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Editor’s Introduction

The editorial staff of NOMAD is proud to bring out this double issue including essays written in Comparative Literature and COLT cross-listed courses between fall 2002 and winter 2005. As the journal’s name suggests, the papers printed here reflect the nomadic and wandering nature of comparative literature. The essays cover topics from Edgar Allan Poe and psychoanalysis to the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova to *The Silence of the Lambs*. They range broadly in tone and approach. And this is as it should be. The only common denominator is their quality and a shared disregard for entrenched cultural and disciplinary boundaries. They are a testament both to the quality of work being done by our undergraduates, as well as the breadth of research being done by our faculty and graduate students.

Accepted papers were then handed back with comments to begin the revision process. As much as possible, this second stage is meant as an opportunity for COLT students not only to improve a given piece of writing, but to improve as writers. Final drafts were then collected and underwent final copyediting by the editorial staff. Out of over fifty submissions representing the best work in COLT, we present here the top nineteen.

We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped see this issue to light, either by submitting essays, reading submissions, copyediting or assistance with other administrative tasks. The editorial staff, along with the rest of Comparative Literature, is proud of the work included here and we look forward to the work we will receive in the future.

Tom Dolack
NOMAD Editor
SPIRITUAL HOMELESSNESS AND HOPE FOR THE RENEWED EPIC:
LUKÁCS AND TOLSTOY

Jena Knudsen

In *The Theory of the Novel*, written between 1914-15 and published in 1920, Georg Lukács explores what he sees as the fundamental and genre-defining philosophical difference between the writers of epic and novelistic works. The philosophical gap between the two literary forms is most clearly reflected in the portrayal of their heroes, who emerge from the same moment in history as the writers do. The first half of *The Theory of the Novel* tells the story of mankind’s degeneration into a state of displacement and spiritual homelessness, reflective of the historico-philosophical world out of which the novelistic genre arose. As a Marxist heavily influenced by the outbreak of the First World War (11), Lukács understood this homelessness to be symptomatic of the alienation brought about by industrial society. Part two of his study, entitled “Attempt at a Typology of the Novel Form,” involves a consideration of several candidates, the last of which is Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. Much of Lukács’ theory that spiritual homelessness is evidence of modern man’s disconnection from a fulfilling belief system could have been drawn directly from *War and Peace*. *The Theory of the Novel* in fact solidifies into theory numerous points that Tolstoy’s characters make on the state of modernity. However, there is a point at which Lukács’ theory diverges from, or at least becomes incompatible with, Tolstoy’s own views. The aim of this paper is to explore this point of divergence and consider what it reveals about the respective political outlooks of the two writers, who shared a belief in the future possibility of a renewed epic worldview, but had different opinions on how this shift could be brought about.

*War and Peace* originated from Tolstoy’s desire to write about the history of the Decembrist Revolution of 1825, and the role played by those Russian soldiers who followed Napoleon’s defeated troops back to France in 1812 and returned to Russia with new ideas about revolution. Tolstoy’s research led him back to the
prehistory of the Napoleonic War, and so *War and Peace* begins in 1805. In alternating domestic and military scenes, the characters’ lives develop alongside Russia’s political history. It is in the thoughts, words, and actions of the characters Prince Andrey Bolkonsky and Count Pierre Bezuhov, as well as in Tolstoy’s own metatextual commentary on the difference between ancient and modern spirituality, that the reader of *The Theory of the Novel* finds the most parallels with Lukács’ argument.

The basic supposition of Lukács’ theory is that in contrast to the epic hero, whose destiny is charted by real and tangible gods, the hero of the novel has neither spiritual direction nor security, and lives in a world detached from God. The temporal world of the novel (which is also to say the historical condition of the novelist) is ultimately dissatisfying and offers no real nourishment beyond the physical requirements of the body. Like the modern man, the modern protagonist is a wanderer and a seeker of truth, forever driven by the desire to unite his soul with its home. This is the “essential aspiration” and “nostalgia of the soul” suffered by the novelistic hero, who has no choice but to blindly follow any course that he (however mistakenly) believes will lead to his spiritual fulfillment (87).

This description fits Pierre perfectly, at least in his youth. Rich and directionless, he spends the majority of the novel alternately pursuing politics, philosophy, freemasonry, romantic relationships, and alcohol-induced oblivion, all in the attempt to understand the meaning of life and how one should live it. His constant obsession with this question is likened to the turning of a “screw that did not bite into anything” (Tolstoy 389). Pierre is also preoccupied with the mystery of his own identity and role in the universe, as seen in a semi-delirious moment during his captivity in which he laughs and raves out loud: “They keep me prisoner. Who is ‘me’? Me? Me—my immortal soul!” (1161). As Lukács points out, the act of questioning the meaning of life and of the self reveals a distinctly modern worldview. He quotes Novalis: “Philosophy is really homesickness; it is the urge to be at home everywhere” (29).

While Pierre basically typifies the homeless wanderer, Andrey illustrates another related and important part of Lukács’ theory of the novelistic hero, which is that even if he comes into contact with a higher meaning, or truth, he is
incapable of successfully incorporating it into his life. In the modern world, unlike that of Homer, the spiritual and physical realms cannot coexist on the same plane. Andrey’s life, like that of Pierre, exemplifies the tension of existing in one world while searching for something outside of it. Andrey is a virtuous but troubled character who has numerous mystical experiences in which he feels his soul to be in direct communication with God. Each time, however, he is unable to retain the experience.

The most dramatic example is the memorable scene at Austerlitz, in which Andrey is wounded on the battlefield and suddenly finds himself on his back, staring up at “the lofty sky, not clear, but still immeasurably lofty, with grey clouds creeping quietly over it” (Tolstoy 313). Contrasted with this sight, the rest of the world seems to Andrey petty and meaningless. He struggles to retain this feeling after his rescue and reintegration into society. At first, even the company of Napoleon, his hero, is nothing to him “in comparison with what was passing now between his soul and that lofty, limitless sky with the clouds flying over it” (324). However, this impression gradually fades and Andrey’s consuming desire to revive and understand it alienates him from the world around him. The beauty he sees in the spiritual realm only emphasizes the baseness of earthly reality, resulting in depression and uncertainty about the meaning of life, if any deeper meaning exists at all.

Andrey’s failure to harmonize his inner life with the outside world illustrates what Lukács calls the “self-destruction of reality” (79). It is Andrey’s inability to reconcile “the fearful contrast between something infinitely great and illimitable existing in him, and something limited and material” (Tolstoy 527) (his body), that ultimately leads to his death (Tolstoy 1117-22). Ill and semi-delirious, he allows himself to be consumed by the mystery that for him can only exist outside of mortal life. Death is the only means by which Andrey can ‘go home’ permanently. For Lukács, this failed convergence of sacred and secular is a rule for the novel. The highest realization to which the novelistic hero can aspire is that “meaning can never quite penetrate reality” (Lukács 88). It is only in the classical epic form that the highest spiritual reality of man coexists with everyday life in a rounded ‘totality.’

It is in Lukács’ treatment of the one character in War and Peace for whom
meaning does penetrate reality that The Theory of the Novel becomes incompatible with Tolstoy’s message. Near the end of the novel, Pierre realizes that his whole life has been spent searching for something outside of himself, but “that seeking for an object in life was over for him now” (Tolstoy 1257). He realizes that God is present in every aspect of his daily life, making his spiritual life on earth sustainable in a way that Andrey’s experience never could have been. Pierre finds that, whereas before he had continually struggled over the right thing to do and was easily dominated by other people, he is suddenly able to make all decisions effortlessly, as if he had “a judge within him settling what he must do and what he must not, by some laws of which he was himself unaware” (1262). This state of being may call to mind Lukács’ description of epic heroes, who “are guided by the gods” and “never walk alone, [as] they are always led” (86). Pierre does seem to acquire something of the “rounded totality” that Lukács argues belongs to the domain of epic, where all aspects of life, mundane and spiritual, exist on the same plane without conflict.

It should be noted that the issue for Lukács is not whether Pierre is an epic character. Writing about the realm of epic, Lukács explains that

[t]his world is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority. If ever this world should come into being as something natural and simply experienced, as the only true reality, a new complete totality could be built out of all its substances and relationships. (152)

Pierre’s frame of mind of course does not reflect any change in the ‘only true reality’ of the outside world, which remains as superficial and spiritually inert as ever, lacking the “plenitude and perfection that would make it [...] a home in which the character might arrive and come to rest” (Lukács 147). As Lukács is concerned with the genre of War and Peace as a whole, it is not surprising that he does not make much of Pierre’s accomplishment. What is perhaps surprising, however, is that he does not even recognize Pierre as making a step in the right direction, and in fact denies that he has reached anything resembling ‘totality.’
He does this by dividing the spiritual experiences of Andrey and Pierre into two distinct and unequal categories, which fill the upper two tiers of a three-layered model of reality. The lowest level is the secular realm, or the world of ‘convention,’ which consists of social constructs such as legal and economic systems. This ultimately shallow and unsatisfying level, which can also be thought of as ‘society,’ is contrasted with the level of ‘community,’ which exists on the second plane, ‘nature.’ This is the realm of brotherly and conjugal love, and wholesome spirituality in which man is attuned to his true self and to the natural world. This is the category under which Pierre’s spiritual experience falls. By the end of the novel, at the apex of his understanding and growth, he has not abandoned his sense of responsibility toward mankind; he is above all else a husband and a revolutionary thinker (who, the text hints, may one day become a revolutionary leader [Tolstoy 1333–43]). Andrey’s fleeting near-death experiences, in which his soul temporarily comes into contact with its home, occur at the third and highest level of reality, which Lukács calls the ‘transcendent.’ This state of awareness cannot be maintained for long in the novel, where “a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer” (Lukács 80). With this division, both characters are denied epic status, Andrey because his spirituality is fleeting, Pierre because his spirituality is somehow not pure enough.

Perhaps the biggest problem with this division is the instability of Lukács’ definition of ‘nature.’ The meaning of the term varies according to context in The Theory of the Novel, sometimes synonymous with ‘transcendence,’ and at other times with a disappointing earthiness. On one hand, Lukács argues that the “loneliness of the soul” is a direct result of its “divorce” from nature (63), and that an epic hero (and only an epic hero) is fully at home, or spiritually fulfilled, in the realm of nature (147). However, when Pierre does tap into this state, Lukács finds it brutish and demeaning. He argues that what happens to Pierre is not a profound reconciliation of temporal reality and spiritual aspiration, but rather “a miserable swallowing-up by nature of everything that is great and noble in man” (148). He continues: “[n]ature is alive inside man but, when it is lived as culture it reduces man to the lowest, most mindless, most idea-forsaken conventionality” (148). Nature can only participate in transcendence
upon meeting the soul; at the level of human-constructed social systems, with their inherent degree of artificiality, nature is a perverting force (146). For this reason, of the domestic scene in which Pierre is found in the novel’s epilogue, Lukács writes that “[n]othing is left of what was there before; as the sand of the deserts covers the pyramids, so every spiritual thing has been swamped, annihilated by animal nature” (148). ‘Nature’ is the key for transcending the modern, novelistic state of consciousness, but only through its partnership with the soul—a union which Lukács does not consider to have taken place in Pierre, though he does not specify why.

The fusion of one’s spiritual and temporal lives should be elevating, but Lukács finds it debasing and disappointing in Pierre, justifying this by the argument that the earthiness of life is profound in the epic, but depressing in the novel (57). So, presumably, Pierre is not an epic character because his earthy spirituality is debasing, and this spirituality is debasing because he is a novelistic character in a novelistic world. The devaluation of Pierre’s experience seems especially strange when one considers that thus far the theory of homelessness has revolved around the issue of spiritual orientation, whereas Lukács’ reasoning here seems based on his personal distaste. Pierre may appear in the epilogue as a two-dimensional character who is dominated by his wife, but it should not matter whether his personality is agreeable to the reader, or whether he possesses the temperament expected of an epic hero. The issue is whether Pierre is a homeless wanderer, and to all appearances, he is not.

Making it clear that Lukács is forging his own trail at this point is the fact that Pierre, not Andrey, is presented in War and Peace as possessing superior spiritual awareness. Pierre succeeds where Andrey fails; Pierre makes his spiritual life functional on an earthly plane, while Andrey wastes away. Andrey’s transcendent moments do not enrich his life, or confirm his faith in the goodness of humanity or even of God. Although awestruck, his experiences leave him with a profound feeling of unease, as if he were standing before a yawning abyss (Tolstoy 436). Pierre, on the other hand, even before his realization about the omnipotence of God, appears to possess a kernel of divine inspiration. On a ferry with Andrey, Pierre argues for his beliefs, which, though undeveloped and based in freemasonry, which he will later reject, still manage
to awaken in Andrey the feeling he had at Austerlitz. Andrey initially resists Pierre’s message of brotherly love, but apparently recognizes its value on some level, as it seems to him that even nature confirms it: “the lapping of the water kept up a refrain to Pierre’s words: ‘It’s the truth, believe it’” (436).

Although Pierre’s experience seems to be privileged over Andrey’s, there is little evidence in War and Peace for a fixed and hierarchical classification of metaphysical experience. War and Peace, like most of Tolstoy’s fiction, does present a distinction between society and community, as seen in the contrasting scenes of shallow aristocratic circles and the hearty, wholesome lives of the peasants. However, there is no explicit division between anything like Lukács’ ‘nature’ and ‘transcendence,’ only perhaps the binary realms of the material and immaterial, with different ways of experiencing each, some being preferable to others.

Tolstoy does not share Lukács’ notion of the impenetrability of the material world by truth, as this is exactly how Pierre triumphs over his years of wandering. For Tolstoy, the level of community is the meeting ground for bodily and spiritual existence, and therefore, it is here that humans can learn the most valuable lessons. That there is no realm higher than that of community in War and Peace reflects Tolstoy’s sympathies toward Slavophilism, the mid-nineteenth-century philosophical and nationalist movement that rejected the westernization of Russia and idealized rural life. The Slavophiles argued for the superiority of Russian culture, spirituality and politics, and many saw the peasantry as preservers of the ruddy wholesomeness and untainted religious devotion that characterized Russia’s national character. Tolstoy began writing War and Peace in 1862, one year after the emancipation of the serfs and in a time when the civil rights of peasants were of serious concern to Slavophiles and like-minded Russians. It is hardly surprising then that Tolstoy, who advocated that landowners should learn from peasants, privileges a robust domestic life to the self-absorbed public life of the upper classes.

Tolstoy had strong opinions about the plight of the modern world, which are openly voiced throughout War and Peace, particularly in the second half of the epilogue. Though he does not use the terms ‘epic’ and ‘novelistic’ in his commentaries, the juxtaposition of “the ancients” and “modern man” suggest
that he is speaking of the same gap in consciousness. The problem Tolstoy sees is that although modern man is skeptical and cannot give himself over to blind faith, he has found nothing else capable of answering his questions. Science and reason have replaced God, but they are not able to provide man with the ‘Truth.’ At the same time, he acknowledges that with the advent of science and the fundamental changes in the modern worldview, a return to the unquestioning faith of ancient civilizations is impossible (1354). The modern ideals of freedom and autonomy have become intrinsic to self-identity, as “[m]an is conscious of his will as constituting the essence of life, and he cannot be conscious of it except as free” (1370). Tolstoy argues that what is needed now is a new way of thinking that draws on the best elements of religion and science; that is, faith and a sense of individual autonomy. With the writing of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy was not so much trying to recreate the Homeric epic as to initiate movement toward a ‘new epic’ mentality.

With Pierre, Tolstoy suggests how this shift might be brought about. Pierre recognizes that his rationalistic, discursive mode of thinking has distanced him from God; by setting down “the telescope of intellect” (1258), he achieves true religious understanding. His life becomes unified and self-contained, in the sense that everything within it exists on the same accessible plane. Pierre embodies the simultaneous and contrasting human needs for autonomy and guidance, as well as the longing for a faith that can eliminate the need for questions, if not actually answer them. In the course of the novel, he gains spiritual knowledge and solid faith, but is still capable of functioning in the scientific-minded world of society. He feels that his life is run by God (an epic conception), but not at the expense of his freedom (a truly novelistic value). Through Pierre, Tolstoy makes the point that free will and predestination, manifested in freedom and religious conviction, can coexist and, in fact, “only by their synthesis is a clear conception of the life of man gained” (1382). The renouncement of personal freedom for the sake of religion is a moot point, because faith is liberating in itself. Pierre experiences the highest degree of freedom he has known in his life just when he finds himself living under the guidance of that ‘inner judge.’

Although eventually excommunicated by the Orthodox Church in 1901, Tolstoy was highly religious and envisioned an idealized Christian society.
centered on brotherhood and family, an ideal shared by Pierre at the end of the novel. Lukács, on the other hand, speaks of ‘God’ more figuratively, to demonstrate the differences in ancient and modern conceptions of the self in relation to the rest of the universe. As a Marxist, his optimism for a return to an epic totality lay in his hope for the overthrow of industrial, capitalist society, with its “lifeless and life-denying” social constructions (Lukács 20). In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács develops the argument that although the structure of capitalism ensures its eventual self-destruction, it is only the matter-of-fact practicality of the proletariat consciousness that can bring about a revolution resulting in a classless society. As Aucouturier points out, this argument encapsulates Lukács’ conviction that a return to an epic world is inevitable (234). Lukács saw man’s alienation as a temporary condition rooted in historical circumstances. Thus, the novel is a modern form of epic literature and is separated from the classical epic by distance on a continuum, not the space between privately enclosed genres (*Theory* 56).

Despite his arguments that spiritual and secular realms can never fully mesh in the modern era, and that the achievement of a ‘totality’ is tenuous, if not imaginary (60), Lukács is perhaps even more optimistic than Tolstoy for an epic future, as he considers it unavoidable. After reading the stories of Pierre and Andrey in *War and Peace*, Lukács’ treatment of their respective spiritual experiences may seem labored, as if out of determination to prove that Pierre is not an epic character. But as mentioned previously, this is not the point of his criticism. Rather, the creation of an additional category of reality (which, incidentally, he refers to in his preface as an example of the “arbitrary intellectual constructs” present in his early work [17]) simply shows that he did not see Pierre as the answer to the dilemma of modern spiritual homelessness. Lukács had his own vision for the renewal of an epic worldview, and it had little in common with Tolstoy’s dream. Although the commonalities of their visions are the topic of another study, it is interesting to note that both writers saw wealth redistribution, personal freedom, and the equality of all men as essential elements for the revival of a more rounded worldview. As a literary critic and political theorist, Lukács would have had limited interest in the religious convictions that fueled Tolstoy’s homiletic suggestions, and so it is not surprising that *The Theory of the*
Novel could walk alongside the actual novel only so far. It would be unfortunate, however, if every reader subscribed to Lukács’ interpretation of War and Peace, as it overlooks Tolstoy’s own views on the potential reconciliation of ancient and modern religious mentalities for the regeneration of man’s spiritual life.

WORKS CITED


EPISTOLARY CHASTITY

Krista Johnson

Nathaniel Hawthorne said, “A woman’s chastity consists, like an onion, of a series of coats.” One of the greatest interests in eighteenth and nineteenth-century society was the peeling off of these coats. European society had many customs governing marriage, and a woman’s virtue was one of the prerequisites for a union in “polite society.” Because it was such a significant social topic, it was also important in the novels of the time, where the marriage plot became a popular backbone of the novel. Jane Austen’s books, including *Sense and Sensibility*, Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Guy de Maupassant’s *Pierre and Jean*, and Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* brought issues of marriage and adultery to the European audience. In *Sense and Sensibility*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Madame Bovary*, the plots highlight the importance of chastity for both men and women. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood’s virtues are put in question by her relationship with John Willoughby, and in *Madame Bovary* Emma Bovary’s virtues are destroyed with her adulterous actions with Rodolphe and Léon. In both cases the women write letters to their prospective love interests which aid in their downfall and prove their bad judgment. Alternately, the men use letters as a form of manipulation and control. There is a double standard of sexuality with women’s letters’ weighing more heavily on their reputation. The epistolary form, or fiction through letters, is an important aspect of these books and tackles the sexuality of women through their most intimate thoughts. Marianne and Emma’s willingness to embody their emotions through the letter foreshadows their future downfalls in society, while Willoughby and Rodophe’s manipulative letters show a socially-acceptable male inconstancy.

Marianne and Emma embody themselves in the letters by communicating their deepest emotions and virtues without restriction. For example, European society was very attentive to potential relationships between men and women in
the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, Marianne writes her letters to Willoughby at the height of her emotions, expressing, without restraint, what is in her heart. When she gets to London and expects to see him she writes:

How surprised you will be, Willoughby, on receiving this and I think you will feel something more than surprise, when you know that I am in town. An opportunity of coming hither, though with Mrs. Jennings, was a temptation we could not resist. I wish you may receive this in time to come here to-night, but I will not depend on it. At any rate I shall expect you to-morrow. For the present, adieu. M.D. (Austen 132)

In English society this letter would have been a risky action for a young, unmarried woman. The letter shows Marianne’s raw affections, her belief that Willoughby shares those affections, and her youth and naïveté. Her youth carries with it an expectation that she is pure and hasn’t been corrupted by previous romantic relationships. In other words, the letter illustrates her virtue in its naïve tone. Yet the act of sharing her youthful virtue degrades it. Later she is corrupted by her heartbreak. The day after her disappointing meeting with Willoughby in London, Marianne sits down to write a letter and Elinor describes her having “frequent bursts of grief which […] were proofs enough of her [Elinor’s] feeling how more than probably it was that she was writing for the last time to Willoughby” (Austen 127). Marianne does not contain or restrict her thoughts, as a single woman should to an unmarried man in order to avoid suspicion. She goes against the social norms by expressing her feelings toward a man too freely. Even though we do not see the letter until later, her actions speak louder than her words. Ruth Perry, in *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, explains that the letter is seen as an uninterrupted thought process. She says:

The reader was meant to believe that the characters in such epistolary fictions were transcribing uncensored streams of consciousness […] without any effort to control their logic or structure. Characters talk to themselves, reflect, think out loud—on paper. As a late eighteenth-century epistolary character wrote, “A letter is the soul’s portrait.” (Perry 128)
This catharsis takes place in a society where many emotions are dramatized and others are downplayed and restricted. The characters’ falseness shows in their actions, such as in the cases of Lucy Steele and Mrs. Palmer’s “silliness.” The letter is more potent because it is an application of true emotion. It is a state of limbo between thoughts and spoken declarations of love.

Letters also stands for the body of the characters in their absence (and perhaps in the promise of their future presence.) In *Madame Bovary*, Emma sees Léon in Rouen after a few years, and he asks to see her again. That night she decides not to see him because it is improper, but in her place she decides to write a letter. She cancels further rendezvous in her prose, but when she finishes the letter she does not know the address (Flaubert 172). The letter begins as a replacement for her presence. Yet since she cannot use the letter as her full representation without an address, she goes to the church to meet him and gives him the letter. The letter then becomes the vehicle for their meeting, exchanging emotions, and in the next scene having a sexual exchange in the carriage. In this case the letter takes on a very important role because “a person is a reflection of his letters: they are a representation of him and can stand for him” (Perry 124). In this case Emma and her letter both stand for her feelings and her body in her relationship with Léon. The letter is the bridge that connects the two together, despite being socially unacceptable. Both Emma and Marianne communicate their bodies and souls to their prospective lovers and open themselves up mentally, emotionally, and sexually.

In representing themselves in letters, the female protagonists give themselves indirectly, and pass on their virtue or chastity. The letter has a powerful way of objectifying women, because it takes their deepest thoughts and brings them to the surface, to be given away. Once the letter is sent, their thoughts don’t belong to them. The letter’s efficacy in these novels lies in the fact that:

the connection between consciousness and sexuality is very close in this genre where people are embodied in their correspondence [...] just as sexual union is seen as the sweeping away of constraints between individuals so that they are open and legible to one another, so the sharing of letters embodies great intimacy and trust. (Perry 130)
From the beginning of Emma’s affair with Rodolphe, “they wrote to one another regularly every evening. Emma placed her letter at the end of the garden, by the river, in a crack of the wall. Rodolphe came to fetch it, and put another in its place” (Flaubert 117). This exchange of letters is symbolic of the lovers’ sexual actions. There is a regular exchange of love under the eyes of her husband. Because they must hide the letters, the exchange produces an air of shame and wrongdoing. The letter acts as a substitution for each other’s presence when they cannot be together, so the exchange is representative of their affair. Moreover, later on, when Emma is having an affair with Léon, despite their problems with each other, Emma “none the less went on writing him love letters, in keeping with the notion that a woman must write to her lover” (Flaubert 211).

The letter is not only an expression of love and sexuality, it is an expectation. Emma feels there are rules in society regarding even adulterous affairs and she follows them. This legitimizes the fact that she is a fallen woman because even she believes in the constructs of society and its judgment. There is an illicit connection because she thinks there is one.

In Marianne’s case, the actual physical act of sex does not take place, but the letter still places her chastity in question. She desires secrecy from her sister for the first time when she starts a private affair with Willoughby. For instance, when Elinor sits down to write to her mother, she suggests that Marianne also write to her. Marianne says, “I am not going to write to my mother [...] hastily, as if wishing to avoid any further inquiry” (Austen 114). Elinor assumes that because of this need for privacy, she is writing to Willoughby, and then assumes they are engaged. The letter is indicative of a private affair. In fact, rather than signing “Marianne Dashwood,” she signs “M.D,” which is a more discreet signature. As Mary Favret says in “Sense and Sensibility: The Letter, Post Factum,” “This scene initiates Marianne’s turn from open-hearted honesty to a covert behavior which, if not deceptive, hints of dissimulation” (375). Marianne’s virtue, along with her chastity, lies in her sensitive nature toward people. By directing her sensibility toward only one person, she is giving herself in private instead of in public society. In fact, the efficacy of the letter derives from the “very fact that correspondence is essentially a private affair”
(Perry 48). It foreshadows that they will later exchange their love in private, in marriage.

The application of the loss of virtue differs in *Sense and Sensibility* from that in *Madame Bovary*. In Marianne’s case, the letter acts as a warning of a future loss of virtue rather than betrayal and downfall. Eliza’s fate, discussed by Colonel Brandon, is the possible outcome of Marianne’s loss of virtue. Colonel Brandon receives a letter about Eliza, who has had an illicit affair with Willoughby and becomes pregnant. The letter is ultimately the bearer of the news of lost virtue, and a material warning of the dangers of writing. Perry suggests that in Jane Austen’s novels “characters have to learn their private lessons, must change themselves, before they are rewarded with marriage” (95). Marianne’s connection with Willoughby is a test, but in the end she figuratively retains her body when Willoughby gives the letters back, and thus retains her virtue for her future husband. Her losses can be recouped. By going through this trial and learning how easily and foolishly she gave up her feelings and virtue, Marianne is rewarded with marriage to Colonel Brandon. Therefore, the applications of women’s chastity in the marriage plots of each book are different, but both Flaubert and Austen create a similar warning by saying that letters are the embodiment of chastity, easily given away. In fact, “writing a letter to a man was always the first step in a girl’s downfall, a preliminary to greater intimacies” (Perry 132). The authors use the letter as a tool for the woman’s downfall in society and in marriage.

