-vampire/babette-freniere.html>.
- Watts, Tracey Ann, "New Orleans as an American jungle| Colonial roots and capitalist representations" (2001). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3081>

Inside the Minds of Latiné Poets

by Jeovany Tzilin-Gomez

Creative Anthology

Introduction

Poets write because they have an overflowing emotion they want to convert into flowery words on paper, letting go of burdens that they feel would get weight off of their chests.¹ William Wordsworth similarly describes poetry as “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that is written by a person “who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply.” Since the poem is produced from the emotions and ideas that flow from the writer’s stream of consciousness, it’s clear that the writer is expressing what’s been going on in their life and how it’s affecting their way of processing emotions. Specifically, the emotions of trauma, depression, anxiety, and other negative issues that occur in the mental health of writers are being turned into words of art. People would typically describe poets as people with “miserable lives” and they’re not wrong. When the “miserable lives” are at an extreme level, it can lead them to a sense of psychopathology which Simonton defines as “the appearance of [mental health] symptoms” that can impair one’s creative work either temporarily or permanently. (473) Though this claim is arguably true, it’s important to consider why these poets are feeling “miserable,” regardless of the quantity and types of emotions they’re bearing at a time. They see poetry as not only a mechanism they rely on, but rather a creative outlet that’s not easy to abuse such as alcohol or drugs. It’s more of the mind giving creativity to relieve the pain than consuming what they think is healthy for them.

With the subject of mental health, there’s a particular group of people who had mixed experiences and perspectives about mental health from the effects of Spanish colonial disruption and the post-colonial effects of establishing sustainable nations; that group is known as Latin Americans. Gobat stated that the people in power who wanted independent Latin American nations were white elites, creating a tension “between inclusion and exclusion” that fueled the discussion of what it means to be Latin American. (Gobat 1347) The dense history of white supremacy and enslavement in its many forms led to the white elites trying to change their own narratives by picturing themselves as liberators without acknowledging the non-white revolutionaries that paved the way for a free Latin America. From the deserted north of Mexico to the surrounding coasts of the Dominican Republic to the cold south of Argentina, Latin

¹ Editors Note: The following publication excerpts three sections of a larger anthology project, and includes the full project introduction and bibliography.

America has had a discourse of enslavement, political corruption, industrialization, search for identity, and historical warfare along with other concepts being deciphered after separating from Spanish colonization. Throughout the development of Latin America, writers such as Pablo Neruda, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Jorge Luis Borges have written works that were inspired by what was going on in the Americas and what they were feeling during the development.

This anthology consists of poetry written by college students from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Most of whom were undergraduates, while are recent alumni. All share one quality in common: they identify as Latin American to some extent. Some poets have a stronger connection with their Latin American cultures while others want to continue exploring that part of their identity. This created a variety of personal perspectives on how one can feel disconnected to a culture when they are not introduced to it by older generations. The reasons for this are numerous, including gentrification and assimilation. These writers have written about their direct relationship with their Latin American identity, their experiences with mental health, or a mix of both.

The main question that a reader may ask is “How does the act of writing poetry play a role in the mental health and well-being of young poets of Latin American descent?” When it comes to the writer themselves, it tends to be overlooked or unknown as to how writing poetry can benefit them into persevering in life.

The featured poets form the flow of the project by filling out a questionnaire and being interviewed to learn about themselves as poets in relation to their experiences with mental health and their unique Latin American identities. This methodology is used in hopes of understanding each of their unique perspectives regarding the poetry they write, how their lives influence their poetry, their familiarity with poetry as an art form, and how they use poetry as a way to manage their mental health and well-being. Each conducted interview lasted at least between 30-45 minutes. There were occasional times where I would need to follow up certain poets whenever I needed clarification on a critical idea they mentioned, which shows how insightful they were in their interview responses. Each interviewee was appropriately compensated for their time as college students typically have busy schedules aside from their own personal lives. Part of the challenge from this project is making the interviewees feel comfortable talking about poetry, so I tried my best making the interviews feel as natural as possible to the point where it didn't feel like a traditional interview by

letting the interviewee ask me questions. This method of interview allowed a rebalance of the power dynamic between poet and anthologist. Despite my role in selecting the poems, I wanted to let the poets understand that their perspectives are valued, understand that their words will be heard by the broader Latiné community to not only feel represented, but also learn about how certain ideas like machismo or the stigmatization of mental health are challenged by their powerful writing. This is a community-driven process when we use art to our advantage to collect ideas and share with readers who are familiar with the subject matter or who are new to learning about the Latiné perspective of poetry. So, this is an important contribution they are making and I want to express my gratitude in that regard.

During an interview, I have questions already prepared to ask, aimed to profoundly observe aspects of their poetic perspectives based on the initial interpretations of their poetry and their responses from the questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaire are usually general questions such as their ethnicity/nationality, their brief description of their relationship with poetry, the time they started gaining interest in poetry, how often they share their poetry, and the conventions they use in their poetry. Alongside that, I asked them for a poem I can include in the anthology and I use it to get a sense of their poetic style, content they execute, the emotions they're conveying, the literary devices they use, and their influences. The initial exposure to their poetry helps me craft questions that discover the poem behind the page and the poet behind the face: the mind. Some examples of questions I would ask during interviews were:

“You mentioned how poetry is a way of therapy for you and you see comfort in transforming pain into something beautiful. How does that pain transform into something beautiful through your poetry?”

“You mentioned that your poetry uses a lot of conventions like similes, imagery, enjambments, you name it. How do you use them in your poetry to communicate about your perspective on mental health within yourself and possibly within others?”

“You mentioned that your relationship with poetry is “complicated.” What ways make poetry complicated for you?”

After conducting the interviews, I was surprised by the information that I received because of

the commonality of the collected responses. Despite having specific differences between each poet, there are major similarities that they share, adding on to how Latin Americans share similar and different ideas. Religion or spirituality, cultural connection, and how they view themselves emotionally were the main ideas that all of the featured poets were generally emphasizing.

Religion can influence mental health in learning that the world has a Creator or creators, whatever those creators may be. It can ground them into knowing that there's divinity in the world and how the belief of the world wielding divinity shapes their perspective in writing. It's important to note that "religion and spiritual experience on health are based on the assumption that the experience itself is positive and healthy" because it can otherwise be an opposing force that can make the believer feel extrinsic, conflict-ridden, and fragmented. (Seybold and Hill 22) The streams of consciousness in their writing is the result of learning about what they believe, what keeps them motivated, and how they communicate it with their communities. Based on the responses, it's a common trope that the featured poets are religiously or spiritually fluid as they find ways to be in touch with themselves in relation to the external world and possibly beyond the world. While some poetry may not be explicitly religious like Joshua Minjarez's "Home.," there is poetry that is simply influenced by religious or spiritual experiences such as Sebastian Muniz-Massa's "I Was Almost Lost"² where the speaker is trying to find a sense of self by connecting with ancestral experiences.

Another surprising similarity, while also being not surprising, between most poets is that they are at least of Mexican descent. This is the result of the long, historic, and complicated relationship between the United States and Mexico: California, along with other states, were formally part of Mexico before the United States wanted to expand westward. After Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the border crossed Mexico. In other words, the United States conquered the land that makes up the current westside of the U.S. The United States didn't want to deal with Mexico's resistance as they offered to purchase New Mexico and California, but General Polk of the United States had the opportunity to "negotiate a peace treaty upon terms dictated by [the U.S. President]" which eventually became "a mere clerical act for an agent accompanying a victorious army." (Reeves 314) All of these crucial past decisions led to the current issues of discrimination, depicting immigration as a crime, and the exploitation of labor that the Latiné community

² Editors note: These poems are not included in this excerpted version, but is included in the larger project.

faces; it informs poets from that community to write about their experiences with these issues indirectly, whatever the reason may be. It's important to consider the region we are focusing on: California. The homes we live in influences how we write our poetry based on what we see and how the external factors of a home affects mental health in various ways. Noël claims:

From a culturalist perspective, our tendency might be to align U.S. Latina/o poetry with the living repertoire, with the community-centered culture of poetry readings and performances epitomized by the Floricanto festivals and the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in the 1970s, and to be sure, such performance cultures were central to the *movimiento*, and their role as engines and laboratories for generations of U.S. Latina/o poets should not be underestimated. (161)

To expand, the communities that inhabit certain regions of the United States behave like hubs for creative expression and California does have a fair share of creative inspiration. While the featured poets don't really associate themselves with a particular movement, their writings carry a variety of inspirations from religious beliefs, familial relationships, cultural practices, and other sources of inspiration.

Writing poetry can help writers understand themselves internally and it's been a practice used in clinical settings before. L'Abate and Sweeney discuss how hospital librarians starting in the 1920s prescribed patients with poetry to monitor their current emotions during treatment, claiming poetry to be "hygenic" and cure "a sick soul." (95) When the past initially antagonized mental illnesses, poetry would be able to open up a new perspective for medical settings and public settings. It used to be hard to understand how poetry can show that it's not "abnormal" to have a mental illness unless you're familiar with literature, but the mental health struggle has been present in poetry for a while. Poetry allows writers to "reveal a good deal about themselves" and "enable the [writers] to facilitate [their] own understanding of feelings and lifestyle." (L'Abate and Sweeney 98) Based on what the patients knew about poetry, it's obvious that writing poetry doesn't require prior knowledge; they take what they know about writing and start forming their style of writing to communicate their emotions. This is what is seen in most of the poets: they're not familiar with poetry in general. They may be dabbling into different poets, criticism, or theory on occasions, but they may not know at least what poetry looked like in the United States. There are times when students don't have the opportunity to read the literary canon and instead read more contemporary

literature. Regardless, poetry is what they make for themselves and what heals them.

There were some aspects that could be explored in future iterations of the project such as taking the time to listen to how they recite their poem to better understand the tone of their writing. It's also important to highlight voices from other parts of Latin America that can present a broader scope of how we understand poetry depending on the culture a poet is from. The anthology is intended to highlight Latin American voices who struggle with maintaining mental health and well-being. Despite having a force that would usually be seen as a disadvantage for some people, it is a result of producing work that exclaims the need to do collective work of understanding how having mental health issues is part of being human, especially in underrepresented communities. Poetry can inspire readers to understand how everything is interconnected, whether someone's mental health is affected by their families not accepting them for their sexual orientation or someone doesn't want to associate with a certain religion. Poetry is a powerful tool that can bring the writer into a mode of serenity that allows them to be shameless of what they're feeling. For a Latin American, it helps them align all of their issues into one platform.

