

Wide Angle
a journal of literature and film

Volume 6, Issue 1
Fall 2016

Published by
Department of English
Samford University

Mission Statement

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 each semester, *Wide Angle* serves as a conduit for the expression and critique of that imagination. 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 undergraduate research, an opportunity for English majors to gain experience in the business of editing and publishing, and a forum for all students, faculty, and staff to publish their best work. 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.

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Essay

Emily Van Dyke

The Rhetorical Artistry of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Frederick Douglass

Martin Luther King, Jr. spent eleven days confined in a Birmingham jail, and more than a century earlier, Frederick Douglass was born into a lifetime of enslavement. However, both men construct texts that serve as an instrument of persuasion in order to protest racial oppression. King and Douglass produce rhetorical artistry in order to appeal to a broad audience and advocate for social reform. In “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” Douglass addresses a predominantly white, upper-middle-class audience using unconventional rhetorical means to reference the severe issues of the racial divide in the nineteenth century. More than one hundred years later, the fight for racial justice was still prevalent, as King incorporates similar tactics to enact a change in the social integrity of the twentieth century. In “The Letter From Birmingham Jail,” King uses rhetorical means as well in order to critique the white modernist approach on civil rights without alienating himself from his audience. Although King and Douglass both confront their intended audience with the unapologetic truth of the racial conditions, their incorporation of rhetorical strategies prevents the audience from rejecting their message.

In the beginning of both works, King and Douglass establish a connection with their audiences as they appeal to the white American’s sense of pride by demonstrating false modesty. Douglass self-consciously begins his speech with an introduction that plays into the various egos of the crowd. He states, “With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting your patient and generous indulgence,

I will proceed to lay them before you” (1). Douglass opens with this self-effacement in order to ensure the attention of his audience. Since he is an ex-slave, many of the white audience would expect Douglass to be illiterate and uneducated. With this humble approach, Douglass accepts their preconceived notions of his intelligence; however, as the speech continues, he eloquently presents his extensive knowledge of racial injustice. One source finds that after Douglass begins, “wondering aloud if his oratorical skills are up to the task; he then slips easily into a brief hagiography of the founding fathers fight for independence” (Reyes 404). If Douglass had immediately begun by revealing his knowledge of the history of slavery, he would have lost the attention of his predominantly white audience. Douglass’s audience was liberal for nineteenth-century standards; however, they never would have given their attention to a boastful ex-slave. Douglass was living in a world in which people believed whites were superior to blacks. Aware of this extreme racism, Douglass manipulates the crowd and performs in an inferior role to gain the attention of his audience. According to DeSantis, “he had to be passionate but not impudent; committed but not threatening” (Desantis 1). In the nineteenth century, Douglass had to be aware of his audience and realize that they would not tolerate what they deemed to be an impudent Negro.

A century later, King also begins with a false sense of modesty in his letter addressing his recent arrest, although he is merely imparting a sense of irony. King’s letter is a response to a public statement of concern that was issued by eight white religious leaders of the South; however, King knew the public would have access to the letter as well. Osborn states that, “King finds himself ‘confined here in the Birmingham city jail,’ certainly a lowly posture from which to address anyone” (26). King begins his letter, “My Dear Fellow Clergymen: While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present

activities "unwise and untimely" (1). King is "confined" in a jail; however, he immediately transforms his prison cell into an ironic pulpit. Like Douglass, King begins his text in a lower position than his audience. As the work continues, King elevates his status until he is equal, or above, his intended audience. King states, "Just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid" (1). Although King addresses a critique, he does so in a manner that suggests it is the audience who is begging for a response. He classifies himself as a prophet who is on a spiritual mission in Birmingham; therefore, he has every right not only to criticize the white clergymen but also to remain in the city to resolve racial injustice. It elevates him to a position of authority, as he becomes the sole voice in the argument against racial oppression.

In both works, King and Douglass make a clear distinction between the audience and the speaker in order to emphasize the divide in racial equality. In Douglass's speech, he highlights that the right to celebrate American independence lies solely with the white Americans. He asserts, "Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary" (4). Douglass does not state that this independence applies to him but that it is the white American's independence. In doing so, Douglass makes a clear distinction between the white community and the black community. This distinction establishes an "us versus them" phenomenon. It also makes it clear that while the white American may be free, the black American is still suffering under oppression. Similar to Douglass's method of distinction, King establishes a distance between the white clergymen and himself. After King begins with

addressing the preachers as, “My Dear Fellow Clergymen,” he continues to write in the pattern of “I” in response to the “you” who composed the original critique. Throughout the rest of the letter, “King introduces every one of his refutations with the use of the second-person pronoun, and most often he fashions a direct response in the first person” (Leff 40). While King separates himself from the eight white clergymen, he does not assert distinction between the whites and black race as a whole. He is addressing the people who condemn the fight for racial justice, rather the white race as a whole. King is able to clearly address an opponent that allows him to “cultivate a personal tone and to project his personality in ways that would have been impossible in a document addressed to no one in particular” (Leff 41). The distinction between the eight white men and King represents the larger audience of the white modernist against those who actively pursue social change. King separates himself from the white modernist group, the group of white Americans who agree that there is a need for social reform but then reject any method that promotes actual change. The white modernists would rather have peace and order than immediate racial equality. Both men create this particular difference in language to highlight the difference in the perspective of the speaker versus the perspective of the audience. It serves as a tool of persuasion by exemplifying the faults of one side while showing the strengths of the other.

As King and Douglass’s works continue, they employ the use of visual imagery to not only recognize racial difference but also to allow the reader to personally experience the divide. After Douglass logically argues against slavery, he establishes a space solely for the visual depiction of the horrors of oppression. Addressing the audience as “you,” Douglass states, “Cast one glance, if you please, upon that young mother, whose shoulders are bare to the scorching sun, her briny tears falling on the brow of the babe in her arms. See, too, that girl of thirteen,

weeping, yes! Weeping, as she thinks of her mother from whom she has been torn” (12). This powerful image implores the audience to sympathize with the conditions of slavery. It brings the reality of human enslavement closer to the northern abolitionists’ perspective. According to Reyes, “In the suspended time of the visual both Douglass and his audience experience racial difference in becoming-slave, which opens the possibility of primary identification between his audience and the southern slave. . . . it invites his audience to become the slave” (Reyes 407). The visual imagery leads the audience to feeling three inescapable rhetorical consequences: anger toward such injustice, empathy for all that have lived through such conditions, and fear that the irrationality of enslavement could be forced on any person, white or black. Similar to Douglass’s depiction, King illustrates the conditions that African-Americans must endure during the twentieth century. Also addressing his audience as “you,” King writes, “when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and father at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters” (3). King’s visual imagery allows the white reader to become fully submerged into the black American’s world. Like Douglass appeals to his audience’s raw emotions, King uses the detailed description of a normal account of the negro life to enact sympathy and understanding from his audience. Osborn states that, “In the celebrated, over three hundred word sentence that details these many humiliations, the use of the second-person plural pronoun (you) invites the white reader especially to enact a ritual of identification: in effect, to cross the boundaries of race to realize what it means to be black in a racist society” (Osborn 28). The continual series of suffocating images provokes the audience to take action and break out of the societal norms. King and Douglass both successfully force the audience to recognize the severity of the racial divide through these profound visuals.

