

An aerial photograph of a wide, deep canyon. A river flows through the center, forming a waterfall that cascades down a rocky ledge. The canyon walls are steep and composed of light-colored rock, with patches of green forest. The surrounding hills are covered in a dense, dark green forest. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.

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Mission Statement

A joint publication between English majors and faculty, the journal embodies the interdisciplinary nature of the Department of English at Samford University. It provides a venue for all Samford students, faculty, and alumni to publish their best critical and creative work.

Literature and film continually reimagine an ever-changing world, and through our research we discover our relationships to those art forms and the cultures they manifest. Publishing one issue per year, *Wide Angle* serves as a conduit for the expression and critique of that imagination. The journal provides a venue for undergraduate research and an opportunity for students to gain experience in editing and publishing. As a wide-angle lens captures a broad field of vision, this journal expands its focus to include critical and creative works, namely academic essays, book and film reviews, and commentaries, as well as original poetry, short fiction and non-fiction, and screenplays. (*Revised, spring 2022*)

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Essay

Sarah Chew

“the great Perhaps”: Thematic Misdirection and Irony in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*

Since its publication in 1927, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* has puzzled students and critics alike, who search for a label to fit not only the book and its themes but also its author. Was Thornton Wilder a skeptic or devout Puritan, a nihilist or optimist, and does his book reflect a belief in the accident of how we live and die or in an intention looming behind the simple choices of daily existence? The novel’s inciting incident is the collapse of “the finest bridge in all Peru” (Wilder 5), which pushes the reader into a careful examination of the lives of the five casualties, but beyond that, the bridge accident seems just that—an accident unrelated to the Marquesa’s troubled relationship with her daughter, or Esteban’s search for meaning after his brother’s death. There is a dichotomy conveyed through the titles of the first and last sections, “Perhaps an Accident” or “Perhaps an Intention”: either the deaths of the characters were by chance, or their untimely end was the culmination of choices made and sins committed over the course of a lifetime. This is the primary thematic question that will be answered. But while Wilder does explore both possibilities, he rejects a definitive answer in favor of “the great Perhaps” (32) and shifts his focus to something concrete: that how we choose to love others is the single greatest factor in determining our impact. In order to justify this focus, Wilder dismantles the original premise of his dichotomy, that it is possible to come to an understanding of divine will, through the irony of the text in tone, characterization, and narrative structure.

The Problem of Theodicy

The reader's first clue that the novel is not a dry theological dissertation is its tone, which is humorous and ironic. Wilder does include weighty and existential themes, but the overstatement of something as true or grand often hides simple disbelief. By overstating something as fact, the absurdity of the claim becomes more apparent. For example, when he labels the inhabitants of Peru as "poor, obstinate converts," the reader might accept this as Wilder's own opinion, but his further description of them as "so slow to believe that their pains were inserted into their lives for their own good" gives room for doubt (8). This modifier makes it seem as if their "obstinacy" is the rule of the human condition rather than the exception, a point that Wilder elucidates in his next words: "doubt springs eternal in the human breast" (8). To Brother Juniper, these doubts are a failure of the human capacity to understand, and only a fool could question God's providence over tragedy; through the use of irony, Wilder gently suggests that he—and all Christians—are such fools.

Wilder's humorous tone also appears in his presentation of misattributed grandeur, best exemplified in the Spanish Church and the Marquesa. The Church in Peru is characterized by pomp and ritual, such as a hymn, "one of the formal services of the Church," used to mark Dona Clara's parting from her doting mother (14). This is a moment that ought to be profound, yet the hymn "never failed to sound weak and timid in all that open air" (14). The inclusion of this description provides situational irony, suggesting that something intended to be grand and comforting has lost its power, and the Marquesa herself, a noblewoman retrospectively known as a great writer, is weak with fear and loneliness as the ship departs.

The hollowness of overinflated devotion appears again through the Marquesa's superstitious efforts to protect her unborn granddaughter. An abundance of "degrading" rites that

bring the Marquesa only “a whole new scale of emotions . . . tears and screams” culminates in a visit to the shrine of Santa Maria de Cluxambuqua (31). While the emotional toll of these rites hints at their futility, the narrator interjects to comment that “if there resided any efficacy in devotion at all, surely it lay in a visit to this great shrine” (32). The reader might expect that this shrine will substantiate the Marquesa’s desperate pseudo-devotion, but instead of protecting her granddaughter, the pilgrimage results in the Marquesa’s own death. This is ironic because the Marquesa’s safety was never at stake, yet her “devotion” has killed her, and the outcome of the childbirth is forgotten. The Marquesa’s true religious devotion is to the superstitions and not to the child, much as she is devoted to writing love letters to her daughter and not to mending her relationship with Dona Clara. As a result, her endless letters, “monuments of Spanish literature” rife with poetic symbolism, are polluted by fear and jealousy and never serve their intended purpose (13). Nowhere is overstatement and irony better represented than in these letters, which are grandiose, beautiful, and poetic, only to conceal bitterness and “a shade of tyranny” (18). They are meant to immortalize love, but they only exist because of its lack.

The primary use of ironic tone in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is to reveal Wilder’s opinions about the foolishness of treating a human idea as absolute fact. When Wilder overstates the value or purpose of something, he leaves the reader skeptical about just how certain that idea was in the first place. Just as a bridge protected by “St. Louis of France himself,” thought to be “among the things that last forever” (5), can fall at a moment’s notice, so too are human notions subject to collapse. This casts doubt on the very nature of Brother Juniper’s experiment, which attempts to extrapolate absolute truth from a subjective situation, to “justify the ways of God to man” (8). The reader’s doubt is solidified by the abrupt revelation that the book which summed up all Brother Juniper’s efforts will be “publicly burned . . . in the great square” (8), which the

reader knows before even knowing its contents. By pointing out other examples of misplaced faith, whether in stereotypes, religious rites, or letters, and showing that even things we revere are impermanent, Wilder suggests that Brother Juniper's search for the meaning of life is doomed to fail.

A second form of tonal irony Wilder uses is understatement, which lends shock value to an idea and thus drives it home. While overstatement strips away deceptive facades, understatement uses simple, direct language to expose hidden feelings. The clearest example of this occurs when each character's story abruptly concludes with their death. After a crisis about her misplaced love, the Marquesa resolves to set right her relationship with her daughter and act better to those around her. Her final words are "Let me live now. . . . Let me begin again," after which Wilder jumps over the "two days" between this and her journey home to juxtapose her prayer with her death (38). In the third section, Uncle Pio heads for the bridge, where "he spoke to an old lady who was travelling with a little girl. Uncle Pio said when they had crossed the bridge they would sit down and rest, but it turned out not to be necessary" (94). This final sentence is painfully sparse, and the unnecessary triviality about Uncle Pio's conversation with the Marquesa draws attention to the skeletal phrase summing up his death. The fact that each segment plunges directly into the next, without pausing to wrap up any loose ends, provides an effect of shock that is almost humorous, albeit darkly so. After the Marquesa's death, the story restarts with "One morning twin boys were discovered," thus introducing new characters and committing the Marquesa and her worries to the grave (40). Wilder's scant portrayal of each death is unexpected and simple, making it far more poignant than if he had painted the tragedy with flowery images because it leaves more to the reader's imagination. The effect of using

fewer words is likewise displayed by Wilder's choice to describe the Marquesa's "famous" final letter, her "Second Corinthians," without reproducing any more than the first line (38).

Perhaps more than any other characters, Esteban and his brother Manuel are prime examples of understatement because they live, speak, and love simply yet profoundly. They prefer silence to speech and communicate their love in a "few words . . . about the details of food, clothing, and occupation . . . and a curious reluctance even to glance at one another" (43). Unlike the Marquesa, who is full of words, the brothers find "all these allusions to honor, reputation, and the flame of love, all these metaphors . . . fatiguing" (44) because they are long-winded and silly. When Manuel himself falls in love, he speaks calmly to Camila, and when he decides to give her up for the sake of fraternal love, he says nothing more than "Well, that's the last letter I write for that woman" (50). This sentence represents an enormous sacrifice of his will, the resolution to give up his object of worship, but it accompanies his bedtime routine and is uttered easily. Similarly, after realizing Manuel loves Camila, Esteban announces his intention to go for a walk in the manner of "the greatest declaration of our lives," even though his only words are "I'm in your way" (52). Just as this walk means a permanent rift in their fraternal bond, everyday moments and words carry more weight for these brothers than inauthentic ceremonies do for the Marquesa. This is why, later in the story, Manuel's crude deathbed words—"How could I damn you to hell, Esteban, when you're all I've got?" (55)—have such emotional impact. They are not poetic or beautiful, but they have genuine love behind them, and this is more valuable.

The assertion that life is best lived through the mundane, not through philosophical musings and gestures, devalues even Brother Juniper's questions about divine justice. Understatement provides such impact because it is intuitive: it shows the external result of a

word or action without a comprehensive exploration of the internal feeling. Brother Juniper is trying to work backwards: to read deeper meaning into moments and actions where it may or may not exist. How could he, or any outside observer, understand the inner turmoil needed for Manuel to relinquish his dreams of love for Camila and cry out “In the name of God, in the name of God, Esteban, come back here” (52)? Ultimately, the function of Wilder’s ironic understatement is to hide more than it reveals, and this effect is key to understanding the book’s true theme: that life’s grand purpose hides behind simple things of true importance, but too much dissection can ruin that simplicity and beauty.

Just as Wilder uses misdirection in his tone, his characterization of the five victims is often a sleight of hand, using subversion of expectations to humanize their virtues and vices. In doing so, the novel reveals something not particularly surprising: despite all Brother Juniper’s efforts to “surprise the reason” for their deaths (7), he can find no satisfactory justification. From the moment she appears, the Marquesa is a contradiction, the author of poetic masterpieces who wanders the streets “continuously drunk,” with “her red wig fallen a little over one ear, her left cheek angry with a leprous affection, her right with a complementary adjustment of rouge” (14-15). Her love for her daughter is, paradoxically, her ultimate temptation, and the letters she writes are to satisfy her wounded pride, not to demonstrate true affection. Even this is not so simple, however; despite her selfishness, “she knew that she too sinned and . . . she longed to free herself from this ignoble bond” (18). It is impossible to say whether the Marquesa’s beautiful letters and genuine love outweigh her selfishness, neediness, and pride and still harder to judge whether she was more deserving of death than her daughter, who, ironically, is a benefactor to everyone except the one who most needs her love. Moreover, Dona Clara spends her life sustaining “all the arts and sciences of Spain,” yet all her generosity and goodwill do not

prevent the fact that “nothing memorable was produced in that time” (15). If the Marquesa were evaluated by who she wants to be, her death is ludicrous, especially when she demonstrates the potential for change right before crossing the bridge. While a judgment based on who she truly is might condemn her, why is her daughter, who seems equally self-deluded, spared? The novel provides no good answers, hinting that they are, by nature, impossible to find.

There is not only a discrepancy between the idealized and true selves of each character, but also between external perceptions and reality. The Marquesa thinks Camila is old and vain, while the latter is twenty-eight and preserves her beauty by “throw[ing] cold water at it twice a day, like a peasant woman at a horse trough” (20), not through elaborate routines. Camila, for her part, mistakes the old lady’s drunken stupor for dignity and “the grandeur of Hecuba” (24), assuming a “fantastic magnanimity” (25) when the Marquesa is merely ignorant. Esteban, upon seeing Camila whispering in Manuel’s ear, believes this represents “a new congeniality . . . such as he would never know” (29), while in reality Camila is using Manuel to send messages to her true lover, an unnamed matador. Uncle Pio is rumored to be Camila’s father or lover even though he keeps his distance, an understanding born of “a slight nervous shadow that crossed her face when he came too near” (74), which reflects that she sees him purely as a mentor. The Marquesa sees Uncle Pio as an eloquent speaker but “so moth-eaten by disease and bad company, that I shall have to leave him to his underworld” (68), even though he devotes his time to perfecting Camila’s theatrical talent and studying theater. If the characters cannot understand superficial things about each other, such as age, sobriety, and even romantic attraction, how can they be trusted to make judgments about human desire, motivation, and virtue, much less that about divine providence?

The characters of this story ascribe virtues and vices to others with comic ignorance, but this irony suggests a flaw in Brother Juniper's experiment: its designer is likewise human, through no fault of his own. Brother Juniper's sincerest attempts to find the "spring within the spring" (9) uncover nothing but more complexity and misunderstanding, as demonstrated by another of his experiments. To prove God's justice, he assigns a numerical value for virtue to members of a population struck by disease, but when "he added up the total for victims and compared it with the total for survivors, [he] discovered that the dead were five times more worth saving" (99). If even someone so determined to track down truth and motivation falls desperately short, Wilder implies that our understanding of others will always be skewed by our own bias. Even the author of the story and its readers are limited by human perspective, so if there were an answer to the question of divine justice, we can extrapolate from Wilder's conclusions that it could never be accurately written or read and understood.

The final layer of irony in the characters appears in how they, by trying their hardest to accomplish their goals, unknowingly jeopardize them. The Marquesa's desperate efforts to earn her daughter's attention, "persecuting [her] with nervous attention and a fatiguing love" (14), drive Dona Clara even farther from her. Dona Clara cannot cope with her mother's passionate, possessive love or the onslaught of letters that follow her to Madrid, but the main problem is not that she hates the Marquesa but that their methods of expressing love are so different. The Marquesa's efforts are self-defeating: if she were less overbearing, it is likely Dona Clara would reciprocate or at least humor her mother. Meanwhile, the Abbess, who longs to improve the situation of women in Lima, sees Pepita as a worthy successor but never as one of the women whose life she might improve with patience and love. For the sake of her grandiose dreams, she "unthinkingly turned upon Pepita the full blaze of her personality" and leaves the poor girl

“frightened by her sense of insufficiency” (35). That the Abbess is motivated by a strong sense of charity is unquestionable, but she fails to recognize the sufferings undergone by Pepita, who is ignored by the Marquesa, persecuted by her fellow servants, and abandoned by the Abbess.

While people cannot fully be evaluated by intention or external perception, it seems reasonable that they might be judged by effort, but the examples above discourage this notion. If our only responsibility is to “do what we can . . . [to] push on the best we can” (64), as Captain Alvarado tells Esteban, then why does Esteban die immediately after resolving to live, just as the Marquesa does? It makes no sense to punish the Marquesa’s penitence, and if there is a divine will behind her death, it seems to be a cruel God, not the loving one described by Brother Juniper’s faith. If our most earnest efforts are not enough to safeguard us from a “sheer Act of God” (7), then we will never be spared merely by a better understanding of justice, and Brother Juniper’s experiment can have little practical use. However, the novel’s refusal to succumb to hopelessness indicates that Wilder will not leave the reader with nothing.

The Bridge of Love: Deconstructing the Need for Theodicy

While tone and characterization help unravel the false premise that *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* will explain divine justice, an overarching look at the book’s narrative and structure helps to explain its theme of love’s connecting power. One way this occurs is through the layout of the book, which is organized to represent a bridge, sloping up from general theme to specific character study and back to overview again. The book is divided into five parts, which is appropriate given the pivotal five deaths, but the first and last sections are bookends, with only three characters receiving a dedicated section: the Marquesa, Esteban, and Uncle Pio. The three middle sections continue the bridge-like symmetry, with the first and third concerning two travelers and the middle dealing only with one. Using narrative structure to create a bridge may

seem like just a clever reflection of the book's title, but the bridge is a motif and symbol used to develop the theme. At the conclusion of the book, the Abbess says, "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning" (107), implying that the characters, living and dead, are connected by a network of love and relationships. Their lives are literally connected by a bridge, since it was the collapse of San Luis Rey that drew the Abbess, Camila, and Dona Clara—the survivors—together. Finally, the book itself is a bridge between a fictional world and readers in real life. At each stage, the bridge described by the Abbess symbolizes something permanent, not only pulling together diverse people and places but outlasting them. If this bridge is love and the "only survival" (107), it makes sense that grand ceremony, fame, beauty, and even philosophy can dissipate sooner than day-to-day expressions of care, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice.

The choice of narrator in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* further develops its theme, and this is most apparent in the two bookends, which tell Brother Juniper's story. The narrator, like the structure of the novel, is the connective tissue between elements of a story, and if the narrator is reliable, readers tend to take this viewpoint as impartial history, rather than a story told for a particular reason. If Brother Juniper is the narrator, the reader is prone to follow his conclusions, and initially, it seems as if he is: he investigates the lives of the five travelers in retrospect, as would be typical of an omniscient narrator, and the reader can assume that sections two through five will summarize the research of his book. However, from the first sentence of the second section, the narrator's perspective is unique: "Any Spanish schoolboy is required to know today more about Doña María, Marquesa de Montemayor, than Brother Juniper was to discover in years of research" (13). Wilder acts as an omniscient third-person narrator, although he briefly enters the story as a rarer form of narrator, first-person omniscient: "And I, who claim to know

so much more, isn't it possible that even I have missed the very spring within the spring?" (9) The true narrator of the story distances himself from Brother Juniper for a reason: he wishes to provide insight that Brother Juniper never knew, such as "the central passion of Dona Maria's life" (9). The well-meaning friar seeks to categorize the "five gesticulating ants" (7) by collecting "every slightest detail" (100), but in the end, Brother Juniper has no convincing explanation of how their deaths accomplish divine justice. Ultimately, his single-mindedness and limited perspective prevent him from being the narrator.

Because Brother Juniper is not the narrator and has no relation to the main plot, it is more productive to consider his role in relation to the theme; in fact, his character personifies the thematic arc of the novel, from its questions about divine justice to its true emphasis: love. The reader expects to discover either a proof of divine justice "mysteriously latent" in the lives of the doomed five, as Brother Juniper expects, or a demonstration that Brother Juniper is wrong and that "we live by accident and die by accident" (7). Either way, the reader's thinking is guided by Brother Juniper's assumptions about human behavior and justice. As a result, for the rest of the book, we hunt for a pattern in the lives and deaths of the five. We want to know that the Marquesa has been condemned for her "avarice" and Uncle Pio for his "self-indulgence" (70) or that Pepita has been saved from her miserable "discipline of . . . long solitude" (34), but there is no such certainty. In fact, Brother Juniper is left with only "great dim intimations . . . forever cheated by details that looked as though they were significant if only he could find their setting" (100)—in other words, supreme ambiguity. This ambiguity is dissatisfying, prompting the formulation of a new hypothesis. Instead of reading each story to find faults, the reader is free to read them, even with a clear-eyed perspective on the characters' mistakes, as stories worth telling, rendered heroic through acts of love.

When Brother Juniper makes his final generalizations about “the wicked visited by destruction and the good called early to heaven” (101), the narrator dismisses these conclusions off-hand. Brother Juniper has directed the reader’s reasoning so far but now no longer; readers must think for themselves. In a cruel twist of fate—or possibly circumstance—Brother Juniper is left a subject of his own experiment, “trying to seek in his own life the pattern that escaped him in five others” (101). Brother Juniper’s execution is the culmination of the book’s irony because it subverts everything he has been trying to prove: if there truly is a purpose behind all events of life, including tragedy, why would it condemn its staunchest defendant to death? Yet, despite everything, Brother Juniper never doubts God, divine justice, or design. The fact that he dies still wondering and yet still believing undercuts the dichotomy initially fed to the reader: that either “we shall never know” or that “the very sparrows do not lose a feather that has not been brushed away by the finger of God” (9). Brother Juniper will die never knowing, but if the finger of God is still at work, he does not need to recognize the purpose in order to live a purposeful life, and this is the point Wilder is making. While Brother Juniper sought validation for his beliefs in pattern making, he never found the pattern and yet was able to hold onto belief and receive validation elsewhere, through his love for his converts.

While Wilder leaves divine will and purpose in the hands of God, he does give a definitive answer to what the value of life is, changing the emphasis from “Why do I exist?” to “What can I do to make my life meaningful?” The greatest value and responsibility of our lives, according to *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, is love. When the facades, intentions, and deceptions surrounding each character are stripped away, the legacy that survives is their relationships, imperfect as they may be. The Marquesa is renowned for her letters, but to her they “take the place of all the affection that could not be lived,” and she “would even have been astonished to

learn that her letters were very good” (17). The true purpose of literature, Wilder assures us, “is the notation of the heart” (17), and when the Marquesa can finally throw off her own trappings of self-pity and despotism to compose a braver letter, the result is “immortal” (38).

The love between Uncle Pio and Camila is equally flawed, a sequence of mutual respect, shared obsessions, misunderstandings, and bitter arguments, but even as Camila’s star wanes, Uncle Pio’s love for her is unchanging, and he tells her, “To have known you is enough for my whole life” (88). Uncle Pio’s love brings value to his own otherwise fruitless life, but its impact extends even farther. Camila realizes in his death a “terrible incommunicable pain . . . that could not speak once to Uncle Pio and tell him of her love” (103), and this brings her “long despair” to its “rest on [the Abbess’s] dusty friendly lap” (105). The Abbess, who feels such pain that she cannot improve the station of women in Peru, realizes it is “sufficient for Heaven that for a while in Peru a disinterested love had flowered and faded” (103). Finally, even the life of Brother Juniper, which seems pointlessly spent chasing questions with no answer, is rendered valuable at the scene of his death, where “in all that crowd and sunlight there were many who believed, for he was much loved” (101). In the light of love, the “very mistakes” that Brother Juniper sees as tally marks in an ever-growing catalog of justice and punishment “don’t seem to be able to last long” (106). The Abbess sees the loose ends left by each character as bound up and bridged in love, a simple conclusion to the book’s far-reaching questions.

By the end of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the reader sees Wilder’s true theme—the value of love—disguised behind a misleading search for higher meaning, an artful display of smoke and mirrors. In Brother Juniper’s struggles to apply the scientific method to theology, he unwittingly closes on a well-known scientific premise: it is not possible to prove a true hypothesis, only to disprove a false one. Nonetheless, the apparent wild goose chase undertaken

by Brother Juniper has its value, if only to force us to consider our own mortality and the consequences of our actions. Wilder himself developed the novel's idea from "friendly arguments with [his] father, a strict Calvinist" (Banks xiv), and these debates, by nature, are never fully resolved. In a letter to a frustrated reader, Wilder justifies his right to pose questions with no answers, using a quote from Chekhov: "The business of literature is not to answer questions, but to state them fairly" (128). Wilder goes on to add, "I claim that human affection contains a strange unanalyzable consolation, and that is all" (128). It may be more satisfying to claim that God's influence is tangible in human tragedy or to disprove His existence, but the only certainty Wilder feels he can warrant is something concrete: love has an influence that can be seen and felt, and that, ultimately, is the point of life—or at least of this novel.

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Kenyon Gradert, PhD

Fiction's Witchery in *Don Quixote* and *Moby Dick*

For the first time in my life, I read my two favorite novels—*Don Quixote* (1605) and *Moby Dick* (1851)—at the same time. It led to a revelation: Melville's masterpiece gets much of its mastery from Cervantes. I logged on to sundry scholarly databases, convinced I'd meet an Alpine range of scholarship on the topic. Several Everests have been piled up, after all, documenting Melville's debt to Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible. Certainly, there would be comparable work on Cervantes. To my surprise, I hardly found molehills. Allow me to heap up some of my own ideas here.

Don Quixote is titled after its "hero," the lanky bachelor who loves old romances about knightly quests so much that he goes mad and decides to *become* a knight. It doesn't go well. He sees windmills and declares that they're giants; he stabs one and is flung into the air. He sees a herd of sheep and thinks it's an enemy army; he attacks and gets his teeth shattered by shepherds with slings. He gets beaten up, lots and lots. Two-and-a-half centuries later, Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick*. You know the gist: Captain Ahab is on a mad, metaphysical quest, not just to kill the rare white whale that ate his leg but to confront a universe that doesn't seem to care. He fights an impersonal cosmos by *making* it personal, even if it means dragging his entire crew down with him. It's insanity, but a kind that makes sense. Scholars have long noted how Milton and Shakespeare helped Melville elevate a sea adventure into a metaphysical quest against meaninglessness. But Melville got much of this—and more—from Cervantes. First and most obvious: both stories spotlight the insanity of madmen obsessed with a fantastic quest. Don

Quixote and Ahab are both monomaniacs. This point is where most of the scholarship on the two novels starts and stops. But *so what?* Why did both novelists construct vast epics around the idea of monomania? Why was this premise so compelling to them? Why has it entranced generations of readers?

One prominent early theory is that Don Quixote is satire. All of Cervantes's comedy is squeezed, slapped, and stomped from the premise that life is *not* like a chivalric romance, that chivalric romances were, at best, unrealistic and, at worst, idiotic. Melville does something similar when the first mate Starbuck protests Ahab's quest: "vengeance on a dumb brute! . . . that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness!" (161). Life isn't demonic, Melville implies; life isn't chivalric, Cervantes says. Quixote is insane to think knight-errantry is real. Ahab is insane to take nature's brutality personally. Don't be like Ahab. Don't be like Don Quixote. But to stop there is to demote brilliant novels to Sunday school lessons. These works rise to the level of metafiction, metaphysics, and mesmerism by exploring how such insanity might be a sane reaction to a story-less world—heroic, even—and thus, how such madness can be as contagious as it is deadly.

First, consider how Ahab and Don Quixote justify their mad quests when faced with a reality that resists it. Don Quixote's constant excuse for seeing giants instead of windmills, etcetera, is that some evil "enchanter" has hidden the "real" world of giants and knights from our eyes, replaced it with the "illusions" of mere windmills and ordinary life. It's pathetic and hilarious. Melville puts a darker, gnostic twist on this idea. Like Quixote, Ahab insists that the sharkishness of our world—the way his leg was reaped like a mere blade of grass—can't be just the impersonal course of nature. It has to be the creation of some malicious devil. Starbuck chastises Ahab for taking vengeance on a "dumb brute" who didn't know any better; Ahab

replies that “all visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks” (161) while “some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask” (161). Put otherwise, Ahab says what Quixote says: the whale isn’t *just* a whale, just like the windmills aren’t *just* windmills—they’re the creation of some malicious trickster out to get us. Like Quixote, he takes the world’s indifference and impersonality *personally*.

Both protagonists thus claim to be heroic disenchanters. Both insist they’re striking through the “illusion” of an indifferent world to the “reality” of a malicious one. Some say Ahab’s mask speech was inspired by Shakespeare’s Prospero, the magician of *The Tempest* who bewitches an island (and at one point throws a magical “masque” party). Certainly possible. But Quixote—who makes his helmet’s visor out of “pasteboard”—is an even more important model for Ahab; both seek to “strike through” (161) the pasteboard and smite the sinister demon behind it all. Cervantes and Melville both want us to feel the madness of their madmen. Neither author ever lets readers directly see what Don Quixote or Ahab sees. We see only a man tilting at windmills or raving at thunderstorms. We hear only old men defending such visions with an untestable theory that the visible world is a product of an invisible, malicious enchanter. On the surface, Ahab’s theory is as “inscrutable”—as untouchable and untestable—as it was for Quixote. As Starbuck says, nature isn’t demonic—it’s just a “dumb brute.” Don’t take it personally. Reality is impersonal. Both Cervantes and Melville remain thoroughly modern, humanist, and realist on this point.

Both authors likewise use important secondary characters for some chiaroscuro: they contrast the hidden, evil world of their monomaniacs with sunnier sidekicks: Sancho Panza and Ishmael. Melville borrows much from Cervantes when he contrasts Ahab’s Gnosticism with Ishmael’s “genial desperado philosophy” (226), a proto-pragmatist, proto-existentialist gallows

humor that laughs at the universe's absurdities. Many of Ishmael's most compelling characteristics echo Sancho. They're both true skeptics, equally weighing belief and disbelief. Though far more intelligent than Sancho, Ishmael inherits the squire's roguish wit, gallows humor, and creativity in the face of danger. Robert Milder deems Ishmael a modern "pizarro" for these reasons. Like the outlaw antiheroes of the Spanish "picaresque" novels, Ishmael is an image of human solitude *and* solidarity, in the critic Robert Alter's view. Because he's at the edges of society, Ishmael looks out for his fellow humanity when he can. Cervantes knew his Spanish readers loved these stories, so he made sure to put a roguish pizarro in *Don Quixote*: the dashing criminal Gines de Pasamonte, enslaved in a chain gang and freed by Don Quixote. I think Pasamonte was also in Melville's mind when he imagined Ishmael and his "genial desperado philosophy" that laughs in the face of death.

Even more than Shakespeare, I think Cervantes helped Melville sharpen his sense of life's "textuality"—the way in which life is (and isn't) like a story, the way we crave a meaningful story from life, and the way this all leads to a much more subjective universe that anticipates the existentialists and poststructuralists. Ishmael suspects that the world is paradoxically "a dumb blankness, full of meaning . . . a colourless, all-colour of atheism" (Melville 193), effectively, a blank piece of paper upon which we can write anything—and thus nothing with objective meaning. Ishmael responds to this contingent universe, like Sancho and Pasamonte, with a desperado's daring-do.

And yet, Ahab convinces an entire crew to sign up for this quest unto their deaths. Don Quixote convinces Sancho to stay by his side through three brutal misadventures. And nearly everyone Don Quixote meets is either forced or convinced to play along with his fantasy, for the mere thrill of it or for the sake of expediency and survival. How? Melville forces readers to feel

Ahab's bewitching powers through more tactics gleaned from Cervantes. First, we feel Ahab's grandeur more keenly because Melville never lets us get too close to him. Instead, Melville sets us down alongside a smaller narrator, Ishmael, just as Cervantes sets us on Sancho's mule to look up at tall Quixote on Rocinante. Ishmael is likewise eager to elevate the loftiness of whalers by ranking them alongside old heroes of scripture, myth, and knightly romance: the mates and their harpooners are called "Knights and Squires." Ahab is constantly compared to Prometheus, to Perseus, even to Christ. Just so, Sancho falls prey to Don Quixote's quest to "revive" the old epics and romances of knight-errantry in the present.

But there's a deeper metaphysical reason that Ahab's insanity overpowers Ishmael's sanity. While Ahab's insanity is mad on the surface, it has a *depth* that the sanity of other characters lacks. Ahab is "used to deeper wonders than the waves" (79) and has a "larger, darker, deeper part" (183) that Ishmael can't illuminate because "all truth is profound" (183) and Ahab's "dive[s] deeper than Ishmael can go" (183). In his Hamlet-inspired soliloquy to the head of a dead whale, Ahab begs this "sphinx" to reveal its secrets, for "of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest" (309) into the sufferings of this impersonal, sharkish world.

The young sailor Pip gets to see what Ahab craves when he nearly drowns in the ocean, and it drives him to the opposite end of insanity: while Ahab rejects the impersonality of the universe by turning himself into a god and the universe into a devil, Pip simply loses himself in the impersonal sublimity of the ocean. "[Ahab] daft with strength, [Pip] daft with weakness" (515), as one observer notes. I suspect that Melville got the idea of the "depth" of Ahab's insanity—not just its extremism but its profundity—from Don Quixote's descent into the Cave of Montesinos, the most mysterious chapter in the book. Though its depths are unknown, Quixote vows like Ahab to the sphinx that "even if the caves went down into the abyss, he had

to see where it ended” (599). Against the warnings of Sancho, Quixote is lowered six hundred feet into the earth and still doesn’t find the bottom. His friends wait in suspense for a half-hour and reel him up to find him sleeping. When he wakes, he’s convinced that he never slept but instead witnessed ancient heroes trapped in the cave by Merlin’s wicked enchantments, and all of them have long been waiting for Don Quixote to descend and disenchant them.

Is this not Ahab? Like Quixote, his insanity has depth. He is willing to dive deep into himself and stand against the impersonality of the world. He voices Don Quixote’s subconscious when he screams at the thunderstorm, “in the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here” (500). Put otherwise, Quixote and Ahab’s vision of a demonic world is fiction, true, but a fiction that affirms the human need for a meaningful, story-like universe. If, with Ishmael, today’s existentialists and postmodernists suspect that metanarrative and “Big Stories” are bunk, with Quixote and Ahab, we nonetheless crave a universe that affirms our dignity as not mere atoms but protagonists. The hero of Sartre’s *Nausee* muses that “this is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others . . . and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it” (85). Melville anticipates this critique through Ishmael, but by making Ahab great and allowing Ishmael to fall prey to his fiction, Melville seems to suggest, like Cervantes, that we can’t bear a story-less universe, that even we good postmodernists will fall for metanarrative if it offers depth to a flat, blank page.

These madmen prove charming not in spite of their madness but precisely *because* of it. Constantly, Don Quixote charms characters with his knightly quest—he addresses prostitutes and peasant girls as noble ladies, so no wonder they play along. He lives in a fantasy world, but one that proves more charming than reality. The same goes for Ahab, in a darker sense: if Ishmael suspects that the universe is godless and indifferent, that it can mean anything and thus nothing,

Ahab's insane tendency to take it all personally feels weightier, deeper than the shallow drifting of proto-existentialist absurdity. Both writers imply that reality's impersonality leaves us susceptible to powerful personalities who promise a big story that can grant us protagonist status. Ahab and Don Quixote aren't merely satirical portraits of enchanted madmen claiming to be disenchanters. They enchant their fellow characters with the possibility of "disenchanting" the flatness of modern life, of revealing a deeper reality.

Put more simply, Ahab and Don Quixote are storytellers. *Don Quixote* isn't just a satire of chivalric romances. It's a story about the witchery of stories. Cervantes brought to life the divine comedy of this idea. On his deathbed, Don Quixote is finally disenchanted. "I was mad, and now I am sane; I was Don Quixote of La Mancha, and now I am . . . Alonso Quixano" (937). He begs Sancho's mercy: "Forgive me, my friend, for the opportunity I gave you to seem as mad as I, making you fall into the error into which I fell, thinking that there were and are knights errant in the world" (938). Sancho's response is why the Pequod succumbs to Ahab's madness, why we succumb to their greatness: "The greatest madness a man can commit in this life is to let himself die, just like that, without anybody killing him or any other hands ending his life except those of melancholy" (938). We all die, so let us die in battle against an enchanter, not wither away from depression in a flat world: "Don't be lazy, but get up from that bed and let's go to the countryside . . . find Señora Dona Dulcinea disenchanted, as pretty as you please. If you're dying of sorrow over being defeated, blame me" (938).

Quixote and Ahab can't be mere satire because they celebrate the witchery of their storytellers, Cervantes and Melville. Just so, *Moby Dick* and *Don Quixote* bewitch us readers. Every page turned makes us more complicit with Sancho and the Pequod—we too are bewitched by their madness. Only Ishmael survives the bewitchment to tell the tale. Here he parallels the

last of Cervantes's lesser characters: the fictional Cid Hamete Benegali, the Moorish writer who first "recorded" the "true history" of Don Quixote. The novel's narrator claims that he discovered Benengali's history for sale in a marketplace and paid to have it translated into Spanish from Arabic. (Ishmael, by the way, gets his name from the biblical father of the Arabic race). The narrator of *Don Quixote* claims he's taken this Spanish translation of Benengali's "history" and polished it into the story that we read today.

This narrator gives the moorish Benengali the last word in the novel: "For me alone was Don Quixote born, and I for him; he knew how to act, and I to write; the two of us alone are one" (939). Like Benengali, Ishmael is a quieter and more intellectual presence that will ultimately bear testimony of Ahab's ungodly, godlike greatness to the world. Benengali ends with a warning: "let the weary and crumbling bones of Don Quixote rest in the grave, and not attempt, contrary to all the statutes of death, to carry them off" (939) for another adventure. Here, he echoes Robert Milder's reading of *Moby Dick* as an exorcism of Ahab's demonic vision of the world. Cervantes concludes his novel with one final bit of metafictional wit: "My only desire," writes Benengali, "has been to have people reject and despise the false and nonsensical histories of the books of chivalry" (939). Satirical readings of the novel miss how Cervantes winks at readers in the next line: these nonsensical books of chivalry "are already stumbling over the history of my *true* Don Quixote" (emphasis mine) "and will undoubtedly fall to the ground. *Vale*" (939).