For Willoughby and Rodolphe the letters are not an expression of their deepest emotions, but a manipulative practice. Willoughby’s letter to Marianne demonstrates his insincerity toward her. After Marianne writes her letter to him in a panic (which Elinor witnesses), she receives a letter from Willoughby saying that he hopes she was not offended, that his esteem for her family is sincere, and he is sorry if Marianne felt there was more between them than there was. He even returns her lock of hair along with her letters (Austen 129–130). Willoughby uses formal language to betray Marianne. He cancels out the chance of an emotional attachment between them by following polite society’s strict epistolary structure, addressing both her family and herself and calling her “Madame.” He expresses remorse at offending her and says he is honored
by her. Although these phrases seem courteous, they do not match the tone of their previous passionate and irrational relationship. The letter does not even admit that there was a relationship between them. He makes her look as though she is unreasonable because he was already involved in a committed relationship with another woman. His skillful use of formal language suggests he may have written similar letters before—perhaps after his affair with Eliza. In addition, Marianne does not react well to the letter. She is deeply offended by the language he used in denying affection. She believes the letter was cruel and “every line was an insult, and which proclaimed its writer to be deep in hardened villainy” (Austen 131). Willoughby does not express emotion like Marianne and removes himself easily from a situation that has put Marianne’s virtue into question. Marianne is the only character that truly understands his villainy because their relationship is often ambiguous for the other characters and the reader. In this instance, “the letter ultimately speaks its own betrayal” (Favret 379). This betrayal is not damaging to Willoughby, whereas it is to Marianne. He marries a rich woman while she becomes ill. The letter is proof that language can have destructive power in a relationship.

Rodolphe uses flowery—instead of formal—language to leave Emma. The flippant way he views women’s letters foreshadows their value to him. Before he sits down to write a letter to call off his elopement with Emma he thinks of other letters:

All these women, crowding into his consciousness, rather shrank in size, leveled down by the uniformity of his feeling. Seizing the letters at random, he amused himself for a while by letting them cascade from his right into his left hand. At last, bored and weary, Rodolphe took back the box to the cupboard, saying to himself: ‘What a lot of nonsense!’ (Flaubert 145)

The ease with which Rodolphe accepts women’s letters shows his willingness to enter into numerous affairs. Although the reader may already know that Rodolphe has had many mistresses, at this point the letters confirm that he did not have sincere emotions for them. Rather than signifying true emotions, the letters represent objects or possessions that are merely amusing and inter-
changeable. They are symbols of his conquests. It is a game to him, and as soon as he has taken their virtue, he gets bored and moves on. Furthermore, he views Emma in the same way he has viewed his past affairs. He carries on a monologue with himself while he writes the letter to her to show how he can manipulate his betrayal into appearing like it is the best thing for her. “He wrote: Courage, Emma! you must be brave! I don’t want to be the one to ruin your life […] ‘After all, that’s true.’ thought Rodolphe. ‘I am acting in her interest; I am honest’” (146). The statement appears ironic because Rodolphe already knows he has partially ruined her life by taking part in an affair with her. In the beginning he thinks about how easy it will be to corrupt her. He gets bored with her precisely because she is already corrupted. He artfully uses the letter to take the guilt off of himself. He writes to her:

Have you carefully weighed your resolution? Do you know to what an abyss I was dragging you, poor angel? No, you don’t, I assure you. You were coming confident and fearless, believing in a future happiness […] Ah! The wretched creatures we are! We nearly lost our minds! (146)

He admits that he is partially at fault. He was involved in dragging Emma into an abyss that claimed her virtue. He also recognizes her naïveté in their relationship, believing they had a future, when he never believed they would be together long. He knew there could not be a future because, unlike Emma, he has had affairs before. He lost his virtue long ago, yet does not have a bad reputation. The letter tries to reclaim some of his virtue through admitting his guilt. However, it is ironic that he admits guilt without feeling guilty. He pauses to think of an excuse and says to himself: “If I told her that I lost all my money? No! Besides that would stop nothing. It would all start again later on. As if one could make women like that listen to reason!” (146).

For Rodolphe the affair represented a game rather than an exchange, and in the end he wins and she loses. He writes the letter after he has taken all of her virtue. It is in his best interest to leave because he can gain nothing more. He says she is unreasonable because she is emotional, while he has not formed an emotional attachment. He has no deeper interest than playing a game of
seduction, which is acceptable for a man of his stature. Then he writes:

Ah, if you had been one of those shallow women of which there are so many, I might, out of selfishness, have tried an experiment, in that case without danger for you. But your exquisite sensitivity, at once your charm and your torment, has prevented you from understanding, adorable woman that you are, the falseness of our future position. (146)

Earlier he realized that a lack of money would not be an excuse, so he knows she is not like a prostitute. He has dealt with other women who were shallow and selfish and recognizes that Emma is sensitive, charming, and tormented by her actions. She is part of a different class of women. Rodolphe acts more like a prostitute by selfishly taking valuable things from her, her virtue and reputation, and compensating with a sexual relationship. He has nowhere to fall, while he refers to her as a “poor angel,” suggesting she has fallen from a high place. She is a fallen angel. Rodolphe’s ironic and artful letter with its flowery, sympathetic language, illustrates his prowess in seduction. He has done this time and again, and he continues to keep a privileged status where he can manipulate women. Emma, on the other hand, falls ill after her first affair, and after her second she dies. The letter for the men is a weapon against the women, along with the women’s own letters.

Furthermore, in Sense and Sensibility, Lucy Steele serves as a connection between the negative aspects of male and female versions of letter writing. She gives up her chastity while being insincere. Although Elinor and Lucy Steele are not complete opposites—they have similar status in society and are available to the same men; however—Elinor is sensible while Lucy Steele is silly and artificial. In fact, Edward Ferrars shows Elinor Lucy’s letter after Lucy ends their relationship and marries his brother. She says:

Being very sure I have long lost your affections. I have thought myself at liberty to bestow my own on another, and have no doubt of being as happy with him as I once used to think I might be with you; but I scorn to accept a hand while the heart was another’s. Sincerely wish you happy in your
choice, and it shall not be my fault if we are not always good friends, as our near relationship now makes proper. I can safely say I owe you no ill-will, and am sure you will be too generous to do us any ill offices [...] I have burnt all your letters, and will return your picture the first opportunity. Please to destroy my scrawls—but the ring with my hair you are very welcome to keep. (Austen 258)

She feels at liberty to switch her feelings onto another person quickly, even onto her fiancé’s brother. She marries Robert Ferrars without a long engagement. Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that she has already “given” herself sexually to him. Trying to save face in society could be a reason for their hasty marriage. Either way, her actions are questionable. Her light language and friendly tone imply that she does not think what she did is wrong, and that she is very free with her friendly affections.

Also, letter burning happens more than once in the book. The letters reveal an unacceptable relationship in society, so they must be destroyed. Lucy asks Edward to burn her letters, but does not appear entirely clean because she says he is welcome to keep a lock of her hair, a part of her body. She has given up a piece of herself in her relationship with Edward that she will never get back. In addition, after Edward lets Elinor read the letter, he says: “I will not ask your opinion of it as a composition [...] how I have blushed over the pages of her writing!—this is the only letter I ever received from her, of which the substance made me any amends for the defect of style” (258). Even though men’s virtue and chastity are not as important as women’s, Edward blushed at her writing. Similar to Marianne, Lucy did not screen her writing, yet Lucy’s letters are less valuable because they have no substantial emotions or commitment in them. Edward seems embarrassed by ever having been involved with her. Although in the beginning the letters between Lucy and Edward prove to Elinor that they are engaged, ultimately they also show that the bridge they established was not strong or lasting. The letters may have given up Lucy’s virtue, but she was willing to give it away too easily. Lucy appears to be an unfaithful person, whose letters accurately portray her lack of virtue.

Not only do the letters in the books show an exchange between lovers, but
also the repercussions of the exchange in society. The letter is both an instrument of warning and a form of incrimination. Ultimately, society is the judge. Emma is the extreme result of the adulterous fall, ending in her death, whereas Marianne is luckier and learns from her mistakes in order to save herself in society. The public views Marianne’s letters as proof of her engagement to Willoughby. Not only Elinor assumes this; Colonel Brandon says, “As they openly correspond their marriage is universally talked of” (173). Also, in the case of Edward Ferrars’s engagement with Lucy Steele, Elinor does not believe it until she “saw that it was his hand she could doubt no longer” (378). To society, letters signify engagement, a meaningful attachment and exchange. They are without a doubt a true testament to affection and love, precursors to sexual closeness. The woman’s lack of chastity is more significant than a man’s because men are raised having more freedom in their sexual actions. Letter-writing can be looked down upon as reflective of a woman’s value as a person: a value chipped away by transactions of love with men.

Letters themselves report interactions in society. They communicate love, sexual desire, and are a “means of reporting contemporary scandal” (Perry 52). This is how the news of Eliza’s pregnancy reaches Colonel Brandon, and the way Marianne’s mother finds out about Marianne and Willoughby. The letters have a very distinct function in society as communication and warning.

In Sense and Sensibility, the damage of Marianne’s letters is contained by the fact that she obtains them privately from Willoughby. However, in Madame Bovary, the full repercussions of Emma’s letter on the husband are realized after her death when Charles opens a secret drawer in Emma’s desk and finds Léon and Rodolphe’s letters. Emma causes the downfall of the Bovary’s marriage, and although Charles never admits this while she is alive, his suspicions are confirmed after death. He uneartths Emma’s secrets. The letters torture Charles because he is jealous that he never “possessed” her, body or mind, in the same profound way as her lovers. They aid in Charles’ downfall even after the marriage has been dissolved by her death. The outcome of both books highlights the fact that the letter is a transaction in society. It is utilized in the forming and the dissolution of relationships. Its power to bring people together is equaled by its power to destroy.
There are two very distinct outcomes for the women in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Madame Bovary*. One woman retains her virtue and finds happiness, and the other loses virtue and ends her life in despair. This testifies to the fact that the marriage plot has versatility, as does the letter. Men’s letters have the power to destroy relationships, while women’s letters have the ability to destroy the women’s reputation completely. Willoughby marries, and Rodolphe continues life as usual. Since their virtue is never in question, they help corrupt the women, and then highlight their fall. The women build the bridges of relationships with their letters while the men burn the bridges down. The letter is an effective tool for the author to use in the marriage plot because it can elucidate the marital problem of communication. The authors both achieve a dramatic marriage plot, one in the beginning of a marriage, and the other at its end, but both focus on the necessity of women’s virtue. The letters in these books are just a transparent coat of chastity stripped away from the onion, revealing its strength and stench.

**Works Cited**

The stranger figure is an important paradigm in literature. In Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose* and Kerstin Ekman’s *Blackwater*, the dominant communities perceive the strangers as a mortal threat, but the reader comes to view them as agents of change.

In both novels, the dominant community perceives itself to be under threat and members of that community seek refuge in a communal identity. The perception of threat elicits construction of the stranger paradigm. The dominant community identifies an individual or a group as representing the antithesis of its own norms and values. The concept of the stranger gives the community something to exclude and oppose as a unified entity. Strangers become central to the preservation of the communal identity, and the ‘otherness’ of strangers is perceived as the cause of the danger that must be destroyed. These two novels illustrate both the perception of the dominant community of the stranger and the perception of the stranger as ‘other.’

The perceived threat in *Sitt Marie Rose* is founded on political disputes. Members of the hegemony define themselves in opposition to the ‘other,’ citing religious, cultural, and physical differences. In contrast, the construction of the stranger figure in *Blackwater* is based on perceived moral differences that place blame on the ‘other’ for not conforming to social conventions.

Exile is a common ingredient in the construction of the stranger figure. *Sitt Marie Rose* is an historical narrative about exile. The novel’s protagonists are the political, national, and religious ‘others,’ who immigrated to Lebanon after being expelled from their territory. They remain pariahs, marginalized by the dominant Lebanese culture. The Palestinian refugees are perceived as foreign strangers by the politically and economically dominant Christian population.
The Palestinian people had been displaced—removed from their land of origin and from the security of a recognized political body of representation. They were condemned to be wandering minorities under the rule of alien governments.

The “stranger” in *Sitt Marie Rose* is embodied in the Palestinian refugees who fled to Lebanon. As Marie Rose narrates, she illuminates the Christians’ belief that the refugees are a menace to their society:

> The Crusade which I always thought was impossible has, in fact, taken place. But it’s not really religious. It’s part of a larger Crusade directed against the poor. They bomb underprivileged quarters because they considered the poor to be vermin they think will eat them. They fight to block the tide of those who have lost everything, or those who never had anything, and have nothing to lose. They have turned those among them that were poor against the poor “of others.” (52)

Marie Rose recognizes that the dominating political and ethnic faction within Lebanon uses religious and cultural differences between themselves and the Palestinian “strangers” to justify its violent opposition to their presence. She suggests that the poverty of the refugees is what turns the Lebanese against them. Also, the size of the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon poses the threat of political upheaval to the dominant Christian minority. Marie Rose suggests that the polarization of Lebanese Christians and Palestinian refugees is a result of the economic burden and the political threat posed by the refugees. Therefore, to establish a unified front against the onset of Palestinian dominance in Lebanon, the dominating Christian society constructs the figure of the ‘other’ using the sole identifying characteristic of being Palestinian.

Although economic and political fears are the true causes of the unrest, xenophobia and ethnic discrimination are the most effective factors of turning one group against another. The binary opposition between the Palestinians and the Lebanese Christians becomes so deeply rooted that Lebanese society creates the notion that, poor or wealthy, a native of Lebanon is superior to a Palestinian
immigrant. The poor of Lebanon are turned against the poor of Palestine in order to “bomb the underprivileged” and to annihilate those who the Lebanese fear will “eat them” (52). The narrator explains:

When a stranger appears on the horizon, or the poorly-loved, he is the dispossessed whose hatred sprouts and grows before the eyes like jungle plants that don’t even wait for the rain to stop to proliferate, then he, the one loved by his mother and blessed with wealth, takes his rifle and goes to the attack. He feels he’s the strongest, and doesn’t know that those bullets will carve bloody words on his naked chest. (67)

Rather than being accepted and incorporated into Lebanese society, the strangers are feared and loathed. Referring to the typical member of the dominant Lebanese social class, Marie Rose states, “he takes his rifle and goes to attack,” and “the cycle of violence [is set] in motion” (67).

The Chabab mafia is the name taken by the Christian Phalangist militiamen. Marie Rose proposes that their propensity to violence against the “strangers” is based on their need to define their own identity. Their identity is defined by their opposition to the Palestinians and, therefore, they define themselves as guardians of Lebanese hegemony. “I know the Chabab mafia, that gang of boys. They have a constant need to find themselves alone. They live in function of their vanity. They are bound together as if with steel” (39).

Living “in function of their vanity” is the Chabab mafia’s desire to set itself apart. The idea that they are preserving their culture relies on the belief that their culture is in jeopardy of destruction by the Palestinian refugees. The members of the mafia see themselves as the heroic leaders of a social cleansing process. In that sense, they desire to be the elite few, chosen to fight against the evil masses of invaders. “[I]t’s our country. We’re at home here,” says Mounir, a Christian militiaman, in a conversation with Marie Rose (55). “They are and always have been foreigners. They are as out of place here as a fox in a wolf’s den” (88). Because the militiamen define themselves as noble crusaders in opposition to the perceived evils of the Palestinian refugees, they state, “[w]e’re fighting for the road that leads to the Divine. The best road” (63).
Marie Rose is a Lebanese Christian woman who lives out of wedlock with a Palestinian Muslim man. She works for the Palestinian cause and she openly advocates for the rights of the Palestinians within Lebanon. The Christian militiamen abduct her and accuse her of being a traitor, “counted in the ranks of the Palestinian Resistance. [She is] fighting against [the Christians]” (54). She has estranged herself from the dominant society by aiding and identifying with the Palestinians rather than with the Christian Lebanese, and for that, the Phalangist militiamen condemn her to death.

In Marie Rose’s socio-political situation, when men are faced with the prospect of a woman as a “worthy partner, ally or enemy” (35), that woman is estranged, killed, or both. The narrator declares that “a woman who stands up to [men] and looks them in the eye is a tree to be cut down, and they cut it down” (67). She is quickly removed before her influence spreads and does further damage to the established authority.

In Sitt Marie Rose, Etel Adnan honors the protagonist’s life and martyrdom as the representation of the often tragic struggle of the stranger figure. The ‘other’ comes to seem more familiar to the reader than do the hegemonic powers. The narrative illustrates the outlandish cruelty of the place that originally constructed the figure of the ‘other.’

In contrast, Kerstin Ekman wrote Blackwater within the conventions of a detective “whodunit” narrative. In order to maintain a level of mystery concerning the identity of the homicidal perpetrator, characters cannot be portrayed in an obviously innocent light. The narrator must objectively portray the perceptions of members of society and its constructed stranger figures.

The setting of Kerstin Ekman’s narrative is Blackwater, an insular Swedish community with a very small population. The inhabitants consider themselves as having a strict code of conduct. To preserve the town’s self-perception of virtue and purity, all transgressions of that code are attributed to foreignness. The natives of Blackwater condemn certain groups and individuals because they are not considered to be adherent to the town’s conventional moral and social code. The contrast between what the majority identifies in itself and its own community as honorable is dependent on the existence of a divergent minority figure; a figure used to distinguish itself from and to define itself
against. What is familiar and virtuous is that which is not foreign and therefore depraved.

The double homicide committed in the pastoral landscape of Blackwater is attributed to the outlandish actions of a foreigner. Annie Raft is the only person who saw the unidentified suspect. She presumes that the murder had been committed by an outsider, rather than a Swede or anyone of Scandinavian origin. Based on her testimony, the entire population of Blackwater believes that the murder had been committed by a foreigner. One detective investigating the case recounts that Raft had seen “a foreigner” and he concludes “[t]hat would indicate someone was after them” (153). The narrator continues:

[The second detective on the case] knew that was true. Every car on the forest tracks was seen by someone. It always was. You couldn’t sneak in, couldn’t escape those who saw and wondered what you were up to—putting out nets in someone else’s waters, poaching, dumping something. But no one had seen a car driven by an Asian youth. Indonesian? (153)

The dichotomy between natives of Blackwater and foreigners is based on the natives’ desire to link immorality to outsiders. Annie Raft might have made a mistake in identifying the ethnicity of the murderer, but the members of the Blackwater community found self-assurance and security in the idea that one of their people had not transgressed moral law. Even Annie Raft—who was not a native of Blackwater and who was associated with the crime as a witness—was identified as a stranger by the Blackwater community despite having lived there for decades. Her connection to the violent crime and her association with a socialist commune further isolated her from the Blackwater society. She is viewed as a communist “Red Guard” who is not to be openly associated with by the natives (42). In contrast, her husband Torsten is often violent and belligerent. Nonetheless, he is excused and accepted as a legitimate member of the Blackwater community because he was born in the area. That shows that the moral and social code of Blackwater is not an absolute one, but instead is a function of membership in the community. Ultimately, if a person is not a native of the community, all of his or her actions that may upset natives are
explained by his or her non-native origins.

It is stated in the novel that the character Vidart had lived in Blackwater longer than the story’s protagonist, Johan, had been alive, but was considered “new” and “foreign,” and his alleged shady business practices are attributed to that status. Johan Brandberg, the novel’s protagonist, identifies himself, and is treated by his stepfather and stepbrothers, as a stranger in Blackwater. “Torsten and his real sons fitted in. They belonged [...]” (57). Johan is racially mixed. He is half white and half Sami, giving him a swarthy appearance that varied from the traditional Scandinavian physical norm. He is more intellectual than his family members, and he never wants to associate with their brash behavior. After being abused by his stepbrothers one day, Johan runs away from his family and from Blackwater. Johan does not want to be a member of the small Blackwater community, which to him represents abuse and insularity. He shares his community’s perception of himself as an outsider because he contradicts the model behavior and therefore challenges the authority of the community’s social code.

A transient character in *Blackwater*, Ylja, explains to Johan that he is “the new Traveler” (140). The “new Traveler” is a mythical version of the stranger figure who deliberately challenges the established authority and norms. Like the stranger, the “new Traveler” is feared by the xenophobic established community, which is described as the “old Traveler.” The new Traveler is a perceived threat to conventional standards and power. Ylja says to Johan:

You’re the new Traveler. He’s the only one who’s allowed to know. In the past [the new Traveler] would kill the old one and replace him [...] But watch out for the old Traveler. If he realizes you’re going to replace him, he may kill you. Such things have happened. In the old days the old one killed all newcomers who threatened to take his place. Or else he himself was killed. (140)

Again, the theme of a stranger usurping the power of the established authority is reiterated in this myth.

Like Johan, Marie Rose is a kind of “new Traveler.” In her case, how-
ever, the established authority, represented by the Phalangist militiamen and the Lebanese Christians, destroys her. Before Marie Rose’s execution, she declares to her captors:

I represent love, new roads, the unknown, the untried. For ten thousand years in this part of the world we’ve always been tribal, tribal, tribal. But Gilgamesh left alone, all ties forever broken, searching for life and death. Since that distant day [...] We haven’t had a single man who was effectively alone, who sought on his own account, to understand good and evil, who could stand up crucified without anyone knowing it, and carry his adventure and his secret to a grave that didn’t open on either Heaven or Hell. Shepherd or sheep you always have defined yourselves in terms of herds. (58)

Marie Rose—the “new Traveler,” the traitor to her Christian compatriots, the “stranger”—embodies a wave of change that is, tragically, not powerful enough to come into effect, and the dominant hegemony—the “old Traveler”—destroys her in an attempt to secure its position.

The figure of the stranger is often portrayed as a paradoxical figure who exists in that role as a result of injustice that condemns him, her, or them to an unfair social status. Narratives often depict the journey or struggle of the stranger figure to illustrate the paradoxical relationship between the stranger and the society. In Sitt Marie Rose, the protagonist represents one constituent of the “other” that was constructed by the fearful dominant society during the Lebanese Civil War. Marie Rose’s life story is the struggle of the individual in a tribal culture and the story of the abused and estranged Palestinian refugees. In Blackwater, the struggle of the stranger is portrayed in the chronicle of events surrounding the lives of Annie Raft and Johan Brandberg, who are perceived as strangers by themselves and the people around them. In both narratives, the stranger figures are portrayed as the victims of injustices created by a defensive society that fears and resents diversity and transgressions of the norm. And in both narratives, the stranger figures represent the agents of transformation and progress.
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ANIMALIZATION & INFANTILIZATION: COLONIALIST TROPS IN *OUTPOST IN MOROCCO* AND *IN MOROCCO*

Magalí Rabasa

In their 1994 book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam devote a chapter to the discussion of the construction and perpetuation of European superiority and dominance through the tropes of ‘infantilization’ and ‘animalization.’ Both tropes involve the reduction of the ‘Other’ to an inferior state through the projection of characteristics generally attributed to children and animals. Many Europeans have documented their encounters with other cultures, revealing how they perceive their relationship to the ‘Other.’ In many cases, such as those involving interaction with North African cultures, this relationship is based on a colonialist dynamic between Europe and the ‘Orient.’ Two examples of such texts are Edith Wharton’s 1919 travel narrative *In Morocco* and Robert Florey’s 1949 film *Outpost in Morocco*. In both texts, representations of Moroccans utilize these two colonialist tropes in the formation of physical descriptions and the justification of French intervention.

Through animalization, the colonized people of Morocco are depicted in such a manner that they are reduced to their physical being, implying less advanced evolution and a shallow civilization. By focusing on the physical aspects of the Moroccans, their cerebral capacities are ignored, if not negated. Shohat and Stam identify the projection of the colonized as body rather than mind through “the reduction of the cultural to the biological, the tendency to associate the colonized with the vegetative and the instinctual rather than with the learned and cultural” (138). Focusing on the physical being of the Moroccans has the effect of dehumanization. By emphasizing the physical qualities of the Moroccans they are established as inferior to the Europeans and relegated to the level of infants or animals, both of which are dominated by their corporal functions. Edith Wharton, an American with established residence in France, comes from a culture that has officially dehumanized blacks through the insti-
tion of slavery. Her descriptions of an entirely black village echo this legacy: “They were handsome blue-bronze creatures, bare to the waist, with tight black astrakhan curls and firmly sculptured legs and ankles; and all around them, like a swarm of gnats, danced countless jolly pickaninnies, naked as lizards [...]” (43). Her use of the term ‘creatures’ denies them any human identity, demonstrating her appreciation of their beauty, like that of an ‘exotic’ animal, to be seen on a safari. Wharton even goes so far as to use animal metaphors to describe the children. This contained village brings Wharton joy in her ability to view it from a distance. In episodes where she describes urban crowds, her terminology bears less appreciation and even disgust as in “sordid heaps of humanity” (37). These moments in her narrative render the Moroccans as, in Shohat and Stam’s words, “wild beasts in their unrestrained libidinousness, their lack of proper dress” (137).

In the film Outpost in Morocco, the most rampant examples of animalization exist in the portrayals of the Emir of Bel Rashad’s troops and of the Arab French Legion lieutenant played by Akim Tamiroff. Upon assigning the Arab Lieutenant to the convoy led by Captain Gerard, their superior states: “He’s the best soldier I’ve got, even if at times I do think he’s really a horse.” To which Gerard responds: “That’s good to know. If I lose mine, I’ll saddle him. Ha, ha, ha” This scene is a disgusting demonstration of the manner in which even those Arabs living and existing in allegiance to the French are perceived as subhuman. The depictions of the Emir’s troops show them as wild, disorderly, savage, and shabby, especially in comparison to the images of the French Legion. The implication is that the ‘native’ troops are a band of barbarians under the control of a debauched ruler. The animalization, therefore, is applied not only to the Arab soldiers, but also to their leader. All of these images are created so as to preserve notions of European superiority and authority over the Moroccans.

Used in conjunction with animalization, the trope of infantilization asserts the notion that modern ‘Orientals’ or ‘Arabs’ are a simple people incapable of maintaining order and of ‘modernizing.’ Shohat and Stam write that this trope “posits the political immaturity of the colonized” (140). While animalization restricts the ‘Other’ to its physical identity, negating its human cerebral capac-
Animalization and Infantilization implies a halted evolution of their humanness. Edith Wharton’s lengthy descriptions of the ruins and the art of Morocco are continually infused with her commentary on the state of its restoration and repair. She comments on a Medersas house noting that “[t]his lovely ruin is in the safe hands of the French Fine Arts administration” (26). This intervention by the French she deems necessary because “[t]he Moroccan Arab […] has, like all Orientals, an invincible repugnance to repairing and restoring” (20). She imposes childlike characteristics on the Moroccans, rationalizing the need for French “protection.”