More Questions than Answers by Julian Sierra

The love you give me,
Do I have enough
Of my own
To give to you?

It's difficult to see who I really am.
I am muddied by my own
Impurities.
Yet, you clutch me
As though I were a Pearl
You had polished.

I find it hard
to believe that

I am a treasure to keep.
Be your precious locket

Around your neck.
You choose to tighten
As it loosens.

I find it harder
to see myself
In the light
and in the dark.
But somehow,
You manage
to tell me Apart
from both—

As we look into each other's dilating eyes,
What if
Mine
becomes
Like a black hole?

Where is all the love you've given me,
Is it thrown into an empty space?

What does it mean
For me to fear
Hurting you
More than
it hurts me?

Julien's Perspective

The mind is a weight to carry in your head when a person has a lot of things stimulating their life, sometimes more than they should, which leads to the person feeling terrible while juggling their responsibilities.

Julian Sierra is a poet who leans on his spiritual self as he navigates through the hurdles of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), clinically characterized by the presence of excessive obsessions and compulsions hard to resist. (Veale and Roberts 1) Sierra, with his OCD, tackles traditional family morals like machismo: the idea of men being superior to women, having an ultra-stern attitude, and not showing any emotion that's considered "vulnerable" like sadness. As someone of Mexican descent, Sierra sees poetry as a way to converse with himself about what he's been experiencing emotionally. He briefly described his OCD as "obsessive ideas that invade your brain every single second" and poetry helps him "understand [himself] and maybe express it in a way that [he] looks at it differently rather than something that stables [him] as a person."

In general, Sierra's not familiar with the poetic canon of works such as Robert Frost or E.E. Cummings. He's equally unfamiliar with any conventional poetic forms, which explains why he usually writes in free verse. What helps Sierra with taking poetry seriously is sharing it with other writers. He found his community in the UCSB Poets' Club, where members write and share their own poetry based on a weekly theme. Sierra believes that sharing poetry with people lets him evolve as a "person to express more about [himself]" because he initially didn't have the confidence to express himself in a regular manner like simply talking it out.

Sierra's "More Questions Than Answers" shows the speaker's denial in receiving his romantic interest's love because he doesn't see himself as the right person for him. The images in the poem are mostly circular or spherical, insinuating a cycle of denial and desire for loving someone despite putting them at a pedestal above them. Sierra's poetry contains subtle uses of punctuation like commas and em dashes that guides the reader through crucial moments. In "More Questions than Answers," the em dash mimics the rapidness of obsessive thoughts for its use next to "from both," quickly leading the reader to the next stanza as both stanzas are closely related to each other. Sierra explains that the em dashes are there to show "how [when he thinks] it's just a constant non-stop thing" of what he's feeling, especially when communicating with a loved one. The poem is about a person's doubt expressing love to his significant other who he thinks sees the whole picture of himself. In the fourth stanza,

the speaker mentions how his lover is able to see his morals and his flaws while he “[finds] it harder / to see [himself] / In the light / and in the dark.” The speaker talks to himself not being in the external world, but immersing into the internal world and noticing what makes him whole: his light and his darkness. In the previous stanza, the speaker perceives himself as “a treasure to keep” by being a “precious locket” for his lover, the speaker’s light side. The obvious image representing the speaker’s dark side is his “dilating eyes” becoming a “black hole” that has no end to the torture being brought by the tension caused by his love.

Sierra deploys the em dash in ways reminiscent of those found in Emily Dickinson’s poetry. Often, Sierra uses em dashes to quickly switch images. Dickinson uses dashes as a denotation that “would be all the more ‘expressive’ if it registered not only the pauses but also the particular inflections of the words or phrases it followed.” (Wylder 209) While using one em dash in his poem in the fifth stanza, Sierra uses the em dash as a moment for the reader to focus on the immediate response the speaker is saying to his loved one. The em-dash serves as a placeholder for “sides” and as a way to show how nervous the speaker is feeling because of the way his loved one is complimenting him, sounding too good to be true.

As the other featured poets would mention later on, poets are seen to understand themselves through their writing by seeing different versions of themselves while also being curious about what shapes them as people. For Sierra, seeing different versions of himself is possible through free form with some structure in the stanzas: “I just really like the spontaneity of things and everything’s just [going] the way they go. But even then in that nature itself, it’s kind of also just you don’t know what to expect.” He only sees himself writing in free verse because it is how he can work with his OCD, coping with the “habits” and “compulsions” he carries; Sierra doesn’t want to write poetry in a “robotic” structure or trying to write under the conventions of poetry.

Poetry allows Sierra to let certain things be “against the law of the nature of the world” or be metaphysical within the limits of his imagination. He uses poetry as a weapon to combat the inner demons he faces in his daily life. While he’s not a religious person, he likes to include religious imagery, especially Christian imagery. For example, he views the story Lucifer as “beautiful” and “tragic” which would bring a religious Christian into questioning. He clarifies that while Lucifer is a horrible character, he sees a human aspect in Lucifer through his arrogance that he finds “admirable,” commenting on the natural aspect of human pride where the person will feel pride, despite not wanting to because it’s a human feeling.

Latin Americans usually limit themselves to see what the good side has to offer, but it's important to acknowledge the bad sides of ourselves to learn what we can do better, which creates more value in our experiences in life.

Julian Sierra offers the challenging perspective of religion and spirituality into poetry along with understanding himself and his mental obstacles through writing is impressive in showing how a person's mind can have a lot of insight in how poetry can empower the poet in being shameless in what they believe and how people perceive them. His work encourages readers to not be afraid to write about what they truly feel internally as it is the only way they can be in harmony with themselves.

Recalcitrante by Morbid Açúcar

A brown Child's cry
is the pent up tears
of generations worth of tragedy,
resilience, and adaptability.

The rivers that run too deep to believe,
The tears that hold millions of screams.
We are here to never leave,
Our humanity ingrained in our belief
That one day we will return to our homes.
Despite being desecrated & removed,
We hold a bond that is unmoved.

Ties that run tighter than veins,
Than the roots that held our reins.
To the ground above as is below,
Let this be of grief and sorrow,
As well as of celebration and bone marrow.

The mouths of exterminators lie open
Catching flies in slew
While we swallow whole what can't be chewed,
Or were greeted to consume.

I know I am not alone
And his story is not set in stone,
But the books that remained were painted white.

So I plant my feet with every collective beat
And cry into the wind.
May the sea salt unite us in ways it never did before
And carry us together
Despite its daunting distance.
My bones miss the sounds of our collective yells of joy
Of reclamation of time
Because together, we created the divine;
We managed to string out the difference in collectivism
and carve our rhythms into time.

We are more than just dreams.
We are reality.
We are the future.

Morbid Açúcar's Perspective

Poetry connects the writer to their culture in a way that helps them understand how they see themselves as an individual and how they relate to the world. Poetry can offer writers a rough path to their distorted pasts, especially those unfamiliar with their cultural origins after years of ethnic cleansing. While colonialism has ethnically erased traditions, poets with cultural knowledge appreciate the opportunity to preserve that culture through writing while others attempt to produce beautiful pieces that can help them find a sense of self.

Açúcar Viana, artistically known as Morbid Açúcar, is a poet of Brazilian descent who

lets their culture speak for itself in hopes of finding warmth in their shivering heart. Viana's connection with their ancestors is one of their main inspirations for their poetry, taking in the lessons they learned like the concept of "Muvuca," which is a Yoruba-derived term meaning "a large conglomeration of things." Viana uses this term to describe the relationship between their European, African, and indigenous ancestry as a Brazilian descendant. Viana said, "All of those cultures come to create something that is really complex," and that something is themselves as a human being who is still understanding themselves within these aspects of their identity. Spiritually, they experienced religious trauma in the sense that the Christian belief system is "intergenerational and cultural" when they try connecting to their African and indigenous side of spirituality.

Their poem, "Recalcitrante," primarily uses natural imagery to convey feelings of trauma and grief to find a light that removes the darkness that tries to diminish their hope of thriving. "Recalcitrante" is a Portuguese word for recalcitrant meaning uncooperative or disobedient. In this poetic context, Viana is using the word's meaning to define the actions of the external forces oppressing the speaker whose human rights are being violated. The poem quantifies the collective struggle of finding homes of people whose origins were removed from their memory by a colonial force. The speaker finds themselves overwhelmed by the amount of pain people are in and they pray that the forces of nature guide people into a comprehension that can grow into learning about their ancestry.

In the poem, there's a lot of quantifying images that show the pain being endured by the speaker as they face the turmoil of colonialism. Through the third person perspective, the speaker presents the poem as realistic while also being motivational for the "Brown girl" who's initially in a depressive state until the hopeful conclusion of the poem. When the poem says, "A brown Child's cry / is the pent up tears / of generations worth of tragedy, / resilience, and adaptability," it strongly opens with an image of someone in the youngest generation carrying the generational trauma that's being passed down. The speaker lists the values of "tragedy, resilience, and adaptability" to show how one is able to overcome trauma for a long period of time through generations experiencing these emotions, suggesting that the "brown Child" or a young person of color is being mentally damaged by having to put energy into resilience and adaptability. A crucial part of the poem was when the speaker said, "I know I am not alone / And his story is not set in stone, / But the books that remained were painted white," using "white" as a double meaning

for the authenticity of the pre-colonial histories to be removed using white paint that create illegibility while also signifying that the narratives are being controlled by the white colonizers. This is the enormous obstacle that the speaker, relating to other marginalized groups, has to overcome through communal efforts of helping each other prosper and grow to feel seen and appreciated in the end of the poem.

Viana uses nature in their poetry as a support system that helps people see themselves through nature, similar to Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral in her eco-feminist literature. Mistral uses the idea of Pan-Americanism, or the idea of being part of the mixture of cultures residing in the Americas, being a strength for feminist writers. Finzer describes Mistral linking “Pan-Americanism and anti-imperialism with conservationist imperatives, deriving from them a concern for the natural environment.” (246) The idea of feminist writers tying Pan-Americanism and anti-imperialism is related to the feeling of motherhood, feeling responsible for taking care of things that should be cherished for their value. In this case, Viana is presenting concern for their community by relating it to the movements of nature like “the rivers that run too deep to believe” in the second stanza or “planting feet in every collective beat” in the sixth stanza to present movement through dance.