Both *Moby Dick* and *Don Quixote* end with gravity: a ship sunk by a demonic metanarrative, a silly literary tradition tripping over the "true history" of a sillier knight. Of course, *Don Quixote* is not true history. And yet, it's more real than other fantasies. Just as those fantasies were more real than reality for Don Quixote. Readers find themselves tripping in a

mess of metafiction: a fictional history within a story about stories that in Part II becomes a story to which fictional characters react. In this final line, it's hard to keep track of all the levels of fictionality. And that's Cervantes's point. The human need for stories crashes into a world that resists stories. In such a world, narratives pile up until it becomes difficult to say where reality stops and fiction starts—"such a dumb blankness, full of meaning" (Melville 193), as Ishmael says. No wonder, then, that we readers, like Ishmael and Sancho, fall prey to great stories.

"Of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?" (194).

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Caroline Huff

“and in the darkness bind them”:

The Shadow, The Ring, and Other Jungian Archetypes in *The Lord of the Rings*

Introduction

Certain aspects of the mind are universal and inevitable. Like the organic structures and chemical messages of the brain, parts of consciousness itself can be identified and labeled. Identity, impulse, and many other aspects are considered common experiences of conscious beings. From these aspects spring the foundations of society and morality: the concepts of good and evil. Whether these universal aspects were side effects of the development of the prefrontal cortex or proof of a higher power, it is impossible for the mind to exist without them. They seep into every facet of society: politics, religion, academia, and literature. They structure the psyche. Psychology has coined many names for them, along with many coinciding theories. Carl Gustav Jung called them the “archetypes” of the mind, which exist in the collective unconscious. He identified many archetypes, but he found four primary ones: the Persona, the Anima or Animus, the Self, and the Shadow. These four, according to Jung, are present to some degree in every conscious mind. They can be applied universally and can determine disposition and personality types. Jung’s archetypes are particularly helpful when examining literature through the psychoanalytic lens. In lengthy, character-heavy works, the archetypes provide the audience with preconceived notions of certain characters and their roles in the story. Moreover, the archetypes can give insight into the universal theme of the work.

J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, when viewed through the lens of Jungian psychology, becomes a story laden with intense internal struggle and great personal sacrifice. Through the struggles of individual characters, it reveals deeper meanings about consciousness as a whole. In his letters, Tolkien is insistent that the work is not meant to be allegorical, however, he admits, ". . . each of us is an allegory, embodying in a particular tale and clothed in the garments of time and place, universal truth and everlasting life" (Tolkien, *Letters* 541). While the narrative itself cannot be viewed as an allegory, the characters can be representative of different archetypes. Aragorn can represent the Hero, Sauron can represent the Trickster, Gandalf can represent the Wise Old Man, and so on. The influence of the archetypes extends beyond the individual characters, however, and addresses the collective themes of the work. One such theme is the corruptive nature of power and temptation, which can be better understood by examining the relationship between the One Ring and the Shadow archetype of the collective unconscious. Once the understanding of this relationship is established, Tolkien's theme of hope and sacrifice at the end of the journey can be revealed in full. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring weaponizes the Shadow archetype of the wearer's mind to influence and ultimately control the psyche. It can be resisted through the individuation of the mind but can only be defeated through self-sacrifice.

Collective Unconscious

The elements of J.R.R. Tolkien's world building in *The Lord of the Rings* legendarium suggest the existence of a collective unconscious. Jung asserts that there are three main parts of the psyche: the personal conscious, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is defined as "a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from the personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its

existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition” (Jung 96). Jung hypothesizes that the collective unconscious extends beyond the individual. It strings conscious life together rather than allowing it to exist as isolated islands. In his essay “The Concept of the Collective Unconscious,” he writes as follows: “This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents” (98). In order for a collective unconscious to exist, the nature of the world must be cyclical and repeat some sort of pattern. These patterns yield predetermined roles and notions through archetypes. Unlike the personal conscious and unconscious, the collective unconscious considers the histories and psyches of those who lived in the past, as well as the present.

Aside from the evidence found in subsequent archetypes, the existence of a collective unconscious in Tolkien’s fictional universe, can be found in its mythological origins. According to Jung, “myth and fairytale” are important expressions of the collective unconscious (25). When providing evidence for his theory of the collective unconscious, Jung asserts that proofs of the archetypes, such as dreams and visions, are only useful if they can “adduce convincing mythological parallels” (111). To Jung, mythology is a way to observe the collective unconscious because it suggests a realm outside the physical. It is evidence of the archetypal nature of consciousness, as it often establishes a higher power or a plane of existence outside of the world itself. For a mythology to support the theory of collective unconscious, it must possess a spiritual element which ties into the physical.

Tolkien’s mythology contains these elements that are necessary for the formation of a collective unconscious. *The Silmarillion* details the history and the creation of Tolkien’s world, called Eä. The creation story of Eä is called Ainulindalë and begins with the creator, Eru, who is

also referred to as Ilúvatar. Ilúvatar created “offspring of his thought” and called them the Ainur (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 15). He then gave them a “mighty theme, unfolding to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed” (15). Afterwards, he told the Ainur to make “a Great Music,” creating Eä, which is formed out of the void by their song (15). In the Great Music resides common themes, which suggest the existence of the collective unconscious in the Tolkien universe. It binds the races of Eä together. In the essay “One Ring to Bind Them All: The Mythological Appeal in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*,” Valter Henrique Fritsch notes, “In many cultures, especially in the ancient ones, mythical narratives tended to present a sense of common identity . . .” (12). Tolkien’s mythology takes this mythical narrative a step further. Since the events of *The Silmarillion* are treated more like ancient historical events rather than religion or myth, the common identity is more of a grounded reality rather than an abstract sense. Therefore, the resulting archetypes from the collective unconscious are tangible forces at play in Tolkien’s universe, rather than speculation or theory.

The Archetypes

As previously stated, the collective unconscious consists of the archetypes. According to Jung, there are four main archetypes: the Persona, the Anima/Animus, the Self, and the Shadow. Each archetype exists in the individual’s consciousness to some degree. There are several other underlying archetypes that accompany these four, each representing different facets of human nature. However, these additional archetypes do not always manifest themselves. The four major ones will always manifest themselves to some degree because they are essential to the structure of the psyche.

Each of the four major archetypes play a universally recognized role in the psyche. The persona is “The mask of the Actor,” as Jung describes it (55). According to Timothy O’Neill,

author of *The Individuated Hobbit*, the persona is a result of societal standards and “. . . meets the expectations (or what we choose to consider the expectations) of others” (O’Neill 25). It is the outward appearance of the individual projects, the surface of their being. Buried beneath it lies the Anima/Animus, the Shadow, and the true Self. The Persona archetype is heavily facilitated by the culture of the Shire, as shown in the first chapters of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The hobbit’s lifestyle, etiquette, and society revolves around an extensive and strict set of unwritten rules. Ironically, awareness of the Persona archetype is at its peak when it is undermined by Bilbo at his farewell party. Bilbo drops his carefully crafted socially acceptable image while everyone he knows watches. He completely and effectively erases his persona by putting on the Ring and literally disappearing. As a result, the other hobbits, in their shock and confusion, are suddenly aware of the world outside of the comfortable, Persona-wrapped Shire. Most of the hobbits quickly recover themselves, writing Bilbo off, but Frodo is not so quick to forget. When Gandalf returns to the Shire many years later, Frodo knows that leaving means letting the Persona down and facing the deeper elements of the collective unconscious.

The Anima and the Animus are the gendered aspects of the psyche. Jung asserts that the Animus is the masculine, and the Anima is the feminine, although “either sex is inhabited by the opposite sex up to a point” (69). Since the vast majority of the characters are male and play masculine roles, the Animus is present throughout the story. However, the lack of female characters may serve to place emphasis on the more complex feminine Anima. According to Jung, the Anima is the “soul” (68). He describes it as an otherworldly, mystical power that acts as an entrance to “the realm of the gods, or rather, the realm that metaphysics has reserved for itself” (69). The Anima has a mysterious and beautiful element, one also found in characters like Galadriel, Arwen, and other elven ladies. However, Jung did not believe the Anima was

necessarily a force of good. He believed it was very powerful and dangerous, stating that “occasionally [the Anima] causes states of fascination that rival the best bewitchment, or unleashes terrors in us not to be outdone by any manifestation of the devil” (65). The nature of the Anima is fickle and cannot be designated to the confines of good and evil.

Arguably, the archetype most vital to the psyche is the Self. Jung’s work suggests that the true Self is the key to fulfillment of the psyche. If the Self is realized and becomes the center of a person’s being, it can bring a healthy balance to the conscious and unconscious. According to O’Neill, “the search for the Self is the final goal of the psyche, and the theme of *The Lord of the Rings*” (30). This final goal of finding the Self is the result of a process called “individualization,” a self-searching journey (37). The struggle to keep the Self archetype in the center of the psyche is clearly fought in Frodo’s internal journey; it is a central factor in the psychological narrative of the story. In light of this, O’Neill postulates that the Ring represents the Self, saying “the Ring has always been identified with the Self . . .” (130). However, the Ring more likely connects to the Self’s opposite archetype, the Shadow.

The Shadow archetype is one of the most central and intriguing archetypes. In his essay “More Light than Shadow? Jungian Approaches to Tolkien and the Archetypal Image of the Shadow,” Thomas Honegger asserts that the Shadow is “in Jung’s own view, one of the most important archetypes” (7). The Shadow is the darkness that is considered a side effect of consciousness. It cannot be untangled from the psyche. According to Jung, “the shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form. It cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness” (55). The Shadow is inevitable and, though it is not inherently evil, it is dangerous. Jung recognizes that the Shadow is not only a symptom of consciousness, but an active part of it. However, its action in the psyche often does not align with

moral or societal standards. In terms of morality and civility, it is inherently malignant because “it contains the repressed weaknesses, shortcomings, and socially not acceptable (primitive) instincts and impulses” (Honegger 7). In Tolkien’s work, these primitive aspects are seen in many characters, namely Gollum, but also in Bilbo and Frodo. But the hobbits are not the only species that fall to their own impulses. In fact, some of the most powerful beings in the legendarium succumb to their internal weakness. In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien tells the story of the legendary High King of the Nordor, Fëanor, who “was the mightiest in skill of word and of hand . . . his spirit burned as a flame” (60). However, as mighty as he was, his pride in his greatest creation, the Silmarils, caused him to give in to his darker nature. In order to keep the Silmarils for himself, he fled Valinor, cast his people into exile on Middle Earth, ordered the kinslaying at Alqualondë, and burned the white ships of the Teleri. His pride and his oath sparked years of war on Middle Earth, even after Fëanor’s death. By succumbing to his Shadow, Fëanor plunged the Noldor and Arda into a long age of chaos and bloodshed. The story of Fëanor is ultimately a warning of the consequences if one so powerful falls to their Shadow. The more powerful a being is, the more dangerous their Shadow. Gandalf, Galadriel, and Elrond know the danger and, centuries after the Silmarils were lost, do not forget this warning when they are faced with the crisis surrounding the One Ring.

The History of the One Ring

The One Ring itself is perhaps the most significant plot device of the trilogy. The central conflict revolves entirely around it to some degree or another. It is a central factor in Frodo’s personal journey and the fate of Middle Earth as a whole. Skogemann asserts that “the Master Ring is the strongest single symbol in the story . . .” (145). Tolkien drew on many depictions of mythological or magical rings to craft this symbol. The most notable is the reference to the ring

of Gyges the Lydian. In Book Two of *The Republic*, Plato recounts the story of a Lydian shepherd, Gyges, who happens upon a deep chasm while he tends his flock. When he descends into the chasm, he finds the lavish tomb of an unusually large man but “took nothing from it save a gold ring on [the corpse’s] finger” (105). Later, he finds that the ring turns him invisible when he twists it on his finger. Upon this discovery, he goes to the palace where he “seduced the queen, and with her help attacked and murdered the king and seized the throne” (106). Gyges’s ring does not force him to murder the king, it merely provides him with the means to do so. It was Gyges’s own longing for power that led to the regicide, as he could not resist the temptation. The story of Gyges closely parallels Bilbo Baggins’ discovery of the One Ring. Both rings were found in caves, which are often symbolic of the unconscious, and have the power to turn the wearer invisible, which alludes to the secretive nature of the Shadow archetype. While Tolkien’s Ring has a more seductive and intoxicating effect, the basic principle of the ring’s power remains. Using the Shadow, it weaponizes the unconscious against the individual, causing them to give in little by little to their base impulses and desires. The Ring preys on the basic need for power and security conscious beings possess, making it a danger to even the most resilient minds in the Tolkien legendarium.

Following in-universe chronology, the Ring of Power first appears in the final chapters of *The Silmarillion*. It was created at the dawn of the Third Age after the fall of Thangorodrim by Sauron, who was formerly a Maia called Marion. He created the Rings of Power by disguising himself as Annatar and counseling the Nodor at Eregion. There, he guided them to make the lesser rings, then created one of his own in Mordor, intent on bringing the elves under his control. It is detailed in *The Silmarillion* that “. . . while [Sauron] wore the One Ring he could perceive all the things that were done by means of the lesser rings, and he could see and govern

the very thoughts of those that wore them” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 288). This passage may provide the clearest insight to the actual ability and power of the One Ring. It acts as a looking glass into the consciousness of others and imposes the wearer’s will on them. In the hands of a powerful being like a Maia, the Ring can use the Shadow to subjugate the minds of others, in addition to empowering the Shadow archetype in the wearer.

In hobbit hands, however, the Shadow is not powerful enough to subjugate others. While the Ring can still influence the hobbit’s unconscious, it cannot harm others when used by them because of their humble, simple nature. It can still cause harm to the hobbit who is wearing it, as it “possesses anyone who carries it,” but it is relatively harmless to anyone else (Skogemann 164). This is why it remained in Bilbo’s care after he found it in the cave and why the council of Elrond decided the ring bearer would be Frodo. However, lack of physical power is not the only requirement. At the council in Rivendell, Elrond states “This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong” (Tolkien, *Lord* 269). The one who bears the Ring must have mental fortitude, otherwise the quest will fail. There must be another psychological element opposing the Shadow to resist the Ring’s power.

The inscription on the Ring, and the poem in which it originated, yields the most compelling connection between the Ring and the Shadow. Gandalf recounts the ancient Elven poem to Frodo in the chapter “The Shadow of the Past.” It is written as follows:

“Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
 Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
 Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
 One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
 In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
 One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
 In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.” (50)

The word “Shadow” in this poem is capitalized and thus emphasized every time it is mentioned. The Shadows are treated as proper nouns, rather than vague descriptors of the darkness in Mordor. To further place emphasis on the Shadows, the line in which they are mentioned is placed before and after the portion of the poem that is inscribed on the Ring itself. The Shadows that lie in Mordor are connected to the Ring, suggesting that while the Ring is physical and can be interacted with on a personal level, the Shadows exist on a higher plane, like the archetypal Shadow. Tolkien could be suggesting that the Ring exists as a key to gain access to the mind, while the Shadows are the active influence. The Ring is not merely symbolic of the Shadow but is empowered by it and uses it to turn the wearer’s own mind against them. Vulnerability to temptation is the price of consciousness. As long as there is more to the mind than instinct, there will be the possibility of cruelty and pride. This potential makes the purpose of the Ring possible. The poem states that the One Ring will “. . . in the darkness bind them/in the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.” The enjambment of the two lines suggests a close connection between the ultimate purpose of the One Ring and the Shadows that lie in Mordor. The Ring is presented as a means to an end, while the Shadow seems to be the end itself. The Ring does not bestow power itself, rather it is a tool that allows something larger and more sinister to take control of the wearer’s mind subtly. Since the Shadow exists in every conscious mind as a result of the collective unconscious, the Ring has the ability to influence every mind. With the Ring empowered by the archetypal Shadow, self-individualization becomes significantly more difficult, and its defeat almost impossible without sacrifice.

Frodo

Frodo's narrative in the story is one of great personal sacrifice. He uproots from his humble dwellings in the Shire to venture across Middle Earth, carrying a burden many dare not touch. His role as Ringbearer, placed on him by the Council of Elrond, not only places him at the crux of the greatest war to befall Middle Earth, but also forces him to fight an internal battle between the archetypes of Self and Shadow. In her essay, "A Jungian Interpretation of The Lord of the Rings," Bridgette Escobar Andersen states that Frodo was chosen as the Ringbearer because, "unlike all the other races of Middle Earth, the hobbits tend to be less immediately susceptible to the power of the One Ring" (12). She cites the hobbit's innocent and generally benevolent nature to support her claim. While this claim is true, there is another factor that makes Frodo the best candidate for Ringbearer, even over the other hobbits. Frodo's Self archetype is closer to the center of his personality compared to other characters. Through his self-awareness, education, and humility, he is mostly individuated before the journey even begins. Frodo is aware of and secure in his identity. He is not powerful like the Elves or the Wizards; if he takes the Ring, he would be shouldering a burden much larger than he has any business handling. However, he speaks to the Council of Elrond, feeling small and reluctant: "I will take the Ring,' he said. 'Though I do not know the way'" (Tolkien, *Lord* 270). In this case, his meekness and his humility are his greatest strengths. The Shadow thrives on the shame and weakness hidden in the corners of the psyche. Frodo is aware of his own weaknesses. Though he does not fully understand the Ring, he is aware of its danger or, at least, the Shadow's danger.

As his journey continues and his strength wanes, the internal battle between the Shadow and the Self becomes more and more apparent. Frodo, weary and in pain, begins to succumb to the burden. At one point while they are in Mordor, Frodo sinks so deep in despair that he cries to

Sam, saying “the quest has failed, Sam. Even if we get out of here, we can’t escape. Only the elves can escape. Away, away out of Middle-earth, far away over the sea. If even that is wide enough to keep the Shadow out” (Tolkien, *Lord* 911). Once again, the word “Shadow” is capitalized, signaling emphasis. Frodo begins to see the Shadow as more powerful than his internal conflict and recognizes its influence as a threat to Arda. His self-awareness, which was his strength in the beginning, becomes his weakness, as he despairs over the sheer magnitude of his burden. The Ring begins to overtake him, forcing his Shadow to the surface. However, his Self holds out just long enough for the Ring to be destroyed. Frodo emerges from his struggle “pale and worn, and yet himself again” (Tolkien, *Lord* 947). His Shadow does not consume him and ultimately, he achieves what he set out to do. However, his body and mind have taken a heavy toll. In defeating the Ring, and by extent his own Shadow, Frodo also loses pieces of his Self. The psychological and spiritual damage are so great, he cannot not remain in Middle-Earth and, instead, has to sail West with the Elves. Before departing, he tells Sam, “when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them” (Tolkien, *Lord* 1029). Frodo is talking about more than the Shire. Frodo gave up parts of his Self so the Shadow did not consume everyone and everything. The resilience and sacrifice of Frodo’s archetypal Self makes him the psychological hero of the story.

Gollum

It is no tall order to argue that Frodo’s main foil in the story is Gollum. Gollum possesses the Ring longer than any other character, except for Sauron. The Ring morphs both his body and mind, leaving him a silhouette of his former self. He becomes animal-like, described in *The Hobbit* as a “small, slimy creature” who hunts fish in the pools of his cave (Tolkien 68). He is completely obsessed with the Ring, referring to it as “my Precious” exclusively (68). Scholars,

such as Skogemann and Honegger, agree that Gollum is closely related to the Shadow archetype. Skogemann asserts, “in the psychological sense, Gollum is Frodo’s shadow, that same being who Frodo thought should have been killed when he first was told about him and his connection with the Ring” (23). However, this may not be the case. Frodo’s shadow is engaged in internal conflict with his Self archetype; it is the central internal conflict of the story. Therefore, it is unnecessary also to represent the conflict externally. In reality, Gollum’s role in Frodo’s journey is much more complex.

Gollum serves as a warning to Frodo, just as the story of Fëanor serves as a warning to the Maia and the Elves. He is an example of how dangerous the Shadow can be and how easily it can overtake the mind. According to Honegger, “Gollum, when we first meet him, represents a person who has been taken over by his Shadow” (Honegger 8). However, just as Frodo is not completely ruled by the Self, Gollum is not completely consumed by the Shadow. Before Frodo ever encounters Gollum, Gandalf tells the story of Smeagol and explains that Gollum is not wholly lost, saying: “There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark” (Tolkien, *Lord* 55). That little corner of Gollum’s mind creeps out of the dark when conditions are favorable. Several times on the journey to Mount Doom, Smeagol pokes his head out of the Shadow and reveals to Frodo what he truly is. It was revealed to Bilbo many years before in the events of *The Hobbit*: “[Gollum] was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking, and whispering” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 81). This realization gave Bilbo pause when he meant to slay Gollum in the cave. Frodo comes to the same conclusion. As the story progresses, he develops not only sympathy for Gollum, but an understanding of him. Frodo feels the power

of the Ring and the effect it has on his own Shadow. Gandalf's words in the Shire resonate with Frodo, as he begins to experience what the old wizard explained as the relationship between Gollum and the Ring: "He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter" (Tolkien, *Lord* 55). Gollum made his choice before he knew there was a choice to be made. By the time the choice was evident, it was too late. The Shadow had overtaken him. Though he appears to be a nuisance, he is actually Frodo's greatest asset. He shows Frodo the choice between the Shadow and the Self, giving Frodo the foresight and strength to endure where Smeagol failed. As a result, Frodo and Middle-Earth are saved.

Bilbo

If Frodo and Gollum are opposites, Bilbo falls right in between them. According to O'Neill, Bilbo is "clearly the ego," a part of the personal conscious rather than the collective unconscious (61). With this idea, O'Neill summarizes the events of the chapter "Riddles in the Dark" in *The Hobbit* through the psychoanalytic lens, saying, "The ego has courageously (more or less) entered the forbidden recesses of the unconscious and collided unexpectedly with its dark mirror image" (61). O'Neill refers to Gollum as this dark mirror image; however, this image could also be referring to the Ring, as Bilbo found it in the cave as well. The Ring made Gollum what he is, dragging him down into the dark cave of the unconscious. With Bilbo's finding of the ring, the audience gets a firsthand account of the Ring's capability and subtle, yet corrosive power.

Bilbo's discovery of the Ring is almost underwhelming considering its overall consequence. He finds it accidentally while crawling on the floor of the cave and "put[s] the ring in his pocket almost without thinking" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 65). The decision to take the Ring was largely an unconscious one. Like Gyges the Lydian, his actions initially appear inconsequential.

Bilbo doesn't even think twice about putting the Ring of Power in his pocket, a decision that would result in the war for Middle-Earth and the end of the Third Age. The Ring hid its true nature from him and disguised itself in the darkness of the unconscious in order to gain access to his mind, just as it did Gollum's. Gandalf intervenes before the Ring can consume Bilbo as it did Gollum, but there is still lasting damage. Years after the events of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo reports feeling "thin and stretched" as a result of being in possession of the Ring (Tolkien, *Lord* 47). The Ring changes him, restructuring his psyche. In Rivendell, when Frodo shows Bilbo the Ring upon request, "a shadow seemed to . . . [fall] between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands" (232). The use of the word "shadow" here is no mistake. When Bilbo's Shadow is revealed, his appearance becomes more like Gollum's. While it is not complete, it has consumed him to some degree. He is caught oscillating between the Shadow and the Self, between Gollum and Frodo. However, Bilbo's role in *The Lord of the Rings* narrative is not merely another warning against the Shadow, like Gollum's. Bilbo proves that the Ring does not always prevail and that Gollum's fate is not the only one afforded to hobbits that possess the Ring. The Ring has affected him but not consumed him. Though he is no longer the hobbit he was, he still has the light inside of him.

Galadriel

In almost every aspect, Galadriel is the most powerful female character in *The Lord of the Rings*. The White Lady of Lothlorien is a wise and gentle queen, whose history stretches back to a time before the Elves walked Middle Earth: the Age of the Trees. Like most of the Elves, she shows signs of individualization because of her many years and experiences. While her Self archetype centers her psyche, it is accompanied by her very strong Anima archetype. Of the women in *The Lord of the Rings*, she is the one who most closely represents the Anima.

Honegger, in agreement with other scholars, states Galadriel is “. . . clearly a personification of the benevolent side of the Anima . . .” (Honegger 9). However, she does have desires and ambitions. In *The Silmarillion*, as the Lords of the Noldor debate whether to leave Valinor, Galadriel is the only woman to stand among the princes and kings, longing to see the lands across the sea. Tolkien writes, “no oaths she swore, but the words of Fëanor concerning Middle-earth had kindled a fire in her heart, for she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 84). A younger Galadriel, before she walked across the Helcaraxë and witnessed war after war, openly longed for dominion over land, for power. As beautiful and wise as she is, her ambition is strong, and her otherworldly nature makes her more dangerous than one would initially surmise.

By the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, she has obtained what she desires, yet millennia have not snuffed out her initial ambition. She admits to this when Frodo offers her the Ring, saying “I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer” (Tolkien, *Lord* 365). Her ambition, as controlled as it is, still makes her vulnerable to the Ring. She considers taking it and replacing the Dark Lord with a Queen, declaring “All shall love me and despair” (366). The “threatening side” of the Anima allows the Ring’s influence to overtake her and reveal her Shadow (Honegger 9). The scene emits great power, revealing the potential danger if Galadriel, or any being of her caliber, were to succumb to the Shadow. However, the moment passes as quickly as it came. She becomes herself again, saying “I pass the test. . . . I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel” (366). Galadriel’s encounter with the One Ring is unique. She actually breaks the Ring’s hold on her with little comparative cost to other characters who have successfully resisted the influence of the Ring. She was able to keep her psyche aligned with the power of her Anima and Self archetypes, but not without diminishing.

Tolkien is careful to emphasize the importance of this scene. In Edith Crowe's essay, "Power in Arda: Sources, Uses, and Misuses," she asserts that "Galadriel seemed to hold a particular fascination for Tolkien, since he continued to work on her character and history until the end of his life" (274). Galadriel, being as important to Tolkien as she was, is placed upon a pedestal. She joins the central quest of the narrative, the destruction of the Ring, by showing how it can be defeated with the mind alone. She shows that victory over the Ring cannot be obtained by gaining power but by diminishing it.

Victory over the Ring

The Self plays a critical role in the defeat of the Ring. According to the Jungian reading, it would stand to reason that the defeat of the Ring could be brought about by Frodo's Self overcoming his Shadow. However, the resolution of the story does not come about so simply. Tolkien believed that realizing one's self is not enough to overcome evil. He writes in a 1941 letter to Michael Tolkien: "However, the essence of a fallen world is that the best cannot be attained by free enjoyment, or by what is called 'self-realization' (usually a nice name for self-indulgence, wholly inimical to the realization of other selves); but by denial, by suffering" (Tolkien, *Letters* 118). Knowledge and actualization of the Self is important, but it can only defeat the darkness if one is prepared to deny it. After Galadriel denies the Ring in "The Mirror of Galadriel," she says she will "diminish" (Tolkien, *Lord* 366). Her personal victory over the ring does not make her greater but lesser, as she has to give up a part of herself to defeat it. She sacrifices a piece of herself, her ambition and longing for wide, unguarded lands, in order to overcome the Ring's temptation. She chooses peace instead of power and diminishes because of it. Therefore, because of her sacrifice, she is able to return to her home in Valinor and find peace.

Likewise, Frodo and Sam have to sacrifice parts of themselves in order to destroy the Ring. Sam, though he is not carrying the Ring itself, repeatedly expresses a willingness to help, even if he suffers. On the slope of Mount Doom, he says: “I’ll get there, if I leave everything but my bones behind,’ . . . ‘And I’ll carry Mr. Frodo up myself, if it breaks my back and heart”” (Tolkien, *Lord* 939). Sam delivers on his promise, literally carrying Frodo for a stint on the last leg of their journey at great physical cost. Without his sacrifice, the Ring would never have been destroyed. Sam becomes a representation of the Self, externalizing the difficult sacrifice Frodo must make to bring about the destruction of the Ring.

However, in the face of the impossible task, Frodo seemingly fails where Sam and Galadriel succeed. His Self falters, and the Shadow consumes him when he “put[s] on the Ring and claim[s] it for his own . . .” (946). Ultimately, he is not able to overcome the Shadow with his own power. In the end, it is Gollum that brings about the destruction of the Ring. Verlyn Flieger summarizes Gollum’s seizing of the Ring and subsequent fall, saying, “evil destroys itself” (qtd. in Honneger 9). This assertion holds true, as the Ring, which draws power from the Shadow, is destroyed by the Shadow-possessed Gollum. However, the circumstances of the Ring’s physical destruction do not negate Frodo’s sacrifice. Although his Self failed to overpower the Shadow at the mouth of Orodruin, it persevered throughout the journey and endured the difficult and torturous task of bearing the Ring to Mordor. His larger sacrifice was not enough to destroy the Ring on its own but the several smaller sacrifices he made along the journey led to the victory. Frodo afforded Gollum kindness again and again, despite Gollum’s trickery and treachery. His kindness is a sacrifice in itself, and his mercy for Gollum facilitates the Ring’s defeat. It is because of these small sacrifices that the Ring is destroyed, even after Frodo’s strength fails.

Conclusion

In the end, *The Lord of the Rings* is a story of sacrifice. Frodo's journey is one of enduring hardship in the face of overwhelming odds, both internally and externally. He is able to resist the Ring and the weaponized Shadow along the course of the journey, remaining kind and humble throughout. Ultimately, his individualization fails him in Mordor, however, his sacrifice is not in vain. Though Jung's theory is applicable and considered highly relevant to the psychological narrative of the work, Tolkien's aim reaches beyond a strict psychoanalytical reading. It is not Frodo's individualization that defeats the Ring, which would follow the Jungian reading, but his willingness to sacrifice. Tolkien, while he believes self-awareness and individuation are vital, does not believe they are the key to peace. Too much focus on the self can lead to indulgence and leaves the door open to pride. The giving of the self is the key, whether it be in large or small quantities. Sacrifice and suffering foster hope, freedom, and victory. Once the self is given, one may escape the binding darkness and pass into the west, into peace.

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Ashlyn Hamrick

First Comes Fear, Then Comes Toxic Masculinity:

Analyzing the Insecurities of the Male Protagonists in *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences*

How does society determine what it means to be a “real man?” The answers to this ambiguous question are vastly different because the rules of masculinity are not completely established due to changing time periods and personal experiences. According to Frank Pittman, masculinity is “what we expect of men...those qualities and activities that men think will make them men, that will distinguish them from women” (xiii). However, Pittman complicates his statement by adding, “When masculinity is overripe, it becomes ‘machismo’ . . . [and] is not always a kind and gentle concept. Masculinity is a cultural concept. . . . Masculinity is an ‘artificial state’ [but] is supposed to be about protection of the family” (Pittman xiii–vi). In other words, without a clear definition of healthy and normal masculine behavior, masculinity can quickly become misconstrued and toxic. Professor Gregory J. Hampton suggests an origin of toxic masculinity: “A male child must grasp some understanding of masculinity if he is to survive in the patriarchal structure. Whether or not a male child learns a performance of masculinity that is ‘productive’ and ‘good’ is largely dependent upon the living conditions and environment he must function within” (194). If this is the case, then beliefs about masculinity’s nature are generational, but the teacher is not as influential as the material (Hampton 194). Other academics and theorists, like Silvan Tompkins, who coined the macho script theory, join this conversation of what it means to be masculine or overly masculine.

Regardless, beyond what individuals observe within their personal lives, hundreds of masculine prototypes flood the media, and the unrealistic standards are those that have historically affected the social climate of cultures, especially in America over the past century. Hampton explains that the masculinities present in media—specifically literature—are imitations of a society’s priorities, ideals, culture, and values (195). Furthermore, he points out that “although the narratives are written in a fictional genre, they speak historical truths about very real social conditions and tragedies in America” (195). One type of a fictional narrative is drama, which extracts moments from reality and focuses on these experiences through live-action performances, producing a highly effective portrayal of what it is to be a human surrounded by external influences (society, culture, language, art, community, and tragedy, among others) and internal influence (thoughts, beliefs, emotions, reactions, values, and prejudices). Therefore, I chose to analyze two American plays set in the mid-1900s—*Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *Fences* by August Wilson—where each of the leading male characters, Willy Loman and Troy Maxson, are influenced by the shifting culture, which produced new standards of ideal masculinity. As a result, these characters, who represent the mass male population at the time, internalize their fears of failing as men, causing their execution of authority to take the form of toxic masculinity, which negatively affects their relationships with their work and their families.

The repercussions of Willy and Troy’s toxic masculinities advance each play’s plot, which traces how their struggles at work and low self-esteem affect their dysfunctional family dynamics. Both Willy the salesman and Troy the garbage collector are not successful in their jobs, and they worry about whether or not they will make ends meet. As a result, Willy feels emasculated when compared to more fortunate men in his life, like his brother Ben, who found manhood and riches in adventure, and his successful neighbor Charley, who offers him financial

assistance. Similarly, Troy is repeatedly denied a promotion from garbage collector to garbage truck driver because of his race. Throughout *Fences*, Troy risks losing his job by continuously fighting for the promotion even though he knows he does not own a driver's license. However, their burdens do not end in the workplace; when they come home from work, they must deal with the stress of having a family. Willy's relationships with his middle-aged sons, Biff and Happy, are stuck in the past. Willy dwells on the disappointment of not living out his high school dreams through his children, who are also failures. Meanwhile, Biff battles with the scarring experience of catching his dad cheating on his mom Linda, who Willy takes for granted and talks to in a demeaning manner. In Troy's home, his wife Rose pressures him to build her a nice fence around their house, but he never does. Instead, he drinks with his friend Bono and cheats on Rose with another woman. Still angered by his failure as a baseball star, he discourages his son Cory from pursuing a career in sports, which leads to the downfall of their relationship. As shown throughout each play, Troy and Willy are reminded of past failures, which lead to shame and guilt, producing negative masculinities that ruin relationships and decrease job success.

Silvan Tompkins' Macho Script and Cultural Considerations

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* are set in the mid-1900s, a time when society reshaped the definition of "manliness," causing confusion in the way that men were expected to behave. After World War II, men returned to America to find women they used to do before enlisting. The shock of this role reversal, as well as dealing with the traumas and repercussions of war and violence, led to an effort to regain what it means to be masculine, resulting in an amplified version of masculinity. When an environment or culture deems "patriarchal supremacy"¹ as the highest and most admirable values of politics and family, masculinity

¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "A form of social organization in which the father or oldest male is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line; government or rule by a

becomes problematic (Mosher 64). As a result, society creates an intangible list of standards—like the division of the “strong masculine dominance” and the “weak female submission”—that a male must achieve in order to be accepted and respected (64). The man that ascribes to this “machismo” ideology affects everyone around him, especially his immediate family (64). In other words, the values and ideals of a country or community affect life within the home. Because of changing economics and politics, the structure of the American family mimicked the operations of government. For instance, the move towards mass urbanization with its emphasis on enclosure is strikingly similar to a subplot in *Fences* where Rose yearns for a fence to surround her house. Due to the emphasis on security, the role of the wife as the homemaker and the husband as the ultimate provider looked much different in this new American society than they had before. The expanding expectations of excelling as a businessman in the family unit produced more responsibility and more stress than anticipated (Williams 62). Grant Williams describes the “American male identity . . . to be remarkably similar to the perception of the bomb, instilling both confidence and fear, marking the era as remarkably contradictory” (64). Comparing post–World War II masculinity to the invention of the atomic bomb may seem extreme, but the impact on society is the same: hope for a renewed sense of normalcy and promise for progression mixed with the lingering fear that in the wrong hands, trouble could come.

Additionally, the economic climate of the country was drastically changing, eventually producing a type of American dream that particularly encouraged consumerism and materialism. In “‘Death of A Salesman’s’ Willy Loman and ‘Fences’s’ Troy Maxson: Pursuers of the Elusive

man or men” (“Patriarchy”). For the purpose of this thesis, I prefer another definition that more accurately describes the implications of a society that idolizes the patriarchal system: “The predominance of men in positions of power and influence in society, with cultural values and norms favouring men” (“Patriarchy”).

American Dream,” James Walton points out how America’s materialistic society entangles Willy and Troy. Willy mainly desires household materials and social approval; whereas, Troy yearns for fair and equal opportunities (57). Admittedly, Troy and his family do express some interest in status, a nice fence, and a television, but their underlying desires are different from Willy’s because of their race, a crucial difference between the two men that will not be addressed to its fullest potential in this paper due to length limitations.