From a high plateau, Edith Wharton reflects on her view of the Roman colony Volubilis as it stands in contrast to Moulay Idriss, the Sacred City of Morocco. The juxtaposition of the European alongside the Moslem allows her to insert a Eurocentric commentary on the two worlds:

So the two dominations look at each other across the valley: one, the lifeless Roman ruin, representing a system, an order, a social conception that still runs through all our modern ways; the other, the untouched Moslem city, more dead and sucked back into the unintelligible past than any architrave of Greece or Rome. (45)

In this succinct description, Wharton imposes the dominance of a European perspective of history, claiming that the Moslem history is “unintelligible.” Furthermore, by identifying her own culture with the Roman, she refutes all significance of the Moslem civilization, identifying it as dead. This conception of Morocco is later restated: “the present is a perpetually prolonged past” (85). This comment implies halted cultural evolution or development, presenting the modern Moroccans simply as remnants of the past, living in a dead and decaying culture. Thus the French are slated as the saviors of the Moroccans, freeing them from the past and launching them into ‘modernization.’

The association of the Europeans with order and a proper system of civilization is also present in Outpost in Morocco. After suppressing the Emir’s attempted attack on the legionnaires, Gerard thanks the Emir for helping restore “order.” This supports Gerard’s earlier presumption, made during his first
meeting with the Emir: “If it wasn’t for us, you might find yourselves a lot unhappier.” This reference to the actions of the French government and Foreign Legion gives no consideration to the negative impact of the French presence. The sentiment that is expected here is the gratitude of the Moroccans. However, the counter-perspective that is addressed only trivially is that of those, like the Emir of Bel Rashad, who see the French as invaders and thieves.

While In Morocco focuses on the cultural and modernizing aspects of the French intervention, Outpost in Morocco presents a view of the role of the French Foreign Legion in the less inhabited regions. Nevertheless, both texts rely on their use of the tropes of infantilization and animalization in their efforts to bolster the French administration and rationalize their intervention. Whether through an outright dedication to the French General Lyautey, a leader of the French Foreign Legion, as in the case of Wharton’s work, or through a story of love between a French captain and the Emira, as seen in Outpost in Morocco, colonialism is presented as a form of salvation for the ‘underdeveloped’ through the dominance of an external, more evolved European force.

1 Although officially a French protectorate, the similarities between their status and that of a colonized nation have led me to use terms of colonization when describing the position of Morocco in relation to France.

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August Strindberg, the author of *The Ghost Sonata*, and Hasegawa Shigure, the author of *Wavering Traces*, were both creative modern playwrights whose theatrical ingenuity has set a standard for modern drama. During a period of female repression, these two playwrights wrote plays that empirically represented social and domestic injustices. Despite their cultural dissimilarities, both Strindberg and Hasegawa reflected on their backgrounds and personal philosophies to develop their female characters into innovative women who defied traditional conventions of female roles. The playwrights accomplished this feat by establishing characters that conform to predictable gender stereotypes at the beginning of the play and then develop into unique characters that represent the playwrights’ values and ideas.

Let us begin by examining Strindberg’s character, the Daughter, and how she can be viewed as a traditional female character at the opening of *The Ghost Sonata*. The Daughter makes her first appearance in a “fashionable English riding habit,” and then proceeds to enter a large, elegant house (190). From Strindberg’s stage directions concerning the Daughter’s primary entrance, the reader may view her as a princess figure: she walks “slowly, not looking at anyone” making her way to the front door of a “fashionable house” that stands majestically for all to see (190, 183). Upon viewing the Daughter for the first time, the Student, who stands outside of the house in awe, immediately becomes infatuated and “puts his hand to his eyes” as if he is crying (190). The Student then claims to have stood “face to face with the unattainable,” suggesting that the Daughter’s physical appearance is divine-like, or heavenly (190). Furthermore, this scene develops the typical love relationship seen in romantic theater: the Student is fixated on a princess figure who seems to be a worthy, but impossible, prize to win.
However, Strindberg develops the Daughter into a more complex character shortly after the Daughter’s second appearance, during which she stands watering hyacinths in the window of the fashionable house. In this scene, the Old Man, who has been carrying on a conversation with the Student in the street, also describes the Daughter as incredibly beautiful, suggesting she is “like a blue hyacinth herself” (191). This relationship between the Daughter and the flower introduces an interesting paradox. Although the Old Man’s observation seems to be a compliment comparing her image to a delicate flower, Strindberg uses the hyacinth as a trope. While the flower, on one level, represents beauty, it also has a symbolic meaning of emptiness. Strindberg notes:

The hyacinth is beautiful to look at, perfectly beautiful; and perhaps it is even capable of perceiving something like pain and pleasure. But without self-consciousness, reason, and free will there is no possibility for a soul to develop, and to be without a soul is virtually to be dead—at least to those who are alive. (203)

Strindberg’s comment suggests that the beauty of the hyacinth is deceptive. And by explicitly highlighting the connection between the “dead” hyacinth flower and the beautiful Daughter, the author consciously alters the Daughter’s role from a fragile female figure who is in need of a male savior to an empty and falsely princess-like character.

This transformation of the Daughter into an atypical female figure is further developed during the third movement of the play. In this movement, the Daughter warns the Student: “you can never win me” (206). Surprised by her statement, the Student confronts the Daughter about the seemingly flirtatious incident in the first movement when the Daughter drops her bracelet out of the window and the Student graciously returns it to her. The Daughter’s explanation for dropping her bracelet out of the window is that “[her] hand has grown so thin” (206). Instead of attempting to attract the Student’s attention, the Daughter drops her bracelet in the first movement because she has grown thin due to malnutrition. Upon accepting the reality of his inability to win the Daughter’s heart, the Student makes a striking remark by relating the Daughter
to a poisonous flower. He comments how “the source of life is poisoned” in her, and then rhetorically asks why “the most beautiful flowers [are] the most poisonous” (208). The Student’s comment about the Daughter does not at all resemble a conventional, romanticized relationship between the victimized woman and a masculine hero. Instead, the Daughter is portrayed as an independent, self-sufficient woman who consistently rejects the Student’s love and tells him that she has no desire to be “saved” from her ordinary life. The play ends when the Daughter suffers from a bizarre death after which there seems to be no remorse or sorrow expressed by the Student.

Strindberg’s use of an untraditional female character emphasizes his personal view of relationships, suggesting that in real life, love is difficult, hurtful, and always imperfect. This can be seen in Strindberg’s essay “Paradise Regained,” when he explains his rather pessimistic outlook on life. He warns his readers that often times when one “seeks God [one finds] the Devil. This is what happened to me” (506). Strindberg’s depressing views are undoubtedly expressed in *The Ghost Sonata*: after the Student seeks the Daughter, he finds her to be poisonous, empty, rejecting, and unkind. The Student, then, can be seen as a metaphoric representation of Strindberg’s personal experiences. The Student sought the divinely beautiful Daughter (God) but discovered that she was lethal, phony, and nothing like he had imagined her to be (the Devil). This is a simple example of how Strindberg, over the course of the play, draws on his own philosophies and applies his ideas to transform the Daughter from a traditional female character into a villainous woman who challenges the simple, delicate, princess-like figure.

Hasegawa, a female Kabuki playwright, makes a similar transformation in *Wavering Traces* with her leading female character, Hatsushimo. At the beginning of the play Hatsushimo fits a traditional female role in Japanese culture. She is a loving woman, a caring mother, and a faithful wife. Early in the play the reader learns of Hatsushimo’s “hundred-night pilgrimage to the temple in the woods” in which she prays for the success of her husband’s craftsmanship of a samurai sword (11). This obviously demonstrates Hatsushimo’s fidelity to her family. The reader may gain further insight into Hatsushimo’s gentle nature by observing her diction and tone towards other characters. For example, after the
Monk tells Hatsushimo never to show the cursed samurai sword to her husband, she gratefully replies, “I am pleased to receive our advice” (12). The reader can assume Hatsushimo’s tone to be humble and meek toward the monk because in Japanese culture women, especially married women, were subordinate to men and were expected to obey a man’s authority. Another example of this subordination can be seen when Korokuta, the sword-smith’s apprentice, finishes work early to go on an errand without eating dinner. Hatsushimo selflessly suggests: “I’ll go on the errand for you and you eat and get some sleep” (13). Hatsushimo’s tone is modest and mild, while her diction is noble and gracious. These examples underline Hasegawa’s attempt to use Hatsushimo as a typical Japanese wife, at least at the beginning of the play.

However, Hasegawa transforms Hatsushimo into a radically different character by the conclusion of the play. Similar to Strindberg, who associated the Daughter with emptiness and false beauty in order to introduce his change, Hasegawa uses a pivotal moment in Wavering Traces to develop the character of Hatsushimo. This moment takes place after Masakuni, Hatsushimo’s husband finishes work early and returns home to be with his family. After a small argument concerning Somego, Hatsushimo and Masakuni’s one year-old daughter, Hatsushimo finally confronts her husband’s constant pessimism and detachment from the family. She tells Masakuni how she longs for his passionate love once again by convincing him that “[e]ven if my life must be taken with the cold blade of a sword […] if you would take me warmly in your arms once more, I should die with no regrets” (14). This quote is significant for two reasons. First, the quote foreshadows Hatsushimo’s ultimate fate in the forest when she is fatally pierced by the samurai sword. Secondly, the quote is an example of how Hatsushimo’s role evolves over the course of the play. Rather than being portrayed as the humble, quiet, submissive housewife, Hatsushimo becomes the confrontational, dynamic heroine. She challenges her husband’s authority by emphatically stating: “I am the one who has made you what you are now” (14). She demands that their relationship be “the way it used to be”—full of passion—in place of their loveless, overly comfortable marriage (14). Following the confrontation, Hatsushimo no longer fits the description of a traditional Japanese woman, but instead she breaks out by questioning her
husband and her fixed role as a Japanese wife, which, customarily, is the most invisible and subordinated character in Japanese theater.

Hasegawa develops Hatsushimo further by making her a sacrificial heroine at the climax of the play. In Kabuki theater and in Japanese culture, *harakiri* is a ritual suicide by which a male warrior slices his abdomen with a samurai sword to preserve his honor. In *Wavering Traces* this ritual suicide is symbolically represented when Masakuni accidentally strikes his wife Hatsushimo in the abdomen with the samurai sword in the forest. Despite the fatal blow, Hatsushimo utters what seems to be the essence of Hasegawa’s play: “What I scorn is what men do for the sake of honor” (17). By being killed in such a way, Hatsushimo preserves her honor while her husband Masakuni is left to suffer eternal shame and disgrace. After his wife’s death Masakuni selfishly admits his desire to commit harakiri, but Morito, a masterless samurai, warns Masakuni that “If you die, you will escape your own suffering, but you must think how long your children will suffer. I don’t think [Hatsushimo] would want that” (17). This quote reveals Masakuni’s self-centeredness and his blindness to his family’s needs. Only through his wife’s death does Masakuni finally realize his failure as a husband, father, and man, while Hatsushimo, a woman, is forever idealized by dying a samurai’s death.

This particular play falls into a specific genre of Kabuki theater called *jidai-sewamono*, in which a domestic conflict is dramatized and “its emotional focus is on the woman and not her husband” (8). Most likely, Hasegawa utilizes this type of theater to express her personal beliefs pertaining to women in Japanese society. Like Strindberg, who develops his personal experiences in *The Ghost Sonata*, Hasegawa also develops her own philosophies in *Wavering Traces*. For instance, Hasegawa, whose literature is often a reflection of her ideas and values concerning sexism and cultural confinements, supported feminism and women’s rights prominently in this play. The character of Hatsushimo embodies Hasegawa’s belief that women can and should challenge their husbands’ “unquestionable” authority. Furthermore, Hasegawa uses her female character to epitomize how culturally suppressed Japanese women can become the heroines of their own reality. Thus, Hatsushimo does much more than challenge theatrical conventions; Hasegawa’s character challenges Japa-
nese culture to recognize women as sacrificial heroines.

Strindberg and Hasegawa develop their female characters over the course of their respective plays by dynamically changing them into unconventional figures who defy traditional gender roles. By the conclusion of *The Ghost Sonata* and *Wavering Traces*, the Daughter and Hatsushimo reflect their creators’ ideologies and life experiences more than they resemble the character traits they embodied at the beginning of the plays. It is important to note, however, that Strindberg and Hasegawa accomplish this feat in dissimilar ways. Strindberg’s deconstruction of gender norms in theater cannot be considered to be a positive confrontation of traditional femininity. In other words, by portraying the Daughter as an empty and poisonous woman the author does not improve the image of women, and their position in society. Rather, his depiction of the Daughter is dreary and pessimistic, which reflects his outlook on romantic relationships. Hasegawa, on the other hand, makes an explicit attempt to challenge gender roles and to instill a positive image of women by developing Hatsushimo into the play’s heroine. Hasegawa confronts traditional femininity with a clear but subtle message: women are heroes too. What both of these plays demonstrate are the intricate and frequently complex relationships that exist between an author and her/his characters. Not only does theater communicate a moral message to its audience, but it also serves as a window that looks into the lives of its creators.

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Cultural Ostracism and “White America”: The Functions of Discourse in Richard Wright’s Native Son

Emily Mattson

Richard Wright’s novel Native Son puts the main character, Bigger Thomas, and thereby the reader as well, in a unique position to observe the various discursive systems that exist and function in society. Bigger Thomas is a young black man growing up in the racially segregated, oppressive cultural climate of 1930s-era Chicago. Bigger’s life is a confusion of fear and hatred that manifests itself in violent and criminal outbursts, and his history is one of alienation and ostracism from the culture in which he lives (Chicago’s “Black Belt”) and from the dominant culture (white America) whose images of happiness and “the American dream” permeate every newspaper, film reel, and media image that Bigger sees. In a society that has doomed him to failure from childhood, Bigger Thomas has never felt any sense of freedom or choice, and has never been able to attach meaning to anything in his life. Yet when Bigger murders a white woman, he suddenly finds himself for the first time enabled to make conscious decisions and take action for himself, thereby realizing his subjectivity and creating value in his life on some level. What is interesting about Wright’s novel is that he comprehends the individual’s inability to take action outside the realm of societal discourse, as these are the systems of power that function in his existence. All his actions must in some way be reactions to the system of power already in place. Even still, Bigger’s identification as an outsider who has no direct emotional ties to any of these discursive systems allows him a certain objectivity to contemplate them and see them as they really function.

The term “discourse” may only be defined in terms of its function in society. As described by Michel Foucault, “the discourse of a given institution or discipline governs the production of knowledge within it” (Quinn 89). More specifically, discourse “aims to describe the surface linkages between power,
knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought” (Bove 54–55). So, the function of discourse serves as an external system of control (of thought and ‘truth’) which also regulates and distributes itself, and which is built upon a set of conventions agreed upon by the majority of society.

Since systems of discourse are present in all parts of society and affect all members of the group, there is a certain measure of political purpose in the search to explain its function, which “develops out of [...] skepticism about ‘truth’ and the correspondence of fact and concept” (Bove 55). Foucault examines the difficulty of defending ‘truth’ in metaphysical terms; yet he suggests that the lack of concrete ‘truth’ (which would transcend all modes of discourse) liberates the individual to make his own determinations. “‘Truths’ are relative to the frame of reference which contains them; more radically, ‘truths’ are a function of these frames [...] and discourses ‘constitute’ the truths they claim to discover and transmit” (Bove 56). Therefore, it is clear that discourse is connected to actual social institutions, which “have power” insofar as they may regulate and control the bodies and actions of individuals (as well as their thought processes). This power of discourse creates a subjective role for humans as they become individual subjects that make decisions and create meaning, and, conversely, as subjects to the dominant discourse which has control over their actions. It does not matter what actions are taken on the individual level because the abstract self does not exist as such, only as an extension of the power structure of discourse.

Bigger Thomas is exemplary of Foucault’s image of the marginalized individual trying to find his subjectivity within the “given sets of power relations” in racist America (Bove 62). He is unique because he is not a conscious contributor to any of society’s discourses, yet he is perpetually affected by all of them. When Bigger is arrested and charged with the murder of Mary Dalton, a young white Communist sympathizer with extremely wealthy and influential parents, Bigger is put on death row. At this time, several persons, who are representative of the various discursive systems existing in Bigger’s world, approach Bigger and offer him the ‘truths’ of their systems to accept as his own. His cultural ostracism grants him a certain objective perspective in which to view
these systems and make his choices about them, yet although his choices are individual, they reflect the ways in which the power of these discourses is played out in society.

The system of discourse that functions on the most obvious level in Native Son is the dominant discourse of “white America.” This system is the one that controls most facets of discourse in society, including legal, intellectual, and political discourse, and that subjugates all individuals, white and black, to its power. The “white American” mode of discourse is best represented by Mr. and Mrs. Dalton, and by the state prosecutor, Buckley.

In a deeply racist society, Mr. and Mrs. Dalton are seemingly more benevolent and understanding of the plight of Bigger Thomas than other, more bigoted white characters in the novel. Although they are remarkably civil and sympathetic, they play a surprisingly powerful and ambivalent role in the black community: “[Bigger] had heard that Mr. Dalton owned the South Side Real Estate Company [...] [which] owned the house in which he lived, one rat-infested room [...] Mr. Dalton was somewhere far away, high up, distant, like a god.” Bigger is conscious of Dalton’s direct involvement in the segregation and exploitation of African Americans in Chicago, and he feels Mr. Dalton’s role in the imposition of the line across which no black persons could move to cheaper rents and better facilities. “He would rent houses to Negroes only in this prescribed [...] corner of the city tumbling down from rot” (173–74). Yet, ironically, the Daltons feel they are helping to better the situation of black people in the city. They donate millions of dollars to “Negro education” and send ping-pong tables to the boys’ club in the “Black Belt,” yet never employing any black people in their offices or renting them decent apartments (294–95). Mr. Dalton fancies himself quite a philanthropist; but his true feelings about black people—his fear and guilt—are manifested in a cycle of poverty and oppression (perpetuated by his company) which continually denies boys like Bigger a “meaningful life” of dignity and self-determination. The language of the dominant discourse has literally ignored boys like Bigger in the construction of the system, yet Bigger is incapable of taking action outside this dominant system. As a result, after his murder of the Daltons’ daughter Mary, Bigger decides to try and manipulate them (by writing a ransom note) as he feels they
have manipulated him all his life, and in this way his resistance to the power structure is dependent upon that power and not his own individual agency. He seeks “recognition of his personality” through his violent actions and his resignation to pay for them in the terms provided by the dominant discourse (418). As Bove indicates, “all [...] within the disciplines [of discourse...] are to some extent incorporated within these systems of control [...] there is no place for any of us to stand outside of it” (54).

Buckley, the prosecutor (and politician) responsible for Bigger’s case, voices the more antagonistic, racist views of white Americans in the novel. “My voice may sound vindictive, but what I am really saying is that the law is sweet when it is enforced and protects [...] and shields the infant, the aged, the helpless, the blind and the sensitive from the [...] half-human black ape [...] climbing through the windows to rape, murder, and burn our daughters!” (Wright 408). Buckley represents the Law of the dominant society which perpetuates the restrictions of the discourse, specifically that “‘the other’ [...] be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts” (Bove 58). This is fundamental to the power relations of discursive practice, yet it is obvious that the ‘truths’ put forth by Buckley here are highly subjective.

As Bigger sits in his cell, other modes of discourse are presented to him as possible courses of action. One of these is the Christian discourse adhered to by his mother, siblings, and the reverend of their church. They all come to see him in prison as he awaits trial, imploring him to pray and accept Christ before death. They explain the ‘truths’ of their faith to him, which include forgiveness, love, and togetherness. Yet Bigger sees his mother’s faith as a means of coping with her miserable plight in life through visions of paradise after her death “where we can live without fear [...] we can be together in God’s heaven” (Wright 299). Bigger thinks of Christianity as “a big lie” and recognizes religion as a tool of the dominant discourse that keeps people satisfied in their respective situations by assuring everlasting salvation if only they put up with hardship in this life, obeying and never questioning. His mother cannot be dissociated from the implications of “white American” control over religious discourse, and Bigger finds justification for this idea when he sees the burning cross of the Ku Klux Klan. “The cross the preacher had told him about was
bloody, not flaming; meek, not militant. It had made him feel awe and wonder, not fear and panic” (337). Bigger doesn’t see how his mother could find love and hope in something that is also meant to instill fear and panic, and he reasons that nothing that can burn and hate that passionately can assure everlasting glory, nor can it appease his fear and hatred in life. In this case the same fundamental religious discourse of society is being used by two different groups for two different purposes, yet one group’s domination of the discourse causes its ambivalent nature in society. “[Bigger] had let the preacher talk to him until […] he had begun to feel that maybe something could happen. Something had happened: the cross the preacher had hung round his throat had been burned right before his eyes” (340).

The dominant discourse of “white America” has also fed Bigger a certain degree of anti-Communist propaganda in his life, yet when he comes into contact with Max and Jan (who represent the Communist party in the novel) he realizes their approach to him differs from the dominant culture of white people. Basically, they treat him as a man, more specifically as a man who stands for all men in his socioeconomic situation. Max understands the environmental factors that led Bigger to act out his fear in violence, the deep-rooted history and system of oppression black men are forced to live with. Max realizes Bigger’s desire to create some sort of meaning in his otherwise futile life, and implicates all white people (or in Communist terms, all dominant bourgeois people) in continuing the conditions of hopelessness and fear that are imposed upon the black populace.

Yet in the end, Wright indicates that Communism does not answer all Bigger’s questions, nor does it completely solve the problem. In seeing Bigger as the representative of all Negroes, Max only “sees them as a whole... a mass” that needs self-identification, and ignores the individual problems and manifestations of fear and subordination that black people face (Wright 397). The Communists do not recognize the isolation that Bigger feels, his inability to feel a sense of community with anyone. They ignore the fundamental disenfranchisement of black men within their own group, the men that are truly “disembodied spirits,” unable to feel any emotions of pride, love, or happiness (402). Max, “like a blind man,” goes away in the end unable to comprehend Bigger’s final
self-identification with the murder of Mary Dalton as the only act of value in his life (429). His communism fails to create in Bigger a sense of belief; it ignores his individual attempt at subjectivity in his own life. In terms of discourse, communism is viewed by Foucault as a “disciplinary society” in which the dominant discourse’s ‘truths’ are representative of every individual en masse; thus what is problematic in communism is the individual’s inability to self-determine which ‘truths’ he deems significant to creating meaning and subjectivity for himself (Bove 61). Communism does not fulfill Bigger’s desire to have an individual identity and therefore prohibits subjective meaning in his life.

Interestingly enough, it is only when all modes of discourse offered have failed him that Bigger begins to comprehend the value of his existence. For the first time, on his deathbed, Bigger recognizes his own subjectivity by voicing “what he himself wanted to hear, what he needed” (Wright 425). The dominant discourse of “white America” that forced Bigger to feel inferior his whole life caused him never, until his death, to think of himself and his actions on his own terms. “Other said [Bigger] was bad and they made you live in bad conditions. When a man hears that over and over […] and sees that his life is bad, he begins to doubt his own mind” (427-28). Killing Mary made Bigger feel like a subject, made him feel something enough to bring it into being within the terms of the dominant discourse. It is his expression of his own emotions. And he realizes that all white and black people are “just trying to get something,” to feel secure and believe in their frame of discourse, although they “didn’t mean to hurt nobody... they was just trying to get something too” (425). Their fear of losing power and control, of being unable to hold on to their belief in the ‘truths’ of their discourse, manifests itself in all the ways that Wright describes in *Native Son*. Bigger’s estrangement from all sections of society gives him a somewhat objective, although limited, image of the various functions of discourse that traverse the entire social structure and the manifestations of its power. Bigger must confront each faction of discourse before he can see clearly for himself the essential structure of dominance and subservience under which all individuals in society function, be it through their violence, ambivalence, or surrender to the structure as it is.
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Gwendolyn Brooks and Edith Södergran: Examination of the Elegy

Kelsea Feola

Gwendolyn Brooks and Edith Södergran lived their lives amidst societal turmoil, each of them witnessing oppression and hardships that faced the people of the times. These women saw victims of prejudice and low expectations; empowerment and equality were restricted all around them. Both poet’s motivation dwelled in their desire for the anguish around them to be heard, for the struggles that they witnessed to be exposed and they both did so through the elegy, though utilizing different forms. Both made use of the elegy to suggest loss and the lamenting of something gone tragically wrong in a particular aspect of their life. Brooks worked with many different forms, while Södergran specifically made the decision to use only free verse. Within their common use of the elegy, though, the women embraced two distinct styles—Realism and Expressionism—to evoke different reactions from their readers on the issues facing them. Gwendolyn Brooks and Edith Södergran both employed the elegy to expose the prominent problems they witnessed as members of divided societies, but Brooks did so through realism to present the actual tribulations she was addressing, while Södergran’s expressionist style focused on stirring the emotions within her readers.

Gwendolyn Brooks lived through the twentieth century in America confronted by scenes of civil rights protests and her fellow black Americans being abused in the streets of their homeland while pushing towards equality. Blacks during her time were segregated into separate facilities that were of poor quality. They were pressured out of voting booths; they were turned away from business and were openly threatened for pursuing the same rights that their white countrymen had held for centuries. Surrounding Brooks, an entire community of black Americans fought these discriminations while risking their safety and security. Members of this beleaguered culture were condemned to life on the streets without jobs or homes, were buried quietly without services,
and were disregarded as equally competent to participate in society. These images of personal suffering and sacrifice are what Brooks witnessed and also what she wanted to convey directly through her elegies. Employing realism to describe the normal situations in the world around her, she was able to create stark contrasts in her work that provided an awakening in her audience as they experienced the sadness and pain that was occurring without their knowledge. Brooks’ use of many forms also provided evidence that her voice was legitimate, educated, and should be heard by everyone.

In her poem, “Beverly Hills, Chicago,” Brooks employs the elegy to explore the economic gap that benefited white people while disregarding the needs of black people. Utilizing free verse, Brooks constructs a conversational atmosphere as a driver and passenger pass a home belonging to someone who is white, an everyday event for her readers. The speaker reveals that this house is something much grander than what they live in, referring to “golden gardens” and “the leaves fall down in lovelier patterns here.” When Brooks writes that white people do have problems, but “it is trouble with a gold-flecked beautiful banner,” she is illustrating how virtually every aspect of being a white person is easier than being black. Also, in the line that reads “sometimes their [whites’] passings are even more painful than ours” she is very revealing in the suggestion that all black people die painfully, die after struggling through hardships that the white race does not have to overcome. Her final stanza in this poem reads:

We do not want them to have less.
But it is only natural that we should think we have not enough.
We drive on, we drive on.
When we speak to each other our voices are a little gruff.

This shows the inequality facing blacks constantly in everyday situations. Also, as is demonstrated by the last line, it appears that such a presence was difficult for blacks to accept. The “gruff” tone of voice that is shared between the car’s passengers is evidence that their emotions are negatively affected by this knowledge that they do not have enough in comparison with the white
population in order to constitute fairness between the races.

In the work, “To an Old Black Woman, Homeless and Indistinct,” the elegiac tradition is apparent in Brooks’ lament for someone who had great potential and now goes unnoticed in a climate grown accustomed to the homeless lining the street. Here, Brooks employs realism in her endeavor to recreate the reality of the image of the women alone in an “alley or cardboard or viaduct.” It is here that the effect of the form takes hold. Brooks is describing a situation that has come to be accepted as a fact of life but that, she feels, must still be improved. She illustrates how a “Rich Girl,” potentially white, “sees you not, she sees you very well,” and despite being aware that this homeless woman is in apparent need of any type of outreach, refuses to acknowledge it. Walking past this old black woman, this younger wealthy girl is decisively choosing to disregard the downtrodden people that would benefit from her interaction and choosing to remain content in her own comforts while allowing the homeless to maintain their veiled existence. When the old black woman dies “your mouth may be all crooked or destroyed,” and no one will be there to assume the responsibilities of arrangements or give a eulogy: she will be forgotten. In light of this, Brooks prepares this piece as a type of service for blacks in similar situations, with the intention of bringing awareness to the issue.