In order to avoid the tension of blame, King and Douglass use subjunctive manners that remove the issue of agency and responsibility. Speaking to a white audience while putting blame and judgment on white America for the inhumane nature of oppression would lead the audience to disengage from the text. According to Reyes, with the use of the subjunctive “there is no agent, only a hypothesis and a possibility that holds both the promise of future change and the threat of potential tragic stasis” (Reyes 405). In his speech, Douglass addresses the slave driver as an “inhuman wretch”(15). Through this comparison, the agent of slavery is transformed into a machine of slavery. The blame moves away from the human, as one cannot blame a hammer or a wrench for its actions. Douglass disconnects the responsibility of the tragedies of slavery from his audience so that they may move past the blame and onto a solution. Similarly, King calls for a change in the racial division without harping on accusations. In his letter, King announces that he wants to bring tension to Birmingham that will “help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood” (5). Osborn finds that this “implication is breathtaking: not only is King attempting to lift a degraded race, but he is also trying to purify and elevate the society that has degraded them. It is, especially in retrospect, a gigantic and dangerous feat of moral engineering” (Osborn 28). King effectively avoids the call for judgment; instead, he calls for the more hopeful future of a society that is above the need for oppression. This separation of blame from the audience establishes rhetorical distance that mirrors that of Douglass’s technique. Both men are able to call out for reform to those who are guilty of prejudice without actually condemning them for their injustices. The audiences remain connected to their causes and inspired to continue in their understanding for the future.

Throughout both texts there are biblical references that connect Douglass and King to the Christian faith, validating their authority to the audience. Since Douglass was born a slave, he

needs to establish authority that will appeal to a white audience. He needs to transform from his status as an “ex-slave” to the status of a prophet of God. In order to inspire racial reform, Douglass needs the audience to view him as capable of handling such an impactful message. Throughout the speech, Douglass employs the systematic use of scripture to establish the status of having the voice of God. Douglass incorporates this scripture to aid in his message:

In the language of Isaiah, the American church might be well addressed, “Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me: the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. . . . I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge for the fatherless; plead for the widow. (10)

Douglass includes the words of scripture, so rather than appearing as an ex-slave who is instructing the audience to change their behavior, he appears as the voice of God. According to Zulick, “God is shown to be the true agent of the prophetic word and the prophet is reduced to the status of agency, an unwilling instrument of the world” (DeSantis 85). As Douglass takes on the role of a prophet, the audience can no longer be angry at his message because it is not actually his words. It leaves the crowd with no one to blame but themselves, as they cannot put the blame on God. It also establishes Douglass’s absolute authority to speak to the upper middle class. While Douglass needs to elevate his persona as an ex-slave, King needs to establish his authority to offer criticism against the church. As King explains his disappointment with the church, he states, “Be assured that my tears have been tears of love. . . . Yes, I love the church; I love her sacred walls. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson, great-grandson of preachers” (7). Leff and Utley found that “King’s figuration

overlaps at three levels of embodiment. Christianity is made physical through representation of the church as a walled physical space” (Leff 42). King’s assertion of his lineage within the walls of the church allows him to assume an identity connected with the Christian space. It presents King as someone who is credible and gives him the authority to criticize the recent actions of the church. King also takes on the authority of a prophet, “Like the biblical prophets and the apostle Paul, he must carry ‘the gospel of freedom’ where it is needed” (Osborn 28). This identity establishes his authority to be in Birmingham. It dispels the perception that King is an unwelcomed outsider who is invading a city to which he does not belong. Like Douglass, King’s identity as a prophet influences white Americans’ opinion that he is a respectable and devout man.

In addition to biblical references, King and Douglass incorporate allusions that highlight the moral shortcomings of past historical events. These allusions connect the racial divide to past irrational events of inhumane behavior that eventually lead to an ethical resolution. In his speech, Douglass refers to the unjust control of the British on the American Colonies and relates it to the unjust relationship between master and slave. He states, “To say now that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy. Everybody can say it; the dastard, not less than the noble brave, can flippantly discant on the tyranny of England towards the American Colonies” (3). Though Douglass does not directly explain the analogy, the audience can quickly make the connection between the oppressed colonies and the oppressed negroes. Douglass’s connection between these two injustices forces the audience to realize the irrationality of such subjugation. He is appealing to a prominent historical event that white Americans can understand. After all, Douglass is speaking on the anniversary that this justice was so rightly earned. As he calls to question the harsh treatment of the British domination, the audience can understand the

oppression that was currently happening in America at the time. According to Patton, “a speaker can move the listener to more or less intensely felt states of mind by bringing the objects of emotions closer or removing them from the listener’s temporal/spatial field of perception” (Patton 60). As Douglass references the American Revolution, he stirs up feelings of pride that America is no longer oppressed under Britain; however, he simultaneously emphasizes that black Americans are still suffering. King employs this tactic as well when he references World War II. He writes, “We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was ‘legal’ and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was ‘illegal.’ It was ‘illegal’ to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers” (4). Like Douglass, King introduces a past historical event that is presently viewed as disgraceful. He connects the treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust to the discrimination of African Americans. In doing so, “King embodies his solidarity with mainstream American values through the use of appeals to authority. . . . King evokes these references to vindicate and explain his own actions” (Leff 42). King responds to the criticism that he is causing unnecessary tension in Birmingham. However, since his cause is the vindication of an oppressed people, the tension is necessary to uphold moral rights. Although Douglass’s allusion is not in response to a criticism, both historical references serve to connect racial injustice with past moral failings that are now regarded with a different outlook. In the past, these events had two distinct sides; however, in the current movement one side is clearly presented as correct. King and Douglass argue that the side of racial justice will soon be viewed as the only correct side.

King’s and Douglass’s various rhetorical strategies allow both writers to criticize their audience without becoming completely alienated. Although time separates the authors by more

than a hundred years, the two men incorporate similar techniques that persuade their audiences to fight against racial oppression. Today, the documents still stand as significant persuasive tools that highlight the racial injustices of their time.

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Essay

Riana Lonquist

The Pleasure of Viewing and Its Effect on Female Identity

Laura Mulvey's and John Berger's ideas concerning the ways in which men view women create an excellent framework for understanding the dynamics of female sexuality and identity in John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes." The characters of Porphyro and Madeline demonstrate many of these principles, such as how men gain pleasure by viewing women, and conversely, how being viewed by men affects women. These different visual perspectives contribute to understanding how men construct female identity, as well as influencing how, in art, the audience takes on this male perspective to create a privileged viewing and identification experience. The male perception of females, especially in this poem, may attest to overarching ideas of the Romantic era that limit women to gender descriptions constructed by their male counterparts.