However, as Hampton reveals, “Pressures to meet Euro-American standards of manhood as provider, protector, and disciplinarian have been internalized and accepted as standards of manhood by most African American men despite inequalities in earning potential and employment and limited access to educational opportunities” (202). The shifting society in post-World War II America produced masculinity standards created by white men for white men. Men of other races tried to force these standards to fit their mold, adding to their disadvantage. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy represents the lives of numerous white men during that period who set the masculine ideal so high that they themselves could never achieve it (195, 202). In fact, within the last decade or so, more and more critics have decided that this play is “a profoundly male tragedy, one in which its protagonist is destroyed by a debilitating concept of masculinity,” but I believe this is the case within *Fences* as well (McDonough 27). As a result of unrealistic masculinity standards, the culture of the 1950s was a breeding ground for frustration and impossibility. By encouraging work that required one to meet an unobtainable ideal, this mindset shaped how white people and African American people viewed the role of a man.

As shown, social constructs influence the way personalities and behaviors are formed. Therefore, in this paper, I will use Silvan Tompkins’s macho script as a theoretical source to support the claims I make about Willy and Troy’s toxic masculinities. Though Tompkins’s

theory is much more complex, it is essentially made up of two main components called scripts and affects. Scripts are comprised of scenes, or events that influence or define a person's personality, and that form a set of organized rules for the purpose of "interpreting, responding, defending, and creating similar scenes" (Mosher 61). Affects, which are either "acceptable" or "unacceptable" forms of sensory feedback, likewise influence script rules (61). Dr. Belinda Hopkins simplifies the script-affect theory by saying, "However we choose to behave in [a] moment will be *triggered by an affect* or a script. Hence, *affect* is the birthplace of all motivation. . . . 'Script' refers to an affect management mechanism . . . that prevents similar experiences [from] producing 'new' responses each time they occur" (30). In short, scripts combine affects to produce behaviors. For example, the macho script is one kind of script. In this script, the "macho man creates, interprets, and responds to scenes that threaten, challenge, or afford opportunities to enact his role as a macho man according to the set of rules in the macho script," which is comprised of "three behavioral dispositions justified by beliefs: (1) entitlement to callous sex, (2) violence as manly, and (3) danger as exciting" (61). Depending on the events or scenes a man experiences in his life, he could form a negative, hyper-masculinity, which influences his personality and ideology.

As the macho script develops, the characteristics of masculine and feminine gender roles become vastly different, exaggerated by the hyper-macho man who cringes at the thought of acting "feminine." Therefore, the man will assert hostile dominance, which is ultimately "motivated by the affects of excitement, anger, disgust, and contempt" (64). It is important to note the immense power a man could gain by feeling like he is excelling in both areas of the post-World War II life: the domestic and the occupational. However, if a man feels he that is struggling in one or both of these realms, he could experience emotions such as shame, guilt,

fear, or inadequacy. Such is the case for Willy and Troy. Both men internalize their fears of failing the established masculine ideal and overcompensate with a toxic version of masculinity.

Toxic Masculinity as the Fear of Losing Power

Similarly, when a man is insecure in his masculine identity, he will seek out opportunities to gain morsels of power to briefly build himself back up artificially. For instance, Willy and Troy attempt to reach for power by committing adultery. An insecure male obsessively desires the authority, leadership, and power that society claims he inherently deserves, so he can appear to have “control over [his] own and others’ resources [freeing him] from the influence of external forces” (Wisse par. 2). However, a false accumulation of control leads to constant fear and worry over if or when he will lose his power. Barbara Wisse claims that the stakes of power-loss increase when the organization, such as a business or a family, has a competitive climate (par. 2). Likewise, Willy and Troy represent the average American man pursuing the American Dream and failing to obtain it, comparing themselves to and competing with those around them who appear more successful (Hampton 195). Failing to realize the American Dream is one thing, but failing to the extent of falling into poverty is another stab to both Willy’s and Troy’s male egos. Perhaps the question is: how far will a defeated man go to find victory? According to Wisse’s study, “Power increases peoples’ focus on rewards and, given the general lack of constraints, they are free to devote all of their attention to the pursuit of their goals. [They] tend to prioritize their own goals, act in a more goal-consistent manner, and are more persistent in their goal pursuit” (par. 7). If a man feels that power—whether it is real or not—increases his chance of reaching a certain masculine ideal, he will do whatever it takes to become the alpha male. Therefore, if there are areas in a man’s life diminishing his masculinity, he will overcompensate in other areas to make up for his losses.

Although it is my belief that Willy and Troy's toxic masculinities continue to worsen in adulthood due to a fear of power loss, I should mention that authors like Grant Williams argue that, specifically in *Death of a Salesman*, "Masculinity . . . [is] a troubled concept with no identifiable definition or normative example. It is less that Willy fails to live up to one ideal and, instead, that a consistent conception of masculinity is not defined" (54). Williams claims it is the confusion from changing ideals that causes Willy to portray a "dominant masculinity, [which is] a new identity bound up with post-war idealism and strength," and does not label Willy's masculinity as toxic (54). Furthermore, he asserts that Willy relieves others' worries of masculinity by "serving as an almost sacrificial figure for masculinity" (54). However, his failure instills even more fear into other men who already felt they were losing the American dream since Willy's final effort at achieving masculinity is killing himself, which sends the tragic message that it is better to die than not to live up to societal standards. To support this claim, Tompkins, in his macho script theory, observes that "fear-expression and fear-avoidance are inhibited through parental dominance and contempt until habituation partially reduces them and activates excitement" (Mosher 67). In other words, the macho man was conditioned in childhood to be ashamed of his fears, producing this dangerous mindset: "Don't be sacred. Be brave. Be tough. Be daring. Become excited by the danger. Risk injury or death. . . . Be contemptuous of anger and cowards" (68). As a result, this toxic masculinity teaches that a man must do anything he can to avoid an overwhelming flood of fear, even if it causes death. Ironically, if he is constantly trying to avoid the shameful feeling of fear, he will always be worried that he is going to experience it, like a watchman on a never-ending shift.

Therefore, Willy's failure does not relieve him of the pressures of the masculine ideal. For example, before he commits suicide by crashing his car, his son Biff places a rubber pipe—

presumably his original suicide plan—on the table in front of him, yelling, “What is this supposed to do, make a hero out of you? This supposed to make me feel sorry for you?” (Miller 104). While Biff can recognize the dangers of masculinity and the lifelong chase after the American Dream, other male characters like Charley still feel the pressure to achieve the standard. After Willy’s funeral, Linda expresses her confusion regarding Willy’s final decision, saying, “I can’t understand it. . . . First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He only needed a little salary,” and Charley responds with a socially accepted answer: “No man only needs a little salary. . . . A salesman is got to dream. . . . It comes with the territory” (110–111). In other words, Charley claims that in order to be a businessman in their society, a man has no other option but to “dream,” as in the “American Dream,” and a salary is just a small portion of what that dream entails. Overall, Willy’s “solution” to showcase his masculinity is an act of power and control, an attempt to prove that he is the only one in charge of his life and therefore can end it when he sees fit. Suicide is Willy’s last move to showcase vainly and uselessly to his family and those around him that he can be powerful. However, his death leaves him permanently powerless and ineffective in the end, and his actions throughout the play lead to this end result.

Ironically, Willy fears losing his masculinity (in other words, his power), but by exuding a toxic form of masculinity, he is the one who destroys his sense of self, negatively affecting his salesman work. Interestingly enough, for Willy, a “hard-working red-blooded, white American male,” his failure at obtaining manhood within the realms of his work is most tragic, since he already has an advantage during the time period: his race (Hampton 202). Willy not only possesses this inherent qualification, but he also has a successful neighbor and friend, Charley, who offers him a well-paying job:

CHARLEY: I offered you a job. You can make fifty dollars a week.

WILLY: I've got a job.

CHARLEY: Without pay? What kind of job is a job without pay?... I am offering you a job... When...are you going to grow up?

WILLY [*furiously*]: You big ignoramus, if you say that to me again, I'll rap you one! I don't care how big you are! [*He's ready to fight.*]

[*Pause.*]

CHARLEY [*kindly . . .*]: How much [money] do you need, Willy?

WILLY: Charley, I'm strapped, I'm strapped. I don't know what to do. I was just fired.

CHARLEY: Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything?...

The only thing you've got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that.

WILLY: I've always tried to think otherwise. . . . I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing—

CHARLEY: Why must everybody like you? Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me...but I'll give you a job. (74–75)

Not surprisingly, Willy is too prideful to accept the offer, and initially lies about his employment status, because it would reinforce Willy's belief that Charley is more masculine than he is in that Charley has the power to offer a job at his own flourishing company. At the beginning of the excerpt, Charley rebukes Willy directly for his immaturity and indirectly for his masculinity. Willy becomes defensive, revealing his low self-confidence and clearly exhibiting one of the behavioral dispositions of Tomkins' macho-script: "violence as manly" (Mosher 61). On the same note, Mosher, by using Tomkins' macho-script, explains that if a man feels fear when he

encounters a scenario, then he would feel “increase[d] uncertainty and meaninglessness, making control impossible, and defeat more shaming” (77). In other words, if Willy were to accept Charley’s help, then he would be publicly admitting to failing as a salesman and providing for his household, which was looked down upon by his society. In fact, Charley’s fourth line reiterates the post–World War II masculine ideal by saying, “The only thing you’ve got in this world is what you can sell” (Miller 75). Willy, who desperately wants to be the boss, knows that he would be putting himself in the position of an employee, losing any power that he thought he had as a salesman.

However, it is clear who has the power in this conversation through how each man uses language. In the above excerpt, Charley asks six questions and Willy does not ask any questions. As a result, Charley guides the direction of their conversation, which means that he has assumed a position of verbal power and sway. Also, Charley could easily rephrase his questions as statements, but by framing them as questions, he does not necessarily give Willy advice or answers. Instead, Charley’s tone seems to patronize and mock Willy. Meanwhile, Willy’s rhythm drastically changes with each line. He begins with short responses then moves to angry exclamations and anxiety-ridden repetitions—“I’m strapped, I’m strapped”—before finally struggling to voice a full thought. Because he is not confident in himself as a man talking to another man, his language is disheveled, sharply contrasting with Charley’s demeanor and consistent questioning.

In Willy’s last line, he attempts to question the masculine standards that he has been conditioned to believe, such as being “impressive” and “well-liked.” As was the case for many working-class men in the post–World War II society, Willy is discouraged from discussing his concerns. Charley’s response dismisses Willy’s attempts to talk about his struggles, and instead,

he offers Willy the only solution he knows could make Willy more masculine and successful: a well-paying job. Furthermore, by acknowledging that Willy does not like him, Charley addresses the common occurrence that workplace masculinity competitions often result in a dislike of the leader or the most successful man. However, Charley reveals that he is willing to overlook being disliked, because he knows that the root causes are jealousy and insecurity.

As for Troy, a black man working for white men, he must “mute his dominance in a way that suffocates his self-esteem,” and in turn, around his family, he portrays his masculinity strictly in a dominant and authoritative manner (Hampton 198–199). At work, he faces the lingering effects of racism and discrimination. Additionally, he does not have a driver’s license, so he is not allowed to become a garbage truck driver, and he cannot “take it to the union,” because he cannot read (Wilson 3). Unlike Willy, Troy does not have a Charley figure to offer him a better job. Consequently, he feels stuck as a garbageman, living in poverty due to being underpaid and overworked. Troy, however, does not sulk in his condition. Instead, he consistently confronts his manager, Mr. Rand, about the issue of “all whites driving and the colored lifting” to the point where his coworkers believe he will be fired (2). Why did Troy wait after all his years as a garbageman to start fighting for a higher position? Perhaps being repeatedly denied a driving position reminded him of scenes he experienced earlier in his life, which threatened his chances of being “masculine” and eventually produced a key macho-man behavioral disposition of “danger as exciting” (Mosher 61). For example, Troy wanted to play baseball in the Major Leagues, but he was denied advancement due to racial discrimination. As a talented baseball player, he felt exploited after being unreasonably denied recognition. In his “real job,” where he is left almost penniless, he experiences the same negative emotion (Walton 63).

The fact that Troy could get fired for confronting his overseers at his job is not only culturally problematic, but also dangerous, as Troy is already struggling financially and arguably should not risk being stripped of a job. However, confrontation at this level is also dangerous because Troy is receiving good and bad attention for standing up against an antiquated system. In general, the man who gains attention could believe he is gaining power and leadership, which is exciting for a man who needs to feel powerful and authoritative. On a similar note, Tompkins writes that the “successful macho warrior is excited, ready for surprise, angry, and proud, contemptuous and fearless” (Mosher 63). Before a man can fully achieve this position though, he must master those macho affects through “social stratification,” which “in general rests upon the affect stratification inherent in adversarial contests” (63). In other words, Troy feels the need to confront those in higher positions than he is to reach the status of a “macho man.”

Although it would have been culturally progressive to “give everybody a chance to drive the truck” (Wilson 3), Troy may desire a higher position not just for the paycheck, but also for a masculinity boost, since his experiences with denied advancement already diminished his masculinity. When Troy is eventually promoted to a driver, he is understandably proud of this accomplishment. However, it is interesting to note that he downplays the fact that he is not truly qualified:

BONO: Been fighting with them people about driving and ain't even got a license. Mr.

Rand know you ain't got no driver's license?

TROY: Driving ain't nothing. All you do is point the truck where you want it to go.

Driving ain't nothing.

BONO: Do Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license? That's what I'm talking about. I ain't asked if driving was easy. I asked if Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license.

TROY: He ain't got to know. The man ain't got to know my business. Time he find out, I have two or three driver's licenses. (45–46)

In this scene, Troy initially avoids Bono's question. Instead, he responds proudly, as if he believes he is too good to abide by the law, but I believe he is afraid to admit that he does not meet the qualifications of becoming a driver. When Bono confronts him, Troy again refuses to answer the question directly, claiming that having a driver's license is personal, private information. In addition, it is interesting that Troy calls Mr. Rand "the man" instead of using his name as Bono does, which allows readers to compare Bono's masculine self-image with Troy's. Bono has enough confidence in his masculinity and himself to refer to his boss in a respectful and normal way, putting himself on the same level. Similarly, when Troy says, "Driving ain't nothing," he means to claim that even though he has never driven before, he does not think it will be difficult to learn on the job. Even though readers know what Troy is saying, the use of a double negative interprets the sentence as, "Driving is not nothing." The phrase then suggests that learning to drive is indeed a difficult task. By using a double negative, Troy could be hinting at his insecurities, and therefore, the language should not be written off as merely the way he speaks. Troy also refers to his concealed information as "his business," indirectly calling himself the boss of his actions and decisions, which no one can take from him.

Furthermore, Troy's confidence stems from the recent influx of power from getting a promotion, resulting in increased masculine behaviors. Surprisingly, later in the play and after several threats to his masculinity—such as confessing his infidelity and being challenged by his

son Cory—he tells Bono he is considering retirement. He reasons that “[driving] ain’t like working the back of the truck. Ain’t got nobody to talk to . . . feel like you working by yourself” (Wilson 83). Bono rightfully claims Troy has it much easier now in his current position than he did before, but Troy is only thinking about community. Perhaps this new desire to retire is a sign of a defeated hypermasculinity with sanded-down edges, revealing a shape that is similar to a normal and healthy masculine mindset.

Connections Between Financial Failure and Infidelity

As a result of toxic masculinity, both of these men negatively affect their families by cheating on their spouses, causing their children second-hand grief. A husband’s threatened masculinity in the workplace drastically affects the way he views himself in his home, especially within the marriage bond. Christin Munsch’s experiment on the correlation between relative earnings and marital outcomes finds that “the increase in the probability that men will engage in infidelity . . . occurs as they become more economically dependent” (par. 5). This conclusion is the case for both Willy and Troy as they struggle in their jobs, carrying the burdensome load of corporate inadequacy into the sacred bedroom. Even though their wives are supportive, the stress of failing as the provider—a stereotypical male ideal—is too much for these men to accept. So, they revert to infidelity to affirm their threatened masculinity (Munsch 474). According to a sociological study by Dr. Edward Fosse, “Low-income men are said to adopt the goals of mainstream society but fail to possess the means to accomplish those goals,” resulting in a self-worth defined by “sexual promiscuity, paternal abandonment, and physical domination of women, primarily because they are denied traditional means of status attainment through the labor market” (127). In other words, when a man cannot adequately prove himself through his work, he seeks out other opportunities, such as infidelity—since a “compulsive, impersonal

seduction of women reaffirms a man's flagging sense of masculinity"—to replenish what is lacking, resulting in hypermasculinity (Pittman 26–27).

Without a doubt, both Willy and Troy commit adultery in an attempt to restore their failing masculinity. For Willy, he becomes involved with “The Woman” while traveling for business in Boston. He believes that this woman will do exactly what he wants: put him “right through to the buyers” (Miller 25). In his own mind, Willy mentally justifies committing adultery because she will be a financial asset. However, after cheating, he is even less fortunate, and his self-esteem as a man plummets. He confesses his insecurity to Linda, saying, “I get so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys” (25). This quote reveals that he cannot be alone with his thoughts, as solitude is a dangerous place for self-reflection and self-doubt. Additionally, Willy admits that his failure as a salesman means that he is not adequately providing for his family. In Willy's mind, the shame of not sufficiently providing for his family through financial means diminishes his self-adequacy. Consequently, he secretly relieves this shame to make himself feel more masculine by seeing another woman who does not rely on him financially. In fact, post–World War II American culture encouraged the belief that the husband, as the “head of the household,”² must provide a sustainable income for his family. However, if Willy would put aside the society's standards of the ideal male, then he would see that Linda supports him by tracking their finances and reminding him of approaching due dates for unpaid bills. Meanwhile, she defends him from their sons who do not think highly

² An outdated term used in the mid 1900s to represent that the male is the provider of his house. Potentially derived from the Bible, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (*New King James Version*, Eph. 5:23). The term is now used mainly in filing taxes to identify the person, regardless of gender, who “pay[s] for more than half of the household expenses,” is “considered unmarried for the tax year, and...[has] a qualifying child or dependent” (Experts).

of their father by saying, “A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man,” meaning that a man is to put in hard work regardless of his success rate (Miller 40). Unfortunately, the secrecy and guilt from committing adultery causes Willy to treat Linda inconsistently. One minute, he is gentle and kind to her, and the next minute, he is angrily yelling at her to “stop interrupting!” (Miller 47). When challenges against a man’s dominance and leadership arise, only a fragile masculinity like Willy’s would produce such outbursts. Fred Ribkoff offers an explanation as to why Willy acts capricious towards Linda:

Willy is driven to commit [adultery] by feelings of shame that arise out of his sense of inadequacy as a man. His adulterous affair with “The Woman” . . . is a desperate attempt to confirm and maintain his self-esteem. . . . Willy believes that he turns to another woman out of loneliness for his wife . . . [b]ut at the root of his loneliness and his need of a woman are feelings of shame he cannot face. He is driven by feelings of inadequacy and failure to seek himself outside of himself, in the eyes of others. "The Woman" makes him feel that he is an important salesman and a powerful man. (9, 11)

Ribkoff identifies Willy’s fear of failing the masculine ideal, and when Willy senses he has lost control of his image, he does something “manly”—cheats on his spouse—to avoid emotions of shame, guilt, and inferiority. Linda will never make Willy feel “important” and “powerful,” because she knows the truth of his situation and the root of his insecurity, but Willy presents “The Woman” with a false image. Tomkins’ macho script theory adds further depth to Willy’s useless effort to regain his masculinity: “To be a macho man is to fulfill and validate the self through scripts that interpret, predict, control, replicate, and evaluate the manly affects of surprise, excitement, anger, disgust, and contempt [to] prevent experiencing the unmanly affects

of fear, distress, and shame” (Mosher 65). Truly, Willy only plays the role of the ideal man by pretending that he has control and by concealing his insecurities.

Additionally, Willy walks on eggshells around his son Biff who caught him cheating on Linda. Willy knows Biff has the power to bring up his infidelity at any moment, even if it is fifteen years later, which is another threat to his crumbling masculinity. Not to mention, Willy attempts to live out his dreams by imposing his personal desires, the American Dream and a white-collar job, onto his sons. Williams notes that Willy puts more pressure on Biff, as if “the more that Biff achieved . . . hypermasculine goals, the more Willy could identify himself as possessing some degree of masculine excellence. When those traits in Biff started to disappear, so too did Willy's self-confidence” (60). However, Willy’s insecurity and confusion about his own manhood ultimately leads to Biff’s resentment of him, since Biff eventually recognizes that Willy did him a disservice by “[blowing him] so full of hot air [that he] could never stand taking orders from anybody” (Miller 105). “Hot air” could represent the toxic masculine pride that inhibits him from submitting, which is traditionally called a “feminine” attribute. After all, there will always be someone who is more successful or more powerful than he is. Biff acknowledges how his father’s examples of masculinity affect him by saying, “I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them. . . . I’m nothing” (106). Biff realizes that “he can redirect his own life to a more enjoyable and realistic future as he lets go of Willy's dreams and desires for him and becomes his own man” (Wattley 15). However, it appears that Happy will further recycle his father’s toxic masculinity. In the play’s requiem, Biff says about his dead father, “He had the wrong dreams. . . . He never knew who he was,” while Happy exclaims, “I’m gonna show [Biff] and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It’s

the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man” (Miller 111). He fought it out here, and this is where I’m gonna win it for him” (111). Happy claims that his father’s vision is the “only dream you can have” (111). By using the word “you,” Happy directly speaks to an all-male audience, specifically the men in his society. He uses the word “can” to emphasize that Willy’s dream is the “only” dream, which males in that American, materialistic culture are allowed and expected to have. Happy thinks that he will win the battle that his father lost—becoming the “number-one man”—but, as in Biff’s case, there will always be someone higher. Consequently, the dream, which was not only Willy’s dream, but also the dream of many other men in his society, is maddening, as it is unattainable. Overall, Happy follows after his father’s teachings, not pausing to consider for himself what he values. Instead, he adheres to human-made standards and values that falsely promote the necessity of “the only dream,” known as the materialistic American Dream where the “man of the household” is all-powerful.

Similar to Willy, Troy blames his infidelity on his troubles at work. When confessing his infidelity to Rose, he says of the other woman, “She gives me a different idea...a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems . . . be a different man. I ain’t got to wonder how I’m gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain’t ever been” (Wilson 68–69). In this line, Troy admits that he feels immense pressure from his family, unlike when he is with a woman who is not dependent on or tied to him. The other woman does not know about his personal, occupational, and familial issues, but Rose is a reminder of these struggles. Within his home, he fears that he cannot fulfill the expectations of provider, husband, and father. Admittedly, Troy cares about the wellbeing of his family which is why he searches for a stress reliever, but he finds the wrong one. Considering a research-based article, Wisse says that a “fear of power loss

may prompt leaders to engage in self-serving behavior by prioritizing their self-interest at the expense of others' interests" (par. 3). In short, Troy is considered the leader of his family, a role model for his son, and a place of security for his wife. However, he committed adultery, which is a self-serving behavior that neglects and disregards others in the family. Troy intends to free himself from the guilt of being an inadequate leader by indulging in an activity that would make him, and only him, feel more powerful. After Troy's confession, Rose stands her ground and passionately describes how she "planted [herself] inside of [Troy] and waited to bloom...to find out . . . it wasn't ever gonna bloom" (Wilson 71). Here, Rose admits she too could not be herself with Troy, but this response angers Troy; he aggressively grabs her arm and yells, "You say I take and don't give! . . . I done give you everything I got. Don't you tell that lie on me!" (71). Troy is insulted, because he does not understand what his wife is saying. Rose clearly knows that Troy has given her marriage, children, and a house, everything their society expected a man to give a woman. However, Rose feels unfulfilled within their relationship, because he has not given her his time, his full attention, his genuine affection, or a fence, which is not a materialistic request but one of deep symbolic meaning. Furthermore, Troy thinks that Rose's boldness dismantles his authority and manliness, and he attempts to compensate for this loss through an act of physical strength. Indeed, his wife is not responding in their society's stereotypically "feminine" way; instead, Wilson writes her as many speaking lines as he does for Troy, and in the 2016 film adaptation, she uses the same tone as he does. In response to Rose's strong reaction, he is violent, asserting his dominance through physicality in order to regain his threatened masculinity. Pittman quotes another writer in his book, saying, "Masculinity is . . . a challenge to be overcome, a prize to be won by fierce struggle" (xiv). He also asserts that "men who suffer from maculopathy cannot tolerate female anger" (25). Additionally, Tomkins's

macho script includes seven socialization dynamics—such as cultural rules, norms, or values—that propel “superior masculinity;” Mosher condenses the dynamics by saying that “unrelieved and unexpressed distress [that] is intensified by the socializer until it is released as anger” is the number one influential socialization dynamic for men (66). Furthermore, Tomkins states, “unexpressed distress becomes increasingly toxic . . . [and] is a specific releaser of anger. . . . The level of distress can elevate to that of anger if intense and unrelieved. . . . The ‘inferior feminine’ emotion of distress is . . . transformed into the ‘manly’ emotion of anger” (66). The rule becomes: “‘Big boys don’t cry;’ they have temper tantrums” (Mosher 67). These findings from both Pittman and Mosher (who interprets Tomkins) explain why Troy, and men like him, act in an aggressive way towards females, especially their wives, who threaten their manhood.

The desire to fight for and prove masculinity is also present in male-to-male relationships. For example, Troy is physical not only with his wife but also with his youngest son, Cory, since “men . . . respond to masculinity threats with extreme demonstrations of masculinity” (Munsch 474). When Troy pushes Cory to do what he did not do—forget professional sports and immediately begin working whatever job is available—Cory rejects his father’s biased and narrow-minded advice, and he, like Willy’s son Biff, resents his father. Cory enters the Marines, attempting to discover for himself what it means to be a man. As Eknath Bhalerao points out, “to prove his masculinity, Troy Maxson enforces his own son, Cory, to behave and respect him in a military fashion,” which is often seen in many of their conversations (115). For instance, in their final argument, Troy tauntingly says, “You a man. Now, let’s see you act like one. Turn your behind around . . . forget about this house. . . . Cause this is my house. You go on and be a man and get your own house” (Wilson 86). In this quote, Troy teaches Cory that a “real man” is able to get his own house and sustain himself, not relying on

anyone else, especially his own father. Cory points out that Troy's words and actions encourage fear rather than love when he says, "Mama...she tries...but she's scared of you...I don't know how she stand you . . . after what you did to her" (87). Undoubtedly, Cory's statement reveals that Troy's toxic masculinity impacts how he runs his household and it instills fear—rather than respect and appreciation—into his family. Cory's reminder of Troy's failure as provider and husband causes him to "advance toward Cory" and "shove him on his shoulder," eventually pressing his son against a tree (87). To fight back, Cory swings Troy's old baseball bat at his father; Troy tackles his son, secures the bat, and "stands over [Cory] ready to swing" (88). Ultimately, Troy feels challenged by Cory, who is developing his own identity separate from his father. Similar to Rose and Troy's earlier conversation, Cory desperately cries, "You ain't never gave me nothing! You ain't never done nothing but hold me back. Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try and make me scared of you...Wondering all the time...what's Papa gonna say if I do this?" (86–87). Cory believes his father rules his household like an authoritarian boss. Kenneth Matos' study, "Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture: How 'Win or Die' Cultures Breed Abusive Leadership," could offer an explanation to Cory's complaint if a household is considered similar to a formal organization. Matos suggests that many organizations promote "masculinity contest cultures," placing masculinity as the driving cultural force, which results in hypermasculine employees. This hypermasculine culture believes that "mistakes are irreparable, emotional vulnerability must be avoided at all costs, and displays of strength and stamina are a requirement for success" (Matos 501). In other words, this mindset is rooted in the notion that power and leadership are inextricably linked. Therefore, without proof of dominance, a leader loses his power, a necessary trait for the post–World War II American man.

Though I have chosen to focus on Troy's relationship with Cory, it is worth mentioning the relationship he has with Lyons, his oldest son who is a struggling but passionate musician, much to his father's distaste. He pursues a music career, but he is not making money; as a result, Lyons repeatedly asks Troy to lend him money. He is following a lifestyle that is similar to his father's—the denied dream of playing in the Major Leagues—in that Lyons does what he loves without ever quite reaching the end goal of success. This reminder of Troy's crushed masculinity causes him to not show respect or favoritism towards Lyons.

Conclusion

Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman* and Troy Maxson from *Fences* both struggle in their work and family relationships because of their toxic masculinity, which stems from their overwhelming fear of failing as men. These two plays do not present new issues about masculinity. Miller's and Wilson's plays are relatable and realistic, because they construct the characters of Willy and Troy while carefully considering the issues in the society around them. In fact, these fictional characters embody the timeless struggle of identity that the "everyman" experiences. Indeed, "the struggle to be a man . . . is not a clinical oddity: it is the norm" (Pittman xxi). In other words, all of the uncertainty, the questioning, and the wrestling with masculine ideals resonates not only with current audiences but also with past and future audiences (Williams 55). Unfortunately, the "sway of the *masculine mystique*" does not discriminate; both fictional and real men from all races, backgrounds, families, countries, and communities can fool themselves into trusting in the promise of self-interest—human nature's deepest desire (Pittman xxi). A fragile man will forsake any priority, value, or belief in order to protect an accepted self-image. Without this acceptance, this man thinks that he is risking any opportunity for personal gain in the workplace or in the home. Ironically, as shown through the

many examples in literature, in professional studies, and in history, a man “throw[s] over the things for which he regularly lays down his life for the sake of that masculinity” and therefore loses everything (4). From this study of the fictional characters of Willy and Troy’s problematic masculinity, perhaps readers—especially men and fathers—will learn the importance of commitment, communication, and confidence. Nonetheless, the implications of this paper are not only limited to men. Any human can alter, little by little, how the culture views masculinity in order to forgo its ego-crushing qualifications, preventing further toxins from seeping into current and future societies.

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Essay

Rachel Woodruff

Music and Relationships in James Joyce's "The Dead" and "A Painful Case"

Born into a family of musicians, famed Irish author James Joyce loved music before he loved literature. His mother studied piano and voice for fifteen years, and his father was a well-received tenor in amateur theater (Haas 20). Joyce himself learned music at a young age. When he was three, he played piano and sang for his relatives, and when he was six, he performed at an amateur concert with his parents. At university, he composed his own music and visited concerts and theaters (20). While writing, he actively studied and performed music; at times, he contemplated making it his career (19). Music exists in many of Joyce's narratives, and it affects the characters in various ways. For example, music in "The Dead" separates Gabriel Conroy from the guests while it strengthens Mr. Duffy's relationships in "A Painful Case." Despite these differences, the fact remains that music is an actor in the narrative. Joyce uses music to create change and profoundly impact the characters of the short stories on an individual level, especially their identities. In this paper, I will move chronologically through "The Dead" and "A Painful Case" to analyze scenes with and without music in order to demonstrate that Joyce employs music to affect individual relationships, thereby revealing the identities of Gabriel Conroy and Mr. Duffy.

Many critics have analyzed Joyce's use of music in his writings; however, a multitude of opinions exist. Some, like Elizabeth Gardner and Allan Hepburn, see music through a feminist lens. For Gardner, it is a feminine language since women and music are "persistently present while being reduced to background noise" (101). Hepburn, similarly, views music as a

distinction between the feminine characters who perform professionally and the masculine characters who perform hesitantly (198). Others, like Zack Bowen, see music as a way to “orchestrate and reiterate existing themes” (11). Another critic, Robert Haas, claims that music “define[s] the real world,” “moves characters beyond their daily lives,” such as through romance, and allows “Joyce’s characters [to] reveal themselves through it” (19—20). It is my opinion that Joyce uses music as a catalyst for change in individual characters and impacts their identities through its presence and absence in the story.

“The Dead”

Haas claims that Joyce employs music in his writings with “the authority and significance of an expert” (20). Joyce’s expertise provided him the opportunity to introduce the intricacies of music in “The Dead” as he does in a chapter of *Sirens*, but instead, he chooses to look at Gabriel as an individual character and uses music to affect and to develop his identity. In a conversation with one of his language students, George Borach, Joyce states that the chapter in *Sirens* is “a fugue with all musical notations: piano, forte, rallentando, and so on” (qtd. in Borach 326—27). In “The Dead,” conversations and descriptions surrounding music are less specific than in *Sirens*, and they analyze Gabriel Conroy’s character more than the music itself. This choice to focus on Gabriel likely comes from the popularity of the Dublin opera during the time that Joyce wrote and published *Dubliners*. Seamus Reilly points out that for Joyce and many other patrons, the most important part of the opera was not the theater or the music but the individual singers (7). This distinction shows why Joyce chose music to focus on individual characters, much like the opera focused on the performer. Joyce chose to focus on “the local and symbolic connections he could make with his characters in the context of their own situations” instead of his operatic knowledge (Reilly 14). That is, Joyce willingly used music to affect the individual characters and

their relationships in his stories. Seamus Reilly points out that the opera “connects a specific person with a work or aria, thus encapsulating the memory not only of a song or a piece of music, but of a dramatic enactment of the music by a single performer” (14), meaning that some spectators, Joyce included, chose to come to the opera not for a completed show, but for an individual’s performance. Emphasizing an individual performance rather than the entire show explains how Joyce recognized music not as a melody or a series of notes but as something meant to affect an individual’s experience. In “The Dead,” Joyce focuses on Gabriel Conroy instead of looking at the specific music being played or other characters throughout the piece.

Joyce contrasts the presence and absence of music to reveal Gabriel Conroy’s understanding of his identity, which affects his relationships with the other guests. Without music, Gabriel develops a stronger sense of self-assurance and connects with the people around him. When music is present, however, Gabriel takes on a misfit identity and acknowledges the tension in his relationships. When the story opens, Joyce immediately sets music as an important facet of daily life. Haas points out that the near-constant presence of music in the narrative highlights how music is “the basis for the household . . . [and] the party” (29). Haas explains that this basis matters because it provides a foundation for characters to “reveal themselves” through music (29). Most of the guests belonged to Kate and Mary Jane’s piano classes or Julia’s choir. These characters develop and strengthen their relationships surrounding musical situations, which exemplifies Steven Feld’s argument that music has a “fundamentally social life” and that it is “made to be consumed—practically, intellectually, individually, communally” (1). As the readers work their way through the story, it becomes clear that while the other guests at the party belong, Gabriel Conroy does not.

Joyce first mentions the piano playing as Gabriel arrives at the annual dance and begins to reveal the disconnection between Gabriel and the rest of the guests. Quickly, the pleasant air he first encounters turns as cold as the wintry setting outside. While he converses with Lily, he “[listens] for a moment to the piano” before questioning her about marriage; she coats her response in “great bitterness” and Gabriel senses that he “made a mistake” (Joyce, “The Dead” 178). In an attempt to appease her, he presents her with a coin, yet he still feels so “discomposed by the girl’s bitter and sudden retort” that it “[casts] a gloom over him” (178-79). Gabriel endures reminders that “their grade of culture differed from his” (179). This comment could suggest that Gabriel holds malice against the people at the dance, but within the context of the rest of the story and the other interactions with the people at the party, it becomes clear that Gabriel simply does not fit. As the piano reaches its climax, the conversations turn to his shoe apparel. Aunt Julia laughs as she questions Gabriel’s goloshes, evoking his “slightly angered” response that “everyone wears them on the continent” (181). Gabriel differs from the guests socially and geographically. While readers hear the distant piano, the divide between Gabriel and those around him grows.

Finally, a “clapping of hands and a final flourish of the pianist” (181) relieve Gabriel of the blows to his identity and pride, and suddenly, Gabriel feels welcomed and appreciated by his family. All animosity fades and Aunt Julia now needs Gabriel to sequester the already-inebriated Freddy Malins; Gabriel’s presence relieves her, and she “always feel[s] easier in [her] mind when he’s here” (182). This sudden change between Gabriel and his aunt starkly juxtaposes the interaction immediately preceding it, but without music flooding the background, Gabriel finds himself able to blend in among the guests.