Brooks also saw distinct additional expectations that were placed on black women strictly because they were female. Women who were not married and bore children brought shame to their families, while the fathers of those children carried no responsibility. In “The Mother,” Brooks’ use of realism is constructed to provide a shock factor that jars the reader and stuns them in an elegy about losing unborn children. The tone of the work is somber and carries regret through phrases such as “if I sinned,” “killed children,” “why should I whine,” and “you are dead,” as Brooks’ speaker resembles a collective mother to aborted babies. The first line creates a definitive tone for the poem by beginning with “abortions,” indicating there should be no misinterpretation about the elegy’s import. Communicating, “I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children,” Brooks is deliberate in her message that these fetuses were aborted due to a conscious decision made by their mothers. Realism becomes the shock value as the eulogy’s subject draws feeling from the
reader. Then, “believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate,” conveys that these women were not having abortions performed because they did not desire to have children, as is further evidenced by lines such as “I loved you all.” Instead, Brooks seems to be proposing that these women were coerced into abortion knowing what consequences an illegitimate child would bring to their family and their own reputation. These societal implications are what Brooks is attempting to dismantle as she reveals that these children were “killed” to fulfill the expectations on women. The effect this has on Brooks’ audience is an overwhelming sense of sorrow for “the mother” with no children, and a question as to why an abortion is a young woman’s only option after discovering herself pregnant.

Edith Södergran lived her life within a societal structure that disregarded the opinions and the voices of women. Her elegies battle her confusion about her womanhood, her position in society, and her impact on the people around her. Södergran’s conscious decision to utilize free verse and her Expressionist style contributed to her emergence as an innovator, making it difficult to place her in a poetic category.

Her desire to influence those around her is exhibited by her attempts to publish her work and her disappointment after the poor reception her poems received. Södergran had messages that she wanted to share with the world, but mostly she wanted her readers to feel as she felt, rather than see what she saw, and here lies the similarities between her and Brooks. The pain reflected in her elegies resembles her own feelings of sadness in regards to her audience not understanding her messages and not accepting what she had to offer as a literary mind.

In her poem, “My Soul,” Södergran challenges the notion that women are emotional objects susceptible to whims and incapable of pertinent discourse. With her argument on the border of rhetoric, she uses incremental repetition to emphasize the soul, something internal to combat the perception that women were shallow creatures only occupied with external appearance and emotional outbursts. The poem’s elegiac nature is evidenced as it addresses the tragedy that suggests women have limited capacities:
My soul can tell no tales and knows no truths,
my soul can only cry and laugh and wring its hands;
my soul cannot remember or defend,
my soul cannot consider or approve.

This illustrates how women were perceived as intellectually weak and
were not expected to come to conclusions or debate, only “cry and laugh,” a
mold that Södergran sought to break. She follows these lines with imagery of
empowerment and conquest, showing that women should not fear to stand up
to such expectations and prove them false. Using the irrationality from expres-
sionism, she describes a dragon and a fearless virgin to provoke an image in her
audience’s mind about the power of women and their ability to sustain a knight.
The final line, “but I have dark rings under my eyes,” suggests that despite
being a woman, the speaker is weary after having fought a battle, something
that would not be deemed an appropriate activity because of her inability to
reason effectively.

Södergran similarly attacks the suppression of women by men and society
in her elegy “Violet Twilight.” In the elegiac tradition, it suggests that men are
imposing dire limitations on women, creating dependence and restricting not
only what women can do, but also what women feel they are capable of. This is
also an apparent account of Expressionism as Södergran abandons reality and
sends her speaker towards celestial objects and Greek mythological characters:

naked virgins playing with galloping centaurs...
Yellow sunshine days with bright glances,
Only sunbeams pay proper homage to a tender female body...

These images evoke a strong sense of empowerment to women, detailing
that they are a select group privileged to frolic with these elusive half-people/
half-horses and be honored properly by the sun. She is attacking the restrictive
standards that were placed on women, telling them “we are the least expected
and the darkest red,” communicating that although what is predicted to come
from them is minute in comparison with what is expected from men, they are
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capable of being the “darkest red,” the color associated with vitality. When Södergran describes that “[a] man is a false mirror that the sun’s daughter hurls against the cliffs in rage,” she is using the mirror to suggest that women see themselves through men and that men determine their competence. When the daughter of the sun, the most powerful body in the solar system, shatters man and his perceptions of women, Södergran is communicating that women should break free of this limited existence that implies they are fragile beings that are dependent on men; women are capable of independence and relevant emotion.

Throughout Södergran’s time, issues of civil unrest and concerns regarding women’s rights were stowed away as these other matters were resolved. Seeing this as an attempt to limit the impact individual voices could make, Södergran’s elegy “Vierge Moderne,” allows her speaker to admit not being “a woman,” but rather a person of benign gender. Interestingly, this feature of being a woman is one of her most significant identifying characteristics. Through her incremental repetition of “I am,” Södergran is stating clearly that whether she is man or woman has no meaning; she is still someone with a voice, feelings, influence. The “I am” is her independence from the conformation that society has anticipated from women. She is bold in her statement, and empowering herself; confident that she is whatever she wants to be. The speaker then goes on to explain that they are many different things such as “a net for all voracious fish” and “a step toward luck and toward ruin.” Södergran is using these images to express specific feelings to her audience, feelings of being trapped and having no options. She is signaling that although the speaker is contradicting elements, such as flame and water, each is something that contributes towards dismantling limitations set before her. Her description of “I am water, deep yet bold only to the knees,” is referring to women having become accustomed to limitations, how women must wade deeper into the waters of intellectual life. Södergran is describing and protesting the ideals and standards of women remaining silent and indistinct, in the home and out of intellectual communities. Her last line illustrates her concept that women are “fire and water, honestly combined, on free terms...”—an idea that sends an image of two contradicting elements to the mind, stirring a powerful emotion of defiance in the
discovery of a way to combine these things despite the natural reaction of fire and water.

Both Gwendolyn Brooks and Edith Södergran were innovators of the traditional form of the elegy. Both also employed their own methods, such as Realism and Expressionism, to evoke particular meaning and reaction from their readers. The women protested the societal tragedies around them, inequality and suppression, and found their weapon in poetry. Shining light on the everyday misfortune of what she saw around her, Brooks was able to attract awareness to issues that had previously been disregarded; her grief over the inequalities eased as her work assisted in the improvements. Brooks gave voice to those who did not know how or where to speak. Södergran challenged the perception that women were merely shallow creatures that were neither capable of logical thought or intellect. She was aware of what she had to offer society and was bereaved when the reception of her work did not acknowledge her gift. She set new limits to what women could accomplish and made valiant attempts at sharing her gift with the world around her. Together, they mastered the form of elegy to best suit their individual pursuits of bringing attention to what they saw as tragedy around them. Both women have had a lasting influence on the elegy, creating new boundaries for future poets, earning their position as permanent figures in the poetic tradition.
Countee Cullen and Anna Akhmatova, two poets who lived in very different countries and social systems, were similar in that they both employed the pastoral within their poetry. The pastoral, in the literary sense, is a mechanism that portrays life in simple terms, often using shepherds, muses and nature. Cullen, as a poet of the Harlem Renaissance, largely wrote about issues of race and oppression and incorporated the pastoral into his writing on these subjects. All the while, Cullen spoke from his perspective on behalf of a larger group of African Americans. For this reason, it could be said that Cullen’s poetry is subjective, as the point of view presented is his own, even though he simultaneously spoke on behalf of the social concerns of a group. Akhmatova, on the other hand, was concerned with using her poetry to portray life through a personal perspective. By employing the pastoral, however, she managed to maintain an impersonal tone when discussing personal experience; she used everyday language and concrete objects, not symbolically, but literally. Thus, Akhmatova’s poetry were labeled as objective in form because she portrayed events as they could be seen without attempting to interpret them. Although both Cullen and Akhmatova employed the pastoral in their poetry, Cullen used it to explore social identity subjectively whereas Akhmatova used it as a tool to objectively portray personal experience.

Cullen wrote in a style much similar to that of British Romanticism, a fact that adds to his purpose for employing the pastoral. Cullen was largely inspired by the British Romanticists, in particular John Keats. Like Keats, Cullen wrote some of his poetry in sonnet form and in compliance with Romanticist principles, focused his work on the subjective experience, emphasized the use of the imagination, and, most importantly for the issue at hand, employed the
pastoral within his poetry. In other words, when Cullen chose to use the pastoral, he did so fully knowing that he was in some way imitating the form of Keats and his contemporaries. Therefore, it is clear that Cullen admired the qualities of the poems of the British Romanticists and found them advantageous to use in his own writing. However, Cullen used this for an entirely different purpose. While in form the two were similar, in content the two poets were drastically different. Unlike Keats, Cullen used the pastoral to explore social themes within his poetry, particularly ones pertaining to being black. This was a somewhat ironic decision to make on Cullen’s part; as a black poet he modeled his work after whites, yet simultaneously he was commenting about the oppression of blacks through this form. This technique of Cullen’s gave him the opportunity to appeal to those people who liked the style of the more traditional British Romanticists as well as make a bold poetic statement. Furthermore, as an African American poet, the fact that Cullen employed forms similar to the Romanticists was integral to his gaining attention in the poetic community. Although it is too simple and a little naïve to say that Cullen emulated the British Romantics strictly in order to gain the attention of white readers and prove his validity as a black poet, it nonetheless helped him that he employed such forms. It allowed his poetry to transcend the labels of blackness in the form of his poetry, yet still remain true to this identity by writing about the black experience within the “white” form. Such poetry still duly accomplished the Romanticist goal of portraying the subjective experience, as it was the context of Cullen’s writing, not the form, which differed from other writers and portrayed Cullen’s own view on life, identity, and social roles.

Cullen’s use of the pastoral enabled him to write poetry that fulfilled the Romanticist goals in form while still allowing him to comment on racial identity within the context of the form. One of Cullen’s most well-known poems is “Heritage,” where he writes:

One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?
Cullen evokes pastoral imagery in the form of the grove and the cinnamon tree to represent what Africa implies about his identity. This identity acknowledges that Africa is very distant from his current existence and experiences. Thus, Cullen is exploring the individual identity’s social relations through pastoral language. He does this subjectively and in the sonnet form while still focusing on the individual. This is evident when Cullen switches points of view in this particular stanza; he uses third person to speak in the second line and first person in the last line. By using this technique, he is able to combine his exploration of his own identity with that of other blacks who are also distant both physically and emotionally from the land of their ancestors. Cullen, then, is considering a topic that was inapplicable to his British Romanticist predecessors and is mixing the British Romanticist form with the ideas and aims of the Harlem Renaissance.

Cullen particularly used the pastoral to consider social themes that relate to identity and used pastoral images of growth and the blossoming of nature to illustrate his beliefs on the subject. It is interesting to note that Cullen often used the lexicon of cultivation in his poems. For instance, the poem “From the Dark Tower” displays how Cullen used the pastoral image of plant growth to illustrate the interplay of social identity and the place of the oppressed. He writes:

We shall not plant while others reap  
The golden increment of bursting fruit  
Not always countenance, abject and mute,  
That lesser men should hold their brothers cheap.

Here, the lexicon of cultivation is used so the speaker can declare the injustice in doing work that only benefits the privileged. Dark contrasts with the light, yet, Cullen says that the night (dark) is no better or worse than the white stars (light). In other words, opposites do not necessarily have to be either superior or inferior to one another and this notion can be paralleled to human’s societal relationships of superiority and inferiority. In the last four lines, the pastoral theme along with the contrast between light and dark come together:
And there are buds that cannot bloom at all
In light, but crumple, piteous, and fall;
So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds
And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.

Here again the lexicon of cultivation is employed with words such as “buds,” “bloom,” and “seeds,” in the midst of the contrasting “light” and “dark.” This mixture uses physical images to portray the attitudes of the speaker. For example, the pastoral image of flowers that cannot survive in light, combined with the comment that people are waiting to “tend our agonizing seeds,” effectively paints a physical picture that illustrates the mental and social struggle against stereotypes that remain intact in spite of evidence to the contrary. Therefore, through pastoral images, Cullen shows that oppression does not equal subordination and is able to use pastoral’s simplicity to evoke the more complex social issues of human existence, such as physical and cultural domination.

Cullen is different from the Romantics because of this social context he adds within the Romantic form. In this manner, Cullen was able to subjectively comment on far-reaching social dilemmas and the notion of group identity. The importance Cullen places on the growth of nature in his poetry is extended in the poem, “Four Epitaphs,” in the epitaph entitled “For my Grandmother.” Cullen likens his grandmother to “[t]his lovely flower,” and says that in death she believed “[t]hat she would grow again.” He is using the pastoral and the image of the flower to portray his grandmother’s influence as something she hoped would spread over again even after she was no longer alive. In effect, Cullen uses the pastoral to portray humans as just another part of nature and that people, like nature, are under the same rhythm of birth, growth, and death. And, perhaps most importantly for Cullen, nature must struggle to survive just as humans must assess their conditions as their lives progress. The pastoral becomes a way for Cullen to explore the connection people have to the nature that surrounds them, and sees them as perpetually intertwined. Therefore, the pastoral not only lends itself to exploring issues of oppression, but also to issues of life and its struggles. It seems as though Cullen regarded the pastoral
as a way to parallel the cycles and themes in peoples’ lives, which he most notably examines in his commentaries on racial identity.

In comparison, Akhmatova used the pastoral to explore identity in an objective fashion. This objectivity is based on form, since it is inspired by Acmeism, which called for the use of concrete imagery and an end to the ambiguity of Symbolism. The use of the pastoral accomplishes this Acmeist goal. Descriptions of nature, animals, and the rustic way of life are all concrete images. They have the power to illustrate ideas and concepts through the physical, which is exactly what Akhmatova wanted to do within her poetry through Acmeist principles. The pastoral’s simple images of life create a visual image in people’s minds with which they can connect and then determine for themselves what it is they signify. It is this combination of the pastoral’s simplicity and the principles of Acmeism that allowed Akhmatova to create poetry that was personal but detached, familiar, but still somewhat impartial, and therefore, objective.

Akhmatova’s use of the pastoral enabled her to illustrate the world without placing a value on it, and therefore allowed her to stay true to her goals within the Acmeist movement. In an untitled poem, Akhmatova writes:

I would rather shout out—a street song quick and gay
And have you grab your grunty—accordion and play.
And go into the oat fields—and hold you through the night
And somehow lose a ribbon—from hair I’ve braided tight.

Here, Akhmatova creates concrete images—singing on the street, playing the accordion, holding a loved one in the oat fields. Yet these concrete images are simultaneously pastoral due to their simplicity and relative naïveté. They allow her to use these physical actions to conjure ideas of the simple life without judging them for herself. These pastoral images are exactly that—images, and not symbols. Yet, they are also not just images in and of themselves because they give clues about the speaker and why she thinks the way she does. In effect, Akhmatova gives us “what,” but she does not answer the question “why”; the reader must infer the “why” solely through these physical,
pastoral images. For instance, a reasonable question in this particular poem might be to ask: “Why would this person rather be in the oat fields?” The answer, undoubtedly, would say more about the speaker and her current life circumstances that make her feel this way. It isn’t the words themselves that matter here, it is the ideas that allow a person to decide on their own terms what the poem is signifying. In this manner, Akhmatova allows her use of the pastoral to be engaging, since the reader is drawn into the poem itself and invited to take a look at the world painted with the words.

Akhmatova was able to represent her belief that the physical world is truth through the pastoral. The role the pastoral plays in Akhmatova’s poetry is evident in the poem “Pushkin,” about the greatest Russian author of the nineteenth century. In this poem, Akhmatova says:

A swarthy young boy lolled down pathways  
By himself at the edge of the lake. 
For a hundred long years we have cherished 
The slight rustle his far footsteps make.

Because this poem is entitled “Pushkin,” it is safe to assume that the “swarthy young boy” is Pushkin himself. Here, Akhmatova evokes the pastoral and relates it to Pushkin. The image of a boy walking by a lake with his footsteps making sounds is a tangible one. Yet, the pastoral image of Pushkin’s “footsteps” and the sounds they made are contrasted with what he gave to the world in his writings. This contrast results in Akhmatova’s being able to tell a larger story through the objectivity of the physical world while still giving more information than observation itself would allow. This is what comprises truth to Akhmatova. Truth is what can be seen and pictured and these images do not need to be analyzed within the poetry because that would not be objective and would instead be skewed by biases.

Akhmatova’s use of muses, such as Pushkin, helps her fulfill her Acmeist motive for using the pastoral. Coincidentally, her poem “Muse” is a great example of how the muse and the pastoral accomplish her goals:
And here she enters. Unveiled, she engages
Me with her eyes most scrutinizingly.
I speak to her: ‘You gave Dante the pages
Of the Inferno?’ And she answers: ‘Me.’

Here, Akhmatova creates another entity and is allowed to reflect on her own poetry and the forces that motivate her. This also follows the Acmeist principle of not judging the person, only showing what happens. The muse becomes another one of Akhmatova’s concrete objects that she can use to present the situation of battling with imagination and creativity. Thus, Akhmatova can step outside herself when she uses the muse, while still remaining objective in form because the muse itself is a concrete object.

Perhaps the greatest example of exactly why Akhmatova chose to use the pastoral is in another of her untitled poems. She begins: “I have no use for elegiac passion/Or for the grandeur of a classic ode.” In other words, Akhmatova is proclaiming that she does not feel the need to stick to traditional forms. This too is evident by her involvement in the Acmeist movement, a deviation from standard poetic forms. Later, she writes:

If you but knew from what trivial nonsense
Our poems grew...not knowing any shame,
Like yellow dandelions lining the fence,
Like burdock, goosefoot...Thus, they came.

Here, Akhmatova makes it clearer why she employs the pastoral. She says that poems are inspired by the ordinary world and that world is not grandiose, like ‘traditional’ poetry would lead you to believe. This ordinary world is “burdock, goosefoot.” The characteristic of the simplicity of the pastoral, therefore, allows Akhmatova to evoke an individual’s surroundings as objective and, according to Akhmatova, as honestly as possible.

Cullen and Akhmatova clearly used the pastoral in distinct ways, yet they were similar in that they both managed to create complex meanings through the simplicity of pastoral images. For example, in the epitaph entitled “For a Lady I
Know” in “Four Epitaphs,” Cullen writes:

She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.

Cullen juxtaposes the simplicity of sleeping late in the physical world with the social complexity of the concept that race is still relevant in heaven. The pastoral becomes a mechanism to illustrate more complex social themes, which is Cullen’s goal. There is a disenchanted tone here, evident with phrasing such as “even thinks” and the ironic “celestial chores.” This is wording that Akhmatova herself would not utilize, as it places a value and a biased attitude toward the images presented. Akhmatova also uses the pastoral to reflect on more complex ideas, although in an entirely different way. The poem, “Song of the Last Meeting,” is an example of this. In the last quatrain of the poem, Akhmatova says:

This: the song of our last meeting...
I looked back at the dark house’s frame;
In the bedroom the candles were burning
An indifferent, yellowed flame.

The speaker states what happens—she looks, sees a candle, and notes how it burns—but does not place an emotion or value on the event. The meeting is what it is and all clues as to what it means are in the event itself. In this manner, Akhmatova can relate her poem, one with deeper meaning than the pastoral image of a dark house with a candle burning, while still allowing the speaker to remain aloof to the implications of the event; therefore, the reader must still ask, “why?” Akhmatova sees the pastoral as a way of representing truth and, therefore, is allowed to remain objective in the form of the poem through the way in which she utilizes the concreteness of pastoral imagery.

The pastoral allowed both Cullen and Akhmatova to be innovative and
challenge, as Akhmatova would say, “custom’s code.” Cullen, for instance, used the form of Keats and the other British Romantics and made it his own through the social connotations that he implemented into his poetry. In effect, he took an established form whites used and proved that a black poet could master “white” poetics. When using a previous literary form, he made the content within the form different than what it had been used for in the past. This is particularly important to note because he wrote in a time when blacks were still being suppressed by both imbedded racial norms and overt racism. Alternately, Akhmatova’s use of the pastoral allowed her to create a new form in Acmeism, as she wanted to step away from the Symbolist form prevalent during her lifetime. She chose not to give the pastoral any grandiose meaning and instead employed it to give it an objective visual significance that aided in the presentation of her poetry. In other words, while Cullen used the pastoral to extrapolate on a previous literary form and comment on the social ideas of his lifetime, Akhmatova used pastoral images to present a new way of looking at the world through the use of poetry. Indeed, these are ironic notions: the social subjective and the personal objective. Yet, due to these aberrations, both poets were highly effective in their work and created poetry that countered the hegemony of society, as in Cullen’s case, and in the case of Akhmatova, the hegemony of literary form.
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The premise that storytelling is what enables a person to leave home and cleave emotional ties from the primary caregiver is clearly manifest in Gus Van Sant’s 1992 film, *My Own Private Idaho*, in the form of its two main characters’ plot lines and their ensuing ability or inability to tell stories. The subsequent quest to find a surrogate parent who will then take him her out into society is also present, at which, again, one of the characters is successful and the other is not. Additionally, I claim that for many people there exists a secondary cleaving from the surrogate parent, followed by a union with another person in an intimate sexual relationship. All three of these premises are dependent upon one powerful, multifaceted force: language. The ability to use language in many different ways is what enables the individual to navigate the world and form intimate relationships. Van Sant adapts lines of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1* in his film to explore the nuances of language. This exploration of language also coincides with the exploration of the intimate relationships between fathers and sons, and friends and lovers.

In the film, the character of Scott Favor is Van Sant’s nineties version of the Shakespearean character Hal from *Henry IV*. It is possible to trace Scott’s emotional attachments as well as his detachments by examining his language choice in various scenes from the film. While the presence of one of Shakespeare’s plays in an avant-garde genre film seems a bit bizarre, it is precisely this peculiar mix of language that calls attention to itself, thereby compelling the viewer to mentally track the close emotional connections via the language. Hal is the spoiled, impulsive, hedonistic Prince Henry, and the son of King Henry the Fourth (Bolingbroke). Not only does the film borrow many of its characters from *Henry IV*, it also uses some of the same kinds of language style changes in order to engage in dialogue with the play. Shakespeare illustrates his mastery of the English language by having his characters speak either in poetry or in prose, each in accordance with his social status. At times,
Shakespeare allows his characters to shift between the two styles of speech for comedic or ironic affect. Van Sant’s characters also have different styles of speech, but the filmic context affords his characters a larger repertoire to choose from: vulgar street slang, paraphrased or adapted lines from the play, and everyday English. The social status differences in the film are as complex as the language, in large part due to the disparity in social structures between Elizabethan England and the present-day United States.

The film opens with a young man performing fellatio—a young man who collapses in a narcoleptic heap and begins dreaming of roads and journeys and a pastiche of bizarre images. This young man is the character Mike, one of two main characters and the close friend of Scott Favor. At the beginning of the film, Scott, who is from a privileged echelon of society, has apparently moved out of his parents’ home and is awaiting his twenty-first birthday and inheritance. While waiting, he has acquired a new peer group: the underground homosexual drug culture of the Northwest. The speech of this group of young men is raw and vulgar and the visual images associated with them are ones of violence, prostitution and drug use. The language Scott appropriates when he talks to his close friend Mike is a coarse, nineties-era street slang riddled with obscenities. Of the many scenes spoken in this language, the coffee house scenes are the most disturbing for the viewer. Van Sant films the gay male prostitutes telling their personal stories of rape and sexual abuse in the coffee house—their only home. The stories are told in succession, the telling somehow validating each one’s membership to the group. This supports the assertion of story telling as a way to access society once a person has left his home. One of the characters openly states, “Yeah, and then I changed my mind and said I’d give the guy his money back, but he got all pissed and I had to do the date any way... he fucked me with a wine bottle... that was my first date.”

Scott’s narcoleptic sidekick, Mike, does not tell his story, which ultimately prohibits him from integrating into a subculture that could possibly relate to his personal experiences of incest and abuse, and accept him as one of their own. In contrast, Scott easily talks his way into and eventually proclaims his departure from them when he publicly denies Bob, the film’s equivalent of the play’s character Falstaff. Bob, like his counterpart Falstaff before him, functions as a
surrogate father to Scott/Hal, educating him in the ways of debauchery.

Oftentimes, when Scott speaks in adapted lines from *Henry IV*, it is in dialogue with Bob, who also speaks in these kinds of adapted lines, serving as a constant point of connection between the film and the play. With most of the other characters, Scott chooses to speak either slang or ordinary English. When the viewer is introduced to Bob, Scott’s “long-lost psychedelic papa,” at the beginning of the film, he is quoting the first line of the poem, “Trees,” by Joyce Kilmer: “I think that I shall never see/ a poem lovely as a tree.” With the exception of “Trees,” most of Bob’s lines are adapted from *Henry IV*, such as the playful banter and insulting interchange in which both he and Scott indulge in. This mimics the wordplay of Falstaff and Hal, which Van Sant uses to communicate the parallels of intimate relationships between fathers and sons (ii.5, 241-8). Scott’s assault on Bob, “This sanguine coward, this horseback breaker,” is met with Bob’s retaliation of “You starfish! What vile breath to utter [...] boot case, vile punk [...] I know you better than he that made you.” The most interesting of these scuffles is the last one they have, which begins when Bob sees Scott enter the restaurant with his entourage and Italian girlfriend:

*Bob (to self and minions).* Look what we have here, why it’s Scott Favor... Good Lord, lads, do you think I would kill the heir apparent? I am as valued as Hercules [...] the lion will not touch the true heir. He is the only one who can get us out of our poverty and oppression [...] he will once he sees that I’m dying to see him. God save you my sweet boy! Scotty, my own true friend, it’s me, Bob!”

Scott’s reply is icily cold and distant and, ironically, foreshadows Bob’s death:

*Scott.* I don’t know you old man, please leave me alone. When I was young and you were my street tutor and instigator for bad behavior, I was planning a change; I had need to learn from you my former and psychedelic teacher. And though I love you more than my dead father, I have to turn away. Now that I have and until I turn back, please leave me alone.
In this speech Scott validates the audience’s belief in Bob as a surrogate parent to Scott; by denouncing him, Scott effectively ends their relationship as well as his relationship with his friends, including Mike.

While Bob and Scott are frequently responsible for direct quotes from Shakespeare, Van Sant does give additional lines to the supporting cast that serve to develop the plot and lend some additional support to the presence of the complex language of the longer direct quotes. Scott speaks to his father only in the most proper English; for example, during a scene in his father’s office, the two men essentially reenact the discourse between Hal and his father, Bolingbroke. (ii.73-4) The film strays only slightly from the original to keep up with the name and time changes, but the play reads:

*Prince*. Do not think it so, you shall not find it so.
And God forgive them that so much have swayed
Your Majesty’s good thoughts away from me...
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities...
And I will die a hundred thousand deaths
Ere break the smallest parcel of this vow.