In chapter three of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, he theorizes about differences in male and female presence by explaining their circumstances of viewing and being viewed. Concerning social presence, Berger asserts, "A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies" (45), while "[a] woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her" (46). These inverse categories denote roles for each gender based on their respective access to power, which for females, restricts women to identities based on others' actions toward them. Furthering his theory, Berger states, "*Men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47, author's emphasis). Under this definition of agency, women—rather than acting for

themselves—passively allow men to perform the first action of looking, while they, in turn, perform a reaction.

Laura Mulvey demonstrates similar ideas to Berger in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” which, although primarily a commentary on film, provides a valid template for analyzing cinematic scenes in literature. While Berger analyzes ways of viewing and being viewed, Mulvey adds to these ideas by further defining the pleasures of looking. She outlines two of these pleasures, asserting, “There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looking at” (835). Mulvey also highlights Freud’s definition of scopophilia—which is the pleasure of looking—by explaining, “He associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (835). Not only can a male gain pleasure through looking, but he can also objectify his female counterpart by his gaze, perhaps dehumanizing her in order to gain the highest form of pleasure.

As Porphyro primarily gains pleasure through looking at Madeline, both Berger’s and Mulvey’s ideas offer insight into analyzing how he fulfills his desires through sight. From Porphyro’s first introduction, his goal is to see the virgin Madeline. The poem states that he begs for “All saints to give him sight of Madeline, / But for one moment in the tedious hours, / That he might gaze and worship all unseen” (lines 78-80). He gains pleasure simply from the anticipation of looking at Madeline, as evidenced in line 188 when Porphyro is “pleas’d amain” to be covertly hidden in Madeline’s room; however, his pleasure peaks when he finally catches a glimpse of her.

Porphyro watches Madeline in secret from the closet as she readies herself for bed and performs her prayer to St. Agnes. Stanza twenty-six offers a methodological description of Madeline's disrobing:

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
 Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
 Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
 Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
 Half-hidden like a mermaid in sea-weed,
 Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
 In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
 But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled. (lines 235-43)

The details about Madeline's attire and the way in which she strips each piece from her body work to construct her femininity. Berger believes that "[a woman's] presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste . . . presence for a woman is so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura," and these ideas certainly seem true in regard to Madeline's undressing (46). Porphyro is attracted to the womanly details of her wardrobe, such as the pearls in her hair, the jewels around her neck, and the tight bodice of her dress—all aspects of appearance that contribute to her feminine presence. Madeline is even compared to a mermaid, a symbol of womanly seduction. A further example of Porphyro's attraction to Madeline's overall aura is his attention to her dress, even after she lies asleep in bed. Line 245 states: "Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress," demonstrating an even greater interest in her attire—and her

socially-constructed gender identity—than in her physical body. Even though she is safely asleep, Porphyro continues to derive pleasure from just gazing at Madeline’s dress, further emphasizing the gain of pleasure through the sense of sight and not touch.

Because the poem offers the reader limited insight into Madeline’s desires, Porphyro and his gender constructs set the narrative tone of the poem, thus imposing a male-privileging perspective. Mulvey describes a similar phenomenon in relation to films, claiming, “The woman displayed has functioned on two levels: erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium” (838). Although “The Eve of St. Agnes” does not share the same cinematic visual capacity as a film, the principle still functions due to the nature of Porphyro’s relationship to Madeline. Mulvey emphasizes how audiences identify with strong, masculine figures, assuming the male pleasure of viewing. Audiences then have the capacity to enjoy narratives by gleaning pleasure from viewing on two planes—from their own perspectives and from the perspective of observing males. In the context of eighteenth-century publications, this poem goes beyond highlighting a female figure for erotic pleasure to demonstrate the social idea that male pleasure is more important than female power over their own circumstances or choices; and while opinions on female agency have developed beyond eighteenth-century ideas, today’s audience still functions in this manner by understanding the poem through a male author and narrator’s perspectives. “The Eve of St. Agnes” then becomes a question of which male creator imposes his view on the audience. There are three layers of viewers: Porphyro, an actual character in the story who is closest to the action; the narrator, an omniscient presence who follows Porphyro’s interactions with Madeline; and John Keats, the author who decides to tell this story and focus Porphyro’s viewing of Madeline. Despite their

varying levels of intimacy with the action, a combination of all three perspectives creates an incredibly male-coded experience for the audience.

While scholars may argue that Porphyro—alongside readers—objectifies Madeline and attains pleasure through watching her undress, pray, and sleep, Madeline challenges her role in this model through her initial unawareness of Porphyro’s presence. This nuance could perhaps undermine the total fulfillment of male pleasure, as Freudian scopophilia necessitates female awareness of male gaze. Porphyro’s goal is to conceal himself from Madeline while watching her, and through some persuasion, her attendant Angela assists him:

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
 Even to Madeline’s chamber, and there hide
 Him in a closet, of such privacy
 That he might see her beauty unespied,
 And win perhaps that night a peerless bride. (lines 163-7)

These lines use a lot of visual language, emphasizing the distinction between the characters’ degrees of sight. There are also numerous words that denote secrecy, reflecting Porphyro’s desire to look without being seen. Although he obtains pleasure through the act of looking, the idea of watching Madeline without her knowledge or consent arouses Porphyro to an even greater degree.

Madeline’s unawareness of Porphyro’s presence differentiates her from the typical circumstances in which females enjoy, or at least utilize, the male gaze. Although she hopes to dream about her future husband on the Eve of St. Agnes, she is not actively trying to catch Porphyro’s or any man’s attention, which is unusual in regard to both Mulvey’s and Berger’s theories. Mulvey explains, “[The woman] holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire,”

(837). She emphasizes that women encourage the male gaze, thereby deriving pleasure for themselves. Berger also comments on this principle, asserting, “She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because...how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life” (37). Berger’s ideas describe how women calculate their actions and appearances so as to attract male attention, in order to ensure a more permanent attachment and thereby secure ultimate success—perhaps through marriage.

Only after Madeline awakens and finally realizes Porphyro is in her chamber does she have the opportunity to experience pleasure from being the object of male gaze; and yet, it is not guaranteed whether she will attain this pleasure:

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
 Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:
 There was a painful change, that nigh expell’d
 The blisses of her dream so pure and deep:
 At which fair Madeline began to weep,
 And moan forth witless words with many a sigh;
 While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;
 Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,
 Fearing to move or to speak, she look’d so dreamingly. (298-306)

While Madeline does gaze upon Porphyro for the first time, she thinks she could still be dreaming—a fantasy that proves more blissful than reality. In the next stanza, she cries, “How chang’d thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!” (311). Rather than deriving pleasure in being the object of Porphyro’s gaze, seeing him confuses and upsets Madeline, and she begins to weep. Although Porphyro continues to admire her, and thus creates pleasure for himself, Madeline is

only startled and confused. Whether or not Madeline ultimately gains any future pleasure depends on readers' interpretations of Madeline's consent to Porphyro's ambiguous later actions.