But the renewal of the piano reverses this change. Now, Freddy Malins is “not so bad” (185), and the need Gabriel filled fades, once again creating a divide between Gabriel and the rest of the guests. Freddy Malins, according to Joseph O’Leary, “embod[ies] the failure and the breakdown of order which Gabriel is nervously warding off” (33). Doubling Freddy Malins and Gabriel creates an image that mirrors Gabriel’s own disconnection with the people around him, simultaneously being the problematic characters and the valued characters. While Mary Jane plays the piano, Gabriel struggles to pay attention. It confuses him. In fact, “the only persons who seemed to follow the music were Mary Jane . . . and Aunt Kate” (Joyce, “The Dead” 186). Everyone else merely learned how to feign understanding. Gabriel then turns his attention downward. He feels “irritated” (186) upon glaring at the ground; however, the irritation stems from the interpersonal tension he battles at the party. Gabriel recalls how his aunts’ strict adherence to “the dignity of family life” led to the “opposition to his marriage” (186). After all, Gretta was not one of them; she was mere “country cute” (187). Gabriel’s marriage outside of his social class created within his relationships an unknown. If he does not belong to this family, where does he belong? The presence of the piano exasperates this question. Finally, the music ends “with a trill of octaves in the treble and a final deep octave in the bass,” and with the ending of the piece, the “resentment died down in his heart” (187). The music throughout the scene reveals that Gabriel lacks the musical knowledge—or at least the ability to feign it—that seems present in every other listener throughout the room, further revealing the tension between Gabriel and the other guests.

The piano plays again during the lancers (a dance requiring pairs), and Gabriel is again reminded of his social and cultural separation from the guests around him. Gabriel fails to connect with his partner, the venerable Miss Ivors. As the two dance, they engage in

conversation about the paper for which Gabriel writes literature reviews. She informs him that he should feel “ashamed” for being a “West Briton” (188), a label that offends Gabriel. Before he can stave his anxiety and reject the identity she places on him, Gabriel learns that Miss Ivors is “only joking” (189). But Gabriel’s “ease” (189) is short-lived when the conversation turns to a trip to the Aran Isles. At this point, the tension increases, and Gabriel begins to answer questions “shortly” (189). He explains that he does not wish to visit Ireland because “it is not [his] language,” and furthermore, he feels “sick of [his] own country” (190). Joseph O’Leary also points out that Gabriel’s physical movements during this dance, including “his blushes, knitting of the brows, glances, [and] agitation covered by energetic action,” connect to his “nervous response to social embarrassment” (34). That is, the way he acts during the dance denotes his discomfort about how he fails to fit in with the other guests. While the piano plays, yet another separation blooms as Gabriel rejects the national identity of Ireland, something of which the other guests are innately proud. Miss Ivors responds in a condescending tone as if speaking to a troublesome child who “of course, [has] no answer” for his or her sudden outburst, and calls him, for the second time, a “West Briton” (Joyce, “The Dead” 190). As the lancers end, Gabriel once again notices the tension between himself and the guests around him, specifically Miss Ivors, and must confront his misfit identity.

Despite the lancers ending, the waltzes continue to play as Gabriel tries desperately to “banish from his mind all memory of the unpleasant incident with Miss Ivors” that left him acting “moodily” and “coldly” (191). Readers see Gabriel’s lack of belonging build as he reflects on this encounter. The more he considers the conversation he had, the angrier he becomes. He snaps at Gretta and begins to contemplate his relationship with Miss Ivors; “it unnerved him” (192) that animosity never existed between the two before that night. With the backdrop of

people waltzing throughout the room, Gabriel turns his focus to his dinner speech. He is desperate to impress the crowd, specifically Miss Ivors. He alters the speech to make him appear more sophisticated; he does not mind that the “two ignorant old women” (193) he praises in his speech will not understand it. He focuses on his desire to feel “very good” about his comment “for Miss Ivors” (193). And thus, his anxiety to impress the guests greatens the divide like the crescendo of the piano piece.

The music again halts, pleasant conversations return, and interpersonal tension fades. Miss Ivors, the most recent source of Gabriel’s grief, leaves, and he absolves himself of causing her quick retreat, noting that she “had gone away laughing” (196). The absence of music bridges the divide, and Gabriel finds himself needed again. He appears with “sudden animation, ready to carve a flock of geese if necessary” (197). Gabriel thrives on feeling accepted by those around him. So, he takes his seat “boldly” (197) and begins to speak “amiably” (199). But then the discussion around him turns to the subject of the opera, and Gabriel ceases to converse with them on a topic he little understands, once again finding himself a misfit in the company around the table.

As the guests prepare themselves for Gabriel’s speech, Joyce details that the “piano was playing a waltz tune” that they could hear in the dining room, and the background melody furthers Gabriel’s unease and reveals the relational tension between Gabriel and the guests (203). His discourse resides in the past: he speaks of the tradition of hospitality “still alive among” them; he laments that the “new generation” will fail to uphold the habits of “an older day;” and he encourages the honoring of the “memory of those dead” (204). Listening to the piano notes glide, Gabriel mourns the perfect past he once had with the dinner guests, a past where his relationships lacked the tension they hold now. His recognition of how he ceases to belong

floods his senses so that he can only consider what once existed. At the end of the speech, he promises not to “linger on the past” nor “let any gloomy moralizing intrude” (205), a vow that Gabriel has already failed to uphold. Thus, what the chorus sings about how “*they are jolly gay fellows. . . . Unless he tells a lie*” (206) rings true. Gabriel is neither jolly nor gay because he has lied to himself and the guests all night long. Additionally, according to Walter Ong, speech causes “the members of the audience normally [to] become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker” (72). Thus, for Gabriel to present a speech before dinner should mean that Gabriel unites himself with those present. However, the emphasis on the past as well as the presence of music reveal Gabriel’s isolated state, brought on by relational tensions he desperately attempts to conceal.

The final scene complicates my thesis. When Gabriel and Gretta finally retire to their hotel, Gretta still thinks about “a person long ago who used to sing [‘The Lass of Aughrim’]” (Joyce, “The Dead” 220), an old Irish tonality they heard as they were leaving the dinner party. She tells the story of her first love, Michael Furey, who died a long time ago, and Gabriel faces the fact that someone else has loved Gretta before him. Gretta tells her husband how she believes that Michael Furey “died for [her]” (221). Suddenly, the one relationship in which Gabriel belonged disappears. However, this revelation occurs without the physical presence of music in the scene. Haas supplies a possible explanation for this occurrence. He claims that “The Lass of Aughrim,” with its “image of an earlier love returning in the rain is . . . a symbol for Michael, who caught his death for love in the rain” (Haas 32—33). Thus, the presence of Michael Furey—through conversation and remembrance—is by extension the presence of the song. Haas calls this final connection between Gabriel and Michael a “confrontation of music” (33). This confrontation further evokes the presence of music as an agent for change within the characters,

specifically Gabriel. He recognizes that his wife loves this ghost from her past, and he recognizes that he has “never felt like that . . . but he knew that such a feeling must be love” (Joyce, “The Dead” 224). And with the music, his only identity begins “fading out into a grey impalpable world,” along with his relationships (225). Music has created one final rift between Gabriel and the people around him. At this moment, he finally recognizes his role as a misfit.

“A Painful Case”

Joyce uses music to develop individual characters in other works as well, and we see that music has an opposite effect on Mr. Duffy in “A Painful Case.” While the presence of music separates Gabriel from the other guests in “The Dead,” it further connects Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico. Thus, music continues to affect the main characters of the story. Through a conversation with a language student in Zurich, we can see an explanation for why Joyce uses music as a magnifying glass in the analysis and development of literary characters. At one point, Joyce mentions the “heroic career” of Odysseus, and then immediately comments that “Odysseus is also a great musician” who becomes a motif for the “artist, who will lay down his life rather than renounce his interest” (Borach 326). Joyce sees a great literary figure and immediately comments on his musicality, demonstrating that he used music to analyze literary characters and likely expected his readers to do the same. In “A Painful Case,” music unites Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico in their intellectual affair, but silence reflects Mr. Duffy’s social seclusion. Josh Epstein argues in this short story “noise is channeled into music” (268) and explains that “noise is not merely opposed or supplementary to music in Joyce’s work, but indispensable to it” (270). Thus, in the reading of this short story, we will consider that all noise is an actor within the narrative, rather than analyzing music alone. Within this story, we see silence turn to sound and sound turn

back to silence through the development and failure of the relationship between James Duffy and Emily Sinico, ultimately revealing the solitary personality of Mr. Duffy.

From the very beginning of the story, Joyce presents Mr. Duffy as a solitary man. The entire introduction lacks any mention of sound. Since noise and music play active roles throughout the rest of the story, we must also notice silence. He lives in Chapelizod because “he wished to live as far as possible from the city” (Joyce, “A Painful Case” 103), a location typically described as loud and busy, and “he found all other suburbs of Dublin mean, modern and pretentious,” showing his distaste for interpersonal connection. Furthermore, many details of his living space and his habits reveal his isolation. The walls of his “uncarpeted room were free from pictures,” and he “bought every article of furniture in the room” (103—104). We would describe a room covered in photos and crowded with furniture and carpeting as a loud room; thus, we can consider an empty room quiet by comparison. This quiet room further reveals the lonely life Mr. Duffy lives. All of these details have explanations outside of solitary living; however, Joyce later explains that “he had neither companions nor friends,” and furthermore, that he “lived his spiritual life without any communion with others, visiting his relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died,” only doing so for “old dignity” sake” but never contributing further to the “civic life” around him (105). Social life, for Mr. Duffy, was a chore. He much preferred to experience life on his own with no duties, expectations, or forced interactions with people around him. He preferred to live in silence.

Although Mr. Duffy spends his life silently isolated, we can see how music still influences his days and how moments of sound bring him into interpersonal interactions. Music is an indulgence that lies outside of his normal, solitary life. Epstein comments that the “autonomy of music structurally parallels the autonomy of James Duffy” (273), noting that both

have a social quality regardless of how they choose to do so. While Mr. Duffy isolates himself, he still encounters others through music. He normally spends his nights “before his landlady’s piano,” and his taste for “Mozart’s music [brings] him sometimes to an opera or a concert;” he considers these the “only dissipations of his life” (Joyce, “A Painful Case” 104). For these “dissipations,” Haas calls music Mr. Duffy’s “only remaining trace of humanity” (27).

Therefore, the places where Mr. Duffy goes to hear music are also the places he becomes a part of some community.

When Mr. Duffy meets Mrs. Sinico at a concert in the Rotunda, music suddenly enters the narrative, and readers see Mr. Duffy grow relationally. By using the opera hall as a meeting place, we understand that Joyce considered music to be a “very natural language” that represented “deeply emotional communication and expression” (Haas 21—22). Joyce believed music had communicative value, and in “A Painful Case,” he uses it to create an opportunity to socialize Mr. Duffy’s characterization. Mrs. Sinico expresses her lament that the opera house is nearly empty because it is difficult for people “to have to sing to empty benches” (Joyce, “A Painful Case” 105). Mr. Duffy takes Mrs. Sinico’s comment as an invitation to converse with her, and while they speak, he “[tries] to fix her permanently in his memory” (105). Memorizing a stranger with whom one converses seems odd, but Mr. Duffy, moved by the music at the concert hall, feels their connection grow. He sees her a second time at another concert in Earlsfort, this time waiting until Mrs. Sinico’s “daughter’s attention was diverted to become intimate” (106). Thus, the first interactions and the development of the relationship between Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico develop through the presence of music in the concert halls they both attend. Steven Feld calls music “fundamentally relational” (2), and through these interactions, Mr. Duffy starts to

understand Feld's theory. Music moves Mr. Duffy's identity away from the solitude that Joyce describes in the beginning.

As the relationship between the two grows, they stop meeting in "the most quiet quarters" for their walks together and begin meeting at Mrs. Sinico's house on account of her husband's absence and "[her] daughter out giving music lessons" (Joyce, "A Painful Case" 106). This strengthening relationship through music further changes Mr. Duffy's identity into something socially-driven. The presence of music in the daughter's life creates space for Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico to continue spending time together. Hepburn contends that Mr. Duffy fails to take "music seriously enough as a system of meaningful gestures, sounds, and actions," which alludes to the eventual failure of the relationship (198). However, music still allows for their relationship to develop further until "their thoughts [entangle], they [speak] of subjects less remote," and he feels that "her companionship [is] like a warm soil about an exotic" (Joyce, "A Painful Case" 107). Epstein explains that music becomes "the shaping force of Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico's interaction" (274), contributing to the idea that music reveals Mr. Duffy's desire to connect with others despite his insistence on solitude. Joyce attributes this development to "the dark discreet room, their isolation, the music that still vibrated in their ears," stating that it "united them" ("A Painful Case" 107). Here, we see music further developing the relationship between the two, thus revealing Mr. Duffy's desire for interpersonal connection.

However, Mr. Duffy falls back into his solitary habits when the relationship between him and Mrs. Sinico eventually fails, and the music fades entirely from the narrative leaving the story in silence, foreshadowed by the concert house where the couple meets, which is "thinly peopled and silent" and "[gives] distressing prophecy of failure" (105). The couple decides to end their frequent meetings and thus their relationship because "every bond, [Mr. Duffy] says, is a bond to

sorrow” (108). This sentiment brings back Mr. Duffy’s earlier belief that his life is better when he is alone. As soon as they reach this decision, “they [walk] in silence toward the tram . . . a few days later he [receives] a parcel containing his books and music” (108). Haas explains that “the end of their acquaintance is also the end of music” (27) because she sends back his books and music. Silence surrounds the couple and again reveals Mr. Duffy as a lonely soul. When Mrs. Sinico leaves, Mr. Duffy “return[s] to his even way of life,” (Joyce, “A Painful Case” 108) a life of solitude. Some may argue that music still exists in his life because “some new pieces of music encumbered the music-stand” (108). However, the use of the word “encumbered” holds a negative connotation and points to music as more of a nuisance than a welcomed connection. Additionally, Mr. Duffy does not engage in former indulgences: “he kept away from the concerts lest he should meet her” (108). Here, we see how music “temporarily liberates” Mr. Duffy from physical isolation but not psychological isolation because Mr. Duffy “remains a solipsist and a narcissist” despite his relationship with Mrs. Sinico (Epstein 273). The relationship between Mrs. Sinico and Mr. Duffy fades, and in the same way, the sounds that united them fade to silence, disconnecting Mr. Duffy from the people and the world around him.

We see the relationship return in a sense years later when Mr. Duffy picks up a newspaper as he regularly does, and something unusual catches his attention. This interaction is silent, representing Mr. Duffy’s isolation. The newspaper announces Mrs. Sinico’s death. Joyce continues to characterize their separation, now widened in her death, by silence. Mr. Duffy does not read it “aloud, but moving his lips as a priest does when he reads the prayers *Secreto*” (Joyce, “A Painful Case” 109). Walter Ong claims that “writing and print isolate” (72) because reading silently is a solitary act, one that disconnects someone from the people around them. By only mouthing the words, Mr. Duffy provides the illusion of connection but fails to actually connect

to anyone. Thinking of the events that led to Mrs. Sinico's death, he realizes that "it revolted him to think that he had ever spoken to her of what he held sacred," pointing to their connection and the way he revokes it in the silence where "the river lay quiet" (Joyce, "A Painful Case" 111). The reintroduction of the relationship by Mr. Duffy's sudden awareness of her passing provides an opportunity for Mr. Duffy to connect on some level with the world around him again—through mourning, through a chance to reach out to her widowed husband and daughter, or even through memories of the two of them. But instead, he chooses to encounter this information in silence, keeping him separated from everything and everyone around him.

The silence continues as readers see Mr. Duffy retreating from engaging in the world around him. The silent contemplation in which he reflects on his memories of Mrs. Sinico continues. When he goes to get a drink, "the proprietor served him obsequiously but did not venture to talk" with him, allowing Mr. Duffy to sit in silence and social isolation. The other patrons "[discuss] the value of a gentleman's estate" ("A Painful Case" 112), drinking, smoking, and engaging in interpersonal connection, unlike Mr. Duffy. Despite the other patrons being near enough for him to notice them, "Mr. Duffy [sits] on his stool and [gazes] at them, without seeing or hearing them. . . . The shop [is] very quiet" (112). Here he "exempts himself from sound in order to remain in self-imposed isolation" (Hepburn 194). That is, sound exists around him, but he refuses to acknowledge it in a meaningful way, choosing instead to remain unaffected by what he hears, reducing it to background noise. As he sits in the silence, he begins to understand Mrs. Sinico in a new way. In her death, he realizes how "lonely her life must have been sitting night after night alone in that room," and he also realizes that his life "would be lonely too until he, too, [dies], [ceases] to exist, [becomes] a memory—if anyone [remembers] him" (Joyce, "A Painful Case" 113). This scene shows the complexity of Mr. Duffy's identity. On the one hand,

he relates to Mrs. Sinico and acknowledges his connection to her, which shows his identity in a personable light. However, Mr. Duffy only recognizes that he is lonely and will feel lonely until he dies—a thought he has in the silence, revealing his solitary identity.

Music reappears briefly in the narrative after Mrs. Sinico's death, and the connection between the two seems to reappear, at least for a moment. Mr. Duffy comments that Mrs. Sinico "[seems] to be near him in the darkness," so much so that he "[seems] to feel her voice touch his ear," and so "he [stands] still to listen" (113). He realizes that Mrs. Sinico will never really leave him because her memory will live on with him. He will always recognize her as an acquaintance, as a connection that he had to someone else. Her voice reminds Mr. Duffy that he once had a friend, that he was not always alone. He later hears the train pass by, and as it passes, "he [hears] in his ears the laborious drone of the engine reiterating the syllables of her name;" and as he turns to return home, he hears "the rhythm of the engine pounding in his ears" (113). It seems for a moment that Mr. Duffy will latch onto the noise and uncover his personal identity to readers. However, he chooses silence again. He stops and "[allows] the rhythm to die away" until he can no longer feel "her voice touch his ear" (114). After listening for a while, he realizes that there is nothing to hear: "the night [is] perfectly silent. He [listens] again: perfectly silent. He [feels] that he [is] alone" (114). Joyce ends the story here. Hepburn explains that he effectively "[kills] the organ of sense that might have opened up human contact" (196) since he rejects the one thing that allowed him to connect to another person. By detailing that Mr. Duffy allows the silence to return and that he seeks to return his world to silence solidifies his lonely identity. Thus, by allowing music and noise to connect Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico, Joyce also allows silence to separate the two, finally revealing Mr. Duffy as a solitary, lonely man.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, music is something small, unobtrusive; it is often just background noise. Most of us play music daily: in the car, in our rooms, in offices, in homes. However, Joyce recognizes how intimately music can affect a person because of his family life, his education, and his culture. Thus, he expertly uses this tool and elevates it to the position of a character capable of changing the narrative, specifically the relationships between various characters. He especially uses the effect of music to reveal the identities of his characters. In “The Dead” we see Gabriel Conroy wrestling with his relationships and thus his identity as a misfit, supported and countered by the presence and absence of music, respectively. In “A Painful Case” we see Mr. Duffy walk from a solitary life into a connected life and back to the same life he once lived, all corroborated by the introduction and then the leaving of music and noise in the narrative.

Joyce understands the intricacy of identity: it is more than actions and thoughts, it is also experiences, connections, and relationships. For Gabriel, the people he connects with intimately influence his identity. Every interaction he has with the dinner guests affects him deeply, and each of these interactions changes because of music. Similarly, for Mr. Duffy, stimulating encounters bolster his identity. Thus, the opera and intellectual conversations impact him. Through “The Dead” and “A Painful Case,” Joyce reveals the complexities of a character’s—and therefore, a person’s—identity. Joyce reveals to his readers through his short stories the importance of music in our daily lives. He shows us that music can impact the fundamental structure of our identities if we are willing to listen.

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Ansley Burnette

**Chronicles of War: Children and War Trauma in the Novel and Film Adaptation of
*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe***

Whether C.S. Lewis reminds his readers that “[w]rong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight” (*LWW* 64) or Andrew Adamson tells his audience that “[t]here’s a right bit more than hope [because] Aslan is on the move” (0:21:22), both forms of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (*LWW*) illuminate the great lion’s ability to bring restoration and hope to children after the trauma of war. Though I believe Lewis and Adamson see children’s literature and film to be useful for adults as well, for the scope of the essay, I will focus on how the novel and film relate to children specifically.³ From 1950 on, Lewis’s *LWW* captured the hearts of readers from around the world. With the popularity of fantasy film adaptations in the early 2000s, Lewis’s Narnian tale was an obvious choice for Hollywood to adapt next. So, in 2005, director Andrew Adamson released a film adaptation of *LWW*. The influence of World War I and II on Lewis shaped the author’s ability to represent war trauma, more commonly known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, in his writings. Likewise, Adamson responds to the trauma of 9/11 and the War on Terror in his film. Instead of changing Lewis’s original story, Adamson relies heavily on expanding the war nuance to include references to a more modern war. While Lewis’s World War I and II trauma inspired his writing of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Andrew Adamson’s film adaptation includes modern

³ All twelve of the professional films Adamson has directed are specifically for and about children, showing that Adamson’s specialty really is in working with children. Likewise, Lewis writes his book for children, and he even dedicates *LWW* to Lucy Barfield, the daughter of fellow World War I soldier and author Owen Barfield.

trauma from the War on Terror, enabling the novel and film to become forms of exposure therapy to help children from two different eras cope with war trauma.

World War I and II devastated Europe in unimaginable ways, and Lewis was not spared engagement in these traumatic wars. The total number of casualties from World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945) is debatable, but historians estimate anywhere from 20 to 40 million casualties in World War I and 50 to 70 million in World War II. Shortly after arriving in England from Ireland, Lewis postponed his education and joined the Officer Training Corps. The young academic served in the infantry from 1917 to 1918 until an injury sent him back to England for the duration of the war (McGrath 53). During the Second World War, Lewis took in child evacuees, spoke on BBC about the war, and served in the Oxford Home Guard (Demy 115). Without the influence of the First and Second World War on Lewis’s writing, *LWW* would not be able to play a part in children’s exposure therapy, as the trauma within the novel must be realistic for children to relive their own trauma.⁴

Scholars debate whether Lewis was profoundly impacted by any of the wars he experienced. Those who claim Lewis was unaffected by war turn to Lewis’s own writings—specifically in *Surprised by Joy*—where Lewis mentions his time in World War I seems so “cut off from the rest of [his] experience and often seems to have happened to someone else. It is even in a way unimportant” (185). Allister McGrath admits that Lewis seems to have “believed that his woes during his year at Malvern College were of greater importance than his entire wartime experience,” yet McGrath also wonders if Lewis simply “could not bear to remember the trauma of his wartime experiences, whose irrationality called into question whether there was any meaning in the universe at large or in Lewis’s personal existence in particular” (50).

⁴ Later in this essay, I will more thoroughly define exposure therapy, a type of trauma therapy in which patients re-experience their trauma in a controlled environment in order to practice coping.

Admittedly, Lewis seems to spend more time writing on the death of his mother, the death of his childhood dog, and his miserable time at boarding school than he does discussing war. This lack of war-related writing, however, is not enough to dismiss the fact that a soldier who went through Lewis's same training and served in one of the world's most horrific wars would feel its effects.⁵ K.J. Gilchrist examines some of Lewis's early works historically, discovering that "Lewis [was] traumatized by war; specific events shattered his early beliefs and assumptions about life; he then attempts to rebuild those shattered assumptions" (8). The historical lens used to view Lewis's writing not only provides an exercise in literary analysis but also serves as an important tool to understand Lewis and his writings more fully. McGrath agrees with this view of literature and sees how "[t]he literature concerning the Great War and its aftermath emphasizes the physical and psychological damage it wreaked on soldiers at the time, and on their return home" (50). So, being heavily influenced by war, Lewis is able to use his storytelling to draw children into a world of fantasy in which they can relive and gain relief from some of the same traumas Lewis endured. Like Lewis, it is highly probable that Adamson's contemporary war influenced his adaptation of *LWW*.

Adamson, a native of Australia and then Papua New Guinea, came to America in 1991 and directed the Walden Media adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005). For three years during the War on Terror, Adamson and his crew worked on the film. The War on Terror was different than any of the world's previous wars, making its effects difficult to grasp

⁵ John Keegan in his book *The Face of Battle* details the training at military academies, specifically the academy that Lewis's brother, Warren, went to. He describes their training methods as preparing the soldiers for the mental hardships of war. The soldiers are trained "to reduce the conduct of war to a set of rules and a system of procedures—and thereby make orderly and rational what is essentially chaotic and instinctive" (Keegan 20). While this emotionless training seems robotic and thoughtless, Gilchrist asserts that it is exactly this type of training that keeps men sane after their war experiences (19). However, Lewis's own training did not follow this pattern. Gilchrist lays out Lewis's military training in detail, explaining that most of the focus was on physical and practical military training as opposed to psychological training, leaving Lewis much more liable to experiencing trauma and struggling to cope with war.

fully. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, “President Bush declared a ‘war on terror’ that ‘[would] not end until every terrorist group of global reach [had] been found, stopped, and defeated’” (Alden). For the next few years, the United States focused on fighting Taliban groups, but 9/11 film scholar E. Deidre Pribram notes that “the War on Terror encompasses not only the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also the USA PATRIOT Act, the Department of Homeland Security, the Bush Doctrine, the 9/11 Commission, Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, CIA renditions, and the use of torture” (235). The stricter immigration policies that came after the start of the War on Terror are some of the most controversial and well-known repercussions of the war. While scholars do not directly address the impact of these repercussions on Adamson, they do write extensively on the War on Terror and American cinema as a whole—thereby encapsulating Adamson’s work.

The War on Terror has impacted American cinema more drastically than most moviegoers realize. In *The War on Terror and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second*, Terence McSweeney highlights the chaos that the events on 9/11 brought to the film industry. Not only was Hollywood now being asked “to help market the war on terror through the medium of film, just as President Franklin D. Roosevelt had sought to mobilise Hollywood during World War Two” (McSweeney 59), but the films that came out post-9/11 were inherently responding in some capacity to the War on Terror. McSweeney also notes that “post-9/11 film . . . functions not as a simplistic cinema of escapism, as we are often led to believe, but as a collection of visceral responses to the era, whether consciously designed by the filmmakers to be so or not” (9). Though the filmmakers at Walden Media dedicated themselves to upholding Lewis’s original text (Moore 2), Adamson does occasionally deviate in his adaptation from Lewis’s World War I and II references to help children cope with the War on Terror.

Though the World War II context is still present in Adamson's film, the adaptation also highlights allusions to the War on Terror, especially allusions directly correlated to 9/11. After the French cinema's New Wave movement, film critics began denouncing fidelity-driven adaptations for their lack of cinematic and artistic value. The closest form of a faithful adaptation that exists today is what film adaptation theorist Thomas Leitch would call a "celebration adaptation" (96). Leitch's view of this style of adaptation considers Kamala Elliot's idea of "adaptation as incarnation, 'wherein the word is only a partial expression of a more total representation that requires incarnation as its fulfillment.' In this view, movies provide what novels can only hint at: words made flesh" (qtd. in Leitch 98). Though viewers frequently call Adamson's film a faithful adaptation, they often neglect the unique aspects of the film that cause it to stand as its own work. The *LWW* filmmakers almost changed the original story setting in order to create a more modern adaptation, but doing so would have taken the film out of the context of war—a setting that becomes vital in order for the film to act as a means of exposure therapy.⁶ Adamson keeps Lewis's original context, yet because he adds modern allusions—like the interrogation and torture scene and the ethnic stereotyping of the fox—to the story, his adaptation falls more in line with an "expansion adaptation" rather than a "celebration adaptation." In an "expansion adaptation," a filmmaker adds to the precursor text—whether adding whole characters and plot points or just adding subtle differences (Leitch 99). If Adamson had adapted *LWW* purely in the celebration style, the film would not have been beneficial for audience members suffering from modern War on Terror traumas.

Reacting to the War on Terror, Adamson expands the story to fit a modern context and, in doing so, helps his audience relate to the film. In her book *Fantasy Film Post 9/11*, Frances

⁶ Another company owned the rights to *LWW* before Walden Media and wanted to set Lewis's classic story in Los Angeles during an earthquake and replace Turkish delight with hot dogs and cheeseburgers (Moore 2).

Pheasant-Kelly highlights how specific films relate to 9/11. While the chapter she writes on Adamson's *LWW* focuses on anthropomorphism in the film, she does point out that in general, "nuances of these sequences [in the film] and the way in which they are depicted through arresting imagery may generate connections for some viewers with their post-9/11 contexts" (Pheasant-Kelly 97). Adamson did not have to change large parts of the narrative to fit this new context but was able to create connections to 9/11 and the War on Terror through expanding and tweaking seemingly insignificant aspects of the story, such re-imagining the escape from the wolves in underground tunnels.⁷ Lance Weldy agrees with Pheasant-Kelley, asserting that "the current American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan could have influenced the way Adamson has portrayed war not only in WWII England, but also in a despotic Narnia" (190). However, regardless of the adaptation style, Lewis and Adamson insert their respective wars in their works, inadvertently turning *LWW* into a form of exposure therapy for children suffering from war trauma.

Psychiatrists use exposure therapy to treat patients with lasting war trauma or, the term this trauma more broadly falls under, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD is usually associated with soldiers who engaged in war on a battlefield, but the terms are much broader.⁸ The American Psychiatric Association defines PTSD as a "disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence or serious injury" ("What"). Though a traumatic event may temporarily affect a person, unless this trauma lasts longer than a month, that person would not be diagnosed with PTSD ("What").

⁷ I will show many of these War on Terror connections later in the essay.

⁸ Though Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was not officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association until 1980, the disorder has existed throughout history under terms like "shell shock" during World War I and "War Neurosis" during World War II (Crocq and Crocq, n. pag.).

Therefore, the trauma children faced during the years following war could be deemed PTSD. Goodenough and Immel connect PTSD to children, noting that “[i]n World War I, new connections were being posited . . . between the mental conditions of the shell-shocked soldier and the traumatized child” (8). Regardless of the age of the victim, a successful form of therapy for such a disorder is called “exposure therapy, in which the patient repeatedly relives the frightening experience under controlled conditions to help work through the trauma” (“Post-Traumatic”). Dr. Johanna S. Kaplan and Dr. David F. Tolin state, “Surveys of psychologists who treat patients with PTSD show that the majority do not use exposure therapy and most believe that exposure therapy is likely to exacerbate symptoms. However, individuals with trauma histories and PTSD express a preference for exposure therapy over other treatments” (n. pag.) In addition, Ashley J. Smith and Amy M. Jacobsen assert that this therapy is most effective for long-term treatment of trauma (n. pag.). Though Lewis and Adamson were probably consciously unaware of this trauma therapy, their work fits within its parameters to treat children with long-lasting war trauma.

Lewis and Adamson both work in mediums imitating real life, which is necessary to recreate a space for exposure therapy. A well-educated man, Lewis would have learned “the classical theory that literature is an imitation (*mimesis*) of life” (Ryken and Mead 48). Through creating an imitation of war trauma, *LWW* becomes this form of exposure therapy. For traumatized patients to relive their trauma, they must feel like the exposure is real. Lewis writes about realism in literature in his book *An Experiment in Criticism*, and Ryken and Mead specifically note that in this book Lewis expresses the belief that “fictional and fantastic stories can be real [because] they embody realities that we experience in life” (49). Though Adamson does not have bookshelves of published works to indicate his thoughts on depicting real life in

cinema, the film medium naturally lends itself to this same kind of representation. After all, throughout film history, scholars have been interested in cinema as a representation of reality from the first photograph as a recording of reality to renown film theorist André Bazin's argument for "the cinema as the art of reality" (4). While more modern scholars argue against cinema's ability to be realistic, the history of cinema relating to reality is significant enough to suggest that film is a useful medium for exposure therapy.

Both the duration and setting of novel and film prove useful for trauma therapy. In an exposure therapy study, researchers found that short-term exposure therapy treatments were much more successful and had a lower drop-out rate than long-term treatments ("Exposure Therapy"). Lewis's *LWW* is a short children's novel, allowing for a quick read. Film, of course, has a fixed time duration, and with Adamson's adaptation running a little shy of two and a half hours, an exposure therapy session through his film would also be short compared to a six-week program. Though the plot of both the novel and the film takes place during World War II, making it seem like the War on Terror does not play a large role in the film adaptation, Narnia itself—the setting for the majority of the story—is a fantastical land that is disconnected from any historical war. Because the land of Narnia is not involved in a real-life world or war, Adamson can easily adapt the story to fit within a War on Terror narrative even while the Second World War technically occurs outside Narnia in the real world of the book. Nannette Norris notes that "because this literature is unattached to a particular time and place, it remains available for all children who suffer possible trauma" (71). The universality of Narnia provides a more beneficial setting for Adamson and Lewis's trauma support because exposure therapy requires a physically safe, separate setting in which to relive the trauma. Norris never mentions exposure therapy by name in her essay on trauma and survival; however, her statement falls right in line

with the definition of exposure therapy. She states that the setting (Narnia) in *LWW* is “liminal space in which problems can be safely confronted through those which are analogous to the real world, thereby providing a measure of articulation and subsequent healing for the victim of trauma and betrayal” (71).⁹ Martha C. Sammons comments similarly, stating that “the secondary world [of Narnia] is a mirror or metaphor for our own[;] things that happen in that world can be applied to our world” (56). The wardrobe is the passage to the secondary world of liminal space, and the etymology of the actual word “wardrobe” comes from the French word *garderobe*, a room in which to guard valuable objects (“*garderobe*”). The professor’s wardrobe is the connecting prop between real world trauma and staged trauma. Once the children go through the wardrobe, they become valuable objects that must be protected from the real world as they safely undergo exposure therapy. With exposure therapy revolving around reliving trauma in a controlled environment, children can engage in exposure therapy by safely facing trauma in the novel or film and then exiting the fictional realm metaphorically through the wardrobe.

On the first page of *LWW*, Lewis establishes that the story takes place during a time of war. Lewis does not specify which war the novel takes place during, and though he does not provide a timeline in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, he did create a timeline, which Walter Hooper published in his 1979 book *Past Watchful Dragons*. This timeline asserts that the war Lewis refers to in *LWW* is in fact World War II (Hooper 42). Lewis curtly gets to the point of the story through his meta statement, the second sentence of *LWW*, which states, “This story is about something that happened to [the Pevensies] when they were sent away from London during the war because of the air raids” (1). Children in 1950 reading the novel would immediately connect

⁹ Norris defines “liminal space” as “lying in between two defined spaces without belonging to either of them” (71). She views Narnia as a perfect space for survivors of trauma to remember their conflict and look hopefully towards the future.

the evacuation of the Pevensies to their own evacuation out of London, and as Peter J. Schakel states, “For children old enough in 1950 to remember the Blitz, this was a time of great turmoil, fear, and anxiety” (39). Norris claims the novel “speaks to trauma because it is framed as a war narrative, both in the historical time in which the novel was written and in Narnia time” (72). So, both the frame narrative and the narrative within the wardrobe center around a similar type of warfare that children would have been familiar with in 1950.

Similarly, Adamson immediately makes a connection between his *LWW* adaptation and the War on Terror through the opening image of his film. The film opens with a point-of-view shot from an airplane in the clouds (00:00:32). The clouds shroud the scene in mystery—the audience unaware of all aspects of the setting, including whose point of view they are viewing the clouds from, creating unease in the audience. After a few moments, Adamson reveals that the camera is in the sky with a team of airplanes, solidifying the allusion to the airplane hijackings on 9/11. Though viewers later discover these planes to be German aircrafts during WWII, by the opening image centering on the sky and airplanes, a 2005 audience would first think about 9/11, setting the film up as a means of exposure therapy specifically for those affected by the events in 2001 and following. Pheasant-Kelley remarks that “although the novel’s opening only briefly mentions war, devoting merely one sentence to it, the film extends it to a lengthy sequence of fighter planes bombing London and the Pevensie family’s escape to an air-raid shelter. The film thus immediately immerses the viewer in war imagery” (91). Adamson could have begun his film at the train station, choosing, like Lewis, not to devote any time to the war, but instead he chooses to emphasize the 9/11 allusions and heighten the tension by beginning with a fast-paced and vivid action sequence.