Hal is talking to his father and trying to surreptitiously convey the idea that he is going to be more of what Bolingbroke expects him to be so that he will not lose his inheritance. Using this formal language and tone allows the son to sway the father into granting the inheritance in his favor instead of the northerner, in this case a cousin of Hal’s. Scott echoes this same sentiment to his father, and while the viewer does not know if Mr. Favor is convinced, it is later revealed that Scott does indeed receive his inheritance.

Scott’s ability to acquire other languages is what ultimately enables him to freely choose his emotional attachments and, by extension, his own place in society. Mike is the example of what befalls a person who lacks this ability. The juxtaposition of the two characters is the genius of the film. Mike does not function very well physically, socially, or emotionally within this societal
framework because he cannot articulate his story. He does not have the language or even the ability to acquire language that could function on the level of an intimate relationship. He cannot choose his own place in society any more than he can choose where he will end up after he falls asleep. The audience instead experiences his story through obscure visual imagery in dream sequences during his attacks of narcolepsy. The bulk of his visual story is unintelligible and later in the film Van Sant tells Mike’s story through his brother, who, because of an incestuous relationship, is also his father, and only then does the audience begin to understand Mike’s inability to reconcile his mother’s abandonment and uncover the evidence of incest. Mike is never able to form close emotional attachments, and even his friendship with Scott ends when he cannot say good-bye to him when Scott abandons him in Italy.

The search for Mike’s mother is what brought both of the young men to Europe, and while they do not find her there, the young woman at the address, Caramia, knew Mike’s mother because she stayed there for a while. Mike does not even attempt to ask any questions about his mother of Caramia, but Scott asks and the audience finds out that Mike’s mom left long ago. The friendship between the men ends with Scott’s haunting last words to Mike, “I’m going to take a little time off... Maybe we’ll meet up again somewhere down the road.” (Italics mine) He has very few spoken lines, coupled with bizarre dreams filled with obscure visual images that surface during his bouts of narcolepsy, but even these images do not tell the story of his childhood. Images of a road that never ends, a falling house and salmon swimming upstream are confounding to the viewer because they cannot be woven together to form a story for Mike. Mike is also not given any lines from the play, which could have given him some language to tell a story, even if it was neither true nor his own.

Van Sant denies Mike these lines in order to call attention to the glaring language deficiency between him and the other characters. Mike is like a shipwreck survivor clinging to the flotsam that swirls around him on the ocean; he wants to find something stable to hold onto, but will settle for anything that will hold him up for the time being, which effectively offers him as the ultimate contrast to the character of Scott. This sad insight directs the audience to believe that Mike will never overcome his emotional isolation brought about by
his inability to tell or elicit stories. After Scott leaves Italy with Caramia, all of his emotional ties to both his biological and surrogate fathers are severed with the addition of side-by-side funerals in the next scene. This encourages the viewer to irrevocably dissociate Scott from anyone other than Caramia, with whom he has entered into an intimate sexual relationship. This is further supported and evidenced in the film by the catalyst-like romance of Scott and Caramia. Once Scott falls in love with the Italian character, “Caramia,” she teaches him Italian. It is yet another language, their lovers’ language, and it is Scott’s willingness to easily acquire it that is indicative of the intense change of emotional attachment that this relationship brings about in his character. For the remainder of the movie, Scott does not revert to speaking in his prior street slang. This signifies a permanent change and, in turn, allows the audience to lend credibility to both Scott and Caramia’s proclamations of love. Scott is forever changed by the love he has for Caramia and the language he shares with her, for she alone offers the fulfillment of emotional connection via an intimate sexual relationship that was previously platonically fulfilled by first his father, then Bob, and lastly Mike. Her presence at his side is what gives him the ability to sever his relationship with Mike, and she is there in the restaurant to witness his final separation from Bob. The presence of Caramia in the film clearly demonstrates the premise that the intimate relationship that was once occupied by a person’s parent can eventually be replaced with an intimate sexual relationship through storytelling which will ultimately become a new home from which a person can journey.

**Works Cited**


Through his *Dream of the Botanical Monograph* and the ensuing-analysis, Freud is able to convey his intense love for his mother. It is possible to discern this emotional connection by conducting a Freudian analysis on Freud, using his own theories about separation and sublimation, latent content, and free association, to disclose the effect of his mother on his life and work. D.W. Winnicott’s focus on the significance of play also supports the conception of Freud’s mother in his work, especially when exploring an infantile playtime activity with his father. Using these two approaches to a single event described in Freud’s *Dream of the Botanical Monograph* it is possible to discern multiple sublimations that lead to Freud’s career, linking his work to the separation from his mother when he was an infant.

In his article, “Playing and Reality,” Winnicott states that “*play is in fact neither a matter of inner psychic reality nor a matter of external reality*” (96 italics Winnicott). When a child is engaged in play, the object of play is not related to the thoughts inside the child’s mind nor to his/her surroundings, rather a symbol of the unconscious. In his analysis, Freud describes his father’s giving him and his sister books to tear apart as a form of playing (205). This occurs only in the presence of Freud’s father; he does not mention his mother as being anywhere close-by. According to Winnicott, an object of play is “a symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother)... the use of an object symbolizes the union of two now separate things, baby and mother” (96). An infant or young child will find and comfort itself with an object that it can relate to its absent mother. This object later becomes a maternal symbol. Since this play occurs in the presence of Freud’s father, the books are Freud’s comfort objects because his mother is missing. When he rips them apart he is signifying the realization that he and his mother are not a single object and that there is more to the world than him and mother. By removing the pages he is
acting out his separation anxiety, as well as creating a physical representation of the disconnection.

It is possible that the book is representative of Freud and the pages are his mother. The traumatic cleaving from his mother feels like his insides, or heart, are being violently torn out, leaving him empty, angry, and seeking something to fill this new maternal void. This emptiness caused by separation is what later fuels the Oedipal Complex. Freud is desperate to get back to his mother’s breast and becomes angry that his father took his (Freud’s) place at her side. The anger is seen as unacceptable and is sublimated, or repressed and redirected, through other outlets, such as tearing apart books, seeking another person/object to replace the absent mother, or through the choice of a favorite flower.

In his analysis, Freud repeatedly remarks that *compositae cynara scolymus*, or artichokes, were his “favourite flowers” (Freud, 204). When discussing the playtime with his father, Freud mentions that he found himself describing this activity like eating an artichoke, pulling it apart “leaf by leaf” (205). Since his mother is not present during this memory and the books symbolize his mother (via Winnicott’s theories about objects of play), the artichokal reference to the books, while appearing on the surface to be free association, is latently connected to his mother. That is to say that though the reference seems to be the product of a random thought process, it is in fact unconsciously, or covertly, related to his mother. He doesn’t mention deliberately thinking of his mother, but the books act as transitional objects, intermediaries, linked to the image of his mother, who is then represented as an artichoke.

A connection between an artichoke and a mother may seem farfetched, however it is perfectly logical given the manner in which the artichoke is consumed. One of a baby’s primal instincts is to nurse from its mother’s breast. This nursing occurs through suckling and pulling at the breast, encouraging the milk production that satisfies the baby’s hunger. This manner of eating is very similar to how an artichoke is consumed. The leaves are pulled off one by one, and the meat is then sucked and scraped off while grasping the inedible part of the leaf. It is necessary to suck and grab on to the leaf to get the most meat just as it is necessary to suckle and grab the breast to get the most milk.
The act of nursing a baby is not only a way of satisfying its hunger, but is also a unique emotional bonding experience between mother and child. It is something that only the mother and child participate in, creating a fierce and passionate attachment to the mother’s breast (a cathexis, an intense emotional concentration of energy on one, frequently sexually-related, object, in this case the breast). The child is taking in a part of the mother, both physically and emotionally, which nurtures both the baby’s body and its emotional heart. When consuming an artichoke, one eats and digests its heart. This artichoke heart, through digestion and absorption of nutrients, becomes an intimate part of the consumer; much like nursing from the mother intimately connects the mother and child, creating a loving place for her inside the child’s mind and body, in its heart or emotional center. Since the symbolic centers of Freud’s books have been torn out, he is unconsciously seeking to fill in this hole. By removing and eating the heart of an artichoke, he is trying to replace his center, or heart.

The artichoke is also a replacement for the books of his childhood. As he matured, his symbolic object also matured and changed. As an adult, it is unusual and inappropriate to go around ripping books apart, especially as a writer. Freud had to sublimate his desire to tear out pages, which was already a sublimated desire for his mother, and shift it to tearing apart another object that was meant to be disassembled: an artichoke. The artichoke and the books are closely connected by what Freud is removing. Without pages a book is unintelligible and without the heart an artichoke is inedible. In both instances he is removing what is most vital to that object’s existence, its core or heart. He is leaving those objects empty inside, symbolizing how the traumatic separation from his mother left him feeling empty and alone in a big, strange world.

This connection between the artichoke and his mother can also account for Freud’s later passion/obsession for books. He says that he suddenly found himself relating the activity of tearing books apart as a child with the action of eating an artichoke (205). By connecting the two activities in his mind, he is also unconsciously adding the connection to nursing from his mother. Ripping the pages out one by one is equated to eating an artichoke, which is then equated to suckling from the mother’s breast. Therefore, the books and his mother’s breast are latently coupled together. Since the cathexis for the breast is an
inappropriate desire, it must find an unconscious and socially acceptable outlet. This outlet is sublimated through his later obsession with books, hence the seemingly inexplicable desire to link the action of destroying books, "leaf by leaf" (205), with eating an artichoke.

Another option to fill this void created by separation is to replace the mother with another woman. The woman is (was) viewed as the primary caretaker of the home, the ideal housewife took care of husband and children in the same loving manner. A man marries a woman to replace his mother and gain sexual access to her. Although Freud was married he was not very affectionate towards his wife, ignoring her for his work with books. She was not able to complete him, or fill his void, because she was not his mother. Only his love for books coupled with his wife seemed to satisfy his maternal desire. The books, maintaining their power from his youth, appeased his emotional longing while his wife met his sexual desires. According to Freud, the Oedipal Complex is a baby boy’s desire to be with his mother in a sexual manner, a longing for the breast. Freud fulfills this Oedipal yearning through his wife.

However Freud did not completely lack affection for his wife and makes brief references to her favorite flowers as well. He reproaches himself for “rarely remembering to bring her flowers, which was what she liked” (202). In addition, he remarks, “my wife often brought me back these favourite flowers of mine from the market” (204). Her action signifies an important desire: the desire to become Freud’s mother and, as a result, receive the same attention and affection he has for her. He rarely brings his wife flowers, nor is he a very attentive husband. He obviously favors his mother over others (artichoke/mother is his favorite flower) as well as his books (which are also linked to his relationship with his mother), making his wife feel ignored and unappreciated. Since she cannot destroy his library and all of his works, she takes a different route to his heart. His wife wishes to be Freud’s maternal replacement in both his mind and heart and to do so she brings him the object that latently represents his mother, the flowers of the artichoke. By doing this, she unconsciously attempts to superimpose the idea of the flowers, as well as their latent meaning, onto herself.

Through this close analysis of a couple pages of a single work, it is easy to
see how Freudian analysis and child’s play can explain the motivations behind things as important as careers or spouse selection. It also demonstrates the viability and applicability of the Oedipal Complex, sublimated desires to be with the mother expressed through more socially acceptable means, and Winnicott’s theories about a child’s play time/object. Something that appears simple, such as a brief separation of mother and child, can create permanent marks on a child’s psyche that manifest themselves in unexpected ways all through their adult life. Somebody’s odd behavior, recreational pastime or unusual attachment to any given object/person can be traced back to their primal connection to their mother.

**Works Cited**

MEMORY AND REPRESSION

Angelina Venezia

Footfalls echo in my memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose garden.
T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

Memory is a powerful force; negative memories can stick with a person and hinder them from moving on and can leave a significant mark on one’s mind. Repression of certain unpleasant memories is necessary in order for an individual to achieve complete growth. The definition of repression is the unconscious suppression of certain thoughts and desires that are deemed unacceptable by society. Memories which may trigger these feelings must be repressed as well. Repression is an unavoidable outcome that occurs once an individual becomes acquainted with society’s demands. If a person cannot achieve repression they could become an outsider, or one unacceptable in society. The characters Briar Rose, of Anne Sexton’s poem “Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty),” and Mike, of Gus Van Sant’s film *My Own Private Idaho* are incapable of repressing their memories which motivate unacceptable desires concerning their parents. Therefore they are among these unaccepted individuals.

The negative memories of their parents scar both Mike and Briar Rose’s minds. They both acquire sleeping disorders because of their dysfunctional upbringing. This disrupts the “normal” development which a person must go through in order to achieve what they are meant to over the course of their life. Briar Rose’s relationship with her father and Mike’s relationship with his mother are the central relationships that interfere with their development.

Both characters, Briar Rose and Mike, have an Electra or Oedipus complex,
which Sigmund Freud describes in his work *The Ego and the Id*. This ultimately leads to their sleeping disorders. Freud defines the Oedipus complex as being a condition in which a boy has sexual desires for his mother and an adverse attitude toward his father, as in the classic Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. The Electra complex is considered the feminine version of the Oedipus complex, which applies to Briar Rose. The more modern description of these theories states that the individual must repress their sexual desire for the parent of the opposite gender by identifying with the other parent. One will then successfully move into society and mature. Unless this repression is successful, the boy or girl will be incapable of growth. Freud later showed that once these individuals mature, their minds redirect these desires to their unconscious, the Id. Their Ego must expel these thoughts of their parent in response to the Id; this way they can live a normal life.

These thoughts of one’s parent could prevent one from growing up, and can appear in dreams. Freud addresses this in his narrative *The Dream of the Botanical Monograph*. Freud shows that overdetermination is possible concerning any detail of a dream, and thus can symbolize anything related to the family, and more specifically to the mother. For example, Freud’s dream first inspires thoughts of his wife, then of his colleagues, later of his father, and finally, and most importantly, of his mother. The thought of his mother is only perceived through overdetermination, an analysis of tiny details of the narrative. Because repression of these thoughts is necessary, they are then redirected to his dream, the transmitter of his unconscious. Freud automatically turned a dream of a flowered monograph into a reflection on his family. Similarly, Mike and Briar Rose have dreams of their parents, which hinder their development. Whereas Freud experienced these dreams as a grown man who allegedly successfully escaped this preoccupation with his mother, Mike and Briar Rose are trapped, dreaming recurring dreams which lock them into their adolescence. Freud’s idea of “normal” development sharply contrasts with these examples.

The “normal” development of a person in the Freudian sense is the development that Scott Favor, another character in *My Own Private Idaho* embodies. “If a man has been his mother’s undisputed darling he retains throughout life
the triumphant feeling, the confidence in success, which not seldom brings actual success with it” (Freud, *A Childhood Memory of Goethe’s*). Scott does not have a complicated relationship with his mother holding him back, as Mike does. He was able to move from her as a child and consequently repress his desires for her. This made it possible for him to function and adapt to society’s expectations. His mother, an occluded, seemingly insignificant presence, is never shown in the film. However, this apparent lack of importance reveals much about the contrast between Scott and Mike, consequently making her a rather important figure. Her absence allows the viewer to come to the realization that Scott has successfully moved into society, unlike Mike who is still incapable of making this transition.

Scott becomes a “man,” according to Freud, in the truest sense. Scott Favor, after rejecting his friends and becoming successful, becomes the ideal man that Freud describes. He accepts the role of leader, which his relationship with his father entitles him, thus acknowledging his responsibility and leaving his life of rebellion. He rejects Mike and the rest of his friends for a more “normal” life. Therefore, a boy’s relationship with his mother greatly affects his overall development, occupying an extreme presence in his life.

Repression is essential to development and transition in society according to Freud. If a child cannot find a place to redirect the thought of his mother away from his conscious, acceptance from society is impossible. They will be unable to relate to the relationships of others, and society will shun them, the way Mike is. Mike will probably never have a relationship with a woman because of his constant preoccupation with his mother. The theme of incest in the film also reinforces this fate. The fact that he is a product of an incestuous relationship between his mother and brother makes the chance of his having a normal relationship even more slim. There is a stigma attached to the word incest. It has always been a universal taboo, therefore societies do not accept such intimate relationships between people of the same family. Most people cannot even accept that it still occurs, let alone relate to it or sympathize with it. Growth is not possible when an individual has sexual desires toward a member of their family. That is why repression of those feelings must be successful, something that Mike may not be able to achieve.
The opening and concluding scenes of *My Own Private Idaho* focus on the image of Mike wandering on a highway. These scenes reinforce Mike’s inability to progress in life. The lack of a relationship between Mike and his mother stops him from changing his cyclical course. The film juxtaposes Mike’s wandering course with the forward course of Scott Favor. Mike experiences narcoleptic fits whenever he begins to think of his mother. He has one memory of her it seems, which he clings to and dreams of during these bouts of narcolepsy. A central subplot of the film chronicles his search for his mother, which never concludes. His search is given up; giving the impression that Mike will never see his mother again outside of his dreams. It is as if Van Sant is telling his audience that it is pointless to recount his search any longer because the fulfillment of Mike’s desire to see her is no longer conceivable. Furthermore repression of his desires is not believable either because he will never meet her. As a result of his failure, he continues to preoccupy himself with flashbacks of her. This shows his unwillingness or inability to repress his yearning for a relationship with his mother. His body forces him to fall asleep to deal with the emotional strain that it puts on him. So, by the end of the movie he is on that same highway waiting to fall asleep again and remember his mother.

Briar Rose, described in the Anne Sexton poem also seems to be searching for her mother. “She is on a voyage./ She is swimming farther and farther back,/ up like a salmon,/ struggling into her mother’s pocketbook” (lines 11-14). The first stanza of the poem tells of her reliving her early childhood and conception, suggesting that she is experiencing this through a dream. “Her mother’s pocketbook” signifies her mother’s uterus, citing her conception as important. Therefore, she may be continuing to search for her mother. Because Briar Rose’s mother does not appear in the poem after the first few lines, one can conclude that her absence has some relevance in it; she may be searching for a maternal substitute. The section of the poem describing the celebration for Briar Rose’s birth mentions the twelfth fairy. She is a maternal figure for Briar Rose because of her moderation of the curse put on her by the thirteenth fairy. She made it possible for Briar Rose to fall into a deep slumber rather than die when pricked with the thirteenth fairy’s spinning needle. The lack of a significant relationship with her mother has given her the desire to find her again. She seems to
be reliving her whole life in a dream to find her true mother.

Sigmund Freud said that a boy could never attempt to become a fully grown man unless he grew away from his mother. Anne Sexton shows the reader that this concept is true for women regarding relationships with their fathers. As a result of the abuse that Briar Rose incurred from her father, she cannot seem to repress the memories of this relationship. Briar Rose cannot begin new relationships with people because of the presence of these experiences and feelings in her conscious mind. She therefore secludes herself from society and from other relationships as a result of her relationship with her father. This impedes her ability to forget and move onto the next stage of her life, in this case marriage. “It’s not the prince at all/but my father/drunkenly bent over my bed” (Sexton, lines 153-155). Her relationship with her father was also incestuous, further secluding her, and making it even more difficult for her and society to accept each other. Her relationships are dysfunctional because of the incest that occurred earlier in her life.

Her memories are redirected to her dreams or her subconscious, but they still affect her life outside of sleep.

Briar Rose
was an insomniac...
She could not nap
or lie in sleep
without the court chemist
mixing her some knockout drops... (lines 102-107)

After awakening from her prolonged slumber, Briar Rose is plagued by an intense insomnia that she can only cure with sleeping pills. Since her slumber, disrupted by nightmares of her father’s abuse, so her body has this fear of sleep.

This trance girl is yours to deal with
You could lay her in a grave,
an awful package
and shovel dirt on her face
and she’d never call back: Hello there!
But if you kissed her on the mouth
her eyes would spring open
and she’d call out: Daddy!
Daddy!
Presto!
She’s out of prison (lines 130-140)

The fact that her father abused her at night while she was asleep causes her to associate him with sleep. Therefore, like Mike, Briar Rose just continues on the same path; she cannot move on with her handsome fairy tale prince. Her inability to repress these memories impedes her from moving forward.

Mike’s lack of an obvious father figure seems to propel his obsession with his mother. Mike discovers that his brother is actually his father as well in the film—a consummation of the pure Oedipal relationship between mother and son; Freud recognizes this as detrimental to successful growth. His origin has further displaced him from society because this incestuous relationship is universally unacceptable. Furthermore, the absence of any parental figure has made it impossible for him to have any ally in life. Therefore, he has had to focus on his mother because the memory of her is the only constant link that he has to his parents. These memories make him believe that he has a place in the world, even though he is an outsider. The narcoleptic flashbacks supply him with an outlet that could help him find his mother. His discovery of the truth regarding his origin has forced him to dwell on his parentage, forever pushing him backward as he moves forward in time. This further perpetuates the Oedipus complex in Mike because he is moving backward so often, rather than progressing forward in his life.

Both Briar Rose and Mike have had to repress their desires for normal relationships with parental figures, forcing them to cope with these desires in their sleep. Therefore, they have had to store these feelings in their memories, and only allow themselves to satisfy their urges in dreams. Mike’s mind searches for his mother with the help of narcolepsy, and Briar Rose’s body avoids her father’s memory with insomnia. These disorders will never force
them to let go of their parents, because they will never achieve their repression. Briar Rose and Mike’s inability to forget their parents, as Freud instructed, facilitates their sleeping disorders, making them incapable of leading “normal” lives, and achieving normal growth.

WORKS CITED

TO EXPLORE THE ‘UNCANNY’

Daniel J. Worden

Philip K. Dick, in “Second Variety,” and E.T.A. Hoffman, in “The Sandman,” create worlds where people and machines barely distinguish themselves from one another. In the case of Rudi in “Second Variety,” a man suspected of being a robot is really a person; and in “The Sandman,” Olympia seems like a quiet young woman but is really an automaton. Both authors engage this boundary between human and machine by investing mechanical characters with ‘human’ talents or tendencies while stripping them of a certain human expressiveness. In Dick’s text, David hugs a teddy bear, a thing that typically only ‘human’ children tend to do, yet his eyes are “without expression” (810) and when asked questions about the death of his parents, his face shows no expression whatever (811-12). Similarly, Olympia sings, dances and plays the piano, yet her eyes appear “completely devoid of life” (117), and she displays an “utter passivity and taciturnity” (118), saying little but “Ah, ah” (118) before Nathaniel’s romantic advances.

The created worlds of these texts, in which a Freudian reading might see characters and objects as symbols representing repressed impulses and wishes, provide the authors an imaginary landscape in which to explore desires and fears. Often, events in these two stories elicit what Freud described as the feeling of ‘the uncanny’ in his paper of that title published in 1919. In fact, “The Sandman” served him as a major source of material to define this concept.

In order to understand the ‘uncanny,’ some background on Freudian thought is useful. Generally speaking, Freud argued that many impulses, wishes, and fears in our unconscious, that is to say in the part of our minds that we are not normally aware of, push us to seek different types of pleasure, including sexual pleasure. We often repress these impulses, desires, and fears, which is to say that we ignore them, deny them, and pretend that they do not exist. This process of repression generates anxiety. In particular, among the
fears that are repressed in our unconscious, there are fears of spirits, of supernatural control of our lives, of the boundary between the living and the dead, and fears linked to our sexuality. Freud argued in “The ‘Uncanny’” that certain experiences can remind us of these fears that have become secretly familiar to us, since we have spent so much effort hiding them from ourselves (241). Freud uses the term ‘uncanny,’ or unheimlich in the original German, to describe the feeling of fright and uneasiness that we get when something reminds us of a repressed impulse or fear (219). Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220).

Freud describes a major aspect of his concept of the ‘uncanny’ as follows:

If psychoanalytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs [...]. This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. (Freud 241)

Applying the idea of the ‘uncanny’ to these two short stories provides interesting clues to the feelings that the authors may have been exploring, whether consciously or not, in writing them. Numerous elements of the two narratives seem to elicit this sort of ‘uncanny’ feeling. Firstly, some of the characters in the texts, which could be seen as representing a fear of the repressed impulses of the unconscious, evoke such a reaction. Before taking some examples from “Second Variety,” it is useful to have a little background information.

In this story, Hendricks is an American soldier stationed in a bunker in a Europe that has been almost entirely destroyed by a war fought primarily by automated machines. The landscape is grey and dead with little to see but ashes, charred ruins and tree stumps. A cold war arms race between the Soviet
Union and the United Nations has progressed to the point that automated nuclear weapons have destroyed most of the planet. The United Nations officials have moved to the moon, but the Soviet forces have stayed on Earth, opposed only by a small number of UN soldiers hiding out in bunkers. For the last two years, the UN forces have employed newly-invented automated weapons that have turned the war in their favor. “Claws” are self-manufacturing, self-repairing automated robots that pursue body heat and shred victims with razor blades. If one claw gets into a bunker, it can kill hundreds of soldiers before being stopped.

In this text, Tasso is a young, beautiful woman living in a room near the Soviet bunkers, seemingly as a prostitute. She claims to have arrived there at the age of sixteen. “I had to survive,” she says (822-3). Later revealed to be a lethal claw in human form, she manipulates Hendricks into letting her take his escape rocket and giving her his top secret password, which she uses, presumably, to kill the rest of humanity (840-1). If one considers the rocket as a phallic symbol, it seems clear that the text is symbolically describing an event that generates an ‘uncanny’ fear: the repressed sex drive returns to hijack the masculine body, which it uses to kill. Tasso, in this case a figure representing the sex drive, ‘has to survive’ being repressed.

In “The Sandman,” Coppelius stands out as a symbolic figure. He arrives in the late evening and the parents never permit young Nathaniel and his siblings to see him. Coppelius enters the parents’ bedroom, the place of the father’s sexual activity with the mother, and when young Nathaniel sneaks into the room to see this man, he threatens to burn the boy’s eyes out with embers. A similar analysis of this story would tend to see Coppelius as an incarnation of a child’s aggression or “death-wish” toward the father figure. In Freudian thought, a death-wish is a secret desire to kill someone in an enviable position. A father is in the enviable position of having a sexual relationship with his son’s mother. Sons theoretically have and repress death-wishes against their fathers. Freud argues:

In the story of Nathaniel’s childhood, the figures of his father and Coppelius represent the two opposites into which the father-imago is split by his
ambivalence; whereas the one threatens to blind him—that is, to castrate him—the other, the ‘good’ father, intercedes for his sight. The part of the complex which is most strongly repressed, the death-wish against the ‘bad’ father, finds expression in the death of the ‘good’ father, and Coppelius is made answerable for it. (232)

In this view, it seems reasonable to argue that his text might be playing on an ‘uncanny’ fear, much in the same way as “Second Variety.” In this case, Coppelius represents two related impulses—Nathaniel’s aggression against his father on the one hand, and his fear of castration on the other. Freud argues that Coppelius’ threat to blind the boy is a metaphorical threat of castration: “Anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration [...]” (Freud 231). Since Coppelius reminds the reader of these two repressed impulses, he can create the feeling of the ‘uncanny.’