Does Madeline ever have the opportunity to experience pleasure, whether through viewing or otherwise? An important scene to consider is that of Madeline and Porphyro's consummation. Madeline has just admitted that the Porphyro of her dreams is favorable to the Porphyro of reality, saying, "Give me that voice again, my Porphyro, / Those looks immortal, those complainings dear" (312-313). From these observations, Madeline seems to be awake; and yet, in the following stanza, her alertness is unclear:

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
 At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
 Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
 Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
 Into her dream he melted, as the rose
 Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
 Solution sweet; meantime the frost-wind blows
 Like love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
 Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set. (316-24)

Does Madeline go back to sleep and envision this sexual fantasy, or is this an account of reality? This description could certainly be a continuation of Madeline's dream, for after all, the narrator says, "Into her dream he melted" (320). The purpose of St. Agnes' Eve is for a maiden to experience a vision of her future husband, and this dream of the marriage bed certainly satisfies that desire. However, this interpretation would provide Madeline with control over her actions—allowing her to independently fulfill her desire for pleasure through a dream—and as Madeline

up until this point has really been at the mercy of Porphyro and his perspective, perhaps the more valid interpretation is that Porphyro maintains control over her actions.

If this scene is, instead, reality, for Porphyro assures her in the following stanza, ““This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!”” (326), then the interpretation becomes a question of whether the lovers are consensually consummating their union or if Porphyro is taking advantage of Madeline. Throughout the poem, Porphyro has been continually active in watching Madeline and seems to take action in this passage as well. He so far surpasses the capabilities of mere mortal men that his actions seem dreamlike. Meanwhile, Madeline takes on a much more passive role. Her ambiguous comments do not entirely reflect the bliss of a woman in love:

No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!

Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine!—

Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?

I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,

Though thou forsakes a deceived thing;—

A dove forlorn and lost with sick and unpruned wing. (328-33)

This response reveals Madeline’s anxieties of being alone and unable to fulfill her heart’s desires. Without Porphyro near at hand, she has no opportunity for pleasure. She links her happiness to her proximity to Porphyro, ultimately displaying the notion of female dependence on male attention.

In the final stanzas, Porphyro gives Madeline directions for stealthily escaping the castle and, once again, pays special attention to the sense of sight. He says to her, “Let us away my love, with happy speed; / There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see” (347-8). This continued

emphasis on sight further reveals Porphyro's anxiety of being watched, perhaps alluding to the self-aware nature of the act of viewing.

Porphyro and Madeline's example contributes to the poem's—and perhaps even the whole Romantic era's—overall dynamics and anxieties of female agency and sexual authority. Although Madeline initially yearns to dream about her future husband—thereby seizing control of her own sexuality—she ultimately remains under the control of the male presence, which is, in this case, Porphyro. His act of gazing creates her appeal. As opposed to Mulvey's and Berger's assertions that females often gain pleasure through being the object of male gaze, Madeline is unaware that Porphyro is even watching her, thus robbing her of the opportunity for pleasure from being viewed. Porphyro creates the pleasure and controls it. Although Madeline later experiences a fleeting pleasure, it is conditional on the Porphyro's whims and motivations, confirming the construct that women depend on male attention to access their own pleasure.

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Essay

Madeline Perkins

Make It Up: Subjectivity, Language, and Consequence in McEwan's *Atonement*

One of the central concerns of the modernist movement was the transiency of language, the subjectivity of language, and the subsequent difficulty of communicating truth. In *Atonement*, Ian McEwan establishes this challenge of modernity through both Briony's young life and Robbie, as his life is a pawn of her declarations. Briony herself is, as an adult, the narrator of the novel. She accepts that language, because of its inability to communicate clearly, has consequences over which she has no power. Briony's novel exists as an attempt at atonement and, by this existence, assigns value to language and narrative because of their moral consequence.

Briony makes a false eyewitness account and, by thinking of the circumstance as though writing a story, exercises the powers of language with disastrous result. Her cousin is raped one night during a search party for the cousin's missing twin brothers. After the household learns about the rape, Briony tells the police that Robbie, the housekeeper's son, was the rapist. Briony condemns Robbie in her discussion with the police, asserting her position as both the story's author and its hero. In Brian Finney's essay on *Atonement*, he writes: "[Briony's] misinterpretation of the adult symbolic world is the product of her childhood reading habits in which she read herself as [the central character]" (79). She misinterprets Robbie and Cecilia's earlier romantic encounters—when Cecilia took off her clothes and jumped into the fountain, when Robbie wrote Cecilia an overtly sexual letter, and when she finds the couple having sex in the library. She does not realize that she misunderstands these situations; on the contrary, she

thinks that she has gained “privileged access across the years to adult behavior, to rites and conventions she knew nothing about” (37). Her authorship reflects not empirical fact but imaginative invention.

Briony’s character functions in a self-declared position of authorship, which has negative consequences in the lives of Robbie and Cecilia. Though she thinks she understands adult behavior—in her own words, she has been “initiated into a solemn new world”—this claim is disproved by her persistence in viewing ordinary life as a story (147). Until she realizes her mistake as an adult, Briony functions as if her understanding is indeed reality. Brian Finney succinctly says, “[f]iction determines fact for her” (79). Briony creates a reality based on a fiction she has established in her head. Though she understands that Robbie is not harmless like she had always believed, she views the situation in binary oppositions: if he is not good, then he is bad. Rather than understanding his actions in the context of a spectrum of human interactions that includes romantic interest, Briony views Robbie’s actions as shifting him from friend to enemy. As she wanders around in the dark, Briony thinks that “[r]eal life, her life now beginning, had sent her a villain in the form of an old family friend . . . villains were not announced with hisses or soliloquies” (148). Briony has allowed her imagination to perceive reality in a way that is wrong, and she gives it this power when she asserts it through language to the police.

The issue here is one of phenomenology, which is the mental understanding of an idea (Derrida 301). Briony’s verbal representation of the situation does not portray her experience of it. Jacques Derrida’s essay “On Grammatology” says that the spoken word is one step away from a person’s mind. Though it is the closest form to experience, it is not close enough to ever truly bridge the gap (306-307). Despite the closeness of spoken words to thought, there is still room for misinterpretation. Briony’s phenomenology—her imaginative comprehension of the story—

is lost in her explanation to the adults, and her lie becomes truth. She shares with the adults her imagined version of the night's event: "what [Briony] knew was not literally, or not only based on the visible" (158). She does not tell the adults that it was too dark to see anything. She does not tell them that the attacker was across the clearing from her. She decides that "[t]he truth was in the symmetry" (158) and tells them the story whose ending she had decided before the crime was committed—Robbie was a sexual predator, an evil man who must be punished.