More war allusions—this time, World War II allusions—appear in Lewis’s frequent reference to wolves. The White Witch’s Captain of the Secret Police, Maugrim (or Fenris Ulf in some early American publications), serves as an obvious German reference. During World War I and II, propaganda strongly influenced every country engaged in war and, in turn, Lewis’s novel. The White Witch sends her Secret Police to arrest Mr. Tumnus for high treason. By calling Maugrim the White Witch’s Captain of the Secret Police, Lewis alludes to the Nazi *Gestapo* who would arrest citizens for harboring fugitives, sharing German secrets, or doing anything to earn the title of traitor. In addition, the fact that Lewis portrays Maugrim as a wolf connects the character to the Nazi party. Nazis and wolves had connections through Hitler himself, *Wolfsangel*, the German *Werwolf* guerillas, and propaganda. The name *Adolf* is “from Old High German Athalwolf ‘noble wolf’” (“Adolph”). Hitler was keenly aware of the etymology of his name, and “Robert G. L. Waite, the psychobiographer, states that Hitler was always fascinated with wolves. At the beginning of his political career, he had chosen ‘Herr Wolf’ as his pseudonym” (“Hitler,” n. pag.) and named many of his military bases after wolf-related terms like *Wolfsschanze*—literally “wolf’s lair.” The *Wolfsangel* is a historic wolf trap, and the design of the trap turned into a “[r]une letter used as insignia” by many German SS divisions but notoriously worn by the 4th SS *Polizei Panzergrenadier* Division—a division specifically made up of German police officers (Lepage, n. pag.). The German *Werwolf* group arose toward the end of WWII as a last resort “to assassinate and terrorize anti-Nazi Germans and to harass advancing Allied troops” (“Organization,” n. pag.). Because of all the wolf-related Nazi imagery, Norris notes that the British anti-German propaganda would portray German soldiers as a “‘mad brute,’ a wolf, and with beast-like visage, in the traditional German army field uniform, or *feldgrau*, which was grey” (84). This propagandist description of the Germans almost identically matches

Lewis's description of Maugrim as "a huge grey beast," a "brute," and a "monster" (105—06). Children in Great Britain, along with most other countries engaged in the war, were bombarded daily with propaganda. With wolves so frequently symbolizing aspects of Nazi Germany, children in this context reading *LWW* would have been easily frightened and triggered by Lewis's use of wolves in his story. Yet by dealing with such traumas inside a safe paper environment, children can engage with their fears and move toward trauma relief.

The wolves also appear in Adamson's adaptation, and though they are similarly depicted as bad, he turns them more into terrorist figures rather than Nazi-like characters. After the tragedy of 9/11, airports began tightening security; all around the country, people who appeared Middle Eastern—especially men—were stopped and questioned far more often than, for example, white women. Adamson expands Lewis's story to connect this common post-9/11 scenario to the fox and beaver scene in the *LWW* film. In this scene, Mr. Beaver calls the fox a "traitor," despite the fox assuring them, "Relax. I'm one of the good guys." However, Mr. Beaver is on edge around the fox because, as he mentions, "You look an awful lot like one of the bad guys" (00:58:56). Because wolves act as the White Witch's henchmen, terrorizing all of Narnia, including the Beavers and the Pevensie children, Mr. Beaver judges the fox because of "an unfortunate family resemblance" to a wolf (00:59:02). Pheasant-Kelley considers this scene "a form of ethnic stereotyping in relation to terrorism" (94) although she does not expound on the scene in further detail as it relates to 9/11. Instead of Lewis's connection of the wolves to the German Nazis, Adamson uses the wolves as symbols of the terrorists America fought to eradicate during the War on Terror and the fox as the unfortunate victim of America's efforts. Though these first two examples do not seem too brutal, Lewis and Adamson both insert into their works scenes that are violent, especially for children.

Though World War I was the first war to fully utilize more modern warfare technology, much of the fighting still took place in close quarters, creating a personal and disturbing type of conflict which Lewis alludes to in his novel. Artillery and other long-range weaponry kept the fighting at a distance, but these technological advances had not eliminated hand-to-hand combat. Killing a whole trench of soldiers with an artillery shell or mortar from miles away was more impersonal than combat in close quarters because the soldiers did not see the carnage they caused. Yet often, soldiers like Lewis found themselves charging into fox holes or trenches and suddenly fighting one or two enemies with bayonets on the ends of their rifles or with three-sided trench knives. As an infantryman, Lewis suffered this gruesome and intimate warfare. Though he does not often describe what he went through during the war, in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis does recall the “the frights, the cold, the smell of H.E. [high explosives], the horribly smashed men still moving like half-crushed beetles, the sitting or standing corpses” (185). Whereas much of Lewis’s writing in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is simple and non-descriptive, the violence in Lewis’s depiction of Peter killing the wolf is similar to Lewis’s description of the violence of war in his autobiography. In *LWW*, Lewis writes that Peter “was tugging and pulling and the Wolf seemed neither alive nor dead, and its bared teeth knocked against his forehead, and everything was blood and heat and hair. A moment later he found that the monster lay dead and he had drawn his sword out of it and was straightening his back and rubbing the sweat off his face and out of his eyes. He felt tired all over” (106). Alan Jacobs notes that this scene is “[v]ivid indeed, and more blunt and brutal than most writers for children would risk” (73); however, Paul F. Ford notes that this boldness is because “C.S. Lewis felt that life is violent, and to deny that would be wrong” (435). Peter’s fight with the German wolf figure is personal and full of graphic description that any reader who had lived through such warfare could have experienced. Though

children were not usually on the frontline, they would have heard stories or imagined what it was like to be fighting. Often, imagination is more traumatic than reality, and exposure therapy also works for imaginative or unrealistic fears.

In the cinematic addition to Lewis's novel, Adamson's wolves close in and torture the fox while they interrogate him, alluding to the fear that children possibly had of being hurt by the terrorists they saw or heard about in the media or from adult conversations. In 2004, the Taliban released the video of the beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl, striking fear and horror into the lives of people around the world. Another particularly intense account of torture from the year the film came out is told in Marcus Luttrell's *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10*. SEAL Luttrell was captured after a group of Taliban fighters discovered and killed the rest his team. He recounts the interrogation and torture he went through:

I opened my eyes in time to see eight armed Taliban fighters come barging into the room. The first one came straight over to my cot and slapped me across the face with all his force. . . . And their inquisition went on for maybe six hours. Yelling and beating, yelling and kicking. They told me my buddies were all dead, told me they'd already cut everyone's head off and that I was next. (Luttrell and Robinson 293)

While Adamson's PG-rated film certainly does not depict torture and interrogation as violently as Luttrell, the director does show the wolves biting the fox and throwing him into the snow (00:59:21). However, the auditory storytelling plays a significant role in addition to the strictly visual storytelling. The fox's whimpering juxtaposed with the wolves' snarling causes Lucy, and perhaps the audience, to gasp and heightens the emotion in the scene. Pheasant-Kelley notes that the emotional scenes in the film, especially those regarding animal cruelty, "elicit maximum

viewer emotion” and revolve around “torture and implied cruelty” (88). This Taliban-reminiscent moment in the film pushes audience members into a state of extreme emotion. The torture in this scene acts as a tool to provide children a place where they can reckon with the same kinds of traumas and fears they face outside of Narnia.

The difference between the novel and the film’s versions of the escape with the beavers illuminates each medium’s respective war imagery. In chapter ten of the novel, three Pevensie children, Mr. Beaver, and Mrs. Beaver flee as the wolves approach. Their fleeing the house mimics a Londoner’s typical air-raid process. Mrs. Beaver is quickly going through her house, “[p]acking a load for each of [them]” (Lewis 81) to take, much like a mother would have quickly gathered a few important belongings before evacuating her house to head to an air-raid shelter. The group, after leaving the house, eventually land in a shelter that is “just a hole in the ground but dry and earthy. It was very small so that when they all lay down they were all a bundle of fur and clothes together” (84). They stay in this hole in the ground overnight, much like many British citizens did during the German *Blitzkrieg*. For any English children who stayed in the cities were forcefully awoken and hurried into air-raid shelters on any given night, this scene would have been extremely familiar and a perfect tool for exposure therapy. Though this scene from the novel contains tension, the film’s dramatic, high-speed version is much more fitting with the War on Terror.

The adaptation of this scene follows the same plotline, but Adamson connects the scene’s nuance to the subterranean style of warfare used during the War on Terror rather than to the air-raid style of warfare during World War II. The scene’s music, action, and new dialogue heightens tension, and Amy H. Sturgis argues that “Adamson has sacrificed the tone of Lewis’s chilling, inspiring, and high-stakes race for the excitement and titillation of the chase” (84).

However, this “sacrifice” is not necessarily a bad change but one that illuminates more of the cultural climate surrounding the War on Terror. The Taliban during the War on Terror “[reverted] to a more traditional use of caves and underground structures, of a nonurban and exclusively military nature” (Richmond-Barak xvii). In addition to the pacing, instead of the characters fleeing above ground and then camping for the night in a shelter, Adamson creates a series of underground tunnels for them to escape and run through (00:57:38). Pheasant-Kelley comments on the underground nature of this scene saying, “[T]he wolves attack the Beavers’ dam and chase the beavers and the children through underground tunnels, highlighting an affinity of post-9/11 fantasy film for subterranean spaces” (95). While armies have utilized subterranean warfare in many wars, during the War on Terror, terrorist groups returned to tunnel warfare to stay undetected. Whereas underground spaces in Lewis’s original context were deemed safe spaces in which to shelter from enemy bombs, in Adamson’s modern context, this once safe space would have been tainted with the possibility of danger. Similarly, as airports and airplanes were once deemed safe, now children had reason to fear these spaces. The film alludes to this dangerous subterranean space, and though this underground warfare did not happen on American soil, children were likely aware of the heightened level of danger in spaces they once saw as safe.

In addition to these more extreme examples of trauma from World War II and the War on Terror, other subtle references appear in the novel and film. Rodger Chapman notices a nuance specific to the novel and says that “Lewis gives chapter fourteen of [*LWW*] the title ‘The Triumph of the Witch,’ an undeniable pun on the title of the infamous Nazi propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*” (4). In the film, Adamson creates an almost unnoticeable dialogue addition which highlights more of the war imagery needed to establish Narnia as a realm for exposure

therapy. Soon after Lucy enters Narnia for the first time, she comes across Mr. Tumnus, and they have a conversation about fathers in war. Lucy sets a picture of Mr. Tumnus's father down and solemnly states, "My father's fighting in the war," to which Mr. Tumnus sympathizes by telling Lucy, "My father went away to war, too" (00:19:28). Having to watch a father or mother leave to fight on the frontline in a dangerous war is one of the most traumatizing aspects of war for children. While there were children during the War on Terror with parents engaged in the military advances against the Taliban, American children now also had to fear danger in their own country—after all, eight children were killed on 9/11. All these examples enable children of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to cope with any war trauma.

Though the original members of Lewis and Adamson's audience have since grown up, new wars and terrors will continue to traumatize more children. Therefore, in order to help each new generation of children cope and recover from traumas and fears, authors and filmmakers must continue to produce stories that utilize this type of therapeutic storytelling. Although Adamson did not fight in a war like Lewis, war was prominent in both of their lives and therefore both of their works. As examined earlier, in much of Lewis's writing, he downplays the trauma he experienced during and after the war, but his trauma allows him to provide an escape and hope for children facing similar trauma through his literature. Adamson could have attempted to perfectly mirror Lewis's writing. However, after the French New Wave film movement, directors became more than just transposers, plucking a sentence from a text and making it look pretty on screen. These film authors were encouraged to say something new with the story they tell on screen, so in order for the film adaptation to become a new form, Adamson had to look beyond Lewis's context and into his own. Through Adamson's adaptation, children facing the uncertainties of the War on Terror find relief. Children, whether living during the

Second World War or the War on Terror, normally cannot engage in the physical battle and instead may feel useless while stuck at home. But in Narnia, the children do engage in the physical fight, and they win the battle, bringing exposure therapy to its completion as the children conquer their traumas both inside and outside Narnia. Readers and audience members have hope as they exit Narnia and return to the real world—just as the Pevensie siblings left Narnia and returned to the safe countryside. Because Narnia acts as a representation of the real world, children can find comfort in knowing that the real Lion conquers all trauma in the end and through the power of this Lion, children can ultimately win the real battle.

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Essay

Parker Gilley

The Twilight of Passion: Love and Death in *The Romance of Tristian and Iseult* and *Vertigo*

Only two love stories have ever been told in the West. For all our infatuation with the swoon-inducing accounts of souls dissolved into one another at the first glance of surreptitious trysts, of sacrifices performed and bitter defeats subjected, there are only two myths, as diametrically opposed as possible, which unfold as an eternal dialectic within the heart of every descendant of the Western psyche. One is the Gospel of St. John, and the other is the romance of Tristian and Iseult. The former proclaims, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (*King James Version*, John 3:16) the latter beckons “My Lords, if you would hear a high tale of love and death . . .” (Bédier 3). *Love and Death*. We have here the two inextricable cords of literature. Nothing could be more metaphysically distant than these two tales—the Gospel pits Love and Death as enemies, while the Tristian myth enshrines them as wretched companions—and yet nothing could be so aligned as their mutual fixation upon the unwrought, rudimentary desires of the human frame.

It is here that we are immediately confronted with a problem. These two myths, rotating around their respective axes of Love, are yet propelled by the common, centripetal force of Passion. In Passion we approach a most ennobled expression of Love, which both retains its etymological significance from the Greek (*pasco*: “to suffer”), and yet is that wellspring of the greatest works of art and action in the human record. The hagiographic passion of Christ and the courtly suffering of Tristian both radiate a solemn sacredness—the former a divine, sacrificial

Agape, and the latter an intoxicating, Gnosticizing Eros. But a brief investigation of our modern milieu, historically downstream from the double springs of these sacred cults of Eros and Agape, sees passion everywhere profaned. Our products of entertainment as much as our private lives reflect a bourgeoisie intoxication with romance at the cost of marital fidelity, and of a ceaseless, unreflective pursuit of corporeal pleasures.

Putting this abstract social and philosophical issue in the concrete terms of the Western artistic tradition, Denis de Rougemont reflects upon the inaugural lines of *The Romance of Tristian and Iseult*, writing, “Love and death, a fatal love—in these phrases is summed up... whatever is universally moving in European literature. . . . What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is...not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion*. And passion means suffering. There we have the fundamental fact” (15). The point of this brief study is to pry into this “fundamental fact” by extending de Rougemont’s thesis into the contemporary age, and to question, at the intersection of metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, the specific role of film in participating in and proliferating the heterodoxy of the now secularized, broadly disseminated, and psychologized cult of Eros. It is at this socio-philosophic juncture that two texts suggest themselves to juxtaposition: *The Romance of Tristian and Iseult* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*.¹⁰ The main thrust of this juxtaposition will be to expose the hidden psychical predilection for a Gnosticizing passion in the Western mind, and to investigate how this passion might be legislated in our imagination and fantasies by the form and content of artistic production. In studying this germ of the courtly tradition, it is evident that Alfred Hitchcock’s reinterpretation of the Tristian and

¹⁰ I will use the edition *The Romance of Tristian and Iseult* by Joseph Bédier, translated by Hilaire Belloc and completed by Paul Rosenfeld, which, in Bédier’s words, was “assembled from so many sources that, were I to enumerate them all in minute detail, this little volume would be weighed down by a profusion of footnotes” (205). In this text, Bédier overcomes the difficulties of a multifaceted manuscript tradition by assembling a palimpsest of the myth, which is both an accessible prose reference, clearly tracking the general argument of the narrative, and is yet inspired by and, in some cases, translated from the greatest contributors to the myth itself, including Béroul, Thomas, and Gottfried von Strassburg.

Iseult myth in *Vertigo* engages in a critique of the profaned dialectic between Eros and Agape, exposing the romantic relationships of the Tristian myth to be essentially power dynamics—which are confirmed by frequent instances of reflexive, meta-aesthetic sequences and ironical transpositions from the original source material—thus proclaiming the impossibility of meaningful relationships in the modern world.

To begin, de Rougemont's general thesis, laid out in *Love in the Western World* and *Love Declared*, is that modernity's possession by Eros can clearly be traced as an effect of the medieval Christian heresy, Catharism. Prevalent in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries in Northern Italy, Southern France, and taking deepest root in Languedoc, France among the nobility of Toulouse, Catharism was a species of the neo-Platonic, anti-materialist Gnosticism, against which the Christian Church had been differentiating itself since the very earliest codifications of its own dogma. Catharism's specific instantiation of this heresy reflected many of the early Gnosticizing religions of the East—especially those theological heterodoxies refined by Manicheism, which, beginning in the third century, spread from its provenance in Persia to as far as Northern Europe (*Love in the Western World* 64–65). The governing metaphor of this religion was expressed in the cosmological duality of Day versus Night, bespeaking a metaphysical opposition between Good and Evil, Unity and Disorder, Spirit and Physicality (65). The thesis of this dialectic is predicated upon the dogmatic assumption that the “soul is divine or angelic,” and is trapped within the evil of the physical form (65). While enfleshed, the spirit is in exile from the Unity of Being manifested in the Platonic Forms—those incorporeal and transcendent sources of being which spill out into immanent physical reality—constantly seeking to escape the perverse realm of disparate, physical matter.

The movement from this metaphysic to the issue of passionate love, though not obvious, is revealed within the Platonic foundation of Catharism. In Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, both of which bespeak an older Eastern influence, Love is lauded by its anthropomorphized name, Eros. On numerous occasions, Plato praises the inspiration afforded by Eros as a "kind of madness" by which the lover is "transported with the recollection of the true beauty" (*Phaedrus* n. pag.). The madness of the lover, revealed in their disquietude, their irrational attitudes, their forgetfulness to take food and sleep, etc., is transfigured in the Platonic scheme into a propulsive force, attenuating the lover's physical manifestation as they approach the "true beauty" of the Forms. It is this divine enthusiasm, first enunciated philosophically by Plato, which undergirds all of the various manifestations of Gnostic asceticism, for to exercise *askesis* is to achieve *catharsis*. This *catharsis* (κάθαρσις) is the same Greek word, meaning "purification," from which the Cathars of Southern France took their name. de Rougemont similarly notes this alignment of purity and suffering, which aims at Unity: "Eros is complete Desire, luminous Aspiration, the primitive religious soaring carried to its loftiest pitch, to the extreme exigency of purity which is also the extreme exigency of Unity" (61). It is clear that Eros, as a divine madness which provokes self-induced suffering, is at the heart of the Catharist mystery.

According to de Rougemont, this rejuvenation of Eroticism in Catharism was a dialectical critique of the passionless reality of marriage in a feudal society: "The cultivation of passionate love began in Europe as a reaction to Christianity (and in particular to its doctrine of marriage) by people whose spirit, whether naturally or by inheritance, was still pagan" (74). This doctrine of marriage was typified in the Christian theology of Agape, which semantically "includes both the love and affection between human beings and between humans and God and is often contrasted with eros (love including sexual passion)" (Flinn n. pag.). In contradistinction

to the Neoplatonic goal of union developed in the theology of Eros, Agape reflects the marital *sacramentum* of Christ and the Church, seeking communion among diversity. Of course, the Pauline theology of marriage, central to Christian theology itself, reflects both the metaphorical beauty of marriage as an eschatological symbol, as well as the quotidian function of marriage as a deterrent to irresistible passion: “But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn” (I Corinthians 7:9). It is against this latter, negative prohibition of Christian marriage, combined with the materialism of economic stability with which many marital unions were focally interested in the Middle Ages, that the Gnostic, courtly troubadours took aim. And it is this image of the psychological and sociological reduction of marriage, as a prohibition from flights of passion, which persists in the modern imagination.

The final, definite link to establish in our historical-philosophical bricolage outlining the courtly love tradition is to note the flourishing of Catharism in Languedoc and Northern Italy and the provenance of *cortezia*—the romance-infused courtly literature tradition—within the same geographical region. It is clear from the record of history that “this period was one of intense literary activity which benefited England through the marriage of Henry II with Eleanor of Aquitaine. The civilization of the southern French courts became available throughout England and elsewhere in Europe fueled the revolution in courtly attitudes which was to affect the Italian poets Dante and Petrarch” (Hollier n. pag.). These court poets of Languedoc and the Romantic poets *par excellence* of Florence, all contemporary with the Catharist saturation of Southern France and Northern Italy, began to hymn explicit odes about Night and Day, fated lovers enraptured by Night’s enveloping darkness, and the resulting death which awaited these shadow-intoxicated lovers (*Love in the Western World* 75–91). The madness and suffering of the lovers is poetically projected in these texts as a theological allegory for the love of Death and Night,

which must enrapture each adherent of the Pure religion, in order to pass from corporality into the shining bliss of the Unity of Being.

Among this courtly literature tradition, the romance of Tristan and Iseult, given multiple poetic and prosaic treatments, emerges as the outstanding archetype of the explicit proclamation of two lovers' Eros unto death and their rejection of the marital theology of Christian Agape. Like all of the finest examples of Romance, the plot of the Tristan and Iseult myth "turns upon a *transgression* of the rules of courtly love," which is transgression by sexual consummation (143). The moral failure of the protagonists in Romance always leads to intercourse, necessitating the aforementioned *askesis* through the intentional obstruction of any further fleshly fulfillment of Passion. Romance, best exemplified in the myth of Tristan and Iseult, is nothing more than the imbibition of the bitter dregs of suffering, promising the achievement of purity through ceaseless spiritual and bodily pain, even to the point of death.¹¹ This "fundamental symbolism" (92) of the Tristan myth spread broadly, and, as de Rougemont argues, was disseminated into the psyche of the Western mind, albeit through constant transgressions, inversions, and profanations, as the monolithic expression of Eros: "The history of passionate love in all great literature from the thirteenth century down to our own day is the history of the descent of the courtly myth into 'profane life,' the account of the more and more desperate attempts of Eros to take the place of mystical transcendence by means of emotional intensity" (170). By the time the myth arrives in our modern context, de Rougemont sees it thoroughly psychologized as an endemic feature of the Western descendants in its historical translation from feudal courtliness to the bourgeoisie morality of modernity. We retain the courtly preoccupation

¹¹ In traditional retellings of the Tristan and Iseult myth, the lovers share a drink of spiced wine, which contains a blend of magical herbs, making all who drink from the cup fatedly fall in love. The Eucharistic perversion of this symbolism is significant, as is Hitchcock's recasting of this scene when Scottie offers Madeleine a drink after saving her from "drowning."

with passion and leave behind all of the governing Christian or Catharist metaphysics which organize passion into a theology.

It is in this twilight of the once potent dialectic between Eros and Agape, now reduced to a materialist shadow of its former, cultic glory, that Hitchcock stages his film as an allegory for the impossibility of meaningful romantic relationships. A cursory glance at the plot of *Vertigo* reveals its incredible similarity to *The Romance of Tristian and Iseult*. The complex nexus of love and fealty binding King Mark of Cornwall, Tristian, and Iseult the Fair is recast in *Vertigo* as the deceitful relationships between Gavin Elster, John “Scottie” Ferguson, and Madeleine Elster. The doomed love affair of Tristian and Iseult the Fair faces similar damnation in Hitchcock’s tale, as does the loveless union between Tristian and Iseult of the White Hands. This duality of Iseult the Fair/Iseult of the White Hands is contained within the duplicitous duality of the singular Madeleine Elster/Judy Barton; and Scottie’s love of Judy simply for her similitude to Madeleine is precisely like Tristian’s love of Iseult of the White Hands simply because she shares his beloved Iseult the Fair’s name. Furthermore, Tristian and Iseult’s escape from Tintagel together into the Woods of Morois is traced by Hitchcock in Scottie and Madeleine’s “wandering” moments in the mist-veiled forest full of *sequoia sempervirens* (*Vertigo* 00:59:05-01:02:44), just as Tristian and Iseult’s parting kiss on the beach before Iseult returns to King Mark is reflected by Scottie and Madeleine’s dramatic kiss on the beach after Scottie asks “Shall I take you home?” (01:02:20). The marital relationship between Gavin and Madeleine (as Judy) is just as much a loveless hoax as King Mark and Iseult the Fair’s unconsummated relationship. Furthermore, the sharing of beverages in Scottie’s apartment between himself and Madeleine after he rescues Madeleine from the sea is just as much a love potion as the one Brangien mistakenly offers to Tristian and Iseult after Tristian has rescued the princesses’ land from a

ferocious dragon. The final symbol of Tristian and Iseult's love, the jasper ring of fealty, is converted into the symbol of disloyalty through the red pendant which Judy retains from her scheme with Gavin.

At nearly every turn, Hitchcock's plot mirrors the constant, episodic meanderings and obstructions to the fulfillment of love in the original myth. And all the while, the film is serenaded by Bernard Hermann's wandering, frequently unresolved melodies, aurally quoting Wagner's score of *Tristian und Isolde* on numerous occasions.¹² Within this scheme of narrative similarity, Hitchcock's many ironic inversions of the Tristian myth achieve the effect of exposing the source materials' frequent poetic dissimulations. In his recasting of the myth, Hitchcock exorcises all the gallantry, courtliness, and fealty, trading it for irony and a self-reflexive deconstruction of his own artistic medium. The great ironic transposition that Hitchcock evokes in his narrative is the conversion of the Eros and Agape dialectic, representing passionate love versus marital love, respectively, into existential exercises of power. In *Vertigo* those who engage in passionate love descend, quite literally, into the complete loss of freedom afforded by death, while those who represent the passionless bond of marriage exercise power over others. Engaging in the same critical process as de Rougemont, Hitchcock illustrates in his film de Rougemont's frustration that "social confusion has now reached a point at which the pursuit of immorality turns out to be more exhausting than compliance with the old moral codes" (*Love Declared* 25). Scottie and Madeleine's doomed attempt to supersede these "old moral codes," themselves perverse in Hitchcock's universe, is no more meaningful than to assent to them.

¹² The most notable quotation in the score is Hermann's Scene D'Amour, taking its inspiration from the theme at the dénouement, *Liebestod*, which suggestively means "love-death" in German from *Liebe* and *Tod*.

From the very beginning of the film, Hitchcock portrays the precariousness of Scottie's freedom by displaying the distinctly geometric visualization of a downward descent. In the opening scene after the title credits, as Scottie hangs onto a gutter after a botched attempt at jumping from one roof to another, he surveys the distance below and swoons as the dark expanse visually pulls on him. This *l'appel du vide*, simulated by the classic "vertigo" shot, poetically reflects the physics of desire. The language of "attraction to" and, poignantly, of "falling in love" with which we couch our experience of passion reflects a passivity—a resignation to the gravitational pull of desire—that is Scottie's downfall. Hitchcock never shows us how Scottie is saved from this vertiginous ledge, allowing us to imagine the rest of the film as an allegorical investigation of Scottie's gradual fall into the cruel darkness of Night at the hands of passion.

This directionality of Scottie's threatening fall is married to the reoccurring theme of "wandering," a quotation straight from the pages of the Tristan myth. As Tristan and Iseult flee into the Woods of Morois, Bédier writes, "They wandered in the depths of the wild wood, restless and in haste like beasts that are hunted" (89). So too, after Scottie has caught up with Madeleine while following her back to his own apartment, the following conversation ensues:

Scottie: Where are you going?

Madeleine: I just thought that I'd wander.

.....

Scottie: Don't you think it's kind of a waste for us to . . .

Madeleine: To wander separately? Only one is a wanderer. Two together are going somewhere.

Scottie: No, I don't think that's necessarily true. (*Vertigo* 00:57:51-00:58:22)

For once, Scottie is right. Nevertheless, the two lovers, like the aimless Tristian and Iseult, set off for their own escapade in the woods. Later, in the *Romance*, when Tristian has gone mad with the loss of his beloved Iseult, he mourns, “Little she remembers or cares for the joys and the mourning of old, little for me, as I wander in this desert place” (148). So too does Scottie, after Madeleine’s presumed death, wander the streets of San Francisco like the “Mad Carlotta,” as Pop Liebel calls her. On this dominant return to the theme of wandering in *Vertigo*, Lesley Brill writes, “In a film as profoundly ironic and essentially tragic as *Vertigo*, the characters can only wander” (Brill 206). Hitchcock perfectly captures the aimlessness of these lovers, for whom the gradual loss of freedom and meaning is inextricably tied to the conditions of their love.

A great irony in Hitchcock’s film is the repetition of “power and freedom” by those who represent the marital relationship. The first time we hear this expression, it comes from Gavin Elster, who reminisces upon the “power and freedom” once afforded to the man of old San Francisco (*Vertigo* 00:13:10). The second time we hear it is from Pop Liebel, who likewise remembers an older San Francisco, when men could get away with exposing their wives: “You know, men could do that in those days. They had the power and the freedom” (00:36:19). The projection of such a capacity for abuse which men had over their wives recalls the “old moral codes” to which de Rougemont claims marriage has been reduced. Hitchcock confirms that Gavin, representing the feudal lord King Mark, to whom Iseult is married and Tristian owes fealty, possesses a power and freedom Scottie does not. In Scottie’s nightmare after Madeleine’s death, he sees himself approaching Elster in the courthouse where Madeleine’s death was ruled a suicide. As Scottie approaches, Carlotta Valdes, the very woman who Pop Liebel describes as being “thrown away” by her husband, appears beside Gavin Elster, who holds her firmly by the arm (01:25:13–18). Even if we never found out that it was indeed Gavin whose deceitful plot led

Scottie into his doomed love, this ethereal scene establishes Gavin's symbolic representation as the "old moral codes" of marriage, which authorize him to dispose of his marital property as he sees fit.

Scottie's tragic lack of power and freedom is most pathetically displayed by an ironic reversal of Scottie and Madeleine's first embrace. Halfway through the film, after their "wandering" retreat to the woods, Scottie and Madeleine hold each other tight on the beach, savoring the final moments of their tryst before Madeleine is returned to her King Mark. Madeleine cries, "There's someone within me and she says I must die. Oh Scottie don't let me go," to which he tragically replies "I'm here. I've got you." As the music swells and the waves thunderously explode in a geyser of climactic passion, the two kiss for the first time (01:05:31–01:06:08). Hitchcock's composition of this preposterously saccharine scene, highlighting the hyperbolic sentimentality of the normative bourgeoisie romance, is both a mockery of the naïve passion between Scottie and Madeleine, as well as a set-up for the final scene of the film, wherein the lovers' embrace is revealed as tragically and ironically subservient to the nocturnal power of passion.

Near the end of *The Romance of Tristian and Iseult*, Tristian, having gone mad, returns to King Mark's castle dressed as a jester. He pleads for the queen's hand, and the king, pitying the poor fool, entertains his madness. He asks where Tristian would take the queen if given her hand, to which he responds, "Oh! very high, between the clouds and heaven, into a fair chamber glazed. The beams of the sun shine through it, yet the winds do not trouble it at all. There would I bear the Queen into that crystal chamber of mine . . ." (182). This is the same deadly promise the maddened Scottie makes to his newly reconstructed object of desire, Judy, by thrice repeating the imperative "Go up the stairs," and adding the final time, "And I'll follow" as an attempt to

“go to the past once more” (*Vertigo* 02:03:34). But Tristian’s Catharist vision of Purity through death and the consequent ascension of the soul is symbolically inverted by Hitchcock into the *katabasis* of the lovers into a death waiting below. In the final scene of the film, as Scottie and Judy emerge atop the tower, Scottie chides Judy for keeping the pendant, which, though symbolized by the jasper ring of loyalty unto death in the Tristian myth, is here the signifier of Scottie’s impotence and inability to secure loyalty: “You shouldn’t have been that sentimental” (02:07:31). So too Hitchcock chides his audience for their complicity in Scottie’s own sentimentality, represented in the embrace on the beach, which is now fatefully reversed in the *denouement*.

For the duration of the film, we have been convinced that the “she,” whom Madeleine claims is demanding her death from “within,” is the feigned demonic possessor, Carlotta. At the last gasp of the film, Hitchcock ironically subverts our presupposition, revealing the damning “she” to be Judy/ Iseult of the White Hands, represented in the hyper-chaste image of an aged nun.¹³ As Scottie and Madeleine/Judy embrace atop the bell tower, Hitchcock positions them and frames them in the exact same shot composition as the embrace upon the beach. Then, Madeleine begged that Scottie would not “let go.” Now, she falls. At the vertiginous climax of the ill-fated lover’s descent into Desire, as the grey of twilight of dusk beckons and Scottie invokes the familiar adage of “all that freedom and all that power” for the third and final time, a careful viewing reveals that it is just as much Scottie’s act of letting go as Madeleine’s act of falling backwards that results in her death (02:07:07). Much attention is given to the absurdity of Madeleine’s “fall,” but it is worth questioning how much of a “fall,” implying accident, this really is. Not only is Scottie seen loosening his grasp on Madeleine, but we hear her footsteps off

¹³ It is highly significant that Hitchcock had Kim Novak dub the final line of the film, “God have mercy,” which is ostensibly uttered by the nun.

screen as she seemingly runs off of the precipice to her presumed death (02:08:17–22). Scottie’s resignation to passion, symbolized in the sentimentality of a hyper-romantic embrace, is also his loss of power, his inability to hold on to his object of desire. So too, Judy’s many pantomimed suicide attempts in the film are now actualized in a self-recoil from the virginal Iseult of the White Hands within her. She punishes herself for her transgressions with Scottie in a final loss of freedom. As de Rougemont writes, “Passion means suffering, something undergone, the mastery of fate over a free and responsible person” (*Love in the Western World* 50). In the final fate of this hapless Tristian and Iseult, Hitchcock’s critique of the impotence of Eros is complete. The necessary distance between the lover and the beloved—that denial of the “happily ever after” through the ultimate negation of freedom unto death—is established forever.

But the dominance of impotence of Eros in the film, as well as its literal descent into death realized in the final shot of the film, is most poetically contemplated by Hitchcock throughout the film by a meta-aesthetic critique of film form itself. Like all great works of art, *Vertigo* constantly returns to an ekphrastic reflection upon its own medium and connects these formal reflections to the trajectory of its narrative. In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock’s meta-aesthetic critique exposes the Gnosticizing gaze of the film camera, which engages in the double act of objectifying and abstracting the human, and specifically female, form. In John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*, he traces the development of visual art in the last millennium of Western history, reflecting upon the evolving paradox of desire and possession in painting and photography: “The contradiction can be stated simply. On the one hand, the individualism of the artist, the thinker, the patron, the owner: on the other hand, the person who is the object of their activities—the woman—treated as a thing or an abstraction” (62). This is perfectly complementary with de Rougemont’s critique of the idealization of femininity in Western Romance as abstracted object

of desire: “We knew that Tristian did not love Iseult for herself, but only on account of the love of Love of which her beauty gave the image” (*Love in the Western World* 223). Film, as the descendent of Western semiotics and Western narratives, contains within its fundamental mode of visual communication the kernel of Gnosticism, by looking at the female form in order to look beyond it.

Hitchcock’s reflexive use of film form, evident from the very beginning of the film, walks the fine artistic line between participation in and exposure of the Gnosticizing givenness to Eros in film form. In the opening shot of the film, the camera opens its eye upon the lower quadrant of a female face. We move to the lips, the nose, the eyes, and finally to a single eye, until a swirling gyre superimposed upon the opened eye entirely subsumes the ever-fading visage (00:01:22–2:13). Compare this to Berger’s comment upon Albrecht Dürer’s ideal representation of the female form in art: “Dürer believed that the ideal nude ought to be constructed by taking the face of one body, the breasts of another, the legs of a third, the shoulders of a fourth...and so on. The result would glorify Man. But the exercise presumed a remarkable indifference to who any one person really was” (62). In this prelude to the film, Hitchcock is not only exposing the entire plot of his film, but is laying bare the beating metaphysical heart of the entire courtly tradition expressed in the maddening Eros of the Tristian myth, and is consciously suggesting the role of the film artist within this tradition. Hitchcock, exposing and exploring the artistic predilection for the fabrication of the female form, as Dürer narrates, is explicitly manufacturing the picture of femininity before our eyes, image by image. However, Hitchcock here both laments and reveals the *dolor* of the artist, and, in particular, the film director: in constructing the object of desire through images, as much as the narrative around which those images cohere, the artist is condemned to an ultimate denial of Desire’s fulfillment. The impotent phantasm of

desire dissolves forever as soon as lovers leave the dark wood of the movie theater. Thus, before a full view of the feminine face in the opening scene of *Vertigo* is fully perceived, the visage dissolves into the swirling, void depths of darkness.