Some thematic elements, which appear in one text but not in the other, seem to elicit the ‘uncanny’ by representing other repressed impulses through symbols. In “Second Variety,” it seems clear, for example, that certain elements of the story evoke anxiety about paternity. David is a robot in the guise of a starving young boy clutching a teddy bear, designed to arouse paternal instincts. Much like the Trojan horse, he waits for soldiers to offer him shelter and food, inviting him into their bunkers, then he kills everyone he can. Generally speaking, father figures in Freudian thought feel aggression toward their offspring, who represent for them potential rivals for the love of mother figures. They most often repress this aggression, which in turn produces anxiety. One might argue that David in “Second Variety” elicits the ‘uncanny,’ since he can remind the reader of this anxiety linked to paternity.

David does not only generate the feeling of the uncanny in the reader by recalling this paternal anxiety. He and the other claws also create this feeling in the reader by producing uncertainty as to whether they are living or inanimate objects. Freud observes in his essay that “a particularly favorable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual
uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (233). Dick maintains a similar uncertainty during most of his text. As Dick describes how the claws seem to occupy the boundary between the living and the inanimate, he even uses the word “uncanny”:

The claws were awkward, at first. Slow. [...] But then they got better, faster and more cunning [...]. The claws got faster, and they got bigger. New types appeared, some with feelers, some that flew. There were a few jumping kinds [...] They became uncanny; the Ivans were having a lot of trouble with them. Some of the little claws were learning to hide themselves, burrowing down into the ash, lying in wait [...]. One claw inside a bunker, a churning sphere of blades and metal—that was enough. And when one got in others followed [...]. The claws weren’t like other weapons. They were alive, from any practical standpoint [...]. They were not machines. They were living things, spinning, creeping, shaking themselves up from the gray ash and darting toward a man, climbing up him, rushing for his throat [...]. (809)

This ambiguity between the inanimate and the animate creates an uncanny feeling in the reader, and Dick may well have been exploring this feeling in writing this text. Clearly, these two stories engage the boundary between man and machine as a starting point to explore human impulses while inciting the reader to feel the ‘uncanny.’ Both texts use robots that occupy the boundary between living people and automatons to evoke this feeling, and many characters, including Coppelius, Tasso, and David, can be seen as symbols intended to remind the reader of repressed impulses, thereby generating the ‘uncanny’ by other means. These texts contain so many moments that can produce the ‘uncanny’ that it seems Hoffman and Dick could have been writing in part to explore the ways in which this feeling can be accessed through literature.
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When Jacques Lacan appropriated the plot of Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” as a literary illustration of Sigmund Freud’s theory of repetition automaton (1972), he triggered an intriguing interplay of psychoanalytic criticism that even the wildly imaginative Poe—himself a literary critic—could not have envisioned. Lacan’s analysis of this third story in Poe’s genre-defining detective trilogy led Jacques Derrida to publish a lengthy deconstruction of Lacan’s Freudian criticism (1975), both of which prompted Barbara Johnson to pen an equally lengthy comparative analysis (1977) of their criticisms, noting the Poe-like doubling Lacan had unwittingly reenacted of Derrida’s analysis. After much rehashing of this tripartite criticism—by Holland (1980), Gallop (1985), Muller and Richardson (1988), and others—John Irwin (1994) submitted that Johnson, too, had doubled “Derrida’s insights back upon themselves,” (Irwin 6) thereby transforming Lacan, Derrida, and herself into caricatures of the story’s main fictional threesome—the queen, the minister, and detective C. Auguste Dupin.

Utilizing Irwin’s Carrollesque insight as a starting point, this essay endeavors to wield the skeleton keys of these three critics to show how Poe created a fictional model of the psychoanalytic criticism that caused Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson to reenact their own version of his story, more than one hundred and fifty years later. There can be little doubt, as Irwin notes in The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story, that Poe’s intent in writing “The Purloined Letter,” was to create a “dizzying, self-dissolving effect of thought about thought” (11). In fact, the narrative intermezzo between the two major scenes of the story can be read as a treatise on creative analysis. Dupin explains not only how he doubles the perpetrator’s thought processes by analyzing his opponent’s mindset rather than by merely sifting through the facts as
the police do, but also how such analysis differs from the type of analysis typically associated with chess, logic, and mathematics—with Dupin’s being more akin to the analysis of poets and card players. Accordingly, in “The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida,” Johnson calls such thinking “the act of analysis which seems to occupy the center of the discursive stage, and the act of analysis of the act of analysis which in some way disrupts that centrality” (457, emphasis in original).

In order to understand this and virtually every other psychoanalytic detail of the story, we must first understand the symbolism of the five main characters. As Lacan indicates in his “Seminar on The Purloined Letter,” various combinations of these characters interact with each other in two sets of three throughout two different scenes. In the first scene, which takes place in “the royal boudoir,” an “exalted personage” in the act of viewing the letter—presumed to be the Queen—is designated as character number one; the “other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it” (Poe 682), presumed to be the King, is character number two; and the Minister, who seeks to purloin the letter, is character number three. They comprise the first set of characters, which correspond psychoanalytically, Lacan says, to the three characters of the second scene, wherein the minister, who is now in possession of the letter, becomes character one; the Police Prefect, desperately seeking to recover the letter, represents character two; and Dupin, soon to find and purloin the letter, becomes character three. Their interaction comprises scene two, which takes place intermittently over an extended length of time, in the minister’s office.

These two scenes establish “three moments, structuring three glances, borne by three subjects, incarnated each time by different characters” (Lacan 44). In the first scene, the three “glances” can be described as follows: 1) the King seeing nothing when he enters the room; 2) the Queen seeing that the King sees nothing and deluding herself as to the secrecy of the letter she impulsively hides in plain sight; and 3) the Minister seeing that what should be hidden is exposed for him to seize and use. In the second scene, the “glances” remain the same, but the characters change as follows: 1) the Police Prefect sees nothing as he thoroughly and repeatedly searches the Minister’s office; 2) the Minister sees that the Police Prefect sees nothing, and deludes himself as
to the secrecy of the letter he hides in plain sight; and 3) Dupin sees that what should be hidden is exposed for him to seize and exchange. Lacan calls these events an “intersubjective modulus of repetitive action” (44), in which he recognizes a repetition automatism via Freud’s formula that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (45), as will be explained later in this essay.

More specifically, within these scenes, Lacan believes that the purloined letter, acting as a “pure signifier,” determines the displacement of each character within the two threesomes. In other words, the character in position one is signified by the letter—a poignant, albeit coincidental correspondence with Saussure’s recto/verso example—until such time as the letter is purloined by the character in position three, who, by the act of seizing it, thereby becomes signified, and who, in turn, moves into position one. Thus, possession of the letter inevitably signifies that its possessor has ascended to the “first glance” position, creating a letter/first-glance “sign,” which progresses from the Queen to the Minister in scene one, and from the Minister to Dupin in scene two. Similarly, had the Police Prefect, who cleverly “purchased” the letter from Dupin for fifty thousand Francs—far less than the reward offered by the Queen—opted to use it as political leverage against her in the manner the Minister intended, he, too, would have become the next character to be “signified.” Presumably, however, the prefect returned the letter to the Queen as agreed, claiming the larger reward, and terminating the tripartite dialectical progression.

In his “The Purveyor of Truth,” Derrida sees this triangular structure as problematic, and accuses Lacan of misreading “The Purloined Letter” as a hackneyed allegory of Freud’s Oedipal triangle, then projecting it onto the three characters of each scene in an attempt to dismiss the uncanny effects of doubling. For Derrida, doubling, not repetition automatism—nor the Hegelian dialectic he believes Lacan’s description of it suggests—is the most important aspect of the story. As Johnson notes, “the problem with psychoanalytic triangularity, in Derrida’s eyes, is not that it contains the wrong number of terms, but that it presupposes the possibility of a successful dialectical mediation and harmonious normalization, or Aufhebung, of desire. The three terms in the Oedipal triad enter into an opposition whose resolution resembles the synthetic moment of a Hegelian dialectic” (472).
Moreover, Derrida asserts that the number associated with doubling is four, not three, insofar as a splitting typically precedes doubling. Thus, according to Derrida, Lacan’s first—and perhaps biggest—mistake is not taking into account the narrative portions of the tale when interpreting its structure. Viewed Derrida’s way, the four components are as follows: 1) the narration of the first meeting between Dupin and the Police Prefect in Dupin’s apartment, in which the latter describes the first scene to the former; 2) the first scene itself, as described above; 3) the narration of the second meeting between Dupin and the Prefect, also in Dupin’s residence, in which the former describes the second scene to the latter; and 4) the second scene itself. In this context, the first narrative is split into a narrative and a scene, and then doubled. Therefore, says Derrida, there are actually four characters involved in each narrative/scene—Lacan’s threesomes of the Queen, the King, and Minister, and later, the Minister, Police Prefect, and Dupin, in conjunction with the unnamed narrator, whom we know only as Dupin’s friend. This leads to a reversed master/slave polarity, “so that doubling tends to be a structure of four halves problematically balanced across the inner/outer limit of the self rather than a structure of the two separate, opposing wholes” (Irwin 5).

These incidences of doubling, which are foreshadowed in the narrator’s first line—“I was enjoying the twofold luxury of mediation and a meerschaum” (Poe 680, emphasis mine)—are too numerous to be coincidental. In addition to Dupin’s doubling of his rival’s mindset, and the doubling of the scenes and narratives, there is also the doubling of the letter itself, both in the Minister’s act of folding (or doubling) it back upon itself before “concealing” it, and in Dupin’s act of replacing it with a facsimile (or false double), upon seizing it.

Yet another doubling, which neither Lacan, Derrida, Johnson, nor Irwin note, is the fact that the two narrative scenes also feature three characters—Dupin, the Minister, and the narrator—who double themselves within the two scenes, while discussing the other threesomes. Lacan’s pattern holds true in these groups as well, with the Minister and Dupin exchanging the positions one and three from narrative scene one to narrative scene two, while the narrator (always the last to see the solution) remains in position two. Thus, as Freud explains in his famous essay, “The Uncanny,” we can see that the process of
doubling “appears in every shape and in every degree of development” (Leitch 940), resulting in differing but correspondent effects with regard to a person’s thinking in relation to the identity of the Self and the Other:

This (doubling) relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy—, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. (Leitch 940)

An interesting textual example of this can be found in the genesis of the name Poe gave his lead character, Dupin. It is widely known among Poe scholars that he was named after a minor French Statesman, one André-Marie-Jean-Jacques Dupin, who, according to a book Poe is known to have read and reviewed, *Sketches of Conspicuous Living Characters of France* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1841), was a walking, talking library: “To judge from his writings, Dupin must be a perfect living encyclopedia. From Homer to Rousseau, from the Bible to the civil code, from the laws of the twelve tables to the Koran, he has read everything, retained everything […]” (quoted in Johnson 486). Consequently, writes Johnson, “Detective Dupin’s ‘origin’ is thus multiply bookish: he is a reader whose writer read his name in a book describing a writer as a reader—a reader whose nature can only be described in writing, in fact, as irreducibly double.” It is no less noteworthy, from the standpoint of character development, that Dupin met his friend the narrator in the “Murders in the Rue Morgue” through a kind of doubling as well, in which their “first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume brought us into closer communication” (Poe 400).

Perhaps the most symbolic example of doubling in “The Purloined Letter” is the analogy presented anecdotally between the narratives of the scenes, wherein Dupin explains to his friend (the narrator) the mental approach he used
to match wits with the Police Prefect, and with which he intends to solve the mystery of the missing letter. The anecdote concerns a school game in which one child holds some marbles behind his back and asks a second child to guess whether he holds an odd or even number. After guessing, say, “odd” on the first try and losing, Dupin suggests that the second child would typically guess “even” on the next try and lose again, because the first child would be able to anticipate that guess. If, however, instead of merely guessing, the second child matched the mindset of the first, through “an identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent,” (Poe 689) he would then state “odd” in anticipation of his opponent’s anticipation and win. This is precisely the technique Dupin uses to discover the letter, knowing that the Minister would expect the police to search every nook and cranny of his office, but would not expect them to examine a cleverly disguised “soiled and crumpled” letter in a “filigree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece” (Poe 695) in plain sight. Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson devote several pages to this last detail, debating the Freudian phallic symbolism of the ribbon dangling from a knob in juxtaposition to the feminine symbolism of the fireplace, etc., but—happily—this does not pertain to our current discussion.

The marbles anecdote is also an important allegory for the numerical and geometrical meanings mentioned earlier, which Lacan, Derrida, Johnson, and Irwin use to justify their decisions to emphasize either an “odd” or “even” number of scenes and characters. Irwin sums up Lacan’s and Derrida’s positions well. “Derrida opts for a quadrangular structure (he plays the even number of four) in order to evoke the uncanniness, the oddness of doubling, while Lacan opts for a triangular structure by playing the odd number three, in order to enforce the regularizing or normalizing effect of the dialectical triad” (Irwin 6). Johnson, meanwhile, after thoroughly analyzing both sides, does not offer a solution of her own, as she so often does elsewhere, but instead asks, “can what is at stake here really be reduced to a mere numbers game? […] Clearly, in these questions, the very notion of a number becomes problematic, and the argument on the basis of numbers can no longer be read literally” (Johnson 471-72). Nonetheless, argues Irwin, even though Johnson refuses to contribute—at least con-
sciously—to the “numbers game,” she participates in it all the same:

In situating her essay as the third of three critical readings following those of Lacan and Derrida, Johnson places herself in that third position which, in the structure governing the wandering of the purloined letter, is the position of maximum insight, but also the position in which the observer is subject to mistaking his insight concerning the subjective interaction of the other two glances for an objective viewpoint above such interaction. (Irwin 7)

The implication here is that Johnson, in seizing the letter or signifier of authoritative insight, which Irwin equates with Lacan’s first position vis-à-vis “The Purloined Letter” and its subsequent criticisms, has become—like the Queen, and later, the Minister—deluded as to the secrecy of the “letter,” not realizing that the insight she possesses is exposed for yet another critic to trump and seize.

Although Irwin does not explicitly posit himself as this critic, he has—by virtue of his own logic, and precisely by having made his observation as the third-position observer—already taken possession of the “letter” representing that first-glance insight away from Johnson. Yet, realizing that such dialectical progressions could continue seemingly ad infinitum, Johnson vests more relevance in her knowledge of why the repetition occurs than who happens to be in a particular “position” at any given moment. In fact, her statement to this effect simultaneously anticipates and refutes Irwin’s analysis and indictment of her “numbers game” criticism. The reader, says Johnson, has been “duped by Dupin’s trick explanations of his technique, a reader who, however, unconscious of the non sequiturs he is repeating, is so much in awe of his subject that his admiration blinds us to the tricky functioning of what he so faithfully transmits” (Johnson 501). In short, the reader (and consequently the critic) is as much involved in the dynamics of the story as are the characters; thus, “to be fooled by a text implies that the text is not constative but performative, and that the reader is in fact one of its effects” (501).

Whether or not Poe intended these effects, he unwittingly provided Lacan, Derrida, Johnson, and Irwin with an ideal fictional model for explicating their
varying views, methods, and psychoanalytic interpretations. By constructing his story in such a way that it would remain insidiously open-ended and hermeneutically irresolvable, he front-loaded it with a propensity to ensnare anyone who delves too deeply into its structure, which continually folds back upon itself. “In the resulting asymmetrical, abyssal structure,” writes Johnson, “no analysis—including this one—can intervene without transforming and repeating other elements in the sequence, which is thus not a stable sequence, but which nevertheless produces certain regular effects” (Johnson 457), such as the ensnarement of its critics.

Therefore, to the extent that the letter’s metaphoric status—that of its ever-changing possessor, its unknown author, and its merely hinted at contents—remains hermeneutically in play, “it is up to the reader to give the letter (and its meaning) [...] what he will find as its last word: its destination. That is, Poe’s message deciphered and coming back from him, the reader, from the fact that, in reading it, he is able to say of himself that he is not more feigned than the truth when it inhabits fiction” (Lacan, as translated by Johnson 501). In other words, says Johnson, the interplay between truth and fiction, reader and text, message and feint, has become “impossible to unravel into an unequivocal meaning” (501).

Poe’s acknowledged deliberateness in constructing this and many other stories in the same manner can be discerned from the final words of his 1840 preface to a collection of stories, titled Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, in which he stated, “if I have sinned, I have deliberately sinned. These brief compositions are, in chief part, the results of matured purpose and very careful elaboration” (Poe 130). Moreover, that he understood the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of deciphering the riddles woven into “The Purloined Letter” is stated even more explicitly in the first words of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the story which introduced Dupin and analytic detective fiction to the world: “The mental features discoursed of as the analytical are, in themselves but little susceptible of analysis” (397).
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Logical deductive reasoning, rather than faith-based intuition, has become a defining characteristic of the principal investigator within the genre of detective fiction as a whole. The successful sleuths in these tales do not depend on faith and intuition but rather employ methods of pure logic and reason, compounding fact upon fact to synthesize an explanation for the mystery at hand. This system of logical deduction is similar to the scientific method used by the early scientists that blossomed out of a society so entrenched in faith. As figures such as William of Occam, Francis Bacon and later Charles Darwin emerged, they immediately encountered the church as a strong adversary against their logical conclusions about the nature of the Earth. William of Occam developed a principle, later called “Occam’s razor,” which states that the simplest explanation for a given incident is usually correct when compared with more complicated possibilities. This logical way of thinking threatens the position of the church, a body of faith that characteristically incites the fantastic to explain the ordinary and looks to heaven-sent clues for explanations, sweeping away the physical details that would cleanly illuminate the earthly event at hand. Logic is thus the natural enemy of faith. Logic is also the language of detection. From the original Sherlock Holmes to his modern-day successors, logical reasoning and analytical deduction have typified the methods of detection. Reminiscent of the scientific community, this hallmark characteristic has developed the model fictional sleuth into a creature that is naturally opposed to the perspective of the church. As a result, to truly represent a pure detective who is successful in clarifying the mystery presented, the detective must fully embrace logical reasoning, rejecting the divergent path of faith.

In the beginnings of detective fiction, defined by the writings of Edgar Allen Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a typical detective figure began to emerge. This character was not driven by the word of God, but rather by the
intellectual pursuit of knowledge obtained by analyzing the world logically. While religion in nineteenth-century England did play a smaller role within society as a whole than it had in past cultures, both Poe and Doyle were writing to a populace still strongly influenced by the church. For this reason, the lack of a strong religious influence, or even the complete rejection of the church, was a clear but subtle component of the detectives’ personas. Poe’s detective, Auguste Dupin, was depicted as a man who had chosen the isolation of his seclusion over the norms of his religious society. He was also described as a man of the night, obsessed with the dark hours that have so long been associated with the reign of the demonic, thus rejecting the daylight hours that are ruled by the holy.

At the first dawns of morning, we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighted a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true darkness. (Poe 154)

The diction in this paragraph invokes the feeling that Dupin’s seclusion has become perversely holy. This interpretation is facilitated by the image of souls waiting in a ghastly light for darkness to spread over the earth. It is clear that Dupin, the lover of logic, has substituted the heavenly bounds of the church for this rational realm of knowledge. In this way the early detectives of the genre valued logic highly and depended little upon faith.

The preternatural abilities that blessed the early detectives were clearly attributed to their ability to analyze the world from a position rooted in logic. Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes was described as performing “rapid deductions, swift as intuitions yet always founded on a logical basis” (Doyle 347). The pioneering detectives, such as Dupin and Holmes, were motivated by their methods of logic rather than by their intuition and faith. This quality has evolved and expanded as the genre of detective fiction has developed, resulting in a model detective driven by reason and logic, a character who is naturally united with science and against the church. Consequently, for a detective to adhere to faith over logic is
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for the detective to fail, as he is no longer able to deduce and expose the true nature of the crime at hand.

In more contemporary works of detective fiction, the split between the detective character and the religious realm has become more defined to the point that the division is critical for the detective’s overall success. It is required of the detective to choose the world of logic over the world of faith, for one cannot be devoted to both. To choose faith is to lose the ability to detect. In the novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco the detective, William of Baskerville, is also a monk. These conflicting aspects of his character split his perspective between faith and logic, leaving him in limbo between the two opposing worlds. To be a monk is to believe in the unknowable, while to be a detective is to continually seek out proof. It is made clear that while William may be linked to the church, he is primarily devoted to the logic and nature of science. His character is representative of the claim that to be a true detective one must embrace logic over the conflicting influence of faith. In the end, William aligns himself with the love of logic, detection, and science over the love of faith, religion, and the monastery. He is described by his young disciple as having “faith in his friend from Occam and [...] swear[ing] by the words of Bacon” (18). The use of religious terminology in this excerpt, “faith” and “swear by,” develops the idea that William’s faith belongs not to the church or to God but rather to science and the emerging scientists of his time. This difference sets him apart from the monks of the monastery, allowing him to understand and see things that they cannot. This split allows him to be a detective.

Brother William also speaks of the struggle between the logic he sees in the world and the claims made by the church to which he has sworn alliance. This is the underlying conflict he faces as Occam’s razor proves again and again to be superior to the labyrinthine explanations offered by the church. William states, “I have never encountered, not even in witchcraft trials, a dead man whom God or the Devil allowed to climb up from the abyss to erase the evidence of his misdeed” (32). In this statement, William is taking a step away from the faith of the church, as he observes that every incident can be explained logically. Miraculous events that define the church, if looked at from this logical perspective, could undoubtedly be explained logically by the
analysis of earthly evidence. For that reason, logic threatens the validity of the church. This understanding allows William to move towards the position of a true detective, escaping the narrow vision of faith and the church.

As he begins to trust logic, William begins to deconstruct his faith. To possess faith, one must rely not on facts but on things that will never be seen. In an earlier passage, William asserts that “hoofprints in the snow were signs of the idea of ‘horse’ and signs and signs of signs are only used when we are lacking things” (28). Depending on “signs of signs” correlates with the overall perspective of the church; as God remains forever in the heavenly realm, we on the earthly side must interpret only the signs of his existence. Thus, the followers of the church must be satisfied with signs and not things. However, William of Baskerville also states “my intellect’s hunger was sated only when I saw the single horse that the monks were leading by the halter. Only then did I truly know that my previous reasoning had brought me close to the truth” (28). William is not fulfilled by the signs of signs that are symbolic of the divine. He seeks the tangible maker of the signs, the physical thing that caused the signs to form. A man of true faith would be satisfied that the hoofprints were made by a horse; he would find comfort in his ability to interpret the signs which were created by the physical animal. William, however, is not satisfied with symbols alone. In this way, even the signs of God leave our detective unsatisfied as he actually yearns for the creator to appear before his eyes. It is this craving that allows our pious detective to solve the mysteries invading the monastery, for even though he is cloaked in the habit of the church he is actually a slave to the reasoning of logic.

The ultimate division between William and the church is made clear by an ongoing interaction between our detective and an aging monk at the monastery, the venerable Jorge. Jorge, who represents the position of the church, argues that laughter is unholy and sinful at its root. William, representing the perspective of logic, counters with the assertion that laughter is a gift from God bestowed upon man to improve his wit and ability to judge the world around him. As William states, “laughter is proper to man, it is a sign of his rationality [...] our reason was created, and whatever pleases our reason can but please divine reason” (131-133). In *The Name of the Rose* his position on the nature of laugh-
After represents the final separation between William and the body of the church. He becomes a pure detective as he sheds this final tie to the world of faith, fully embracing the domain governed by logic. William interprets laughter as a critical component of man’s ability to use reason and logic. The perspective of the church, voiced emphatically by Jorge, sees the act of laughter as a step away from true piety. Standing on the side of laughter symbolizes Williams’s ultimate betrayal of faith. The church’s position on the nature of laughter is so absolute that monks are poisoned and the monastery is razed, and yet William maintains his assurance that laughter is good and right, signifying his fidelity to logic.

To be successful at his craft the detective must embrace logic over faith. Methods of logic allow him to be deductive and analytical regarding the evidence at his disposal while methods of faith and intuition lead him through an endless, confounded maze. To choose faith is for the detective to shed his ability to solve the mystery, as faith requires that he be emotionally tied to the situation. Creating emotional bonds to a situation, thus becoming an inside observer, makes the truth much harder to filter out. In the short story *Death and the Compass* by Jorge Luis Borges the detective, Erik Lonnrot, is overcome by the lure of religion, abandoning logic and reasoning as he attempts to solve the mystery by analyzing the evidence of the crime from a position rooted in faith. Unlike William of Baskerville, Lonnrot chooses the path of faith and intuition over logic. It is this divergence from the model detective character that is his ultimate undoing as a detective: he is unable to solve the mystery. In the opening paragraph, Lonnrot’s perspective of himself is described as follows: “Lonnrot thought of himself as a pure logician, a kind of Auguste Dupin [...] but there was a streak of the adventurer and even of the gambler in him” (65). A gambler, by nature, is a man who trusts in the secret workings of faith and fate. While Lonnrot may perceive himself as a man of reason, the opening depiction betrays where his allegiances actually lie. It is this obsession with faith, chance, and religion that ultimately causes Lonnrot to be utterly unsuccessful as a detective.

Lonnrot’s faith-based methodology leads him to completely misjudge and misinterpret the mystery at hand. Lonnrot, with his mind circling around the
musings of religion, believes with an assurance kindled by faith that he has discovered the truth behind his mystery. Our detective, however, has actually walked right into his killer’s trap. His devotion to the religious aspects, rather than the logic of the case, halted his progression as a detective. His passion and belief that the case was rooted in religion distracted him from the truth of the case overall, making him unable to correctly analyze the evidence.

Lonnrot uses his intuition rather than his logic to understand and investigate the murders, diverging from a dedication to logic which is traditionally upheld in the model detective. It is this deviation which proves to be his ultimate undoing as a detective. “All at once he felt he was on the verge of solving the riddle. A pair of dividers and a compass completed his sudden intuition” (72). Intuition is a gut feeling, a sensation of the body that convinces the brain of its validity. It is not founded in logic, but is rather similar to religious faith, the belief in something because it feels right. As tools of detection, intuition, and faith are ineffective, a claim which is verified by the end of Lonnrot’s mystery. If he had been following clues of logic, rather than an emotional trail of faith, Lonnrot’s personal involvement with the case would never have run so deep. He would have remained outside the case, a position that would have allowed him to discern the truth behind the mystery. Even as his death was upon him, as he became fully trapped by the cage set by his murderer, Lonnrot’s mind was still clouded by the promises that his faith had guaranteed him, looking into the face of his killer and asking “Scharlach, are you after the secret name?” (75). His absolute dedication to faith, faith which leads him to believe that the clues of the case are leading him to the secret name of God, strips him of his ability to act as a detective. In rejecting logic, Lonnrot loses the ability to decipher the meaning of the clues at his disposal, misinterpreting the evidence so severely that he is not even able to prevent his own death. His death represents a warning to any detective tempted to stray from the path of logic: to do so is to lose the ability to foresee even the most critical events.