Briony's opinion is the only characterization of Robbie available to the reader. This prevents Robbie's character from being viewed objectively. Robbie's characterization does not lead to truth because the information presented is nothing more than blending of the narrator's representation and the reader's perspective. Though this separation is the case in any narrative, it is amplified by the triple filter—young Briony, elderly Briony, and McEwan himself—in *Atonement*. Readers only know Briony's subjective distillation of Robbie's character; readers only know Briony's truth.

Robbie is arguably the character who comprehends Briony's misuse of language most completely and struggles because of the false account most painfully. He is a character only seen through Briony's perspective. His dichotomous background—working class, yet educated at Cambridge—makes his character an unstable signifier in the narration. Briony, along with the reader, is never sure whether Robbie will be a landscape architect or a doctor, whether he will appear as a servant or a dinner guest. His character is unique in his understanding and use of language to effect his desired ends, as seen at the beginning of the novel. This success with language is not enough, however, for language ultimately fails him in its ruin of and inability to save his life.

Robbie does not fit clearly into the dichotomy of aristocrat or manual laborer. Though his mother is a laborer, he has been raised as an adopted son of Jack Tallis. Though he does manual work around the estate, he received a degree from Cambridge. This explains Cecilia's confusion in her feelings about him and her later willingness to disregard his lower-class status as she falls in love with him. Also, it is Robbie's cultural displacement that inspires Cecilia to leave her middle-class life and become a nurse; she is willing to lower herself because of her love for Robbie (Fraser 466). This perplexing romantic relationship assists Briony's misconception of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship, and it is his lower-class background that bolsters Briony's confidence that he is the villain. Robbie's ambiguous class situation makes Robbie himself a representation of the instability of language: his background is inconsistent, his presence communicates different things to different people, and his thought process is revealed by someone other than himself. Briony, in her characterization of Robbie, portrays him as having control over language.

Robbie's use of language in the first part of the novel accomplishes its desired ends, especially compared to other characters. His letter to Cecilia, in its bluntness, persuades her that she is attracted to him as well. Though the letter she received was not the one he intended to send, it was the one that communicated his feelings accurately. This letter substantiates the love of Cecilia and Robbie, and the rest of the book relates to this love story. Robbie also seems to exhibit a mastery of language when he and Cecilia are interrupted by Briony in the library. He understands Briony's thoughts and motivations: "[s]he had come looking for her sister—no doubt with the exhilarated notion of protecting her, or admonishing her . . . [p]ropelled from the depths of her ignorance, silly imagining and girlish rectitude, she had come to call a halt" (130-131). This is exactly why Briony was in the library—these are the same motives she herself

revealed earlier—and Robbie understands this. Robbie is able to acquire Cecilia and understand Briony through language. This success is not continued, however, as the novel progresses.

Robbie is the principal victim of the novel's dominant misuse of language. He is the subject of Briony's accusation and the scapegoat of the law. Though he is originally portrayed as controlling language, Briony's language has an affect on him that he cannot control. This results in his imprisonment. When Briony volunteers to revoke her testimony and attempts to rewrite history, she is unsuccessful. Robbie hopes for a happy ending, he hopes that Briony's words will be accepted with as much faith as the first time, and he hopes to return to a life of freedom. These hopes are not manifested; the damage done by Briony's words cannot be remedied. In the story portrayed by the narrator Briony, though its final ending is ambiguous, Robbie's life has been stopped by the misuse of language. Just as Robbie was subjected to Briony's characterization of him and testimony to the law when she was a young girl, he is subjected to Briony's portrayal of his story as an adult author.

Thirteen-year-old Briony and Robbie are tools of the older narrator Briony that she uses to show how the instability of language prevents successful communication. The older Briony describes the experiences of these two characters in a way that perpetuates the theme of the failure of language. The entirety of the novel shows her acceptance of the way language subjectively shapes situations, an attitude that is a progression from younger Briony and Robbie's portrayal of the written word as safe.

Briony as an older narrator uses her narrative to illustrate the transiency of language, a characteristic that she did not understand when she was young. This characteristic of language is shown by the false eyewitness account of the younger Briony, who, because of her mistaken belief that she understood the story, ruined a man's life. It is also shown in the narrator's

depiction of Robbie as a character who, despite his apparent mastery of language, is unable to rise above its consequences. Briony also exemplifies this instability of language by using her narration to simultaneously describe a war-torn town and discuss the novel's concern about language. One example of this is Robbie's thoughts as he trudges toward Dunkirk:

None of that [disloyalty of friends because of his false accusation] mattered. From here it looked simple. . . . The convoy had entered a bombed village, or perhaps the suburb of a small town—the place was rubble and it was impossible to tell. Who would care? Who could ever describe this confusion, and come up with the village names and the dates for the history books? And take the reasonable view and begin to assign the blame? No one would ever know what it was like to be here. (214)

At first glance, this is a physical description of the town through which he is walking. The passage can also be read as a discussion of the novel itself—the illusion of the world looking simple, the pain and confusion of a situation and a questioning of the situation's importance in the first place, the inability to accurately place blame. The passage's final statement summarizes the problem of communicating through language: “No one would ever know” (214). This is indeed the case, for no one will ever know what actually occurred because the entire narrative is subject to Briony's design.

The subjectivity of language and its subsequent inability to successfully communicate is also shown in Briony's insertion of two endings. Briony shares two endings to the lives of Robbie and Cecilia, yet the reader does not know which actually happened. In Part Three, Briony visits Robbie and Cecilia in their apartment and reaffirms her resolve to redeem the wrong she caused. Robbie and Cecilia are together and in love, and when Briony leaves, the couple is

together (329). At this point, as far as the reader knows, Briony successfully achieved Robbie's pardon, and the couple was happily married after the war. Or, at least, Briony intended to remedy the situation, and the loving couple had a chance of surviving the war. The narrative at this point gives hope for the relationship between Robbie and Cecilia. This is contradicted, however, by the older narrator Briony in the final section. She writes: "I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station. That I never saw them in that year" (350). The reader must now revisit the outcome of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship. This new development presents an option that defies choosing. The reader cannot know which happened in reality, for the only reality they see is displayed as fiction in the novel. This is confirmed by further musings of the elderly, near-forgetting Briony: "How could that constitute an ending? Who would want to believe that? I couldn't do it to them. When I am dead . . . we will only exist as my inventions" (350). Briony herself, as the narrator late in life, recognizes that the two endings are in disagreement and do not have a resolution. Subjectivity is a barrier precluding communication of truth—perhaps precluding even the existence of truth.