One of the key elements in Viana’s poetry is the symbolic use of water imagery, referring to not only how water is an important part of nature, but also what it historically represents for African communities. “Water is like a living being that we interact with, that heals us, that we rely a lot on for cleansing, for rebirth...then also thinking a lot about the Transatlantic Slave Trade and colonization and how all of that has led to systems of assimilation. But, you know, difference makes us stronger, ultimately.” For example, in the poem’s sixth stanza, Viana uses the “sea salt” as a metaphor for unity through flavor that life needs to be worth fighting for, since sea salt is a seasoning.

An interesting part of Viana’s creative process is that they go straight to form their thoughts into a poetic structure rather than a journalistic approach. Viana said that they don’t like to journal their thoughts down in a notebook as they realized that they can be “visceral” with alliteration and metaphors, creating images that the reader could resonate with instead of just raw blurbs of rants. Viana said, “I think that spiritually and energetically, [my poetry] comes through a lot more than just like plainly saying out like, ‘Oh, this is how I feel.’” Viana is aware of how complex the human mind works for each person besides how each person experiences certain things; “[people

are] bringing the past and everything that [they've] learned into every single moment.”

Viana's attempt to connect with their ancestors and culture through poetry reassures them that they are there because of everything that happened before their existence. All of the knowledge that they gained is being preserved in this relic of impactful phrases that represent their Brazilian heritage. If this poem were to be recited, especially by the poet themselves, it's a reminiscence of past stories that were passed down to them like stories that their relatives told them. This is a form of oral storytelling and Querioz explores Brazilian oral storytelling through João da Silva Campos's tales. Querioz states that “[Campos] observes that, as far as possible, he ‘faithfully reproduced the language of the people, often copying cacophonies, corruptions and solecisms.’” (677) Viana makes the point that even the internal thoughts of a person's mind is more complex than “how we actually experience things” because the past and the present are colliding into one single memory that is carried and the memory is subject to change after that complexity. They added, “My connection with my ancestors and having those [vocal] forces [led] me through things that maybe sometimes I don't fully understand, but it feels instinctually and intrinsically right.”

Poetry, for Viana, has been a method of grounding themselves superficially and understanding that what they see in the external world gives them perspective in how it works. Viana emphasized, “The process of becoming Americanized and living in the United States can often feel separated, which is why I really dig my fingers back and I'm like, ‘No, you cannot push me in this direction that goes against everything that my culture [represents].’” Cultural pride is important for poets like Viana who know that they must continue preserving experiences that they come across in their daily life, hoping that it will get passed down to their descendants to bring the positive energy together.

Two People At Once by Jazzy Patchell

My fingers trace the edge
of the dirty penny I found on the street.
It was heads up on the sidewalk,
tails down when I picked it up

Las monedas son extrañas.
They have two sides,

yet make up one whole.
By definition it divides,
pero nadie duda de su valor.

Heads.
Tails.
Flipping over and over,
spinning like a hangover,
hasta que encuentres algo en medio.

Does the same go for people?
Para mi?
Or must I ask the question:
How can I be someone
when I feel like two people at once?

Sometimes I am split in two,
just like a coin.
Though my sides are not heads and tails.
no sé que son,
but they feel like tipped scales.
Maybe if I look hard enough
I can find them in the details.

Here's the coin flip,
and it goes like this.

Por un lado esta mi primera familia,
My first home.
It's the smell of my nana's tortillas,
made with gentle and loving hands
as she taught me how to do it myself,

pero siempre con cuidado.

It's learning Spanish and English at the same time,
así que no tengo una primera lengua.
Another part of me split in two,
until I don't know where one ends
y la otra comienza.

It's the sound of my abuelo's banda
played on his stereo at the same time
every Sunday morning.
We would dance in the dull light
of foggy San Francisco
glowing through the window.

As a child I thought this side of me
was the only one.
But when I left the only neighborhood
I have ever known,
I found there's more to me
than I realized.
And more opinions of others
I had to revise.

And this is where
the other side of the coin
nació.
Middle school taught me
I look different than I feel.
Yo era la única que habló español,

and heads turned when I did.
Slowly, I lost my Spanish
like I lost pieces of me
to fit in with my peers.

My skin was pale,
but my hair was full and curly,
nappy and burly.
My accent disappeared
as I learned to speak English
the proper way.

The people around me
assumed I was as white as my skin,
and when I said no,
my protests were dismissed.
So eventually I gave up.
I resigned to the box forced upon me.
Confining, constricting,
surrendering to someone who's not me.

And just like that,
the coin flipped.
Heads was tails.
Wins were fails.
And I was stuck
somewhere in the middle.
Like the space between reflections,
begging to be closed.
Left wondering the same question:
Can I really be someone
when I'm two people at once?

Jazzy's Perspective

When a poet is exposed to two different cultures simultaneously, it can be challenging to settle with one culture at a time or even live with both cultures. It would feel like the two cultures are clashing against each other instead of becoming a fusion, leading the poet to question their own identity and letting it affect their mental health. There would be times when people from both sides won't accept a culturally or racially mixed individual because they seem to lean on one identity over the other, making the individual feel lost and excluded.

Jazzy Patchell experienced this dilemma when she grew up in the Bay Area until now. She's in a similar situation as Mia Regalado³ where she's mixed with Anglo and Mexican. However, Patchell was fortunate enough to have a deeper connection with her Mexican side of her identity. Patchell embraces being ethnically and racially mixed, but she struggles with balancing her "two sides of the coin" or her two identities whenever she navigates through her social life. She described herself adapting to the version of herself that was "best suited" for an environment that either includes her white friends or her Latiné friends.

Patchell's struggle with embracing her Mexican identity and Anglo identity can be compared to Jean Toomer's white-passing dilemma, where Toomer is too white to be Black and vice versa. Toomer at one point convinced himself that he has no "racial consciousness" because he doesn't feel like he belongs to a certain race, rooted from his experiences of feeling excluded from his white side and Black side. (Rusch 41) Patchell, on the other hand, is aware of both sides of her identity and it's a struggle for her to "change herself" if she's hanging out with her white friends or her Latiné friends. Patchell states, "It felt like I had to not necessarily change myself, but adapt the version of myself that was best suited to that environment and so I think that's also naturally why themes of identity just naturally come through my writing." Through writing, she's learned how to "accept and navigate" her white and Latina identity "a lot better now and kind of not let it be something that restricts [her];" Writing poetry allows her to "expand, enrich, and deepen the way" she sees the world with genuine care for herself.

Patchell's poem, "Two People At Once," is a poem that clearly states her personal issue of dealing with her two identities as depicted as the sides of a coin. She uses the coin to indicate that she saw her two identities as strictly binary while attempting to combine them

¹ Editors Note: Mia Regalado's work appears in the larger project, but is not present here.

to feel whole. The speaker of the poem gestures the coin into thinking that it's indecisive as herself, saying that the coin is "Flipping over and over, / spinning like a hangover," confused about navigating her own identity as it is impaired by pressures from both sides of herself. She ironically follows by saying "hasta que encuentres algo en medio" or "until you find yourself in the middle," which arguably presents the struggle of finding a balance between her Mexican culture and her white culture. Specifically, Chicané people experience the cultural isolation between Mexican culture and American culture that they feel like they don't belong anywhere. However, there has to be a point where the culturally mixed individual realizes that they must embrace both sides to feel comfortable in their own skin, if that's what they truly feel and want to accept. Patchell expresses that "it's empowering to be able to not necessarily claim, but to inhabit different spheres [of one's identity]. It almost feels a 'fuck you' to the dominant order because the [political] powers seek to oppress people by thriving in people facing isolation."

In Patchell's poem, the speaker pays homage to her Mexican culture by mentioning some of the memories connected with her culture. The speaker says, "It's the sound of my abuelo's banda / played on his stereo at the same time / every Sunday morning," being proud of the traditional routines that bring her joy, comfort, and a sense of belonging. Describing the memory helps her accept her own identity, despite the clash between the Mexican side and the Anglo side. Patchell doesn't want to get rid of one or the other if that's how she was raised and if she doesn't oppose any of the both sides. She presents her struggle in maintaining both sides in the eleventh stanza where she says, "Middle school taught me / I look different than I feel. / Yo era la única que habló español, / and heads turned when I did," using the double meaning of "heads," one for the side of her identity through the coin metaphor and the other for the odd attention from her middle school classmates when she spoke Spanish.

This is similar to Anzaldúa's experience with switching between English and Spanish to the point where Spanglish is the language fusion that she uses to connect the Mexican side and Anglo side. Anzaldúa states, "Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without [always having] to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long I have to accommodate." (Anzaldúa 81) Patchell's poem is a form of resistance against the norm of writing in one language at a time and the overall norm of having to fit in communities where they don't allow code-switching. She makes the poem relatable to anyone who speaks English

and Spanish, even people who are just bilingual in general, because Spanglish is her comfortable way of communicating and it's her way of embracing both sides of her identity.

Patchell doesn't want her identities to melt in a pot because she doesn't like the obscurity of her identities; she sees her identities like a salad where "the lettuce is still lettuce" and "the tomato is still tomato" because it helps clarify herself in a position where being Chicané is being challenged by both sides of her identity. She's aware that while people might not place on one category or the other, she will continue embracing who she is and no one can take that away from her. She celebrates her both sides, letting them be harmonious with one another and encourages the reader with similar experiences to do the same.

Bibliography

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Meztiza*. 4th ed., Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- Bautista, Anthony. Personal interview. 28 February 2026.
- Brand, Peg Zeglin. "The Role of Luck in Originality and Creativity." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2015, pp. 31–55. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43283315>.
- Finzer, Erin. "Mother Earth, Earth Mother: Gabriela Mistral as an Early Ecofeminist." *Hispania*, vol. 98, no. 2, 2015, pp. 243–51. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24368285>.
- Ghasemi, Parvin. "VIOLENCE, RAGE, AND SELF-HURT IN SYLVIA PLATH'S POETRY." *CLA Journal*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2008, pp. 284–303. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44325429>.
- Gobat, Michel. "The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 118, no. 5, 2013, pp. 1345–75. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23784580>.
- Goethals, Lucien, and Gust Gils. "The Relationship between Poetry and Music. A Conversation between Lucien Goethals, Composer and Gust Gils, Poet." *Revue Belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Muziekwetenschap*, vol. 54, 2000, pp. 73–86. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3686878>.
- Gyurko, Lanin A. "Hallucination and Nightmare in Two Stories by Cortázar." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 67, no. 3, 1972, pp. 550–62. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3726124>.
- L'Abate, Luciano and Laura G Sweeney. "Chapter 7: Poetry Therapy." *Research on writing approaches in mental health*, 2011, pp. 93–114.
- MacDonald, Ruth K. "The Weirdness of Shel Silverstein." *Studies in American Humor*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1986, pp. 267–79. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42573672>.
- Maurya, Vibha. "Power of Poetry and Pablo Neruda." *Indian Literature*, vol. 47, no. 5 (217), 2003, pp. 180–87. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23341498>.
- Minjarez, Joshua. Personal interview. 4 March 2026.
- Muniz-Massa, Sebastian. Personal interview. 17 February 2026.
- Noel, Urayoán. "Poetry." *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, edited by Deborah R. Vargas et al., vol. 6, NYU Press, 2017, pp. 159–63. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.cttlpwtbpbj.47>.