The conflict between faith and logic has been acted out between the church and the scientific community in the past and in the present, the two bodies colliding in opposition again and again. Faith and logic find it difficult to dwell in one body, as logic tears down the walls of faith and faith waters down
the contours of logical thought. Within detective fiction, the difference between faith and logic becomes critical. If the detective chooses to walk the path of logic, he will be able to deconstruct the mystery he is trying to unravel. Logical deductive reasoning allows the detective to systematically analyze the evidence while maintaining an emotional distance from the case. This distance is vital, and cannot be maintained if the detective chooses to analyze the issue from the perspective of faith. Faith is too intimate and too personal. If a detective relies upon faith above logic he will ultimately fail, as logical reasoning is essential to detective success.

**Works Cited**


Megan Waldram

The hope of an achievable unification of knowledge is the force that has propelled many a philosopher and many a scientist to investigate their world since the era of the Enlightenment in Europe, which could more appropriately be termed the era of the Hope for Enlightenment. However, since the foundation of modern science in the eighteenth century, the buffer zones between fields of study have come to look more like battlefields than bridges. In his 1959 Rede Lecture, C. P. Snow deplored the schism between the intellectual schools of art and those of science, saying that they spoke different languages and thus were not on speaking terms. Within the last decade some of the most heated battles have taken place over the debate of nature versus nurture and whether scientists should tread on hallowed artistic ground when exploring the genetic origins of human identity. No two figures in the science wars seem to be as much at odds as Stephen Jay Gould and Edward O. Wilson. When Wilson, the founder of sociobiology, published a new book in 1998 discussing the prospects for unification, Gould—influential science critic and historian—was quick to oppose it in a review in the journal Civilization. Titled “In Gratuitous Battle,” Gould’s article—more a cautionary commentary than a review—portrays Wilson’s concept of “consilience” as a reduction of the arts to their scientific elements for reductionism’s sake, and dismisses his arguments as those of a missionary sociobiologist, bent on converting all the humanities to fit his gene-oriented agenda. Gould’s review makes no mention of what I took to be a central object of study in Consilience: the archetype—a symbol, character, or event that recurs from culture to culture, independent of oral tradition. Archetypes are a territory that remains shrouded in mystery, unexplained universals. Wilson’s faith in the revelatory power of science applied to art may be overdone, but cooperation between the two, if only for the elucidation of archetypes, is vital. Gould fails to see Wilson’s vision of the study of archetypes
as a bridge between Snow’s two languages, which has the potential to bring art and science together in the pursuit of a primordial concept of truth and beauty that binds not simply nations or social classes together, but all of humanity.

An eccentric aspect of Stephen Jay Gould’s ‘review’ is that it is only implied that he is referring to E.O. Wilson and his Consilience when he speaks of the “imperialistic (or ‘hegemonic’) assertions of any sociobiologist” and scientists that “view the humanities as a frilly epiphenomenon of evolved consciousness, an artifact best studied by reduction to its Darwinian sources.” Neither the scientist nor the work is directly mentioned once, and there are no quotes or concrete details from the work. If there were, the Wilson of Gould’s essay would surely be more recognizable to someone who had read Consilience — as it is, they seem to be drastically different people. Gould’s Wilson is an arrogant “imperialist” who campaigns for the deconstruction of the humanities into their basic genetic origins, the questionable “building blocks,” and is ignorant of the merits of every other endeavor. The E.O. Wilson who pens Consilience plainly has a deep understanding of the arts, about which he speaks much more than he does science in Chapter 10, “The Arts and Their Interpretation.” He opens this chapter with a beautiful criticism of Milton’s Paradise Lost which would remove any preconception of the writer as an ignorant and self-righteous scientist working to subjugate the arts. He goes on just as eloquently to tackle the works of Piet Mondrian and Nabokov’s Lolita: “‘Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta’. Thus with anatomical accuracy, alliterative t-sounds, and poetic meter Nabokov drenches the name, the book title, and the plot in sensuality” (Wilson 242). Wilson seems to anticipate the form Gould and others’ criticism of him will take and confronts it when he says: “While it is true that science advances by reducing phenomena to their working elements [...] it does not aim to diminish the integrity of the whole. On the contrary, synthesis of the elements to recreate their original assembly is the other half of the scientific procedure. In fact, it is the ultimate goal of science” (230). This conception of the scientific method echoes the process outlined by Decartes, one of the fathers of modern science, wherein the two key undertakings are reductionism—dividing an object of study into its smaller elements to be analyzed, and synthesis—putting
the pieces back together as a recreated object illuminated through new insight. What follows Wilson’s disclaimer is not a very inflammatory discussion of what the arts offer science and science offers the arts; Wilson shows himself to clearly be a lover of the arts and a man thoughtful of the dangers of reductionism.

Gould’s essay is difficult to take seriously not only for its harsh and false characterization of Wilson and his contemporaries, but also for its internal inconsistency. At the outset of his review, Gould calls the science wars a “phony war” and bemoans the distrust many professionals in the humanities have for science and vice versa. He then proceeds to declare the sciences and the humanities absolutely separate, and refuses to consider that their cooperation might have merit despite its roadblocks, instead accusing the scientist who wishes to work with the artist of undertaking no more than a grab for power: “The humanities cannot be conquered, engulfed, subsumed or reduced by any logic of argument, or by any conceivable growth of scientific power [...] [they] stand distinct and unassailable” (Gould). Wilson agrees with him, saying, “I can conceive of no intrinsic limit to future originality and brilliance in the arts as the consequence of the reductionist understanding of the creative process in the arts and science [...] Scientists are not conquistadors out to melt the Inca gold” (Wilson 230). Who is more bellicose, the uniter or the divider? Who contributes more to animosity between sciences and humanities, the collaborator or the skeptic? They both declare the indestructibility of creative artistic power, but Gould speaks as if he were the military leader of the fort of humanities preparing for war, while Wilson comes peacefully bearing an offering to its gods.

What Wilson calls “gene-culture coevolution”—the theory that natural selection gave rise to genetic evolution and from thence universals or near-universals in different cultures developed—is generally the presupposition in the science wars. The most central debate between scientists themselves, and between the few individuals who blur the lines of study between the sciences and the humanities, is over what amount of each is present in the fusion that makes up the human mind, or whether it matters. The prevalence of archetypes suggests that “the arts are not solely shaped by errant genius out of historical circumstances and idiosyncratic personal experience. The roots of their inspira-
tion date back in deep history to the genetic origins of the human brain, and are permanent” (Wilson 238). If the motivation for artwork is largely universal, how can one not be intrigued by the ramifications? Coincidences lie at the root of scientific investigation. Is it just coincidence that there is less plant life as one approaches the poles, regardless of the continent? Scientific study has shown that no, there is a reason. Yet knowledge of climate and soil composition does not detract from the beauty of the equatorial rain forest and the polar tundra. In the same way, a scientific look at the literary coincidences called archetypes will not detract from the beauty of Milton’s *Paradise Lost.*

Archetypes hold so much intrigue because they are so central to the human experience and its philosophical questions. Psychologist Carl Jung led archetypal theory with his idea of a collective unconscious in addition to the personal unconscious, and archetypes as evidence of its existence. Archetypes were for him “‘typical modes of apprehension’ – that is, patterns of psychic perception and understanding common to all human beings as members of the human race” (Hopcke 13). Jung came to conceive of these modes through empirical observation: a broad knowledge of mythology, anthropological studies, religions, art, and his patients’ descriptions of their recurring dreams. Jung thought that archetypes may be explainable by evolutionary adaptation. Wilson posits the question: “If the arts are steered by inborn rules of mental development, they are end products not just of conventional history but also of genetic evolution [...] Were the genetic guides mere byproducts—epiphenomena—of that evolution, or were they adaptations that directly improved survival and reproduction?” (Wilson 245). The reason for the existence of archetypes is one of the most relevant of the sciences’, and the humanities’, unsolved mysteries. Critics called Jung’s conclusions on archetypes “unscientific,” although Jung maintained that they were scientifically supportable through empirical observation (Hopcke 15)—more evidence that archetypes are truly a conduit between the two intellectual cultures.

There are innumerable examples of different archetypes, making them a difficult subject of study. They can be as simple as hero figure or as complex as children lost in a forest. Believing that archetypes must be defined “by specification,” Wilson draws up a list of examples. He focuses on epic archetypes, the
sweeping themes universally present in cultural folklore: creation, emigration to a promised land, battle against heavy odds, hero’s sojourn, apocalyptic end of world, physical source of great power, nurturing woman, seer, powerfully pure virgin, female sexual awakening, trickster, and monster threatening humanity (244). Why is the virgin powerful and pure, instead of helpless and unlucky? People are so accustomed to these archetypes in art and religion that they do not question why they appear in stories as they do. Universal characters, universal symbols, universal story lines, universal patterns—all make up the arts.

One should be conscious of both the complications that arise from the cornucopia of archetypes, and Wilson’s susceptibility to the seduction of the budding findings that highlight the connection between archetypes and neural studies. However, his arguments can be very convincing. The artist Piet Mondrian strove for his abstract art to be “nothing human, nothing specific,” but Wilson insists that in his *The Farm Weltevreden at Duivendrecht*, “the spacing of the treetrunks seems intuitively right, the redundancy in the canopy lacework is close to what modern EEG monitoring suggests is most arousing to the brain” (241). In his discussion of metaphors, Wilson truly seems to pinpoint the central location where art and science may be bridged: “The archetypes spawn legions of metaphors that compose not only a large part of the arts but also of ordinary communication. Metaphors, the consequence of spreading activation of the brain during learning, are the building blocks of creative thought. They connect and synergistically strengthen different spheres of memory” (238). Metaphors are so transcendent (Wilson utilizes examples from linguistics—English adapted the Italian word for room, “stanza,” to describe separate “rooms” inside a poem), and extend from the arts to the sciences on so many levels—how can Gould assert so firmly that the arts and the sciences are and must remain separate entities?

In his *Consilience*, Wilson honors the arts for their truth and beauty, and speaks of their integration with science with regards only to the humble goal of shedding light on the transcendent elements of archetype and metaphor. Gould’s review “In Gratuitous Battle” denies the lines of connection and accuses Wilson of an intellectually dishonest sociobiological agenda. Wilson’s theories and hopes for a study of the important subject of archetypes and uni-
versality deserve more credit than Gould gives them. Gould speaks the truth when he says that the science wars are “false categories and bad mental habits,” but if scientists and humanists follow Gould’s advice and refuse to cooperate because of suspicion of each other’s motives, the rift is only widened. Wilson’s simple yet grand ideal, “consilience,” is the logical first step in the search for what causes archetypes, the mysterious phenomena that exist at the core of universal consciousness.

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MISERY: AN AUTHOR’S EXPERIENCE OF READER-RESPONSE

Elizabeth Hendrickson

Stephen King’s well-regarded novel Misery was turned into a film by Rob Reiner in 1990. Reiner did an excellent job of portraying King’s plot which examines the relationship between writer and reader, and writing and reading alike, as the two characters must both “write” and “read” each other. It becomes important to interpret signals and actions to understand and predict what the other will do next. As each gains deeper insights into the other, dynamics of relationship shift and change. Lauri Berkenkamp notes that they “become creators as well as interpreters of each other as texts” (204).

In the novel/film, writer Paul Sheldon comes close to death when he crashes his car during a blizzard on a tiny mountain road near a small town. He is saved by his self-proclaimed number-one fan, Annie Wilkes, who cares for him in her farm house. No one knows Sheldon is in her care as she keeps him hidden away as her own. Annie is obsessed with Sheldon’s Misery series of eight novels. His last novel of the series has just come out, and Annie is devastated to learn that the main character, Misery Chastain, dies at the end of the novel. After burning his latest manuscript because it had too many expletives, Annie forces Paul to write Misery’s Return; for fear of his life, Paul must comply. Berkenkamp and other critics deploy reader-response theory to investigate the issue of control over a text, writer v. reader, in King’s Misery. Reader-response criticism explores the role of the reader in making sense of text. Reader-response relies on the reader to complete the meaning of the text. Criticism of the theory argues that if the reader simply decides what they think is the meaning of the text then there are an infinite number of meanings. Stanley Fish explores this idea and mentions that if the meaning is simply what people want to get out of it, then, “not only will [the text] prove something, it will prove anything” (2073). In contrast to Fish’s claim, Wolfgang Iser claims that the structure of the literary text guides the reader to fill in the “gaps” of what the text does not mention. The reader is constantly changing views as more and
more “gaps” are filled (1672). There can be right and wrong meanings based on the information the author chooses to give and the “gaps” he chooses to leave. The reader is sucked into the plot and supplies “what is meant from what is not said” (1676). Filling in gaps controls the reader’s activity, leading to a discovery of different “segments and patterns” throughout the text which can be connected, creating a “background” for the “next segment to take on its actuality” (1679). The text guides the reader to conclusions and meanings. Without the filling of gaps Paul Sheldon would never have survived his stay in the home of Annie Wilkes.

Writer and reader roles are shifted in the relationship of Paul and Annie. Paul is accustomed to being the all-knowing author. As Berkenkamp states, Paul has little respect for his readers of Misery because he views the novels as “his personal prostitution” (204). He simply writes them to make a buck; Misery has paid for his daughter’s braces and is now sending her to college. However, Paul believes that he hasn’t “been a writer since [he] got into the Misery business,” and tells his agent “If I hadn’t gotten rid of her now I would have ended up writing her forever.” Finished with the Misery series, Paul has written another novel to express his true talent. Believing Annie to be simply a caring woman who saved him from a car accident, Paul allows her to read his new manuscript which, due to the violent nature and abundance of profanity in the novel, she forces Paul to burn. Before its burning, Annie asks Paul, “Who am I to make a criticism to someone like you?” Annie expresses her knowledge of a belief in a writer’s authority over his text, and a writer’s power. A tyranny of the reader occurs when Paul is forced to burn his manuscript, creating a shift in plot when Paul truly realizes that he is in trouble and no longer in control—Annie has become the writer.

Annie “keeps a firm and creative control of the story of Paul’s life” (Gottschalk 128). With her transition from the number-one reader of Paul Sheldon novels to the writer of Paul’s life, she takes on an incredible power. After the burning of Paul’s manuscript he fears for his life; fear along with his need to recover from the accident gives Annie power. Annie is the one who gives Paul his medicine, trying to get him addicted to painkillers in order to make him more dependant on her. She also forces Paul to write Misery’s Return,
pointing out that he chose to kill Misery and he can bring her back. Paul insists that this is not how writing works and that he can’t simply bring her back to life. He argues, “You expect me to just whip something off!” However Annie supplies the necessary creative impulse, mainly the fear for his life. By forcing Paul to write a novel, Annie actually acquires authorship; as she tells Paul, “I’m sorry, Paul, this is all wrong. You’ll need to do it over,” after she dislikes his first attempt at the first chapter of Misery’s Return (Misery). Not only does she have authority over what Paul is expected to write, but she also controls his recovery, or rather lack thereof. After discovering Paul has escaped from his locked room to explore the house, Annie takes it upon herself to hobble Paul, breaking his ankles so he cannot run away. She writes Paul’s recovery—he will only recover when it suffices her “plot.”

Annie has become a writer, but she came this far by first completely understanding the act of reading. As Berkenkamp explains, Annie has a sense of what “powers a careful reader can have,” as she consciously alters her “appearances” to control how others read her (207). She writes herself to ensure that others read her as good. She tells Paul, “I will take care of you,” as she attempts to appear to be a good caring nurse from the local hospital (Misery). In addition, Annie has a nicely kept farm house, is sure to always wear her silver cross around her neck, and never uses profanity. She even has a telephone shell in her living room to resemble a normal household with normal things. She has created, or written, herself as a stereotypical good-natured character from a novel.

Annie goes to great lengths to appear normal, but she underestimates Paul’s ability to read her. After the burning manuscript incident Paul learns to talk less and observe more to try to understand/read Annie. Paul begins to hide his painkillers instead of taking them since he no longer trusts Annie; he learns to withdraw sarcastic comments that could potentially anger Annie and threaten his life, and he also learns to make positive comments towards Annie. Paul can read Annie’s moods and then respond appropriately to them. At one point when Annie is telling him about the missing Ns of the typewriter, Paul tells Annie that N is “two of the letters in my favorite nurse’s name” (Misery). By his closer observation Paul learns to read Annie as a type of text with many blanks,
and begins to fill in the large gaps of which Iser speaks. He interprets her as he
would a novel.

Using his reader skills along with his writer skills, Paul begins to write
Annie by filling in missing pieces of information to discover her past. Annie
leaves Paul with little tidbits of information which supply him with numerous
blanks to fill in. The simple fact that no one knows Paul is at Annie’s creates
many blanks in her story. Annie originally told Paul she had communicated
with his publisher, but he later learns this is a lie. As Paul learns more about
Annie, the fact that no one knows he is there becomes a background fact which
Iser refers to. Annie creates a great blank when she tells Paul, “Sometimes my
thinking is a little muggy [...] that’s why I couldn’t remember the answers to all
the things they were asking me on the witness stand in Denver.” This little
piece of information, grouped with what Paul finds in “Memory Lane,” Annie’s
scrap book, helps him to fill gaps by writing a history which soon becomes
simply a background in the course of the film. The first article shown in
“Memory Lane” is headlined: “Paul Sheldon Presumed Dead.” This creates a
blank as to why this article is in Annie’s scrapbook. Paul then goes on to dis-
cover that there are other articles, all about people dying. This leaves Paul to
fill the gap about his article: Annie plans to kill him, too.

The articles in the book create other gaps, and then quickly the book
supplies more information to guide the reader to fill in those gaps. For in-
stance, one headline reads “Top Nursing Student Falls To Her Death,” and then
the next one guides Paul to make a connection by saying that “Anne Wilkes
Garners Nursing School Honors.” Interesting and odd how Annie gets school
honors after the top student dies; this is not a coincidence, and Paul knows this
because of the background he already has of Annie’s temperament and sanity.

Paul must learn to use his newfound knowledge, or filled gaps which have
now become merely background, to continue to survive under Annie’s “care.”
As Paul writes Misery’s Return he discovers an authority when Annie accepts
that she must wait to find out what happens in the new novel. Authors use
suspense to hold readers in captivity of what will happen next. Paul is in literal
captivity with author Annie, but Paul also holds her in captivity as she ex-
presses that she’s “gotta find out what happens next” (Misery). Paul becomes
active and begins to write Annie’s downfall. He tests his new authority when he asks Annie to go get a different type of paper for him to type with. Paul can read in Annie how important this novel is, but he slightly misreads her and she gets angry with his request and drops the heavy box of paper on Paul’s extremely bruised legs; however, she does then head out to get him the desired paper. Paul continues his writing of Annie’s fall as he plans to poison her with his collected pain killers. Paul is active in his writing of Annie and asks her to have dinner with him to celebrate the completion of *Misery’s Return*. The plan fails because Annie accidentally tips over her glass of poisoned wine, but Paul does not give up. Continuing to write Annie’s end and his escape, Paul sends Annie out to get him his ritualistic cigarette, match and glass of champagne for the end of his manuscript. Out of her love for Misery, Annie does not hesitate to give Paul the items that ultimately lead to her demise.

Annie’s obsession with Misery is evident and is what throws her off from Paul’s plans since she is so excited to once again have Misery in her life. She tells Paul that “just to read the name of Misery Chastain is like a visit from my oldest dearest friend.” This idea of becoming one with the novel is explored and explained by theorist Georges Poulet. Poulet states that “a work of literature becomes (at the expense of the reader whose own life it suspends) a sort of human being” with a conscious all its own, “continuing itself [in the reader]” (1325). Annie feels exactly what Poulet describes. When thinking about Misery Chastain, Annie expresses that “She made me so happy. She made me forget all my problems. ‘Course I suppose you had a little to do with that, too” (*Misery*). Annie’s realization that the author too had something to do with her fascination is also part of Poulet’s theory. Poulet believes that the author is within his work and in reading one lets “the individual who wrote it reveal himself to us in us” (1324). Annie definitely feels this connection with Paul because of his *Misery* novels. She tells him, “I love you, Paul, your mind, your creativity” (*Misery*). Poulet takes a very passive stand with his views of reader-response and reader interaction by allowing the book to simply take over the reader. Annie is taken over by the *Misery* series as Poulet suggests, but she also challenges Poulet’s theory when she dislikes the feeling the book instills in her and actively forces Paul to bring Misery back to life. This challenge is, however, undermined in
that Annie merely becomes active in order to restore her passive bliss in *Misery’s Return*.

By forcing Paul to once again become an author, Annie sets the stage for her own downfall. Paul attempts to completely restore his creative authority symbolically by choking Annie with the torched manuscript. “You want it? You want it? Eat it ‘till you choke!” Paul screams as he shoves the burnt pages down her throat. However, Annie does not die from choking on the manuscript but, instead, of a head injury; her “creative force can not be killed,” as Paul continuously thinks about and sees her in his imagination after the terrible incidents in the house of Annie Wilkes (Gottschalk 129).

In the house of Annie Wilkes, Paul was forced to take on the role of reader before he can resume the role of author/writer. Berkenkamp claims that Paul learns through the necessity to read Annie that “readers assert control over the texts they read in as powerful but different a way as their writers” (206). Annie displays a literal tyranny of the reader when she, reader, attempts to control Paul, writer. Forced into the position of reader in order to survive, Paul realizes that the writer is not the only authority over a text. Gaining deeper respect for writing as he learns to read Annie, Paul manages also to gain back control. *Misery* greatly supports Iser’s notions of intentional blanks, and the author’s ability to guide his readers as, in contrast to Berkenkamp’s claim, Paul the author proves to be more powerful in the end as he eventually writes Annie’s demise. As an author himself it is not surprising that King would have the author thrive in the end, the author who instead of discovering the importance of his readers merely discovers his power over them. However, in support of Berkenkamp, images of Annie continue to haunt Paul after her death, reminding him that without readers his books have nothing to control; without readers, why write? Reiner ends the film with Paul’s reflection that “In some way Annie Wilkes, that whole experience, helped me.”

**Works Cited**

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR THE GOTHIC HEROINE:
A COMPARISON OF THE ITALIAN AND THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Megan Holmes

When Hannibal Lecter declares to Clarice Starling, in Jonathan Demme’s The Silence of the Lambs, that she is motivated to rescue the latest victim of Buffalo Bill in part so that she will finally conquer the dangers and trauma of her own past, his assertions about her strength and needs are correct. The film positions Starling as an updated heroine who is responding to some of the cultural shifts that have taken place since the eighteenth century and have changed the implications of the Gothic text. Like Ellena di Rosalba in Ann Radcliffe’s The Italian, Starling is quickly identified as an orphan, a young woman with a fluid identity who is extremely vulnerable and certainly in need of protection in order for her story to be resolved. While Ellena eventually finds and receives this protection from traditional eighteenth century sources (she is reunited with her mother and then married to the hero of the story), Starling proves that the possibilities for gothic heroines have changed by revealing her willingness to capably transform her own vulnerability into a means for sufficiently protecting herself.

Radcliffe endows Ellena with keen intelligence and “a just regard for her own dignity” (40). These qualities are combined with physical beauty and delicate manners to establish her as a worthy gothic heroine, innocent but not weak or silly, and someone to whom Vivaldi, the hero, is instantaneously attracted. The impending death of her aunt, Bianchi, means that the already parentless Ellena will soon be a “young and friendless orphan, still somewhat dependent on her own industry; and entirely so on her discretion” (32). The conclusion that Bianchi reaches not long before her death makes perfect eighteenth century sense, especially given the fact that Ellena’s “mind was not yet strong enough, or her views sufficiently enlarged [...] to glory in the dignity of virtuous independence” (13). Bianchi’s niece is desperately in need of “the protection of a husband and a man of honour” (32), so that she will not be just a
young orphan, totally alone in the world and without anyone to guide her morally, defend her status, or ensure her safety. This logic is critical to the progress of the story because it justifies the narrative necessity of the marriage between Vivaldi and Ellena, despite the problematic fact that “a family of [his] rank must be averse to a union with one of [hers]; nor [is Ellena] unacquainted that a full sense of the value of birth is a marking feature in the characters of [his parents]” (31). The genuine love, respect, and affection between Vivaldi and Ellena is thus supplemented by her immediate practical need for a protector just like him, a man who will marry her and provide her with status, wealth, and family security to relieve her of the vulnerabilities particular to female orphans.

The exact nature of Ellena’s vulnerability is also defined by some of the values of the eighteenth century, specifically the moral guidelines for the conduct and treatment of young, innocent virgins. Although she is bodily kidnapped after she takes too long “in retiring, during the period of her grief, from a home where she had no longer a guardian, which delicacy seemed to demand” (69), it is not only Ellena’s physical safety that her loved ones are primarily concerned for as they attempt to plan her marriage. Rather, it is the safety of her honor and innocence that they are trying to protect. Ellena’s innocence would certainly be violated if she were actually raped, but Vivaldi also believes she has been dishonored, for example, when his parents accuse her of trying to ensnare their son in a marriage that would be beneath his aristocratic status. After she has been “left alone in the world” (68), Vivaldi eagerly hopes to “acquire the right of vindicating the honour of Ellena” (57), a privilege that he does attain in the end, ultimately leading to the very marriage his parents had been trying to prevent.

Fortunately, the path to this classic gothic ending is made much smoother by the revelation concerning Ellena’s true identity and pedigree, when it becomes apparent that she is not actually the orphan everyone believed her to be. This means that she can be reunited with her loving, respectable mother, Olivia, who offers maternal protection (evidenced by her initial reluctance to relinquish her newly found daughter to Vivaldi and his family in marriage). It also makes it much easier for Vivaldi’s father to “willingly [relinquish] the views of superior
rank and fortune, which he had formerly looked to for his son, for those of virtue and permanent happiness that were now unfolded to him” (473). The conclusion of the formerly orphaned Ellena’s story is happy and ideal because her honor and dignity have been preserved (indeed, even celebrated) as she gracefully gains a heroic husband who will provide for her and continue to serve as her protector throughout their marriage, thus permanently solving the central problem of her vulnerability.

Clarice Starling, the heroine of *The Silence of the Lambs*, is also an orphan who was rendered incredibly vulnerable by the deaths of her parents (specifically her father, as her mother died much earlier during her childhood). He was her whole world, she admits to Hannibal Lecter during their second meeting, and she lost everything at ten years of age when he died violently. The incident at the Montana ranch when Starling attempted to save the screaming lambs from spring slaughter is the painful event on which she has fixated. Years later, it still represents the entire enormous trauma, as proven by the fact that she talks readily (if dispassionately) about her father’s murder, yet requires much more prompting from Lecter during their third meeting to discuss the lambs and her subsequent trip to the Lutheran orphanage in Bozeman. As the film opens, Starling is in the middle of her attempt to rise above this vulnerability by disconnecting from every possible element of her past (including her accent and poor, rural roots) on her way to assuming a position of ultimate authority. She will be an FBI agent who rescues people and punishes villains—a hero rather than the victim she has always been before. This effort is designed to redefine her own status in the system of victimization by attempting to do what she can to eradicate that system altogether.