Scottie's inebriating passion for Madeleine, his recomposition of Judy in the likeness of Madeleine, and his final denial that this synthetic product satisfies his desire, ("It's too late. there's no bringing her back" [*Vertigo* 02:08:05]), reflecting the exact trajectory of Tristian's own relationship to the dual Iseults, mirrors Hitchcock's own self-reflexive critique of film form and the office of the artist. Following the mood of the aforementioned opening credits, Hitchcock chooses to obscure the audience's first view of Madeleine by showing her first from behind, and then in a subjective shot from Scottie's perspective in portrait (00:18:48). Donald Spoto notes this artistically contrived introduction to Madeleine: "There is something statuesque about her, something eminently desirable and yet infinitely remote, the quintessence of the mystery of Woman" (282). Spoto gets right to the heart of the matter. We see precisely what Hitchcock wants us to see, which is the idealization of Woman as the object and aim of the soul's eternal projection of desire. However, as Madeleine exits the scene of her first appearance with Gavin, she passes by a mirror, which Hitchcock has positioned so as to momentarily provide the illusion of two Madeleines on screen. This not only presages the later projection of desire upon Judy which will recompose her as Madeline, like Tristian's projection of desire upon Iseult of the White Hands after "hearing her name" (151), but also signifies the phantasmagoric incorporeality of Madeleine as an object of desire, especially as she is projected upon the film screen itself.

At the very end of the film, after Scottie has completely reconstituted the ghost of his lover, denied the efficacy of his work, and "let go" of Madeleine in her fall, Hitchcock displays a

deft framing technique by positioning Scottie under the archway of the tower. Scottie passes through this framing arch, emerging immediately onto the precipice of the tower and gazing in horror below (02:08:33–42). Throughout the film, Hitchcock has explicitly illustrated the female figures in the film as a contrived artistic product contained within frames (whether they be the filmic or diegetic). Nevertheless, from the dissolution of the female face in the opening credits, to the black swirl into which the camera zooms in the framed portrait of Carlotta (00:27:30), to the shadowed silhouette of Judy in portrait at the Empire Hotel (01:45:16), Hitchcock has suggested an ultimate darkness behind the frame of Scottie’s desiring gaze. Now, passing through the frame of the archway, Scottie finally sees the upshot of all his passionate striving. Beyond the façade of desire, entering in upon that holiness of Desire itself, Scottie is left precisely where he was at the beginning of the film—dangling precariously above the void of meaninglessness. Scottie’s ineluctable vertigo is the image of the artist’s powerless Pygmalion desire.

In these preceding pages we have attempted to tell the story of Western art from the following vantage: The great literary and imaginative ascendancy of Eros over Agape in the Western tradition, on display in the highest degree in the courtly myth of Tristan and Iseult, has been profaned in the modern world, evinced through the artistic products and personal lives of the common man in modernity as an ill-fated striving for the fulfillment of desire as a means of preservation against the imagined passionlessness of marriage. Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* documents the profanation of this dialectical duel, revealing the meaninglessness and manipulation behind modern romantic relationships in the ever-lengthening shadow of the Western Romance tradition. What Hitchcock’s film suggests is that there is an inextricable bond between our artistic products and our social realities. Of course, in our modern situation, the Kantian ideal of a

disinterested aesthetic experience is no longer possible. Our psyche has been utterly shaped by the artistic products of an era we no longer understand. The perennial question of the commensurability of Art and Reality is now nonsense as we gradually approach a unification of the two. The metaphors of Western art have become the structures of the Western mind itself—how can we any longer express ourselves through these metaphors if they are the very apparatus by which we confer meaning upon reality? In the final estimation, the Gnosticizing urge to complete unification of being has been so thoroughly sublimated in our Western psyche that we, like materialist Don Quixotes, have blurred the lines between our own fantasies and realities. Hitchcock can do little else but point his film camera at the soul of this strange new world as it falls headlong into the murky void of its own eternally recurring desires.

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Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh, PhD

Religion and Film

In or around 1997, I attended the British New Testament Society conference at Aberdeen University. W.R. Telford delivered his Presidential address on “Images of Christ in the Cinema.” It was a masterful presentation, using excerpts from seven movies, beginning with *King of Kings* in 1927 and ending with *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988. He concluded his presentation by commenting that “The screen image of Jesus has varied with the shifts and currents of society itself, in line with its changing social, political and religious perspectives and values.”¹⁴ This observation sowed a seed in my mind that led me to begin to use movies as hermeneutical lenses to interpret biblical and theological material in my courses at Samford.

I have tended not to use “Christian” films but rather commercial movies that have religious themes, thereby encouraging a connection between the Church and contemporary culture and allowing for a fresh way of learning about biblical and theological themes. Such films also present opportunities to discuss spiritual questions at a time when more and more people have given up on traditional religious institutions but not on spirituality itself. The movies become a lens I use to explore religious ideas about God, Christ, providence, sin and evil, and suffering, as well as the doctrine of salvation and eschatology.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to co-teach an upper-level course titled “Religion and Film” with Dr. Geoff Wright. He helped the class to understand issues relating to film form, and I explored the religious themes contained in the films. We explored these themes using the

¹⁴ The paper was published as W.R. Telford, “Images of Christ in the Cinema: Media and Theology Project Public Lectures.” See [Telford-1997-Images-of-Christ-in-the-Cinema.pdf](#).

Apostles Creed as our framework. In 2020, I taught this course myself, focusing on the religious significance of each movie and trying to watch the full movie on one day a week, and then discussing it on the following class. This was interrupted by Covid at spring break that year, and the students had to watch the movies in their own homes, without the opportunity to discuss them in class.

Over the last seven years, I have set aside time in my Biblical Foundations and Christian Theology classes to allow students the opportunity to watch a movie over a weekend and then respond to various prompts. I expect students to write a reflection and sometimes to respond to another student's submission. The movie day follows in line with class discussion on a particular theme, such as how we visualize God in our minds, what we understand about providence, the way the Bible understands salvation, the problem of sin, evil and suffering, and how Jesus is presented in the New Testament and in the history of Christian theology. The movies I have often chosen to develop these themes include *The Shack*, *The Adjustment Bureau*, *No Country for Old Men*, *Still Alice*, and a variety of "Jesus" movies from which students can choose.

Following a class discussion on the nature of the Trinity, when we examine various biblical passages in the Hebrew Bible that speak of God not only as loving father but also as a nurturing mother, students are better able to think about how God is presented in *The Shack*, a movie based on a novel by William Paul Young. Young wrote the book partly to exorcise his own pain over being raped repeatedly as a very young boy by tribesmen in New Guinea and by "older boys" at school while his parents were missionaries. The book and the movie are about a man whose daughter is abducted and murdered. In the midst of emotional turmoil four years later, the father, Mack, has an encounter with "God" at the Shack where his daughter's body was found, and he eventually makes peace with her death. I have been surprised by how well students

respond to this story and the way in which God is portrayed. *The Shack* provides a very meaningful approach to the issue of theodicy, grappling with questions of why God allows suffering and how we can find meaning in the midst of pain. The prompt I use for this movie reads, “Do you struggle with believing God is good in light of all the tragedy in the world? How is Young's description of God different from your concept of God? . . . Do you struggle with the idea of God have feminine characteristics as well as male? Did *The Shack* change any of your opinions about God or Christianity?”

On the topic of providence, we listen to various voices from the early Church Fathers, such as John of Damascus and Saint Augustine, as well as later contributions from John Calvin in the sixteenth century and the views of the Open Theist, Clark Pinnock. Afterwards, the students watch *The Adjustment Bureau*. The movie, which is a romantic adventure, asks questions about whether we, as human beings, control our destiny or are controlled by unseen forces that manipulate us. In the film, a politician named David (played by Matt Damon) glimpses the future that has been planned for him and realizes he wants something else. To get it, he must pursue across, under, and through the streets of modern-day New York the only woman he's ever loved: a dancer named Elise (played by Emily Blunt). Mysterious men (i.e., angels) conspire to keep the two apart. In the face of overwhelming odds, David must either let Elise go and accept a predetermined path or risk everything to defy fate and be with her. The prompt for this movie asks students to think about the agents of fate/providence, i.e., the adjustment bureau. Do we really have free will, or is it all planned out for us? Am I free to choose, to alter any plan, or create a new plan? What is the relationship between God as sovereign and human beings as freely choosing people, created for a relationship with a personal God?

I use *The Greatest Showman* to tease out theological issues relating to the Church being an inclusive community of grace. Starring Hugh Jackman, the movie is a musical drama recalling the life of P.T. Barnum. It is a “rags to riches” story of someone who was orphaned and penniless but ambitious. Thirsty for innovation and hungry for success, Barnum manages to open a wax museum but soon shifts his focus to the unique and the peculiar, introducing extraordinary, never-seen-before acts on the circus stage. Some people call Barnum’s rich collection of oddities an outright freak show; but when Barnum, obsessed with applause and respectability, gambles everything on the opera singer Jenny Lind, he loses sight of the most crucial aspect of his life: his family. The people he employs in the circus show appear to be outside of society and find opposition and resentment to their presence in various towns the circus visits. The movie also examines how Barnum treats them, which I use as a metaphor for how the Church welcomes and receives all who come into its orbit. The prompts for the movie ask students to think about questions of how we treat others on the basis of gender, class, skin color, disability or sexuality. Does Barnum learn something from his performers about being inclusive? How does the song “From Now On” reflect on issues of hope and how the Church, as an inclusive community of grace, can enable us to find hope in and from each other?

The use of movies in the classroom is something that I have found stretches the thinking of Samford students and allows them room to consider biblical and theological themes that are very real in the context of living in the twenty-first century.

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Poetry

*Sarah Chew***One Drop**

For one drop he died,
One seared and scorch-marked scar,
And now you are here
Where the wasteland wept.
You came breathing sparsely
To the cross, with wires,
With bedsheet sweat,
Not with horses of war but with
Bare feet. In the desert
A tree grew up to its breadth,
Sweating green and gloss, black
Soil and seeds, and the fruit turned
On its stem to your reach.
Your hand was a fist and your feet
Begged to leave, but your God
Plucked the fruit of one drop
And with love gave you grief.
When you beat him away,
When you begged him to stay,
He took, and for one scar,
Your scar, he ate.

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Poetry

Davis Hicks

Catharsis

How cool are the waters pulled from the well of the soul,
How fresh the taste of self-poured sorrow.
How panged the self-portrait of cosmic cruelty.

Wretched leper-man that I am, Who will umbrella me?
Only shaky breath and blood brow, chapped lip and broken bone,
You who accept my hemlock love.
Your wreath of whips threads wine across Your leather rind,
Magpie spine is stained scarlet by this mutiny of mine.
I, Simon and Peter, man and boy, see and flee, feel and kneel...

Hinge of the world, let driftwood shroud your glory!
Discarded nail and woodpile sorrow-shroud the life of Your joy,
I see and feel and know Why, Oh My

Adonai El Roi.

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Poetry

Julie Steward, PhD

Bailey, Texas, pop. 187

St. Hilary, fourth-century bishop: "Everything that seems empty is full of the angels of God."

Bailey, Texas. Angel Central.
 The very birthplace of cherubs
 until the lucky ones escape
 to perch on skyscrapers,
 get lost in traffic,
 or ride the subway to the end of the line
 just for fun. Just because they can.

Whoever said empty was a beautiful idea?

Our farm sat back from a white rock road
 you had to know
 from a threadbare line
 of pecan and mesquite.
 No streetlamp.
 No signpost.
 Giving directions became a cruel joke:
 "Turn right after the big tree."

Oh sure. The big one.

Lloyd and Linda
 bought the yellow trailer
 just across the way.
 Lloyd grew grass,
 acres and acres
 of St. Augustine.
 He was the first real live farmer
 I ever knew. No dairy cows,
 no happy pigs,
 just acres and acres
 of St. Augustine.

Imagine the blankest
 canvas you know.
 Imagine it blank
 on a gray day in snow.

Imagine all shape and texture
stripped.
Now paint it green
and you have their “front yard,”
a hemorrhage of St. Augustine,
lawn carelessly
everywhere,
endless.

Grass.
Grass.
Grass.
Grass.
Grass.

I had never seen so much void.
At times I would hallucinate shrubbery.

Four hours before our blue heeler
was hit by a truck in front of their farm,
I thought I saw him running across
Lloyd and Linda’s sky.
I rubbed my eyes
but there he was already in the clouds,
Zeke, mercifully giving me
something, anything, to look at.

I mean 360 degrees of grass.
So much grass you’d think the earth was flat.
Nothing more.
Nothing less.
Man, I’m talking about flat ass grass.

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Poetry

Ashlyn Hamrick

The Month After He Leaves You

One by one,
like the birch leaves in autumn,
the petals of your eucalyptus bouquet
pile on the hardwood floor.
You haven't swept in a month.
The motion reminds you of his hair,
cinnamon-colored curls sweetly
touching the tops of his ears, like the torrent
oceans of ivy cascading down the sides
of the cliff where you first felt
his laugh in your chest.

You can't sleep
in your house—the house
where you melted
into his mattress that was waiting
for you. Like clockwork,
jangling keys opened your drooping eyes,
creaky doors nudged your drowning skin,
familiar sideburns grazed your dreaming lips.

You can't sleep
so you drive, and spend your
nights in a low-lit lot lying
under the midnight sun, far away
from everything he was:
the ginger blaze of aspen trees in his eyes,
the tint of your morning latte in his skin,
the taste of cocoa and mint in his lips.

You can't wake up
though 2pm tiptoes nearer—
a splash of Citgo faucet water on your face, then a drink,
since you started to take your Trazodone
whole. He knew you preferred them powdered into applesauce.
But the stubbly texture feels like his last kiss, and the lingering
scent of citrus is his laundry detergent
that soaked the air every Sunday morning.

Everything and nothing will remind you of him.
Memory is greedy like that.

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Short Story

Bailey Lou Connell

Demons Eat Too

I daresay there's a difference between being depressed and having depression. Those who don't know the difference are just momentarily sad; those who do know the difference are depressed; and those who just simply don't care enough to ponder on the concept actually have depression. Before you say anything—yeah, I'm depressed. And maybe before you try and insert yourself into the percentage, stop and look at yourself. Do you *really* want to be here?

Hyper-fixations can become complex infatuations. I've seen *The Office* well over twenty-three times. There's a scene in season six, episode twenty-one. Dwight is just chilling, sticking to his own knitting, when Angela, his former lover, sneaks up behind him and scares the shit out of him. She is a shrimp of a woman, not much different from myself, I suppose, but she packs a punch powerful enough to take out John Cena. His startled response ends in him yelling "F@&\$" and levitating off the ground with a jolt of both fearful confusion and annoyance. Avid watchers would know exactly what scene I'm talking about, and those who are indifferent should consider culturing themselves. Angela *is* depression. Just when you think all the vinegar has bled out of your veins and your pot has no more room to be pissed in, it creeps up behind you and, for lack of better terminology, scares the shit out of you. For what? For why? Because it doesn't care. Don't be an idiot.

As I stand here waiting to check out at the grocery store behind a raunchy mother and her child crusted over in boogers, I'm reminded of a most excellent Freudian quote: "If it's not one thing, it's your mother." This statement is essentially the mouth of the Nile River when it comes

to depression. A concept that splits off into an infinite number of canals. Be that as it may, one canal, I would argue, is largely consequential. In a boiled-down version for the dim-witted, crackbrained, bovine wastes of tissue that roam the earth, the point is this: before you decide to give yourself a label with an (unfortunately) desensitized term such as depression, you should first check and make sure you are not, in fact, surrounded by assholes. The essence of this being, maybe, just maybe, you have some shitty friends and surrounding audience that are making you a hell of a lot sadder than you need to be. Association is a foul disease. If there's something wrong with the bitch, there's something wrong with the pup. And remember, just because you *think* no one cares you are alive and everyone is out to make you rue the day, doesn't mean it's true. Try missing a couple insurance payments. I promise you Jake from State Farm cares. My personal win for the day is not coming to the grocery store starved or hungover. There's a silly little fella that lives inside all humans and his name is the ghrelin hormone. His job title gives him the unsolicited authority to do two things. He can either give you the irresistibly enticing urge to put more food in your body than the contents of your entire fridge (and perhaps even freezer, depending on your ratio of Ben and Jerry's to frozen vegetables) or he can make you forget coffee and diet soda are, in fact, not meal replacements. Sometimes normalcy is something he can manage, finding a middle ground between the two. I presently find myself cautiously hungry as I drive home to craft my sourdough, honey baked ham, and fresh brie sandwich . . . as long as the angsty playlist I put on doesn't put me in a spinning tornado of emotional eating.

For some reason, there seems to be a frightfully blurry line between what should be listened to versus what should be avoided when one is depressed. Personally, the line doesn't even exist. My journey of using music to self-medicate began when I was eleven years old and

discovered the perpetual YouTube cycle. Certain genres that were sappier, angsty, and for lack of a better word, “emo,” took me into their tragically scarred arms and carried me away. It does that for a lot of people. Woefully, society predetermines those associated with said genres to be a bunch of angsty Neanderthals who don’t know how to keep the wolf from the door. That’s fine. Go listen to your whiney Ariana Grande tracks and keep being the ineffectual, toffee-nosed, debutante, suburban automatons you so deeply desire to be. It must suck having to listen to rap music as an emotional release and having such a basic hamartia as letting a vape pen control your impulses. At least I don’t use an e-ciggie to overpower my hunger and distract from the fact that I very likely have an eating disorder. The tantalizing sandwich I’m carefully crafting in front of me and the money in my checking account that doesn’t go towards such an insalubrious habit is enough evidence of that.

Ah. Evidence. Traces. The marks some have that let the world know that, at one point, the thought of ending it all was too charming not to tease, even if only for a small moment. Trying to feel something. Trying to scream without allowing a sound to escape. Most of the brutes that inhabit the earth seem to forget that just because some people are struggling to live, does not mean our eyes don’t work. In simpler terms: I can see you staring at my leg, halfwit. No, they’re not stretch marks, but thank you for making me think about my weight now too. And yes, I am, in fact, fully aware that it looks like a sheet of college ruled notebook paper. Insufferable. I don’t even know why I keep entertaining myself with thoughts that make me so flustered. . . . It’s not like I would ever say any of this out loud, let alone in a piece trying to get published. Time to just eat my sandwich and write about someone’s happily ever after again.

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Short Story

Rebekah Crozier

Ninakupenda

“Jambo.” His voice was very deep and very American, and he raised a hand in greeting to her and the two other women cooking in the kitchen.

She looked up at the sound of his voice, and from the moment he stepped into the kitchen, his eyes tearing up from the dense smoke, she knew she loved him. She sat on her small stool rolling *chipotti*, staring into his beautiful blue eyes—she couldn’t look away.

“My name is Elijah.” He spoke these words slowly. She smiled, appreciating his effort, although she had been around the missionaries long enough to understand English perfectly.

“Hello, Elijah. I am Tabitha.” He didn’t ask the names of the other women cooking beside her, and they didn’t offer them. They just sat there, smirking knowingly at each other.

Before another word could be said, the rest of the missionary team tumbled in, introducing themselves and thanking Tabitha and the others for their cooking. Elijah stood there in the corner, his eyes never leaving her.

She had never traveled before. Nairobi was the largest city she’d ever visited, and she knew that Nairobi was nothing compared to cities around the world.

Now, she was getting off an airplane at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, stepping foot in America for the first time in her life, a ring on her left hand.

She didn’t speak a word until they made it to the customs desk where she was more aware of her Kenyan accent than ever before. The stares of the people around them pierced the back of her neck like a thousand needles. So, she instead focused on the customs officer and

Eli's hand on the small of her back, grounding her and gently reminding her that she was not alone.

They told her to be careful. Joshua, the white man in charge of the mission organization. His wife, Nancy, who had practically raised Tabitha after Tabitha left her family and moved in with the missionaries. Callie, their daughter and Tabitha's best friend. Tabitha's fellow Kenyan staff members. Even the other American college students. They all warned her.

"Eli is a wild card," Nancy told her.

But the more Tabitha tried to guard her heart, the more room inside it she seemed to create for Eli. Eli listened to her stories; he sympathized with her; he cared about what she cared about and hated what she hated. He was impressed by the number of English books she had read, and she loved to watch him get excited over discussing literature with her. He said he could listen to her talk for hours, but all she wanted to do was listen to *him*—to the way his words curled around his tongue and the way the right side of his mouth lifted when he was amused. She could listen to him talk and watch him think for the rest of her life, she thought.

Yet, there was a wall up around his own heart. It took two whole months of sleeping in tents and going without showers and eating unfamiliar food for the wall to collapse.

Tabitha knew as soon as it did. He disappeared from camp for three hours, returning with an apparent peace upon his shoulders and his blue eyes puffy and swollen. Tabitha knew that peace. She'd had her moment, too, eight years ago.

That evening, under the light of a full moon and twinkling stars, surrounded by the penetrating dark of a Kenyan night, he kissed her for the first time.

"Ninakupenda," he told her simply. *I love you.*

Upon exiting the airport, a stout, burly man rushed at Tabitha and Eli, wrapping them in a warm, three-person hug. Aside from their blue eyes, Eli's brother, Sam, resembled Eli very little. His hair was darker, and he looked stocky and short next to Eli's long legs. He grabbed Tabitha's bags from where they sat on the ground next to her and led them to his truck, which would take them to Eli and Sam's parents' house.

The drive lasted for an hour, and Tabitha sat silent for most of it. She couldn't tear her eyes away from the world outside her window. She had lived in the city of Nairobi for years, and while the number of cars on the road and the technology and tall buildings had shocked her after living in a rural community her entire childhood, she had grown used to it. Atlanta, though, was something different altogether. The cars that drove on the right side of the road followed clear-cut traffic rules that were almost non-existent in Nairobi. Everything looked cleaner, and newer, and more polished. There were fewer people walking and no trash piled high on the sides of the highway.

After several long minutes, the city skyscrapers were replaced by suburban shopping malls like Tabitha had seen in American films, and eventually, even these were replaced by cow fields and neatly trimmed neighborhoods that, in Nairobi, would belong to the wealthiest of citizens.

Sam drove the car through an open, wrought-iron gate, and it ambled down a dirt road. At the first sight of the house, Tabitha's jaw dropped. She turned to Eli, who was absentmindedly stroking her arm, and he grinned at her.

Eli promised to return after that first summer, and he did. They talked all the time while he was away, and when he returned six months later in January, it felt as if no time had passed between them.

He proposed in June of that year when he returned with the missionaries once again. He had waited until they were back in Maasai territory, where Tabitha's family still lived, to propose. She marveled at how it was here, where she had once feared being forced into marriage as a thirteen-year-old girl, that the man she loved asked her to be his one and only wife.

Eli offered to move to Kenya to live with Tabitha, and Tabitha knew how big a sacrifice that was for him to make. He had a loving, close-knit family in the state of Georgia, along with a steady teaching job, both of which he would miss greatly if he moved halfway across the world.

So, she refused. Eli was her home, she decided, and she would follow him anywhere.

They married the next January, among their Kenyan friends and the missionary team who had become like family to them both. Looking into Eli's blue eyes as she stood in front of him at the altar, Tabitha felt safe. Those eyes conveyed all the love she would ever need from another human.

It was the best day of Tabitha's life.

Their house was the largest Tabitha had ever seen, and it was surrounded by a field that was greener than she had ever thought grass could be. A large porch wrapped around the house in the shadow of tall, white columns, and tall trees sprinkled the front yard, their trunks thick and their branches still bare and shivering in the cool air.

A group of people filed out of the front door as they drove up. Despite his obvious excitement to see his family, Eli waited on Tabitha before approaching the house. He grasped her hand in his as they walked forward, squeezing it in reassurance. He knew how nervous she was.

They all met on the expansive front porch, Eli introducing her to each member of his family in turn, all the while never letting go of her hand. Tabitha thought that if he did, she might take off running.

A short, matronly woman that Tabitha assumed was Eli's mother, stepped forward first. She embraced Tabitha and kissed her on the cheek, welcoming her in a thick, Southern accent that almost made Tabitha laugh. She had never heard the English language spoken in such a nonchalant, yet warm, manner. They were joined by a tall, bearded man with a wide smile and a similarly thick cadence to his voice. Tabitha felt drawn to both of Eli's parents in a way that was familiar and intimate; her nervousness left her immediately.

After this, the porch was a flurry of hugging and talking, Tabitha struggling to keep up with the many conversations. Two tall women with equally long, equally blonde hair introduced themselves as Eli's older sisters, Katherine and Amelia. Their husbands and children were inside the house, they informed Tabitha.

Tabitha and Eli were ushered inside where they were met by an onslaught of savory smells and a gaggle of children who ran at them, yelling, "Uncle Eli!" Tabitha smiled to herself as her husband played the part of the fun uncle, laughing and greeting each child.

That first Southern dinner was one of the best dinners Tabitha could remember, and the whole event was different than anything she had ever experienced. The night was a frenzy of blonde hair and loud Southern accents. The family's closeness was made evident to Tabitha

through the lack of pauses in the conversation, the light touches on arms or shoulders, and the pure happiness in each pair of blue eyes.

“How do you like being married to our little brother?” Katherine, the older of Eli’s sisters asked, a sly grin on her face.

“The runt of the family,” Sam joked lightheartedly. “Last to get married.”

Tabitha smiled. She loved how they joked so freely with each other, words moving with ease from one person to the next, almost too fast for Tabitha to follow. “Oh, well I’m the last of my family to marry too,” Tabitha said.

“Are you the youngest sibling, too, dear?” Eli’s mother inquired, clearly eager to learn more about her new daughter-in-law.

Tabitha hesitated. “No, I . . . I have three younger sisters. And seven older siblings.”

She hadn’t meant to stun them. Each face around the table looked frozen and uncertain. Eli reached under the table to steady Tabitha’s leg, which bounced in an anxious rhythm. She had already decided against sharing any more about her family, until Amelia asked, her voice as sweet and gentle as a child’s, “How old is your youngest sister?”

“Twelve.”

“Twelve!” Sam exclaimed, his eyes wide. His wife elbowed him in the side, and his expression immediately shifted from astonishment to shame.

Amelia interjected, clearly used to making peace in the family. “Your twelve-year-old sister is married?” There was not an ounce of judgement in the question, which surprised Tabitha, who was used to Americans being stunned upon hearing about Maasai culture.

“Yes,” Tabitha whispered. She glanced sideways at Eli who gave her an encouraging nod. “In my culture, girls are married young. And . . . not by choice.”

The silence continued. Except for Amelia whose eyes were alight with curiosity and kindness.

“But you were not?” Amelia asked.

“No. I almost was, but then the missionaries offered me a job.” Tabitha smiled at the fond memory. “God delivered me.”

Amelia reached across the wooden table, her palm facing up. Tabitha responded to the gesture, laying her hand in Amelia’s who wrapped her light fingers around Tabitha’s dark ones and squeezed. “I’m so glad He did,” Amelia said. “Or else you wouldn’t be here with us.”

Tabitha’s eyes filled with tears, and she grinned at her new sister.

After dinner, Sam drove them the ten minutes to Eli’s apartment complex. When Tabitha walked into the apartment, she laughed. Eli looked hurt.

“It just needs a woman’s touch,” she said, grinning as she observed the drab-looking furniture and dull, brown curtains.

He took her in his arms and drew her close to him. “Well, thank goodness I have you.” And he kissed her, soft and sweet, all her worries and fears dissolving into his touch.

Their honeymoon ended. Eli returned to work at the local university two weeks after arriving back in town, and Tabitha was left alone in the apartment.

She didn’t have a car to drive anywhere, and even if she did, she had never been taught how. At least once a week, one of Eli’s siblings would pick her up at the apartment and take her grocery shopping or to their house to spend the day.

For the most part, she stayed at the apartment. She cleaned the small space more thoroughly than it had probably ever been cleaned. She decorated the living room and bedroom

with furnishings, and fixtures they had bought together, and with the few handcrafted Kenyan novelties she had brought with her, woven baskets and Maasai beads now hanging on the walls.

Mostly, she read. Tabitha thought she had read a lot of books, and compared to her Kenyan friends, she had. But Eli had so many she had never even heard of—both non-fictions about theology and history, and fictions with intricate characters and thrilling worlds. She loved them all, and the newness of the stories brought excitement to Tabitha's mundane days.

Tabitha had never minded being alone. Actually, she liked it and the peace it offered her, especially when she had a book in hand. But she did not like feeling lonely. And the loneliness started to creep in after only a few days into Eli's first week back at work.

She missed her friends back in Kenya. She missed being within walking distance of anywhere she wanted to go. She missed knowing the streets she treaded like the back of her hand. She missed home.

And over and over again, she had to remind herself that *this* was home now. America was home. But these confusing thoughts disappeared the moment Eli returned from work. Because with Eli, she was always home.

“What is your greatest fear?” He asked her, his voice almost a whisper. They were sitting outside on the ground, side-by-side, so close that their arms and shoulders touched. The rest of the camp was sleeping soundly in tents that were only a few feet from where Tabitha and Eli sat, everything in the camp enveloped in ink-black sky and warm Kenyan air.

Tabitha thought for a moment before answering his question. She was too elated to have him back in Kenya with her after six months apart to think about anything other than the scent of him so near and the feeling of him beside her.

“I think . . . not being valued. Not feeling loved.” All throughout her childhood, Tabitha had been just another one of her many siblings, preparing to be married off like the rest of her sisters.

Eli turned her head so that she was looking straight at him. The stars in the dark sky reflected off his blue eyes, giving the illusion that his eyes were stars themselves. “You will never feel that way with me,” he said.

Tabitha knew, in that moment, she was going to marry him. She knew she would never again have that fear.

Tabitha sat in a plush, red armchair in Amelia’s living room, cradling Amelia’s newborn baby in her arms.

“How have you been adjusting?” Amelia asked.

Tabitha liked Amelia the most out of Eli’s three siblings. She was gentler than Katherine and Sam, putting thought into every word she spoke yet never shying away from asking Tabitha the questions that everyone else avoided. Amelia reminded Tabitha of Callie, her best friend. And Tabitha really needed a Callie in her life right now.

“It has been all right, I suppose. I guess I just don’t know exactly what to do while Eli is at work.”

Amelia looked thoughtful, her blue eyes shimmering in the same way Eli’s did whenever he was thinking deeply. “You can’t work, can you?”

Tabitha shook her head. She would need a work visa to be able to have a job in the states, and she hadn’t even scratched the surface of the lengthy application process.

Suddenly, Amelia gasped. “Eli said you like to read, yes?” Tabitha smiled, and she didn’t even have time to respond before Amelia leapt out of her chair. “I know the perfect thing.”

When Tabitha was seven, she read her first chapter book in English all by herself. It was one of Callie’s, and everyone was impressed by the speed with which Tabitha had learned to read English. She read all of Callie’s short books, some more than once, and when Callie left, Tabitha asked her to bring more from America.

With Callie gone, the only reading material in Tabitha’s community was the Swahili-English Bible the Americans had left behind for her family. By the time they returned, Tabitha had read the entire book cover-to-cover.

She soon surpassed Callie in both reading level and interest. Joshua started to loan Tabitha his theology books, and Nancy brought her thick tomes full of fantasy and fiction.

Tabitha loved them all. But it was the fictional stories that she loved the most.

Her fellow Kenyan staff members didn’t understand her yearning to read. How could she possibly enjoy trudging through the unfamiliar English idioms and metaphors, they would ask.

Stories transcend cultures, she would tell them. That was her only answer.

The local library was a short walk from their apartment, and Tabitha had fallen in love with the quaint space the moment Amelia introduced her to it.

It was through stories that Tabitha found her place in the strange unknown of her new home. With Eli by her side and her stories to keep her company throughout the day, she could endure all of it: the stares prickling her neck when she was with Eli’s all-blond, all-blue-eyed family, the whispers among the gossips at church, the loneliness.

During the day, Tabitha walked to her volunteer shift at the library where she interacted with children and adults alike, helping them find the books that she knew like old friends.

And in the evenings, she returned to Eli and the home they shared together.

“Ninakupenda,” he always greeted her when they reunited at the day’s end, his blue eyes looking only at her. *I love you.*

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Kate Davis

h k p³

(hugs and kisses and a pat, pat, pat)

The highly anticipated, yet consistently ignored, moment came while sitting in a cubicle at 2:20. My mom said “call me later”—I knew what that meant—they had been to the doctor. Impatient anxiousness washed over my brain. In hindsight I should have left work, but duty and control kept me frozen in the swivel chair; I called from the swivel chair; the worst news of my life came in that dinghy swivel chair.

Her voice quivered; it shook; I understood. Quick sharp breaths interrupted the silence. “She’s ready to go.” Immediate numbness, like the cold that cuts through your coat on a Midwest January day, swept over my body. Options and choices and chances were thrown out one after the other. There were three avenues home: Denver or Dallas or Houston. My brain returned from the scavenger hunt of chances and choices and options, and I heard, in a faint echo from the background, “I don’t want her to see me like this.” I stayed put at her request. My mother hung up. I stopped crying and kept working, answered phones and filed addendums all while my nana lay dying—I kept working, while my nana lay dying—*Why* did I keep working? Maybe I drove home, maybe there was traffic, or maybe I was the only car on the highway.

I kept going. I answered the call to talk one last time. I didn’t want to. Her chest rose and fell. I choked over words, and she focused on breathing. Immobilized I cried, contemplated driving, but didn’t. Ignorance and innocence called like demons in the dark—I listened. I could have been there while my nana lay dying. My mom called back: “she is talking a lot, just listen.”

I listened. She gave me all her love in every way possible—please be okay—“don’t worry nana, I will,” I lied.

I kept going. Thursday, a poem by Natasha Trethaway made me weep. I wish I had checked the syllabus. On the walk back from class, I remembered the smell of her perfume. Friday, I attempted to work on a paper, I typed and untyped sentences—nothing stuck. Distractions covered my shame; I think I turned on a movie, or maybe I went on a walk. Saturday, work occupied my mind from 7:00 to 2:00. I hated myself each time I forgot, and I forgot a lot.

I kept going. Absent. I walked from responsibility to responsibility—supposedly the only reason why I stayed—ignoring the hospital bed 719 miles away. I called every chance I remembered but didn't mind the moments the agony slipped my mind. Did I make the right decision? Sunday came, and I got the call, writing a paper at 11:48 am. My mother was talking, but a thief stole her words.

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Short Story

*Caroline Huff***The Smoking Gun**

By all rights, he should have kept running. There was no logic in coming here, for this, or any other reason. It was stupid, hit-every-tree-in-the-stupid-forest kind of stupid. Piss-on-the-sleeping-bear kind of stupid. He knew his errand, but the pieces of him that had kept him alive for this long were all too aware of the rule he was breaking, the rule that was sacred to every man living on the run: don't go home.

But crossing the Alabama state line wasn't nearly as hard as it should have been. Neither was crossing over the Mobile County line. Nor was crossing the tracks into Bayou la Batre. The pause didn't come until his street. At its mouth, the truck stopped.

The street, long and straight and flat, constricted like a gullet, slippery in the wetland winter. Live oaks curled over the top of the narrow road, choked with tangled mats of Spanish moss. The loose lines of houses, lean-tos, double-wides, and boat sheds backed up against the jagged edges of the pines, differing from each other in all except the shared goal of shelter. Each spit of property was peppered with its own personal collection of shit only poor southerners could justify keeping. Hoarding. The truest form of southern culture. A heavy overcast sprawled over the lowlands. The north wind blew hard.