Briony's realization of the subjectivity of language does not negate the importance of language. Language carries moral consequence regardless of, or perhaps because of, its lack of success at communicating a solid truth. These consequences are the corollary of language's shortcomings, and it is these consequences over which Briony has no power—as a child witnessing and as an adult publishing a novel. The novel's existence as an attempt at atonement—for a crime caused by misuse of language—assigns value to story and language because they carry moral consequence.

Briony recognizes that language has consequences because of its instability, and she has no power over these consequences, whether in her lie about the rape or in her book. From the beginning of the novel, when Briony relates her pleasure at her mother's praise of "The Trials of Arabella," Briony understands that language has an effect. Her comprehension of the expanse of this effect continues as she grows up. Though she is unaware of the harm caused by her lie while she is in the situation, by the time she has grown up, she is writing her novel both about and because of the problems caused by language. Robbie's imprisonment because of her false testimony is the ultimate example of language's consequences. Though at the time she did not know that she was misusing language, she was fully aware that her words would have repercussions on Robbie; she uttered them for that very reason. And because of the adults' reception of her words, because of the letter Robbie had written that seemed to confirm their opinion of him, because the language failed, Robbie was imprisoned. After he was unjustly condemned, after the words had left her mouth and the letter had left her hand, Briony was unable to control their effect. When she had doubts about the adults' understanding of her testimony, she quieted them. When she sought to do penance by becoming a nurse, she was unable to fix the irrevocable effect of her lie on her sister's life. Also, at the end of the novel when Briony reveals herself as the narrator, she recognizes that she is unable to control the consequences of her draft. She attempts to mollify potential bad consequences by publishing posthumously, yet even then, she cannot control how people read and understand it.

Briony attempts to use language to atone for the consequences of her failed communication but is unsuccessful because the power of authorship does not extend beyond her words. The author of a novel has final power over the words in the novel, yet these words do not supersede Briony's past and cannot change her crime. Within the narrative, Briony pursues

reconciliation with Robbie and Cecilia. She writes to them, visits them, and, the reader presumes, follows up with her promise to revoke her testimony before the court. From the perspective outside the narrative, Briony writes the story, which is in itself an attempt at atonement. She revises her story, from her initial idea as a thirteen-year-old to her first draft as a nurse to her final copy when she is about to lose her memory, yet none of these revisions are able to undo the initial crime caused by her misuse of language. Though she is the authority, she realizes that this authority cannot make whole the deficiencies of language—truth refuses to be communicated through language—therefore atonement is lost. Though she comprehends language more as she lives more, she is not able to control its detrimental effect. Even the book—her ultimate attempt to control the situation—does not achieve atonement. It does not fix Robbie’s situation. It also does not fix her life because it is not even published during her life. Briony can control language—her status as a published author is proof of that. Yet, as the author, the one who holds control, the limits of her control are shown: despite how invested she is in the circumstances of the novel, she is outside of the situation of the novel. Fiction has consequence, words have consequence, and trying to fix words through words will fail when both are the product of only one source. This failure is not a complete loss, for it says something greater about language.

Briony’s failure and the existence of Briony’s novel assign value to language even in its deficiencies, because it shows that language has moral consequence. Though Briony is unable to remedy Robbie’s fate, she writes about it in a novel. Though doomed to fail, though unable to successfully achieve atonement, she writes a novel. Her novel studies the powers of language, displays control over language, and, when it reaches the furthest extent of its ability to atone, recognizes the weight of language’s moral consequence. She writes that atonement “was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all” (350-351). This is why

she wrote the novel, even in its uncertain occurrences. Her misrepresentations were a creation of truth just like all other uses of language in the book. She argues, however:

[n]o one will care about what events and which individuals were misrepresented to make a novel. I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what really happened? The answer is simple . . . As long as there is a single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love. (350)

Why is the survival of the couple what Briony claims “really happened?” Because that is what the language says, that is what the novelist declares. The language used by the novelist carries moral consequence.

This ending shows McEwan's thoughts on language: despite language's transiency, despite its failures and its inability to communicate truth, it communicates something, and in this communication, it forms meaning. O'Hara argues in his discussion on *Atonement* that “self-conscious narrative, in the case of McEwan, is oftentimes utilized in order to reassert an ethical complex that lies between author and reader, text and world” (74). This is precisely applicable to *Atonement*: inclinations to disregard the novel because of its subjective depiction of events can be overcome by understanding that the subjectivity and misuse of language have consequences, consequences that sometimes necessitate atonement.

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Essay

Caleb Punt

Beach Day with Momma Dearest:

Working Through Tabooed Topics in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach"

Sigmund Freud concludes his essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" by suggesting that the creative writer's most impressive ability—"his innermost secret," his or her *ars poetica*—is his or her ability to help a reader think through and consider a tabooed topic without the "repulsion" that would inevitably result if the topic was discussed openly in everyday conversation (428). Freud discusses the tendency of the "day-dreamer" to reflect on suppressed desires or tabooed feelings through the medium of creative literature (poems, plays, novels, etc.) as a substitute or supplement to night dreams. However, Freud notes, "The day-dreamer carefully conceals his phantasies from other people because he feels he has reasons for being ashamed of them" (429). And indeed, if the day-dreamer were to reveal his phantasies in a direct manner, they would "repel us, or at least leave us cold" (429). However, when a *creative writer*, as opposed to a simple day-dreamer, reveals his or her phantasies to us, "we experience a great pleasure," and "[we are] enabl[ed] thenceforth to enjoy our own daydreams without self-reproach or shame" (428). A creative writer is able, through the ornamentation and aesthetic beauty of his or her chosen artistic medium,¹ both to express his or her own tabooed feelings in a socially acceptable manner and to help his or her reader work through the same feelings by engaging with the work. Freud's theory is evident in Matthew

¹ "The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies" (Freud 428).

Arnold's poem "Dover Beach." Through the extended metaphor of the tide's slow, tortuous withdrawal from the beach and a society's attempt to interact lovingly in a violent world, Arnold subconsciously explores the difficult process of learning to distance himself from his mother, attach to other "suitable" female companions, and develop a typically masculine identity in a socially acceptable manner; in doing so, he allows potential readers to do the same.

A critical, if admittedly far from comprehensive, look at some of Matthew Arnold's personal letters reveals an intimate relationship between the author and his mother that, when read in conjunction with "Dover Beach" and psychoanalytic theory, might illustrate a difficulty Arnold had in separating himself from his mother, establishing a masculine identity, and forming strong bonds with other socially acceptable female suitors. Arnold was a voluminous letter writer, writing at least 450 personal letters from the years 1848-1888 (Arnold, *Letters*). A large portion of these letters were written to his "dearest Mother" (*Letters* 22). These letters, without fail, begin with some kind of affectionate epithet—"My Dearest Mother," "Dear Mamma," and "My Dearest Mamma" being the most common—and end with the phrase "ever your most affectionate son" (*Letters* 50). They also contain effusive lines such as, "[Please] accept every loving and grateful wish from a son to whom you have for nearly thirty years been such a mother as few sons have," and "I long to be at Fox Hound with you. . . . Nothing can be better than that. . . . God bless you, my dearest mother" (22, 36). At one point, Arnold refers to his upbringing by his mother as "so unworldly, so sound, and so pure" (23). When nearing the end of one of Arnold's poetic lines of praise, the reader might find him or herself compulsively checking the editor's notes, just to make sure the letter was actually written to his mother as opposed to a romantic interest.