But just as Ellena di Rosalba lacks the power to banish all of her vulnerabilities and social limitations even if she wanted to, Starling possesses some weaknesses that she simply cannot escape. The film injects her into the tradition of desperately wandering gothic heroines by framing the story with two labyrinths: the training obstacle course and the dark, horrible basement of Buffalo Bill. Despite her determined attempts to develop her own physical strength and toughness, Starling is a small woman in a world populated by tall men, as we see in the scenes in the elevator and the funeral home, when she is literally
dwarfed by the men who are supposed to be her peers. Perhaps most importantly, she cannot just move beyond the very ordeal that has been driving her since childhood. The same painful events that are providing the impetus for Starling’s incredible bravery and fortitude in her rising career and the dangerous search for victims of crime will continue to haunt and weaken her until she can find some way to conquer them. Even if Starling can eventually become a woman whom nobody will ever be able to identify as orphaned white trash, her past (and the screaming of the lambs) will never disappear.

The personal opportunity to take command of this particular obstacle is, of course, provided by Starling’s encounters with Hannibal Lecter. Lecter is intellectually attracted to Starling and her unique set of vulnerabilities because he has an intrinsic and professional fascination with the processes and malfunctions of the human mind, and because he sees some of his own ambition in her. This connection is why he offers to provide some assistance in the matter of hunting down Buffalo Bill, once he sees the opportunity to escape the dungeon and become a free man again. In exchange for hearing the story of the young FBI trainee who has been sent to convince him that he should fill out a worthless questionnaire, he will give her some cryptic hints—just enough so that she will succeed in her mission and there will be no question that the achievement is hers. Starling, in turn, is ultimately willing to play Lecter’s verbal games because she desperately wants to solve the case and rescue the girl. Her motivations in this quest are threefold: she has a human desire to save the life of an innocent woman, she knows that if she contributes to the resolution of the case her career is made, and (once Lecter points it out to her) she realizes that saving Katherine Martin will avenge her childhood failure to save the lambs and finally put to rest the pain that has characterized her entire life.

For these reasons, Starling takes the enormous emotional and professional risk of delving into her own vulnerabilities, offering them up to Lecter for his own enjoyment and pleasure, a gift for which he thanks her sincerely. This requires trusting an insane serial killer with the secrets and memories that have most tortured her since she was ten years old — but the payoff is worth it to Starling. If she had been unwilling to share herself with Lecter, she would have had the same sort of success with him that all of the traditional male
psychiatrists and scientists did. Her particular weaknesses (and her ability to harness them for her own purposes) are the key to Starling’s unique and startling success. She is a heroine not in spite of her vulnerabilities, or after other characters appear to protect her, but directly because of those chinks in her individual armor.

The result is that Starling is able to be her own advocate by using both skill and weakness (and quite a bit of luck when she first recognizes Buffalo Bill and then manages to shoot him in the dark before he shoots her). Her superior throughout the entire case, Crawford, shakes her hand as an equal at her graduation. This is in contrast to the incident at the funeral home, when he casually brushed her aside for being a woman and a student, and is evidence that he recognizes her success and strength as a professional and an individual. Perhaps most tellingly, Lecter himself reinforces this new stability in Starling’s character by reassuring her that he has no plans to hunt her down – and asking that she extend him the same courtesy. This serves to prove that even Lecter understands Starling’s ability to be a protector (and even an aggressor in her new role of authority), in that he considers the possibility that he might need to protect himself from her. This gesture is confirmation of the truth that Starling’s vulnerabilities have been resolved through her own doing – although perhaps her real strength is still that she has the power to access them again in the future.

The differences in how the heroines in Ann Radcliffe’s The Italian and Jonathan Demme’s The Silence of the Lambs find their resolutions are indicative of some major social changes that took place between the eighteenth century atmosphere that produced many of the earliest gothic novels and the 1991 cultural landscape into which the film was released. Questions of social mobility and freedom to choose within the system of marriage have evolved so much that female heroines are facing entirely different dilemmas. In contrast to Radcliffe’s heroine, whose narrative problems had to be solved by using other characters to protect her, Clarice Starling displays the power and freedom to be her own protector by owning and using her own weaknesses in order to succeed on the level she chooses.
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ART AS A BYPRODUCT OF EMPATHY

Anthony Lucero

Searching for a function to art is often seen as contradicting of art’s purpose: Art should serve no other function than “art for art’s sake,” as author Oscar Wilde wrote. Yet the continued development of fiction and its ability to remain a staple in collective consciousness force one to ask—why? According to evolutionary psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides in their essay “Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds?,” art simultaneously “suggests functional design” (9) and yet is one of several surviving “seemingly purposeless behaviors” (16) that do not correspond with theories of evolution. Yet Tooby and Cosmides fail to regard the issue of how art is geared toward human empathy; art’s contextual message within history, philosophy and linguistics; and finally the symbols of art that saturate society and influence cultural aesthetics.

In understanding how the enjoyment of fiction fits into the framework human evolution, Tooby and Cosmides first rule out randomness as an explanation because this particular adaptation—literary enjoyment—is “more highly ordered than chance can account for” (6). The other option, then, is natural selection, meaning that the enjoyment of art is a tool developed for the survival of the species. Natural selection can take three different paths, which are outlined by Tooby and Cosmides: Adaptations, which are functions that “ultimately contributed to genetic propagation;” byproducts, or traits “causally coupled to [other] traits that were selected for,” such as an inherent avoidance of harmless snakes because of existing adaptations in the human species to avoid the venomous variety; and finally the possibility of genetic adaptations that occur by chance, known as genetic noise (6). It is clear that genetic noise is not the cause because, again, this adaptation is too complex and intricate to be left to chance. What about byproducts? Tooby and Cosmides provide the following explanation as to why they disagree with the consensus that enjoyment of art is not merely evolved through its being coupled with other traits: “The
machinery that permits pretense can be selectively impaired while other faculties are spared, suggesting that it is the product of a specialized sub-system, and not simply a byproduct of general intelligence” (9).

So, as an adaptation, art is not purely for art’s sake: It is a “relentlessly utilitarian [...] complex neural machinery that [...] promote[s] [...] the genetic propagation of the traits involved” (10). How could opening up a book or watching a film encourage the propagation of the human species? Therein lies the bone of contention both for the community of evolutionary psychologists as well as myself: Tooby and Cosmides believe the enjoyment of art exists to make “adaptive changes in the immense and subtle internal world of the mind and brain” that are comparable to skills humans learn for the propagation of the species—like “caring for children, acquiring a mate, foraging, and so on” (Tooby 16). I believe that the enjoyment of fiction is a byproduct of a larger mental evolution that was critical for human survival by allowing humans to connect and exchange with their peers: a tool known as empathy.

Empathy is the identification of another’s situation, feelings or motives, but also the ability to put oneself in another’s position in order to navigate or understand these feelings and motives. The importance of this skill is paramount; on any given day humans use this tool, whether for social interaction, bartering, or creating alliances. In human history, empathy is able to account for the structure of cooperative hunters during nomadic times to the development of tribes created for safety and trade to the level of nation-building that has reached staggering levels of social and economic strength through intrapersonal dependence.

An adaptation that utilizes group and intrapersonal dynamics for the survival of the individual must develop in a species that is not solitary, meaning that empathy is a wide-ranging tool created for a social species that frequently engages in social interaction. If this is how humans have evolved, then it is why empathy has become so prevalent in the framework and logic of the human mind, instilling this social paradigm from an early age through language-learning, emotional development and family associations, and even in play. Tooby and Cosmides stress that play is an inherent design in a child’s mind, one that helps the individual navigate social matters later in life: “Behav-
iorally, pretend play appears in all normally developing children in all cultures around eighteen months of age, about the time that infants become maturationally equipped to engage in sophisticated social activity that acknowledges the existence of other minds” (9).

Is fiction, then, just an extension of pretend play, which imagines these ‘other minds’ in any given situation, spelled out by art, which can provide enjoyment, suspense or emotions—all of which are experienced vicariously through the characters?

Tooby and Cosmides themselves say that, although fiction should be viewed as a “surrogate experience, some psychological subsystems reliably react to it as if it were real, while others do not” (8). This is due to the way humans interpret fiction and escape into imagined worlds as a means of enjoyment. Tooby and Cosmides say they are “using the word fiction in its broadest sense, to refer to any representation intended to be understood as nonveridical,” (7) or untruthful. However, that implies that fiction does not inherently seek to observe or interpret, on any scale, the dimensions of human thought, emotion, or action, regardless of how much it may stray from historical fact. Many stories that humans indulge in are combinations of the extraordinary and the plausible, so that the story is grounded and realistic while going beyond conventional happenings and stretching the imaginations. That fictional observation and the participants’ interpretation is what drives the engine of fiction, creating a vehicle by which participants can vicariously live through fictional characters’ experiences and emotions in- and outside of the fiction. Or, as Michelle Scalise Sugiyama says in her essay, “New Science, Old Myth: An Evolutionary Critique of the Oedipal Paradigm”:

We assume that literary characters have human beliefs, desires, emotions and perceptions—for example, that a (mentally competent) character’s conceptualizations of dog, fetch and devotion reliably correspond to our own. By virtue of its subject matter, then, all literary criticism is in one way or another psychological criticism and, in a fundamental way, literary study is the study of human cognition. (121)
Whereas fiction began as folklore relating to creation stories, which used mythical representations to correspond with natural phenomena that enthralled humans but were unexplainable, it has retained its value and interest despite not being true. In its essence, fiction has not changed, though it is relied upon less to explain the natural world. Instead, fiction serves to depict and accentuate a theme the artist wishes to express, displaying the world through a unique lens. Empathy is the ability of participants to place themselves in other roles, to understand or appreciate the feelings and situations of others. Like most conversations and other interpersonal discourse, fiction requires empathy from its participants and is “an intrinsically rewarding activity, without apparent utilitarian payoff” (Tooby 8). Though most fiction develops more thematic elements with the intent to pull participants out of real life, fiction is no different than other interpersonal exchange because it also requires the participant to suspend all inner conclusions or feelings and submit to the perspective of the creator—much like a listener must do in a conversation, though the topic may not relate to a time or place the listener is familiar with.

Also humans identify through conversation in the way they identify through fiction: narrative that provide description delivered chronologically; detail; and plot. Books and films, just like conversations, unfold, striking developments that trigger feelings of suspense, surprise and (hopefully) satisfaction. Conversations are also geared toward this format: one person speaks of a situation and explains a situation; the listener understands why the speaker made certain decisions or why he reacted a certain way. Like hearing a punchline, fiction provides similar “rewards” because a twist in the storyline, for example, excites participants and pulls them further into the fictive world. There exist pragmatic rewards for conversation just as for fiction and accurate information—such as ways to navigate through unknown settings, and how to interact with a particular person. Such pragmatic knowledge is gained through fiction and conversation, just as if it had been gained through actual experience.

In real life, this empathy extends to fiction because it is centralized in the human experience, molding the realities of everyday life into a fictionalized rendition of events that serves to provoke a response from the participant. This
is not always a physical reaction—like audiences at an early screening of a Lumiere brothers’ film *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* running from the screen in fear as the train headed toward the screen. Though fiction rarely inspires that level of reaction—Tooby and Cosmides accredit that to a “switching off” mechanism or “off-line thinking” (12)—it speaks volumes about humans’ ability to empathize with fictional creations and to invest their feelings in something unreal. It speaks more to human empathy that a reaction does not have to come from terror or excitement, proven by Michelangelo’s *David* which invokes anxiety and suspense as the sculpted body is in mid-hurl with the rock that famously kills Goliath.

But empathy is a tool that is honed by seeing one’s self in another’s position, obtaining knowledge for successfully navigating a certain hypothetical situation. Narrative—culture, history and religion—is complementary to navigating the social world. This lends itself further to the perception that fiction is as a byproduct of reality, basing itself on everyday circumstances and creating a fictional representation. Though not limited only to these contexts, it is difficult to extract any fiction that is not based, in some degree, on customs and events that have inspired the creator of a particular fiction to express his or her vision of those influences, and thus share them with others.

In this way, symbols and context in fiction mirror the blank slate theory: “we possess a system Pcpt.-Cs., which receives perceptions but retains no permanent trace of them, so that it can react like a clean sheet to every new perception; while the permanent traces of the excitations which have been received are preserved in ‘mnemic systems’ lying behind the perceptual system” (Freud 208). Fiction employs several narrative devices like character, setting and plot, to entertain our immediate “perceptual system” and lets us into the vision the creator wants to share. Yet, “permanent traces” remain in our minds, traces that are influenced by our experiences and education, much of which is in turn influenced by the way we interact with society, government, and religion.

The Bible, for one, is a manuscript that contains the guidelines for living a wholesome life and, in death, achieving a place in Paradise. Much of our learning is imparted through the use of symbols in the text. Indeed, the focus of religion is centered upon many symbols that present conditions to us through
iconography: the cross serves to remind of the punishment Jesus accepted to open the kingdom of Heaven while reinforcing the primary tenant of Christian belief in a Father, his divine Son and a Holy Spirit; bread and wine represents body and blood; and the apple which symbolizes knowledge, forbidden yet indulged upon in Adam and Eve and thus banished from Eden in favor of free will. Symbols and iconography also exist as a byproduct of architecture: The manner in which we use art in our surrounding environment is not merely for the purpose of enjoyment, but to engender a specific, human, response. When used by governments, banks or other important institutions that wish to portray authority, order and strength, ancient Greek architectural forms command order and authority with their solid designs. It also reflects the historical subtexts of Greek society on which American and other modern democracies are based. Another style, that of the modern corporation, is one that has come through the historical shift toward big business after World War II: “The building’s clean lines and crisp design seemed to epitomize the efficiency, standardization, and impersonality that had become synonymous with the modern corporation itself” (Stokstad 1154). Humans see within those crisp lines the integrity and togetherness a company portrays through its building, and responds to the corporation as a symbol of productivity and prosperity. In this way, a building’s architectural style may be aesthetically pleasing, but symbolism and design speak to subconscious behaviors and influence the way in which one may view it. As a byproduct of symbols, fiction is able to navigate and create specific responses in humans through a shared knowledge of these symbols’ meanings.

Finally, fiction may be received as a byproduct of existence because it accounts for the ways our civilization has developed. Tooby and Cosmides agree, saying, “leaving aside history, philosophy and linguistics (whose findings and objects of study are generally consistent with Darwinism), almost all the phenomena that are central to the humanities are puzzling anomalies from an evolutionary perspective” (7). Fiction would not be able to develop without this ability to display social meanings and to have those meanings understood by a large audience.

As mentioned before, fictions rely on a historical backdrop to portray subtext. If history is “consistent with Darwinism” and thus not a “puzzling
anomaly,” fiction should also be considered consistent since it was first produced as a means to record history and knowledge. The first appearances of art seem to align perfectly with fiction’s being tied into history and survival: the Lascaux cave paintings, thought to be created around 30,000 years ago, depict hunting humans. This could be seen less as artistry than as instruction, showing future generations how this particular tribe hunted. Indeed, it has become a timeless representation and guide: We can use it to study the beginnings of art and the human species at that time in the past, and it gives researchers clues to animals that are now extinct.

Fiction, then, is a byproduct of the everyday world, and not only a vehicle for creating stories, paintings, buildings or sculptures, but for adding another pair of eyes through which to see the world. It is the response to that worldview, empathy, which allows fiction to flourish in everyday life.

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Throughout history, poets have portrayed the act of rape as a way to express concerns that expand beyond the scope of the poem. W.B. Yeats and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) both used the mythological rape of Leda by Zeus, in the form of a great swan, in their poetry. According to Greek mythology, Leda is impregnated by this rape, and then bears a daughter, Helen of Troy, whose abduction initiates the Trojan War; her kidnapping is eventually responsible for the downfall of Greek civilization. W.B. Yeats explores this myth in his 1928 poem “Leda and the Swan.” The author chooses mainly to focus on the power differential and sexual violence present in the rape as a symbolic representation for greater problems present within his life, with his violent and disturbing portrayal of the rape as a method to express his feelings concerning much broader issues. It has been suggested that the poem, which was first written during the Irish Civil War, is intended to draw attention to the violence that beset Yeats’ homeland during that time. However, Hilda Doolittle’s poem, “Leda,” written in 1921, does not express the interaction between Zeus and Leda to be rape, but seduction, courtship. There is not nearly as much frustration or anger behind the poem as there is in Yeats’ rendition, but rather serenity and tranquility, which is used as a way to explore issues beyond the primary content of the poem, such as questioning the act of rape from multiple perspectives, both male and female. The same scenario is expressed by these poets in two contradictory representations. However, a close look at the poems reveals that, along with the many differences there are also similarities to be found.

Rape is the single most degrading experience, the most vicious method by which one can exercise power over another human being. The extent of the forcefulness of this act is portrayed throughout the entire poem with Yeats’ choice of vocabulary and language, beginning with the depiction of a “staggering girl” who is surprised by the “sudden blow” from the great swan who comes down upon her without warning. The young girl has no way of protect-
ing herself from the powerful swan. She is completely defenseless, which Yeats continues to illustrate with the line “he holds her helpless breast upon his breast.” The poem later reads: “and can those terrified vague fingers push the feathered glory from her loosening thighs?” This passage suggests Leda attempted to resist; although terrified, she struggled to keep him from penetrating her. Yeats uses the image of Leda being “so mastered by the brute blood of the air,” demonstrating that the rape was not only aggressive but also resulted in bodily harm due to the extreme violence and sheer size and strength of the swan. The image of the swan’s taking Leda by the nape of her neck and forcing her into the act provides the reader with the picture of the swan gaining complete and total authority over her helpless body. Overall, Yeats’ choice of vocabulary is effective in conveying chaos and action; over a dozen verbs are used in just 14 lines, which makes the poem frantic and flustered.

The structure of the poem is rigid and controlled, which further perpetuates the feelings of fear and trepidation. The intensity is restricted by the narrow confines of the sonnet, an aesthetically pleasing, but heavily structured, art form which requires a distinct rhyme scheme and strict structure. Additionally, the sonnet itself is brief, thus ensuring the rape will be brief as well. The text, then, presents the rape scene, painting a vivid and terrifying picture of its aggressive violence and its subsequent transition to passivity. Because the structure of the poem is so short, and the rape is portrayed in such a concise manner, the poem suggests that any rape, no matter how brief, can potentially lead to the destruction of a nation, the extinction of a civilization. The repercussions of a single act can be devastating.

Yeats chooses not to focus on the swan as a whole, describing him in abstract terms which disembody the swan, making it appear as though the swan is a representation for something larger and deeper than the mythological history behind the poem, while Leda is described with concrete, tangible adjectives and nouns which lock her into the position of a woman. She is an earthly figure, unable to take flight, and unable to escape the narrow confines of her physical body. The imagery and wording in general is also representative of oppositional elements within the text. Leda is “the staggering girl” and the poem refers to “her thighs,” “her nape,” “her helpless breast,” and “her loosening thighs.”
The swan is never called Zeus or even acknowledged as a physical swan. Rather, the swan is described as “great wings,” “dark webs,” “that white rush,” “blood,” “indifferent beak,” and “feathered glory,” all representations of the ambiguity that Yeats creates.

The vagueness and uncertainty of the swan is a way for Yeats to use the rape of Leda as a demonstration for a much larger problem. The rape of Leda is a way to express his political analysis of the violent atrocities which are committed against the people of Ireland during the Great War (1914-1918), which introduced new and improved methods of killing. The killing in Ireland was on a gargantuan scale; all too often, only minimal ground was lost or won; battles continued for months, and casualties were reckoned in hundreds of thousands. Yeats was a political poet and often wrote about the revolution. However, he never become fully engaged in the political battles in his country. As an effective alternative, he used his poetry to express his feelings of anguish with the government. This poem uses Greek mythology as a guise to conceal his political criticism. The raping and looting of his fellow Irishmen during the Great War in 1914 is similar to the rape of Leda in the way that they, Leda and the Irishmen, attempted to resist, however collapsed under the overwhelming power of the government. Yeats provides the image of “the broken wall, the burning roof and tower” which displays his aggression and opposition towards the policies which are harming his fellow Irishmen. Yeats’ “Leda and the Swan” addresses an issue that causes anxiety for many modern critics; not that the theme of the poem is rape, but that Yeats seems to glorify the power and sensuality of the rapist. The poem accedes to the belief that women enjoy being taken by force, and further uses the rape as a starting point for historical and cultural inspiration.

While Yeats’ rendition of the rape of Leda is openly aggressive, Hilda Doolittle is much more subtle in the way she presents the scene, offering mystery and sensuality. As an imagist, Doolittle wrote with the desire that every word be used clearly and concisely, and be essential to the presentation of the poem. Yeats also assigns special responsibility to his words, and it is clear that his choice of vocabulary was meant to evoke images and feelings of aggression and violence. H.D.’s selection of words, on the other hand, induces
sensations of pleasure, contentment, tranquility, and even safety. She uses adjective as opposed to verbs, which makes for a fluid and peaceful poem. Doolittle’s continuous use of colors paints a vivid and beautiful picture of the scene. The colors that she uses are light golds and yellows, and also darks, especially deep purple, which provide a lot of visual contrast to construct an image of the swan next to a slow moving river flowing through a magnificent field of warmth and sunshine. The use of color in her poetry is essential to her presentation of this rape scene, making it appear beautiful and relaxed.

Doolittle also uses comforting words and phrases such as “slow river,” “soft breast,” “caressed the lily,” “bliss,” and “beneath soft fluttering,” which reinforce and play up the serenity of the poem and its environment, creating a feeling of tranquility instead of brutality. Doolittle’s use of the “kingly kiss, no more regret, not old deep memories to mar the bliss” implies that the intercourse is consensual and welcomed. Kissing is one of the most intimate forms of physical interaction, and would usually not precede forced penetration because it is a mutual act, one of sensuality. The encounter is described as blissful and unmarred, an atypical approach to the interpretation of a rape. Doolittle then reinforces the idea of consensual sex with the lines “the gold day-lily outspreads and rests.” This does not imply a struggle by Leda, but a willingness to submit to the swan’s magnificent power and her welcoming of domination.

Unlike Yeats’ use of the narrow confines of a sonnet, H.D. writes in a much more lyrical and free-flowing poetic form, one of the most commonly used techniques of imagists. She does not use rhyme, which is a major constituent of the sonnet, and does not have any particular structure into which the poem must fit. Because Doolittle does not use a rhyme scheme, she is not limited in which words she can use. Thus, she can express exactly what she desires with each word. She also enables herself to be as free-flowing as she wishes because there are very few limitations to the actual structure of the poem. She chooses the length that she desires and will most accurately communicate her message. Doolittle places no limitations on the structure and line length, which are somewhat broken and irregular, although this does not impede the flow of the poem. H.D. breaks the poem into multiple stanzas for such
a short poem, symbolizing movement and openness in space. The structural freedom of the poem allows her to play up her femininity in the writing of this poem with the use of colorful, imaginative images, and sexual insinuations. She writes very sensually, with many sexual undertones that ignore the violence of rape and focus on the attraction and beauty of the act, making it appear not to be a rape at all, but a consensual act of love.

Doolittle never directly refers to Leda outside of the title, nor does she ever mention a woman or parts of a woman as Yeats does. However, she does refer to Leda as a flower on multiple occasions such as: “has caressed the lily with dark breast” and “the gold day-lily outspreads and rests beneath soft fluttering.” The use of the flower as a representation for Leda plays up the eroticism of the poem while disembodied her at the same time. A flower cannot be raped or damaged as a human can, so the scene is not one of violence because no detrimental psychological or negative emotional harm can be done to a flower. The image of the flower is a highly sexualized representation of a woman that creates an environment of sexuality as opposed to abuse. The use of the flower also plays with the use of the term deflowering, a longstanding word used to express the taking of a woman’s virginity. Flowers are often used in literature as the symbol of female sexuality, virginity, and purity. Doolittle never refers to the act of rape or hints at any violence, but instead chooses to focus on the swan, with close detail to its body parts and the environment in which this encounter takes place. The swan is not villainized and Leda is not victimized as is true with most rapes. By choosing not to refer directly to the act as one of rape, she leaves the poem open for interpretation. Its ambiguity is, like Yeats’, a representation of something more important beyond the scope of the poem.

Although these two poems may appear to be different in many ways (their language, structure, the undertones of the poems, the emotions evoked), when looked at from a feminist perspective one finds that there are many examples of how these two poems are similar. Yeats appears to be writing to reflect emotions of anger and dissatisfaction, and H.D. seems to be writing to express feelings of love and tranquility, but both glorify the scene to provide us with an interpretation of the act that is much larger than the individual act of rape.
Yeats creates uncertainty with the irony between the structure of the poem and the subject matter which it portrays. The poem is written in a traditional form (sonnet), yet the subject matter is extremely nontraditional. Ironically, Yeats uses a poetic technique which is used in order to convey feelings of love and attraction, making the rape appear as an act of passion; he turns aggression and sadism into splendor. The very representation of the swan evokes the image of a bird with much beauty and grace, regardless of the fact that the swan is performing this aggressive, inhumane act on an innocent woman. Yeats’ openly aggressive use of vocabulary and his political background lead readers to believe that he is dissatisfied with the treatment of women in his own life and in his nation. The violent raping of women is unacceptable in society and should not be used to overpower a woman or as a tactic of war. Rape leads to destruction and death just as the rape of Leda lead to the death of many people in the Trojan War and the collapse of the Greek civilization.

Doolittle, writing from an extremely different perspective, makes the seduction an act of love and beauty by making it a work of art. She rewrites the entire scene and chooses to perceive the situation as a man may witness it. The scene which is played out in the poem is a courtship of two lovers. This is interesting because Doolittle often wrote from a feminist perspective in other published poems that typically empowered herself, and other women, as a woman, but not this particular poem. When writing about Helen of Troy, the daughter born as a result of the rape of Leda by Zeus, she refers to her very negatively and with a lot of resentment and hatred because her beauty caused the downfall of an entire nation. Through this interpretation, H.D. views the rape as Leda’s fault for the impregnation and the birth of her daughter. In the poem “Helen,” written in 1925, H.D. states “Greece sees, unmoved, God’s daughter, born of love,” which states that she did not see the mythological story of Leda and the Swan as a rape at all, but rather a willful act of love. Women are to blame and are at fault for their raping and bring it upon themselves with their erotic displays of beauty. This one rape was the initiator of the Trojan War and the downfall of the Greek civilization. The result of women using their sexuality is eventually the downfall of a nation. A single woman and her beauty are responsible for a war. Women’s beauty creates destruction.
Yeats’ overtly aggressive sonnet and Doolittle’s representation of consensual love both portray the same mythical scene, but in two very different ways. For Yeats, rape is an appalling and inexcusable act of violence committed against women that represents the problematic ideology of patriarchal society. The raping of young women is used as a way to keep them in a subordinate position, and to allow men to resume their seat in the patriarchal system of domination. Doolittle however, minimizes the women, blaming them for the violence, excusing the men, and treating rape as an act of consensual love and respect. This is very interesting in that the positions of the two authors are contradictory to the stance that is normally taken. Yeats, a man, blames the men when H.D., a woman, blames women. This paradox serves as an effective tool for displaying the opposing viewpoint. Both authors explore the highly stigmatized act of rape and analyze it thoroughly and effectively as a way to express their concerns regarding far deeper problems rooted in society.
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