Jay's eyes were fixed to the end of the street, just below the tree line, where the horizon would be if the pines weren't there. He sat idle for a moment, staring through the cracks in his windshield, before taking a deep breath and realizing he'd forgotten to breathe. The inhale jostled something in his chest, and it dug its way further inside him. Empty cans and gas station

napkins were evicted from the passenger seat as he tried to fight it back, looking for cigarettes or chew. His hand found the gearshift instead. Yeah, that's what it was, worming its way inside him: the urge to run. The truck lurched as it shifted into reverse.

The boy's foot never left the brake. Jaw working, he stared at the white ridges of knuckle as the hand gripped the steering wheel. He should have kept running. Too late now.

The Ford moved on down the street.

His mother's home was an old one-story, pushed back off the road by a wide yard and a pecan tree. There was no driveway. It was family property, used to belong to his grandfather. It was a gift for a young couple and their newborn son. The thought of family hit like a punch to the liver. Jay's forehead touched the top of the steering wheel, and the breath came hard out of his nostrils. Why couldn't he open the damn door?

In the end, it was Trouble that made him get out of the car. They saw each other at the same time, just as the German shepherd came out from behind the house. The old dog stopped broadside, eyeing the faded red truck defensively. He didn't recognize it nor the grinning boy who hopped out and opened the gate. It had been three years, after all.

But the whistle was unmistakable. The dog had learned it so young that it was a part of his instincts. He sprinted across the yard, whining with emotion and joint pain. Jay practically shook with giddiness as he knelt clumsily to meet the dog. Trouble's feverishly wagging tail smacked him across the face as the dog took in as much of his scent as he possibly could. Jay laughed, all notions of guilt momentarily gone in this one shining moment. His dog was still alive. He, at least, didn't care about the dead man.

The slam of the screen door brought them both back. Even from the gate, the look on his mama's face was clear as day in Jay's mind. Trouble, remembering his duties, loped over to the

porch and nudged her a bit, letting her know there was no threat. Despite his efforts, she looked up and down the street anxiously. Jay turned to scan the street, trying to see what she was looking for. Neighbors? They knew his history. Bad gas travels fast in a small town.

No one was visible, but that didn't mean everyone's nose was in their own business. His mother wrung her hands on the porch, staring at him helplessly. She looked completely unsure of what to do. Jay crossed the yard to her.

"Inside," she said when he reached the shade of the porch, her voice barely above a whisper. Jay obeyed before he could tell himself to, just like he used to as a kid. The screen door swung shut behind them, blocking out everything but the noise of the wind.

The house was what it had always been. It was nothing much, nothing much at all. Jay thought it had gotten a little smaller since he'd left. Then again, he had probably gotten a little bigger. The furniture was still mostly antiques, mostly inherited. It no longer had the health or neatness it had three years ago. It was dark in the midafternoon light, washed with grey-blue in the absence of warm lamp light. It wasn't messy, just out of sorts. It was like the house was preoccupied with something else. Jay noticed the TV was new.

His mom locked the door slowly. The sound of the bolt sliding shut made Jay turn. His mother didn't turn to face him. Was she afraid? Did she think she was locking herself in here with an animal? Jay swallowed hard. There was something in his throat.

When she did turn to take him in, the sharp lines of fear on her face had faded a bit. She looked as preoccupied as the house. Her thin arms wrapped the worn blue cardigan around her. The old, smudged makeup around her eyes made them stand out from the rest of her face, making their weariness even more obvious. The blonde mass of curls was just as unruly as his. Jay noticed the dark red of her lips was wine, not lipstick. That would explain the sway in her

stance, the tremble in her fingers. She was taking inventory of him, too. The stains on his jacket, his unwashed hair, his hands, the state of his old boots.

His boots. He still had his boots on. He forgot to leave them outside. He stooped down to untie them in a quick, awkward motion. Crap, he just tracked dirt all through here.

“Sorry, Ma,” he said, thumping back onto his butt to wrangle his boot off his foot. “I’ll throw these out the back—”

Her arms were around him before he could finish. The whole house stilled as the little flashes of surprise subsided in Jay. The guilt and fear that was twisting inside stopped. The tension eased. Even the wind outside became gentler. Mother and son crumpled together, healing and hurting and mending each other.

His mother’s sob nearly made him jump out of his skin. He’d expected tears but the cry was so anguished and so sudden he wasn’t prepared for it. He laid his hands on her shoulders and gently pushed her off of him so he could see her face. It was still mostly dry. Trouble circled them, distressed by their distress.

“Mom?” His voice sounded embarrassingly boyish, like a kid who’d never seen his mother cry. She collected herself a little too quickly. Her trembling hands ran over her face before reaching up to touch Jay’s. She sighed.

“You’re just barely twenty-one now,” she said, managing a smile. “Would you like a drink with me?” Something was wrong. Their family followed the old southern tradition; they drank when things were wrong.

“Alright,” Jay said as his mother pulled him back into a hug. Over her shoulder, he saw another pair of dirty boots next to the door.

Another hour-and-a-half passed before Jay emerged from the house. He nearly blew the screen door off its hinges when he did. He hopped the fence, ignoring Trouble's whining, and walked right past his truck. People in town knew his truck. The street that had swallowed him so confidently earlier now flinched, retched, and dry heaved at his reappearance. The wind was at his back as it spit him back up.

His laces lashed the asphalt as he turned the corner. He hadn't bothered to tie them. The wind tugged at his white t-shirt. He left his jacket back at the house. And his phone. And his mother, tearstained and strung out. He took the bottle. Cheap liquor should always be handy for an errand like this.

The part of his mind that wasn't on autopilot felt guilty for taking the whole bottle. It also felt guilty for leaving his mother at the kitchen table like that with barely enough voice to beg him to stay. It also wanted him to tie the laces of his boots.

The rest of his mind thought that part was a pansy, so he ended up not listening. There was a dark, swampy rage pulling at him, beating back the advances of civilization and evolution in favor of simpler times and simpler solutions. His fear and hesitation dissipated into the haze of boyish violence. The more he walked, the less he cared about the neighbors in the window. He didn't care who saw him. He didn't want to leave this shit hole. He didn't want to run. He didn't want to think. He wanted to kill the man who laid hands on his mom.

It wasn't the rage talking and it wasn't an idle threat. Jay knew this one was real and seasoned. He'd felt this on the day he first ran.

The wind was blowing hard that day, too. It came from the shipyard. He could still smell the docks, he could feel the rebar in his hand, and he could see the man's face, his intentions written all over it. Robbery was the intention, but he didn't just want the money.

One good swing and a few extras were all it took then, and that's all it needed now. The first time was over with, the second time would be no big deal. At least, that's what Jay was told. He believed it.

It was no big deal when the day got older, and the wind blew harder, and bar after bar turned up without a trace of his new stepfather. Jay knew the man's face. His mother's new husband was one of his father's old fishing buddies, Tom Flemming. Jay had last seen him at his father's funeral. They had gotten married after Jay had left and he couldn't be mad about it. He'd left his mother alone. He sure as hell was going to fix it now.

Jay didn't speak to anyone at the bars or the docks. He just walked in, looked, and walked back out. They had neither right nor reason to tell him where the man was, so there was no point in burning time. Besides, he'd rather avoid the inevitable questions about his untied boots, or his missing jacket, or the man he had beat to death three years ago.

The overcast didn't reach the horizon, so when the sun dipped low enough, it washed the clouds in raw, red light. The shrimp boats and haphazard, waterlogged piers eased into a bit of peace under the red evening sky. It held the promise of calm waters. It made Jay's stomach turn. He didn't want calm. He wanted the wind to pull a storm in, so he could kill a man and disappear into the rain. He wanted to clean up his mess and leave again.

He passed back by an old hole-in-the-wall, The Fishwife. He'd already checked inside. The barmaid stood underneath the flickering neon sign, taking a smoke break. She'd smoked in high school, too. Jay walked by her without acknowledgment. Just as the smell of her cigarette was fading, she called after him.

“Did you get him a wedding gift or something?” Jay stopped, turned, and followed the papery voice back into the blue neon glow that was slowly taking over the oyster shell parking lot.

“You’ve seen him?” He sounded more breathless than he had thought he was. The barmaid’s eyes held his evenly, their gaze broken only by the wisps of hair blowing across her face. She took another drag.

“Tie your shoes,” she said. Jay blinked.

“What?”

“Tie them.” She let the smoke curl out of her mouth. “Trust me, you’ll want them tied.” Strangely, Jay didn’t find himself irritated by her odd request, or the nonchalance in her thin voice. He knelt and synched down his laces. She watched him, then put her cigarette out. He saw the crumbs of ember fall out of the corner of his eye. He started to get up but stopped when the slender hand touched his shoulder.

“Someone saw you come into town,” she said quietly. “And those who didn’t know you were here before, certainly do now. If anything happens tonight, it’ll be your neck.” Jay looked up at her, long and hard. Lucy looked back down at him, as pretty and tired as ever.

“What’s my neck to you?” It came out a little harsher than he meant it. She kept her hand on his shoulder even as he got back to his feet.

“You wouldn’t be storming about if you didn’t know, but your new stepfather’s a bastard and abusive and the world would be better off without him. And I know your mother’s at her wits end with him, but I also know she’d take it for another century if it meant she didn’t have to lose you again like she did three years ago. It’d kill her, Jay—” The weakness in her voice betrayed itself as her volume rose in desperation. “It’d kill me.”

Jay stared at her, jaw clenched so tight he was on the verge of breaking teeth. He thought back to a pipe dream he'd entertained three years ago. It involved boat theft on top of murder, but what the hell. Take a shrimp boat, chart a course south, find an island to disappear to—it wouldn't have been any harder than trying to stay here. They could run. Lucy was right. If he carried out what he set out to do tonight, she and his mother would lose him. But there was nothing else to do.

“What would you have me do?” The answer hung unspoken between them, like a rope swinging in the wind.

“I'd have you run.” It was the wrong answer. She knew it.

“Lucy,” he said softly, like a prayer. “Where?” He could smell the cigarette on her fingers. She closed her eyes and told him in her next breath.

“Your house. He went when he heard you were there.”

Jay would have to thank her someday for telling him to tie his boots. He would have lost them otherwise. He ran harder than he'd ever run. He tore his way back down Shell Belt, unconcerned with cars or puddles or police. The red sky deepened as the sun dropped into the Mississippi Sound. The wind pushed its way through the trees, exposing the pale underbellies of their leaves.

There was another truck in front of the gate. When Jay rounded the corner and saw it, he thought his heart was going to explode. He vaulted the fence, sprinted across the yard, and put his foot through both doors. His voice was so desperate and so bloodthirsty; it startled him.

“Mom! Mama?!” The coffee table was broken, and the unlit lamps had been knocked to the floor. Jay had no weapon; he didn't need one. He rounded the corner to the kitchen, ready to confront the man. What he saw sent his heart to his feet.

The kitchen was worse than the dining room. Half the floor was covered in broken glass and china. The fruit bowl had been spilled and some of the peaches had burst open on the floor. Jay hoped to God those were peaches and not the contents of Tom Flemming's head. He lay face up, cross-eyed, his head set squarely in a splatter of blood. Two shots to the chest as well. The bright red of the sunset coming through the window turned the blood black.

Jay and his mother locked eyes. She was standing where she had been when she had shot Tom, only a few feet from the body. The .38 special was still half raised. She gave a soft moan, then curled in on herself, pressing her elbows to her stomach and sinking to her knees. Jay went to her carefully. He felt his own knees weaken. He knelt down with her.

"Mama," he whispered. She shook a bit and let out a small sob.

"I d-didn't. . . . I just—"

"Mama, it's okay." The calm he felt was shaky at best, but it would do. "Mama, gimme the gun." In a snap, she recovered herself. She looked him dead in the eyes.

"He came here for you, Jay," she said with earnest, grabbing his hand as it curled around the barrel of the gun. "He was afraid of you, came here to try to get to you before you could get to him. He knew you were your daddy's son. He knew what you were gonna do to him. I-I couldna let him have ya. I wouldna stand for it!" She started to cry. The sirens could be heard in the distance. It wouldn't be long. She heard them, too.

"Baby, you have to go," she gasped, grabbing onto his shirt sleeve. "You have to go! If they find you here, like this, oh, God, this—"

"Mama." Their eyes met, like they had so many times before. "I'm not leaving again. I'm not gonna run again. I don't think I'd make it far this time, anyway." He placed his other hand

over the gun barrel, hiding it completely under their fingers. “I’m going to take this. Okay? I’m going to take this and stop all the grief in your heart. I’m gonna make it right.”

Her hand went slack under his, allowing him to untangle her finger from the trigger and the safety. The barrel was still warm. He inched away from her, so when the police took him, they wouldn’t touch her. Her face twisted a bit as she realized what he was doing.

“You are your daddy’s son,” she said, half-laughing. “Jay, I won’t—”

“Mama, let it be. Let me make it right.” The sirens were on the street now. The flashing blue drowned the dying sky. Trouble was standing in the kitchen doorway. He gave a half-bark, a small warning to the policemen coming up the way.

“Trouble,” Jay called to the dog. “Go to mama, take care of her till I get back.” The German shepherd obeyed, limping over to the woman on the floor. Evidently, he’d taken a beating too.

Oddly enough, the calm settled into Jay’s bones nicely. It wasn’t built on sand. Even as everything he’d been running from—the police, the eyes of dead men, his mother’s crying—closed in around him like a bell tolling in the marsh. He was calm. He wrapped his hand tight around the barrel of the gun and held on for dear life. Whose life, he couldn’t be sure.

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Short Story

*Caroline Huff***Suzanne**

Unfortunately, it snowed that night. The overcast that hung over the city finally began to fall to earth, mere hours after temperatures dropped below freezing. The sprawling, heavy branches of the live oaks caught most of the small flakes. Enough escaped to form moving halos around the streetlights. Soon, it would coat the cluttered gardens and rooftops of the homes stacked onto midtown's streets. It would turn to slush not long after sunrise. It always does in Mobile. But, in the cold of the night, it was still and firm and beautiful. The cruelest things always are.

A woman turned the corner off Julia Street and onto Old Shell Road. She was an older lady, small in stature, her round face set against the cold. Snowflakes clung to the wisps of hair that escaped the scarf wrapped around her head. In her arms was a comically large bundle of cloth. Her newborn granddaughter was swaddled inside, wrapped in every blanket the old woman could find. The baby slept as her grandmother hurried down the street.

No cars passed them; no one else walked the street that night. The rest of the world slept as the old lady tore her way through the night, leaving clouds of breath behind her like a breadcrumb trail. She had no interest in the oak trees or the snow or the idyllic scenes they conjured. She walked single-mindedly.

The bells of St. Mary's struck midnight just as the grandmother reached its stone steps. There, she paused and contemplated, staring at her reflection in the dark windows. Deciding there was certainly no one in there at this hour, she went around the side of the church and

headed down the alley to the rectory that sat adjacent. She gave three polite but firm knocks. When no one answered, she gave three more. When they yielded the same result, she pounded on the door until her frozen knuckles hurt. The priest, who was obviously abruptly awoken, flung the door open.

“Florence?” he said, startled. “What on earth is it?”

“Father, I need you to baptize my grandchild,” the old woman said, curtly. The priest’s eyes widened further as he saw the small nose peeking out of the bundle of blankets.

“Florence, do you know what time it is?”

“I do, Father.”

“And the cold surely isn’t good for the baby—”

“So, you best unlock the church.” The priest looked at the old woman helplessly.

“Florence, surely this can wait until—”

“No, it cannot, Father.” Her voice suddenly became heavy as a stone, like a boxer’s punch in the final seconds of the round. They held each other’s gaze for a while, an understanding passing between them. Without another word, the priest grabbed his key ring and led the way back to the church, not bothering to grab his coat.

No matter how quiet the world outside is, the inside of an old church is always quieter. Every sound, no matter how small the movement, echoed in the vestibule. The footfalls of the priest and the grandmother thundered through the silence, echoing off the marble and polished wood. The altar was dark save for the red glow of the sanctuary lamp. The priest strode ahead, half-bowing and crossing himself when he got to the steps of the altar, before ducking off to the side and disappearing into the sacristy. Florence shifted the baby to cross herself and waited.

The large lamps above came alive, unfurling the sanctuary like a stage, washing it in golden light. The church ceiling soared above in a high arch and the sandstone walls were painted with the straight, simple patterns of the Spanish colonial style. The alter was set in a half dome, surrounded by marble carvings and gold accents. An ornate crucifix hung above the alter, suspended by a single chain from the ceiling. Christ's head lolled to one side, thick globs of blood left trails down his arms and side. Behind him, a mosaic of the Annunciation gleamed.

The priest reemerged from the sacristy, dressed in the white worn for baptism, worn for celebrations. Quickly and reverently, he gathered what he needed, filling the baptismal font and lighting the tall, lavishly decorated candle. The grandmother watched him, rocking the still silent child in her arms. She didn't take the child out of the swaddle until the last minute, wanting her to sleep as much as possible.

The child was wearing her light pink night gown, not the white, lacy baptismal gown that her grandmother made for this exact occasion. It was sitting in a hat box back on Julia Street. Part of her wished she had taken the time to change the baby into the gown; most of her knew it wasn't important. There were also no parents or godparents to present the baby, no family to bear witness. And it was a Thursday, not a Sunday morning. None of the formalities mattered, not now. The priest didn't waste any time once he was ready.

"What name do you give the child?" He asked.

"Her mother wants her called Suzanne," the grandmother replied, "Suzanne Margret."

"What do you ask of God's Church for Suzanne?"

"Baptism." The request was almost too forceful, but the barely detectable note of desperation justified it. The priest carried on, omitting the traditional parts that were unnecessary to the sacrament, mindful of the approaching morning. The grandmother had been to so many

baptisms for her children and godchildren that she had the ceremony memorized. She answered the priest almost on autopilot. The mosaic of Mary observed from above, the small, smooth pebbles filled with light and color. The priest stretched out his hands over the font.

“Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament.” He continued, and the grandmother looked at the water in the small marble basin. The doctor’s words trickled into her mind. “Pneumonia” was chief among them. The baby cooed, beginning to wake now that she was free of the swaddle. “Nothing more we can do” the doctor had said. The gift of water. As she handed the child to the priest, the grandmother couldn’t help but wonder how much of a gift it actually was. To her granddaughter, water is water. How different were the waters of baptism and the fluid in her lungs?

“In the name of the Father. . . .” The priest poured the surely frigid water on the infant’s head, bracing for the piercing cry. Suzanne made no such sound. She was calm and alert and staring up at the faces and lights, smiling. The priest and the grandmother smiled with her, partially in surprise, partially in celebration. Florence watched the baby’s content face as the water was poured over her head twice more, in the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit. She could have sworn the baby was looking up at the mosaic of the Blessed Mother. Her vision blurred with hot tears. Her granddaughter’s faith was greater than her own.

The priest handed the baby back to the grandmother and made the final blessing. The church stilled and silence fell again on the stones. The grandmother composed herself as southern ladies do.

“Thank you, Father,” she said, managing to keep her voice impressively steady. “For everything.” The priest nodded, struggling with his own composure. He suddenly wished the

archdiocese had been able to afford the parish a car, then he could give them a ride home. Instead, he watched the two depart, bundled against the cold, knowing he wasn't going back to sleep until he received word of them the next morning. The church door closed behind them, and the priest stood alone in the silence.

The snow fell thickly now in slow spirals. It had begun to blanket the grass and the gardens. It was still beautiful. It was still cold. The grandmother pulled the blanket up over Suzanne's mouth and hurried back to Julia Street.

It was half past one o'clock when the two made it back to the house. The grandmother didn't bother taking her shoes off, immediately bringing the baby to the hearth. They stood in front of the smoldering remnants of the fire until the cold fell from their bones.

The baby's mother was asleep in the kitchen. She was slumped over the breakfast table, head resting on her folded arms, mouth slightly ajar. Tears had left sticky trails down her pale cheeks. Florence paused as she passed on her way to lay the baby down. She gazed down at her own sleeping daughter, who was still weak from the difficult birth and the stress of circling grief. She chose to ignore the empty brandy glass on the table. She was happy the young woman was finally sleeping; she didn't care how she had fallen asleep.

The grandmother laid Suzanne down in the crib and sat in the chair beside it. The warmth had made the child doze. She fell asleep quickly. Florence sat, listening to the breathing. She fiddled with her rosary as the hours passed, praying prayers she had known for so long, she didn't remember learning them. It was all there was left for her to do. She had done everything she could for her granddaughter and goddaughter. Now, she waited for morning. She waited for the breathing to fade, like the doctors said it would. She closed her eyes and the mosaic of Mary burned behind her eyelids, gazing down from above.

The sunrise was golden over the snow. The bells of St. Mary's rang in the distance. The children had the day off from school. The sun climbed and melted the tips of the icicles hanging from the roof of the house on Julia Street. Florence had fallen asleep beside the crib, rosary dangling from her fingers. It was nearly afternoon before she awoke to the water dripping on the rocks outside and the small, deep breaths.

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Short Story

*Rachel Woodruff***A Broken Olive Branch**

As a child, she had learned to take the blame. It was better this way, fewer arguments. Plus, it was usually true. Olive thought about the signs she missed, the steps she should have taken to avoid this blowout. She mechanically opened the closet door at the very edge of the kitchen, barely flinching as wood collided with frame, leaving the small apartment in stifling silence. Face blank, she picked up the rag, the paper towels, the small trashcan; she exited the closet and moved to the sink. She thought about the water that she used hours earlier when she set out to make dinner for two. The setting sunlight shone on the small stream falling into the bowl, covering it in reds and oranges and yellows—frustratingly bright. She didn't look out the window. It was her fault, really; she shouldn't have pushed him. She knew he had a long day at work. He didn't have to stay and eat the dinner she cooked or drink the wine she set out. She should have known he wouldn't want to sit with her.

Her mind failed to instruct her feet and her hands, but her body knew where to go. She knelt carefully by the couch, delicately picking up the largest pieces of the shattered wine bottle he threw when she insisted he have a glass, just a small one. Her hands shook—he hadn't meant it. She gripped the paper towel and folded it once, twice, thrice, again and again until the pad was too small to use. Laughing mirthlessly at her mistake, she grabbed a new towel and stopped at the third fold. She gently tapped, tapped, tapped at the floor, gathering up the smallest pieces before discarding them in the trashcan behind her. She dipped the rag into the water, wiping genially against the red stains, wringing it over and over again. The smell of wine and water

brought back memories she had nearly forgotten—memories of her mother kneeling as Olive kneeled now, cleaning up a mess her father made. Smiling so Olive didn't know. She glanced at the disappearing light outside, hoping he was someplace safe.

She stood slowly, eyeing the grandfather clock in the corner, her mother's gift to the happy couple. Something about the promise of a lifetime.

Olive dragged the trashcan behind her, stopping at the closet to store the remaining paper towels. While she waited for him to return and to finally lay this night to rest, she could at least clean. She entered the kitchen slowly, hands resting on her hips as she noted the important tasks: wipe the counter, store the uneaten meal, clean the pots, unload the dishwasher, load the dishwasher, take out the trash, sweep the floors. She might as well Swiffer too. She prided herself on keeping a clean home—everything neat, everything with its own place, everything exactly as it should be. She got to work: start with the hard things, the most essential. Don't think about the conversation, don't think about making him raise his voice, don't think about how you kept insisting.

She grabbed the pots from the stove, sweeping their contents into the containers she had dislodged from the dark cabinets. She shut them tight, moved to the fridge. She looked at the dent on the metal door—a reminder of what happens when she pushes him too far. He didn't hit her, but he made it clear that she shouldn't make him so angry. She averted her gaze and opened the fridge. She placed the uneaten meal on the third shelf above the dairy. Pasta would keep best there, and he might be hungry later. She moved to the dishwasher: stack the bowls, stack the plates, shut them in the cabinet, grab the pots and pans and measuring cups; they sit in the drawer by the oven; stack the cups; put them away: forks, spoons, and knives go last. She did the next part in reverse: first the silverware, then the dishes, finishing with the cups. She nodded to

herself. She made another trip to the closet, plucking the broom, dustpan, Swiffer, and pads from their spot on the inside wall. Placing the Swiffer and the pads next to the stove, she started sweeping. Humming softly, she entered a rhythm moving the broom back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. She swept the small pile into the dustpan, tapping three times on the trashcan rim to clear the pan of its contents. She opened the Swiffer pads and placed a clean one on the edge, pushing the spray button and falling back into the rhythm until the entire kitchen was cleaned. She repeated the process in the living room. She glanced at the couch and relived his accosting scream as the bottle left his hands, she winced and turned away as if it would erase the memory. It's better to be numb, she reminded herself, you can't hurt when you're numb. He'd come back, like he always does. He'd give the same apology, reminding Olive that if she had just let him be it wouldn't have happened. But he still loves her. She'd nod, bow her head, and listen to his footsteps disappear to the bathroom and the shower turn on. She'd retreat to the bedroom, and he'd elect to sleep on the couch. They'd put the Band-Aid over the fault line, and the countdown would start to the next tremor.

Her glassy eyes met the grandfather clock standing gravely in the corner—the hour hand and minute hand poised in opposition.

She glanced at the wooden door before swiftly averting her gaze, blinking rapidly to clear her vision. Now's not the time, Olive, there's more to do here. She put the broom, the dustpan, the Swiffer, the pads back in the closet and hung them on their respective nails or placed them on the designated shelf. She moved down the hall, stopping in the bathroom to wipe her face. Hollow eyes stared into hollow eyes. She looked at the sink, breathing deeply as she gripped the counter. The trashcan was overflowing—that just wouldn't do. She wrapped the bag's contents up carefully, doing the same in the shared bedroom and the kitchen, before placing the bags by

the front door. She grabbed a spare bag for the loose wrappers and empty beer cans covering the coffee table in front of the TV. She added that bag to the pile before folding the blanket on the couch and dropping it gently on the pillow. If she moved it, would he come back to the bedroom? Shaking her head, she grabbed the bags and stepped outside into the darkening atmosphere. Outside it was cold—the fire-like lights on the porch lit up her path but did nothing to block out the harsh wind blowing through the yard. She lifted the lid and dropped them in before hurrying back inside, arms wrapped loosely around her middle. She pressed the wood gently into the frame. Her hand hovered over the lock.

The soft chiming of the grandfather clock caught her attention. She watched the minute hand move on his own time, never slowing for her.

She looked over to the small table beside the reading lamp, not realizing she was moving until she picked up the picture frame. She brushed her fingertips over their faces, and she was struck by how genuine they looked. When was the last time they looked so happy? She remembered the moment clearly: she stood proudly in white and swiped the white cake on his nose before he was ready, and when he raised his own hand, she ducked out of the way leaving her hair the perfect target. They had laughed together as his dad handed over a napkin to wipe it off. Olive smiled at the tender looks on their faces, thought about the happy promises they had made. She put the photo back down. She yawned softly, blinking bleary-eyed at her phone to see that hours had passed without a word. She knew better to call when he needed space, so she shut off the light and walked down the hall. Her mother always warned her that the first sign of a failing relationship is the lack of communication. If she were here, she'd probably be saying that she had prayed for this relationship to work. That the past wouldn't repeat.

The bedroom door squeaked resistantly as it opened. She flicked on the light and moved about the room, feigning purpose. Something seemed different, heavier. Darker maybe. She shifted the lamp on the bedside table an inch back, the book and journal an inch forward. The glass shadowbox of the couple's vows glared at her. Falling back onto the bed, she draped her arms over her eyes: breathe, Olive, take deep slow breaths. You're okay. Breathe in, breathe out, repeat. She dropped her arms, and slowly opened her eyes. Momentarily blinded by the sudden flood of overhead light, she didn't notice it right away. When her eyes adjusted and met the shadow above her, she bounded off the bed, backing up toward the bedroom door. In her rush to get away, she bumped into the bedside table, the shadowbox shattering on the floor. She couldn't bring herself to care. Her eyes stayed glued to the dark figure in the lamp bowl. It wasn't moving, clearly already dead. But a dead bug is still a bug. And she hated bugs, especially cockroaches; abhorred them really. How long had that stiff carcass been hanging above her head?

Eyes on the lamp bowl, Olive weighed her options. She could wait for him to come home, hope that he's willing to remove the dead for her; or, because it was invisible with the lights off, she could leave it in the dark and pretend it's not the Sword of Damocles hanging over her head; or she could expose it to the light, remove it, and clean it out. Strengthening her resolve, Olive rolled her shoulders and stepped determinedly into the hall, back to the closet, yanked the paper towels and rags toward her, and set out on her mission.

She climbed onto the bed. Peering into the light, she tried to discover how to get into the lamp bowl without hurting herself. The lights, she realized. She stepped down from her perch and flicked the switch down, drowning the room in darkness. A sound in the kitchen caught her attention and she froze. Just the fan. She pictured herself unhooking the pull chain; unscrewing

the finial, round nut, and decorative cap; catching the glass bowl; covering the cockroach before removing it with a victorious finality. A car's beep interrupted her fantasy, and she blinked away the image. Without thinking, without instructing, she moved back to the living room, watched his car light up the driveway, his dark silhouette stomp across the porch. She stood frozen by the couch, and he turned the knob.

She glanced at the grandfather clock—the hands stood together, if only for a minute.

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Preston Blakeley

“shapes of creatures mythical or extinct”: Myth and History in *The Orchard Keeper*

The age-old conflict between humanity and nature transcends life and inhabits myth. In his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, Cormac McCarthy tells of Arthur Ownby, a reclusive woodsman living in the wilderness of East Tennessee, and the isolation he experiences at the will of urbanization, the force that facilitates the displacement of his beloved mountain culture. The questions that confront us are archetypal ones: What is Ownby’s relationship to the earth he inhabits? And how does this relationship mirror the sociohistorical milieu in which the novel is set? Although Ownby signifies his ancient Appalachian past, he is also representative of the ruin of his mountain culture. As McCarthy’s rugged region swings between sacred and spoiled, as the landscape yearns to escape from the strangle of encroachment, so Ownby is inseparable from his environment, acting as a mythical extension of creation. Inextricably fixed to nature, Ownby’s tragedy is not his own but rather signals the fateful consequences of neglecting nature.

Though Ownby signifies both sides of the paradox, his region’s ancient past and unfortunate future, his status as a symbol of East Tennessee’s bygone historical age is elevated by mythic imagery and archaic diction, creating an inseparable union between humanity and nature. McCarthy begins, “[the forest] has about it a primordial quality, some steamy carboniferous swamp where ancient saurians lurk” (11). Archaic diction such as “carboniferous,” referring to the “Carboniferous Period” (Ross and Ross, n. pag.), and “ancient saurians,” evoking the image of extinct reptiles, aids the text’s “primordial” aesthetic of nature (11). Nature’s

primordialism spell binds her onlookers, such as when Marion Sylder encounters the “high country [that] rolled lightless and uninhabited, the road ferruling through dark forests of owl trees, bat caverns, witch covens” (31). The mountains “work a sort of magic on Sylder,” says Luce, a sense of aesthetic rapture that combines the archaic and alluring (38). Ownby signifies the amalgamation of both the archaic and the alluring, as he “selected a magazine . . . an ancient issue of *Field and Stream*, limp and worn, pages soft as chamois” (131), which he read while he “rocked, dwarflike in his ponderous chair” (132). Ownby’s image as a mythic Appalachian sage burns in our minds as he burrows down in his Hobbiton-esque hole. His gnomish mountain hovel is draped in a “silhouette of pines . . . like a mammoth cathedral gothically spired” (59), furthering the fabled connection between Ownby and his “primitive . . . [and] mesozoic” landscape (173). Ownby’s position in the novel remains both archaic and alluring, both ancient and mythic, as he sees the snow and ice as “incomprehensible runes” (137), as his hiking staff is etched with “hex-carvings . . . [that have a] pleistocene aspect” (46). This archaic diction and mythic imagery, which describes both humanity and nature, furthers Ownby’s inseparable connection to his mountain landscape, elevating him to the status of an ancient steward, protecting the sanctity of his historical space.

Yet, Ownby’s mythic resonance proves the preeminent force that strengthens his intimate—and altogether ancient—union with nature. Even the mysterious creatures who lurk in the Appalachian Mountains, “the mountains [that] are a realm of mystical wonderment” (38), acknowledge Ownby’s mythic stature: “shapes of creatures mythical or extinct and silently noting his passage” (189). Before Ownby actively enters the action, the novel revolves around what he omnisciently watches from his house, which “sits on the sidehill, dark and abandoned-looking” (21), a position of apparent all-knowing observance that molds the old man into the

town's transcendent guardian. In moments when he seems to be "outside the action," says Kottage, "Ownby is actually at the center of a rather disparate Red Branch community. His mystical vision and connection to wilderness are the forces that maintain the society's equilibrium" (17), establishing his sacred center as the vessel through which his land speaks. The woodsman is himself the mythic personification of nature. Ownby ascends as his community's own mythic symbol and acts as a divine perpetuation of his land's archaic age. His mythic symbolism serves to heighten the reader's emotional and aesthetic attention to his landscape, though it also will serve to magnify the novel's final tragedy, revealing the dreaded consequences of humanity's defilement of nature. Through his transcendent sight, the reader experiences nature's mythic triumph and ultimately her tragic destruction.

Ownby's mythic union with nature elicits a Druidic reading of the text. The Druids were members of the Celtic priesthood whose spiritualism challenged the materialistic nature of Roman religion (Caesar 341). First, the connection emerges in the text when one considers Ownby's Druidic description. The trees that surround Ownby's damp abode are described as "rotund and druidical" (120); the old man ponders them like an "old hierophant savoring a favorite truth" (148), and the sun illuminates "his white hair with a prophetic translucence" (150). Ownby's description as a "hierophant . . . [having] a prophetic translucence" (148, 150) incites an intriguing connection to the Druids, for the hierophants were an ancient Greek and Celtic strand of prophets tasked with revealing sacred truths to ritual practitioners. Similarly, Ownby serves as a prophetic hierophant, a Druidic protector of Mother Nature and her sacred space.

The second way in which the connection emerges in the text is through Ownby's display of governmental antagonism. Kottage says that Ownby's antagonism towards government

encroachment correlates with “the Druids’ attitude of opposition to their Roman conquerors” (120). As the Druids resisted the interventionism of the Romans, so Ownby’s antagonism mirrors his ancient counterparts. Ownby expresses his antagonistic attitude towards government encroachment through his obsession with “the squat metal tank that topped the mountain . . . which had once been used to mix insecticide” (51). These tanks are an allusion to those the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) used to store fertilizer-based farming chemicals, which poisoned “farmlands of hundreds of families and permanently altered the traditional culture of the region” (Luce 20). The inception of the TVA disrupted traditional farming methods, created “a permanent flood in the valley itself” (20), and displaced roughly eighty thousand people (20), illuminating Ownby’s perception of the TVA tank as “sinister” (92) and “coldly gleaming and capable of infinite contempt” (93). Ecologically destructive practices such as these facilitated the death of the traditional mountain culture.

Perhaps Ownby’s connection to the Druids is best exemplified during his armed standoff with the government agents who have infiltrated his naturalistic space, one of whom was dressed as “like an ATU agent” (186), the region’s human development agency. The agent’s violent suspicion, their irreconcilable inability to “empathize with this old man who lives by his own principles” (Luce 47), resembles Tacitus’s account of the Roman attack on the Druids. Tacitus recounts, “a circle of Druids, lifting their hands to heaven and showering imprecations, struck the troops with such an awe at the extraordinary spectacle” (Annals XVI), furthering the reader’s perception of the Celts as untamed and savage. As Tacitus “paints the Druids in the worst terms for his Roman audience” (Nigel, n. pag.), the armed agents similarly and “wrongly . . . expect violence from him [Ownby] and send an escalating arsenal against him” (Luce 46), highlighting his untamed otherness as justification for offense. Nevertheless, the intertextual relationship

between Ownby and the Druids elevates the old iconoclast's mythic status while also serving to heighten the near-transcendent stakes that permeate the novel's historical context.