Arnold's relationship with his mother seems even stranger when compared with the letters he wrote to his wife. His wife seems to be his only correspondent who does not get a personalized greeting. None of the letters to his wife begin with anything resembling the "My Dearest Mother," "My Dear Wyndham," or "Dearest Fanny" that Arnold uses to address his other correspondents. Replacing these affectionate greetings are romantic openings such as, "I got here a little before two [and] had a sandwich" (30). Nearly all of the letters to his wife begin in this impersonal, matter-of-fact tone, and they seem to be lacking the poetic descriptions of praise and love that are so common in his letters to his mother. Also conspicuously missing are the stylized letter closing, à la "ever your most affectionate son." Most of the letters to his wife simply end. One letter ends with a paltry "Ever yours," but this comes off as an exception proving the rule (54). This evidence suggests that Arnold tended to see himself as his mother's son rather than as his wife's husband.

According to the modern gender and psychoanalytic theory of Michael Gurian, Arnold's apparent lack of emotional intimacy with his wife could be the result of an overbearing relationship with his mother during the earliest phases of his life. In *The Invisible Presence*, Gurian emphasizes the almost divine place the mother holds in the mind of a newborn son. As a boy grows up, the mother "[is] like a great nurturing Goddess—the Mother-Creator, the Sacred Queen, the wise Crone, and the beautiful Maiden all in one" (50). This place of extreme influence is essential to the well being of a growing boy, and it can be catastrophic if the mother ruins this illusion prematurely—before he has fully identified himself as a "self" apart from the mother's body—either through abuse, neglect, or the like (Gurian 54-56). However, a mother who maintains this position in her son's life as he grows out of childhood and into adulthood can also damage her son's emotional and relational health. This tendency, which Gurian calls

“impingement,” occurs when a mother subconsciously emphasizes her own emotional needs—desire to be loved, to be important, to be intimate—over the need of her son to establish a separate, male identity (57). The child may instinctively pull away, but then “the mother feels psychologically abandoned by the child. . . . She pulls at the child even harder, invades his system with her own” (59). This makes the separation process much more painful for the boy and can severely damage the son’s ability to establish a healthy male identity, separate from his mother, and to form intimate relationships with women in the future. Gurian writes, “He will not develop a true self and will . . . move through life unable to achieve intimacy” (60). Arnold’s personal letters fit Gurian’s descriptions. He seems to be more emotionally intimate with his mother than with his wife. This could reflect a particularly difficult period of transition from a newborn child, completely reliant on the love of his mother, to a fully-grown adult male, socially expected to bond with his wife and interact with the world in a masculine manner. “Dover Beach” is ostensibly about the slow, continuous process of the tide receding from the shoreline. However, in light of the biographical evidence found in Arnold’s personal letters and the theory provided by Gurian, this poem acts as Arnold’s subconscious, aestheticized exploration of his own difficulty in separating himself from his “impinging” mother and establishing a separate identity.

The first few lines of “Dover Beach” paint a peaceful scene of the sea lapping the cliffs of England and France: “The sea is calm tonight / The tide is full, the moon lies fair . . . the cliffs of England stand, / Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay” (1-2, 4-5) This section acts as an expression of what Nancy Chodorow refers to as the “Pre-Oedipal” or “infantile dependence stage” (47). During this very early stage, “The child does not differentiate herself or himself from her or his mother but experiences a sense of oneness with her” (47). This is the stage in

which the divine, near Goddess-like conception of the mother is appropriate; the son has not yet identified himself as a separate being from his mother and relies on her for everything; separation has not yet begun. Arnold represents this phase of his life with the peaceful, calming diction of these first few lines. “The sea is calm,” and the tide has not yet begun to recede from the shore (1). “The moon lies fair” over the scene almost like some kind of blessing (2).

However, the very first line gives a sense that this stage is ephemeral, that it will come to an end: “The sea is calm *tonight*” (1, emphasis added). It may not be calm tomorrow. A slight change in emphasis shows that the peaceful, Pre-Oedipal stage will not last, for it is not intended to last.

Just four lines later, the peaceful, comforting words used to describe the scene at high tide—“calm,” “full,” “fair”—have been replaced by negative terms: “grating,” “tremulous,” “sadness” (9, 13, 14). The serene sound of waves on the English cliffs has become a withdrawing “roar” and the retreating of the tide has been identified as “the eternal note of sadness” (14).

What has caused this abrupt change? The transitioning lines provide a clue:

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
 Listen! you hear the grating roar. (6-9)

In the lines separating the calm sea and the “grating roar,” the reader is given two imperative statements. We are told to “Come to the window,” and to “Listen!” These lines represent the end of the Pre-Oedipal stage, in which a child does not rely on his or her own senses or sense of self but on that of his mother. These commands force us to use our own senses in order to become aware of our surroundings. “Come to the window” implies the command to use our sense of sight, to look. “Sweet is the night air” implies the assumption that we are able to use our sense of

smell. “Listen!” demands that we use our sense of hearing. In these lines, we are instructed to use our own senses in order to determine our own surroundings as an independent self. We are no longer allowed to rely solely on the experience of the mother in order to find meaning. By becoming aware of our own senses, we have become able to locate our own position in the world; we have become individuals.

As soon as self-sufficiency occurs, we realize that the sea is no longer calm. The peaceful lapping of the waves against the cliffs has become a “grating roar” as the tide begins to recede. It is a “tremulous cadence” and brings sadness (13). This sequence represents the first stages in the child’s split from the mother. The slow, painful separation of the sea from the shoreline mirrors the difficult process of a child learning to separate himself from his mother. It is a “melancholy, [and] long” process (25). It seems to take pieces out of the identity of both parties; “pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling” (10). It leaves both parties feeling naked and exposed; Arnold describes the separating tide as “Retreating, to the breath / Of night-wind, down the vast edges drear / And naked shingles of the world” (26-28). Just as the retreating tide takes pieces (pebbles) of the shoreline with it and leaves the beach “naked” so does the withdrawal of the son from an “impinging” mother leave both parties feeling fragmented and vulnerable.