- Patchell, Jazzy. Personal interview. 13 April 2026.
- Perez-Granados, Kiana. Personal interview. 6 March 2026.
- Regalado, Mia. Personal interview. 21 February 2026.
- Reeves, Jesse S. "The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo." *The American Historical Review*, vol.10, no. 2, 1905, pp. 309–24. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1834723>.
- Rusch, Frederik L. "THE BLUE MAN: JEAN TOOMER'S SOLUTION TO HIS PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY." *Obsidian* (1975-1982), vol. 6, no. 1/2, 1980, pp. 38–54. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44489753>.
- Queiroz, Sônia. "African Oral Traditions in Brazil." *GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA • X: Africa and Its Diasporas*, edited by VANICLÉIA SILVA SANTOS, UNESCO, 2025, pp. 671–85. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep72889.52>.
- Salcido, Alexander. Personal interview. 3 April 2026.
- Seybold, Kevin S., and Peter C. Hill. "The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Mental and Physical Health." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2001, pp. 21–24. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182684>.
- Sierra, Julian. Personal interview. 14 February 2026.
- Simonton, Dean Keith. "The Mad-Genius Paradox: Can Creative People Be More Mentally Healthy But Highly Creative People More Mentally Ill?" *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 9, no. 5, 2014, pp. 470–80. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44290034>.
- Veale, David, and Alison Roberts. "Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder." *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, vol. 348, 2014. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26513796>.
- Viana, Açúcar. Personal interview. 20 February 2026.
- Wardi, Eynel. "Gravity and Grace in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins." *The Hopkins Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3/4, 2001, pp. 130–61. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45241370>.
- Wilson, Suzanne M. "Structural Patterns in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson." *American Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1963, pp. 53–59. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2923020>.
- Wordsworth, William. "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." *Lyrical Ballads*, T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800. *Literature in Context: An Open Anthology*. <http://anthology.lib.virginia.edu/work/Wordsworth/wordsworth-preface>.

Recentring Mrs. Ramsay Through Psychoanalysis: Woolf, Joyce, and the Recovery of Maternal Psychic Power

by Sophia E. Vogt

Critical Essay

“Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,” said Mrs Ramsay. “But...”

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy...Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that...since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests...

“But,” said his father... “it won’t be fine”

— Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

It is a psychological certainty that a mother molds her child, yet her conscious influence is often controlled by the patriarchal society that molds her. *To the Lighthouse* reveals and reforms the mother’s psychic centrality with her social subversion in mind. Framing this dynamic is Virginia Woolf’s aphorism regarding mothers’ influence on creativity, “for we think back through our mothers if we are women,” which seems to conflict with her task as a female writer of “killing the Angel in the House,” a phantom who stifles female authorship and is often related to mothers. (Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* 151; “Professions for Women” [PW] 4-5) Mrs. Ramsay, based on Woolf’s mother Julia Stephens, embodies the divided influence of mothers by inspiring and obstructing the individualization of her daughters, notably Prue, and surrogate child, Lily Briscoe. As her influence is divided and opposed, I propose Mrs. Ramsay’s negative influence stems from the patriarchal ideologies she is conditioned to adopt, and are psychically transferred to her children. Thus, it is not mothers who impede individualization, but rather patriarchal expectations of womanhood that mothers are conditioned to champion via the Angel in the House archetype. The division of maternal influence is contextualized by James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, in which the usurpation of maternal power is exposed via Stephen’s dismissal of his mother Mary. While Joyce’s treatment of mothers identifies her subversion, it does not provide resolution. Woolf however turns towards reformation: Lily Briscoe’s triumph over the Angel in the House and maintenance of the positive influence of Mrs. Ramsay, is thus a means by which Woolf challenges a father-centric society to restore reverence for the mother through psychoanalytic theory.

The Hogarth Press is a key element in contextualizing Woolf’s connection to

psychoanalysis. Established by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, it published translations of the works of Sigmund Freud, and later Melanie Klein. (Stimpson x; Meisel 332-333) While Woolf was largely critical of Freud and psychoanalysis generally, perceiving it as “theory” and “therapeutic practice,” *To the Lighthouse* is widely agreed to reflect Kleinian theory which expanded upon Freud to centralize the mother. (Stimpson x; Meisel 333) Woolf’s alignment with Kleinian theory, despite the temporal and translation barriers between their works, reflects a cultural shift towards “a matricentric, rather than a patricentric, commencement of human culture,” as *To the Lighthouse* “offered a visionary, deep alternative to Freud’s ‘paternal genealogics.’” (Stimpson x) However, because of her skepticism, it is critical to preface psychoanalytic readings of Woolf as a tool to expose “intertextuality” rather than reveal the “influence” upon the author. Elizabeth Able notes:

By alerting us to certain recurrent but submerged narrative tensions in Woolf’s texts, psychoanalysis helps make us the discerning readers she desired. Woolf’s fiction, in turn, de-authorizes psychoanalysis, clarifying the narrative choices it makes, disclosing its fictionality. (Able xvi)

Here, Able explains that because of Woolf’s skepticism of psychoanalytic factuality, she rather leverages the narrative that psychoanalytic theory proposes, and what the theory infers about society. Through psychoanalytic narrative, Woolf illuminates the psychic power of the mother through Mrs. Ramsay, who had “eyes so clear that they... [unveiled] each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort.” (Woolf, *TL* 77) As such, Woolf anticipates the theory of Klein, and further Winnicott and Bollas which will be references in this paper, making a “contribution both to our understanding of the problem [of knowing another’s mind, which is sealed like a beehive] and to its resolution.” (Nussbaum 732) By emphasizing the psychic power of the mother to understand and form other minds, Woolf further reveals the way a mother’s power is co-opted by the patriarchy and transformed into the Angel in the House. The assertion emerges that if the psychic power of the mother, and women generally, is parsed from the stifling Angel in the House, society can begin healing from the terror of dictatorships, tyranny, and war.

A matricentric culture leading to political reforms stems from Woolf’s metaphor in *Three Guineas* regarding the foul “odour” and “atmosphere” surrounding and informing

women's position in a patriarchal world, a phenomenon that is invisible yet experienced. (Woolf, *Three Guineas* [TG] 96) Such an "atmosphere" called for reevaluation, since the patriarchal structures that are controlling it breed political violence and social inequality. Woolf references this directly when regarding governmental messages that advocate for women's seclusion to the private sphere to "have in embryo the creature. Dictator," continuing that the resulting atmosphere surrounding women holds "a very mighty power" which "not only changes the sizes and shapes of things; it affects solid bodies...which might have been thought impervious to atmosphere." (Woolf, TG 96) The pervious nature of "atmosphere" reflects the cascading effect flowing from the treatment of women towards all "solid bodies," or those who were thought to be immune. Men, for example, may not believe they are negatively affected by said atmosphere; however, Woolf argues they are due to the mentioned political ramifications. Therefore, Woolf argues that a change in the atmosphere surrounding women can change society.

Woolf's political recentering of women in *Three Guineas* is the psychic recentering of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, another invisible but pervasive influence informing the social atmosphere. Through Mrs. Ramsay, the influence of mothers becomes embodied and experienced in the consciousness of Woolf's characters. Mother's holding psychic power is explained by psychoanalytic theories such as the "good enough mother," as theorized by D.W. Winnicott, whom Klein mentored. The good-enough mother is one who almost perfectly adapts to the infant's needs, provides them with a sense of continuity and safety, and eventually imperfectly adapts to the infant's needs to catalyze the process of individualization. (Winnicott 10-11) Christopher Bollas emphasizes the salience of the good-enough mother's psychic impact on the child. Because the mother is the "first human aesthetic," informed by her "idiom of care," which refers to how the mother interacts with the infant, she provides "the most profound occasion where the content of the self is formed and transformed by the environment." (Bollas 385) The mother is then the "first transformational object" informing the infants "paradigm of transformation," meaning that the mother is the first example of aesthetic experience due to how she cares for the child, and resultantly is the blueprint for that child's subsequent search for aesthetic experiences that either resemble the care of the mother or heal the individual from inadequate care (Bollas 385-385). As a result, the mother "forms, and hence transforms, the internal and external realities of her infant," subsequently influencing the individual's experience for the rest of their life (Bollas 393). The good-enough mother's

role in shaping an individual's paradigm of transformation is particularly poignant, as it reveals the mother as the root of unconscious influence not only in infancy but throughout adulthood.

Capitalizing on the social and psychic power of the mother, patriarchal constructions then function to usurp the mother's power, influence the child, and thus uphold the atmosphere. Moreover, since the atmosphere surrounding women is patriarchally controlled, Mrs. Ramsay's psychic influence is therefore subverted, corrupting her influence upon her children to reflect the Angel in the House rather than her personal identity. As the atmosphere shapes the conflict between Mrs. Ramsay and her daughters, the factors corrupting maternal influence must be examined. We can contextualize the atmosphere of patriarchal control by looking to Woolf's contemporary, James Joyce, and the Madonna iconography in *Ulysses*, as Joyce's Catholic background illustrates the religiously-informed subversion of maternal influence through Stephen Dedalus. In *Ulysses*, Stephen exchanges his maternal point of origin, the "successive anastomosis of navelcords" linking back to Eve and God, for the mysterious and "necessary evil" of fatherhood that "the church is founded and founded irremovably because [it is] founded, like the world... upon the void." (Joyce 14.300, 9.828-843) Through this logic, Stephen helps establish the religious usurpation of mothers who, while having a physical verification which should empower their succession and influence, are marginalized by the Church's centralization of the father, which nullifies their biological prominence.