Ownby's depiction and connection to the Druids elevates his function as a steward of his region's sanctity, though his ironic participation in the railroad logging industry contributes to the demise of his landscape. Early in his life, Ownby moved to a small farm in "Sevier County," surrounded by "purty woolly country at that time" (153). Yet Ownby's idyllic woodlands meet their demise in "the intrusion of the machine . . . [and] logging operations" (Luce 39), an operation that Ownby worked for upon his move. Ownby's occupation as a railroad logger signifies an ironic reversal. For as much as he is a representation of the undefiled, his profession contributes to his landscape's defilement; and for as much as he detests intervention in the region, he enlists in an interventionist trade that adulterates his naturalistic space. As the wrought-iron fence of the novel's prologue "grewed all through the tree" (6), as "the folded Appalachians . . . contort roads to their liking" (10), and as "oaks and . . . tulips brace themselves against the precarious declination" (11), so we understand that nature wages a ruthless war against intrusive economic practices. Though logging promised financial prosperity to an economy that was collapsing as "unemployment was rising at a catastrophic rate" (Luce 15), Yarnell notes that "lumbering and industrialization had destroyed the livestock industry by destroying the forest range," facilitating nature's defilement (21). Ownby exists within the tension between new and old, oscillating between the lucrative logging industry and his mythic mountain yearnings. He swings between past and present, between his love of nature and his ironic contribution to her destruction. For as much as Ownby thirsts after the mountain's escape, exclaiming that "If I was a younger man . . . I would move to them mountains" (55), his contribution to industrialization damns his own landscape, sending green pastures and primordial

hollows into a hell of “pollution and environmental change” (Yarnell 21). Ownby’s employment, which represents his reversal from nature’s mythic center to her ironic perpetrator, reveals the extent to which the mountain people facilitated the ecological death of their own environment for the sake of economic gain.

Ownby’s ironic hand in the logging industry is not without its mythic reverberations. While living in Tuckaleechee, Ownby’s eyes are opened to the danger of the “wampus cat,” or mountain lion, when an African witch “put three drops of milfoil on the back of his tongue,” referring to yarrow liquid, often used as a psychedelic drug (59). The wampus cat, or the “painter” (147), signifies a disordering force in mythology. For the Greeks, “the panther . . . [is] the favorite animal of Dionysus” (Otto 111), the god known for his chaotic rites. The mountain lion is nature’s preeminent symbol of primordialism. When Ownby and his logging crew were “blastin . . . up t’wards Wears Valley” (15) and found a cub to domesticate, (16), it is no surprise that the primordial feline would resist its taming. The lion kills Ownby’s wife, Ellen, and all his livestock. Before her death, Ellen attempts to describe the cat—“I don’t know, or I couldn’t tell what it was” (155)—and her inability to articulate its elusive appearance correlates with Yarnell’s claim that “[following] “industrial development. . . Mountain lions became so rare that many thought sightings were figments of the imagination” (21). Left without description and not named as the perpetrator of the attacks, but understood as so, the feline’s phantom image is in tune with the Appalachian imagination. The panther is the supernatural subject of mountain legend. According to one Native American myth, the panther is “a witch who kills livestock by night . . . metamorphosing into a cat and subsequently frozen forever in transition from human to feline” (Kottage 22). Kottage’s metamorphic description supports McCarthy’s treatment of the panther while also elevating the animal’s mythic stature.

But it is these mythic qualities that Ownby subdues. Though the feline's fierce attack seems to be nature's atonement for Ownby's fateful industrial encroachment, an ironic reversal from his status as a symbol of creation's sanctity to an agent of her defilement, Ownby's intrusion contributes to the cat's subjugation. The strength of feline imagery weakens as urbanization progresses, until, as Luce notes, "the only predatory feline left is a half-feral domestic cat" (41). Through Ownby's ironic involvement in destructive industrial work, which allowed the "government [to take] over the land and imprison its advocates" (Kottage 24), the old man also contributes to the panther's extinction. The mature Ownby recognizes this fact when he says, "they ain't painters round like they used to be" (149). Nature's primordial spirit is suppressed by industry, her untamed advocates tarnished by encroachment. Instead of transcendent triumph, the deconstruction of the feline's mythic stature—stature dissolved into nothing more than "a loosed box of kittens" (180) and "kittens bobbing over the floor like brown lint" (181)—facilitates the fateful suppression of nature's mythic power, a fate determined by those willing to prioritize economic felicity over ecological sanctity.

As Ownby's ironic occupation contributes to nature's corruption, it also displays the tragic consequences of suppressing nature's mythic power. After his self-defiant volley of gunfire with law enforcement, Ownby is declared "light in the head" (277) and sent to a mental institution. Though Ownby's defilement of nature is largely unintentional and ironic, his tragic and final imprisonment elicits our sympathy. His imprisonment displays the ironic defeat of a man and culture motivated by isolated necessity yet deceived by promising industry. While his mythic resonance now faintly echoes in the constraints of his cell, he is stripped of its primordial promise as its once-sacred beholder and finds himself deemed disturbed and disillusioned by his captors, and so nature is also left disenchanting and devoid of its power: "dissolved in a pale and

broken image” (244). The union between humanity and nature, which once flourished in unfettered mysticism, remains fast even as fate deals Ownby’s tragic blow. Through ironic economic conformity to popular industrial culture, Ownby’s tragedy does not only incite the death of nature but also the death of humanity, as signified by the novel’s final epitaph: “No vestige of that people remains. On the lips of the strange race that now dwells there their names are myth, legend, dust” (245). Ownby’s mythic qualities—and his historical centering as a symbol of the ancient Appalachian age—now lay in extinction, as he and his people are damned out of existence. While humanity and nature remain inextricably tethered together, the consequences of industrial intrusion are no less than the removal of humanity from nature and thus the removal of humanity from itself. Ownby’s tragic plight becomes our modern parable.

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Adeline Lee Frierson

The Beauty of Living

Nature. Our literature is saturated with it, appreciating its beauty and condemning how our modern inventions have killed it. Poem after poem highlights the beauty of Nature—how despite “man’s smudge,” (Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” line 1) “nature is never spent” (9). In our fast-paced modern world, rest is rare. A lack of rest leads to a lack of time spent in nature. Poems like “God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manley Hopkins become poems we simply read, another person’s experiences on a page. We no longer *experience* these profound moments of appreciation ourselves. Our connection with nature is passive. Gone are the days when we climbed mountains in National Parks of our own volition. Someone told me that Olympic National Park is a beautiful place worth visiting, but I never would have hiked to its peak if another person had not described the mountain’s beauty. Dover Beach is one such place where people visit because someone else wrote about “the long line of spray / Where the sea meets the moon-blanch’d land” (Arnold, lines 7–8) and how “the grating roar / Of pebbles which the waves draw back” (9–10) sounds through the night. Experiencing nature becomes something we do through another’s eyes, another’s words from one hundred or two hundred years before we even opened our eyes to see the earth’s beauty.

For years, I have been guilty of this passive view of nature, never fully comprehending what inspired hundreds of poets. At least I was until March 2020. As I sit to write this piece, we are approaching the second anniversary of when the world stopped. Every person, every nation held their breath as stores and restaurants closed, as hospitals became overrun with Covid-19

patients. My mom and I were walking through the gardens at the Biltmore Estate when I got the email that Samford would be postponing returning to campus for at least a week, but I had a feeling I wouldn't be back in my dorm the rest of the semester. I tried to stay present with my mom, but internally, my imagination was running wild with ideas of how the next few months would go. Self-quarantining with my family sounded daunting. Personal space was not a concept my family was well versed in, and after two years at college, I was content with my independence. How was I going to survive being crammed into an already packed household with my younger siblings, all attending our respective online elementary, middle school, high school, and college classes?

Nature.

That is how I survived the isolation of the pandemic. No longer was I simply studying the poets that wrote of the night sky and “all the fire-folk sitting in the air! / The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!” (Hopkins, “The Starlight Night,” lines 2–3). I had progressed to first-hand experience. I wasn't reclined, contemplating the plight of humanity while “The birds around me hopped and played” (Wordsworth, “Early Spring,” lines 13), as William Wordsworth describes in “Lines Written in Early Spring.” But I read a book on a picnic blanket under a tree by the brook that ran through the center of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia while “The birds around me hopped and played” (13). I climbed into the center of a sprawling magnolia tree on the University of Georgia's campus—curiosity driving my actions. I walked on a winding path lined with every color tulip: yellow, red, pink, orange, white. I lay beside my best friend at her parent's pool (six feet apart, of course), soaking up the feeling of the sun on my skin. I took in the green of the leaves of the tree that my hammock was under while my brothers played intense games of soccer or basketball. I relished the feeling of sweat dripping down my neck as I ran for

my life during hide-and-seek-tag with my younger siblings. I hopped in my car with my sister to weave through the side streets in downtown Athens, windows down to let the North Georgia summer breeze in, music as loud as we could handle. The highlight of my days became whatever moment was touched by nature.

When I was forced to seek comfort in nature, I realized that spending time in its beauty evokes a response. I may not have written poetry about my experiences, but I am no longer a passive reader. Nature welcomed me with open arms, holding my hand as I walked through one of the hardest seasons of my life. Because of it, I am filled with longing and peace. When I look back on the spring and summer of 2020, my first thoughts are of the long days playing outside with my family or my solitary walks in unfamiliar neighborhoods. The loss I experienced in 2020 is not my immediate thought. The memories I made during the spring and summer of 2020 have become my “God’s Grandeur,” my “Dover Beach,” my “Tintern Abbey.” The hours and hours I spent covered in nature’s warm embrace have become

to me

As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din

Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart. (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” lines 23–28)

When I close my eyes, I hear the birds, I feel the magnolia tree’s roots, I see the rainbow of tulips, I feel the burning sun, I hear the rustling of the leaves, I feel my sweat trickling, I smell the night air. These moments are all imprinted on my mind, my blood, my heart. Nature colored,

and continues to color, my life in vibrant hue. To nature, I am forever grateful for the call to embrace the beauty of living.

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Margaret Kirby

“vicaire of the almighty lord”: How to Heal Pandemic-Weary Minds

As we considered the theme for this *Editors’ Desks* section, our thoughts coalesced into two questions: why did so many of us return to nature during the pandemic years, and what is it about nature that instills such healing and hope in us? I believe these mysterious questions can be answered in part by a reflection on the meanings of the word *nature*. C.S. Lewis, in his book *Studies in Words*, traces the many ways *nature* has been used throughout Western literature. Four of these meanings are especially pertinent to this pandemic (dare I say post-pandemic?) world: nature as birth, as order, as essence, and as mother. I believe these four meanings serve as some of the reasons we continue to return to nature in times of trial and disillusionment. Lewis’s precise semantic study prompts my mystical, personal reflections on these times. He warns, “it is risky to try to build precise semantic bridges,” but in many cases he builds bridges anyway (25). Now, I’ve always loved bridges, but are mystics ever precise? My bridges will be risky, but walk along them, and look around you. You’ll trip only if you’re looking down at your feet.

Nature as Birth

The word *nature*, or *natura*, can be traced back to the Latin *nasci*, “to be born” (Lewis 25). The earth is being re-born. Have you seen it? As I write, springtime is returning to our part of the world, just as it did two years ago when we were all sent home from school. I remember walking among the budding trees and hoping for something—I did not know what—from God. The three low notes of the mourning dove came sighing from the depths of the earth. If I didn’t

know better, I would have thought that lonely call was the earth groaning in the pangs of childbirth, which Paul heard. And maybe it was.

Here they come: the little children born anew in the rhythm of the Dove's call, the star flowers in the park my granddad pulls up as weeds, the fairy-spuds and forget-me-nots. I wonder if they remember how that spring I cried out to their silent beds, "God, do not forget me!" Look: here I am—here we are—the children of the earth, being born again. We come into the world, our ears ringing with the groaning cries of the heavenly Dove. We are those flowers, begging to be remembered. We have sprung from the earth only to realize this is a withering world. But listen! How he gathers our cries from these deaf flower beds and sends them flying to the Father's throne. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased!" still echoes, flung across the breezes. As I feel it blowing on me, I sit and think: it's a good thing I don't have to talk to the Father face to face. I have trouble speaking my mind as it is.

Nature as Order

When something is "natural," it is properly ordered (Lewis 40). Is crying at flowers the "natural" thing to do in a pandemic, you ask? When talking to an invisible God, where do *you* look? C.S. Lewis writes, "Pagan myths . . . and *Genesis* seemed to agree that matter first existed in a state of disorder (*tohu-bohu* or chaos) and was afterwards ordered and worked up into a *kosmos*. . . . The cosmos can then be called *nature* and contrasted with the preceding—and perhaps subsequent—disorder" (40). These pandemic years have felt more like a chaos than a cosmos. And so I go on walks—more than ever—hoping my walking might unravel the tangled mess of the world one step at a time. I especially did that spring, walked in nature, where spring was awakening as it did every year, where the honeysuckle bloomed in all the same places, and the birds came out to feed at the same time every day: *natural order*, philosophers call it.

Yet, “[a]nything which has changed from its sort or kind (*nature*) may be described as *unnatural*, provided that the change is one the speaker deplors” (43). Do you deplore the pandemic, dear reader? Honeysuckle is natural. Pandemics are not.

Nature as Essence

As I walk in my human-made neighborhood park and call it “escaping into nature,” Lewis looks at me and smiles. Sure, he says, let us stop here and “pause on a man-made bridge to look . . . [out] at a landscape which has only its larger geological features in common with that which would have existed if man had never interfered” (73–74). Yes, Lewis, it is indeed a far cry from Oxford. “But if man had never interfered in the park by my house, it would be a tangled forest unnatural for walking,” I add smiling. When are things “unnatural?” When the forest’s nature is impinged upon or my own? And is nature touched by people no longer nature? “There is obviously some idea of a thing’s *natura* as its original or ‘innate’ character” (25). So, perhaps if my neighborhood park retains a piece of that innate character, its nature may still remain intact.

E.E. Cummings’s punctuation makes me squirm, but I think he understands something of the innate character in things. He writes, “i thank You God for most this amazing / day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees / and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything / which is natural which is infinite which is yes” (e.e. cummings). The nice old man in “A Room With a View” replies resoundingly: “By the side of the everlasting Why there is a Yes!” (E.M. Forester, n. pag.). What does “yes” taste like? Essence. The innate nature of things must be what “yes” tastes like. Frederick Buechner says, “The sap of maple is like rainwater, very soft, and almost without taste except for the faintest tinge of sweetness to it” (Buechner 164). I have never tasted

the sap of trees, but I have inhaled the soft sweetness of their breathings—and there is a yes, a rightness, an order, and something about them that fits inside of me.

Despite those trails in my neighborhood park being human made, walking them still gives me “a wider range of vision,” still gives me the sense that I am “for the moment, in conditions more suited to [my] own *nature*: to [my] lungs, nostrils, ears and eyes” (Lewis 74). So, perhaps the forest’s innate nature answers something within my own nature. If trees and I are made of the same stuff, then that must be why I feel so at home among them.

Nature as Mother

One night, wandering outside during quarantine, I looked up and saw the Milky Way and felt that I had just received a glimpse through the lacy bridal veil God drapes over all his most beautiful treasures: “Great Mother Nature may well come in at this point but she will be either, for Stoics, a deified Mother Nature, or, for Christians, a Mother Nature who is the ‘vicaire of the almighty lord,’ inscribing her laws, which she learned from God, on the human heart” (Lewis 61). What are you saying, Mr. Lewis? That the law of the Milky Way is in my heart? When I see all beautiful things, I do indeed take them inside of me. I drink from the draught of their memory as I do the breathings of trees—and they sustain me. Where does all that milk come from? Mother Nature? Just like the bees waking from their wintertime slumber to drink from the honeysuckle’s bosom, we stir in the nighttime of this chaotic world to drink in the nectar of beauty. High and beautiful things are always obscured. We cannot get enough of them, the stars in the Milky Way and the drops in a cloud. God has put a veil over them, his daughter, our mother. And one day, he will draw us through the veil with her. We will no longer need bridges then, risky or sturdy, for we will be in that place our hearts have pined for, that place to which our feet have never known the way.

The Milky Way in the sky, that endless tangle of lace too delicate for us to unravel, is indeed the writing on the wall of our hearts. It is written in the handwriting of my mother. I know within an instant that it is hers. All the mysteries eluding us are contained up there in the sky. She is the messenger, the vicar, the priest, visibly standing in the place of an invisible Christ, telling her children over and over again that their Father will not leave them in the dark, will not let the chaos of this world overstep its bounds.

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Juliana Mink

Where Were You: Nature and Human Experience in *The Tree of Life*

It seems we live a messy, sometimes contradictory existence where nothing appears to cohere. The frustrating cycle of philosophical and spiritual inquiry occurs more as we seek to understand and as we realize how little we know. For every one answer we receive, we are given ten more questions. And yet we cannot stop our search for understanding. We try to make sense of our relationship with the world, the nature of human existence, or the qualities of God. We are a species made for enlightenment and existential questioning, wanderers trying to reach meaning. Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* depicts the plight of comprehending the paradoxical characteristics of nature and humanity. The correlation between suffering and nature is established through the opening epigraph, which depicts a quote from Job that reads, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4,7). From there, Malick launches into an existential and spiritual passion project where characters wrestle with their humanity and relationship with the cosmological unknown. On one hand, Malick depicts the natural world as intimately connected with the development of individual memory and virtue, signifying humanity intertwined with a personal God. But a contradictory perspective in *The Tree of Life* exhibits sublime nature, the scope of the universe, and humankind's relative inferiority, wondering whether one's suffering is negligible to an all-powerful, distant deity. Malick's portrayal of creation as paradoxically personal and sublime conveys his perspective on human experience as relatively small but still deeply meaningful.

The Tree of Life explores the idea of nature as connected with individuals' private lives primarily through an autobiographical narrative of the young protagonist, Jack O'Brian, who is played by Hunter McCracken, as he grows up in the 1950's Waco suburbs. Though the film features an unconventional plot focusing more on emotional experience, much of the screen time is devoted to Jack and his personal, familial, moral, and spiritual struggles. In this narrative, Malick presents nature associated with memory, development, and individual moral goodness. The environment encircling Jack's childhood home is used to capture the sensation of memory, as a present-day, now late-middle-aged Jack (Sean Penn) remembers his upbringing. The whole sequence, which lasts around two minutes, consists of short takes, emulating the episodic flashes of memory. The influence of memory enlightens every scene, depicting the world through the eyes of a small child. During the montage of his infant to toddler years, there are frequent shots from Jack's perspective of large and unknowable creation surrounding him. One frame is a low-angle, medium shot of rain dripping down from the house's roof. The angle illustrates Jack's perception of nature as big and daunting but benevolent. The next shot is of a puddle from a similarly low angle, a possible imaginative playground for a young child (0:40:53). The framing of nature from young Jack's perspective works to portray the world as vast but still intimately benign as it teems with unending potential. Later in the montage, after Mrs. O'Brian, played by Jessica Chastain, turns out the light for a sleeping four-year-old Jack, there is a low-angle shot of the backyard oak tree, shadowy against a dusk sky (0:48:31). Then there is a shot from the base of the same tree, framing the three, now elementary aged, O'Brian boys as they climb the oak (0:48:39). The reference to the same tree conveys the environment's consistency, despite the passage of time. The natural world around Jack acts as a foundation upon which Jack's development occurs. But the natural world is not stagnant: the low-angle shot from the tree's

base slowly moves tilts up, mimicking both the boy's steady climb and the tree's slow growth. The depiction of the natural world as a collaborative developer with the children deepens the connection between humans and environment. The simultaneous growth of the tree and the boy makes creation a personal, intimate entity, one connected to human experience. These shots link nature to memory and growth, establishing Jack's environment as a foundation for play and relational development.

Malick depicts nature not only as Jack's childhood backdrop, growing parallel to his physical development; he also establishes a correlation between creation and Jack's moral development. The mother, who represents grace and moral goodness, is associated with reverence and attachment to nature. Her relationship with nature is shown especially in one scene when a butterfly lands on her hand (0:41:36). In this shot, Mrs. O'Brian is backlit, illuminating her profile and the butterfly. Mrs. O'Brian lifts the butterfly in her hand to the same level as her eyes. The blocking illustrates the mother's respect and love of nature as an entity equal to her as she holds creation up to her position. The lighting conveys her harmony with her environment as the sun highlights her figure. A later scene more explicitly intertwines the mother and her goodness with creation. After Jack whispers, "Mother. Make me good" (0:54:11), Mrs. O'Brian is pictured floating in front of the backyard oak tree. As though from Jack's perspective, the camera peers up at her gazing smilingly down (0:54:36). Mrs. O'Brian's limbs resemble the tree's behind her as she blends with the natural environment. Floating suggests a transcendence or out-of-body experience; this symbolism conveys Jack's perception of his mother's goodness as almost supernatural. Furthermore, this scene relates her goodness to an oak tree: both are seemingly detached from human corruption. For Jack, the mother levitates just above any innate depravity of humankind, just like the environment around him.

The correlation between the mother, virtue, and the natural world heightens as Jack opposes his mother's virtuous example. When young Jack experiences the temptation to yield to anger, violence, and lust, he directly abuses creation. His first transgression against nature occurs when he blows up a bird's nest and eggs with a group of boys (1:27:59). The scene utilizes short takes frequent cuts, cutting three times in three seconds. The last shot quickly pans from the blur of boys back to the destroyed bird's nest on the tree. The quick cuts in the scene create a sense of turbulence and jolting stress, correlating to Jack's own emotional, moral, and spiritual turmoil. The last shot's composition, panning from the boys to the nest in the tree, connects Jack's spiritual stress to the innocent bystander, nature, suggesting that moral goodness appeases creation, while moral failing opposes the natural world. As Jack continues acting destructively towards nature by attaching a frog to a rocket, the audience repeatedly receives extreme close-ups from a shaky hand-held camera focusing on Jack's distressed face (1:28:45). The combination of the actor's worried expression and the bumpy cinematography emulates his internal wrestling: he knows he is doing wrong by destroying the creation his mother holds so dear. Coming home after committing his destructive acts, Jack meets his mother, who stands in the yard, arms crossed, with a knowing look on her face. The lighting emphasizes Jack's transgression of his mother's example of moral goodness aligned with nature (1:35:23): sunlight hits directly on the back of Mrs. O'Brian's head, illuminating her face and hair with a golden glow. Jack crosses in front of her and moves back into the shadows, putting the mother's concerned face into the frame's foreground. The subtle chiaroscuro created in the scene exemplifies Jack's infringement against his mother, nature, and morality. Mrs. O'Brian remains connected with her goodness and nature: the sun rests on her face, reminiscent of the butterfly scene. Meanwhile, Jack is giving in to desire, disassociating from his mother and her morality,

moving away from the sun and towards the shadows, away from creation itself. Nature is more than a setting for childhood Jack; it is a deeply personal component of his memory and growth.

However, Malick contrasts the illustration of nature as intimately connected to individual memory and goodness with another perspective on the environment: one where creation is cosmically vast, unknowable, and possibly indifferent to humanity's existence and suffering. Beginning with the Job quote, *The Tree of Life* diametrically opposes individual human experience with the grand scale of the universe. The film opens with this contemplation as present-day Mr. and Mrs. O'Brian receive the news of their middle son's untimely death. The audience then follows Mrs. O'Brian as she struggles to reconcile her grief. The camera follows the mother as she walks through a forest, head turned upward, and closes her eyes, as if in prayer (0:19:27). The next shot reverts back to the very beginning of the film, picturing a ray of light piercing an otherwise dark space as the mother asks, "Lord. Why? Where were you?" (0:19:57). The "Where were you?" directly inverts the quote from Job in which God asks of Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" The following sequence in the film acts as God's answer, a visual representation and re-creation of this quote from Job. While the sweeping and hauntingly beautiful song *Lacrimosa*, by Zbigniew Preisner, plays, shots depict the Big Bang, the cosmos, and more grand environmental scenes, oscillating between a boundless, cosmic scale and views of cellular intricacy. One particular image is an extreme-long shot from a low angle as clouds swirl and circle a gaping illuminated hole in space, an awe-inspiring and daunting image (0:21:11). The angle of the shot further asserts the viewer's inferiority compared to this cosmic extravagance. Additionally, the shot's extended duration forces the audience to view these scenes longer, letting them grasp the scope and size of the intimidating spectacle. All of this is layered over the mother's existential prayers which whisper, "Did you know?"

(0:21:08), “Who are we to you?” (0:21:25), “Answer me” (0:21:48), “We cry to you,” (0:25:59), “My soul. My son” (26:06), and finally, “Hear us” (0:26:28). Her whispers, coupled with the framed images, prompt the audience to wonder alongside Mrs. O’Brian how individual prayers hold up against the cosmos. Does individual suffering matter? What does one soul or one son cost in the grand scheme of nature? The film’s depiction of an immeasurable, sublime creation reduces individuals to flecks in a universe too large to comprehend.

Malick reintroduces the existential question of creation’s indifference to individual action when Jack commits his ultimate transgression of nature. In this scene, Jack does not defile a creature but sins against his brother. Beginning with the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel, the literary canon depicts brother-against-brother conflict as an inversion of the natural order. After Jack deliberately shoots R.L. (Laramie Eppler) in the finger, the camera immediately cuts to a low-angle shot from Jack’s perspective as he looks at the trees (1:48:46). The film then cuts to another low-angle shot, this time from R.L.’s perspective as he lies on the ground, of long grass moving in the wind. The upward perspective of nature in both shots seems to ask whether creation sees or cares for human transgression or suffering. The implication of smallness against the backdrop of infinite, sublime creation reoccurs in these scenes through the diatonic sounds and the extra-diatonic score. Before and after Jack shoots his brother, the sounds of the forest—birds and cicadas—drone on without faltering. Despite human action against the natural order, like a brother turning against a brother, the environment continues to do what it has always done: bugs still chirp, and birds still sing. As the wounded brother lies in the grass sobbing, a soft piano begins to play (1:49:20). It continues as Jack whispers a prayer off-screen, saying, “What I want to do, I can’t do. I do what I hate” (1:49:42), a line deeply reminiscent of Romans 7:15 that reads, “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15, NIV). Overlaying

all of these scenes is the extra-diatonic instrumental score: a solo piano rendition of *Lacrimosa*, the staggering operatic melody played throughout the Big Bang sequence. The melody acts as a leitmotif encapsulating creation's infinity and humanity's comparatively finite nature. By incorporating a reference to the scenes of cosmic immensity, the significance of human action and suffering is again questioned. In comparison to the grandeur and vastness of nature, individual loss, struggle, and goodness seem microscopic.

However, the eternal, the infinite, and the cosmic do not devalue our experiences, our struggles, and our lives. Rather, acknowledging the cosmically grand creation and human smallness heightens our appreciation for the more personal, backyard version of nature. This paradoxical combination is seen through Mr. O'Brian, played by Brad Pitt. The acknowledgment of insignificance relative to nature is anxiety inducing. But the simultaneous recognition of one's finite humanity and creation's immeasurable design is crucial for the acquisition of peace and meaning. This is illustrated, or rather composed, in the scene where Mr. O'Brian realizes his past inability to notice his environment and moral failures. He says, "I wanted to be loved because I was great. A big man. I'm nothing. Look at the glory around us. Trees and birds. I lived in shame. I dishonored it all and didn't notice the glory. I'm a foolish man" (1:54:11). Mr. O'Brian's realization is almost a direct reiteration of a quote from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Father Zossima, a religious figure exemplifying the good life, remembers his brother's words saying, "There was so much of God's glory around me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, and I alone lived in shame, I alone dishonored everything and did not notice the beauty and glory of it all" (Dostoevsky 250). While Mr. O'Brian laments his mistaken perspective on success and his neglect of nature, a nondiegetic score begins to play. It is a soft piano rendition of the previous score that sounded during a montage depicting Mr. and Mrs. O'Brian's love story

and early family life (0:37:12). Played overtop scenes like a picnic in the field, the tree in the backyard, or an infant Jack learning how to walk on the grass, the leitmotif symbolizes the small, ordinary moments of nature and goodness in life. The leitmotif is reintroduced during Mr. O'Brian's speech, reminding us of the wonder of nature and his comparative insignificance and prompting us to focus on the quiet goodness of creation.

The paradoxical coexistence of the personal and impersonal environments alludes to the mystery of human existence itself: people are both insignificant and deeply meaningful at the same time. Individual life is merely a blip in the grand scheme of time, making it more precious. Nature in *The Tree of Life* highlights both personal and sublime perspectives on creation. While these two seem diametrically opposed, they exist in tandem with each other, teaching us that the nature of human existence is both fleeting and seemingly insignificant and deeply meaningful. The two qualities of creation and humanity fit our suffering and our questioning into an overarching pattern: the narrative of existence. Just like the growing of a tree or the orbit of a planet, the internal individual struggle has occurred in every soul and will continue to occur long after we are gone. Our internal struggles are not just ours; they are intrinsic to human experience. While this knowledge does not stop our soul's wrestling, it does provide perspective and points to one above our humanity, existence, and creation.

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Lacey Spear

Thunder Embraces Earth:

Reconciling the Earthly and the Spiritual in Mary Szybist's Annunciation Poems

Navigating the world of religious language—especially for the nonbeliever—can prove not only daunting but also unfeeling. Christian imagery and symbols can seem neither malleable nor comforting. Because Christian language feels so remote from daily existence and so elevated above the physical world, it can alienate the nonbeliever and believer alike. In a world of consumerism, social injustice, and instant gratification, what use are angels, chariots, and fire? In such a world, the elevated language of the Bible can feel hollow and unsatisfying. Although the words of Irenaeus, that “the glory of God is man fully alive,” continue to echo, the world of Christian symbolism feels so far removed, lacking the rawness of daily life.

How can Christians, in the face of this enigmatic dilemma, reconcile the inaccessibility of Christian language with the immediacy of modern existence? They can find answers in the mediator of poetry, an art form that thrives on Viktor Shkolvsky's concept of defamiliarization and restores the meaning to the once-alienating Christian symbols.¹⁵ The poems of Mary Szybist unveil seemingly impenetrable Christian language and reconcile the modern mind with such lofty images. In two poems in particular—“Annunciation (from the grass beneath them)” and “Annunciation as Right Whale with Kelp Gulls”—Szybist utilizes nature to defamiliarize

¹⁵ Defamiliarization attempts to reframe something familiar to readers in a manner they have never perceived it before. Thus, the formerly familiar object becomes new, and readers can understand it in a fresh way. Defamiliarization thrives on the usage of unorthodox metaphors.

Christian language and offers fresh interpretations of the Annunciation.¹⁶ Through earthly images such as grass and animals, Szybist transforms the lofty Annunciation to a tangible experience with which the reader can connect.

Mary Szybist serves as the ideal author to navigate this tension between Christianity and modernity due to her personal struggle with faith. Although Szybist grew up Catholic, she does not quickly identify herself under that umbrella anymore, and *Incarnadine*, which contains nine Annunciation poems (including the two mentioned previously), demonstrates her struggle to develop faith in the distress of doubt. In her Annunciation poems, Szybist employs defamiliarizing metaphors and uncovers how one can approach the stoniness of Scripture and turn it into something malleable and penetrable. “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them)” and “Annunciation as Right Whale with Kelp Gulls” offer a fresh interpretation of the Annunciation; however, they differ in their approaches. Whereas “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them)” utilizes the perspective of the grass to understand the holiness of the Annunciation, “Annunciation as Right Whale with Kelp Gulls” employs violent animal images to reveal the potentially dark side of the Annunciation.

In “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them),” Szybist tells the story of the Annunciation from the perspective of the grass beneath the feet of Mary and the angel Gabriel. The poem lacks the lofty religious language usually recycled in Christian circles and instead defamiliarizes standard characterizations, referring to Mary as “the girl” and to Gabriel as “it.” Since the grass does not yet know of Mary’s significance in the Christian plan of salvation, she is nothing more than a girl, and since the grass, being utter earth, cannot comprehend the spirituality of Gabriel, he is other. Furthermore, the grass, as the narrator of the poem, reconciles

¹⁶ The Annunciation refers to when the Angel Gabriel visits Mary and tells her that she will be the Mother of the Savior of the world, Jesus. See Luke 1:26-38.

the sensory with the spirituality of the Annunciation, focusing mostly on how the moment feels rather than describing what occurs. For example, in the first three lines of the poem, the grass asks, “how many moments did it hover before we felt / it was like nothing else, it was not bird / light as a mosquito, the aroma of walnut husks” (Szybist, lines 1-3). The poem immediately detaches itself from the loftiness of religious language by aiming to understand the Annunciation through feeling rather than rationalizing. Additionally, to contemplate this moment, Szybist utilizes earthly images, such as birds, mosquitos, and walnut husks, instead of heavenly or spiritual images, making the Annunciation more accessible to readers.

The grass also embodies an almost childlike wish to encounter the divine. When Gabriel, referred to as “it,” comes close, the grass says, “we rose up to it, held ourselves tight / when it skimmed just the tip of our blades / didn’t you feel softened / no, not even its flickering trembled” (lines 15-18). The grass, in its own innocent way, recognizes the holiness of the angel Gabriel and longs to feel the weight of such glory. Touching Gabriel’s garment, the grass experiences a transfer of glory.¹⁷ The grass does not try to understand Gabriel as a spiritual being but senses his closeness and understands him through physical touch. “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them)” attempts to extract the profound holiness from the Annunciation, a holiness that can get lost in the inaccessibility of religious language, that can be recovered only by the materiality of earth.

Contrasting the positive defamiliarization of “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them),” “Annunciation as Right Whale with Kelp Gulls” explores a much darker interpretation of the Annunciation. In the poem, Szybist utilizes whales and gulls as a metaphorical framework,

¹⁷ See Luke 8:43-48. I use the phrase “transfer of glory” to echo when Jesus healed the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. In the Biblical account, Jesus says he knows someone touched him because he felt the power go out from him.

with the whale representing the Virgin Mary and the gull representing the angel Gabriel (and, by extension, God). In the epigraph, Szybist includes information from the BBC, which explains that gulls have learned to feed on whales.¹⁸ Szybist depicts the Virgin as a helpless and unknowing maiden, overshadowed by the attack of the Almighty. Her submission is not a willful choice but rather a forced acquiescence.

In the poem, the speaker describes the gulls as aggressive. They “[dive] fast,” “outnumber [the whale],” “swoop down,” and “eat [the whale] alive” (Szybist, lines 2, 10, 13, and 14). The speaker describes the whale, on the other hand, as full of “softness,” “sweetness,” “tender[ness],” and “openness” (lines 2, 8, 11, and 12). The whale, representing the Virgin Mary, is submissive to the point of paralysis. She does not act or retaliate but sits ready and defenseless for the merciless acts of the gulls, who represent the angel Gabriel and even God Himself. Szybist implies that the Annunciation is far from an announcement of salvation; it is the denial of free will. This metaphorical framework of the whales and the gulls defamiliarizes the traditional interpretation of the encounter and distorts the Virgin’s humility, turning it into her curse.

Szybist’s contrasting depictions of the Annunciation demonstrate how defamiliarization can penetrate the inaccessibility of religious language. Her nature metaphors help the reader connect more with the loftiness of the spiritual context because of their materiality and immediacy. Additionally, the two poems, through employing defamiliarizing metaphors, offer fresh interpretations of the Annunciation and allow the reader to perceive it in a new manner. Therefore, in light of these aspects of Szybist’s work, I see no better way to conclude this analysis than by crafting a response poem, mimicking the style of Szybist. In this poem, I aim to offer an alternative perspective to “Annunciation (from the grass beneath them)” and

¹⁸ The full epigraph reads: “The gulls have learned to feed on the whales...The proportion of whales attacked annually has soared from 1% in 1974 to 78% today.”

“Annunciation as Right Whale with Kelp Gulls.” Inspired by the effectiveness of Szybist’s defamiliarization, I will use nature to reframe the biblical narrative.

Annunciation (from the sun to the clouds)

didn’t you feel it when the sky emptied itself
when you shrunk up in shame as his glory passed
through your mist
didn’t you hear it when their hands almost touched
when you shivered at the sound of thunder
embracing earth
when he told her I closed my eyes
my glow fled from the grass
and descended deep inside me
heat seared my lungs
fire scorched my breath
my light burned within me
leaving their glowing frames
illuminated only by the glimpse
of glory, all suspended
in obscurity, her knees nestled
into the grass, until
with a gasp – her yes –
she rose, and I shone again

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