Despite awareness of the religious desecration of motherhood, Stephen succumbs to religious pressures. His quotation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, "verGINE madre figlia di tuo figlio," translated to "virgin mother, daughter of your son," is a specific instance where this usurpation occurs. (Dante qtd. in Joyce 14.303; Mandelbaum) Here, Dante constructs the Virgin Mary as simultaneously the Mother of God and the daughter of God, incarnate in Jesus—an already complicated position for the icon of motherhood. Stephen, however, focuses primarily on the Virgin Mary's subverted creative power and the subsequent exaltation of her son's. Seeking to disassociate his art from all influences, Stephen ironically uses this religious quotation to bind his mother's creative power to the Earth, attach her purpose and identity to his birth, and elevate his writing to an eternal realm. (Joyce 14.292) Despite this maneuver, Stephen's expression is stunted, with his only instance of being "stirred to creativity in the narrative" occurring in an early episode of the novel which "deals with his mother, where he poeticizes "Oomb, all wombing tomb (3.397-98, 401-02)." (Hill 338) This creative link

underscores the mother's foundational contribution to aesthetic formation and creativity, which Stephen unsuccessfully challenges in his efforts to detach. The persisting spirit of the mother underscores her psychic embeddedness in the child, yet her influence in *Ulysses* is vilified by the religious culture, which subverts her.

Maternal vilification explains why Stephen's supposed defeat of his mother is often viewed positively, and, in relation to *To the Lighthouse*, why the Jungian archetype of the "Great and Terrible Mother" emerges to describe Mrs. Ramsay, representing the mother as a nurturing yet destructive force. (Lilienfield 351-355) Jane Lilienfield's mapping of the Great and Terrible Mother onto Mrs. Ramsay functions similarly to Klein's "paranoid-schizoid position." In this position, the infant's relation to the object of the mother's breast, a similar notion to the mother being the first transformational object, "becomes split into a good (gratifying) and bad (frustrating) breast; this splitting results in a severance of love and hate." (Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" [Schizoid] 2) The paranoid-schizoid position emerges as the infant feels fear that the bad part of the mother is persecutory with the intention of annihilating the infant, and increases "idealization of the ideal object, in order to keep it far apart from the persecutory object." (Segal 27) As the infant's ego develops strength over the persecutory object, the paranoid-schizoid position should transition into the "depressive position," in which the infant identifies with the ideal object, realizing that the mother is a whole being who is both good and bad. (Segal 68) If a developmental impairment occurs however, the paranoid-schizoid position becomes particularly damaging to both the infant and mother, as:

If persecutory fears are very strong, and for this reason (among others) the infant cannot work through the paranoid-schizoid position, the working through of the depressive position is in turn impeded. This failure may lead to a regressive reinforcing of persecutory fears and strengthen the fixation-points for severe psychoses. (Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" 2)

When the atmosphere surrounding mothers portrays them as persecutory objects, the child becomes predisposed to stronger fear, fixates on the "bad" component of her identity, and stunts the view of her wholeness. As such, when the patriarchy shapes the view of the mother as inferior and persecutory to self actualization, and further cultivates children to perpetuate this ideology out of fear, children and mothers are cyclically stifled.

Unable to view his mother as a complete being, rather experiencing and banishing a hallucination of her supposedly persecutory ghost, Stephen is then reflective of the stagnated paranoid-schizoid position. (Joyce 15.4173-4245) Marilyn Hill argues that Stephen deliberately ignores his mother's "selfhood" because of his inability to "consciously mature beyond his infantile desires," which are conflicted "between the desire to remain an undifferentiated part of the mother and the developmental wish to be separate and free." (Hill 330; McKnight (422) qtd. in Hill 330) The desire for unification is reminiscent of the mother-infant dyad as formulated in psychoanalysis, which explains a stage where infants are unable to view themselves as separate from the mother, and, further, how this merger remains an influence throughout the life of that individual. (Winnicott 14-15) With this theoretical context, Stephen can then be viewed as trapped in an intermediate zone between merged and separate, since he does not view his mother as a whole individual, but is rather fixated on her as a persecutory object. As Stephen is swept up by the patriarchal tides that engulf women, he perpetuates the patriarchal vilification of motherhood that splits the mother's identity, emphasizes her as a persecutory figure, and stunts the child psychologically, recreating the cycle.

The paranoid-schizoid split of the mother manifests in Mrs. Ramsay through the extinguishing of her personal and professional desires, which she exchanges for service to her husband, children, and guests. Her suppressed wishes emerge throughout the text, for example feeling "withheld" from the beach by "something so strong that she never even thought of asking herself what it was," rather submitting "with a smile on her lips into the other room, where her husband sat reading." (Woolf, *TTL* 84) Another example is found in the suppression of Mrs. Ramsay's professional ambitions leaving only an unspoken "hope that thus she would cease to be a private woman...and become...an investigator, elucidating the social problem." (Woolf, *TTL* 7) These are rare moments in which the personal desires of Mrs. Ramsay reach the top of her consciousness, which is more often consumed by the "minds and wishes of others," as Woolf describes in her characterization of the Angel in the House (Woolf, *PW* 3). Being so occupied with others and upholding the social order which informs her life, Mrs. Ramsay is left with "scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by." (Woolf, *TTL* 28) Mrs. Ramsay is trapped and divided, with one part yearning for freedom, and the other conditioned to fulfill her duties as the Angel in the House. The "good" and the "bad," if you will.

Mrs. Ramsay's Angel in the House identity largely emerges through her championing

of gender norms and matrimony. We can see this in remarks like: "...an unmarried woman has missed the best of life." (Woolf, *TTL* 36) Yet again, Mrs. Ramsay is split, saying such things "as if it were an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children" since her marriage was not particularly pleasant with "plates whizzing and the doors slamming." (Woolf, *TTL* 44; 148) Regardless, the suppression of her identity to instead compulsively champion marriage, reveals the insidiousness of the Angel in the House role, which becomes self-justifying. Yet, it is also a means of protection, as within a system that renders daughters socially irrelevant until they become mothers, since "the iconography of the Madonna and Jesus leaves no room for a daughter, and, in enshrining motherhood, it repudiates the spinster," Mrs. Ramsay wills her position to them out of necessity, offering the only path to relevance available. (Rosenman 99) Therefore, the patriarchal usurpation of the maternal psyche corrupts the mother personally, yet also requires her to pass her role to her daughters. The mother is thus subverted two-fold, within the imagination of the child, and her own identity, both of which divide and suppress the "good" part of themselves to implicitly perpetuate the patriarchal atmosphere.

Of Mrs. Ramsay's daughters, Prue most fully inherits her mother's suppression. Describing Mrs. Ramsay's marriage, which left her "tired" and "cowed," Lily notes the effect upon Prue, who was:

always so occupied...seeing that nothing went wrong, she scarcely spoke of herself. How Prue must have blamed herself... How white she had gone when Mr Ramsay threw his plate through the window!... Anyhow, her mother now would seem to be making it up to her; assuring her that everything was well; promising her that one of these days that same happiness would be hers. (Woolf, *TTL* 148-149)

Holding undue responsibility for household dysfunction, Prue looked to her mother's example for resolution, mirroring her "intensely sympathetic," "immensely charming," and "utterly unselfish" Angel-in-the-House-esque demeanor. (Woolf, *PW* 3) Clearly, Prue reflects her mother and is particularly affected by Mrs. Ramsay's accepted suppression by the patriarchy. The early works of Klein reflects why Prue is predisposed to inherit the suppression affecting Mrs. Ramsay. Klein describes that a conclusion of psychoanalytic experience is the "demand that children shall, whenever possible, be protected from any over-strong repression, and

thus from illness or a disadvantageous development of character.” (419) While Prue is not revealed to have encountered any major, life-threatening, “Big T” traumas, Klein continues the point to advocate for “avoiding dangers that are equally actual, even if not visible (because not recognized as such) but which are much commoner, deeper, and therefore call much more urgently for observation.” (419) These invisible, unrecognized, ‘Little T’ traumas include the distress encountered by her fighting parents, and the embodied experience of her mother’s socially and self-imposed repression. These invisible and unrecognized traumas are reminiscent of Woolf’s evocation of the oppressive atmosphere that surrounds women, informed by patriarchal tenets. Engendering awareness towards traumas and social conditions both created and dismissed by the social atmosphere is then a means by which constructive reformation can begin.

Mr. Ramsay, a tyrannical figure who is the novel’s direct source of patriarchy, particularly affects the development of Prue, with his slamming doors and whizzing plates, making Prue a character in whom the traumas of the social atmosphere can be illuminated. Klein asserts this by arguing that the adult lives of children are informed by their first encounter with authority: permanent submission to the authority principle...are based on this first and most significant experience of authority, on the relationship between the parents and the little child. (Klein, “The Development of a Child” 442) Prue, having been particularly sensitive to the tensions of her household, finds herself then most affected by permanent submission to the authority principle relative to many of her siblings. As while Cam reveals a feeling of division from her mother’s influence, thinking when “looking at James... you’re not exposed to it, to this pressure and division of feeling, this extraordinary temptation,” unlike Prue, Cam identifies the influence of Mrs. Ramsay as a temptation to appease men and gain approval, which is unique to the socialization of women. (Woolf, *TTL* 126) Further, with this awareness, Cam enters the pact with James to “fight tyranny to the death.” (Woolf, *TTL* 123) Cam’s rebellious disposition then causes her to receive criticism from Mr. Ramsay, who characterizes her as “Cam the Wicked.” Alternatively, “Prue the Fair — for Prue would have beauty, he thought, how could she help it?” protects herself by developing in the image of her mother, not identifying gender roles as a temptation, but rather as her duty. (Woolf, *TTL* 16) Prue, shaped by her paradigm of transformation and submission to the authority principle, is then conditioned to transform into an Angel in the House out of fear of Mr. Ramsay and admiration for Mrs. Ramsay, seeking to recreate the idiom of care, the safety, her idealized

mother provided her, and in doing so traps herself a child-like merger between herself and the role her mother is forced to embody:

‘That’s my mother,’ thought Prue... what an extraordinary stroke of fortune it was for her to have her, and how she would never grow up and never leave home, she said, like a child: “We thought of going down to the beach.” (Woolf, *TTL* 84)

Prue’s maternal idolization is dangerous, as her mother’s identity is conflated with the Angel of the House. Further, her merging of identity with Mrs. Ramsay pulls Prue towards the stagnated paranoid-schizoid position, though, unlike Stephen, she represents the over-idealization of the good part of the mother, without scrutinizing the bad. She can not see her mother as a whole, and as such, is susceptible to inheriting her patriarchally corrupted influence. This reveals an interesting gendered element of the paranoid-schizoid position when it relates to the subversion of maternal authority—with women conditioned to idealize their mother as to become them, and men conditioned to reject mothers as to maintain power over women.

Prue’s status as merged with Mrs. Ramsay, stuck in the idealized posture of the paranoid-schizoid position, makes it no accident that she tragically dies during childbirth, having “enjoyed for less than a year” the happiness which her mother promised her, and she sought. (Woolf, *TTL* 148-149) Prue’s death reveals the necessity for the Angel in the House to be killed by the author, particularly in a post-World War One society as exemplified in *Three Guineas*, with Woolf perhaps also fighting “tyranny to the death.” The death of the Angel in the House as a figure in *To the Lighthouse* then begins to eradicate misogyny from the mother’s influence, reflecting Woolf’s occupation as a writer and goal from *Three Guineas* to reform the social position of women to avoid further political violence. So, by killing the figures of Mrs. Ramsay and Prue, Woolf essentially “kills” paternal authority within the novel as a political revolution, opening a space for the split maternal essence to be unified via Lily Briscoe’s painting, which pays tribute to Mrs. Ramsay.

The recentring of maternal authority in Lily through her painting allows her to emerge from the paranoid schizoid position towards the depressive position, as she grieves Mrs. Ramsay holistically, with reference to the good and bad, rather than simply the bad, as Stephen does, or the good, as in Prue. Lily recognizes the bad of Mrs. Ramsay, having had

a conflicted relationship characterized by matrimonial pressures which inhibited her desired lifestyle as an unmarried painter. Like Stephen, Lily challenges the persecutory aspects of maternal influence, with her ultimate detestation being: "... she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation. She had felt, now she could stand up to Mrs. Ramsay." (Woolf, *TTL* 131) However, unlike Stephen, Lily remains connected to the positive influence of Mrs. Ramsay. She is neither disillusioned with Mrs. Ramsay's corrupt influence nor overly averse. Rather, Lily develops to view Mrs. Ramsay as a whole and is able to identify with her positive attributes, having gained the mental fortitude to overcome the negative components. Resultantly, Mrs. Ramsay emerges as the content and inspiration that spurs Lily to complete her artistic vision; the undercurrent that flows into her art's purpose and informs her experience of life:

'Life stand still here'; Mrs Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)-- this was the nature of a revelation... 'Mrs Ramsay! Mrs Ramsay!' She repeated. She owed this revelation to her. (Woolf, *TTL* 120-121)

So, despite the rejection of Mrs. Ramsay's patriarchal tenets, Lily remains connected to Mrs. Ramsay's personal character apart from her Angel in the House role, thus reestablishing her psychic centrality as a whole individual, opposed to the overemphasis of her divided components. Relatedly, Nini Fang situates how Lily's painting is a key device which functions to recenter Mrs. Ramsay's psychic power, noting:

whilst Woolf let Mr Ramsay, the father, enjoy the narrative centre, she gave centrality to Mrs. Ramsay, the mother, in Lily's aesthetic moments... The break between the space of the novel's overt narrative and the surface of Lily's canvas marks what can be effectively reflected upon through Winnicott's (1971) idea of 'the transitional space.' (17)

This "transitional space" is a liminal zone between subjectivity and objectivity that emerges in infancy, during the process in which the baby begins to separate from their merged position within the mother-infant dyad. (Winnicott 14-15) Fang notes that the surface of Lily's canvas opens this transitional space as it provides "an entrance to the dimensions of psychic life hosting

the unthought known.” (17) The “unthought known” in this case can refer to the mother’s embodied influence on the child, which is invisible, yet experienced. As painting reveals the atmosphere that is otherwise invisible, Lily elucidates the centrality of the mother in an individual’s unconscious, with Lily unknowingly depicting Mrs. Ramsay’s perception of her interior as a “wedge of darkness” in a similar “triangular purple shape,” for example. (Woolf, *TTL* 45;38) So, as Lily works through the internal and external voices telling her “women can not paint, women can not write,” she thinks back through the same mother who “repudiates” her status as a “spinster.” (Woolf, *TTL* 119; Rosenman 99) While thinking back through Mrs. Ramsay seems ironic for Lily’s journey towards self-actualization, it is the necessary step that Stephen avoids to cause his stagnation. Rather, Lily acknowledges Mrs. Ramsay’s influence upon her and uses her painting as a means to parse out her good and bad components, before uniting her as a whole and moving forward to the depressive position.

The process of painting reveals the challenge of maternal parsing, with overstrong patriarchal influences, or “demons,” obscuring Lily’s vision and the positive components of Mrs. Ramsay:

It was in that moment’s flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from a conception to work as dreadful as any down dark passage for a child. (Woolf, *TTL* 14)

Here, Woolf acknowledges that the space between the canvas and Lily’s mind’s eye, and the clarity of her imagination, is clouded by patriarchal influences that try to retain her in a childlike subservient position to the patriarchy. However, by enduring through such demons, rather embracing Mrs. Ramsay as a unified individual who has positively informed her person and creativity, Lily has the clarity to complete her painting: “With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished.” (Woolf, *TTL* 154) The ability to reach back to the embodied influence of Mrs. Ramsay reveals the utility of creative expression in exposing the atmosphere influencing society. As while Stephen and Prue have both been caught in this transitional space, neither able to remain merged or completely disconnected from their mothers, Lily creates the space to reckon with Mrs. Ramsay through her painting and expresses what is unconscious yet affective. As Lily emerges from the transitional space and completes her vision, healthily separating from the childlike merger while

retaining the positive essence of Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf pioneeringly establishes the restoration of the mother's influence through processes indicative of psychoanalytic principles from beyond her era.

As Lily's feminist revolution stems from defeating the patriarchally-injected identity of Mrs. Ramsay, while remaining connected to her positive essence, viewing her as a whole individual rather than isolated parts, I push back against Mrs. Ramsay's treatment as the "Great and Terrible Mother," as it resembles the atmosphere subverting mothers, which Woolf fought against. For example, scholars analyzing the role of Mrs. Ramsay, such as Lilienfield and Rosenman, describe Mrs. Ramsay as an overbearing force to conquer. Lilienfield writes that "a successful mourning entails the relinquishing of the person lost; having completed this process, Lily is free to explore not only different ways of being a woman, but different ways of living with men." (368) Further, Roseman writes, "Lily's painting finally secures her freedom from the mother's obsessive attraction, purging Mrs. Ramsay of her overpowering emotional significance." (110) In contrast to this view of Mrs. Ramsay as an overbearing mother, I argue that Mrs. Ramsay as an individual has been conflated with the Angel in the House. The Angel in the House is not the embodied essence of the mother that informs Lily's painting, but rather the patriarchal construct of the mother imposed upon her that dilutes her individuality. Therefore, by killing the Angel in the House, the positive components of Mrs. Ramsay are excavated out of the atmosphere that buried her, and recenters her as the "repository of memory... the source of poetic inspiration for women writers [or painters, in Lily's case] by locating her at the core of the creative impulse." (Schwartz 721) Mark Spilka further supports this view by explaining that Lily:

must not only come to terms with Mrs. Ramsay before she can finish painting, but she must also emulate her creativity in life, in marriage, at every step of her artistic work. Her artistry is in fact a maternal inheritance, a distilled result of maternal guidance long-delayed by death and emotional arrest. (25)

It is thus not the whole mother who oppresses, but rather the component of her informed by the patriarchal society that conditions her. A more holistic view of Mrs. Ramsay, such as the one Lily achieves, that recognizes the complexities, ambiguities, and influences of her character, allows the awareness that Woolf advocated for to emerge; an awareness of

the atmosphere that informs women, rather than blaming women for the atmosphere. Through such awareness is where reformation begins, and such awareness can emerge from thinking back through one's mother holistically rather than divided, and vilified or idealized, as Woolf had done through this novel, and Lily had emulated through her painting.

Thinking back through mothers, Bollas notes how an "adult's search for transformation" is connected to the image of their mother, and "often finds its way into literature where [they] may experience an intense moment of rapport with a text that evokes a character memory." (393) Virginia Woolf's literature then functions as a destination for the search for transformation, with the character of Mrs. Ramsay being an iconified mother, and her children functioning as surrogates for the reader. The integration of psychoanalytic theory is then a component of what makes Woolf's prose so salient to the affective reader, as it touches on the embodied, unconscious experience of infancy that influences every adult human. The integration of psychoanalysis—conscious or not—in literature may be a component in unraveling what it is that makes "the literary," in the terms of David Attridge, metaphysically meaningful and trans-temporally relevant, as phenomena such as the mother–infant relationship exist despite contextual changes of humanhood. (1-5) Further, this helps in "making the case for the relevance of specific cognitive universals to the study of literary texts" by revealing how psychoanalysis in *To the Lighthouse* "relates to a particular version of the given universal, and [makes] the case for the significance of that version in terms of some larger nonscientific concept." (Jackson 178) Because the mother's influence is a universal phenomenon, whether it be positive or negative, a psychoanalytic study of Mrs Ramsay's influence upon her children, and the political causes and effects, grounds the interdisciplanarity topic of this essay.

Through a psychoanalytic narrative, Woolf re-centers the psychic power of the mother, exposing the personal and political consequences that result from her social subversion. Stephen's absorption into the patriarchal order and Prue's death within it reveal the two extremes of this usurpation: the child who rejects the mother entirely, and the child who merges with her corrupted role, with both helping uphold the atmosphere constructing the mother's role. However, by interrogating the patriarchal conditioning embedded in Mrs. Ramsay's influence while retaining the essence of her care through painting, Lily can pass through the transitional space and emerge individualized, not despite Mrs. Ramsay, but through her. The completion of the painting is therefore not a triumph over the mother, but a restoration of her wholeness, diminishing the patriarchal distortions that had obscured her psychic centrality. This restoration

is not confined to Lily alone. As Laura Doyle argues, the narrator of *To the Lighthouse* “stations herself within the objects which situate the mother’s presence in the world,” and in doing so “revises the patriarchal coding of bodily emotions,” of which the traditional mother is typically complicit in upholding. (43) The novel’s very structure, then, performs what Lily develops on her canvas: a recentering of the mother that strips away patriarchal inscription while preserving her transformative influence. In this way, Woolf enacts her own aphorism: to think back through one’s mother is not to inherit her suppression, but to recover her patriarchally buried essence and restore the matricentric vision of the future. Therefore the Angel in the House must die so the mother can live.

Bibliography

- Abel, Elizabeth. *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. U of Chicago P, 1989. *Internet Archive*, archive.org/details/virginiawoolffi00abel.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Paradiso* 33. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum, Columbia University Libraries, *Digital Dante*, digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-33/.
- Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature*. Routledge, 2004.
- Bollas, Christopher. “The Aesthetic Moment and the Search for Transformation.” *Annual of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 6, 1978, pp. 385–94, <https://bgsp.edu/app/uploads/2014/12/Bollas-The-Aesthetic-Moment-and-the-Search-for-Transformation.pdf>.
- Brader, Claire. “Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords Explained.” *House of Lords Library*, UK Parliament, 5 Jan. 2024, <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/lords-spiritual-in-the-house-of-lords-explained/#heading-2>.
- Doyle, Laura. “‘These Emotions of the Body’: Intercorporeal Narrative in *To the Lighthouse*.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1994, pp. 42–71. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/441550.
- Fang, Nini. “Lily Briscoe and Her Canvas: Kleinian Depression in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*.” *Emotion, Space and Society*, vol. 29, 2018, pp. 15–21. *ScienceDirect*, doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.07.010.
- Hill, Marylu. “‘Amor Matris’: Mother and Self in the Telemachiad Episode of *Ulysses*.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1993, pp. 329–43. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/441690.
- Jackson, Tony E. “Issues and Problems in the Blending of Cognitive Science, Evolutionary Psychology, and Literary Study.” *Poetics Today*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 161–79.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior, Garland Publishing, 1984.
- Klein, Melanie. “The Development of a Child.” *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, 1921–1945*, Hogarth Press, 1921. University of Pennsylvania, web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Klein_Development_of_a_Child.pdf.
- . “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms.” *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*, edited by Melanie

- Klein, The Free Press, 1984, pp. 300–317.
- Lilienfeld, Jane. “‘The Deceptiveness of Beauty’: Mother Love and Mother Hate in *To the Lighthouse*.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1977, pp. 345–76. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/441262.
- Meisel, Perry. “Woolf and Freud: The Kleinian Turn.” *Virginia Woolf in Context*, edited by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 332–41. doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511777103.030.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. “The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in Virginia Woolf’s ‘*To the Lighthouse*.’” *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1995, pp. 731–53. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057316>.
- Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk. *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship*. Louisiana State UP, 1986. *Internet Archive*, archive.org/details/invisiblepresenc0000rose.
- Schwartz, Beth C. “Thinking Back Through Our Mothers: Virginia Woolf Reads Shakespeare.” *ELH*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1991, pp. 721–46. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/2873462.
- Segal, Hanna. *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*. New enlarged ed., The Hogarth Press, 1973. Reprinted by H. Karnac (Books) Ltd, 2002.
- Spilka, Mark. “On Lily Briscoe’s Borrowed Grief: A Psycho-Literary Speculation.” *Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1979, pp. 1–33. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/23103167.
- Stimpson, Catharine R. Foreword. *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, by Elizabeth Abel, U of Chicago P, 1989, pp. ix–xvi.
- Tate, Trudi. Review of *Virginia Woolf and Christian Culture*, by Jane de Gay. *Literature Cambridge*, literaturecambridge.co.uk/news/de-gay.
- Winnicott, D. W. “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena.” *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, 1989. University of Pennsylvania, sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Winnicott%20Transitional.pdf.
- Woolf, Virginia. “Professions for Women.” *Killing the Angel in the House: Seven Essays*, Penguin, 1995.
- . *A Room of One’s Own*. Hogarth Press, 1935. *Internet Archive*, archive.org/details/woolf_aroom.
- . *Three Guineas*. Hogarth Press, 1943. *Internet Archive*, archive.org/details/dli_ernet.475785.
- . *To the Lighthouse*. Wordsworth Classics, 1994.

Paratext, Epitext, and Contemporary Media: The Evolution of Literary Culture Beyond the Book

by Josephine Yario

Critical Essay

The reception of books has increasingly become an interactive process fueled by popular culture, and, as a result, the location of books' meaning is shifting from something exclusively inside of the book as an object to the meaning existing in a wider scope outside of the text itself. In critical terms, we can say that meaning is shifting from paratext to the liminal space of epitext. Rather than functioning as self contained literary objects, contemporary texts often cater to a broader scope which incorporates beyond the author, publisher, and reader. These texts can be expanded and evolved through the merchandising, digital communities, adaptations, and participatory fan cultures. As a result, the success of the works are not focused as greatly on the quality of the texts, but also by a works capacity to adapt intermedially and expand across forms of engagement.

The research I conducted was initially an examination of aesthetic signaling and publication practices for contemporary books, more specifically why there seems to be a simple genre signifying format in book covers. I approached my research with a desire to understand the commercial success of these types of successful modern novels and why, despite being similar in content and/or appearance, they still become popular and are profitable. The answer is partially practical, decreasing risk leads to greater profitability; sticking to things that work and making minor shifts over time as opposed to more dramatic shifts in appearance or style of paratexts. This is only part of the picture, however, as intermedial adaptability, or how well a narrative translates across different media formats has become integral to the reception and constructions of texts in the contemporary literary marketplace. Contemporary works take into consideration not just narrative content but also their potential for narrative content to expand into elements outside of the text.

On a surface level, many decisions within contemporary publishing are informed by considerations of profitability, functionality, and audience engagement. However, these external elements are not supplementary to literature; they are able to influence how texts are interpreted, circulated, and consumed. In other words, books are heavily judged by their covers as the appearance is an integral part of the reach and success. Examining book appearance as something that enhances the text and elements that exist beyond the primary text is commonly associated with the concept of paratext, a term developed by Gérard Genette. Genette defines

paratexts as “liminal devices and conventions” which mediate the relationship between the text, author, publisher, and reader, including titles, prefaces, epigraphs, cover art, and publisher commentary (Genette xvii). These features function to shape the interpretive framework through which readers approach literary work and contribute to the broader public life of the text. One example of this is movie tie-in covers which can expand the audience to casual moviegoers and broader public audiences, while also providing visual reference to characters and elements of the narrative’s world. Though these covers are generally not preferred, it does have the benefit of bringing in new audiences that may ignore the book in other formats. (Nguyen 9)

Furthermore, paratextual conventions evolve alongside transformations in media, technology, and consumer culture. All of which rapidly shift, certain conventions may disappear over time while new forms emerge in response to the changes happening within a culture and its trends. This paper focuses specifically on contemporary textual conventions outside of the text itself into more abstracted forms of text, the epitext, as well as metatext, and hypertexts. The epitext is highly critical for contemporary reception of a text because the elements outside of the text like an author’s social media presence, fan communities, merchandise, etc. shape the production and interpretation of literature. These are elements that go beyond spatial and temporal confines of traditional text. Public epitexts, ones that are shared to the public, are often how audiences discover a text and they can define its perceived conventions which could benefit or damage a text’s overall reputation. Epitexts cause book markets to be heavily consumer led, with such dominant technological reach that developed in the 21st-century, epitext is a leading influence for the text, initially taking attention away from the text itself. (Genette 344)

Book form and appearance function as a key starting point for paratext in this analysis. They frequently function as primary sites through which a novel is framed; the aesthetic visual response and emotional appeal. A book’s physical characteristics shape a reader’s initial interpretation of a text prior to the engagement with its content. This function becomes especially significant when looking at how design is influenced by the time period and accessibility. It supports why the changes in book appearance that are occurring in the present are distinctly different from the past.

Specifically, this function can be seen with the rise and fall of mass-market paperback publishing. This style of book, known as “pocket books” for its small size, roughly 4 by 7 inches,

was a new technology which influenced the 20th-century reading sphere. As Dan Sinkyin states in his analysis of 20th-century publishing houses and publishing trends, “For the first several decades of the twentieth century, if you didn’t live in an East Coast city, books were hard to find. Books were few and far between. Mass market paperbacks changed the game” (Sinkyin 26). This transformation is not only crucial as a means of distribution and accessibility, comparable to those in the early 2000s with the rise of e-readers, but also as an evolution of paratexts. This displays that when the relationship between the reader and the form of text is modified, elements of the appearance will also change to attract the expanded or modified audiences. Using mass-market paperbacks to demonstrate how increased accessibility changes the paratextual relationships also elevates the argument of how present social media and epitexts change textual relationships through expanded accessibility.

These conditions for the paperbacks, occurring from the 1930s-1990s provide a foundation for the contemporary evolution of paratextual systems. The expanded access of books to the public created more production of epitext; much more fan communities and events, merchandising, and interplay between these elements. Some notable examples are the development of science fiction fans and pulp fiction novels, as well as novels with authors like Vonnegut, Tolkien, and Hemingway. The book covers that occurred in these editions are also some of the more notorious representations of the text, further highlighting the power of appearance.

This can be seen specifically with the novel *The Great Gatsby*, which exemplifies how beautiful art is incorporated within the novel itself; the night city skyline, with the watching eyes working to become visual starting points for people. *The Great Gatsby* models how paperbacks released at the beginning of the era of mass produced paperback books were supported through their distinctive and captivating covers. Although, when observing this cover in digital e-reader format, we can see how the cover, which had been a major benefit to the reception of the novel, may fall short to new forms of media and lose aesthetic appeal and comprehension. Oftentimes in the e-reader these covers are not as visually appealing, compressed and black and white, taking away the beauty of the art and losing what may be a driving interest in engaging with the text. Because of this, these artistic elements are now often omitted to consider the possible compression and alteration of the appearance of a cover in digital spaces (Vaders 19).

It is with this historical context that fictional genres which catered to these interests

began to expand more substantially. The growth of bookstores and the desire to generate more income started to create systems of very formulaic paratext. “It worked best if the title had a familiar author name on the cover, a brand name. It helped too if that brand name worked in a recognizable genre such as mystery or romance or, thanks to Stephen King, horror.” (Sinky in 43) This development also created a distinction between aesthetics and functionality, as some people preferred more artistic books while others may have simply wanted access to the text itself.

The gap between accessible and functional novels which may be simple, formulaic, versus the more expensive and prestigious associations of book form has widened and contributed to contemporary culture. Even as the paperback novel expanded access, the craftsmanship around the text still conveyed a sense of literary prestige. Ernest Hemingway, for example, was widely circulated in paperback novel form, but was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. As a result, the novel also took this shift into account becoming not merely a self-contained literary object, but a more flexible participatory artifact which can generate broader social and intermedial engagement through epitext.

It is important to note that it was not necessarily that paratext had changed, and that the material form of the book has undergone many revisional changes throughout history. However, in the digital age paratextual elements such as cover design have now adapted to new conditions of circulation. These changes can also be credited to the compromise for smoother transition between formats, simpler covers with bold letters were less likely to be poorly compressed in digital formats, or muddled by e-readers. What is lost in artistic distinctiveness associated with earlier cover traditions simultaneously strengthens the digital culture because of its adaptability. This simplification of cover art and paratext also puts more emphasis on the epitext; how the book is promoted, discussed, and interacted with.

As Alana Pokros discusses in her article “The Endless Life Cycle of Book Cover Trends,” contemporary cover design is often shaped by “intermingling cultural and economic forces.” These covers function as genre signifiers and use more symbolic representation of their text, more likely to be formulaic to fit their respective genre. “Designers have to strike the right balance between representing what’s inside the book, while obscuring just enough to preserve the reading experience. This can be a tricky process, which is perhaps why publishers often draw on examples that have worked in the past, rather than risking the failure of a new idea.” (Pokros 5) The balance between risk and security when designing paratextual features is why

demonstrate how publishers rely upon familiar structures in order to position literary works within increasingly competitive digital markets. Consequently, this means that books in the current market lack artistic elements, like those in earlier eras, in part because of trends.

The epitext and elements of the book forms are shaped through the epitextual engagement. Contemporary covers function effectively within social media environments, digital markets, and even algorithmically driven recommendations, which all work together to create a more individualized reading experience. This experience includes specialized editions and releases, customizable formats like digital, audio, and paper. All factors which help broaden the potential audience because it can work to a person's needs. Considering individual expression through tangible epitexts like special editions is also proven to sell, as "respondents are willing to pay a premium for customized items due to their uniqueness, fit, and higher quality, especially for special occasions" (Karlsson and Ryberg 3). This creates a balance between commodity and what will make the consumer's identity feel seen and stimulated through artistic and personal elements. This element of customization gives an agency and ease in the purchase of literature because it can become exactly what a person enjoys best easily.

Examples of this phenomenon can be observed with the highly popular contemporary fantasy series such as *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas, whose extensive merchandising and collector culture significantly expand the series beyond its textual form. From reading and examining fan forums and conversations it can be gathered that people, majority women, find something within the text and its romance that they feel is lacking in real life. An article containing an interview with Maas describes it as, "unlike most contemporary film and media, the perspective is almost entirely the woman's — when it's (briefly) not, it's usually because we're getting insight into how the dude wants to figure out how to better (in every way) for a woman (Peterson 5)." She then further describes how it is commonly a deep attraction for the characters which creates a desire to engage deeply with the text. This attraction then extends to epitext, metatext, and something that may be developing beyond that.

The *ACOTAR* series' epitext contains many heated fan debates and polarizing opinions. The fans thrive specifically on TikTok, Reddit, and the fandom's wiki. According to Fanlore.org, discourse often gets heated through debates on character relationships and personalities are popular topics. Some can even go as far as attacking Maas's character for catering to.

“performative white women feminists,” but mostly contains fanart and fan discussions. Popular discussions and implementations of intermedial mindsets within reading audiences are their desires to create “dream casts” which feature real actors for a hypothetical live action movie adaptation.

Series’ like *A Court of Thorns and Roses* are very good examples for how epitext functions in a digital environment. Also, the epitext is now chronologically documented and preserved through digitization and creates a large sense of community and kinship as well as personal comfort. These communities are a perfect opportunity for marketing elements to come into play. Companies such as LitJoy Crate collaborate with authors like Maas and publishers specifically to create special editions, merchandise, and immersive literary products in relation to the literary universe. LitJoy markets with the statement: “Escape the mundane and enter the world of stories! LitJoy’s beautiful books and clever collections connect you with the stories you love.” (LitJoy Crate) This language emphasizes the connection and immersion through material and epitextual experience rather than through mental immersion, the focus is not on the text, but rather how it can be implemented into daily life. Currently, the website features an officially licensed collab with Maas. This collaboration has themed keys, book sleeves, bookshelf alleys, fan art, and t-shirts. All small items which can be placed on a bookshelf or used as decoration. This immersion increasingly involves bringing elements of the literary world into the physical and social reality as well as an aesthetic interplay between the text and the reader.

Many of the book series that collaborate with LitJoy were often popularized through new social media like TikTok which came to be in the late 2010s. TikTok’s popularity is in part due to its complex algorithm and short video reel construction which curates a video feed designed specifically for the individual. The advancement of technology has allowed for highly complex algorithmic mechanisms which function to keep the user entertained and engaged with the content for as long as possible (Low et al.). Consequently, this lead to the development of communities which form through people who are sorted into groups with similar interactions on posts, and in this case to the community under the name “#booktok”. The creation of these online literary subcommunities creates a place where literature and text can actively be engaged with and participatorily consumed, again deepening the epitext, metatext, and even forming hypertext which is the text that links these separate forums together.

Furthermore, many of the products and the overall audience of these communities have been women. The intermedial and intertextual relationships within fandom culture are predominantly women led and organized by a great majority. These fan communities date back to the early 1970s, specifically with what can be classified as *Star Trek* fanfiction. It is argued that women created this content to compensate and subvert for where writing may be lacking and hold bias to conform to patriarchal male centered stories (Una 6). The men are often rewritten to appeal more to a female audience and it is the inclination of these epitextual elements that promotes engagement with the original content rather than the other way around.

This creates a world of content which expands through its interactive potential. In *Spreadable Media*, this is explored at length acknowledging the importance of targeting a group and not one individual alone when creating a media. Combining the proposed idea of a text which can “spread” amongst groups with media through the framing of epitext and metatext can expand the cohesiveness of these two ideas in contemporary modes.

Social media posts which include art, teasers, or statements released by authors can expand the literary canon and it is through these social and literary phenomena working together which allow it to happen. People are actively engaged now, not because of the text itself, but because of the potential it has to create more content in relation to the text suited to their desires. This transforms the relationship of the text entirely because it means it is always subject to expansion or change at any given moment. This adaptable, highly interactive and primarily digital community is what distinguishes it from the past communities: Attention is brought away from the text and to the epitextual and metatextual phenomena.

In the present day, the resurgence of physical books comes not out of necessity, but out of a proposed consumer desire also known as “participatory culture.” This is a culture which is enabled through the media to spread an idea and blurs the lines between consumers and producers (Jenkins et al. 3). This expanded literary market may also be beneficial as a form of protection or durability for authors and publishers. Contemporary literary works frequently maintain popularity even amidst public controversy surrounding their creators because expansive fan communities and participatory adaptations allow stories to develop forms of cultural autonomy independent of authorial identity. The common assertion that audiences may “separate art from the artist” becomes increasingly significant within participatory literary systems where narratives are continuously reinterpreted through fandom and

intermedial adaptation.

Even with controversies and attacks on character, especially with the rise of cancel culture, authors like Maas, as mentioned, who face criticism can still have successful works. This autonomy of the text and the epitext can then also be looked at through a metatextual perspective as they do not rely on their source to exist. Some people even go as far as disregarding or rejecting the author completely (Giolo 204). In this sense paratext can almost be completely disregarded and solely the text itself and epitext do the work. Whether this is due to an expanded industry less focused on prestige or because of a highly digital culture, there is an undeniable shift in the relationship between reader, author, publisher and text occurring with digital technologies.

Importantly, this metatextual relationship grants the readers and more specifically fandoms increasingly intimate and influential forms of interaction and participation within literary culture. These communities can be capable of generating entirely new layers of content that can function semi-independently from the work itself. This also brings up a conversation regarding ownership, originality, and autonomy of media. Now, as artificial-intelligence technologies develop, human-made products and human experience may grow in value. Many of the epitexts are creative and artistic, displaying the power of literature and need for human connection through distinctively human outlets like narration and storytelling.

Bibliography

- A Court of Thorns and roses* wiki | *fandom*. Home Page. (n.d.).
https://acourtofthornsandroses.fandom.com/wiki/A_Court_of_Thorns_and_Roses_Wiki.
- Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge University Press.
- Giolo, Guilhaerme, Driessen, Simone, & Stanfill, Mel. "Waving the cancelling wand: Harry Potter fans and the cancellation of J.K. Rowling". *Social Semiotics*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2026. 199–214.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2026.2615634>.
- Jenkins, Henry, et al. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York University Press, 2013.
- Litjoy Staff. "About Us." *LitJoy Creates Signed Books, Book Boxes, and Gifts for Book Lovers*,
<https://litjoycrate.com/pages/about>. Accessed 9 June 2026.
- Low, Bronwen, et al. "Algorithmic imaginings and critical digital literacy on #BookTok." *New Media & Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2023. *Sagepub*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/14614448231206466>.
- Maas, Sarah J. *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Bloomsbury, 2015

- McCormack, Una. "When the Subject Changed." *Foundation*, vol. 51, no. 142, 2022, pp. 26-33. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/when-subject-changed/docview/2709983229/se-2>.
- Nguyen, Vivian, "A Major Motion Picture or Just a Picture? An Analysis in Movie Tie-Ins vs. Original Cover Art." *Book Publishing Final Research Paper* 2020. https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/eng_bookpubpaper/47.
- Petersen, A. H. "Culture study goes full ACOTAR." *Culture Study*. 6 March 2024. <https://annehelen.substack.com/p/culture-study-goes-full-acotar>.
- Pockros, Alana. "The Endless Life Cycle of Book Cover Trends." *AIGA Eye on Design* August 23rd, 2021. <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/the-endless-life-cycle-of-book-cover-trends/>.
- Ryberg, Anna, and Josephine Karlsson. *The Power of Customization: Exploring the Impact of Cutsomized Design and Fit on User Experience and Perception of Garments*. 2024. University of Borås, Master's Thesis.
- Sinkyin, Dan. *Big Fiction: How Conglomeration Changed the Publishing Industry and American Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2023.
- TikTok Support. *How TikTok recommends content*. [Support.tiktok.com](https://support.tiktok.com). (2026).

Volume XI: June 2026