These sections of Arnold’s poem also contain connections to Freud’s theory in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming.” Arnold’s inclusive diction and allusions, as well as his varied use of the first-, second-, and third-person points of view, illustrate that he is not only exploring his own experience of this difficult and somewhat tabooed topic but that he is also allowing his reader to do the same. Arnold refers to the withdrawing of the tide as the “eternal note of sadness” and as a “human misery” (14, 18). These word choices illustrate the universal scope of Arnold’s difficulty, suggesting that it is an essentially human problem extending throughout all

of history. The withdrawing of the tide, representing the separation of a son from his mother, has always been a part of the human condition. This point is further emphasized by the reference to Sophocles: “Sophocles long ago / Heard it on the Aegean” (15-16). By claiming that Sophocles, an ancient playwright, also went through this experience, Arnold suggests that this difficult process transcends both time and social or educational class. A 400 B.C. intellectual and, for instance, a twenty-first-century plumber can hear the “tremulous cadence” just as easily. By universalizing the issue, Arnold invites his reader not only to analyze the poet’s own experience, but to use the aesthetic beauty of the poem to work through his or her own subconscious problems in an aesthetically pleasing and socially acceptable manner.

This process is further reflected in Arnold’s alternating use of the first-, second-, and third-person points of view. In the beginning of the poem, the speaker seems to be a third-person narrator, describing the scene from a removed point of view. Then the speaker directly addresses the reader using imperative statements and the second person: “Come to the window . . . Listen! you hear the grating roar” (6, 9). In the beginning of the second stanza, describing Sophocles’ experience hearing the outgoing tide, the speaker again is a third person narrator, “Sophocles long ago / Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought / into his mind the turbid ebb and flow” (15-16). But then, in the third stanza, the speaker uses the first person, “But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar” (24-25). Finally, in the last stanza, the speaker uses the plural first-person pronoun “us”: “Ah, love, let us be true / To one another! for the world, which seems / to lie before us like a land of dreams” (29-31). By alternating between the first-, second-, and third-person points of view, Arnold allows the reader to see the experience of separation from the mother (represented by the tide) in the speaker and third parties (such as Sophocles),

but he also invites the reader to identify with the poem, to see his or her own experiences reflected in Arnold's aestheticized lines.

The last stanza exemplifies Arnold's attempts to define his own identity in light of his reluctant separation from his mother and his equally reluctant assumption of the socially acceptable masculine self. Chodorow notes that, because boys are unable to fully identify with their primary caregiver (their mother) and must separate themselves from her, they often do not feel as connected to the world and society as girls do (Lynn 214). They tend to think of the world in a competitive rather than cooperative sense, and find it more difficult to cultivate intimacy (Lynn 214). Chodorow describes this competitive nature by saying that, for boys, "success is always temporary—a failure wipes it out—and love and approval are dependent upon success" (*Feminism* 33). Competition and struggle typify the male outlook.

The final stanza in "Dover Beach" shows Arnold, having grudgingly separated from the femininity of his mother, reluctantly embracing a typically masculine view of the world. The first lines contain a call for unity and intimacy: "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!" (29-30). However, this typically feminine response is immediately swallowed up by the typically masculine, pessimistic view of the world that makes this brief call for unity necessary. Only one and a half lines of the final stanza are used to make this unifying call to love. The remaining seven and a half are used to describe the world as a place that may seem "various, beautiful, and new" but actually contains "neither joy, nor love, nor light / nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" (33-34). Instead, the world is a place full of "struggle[,] . . . flight," and violence (36). The uncertain, violent, and competitive way Arnold sees the world shows that, by the end of the poem, he has reluctantly embraced a typically masculine identity, one that may derive some of

its pessimism from the harmful separation process described in earlier stanzas. The brief, nine word long call for love and unity is all but forgotten.

This reading of "Dover Beach," in light of the biographical evidence found in Arnold's letters and the work of various psychoanalytic theorists, shows Arnold embodying Freud's conception of the *ars poetica*. Arnold has taken a difficult and sensitive personal experience, the strained separation from his mother, and unconsciously sublimated it into this aesthetically pleasing poem about the outgoing tide. By doing so, he is able to work through his experience in a safe, socially acceptable manner while simultaneously allowing potential readers to do the same.

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Essay

Caleb Punt

“Divine Justice” or “Menaces of Nature”?

Religion in the Philosophies of Malcolm X and Ta-Nehisi Coates

Spike Lee’s sprawling biopic chronicling the life of Malcolm X begins with an impassioned speech given by the controversial Civil Rights leader. It ends with Malcolm X powerfully declaring, “We don’t see any American Dream. We have experienced only the American Nightmare” (*Malcolm X*). Lee adapts these lines from a speech given by Malcolm X in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1964. Sixty years after this speech is given, another author publishes a book in which the American Dream is castigated as “rest[ing] on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies,” as “persist[ing] by warring with the known world,” and as being achieved “through the pillaging of life, liberty, labor and land; through the flaying of backs; the chaining of limbs; the strangling of dissidents” (Coates, *Between* 11, 11, 8). The synonymous conceptions of the American Dream as a thinly disguised nightmare are one of many similarities between the messages of Ta-Nehisi Coates and that of Malcolm X. An analysis of Spike Lee’s biopic *Malcolm X* and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s book *Between the World and Me* suggests that Coates built his literary and political activist identity on Malcolm X. The main point of departure between the two figures is the issue of religion, and Coates’s rejection of religion in all its forms allows him to avoid the extremism evident in Malcolm X’s early thought but also leaves him without the universality and sense of hope evident in Malcolm X’s thought near the end of his life.

Coates leaves no doubt that he is strongly inspired by the work of Malcolm X; his tribute published in *The Atlantic* shows the immense value he sees in Malcolm X's message and suggests that he sees himself as following in the same steps. Coates says, "For virtually all of my sentient life, I have carried some talisman of Malcolm X" ("Legacy"). This dedication first arose because Malcolm X was one of the first black leaders who taught African Americans to reject the notion of themselves as lesser, ugly, or inferior to their white or lighter skinned neighbors, a very appealing message to Coates. Malcolm X taught Coates "to reject hatred to awaken to the ugly around us and the original beauty within, to be aware, to be 'conscious'" (Coates, "Legacy"). Coates describes this consciousness as "reject[ing] the agents of their [white people's] deceit—their religion, their culture, their names" ("Legacy"). Coates tries to maintain this "consciousness" and bemoans the periods in his life when he "stuff[ed] [his] conscious days into in the closet" ("Legacy"). These sections of Coates' article illustrate the profound value he found in the message of Malcolm X and begin to show how he has tried to pattern himself after Malcolm X's teachings.

However, Coates' own literary work, rather than his work as a journalist, reveals the most telling connections between himself and Malcolm X. For example, in *Between the World and Me*, Coates reacts to the tragedy of 9/11 in a very controversial manner, inevitably evoking a comparison to Malcolm X's infamous comments on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. After 9/11, Coates reflects:

Looking out on the ruins of America, my heart was cold. I had disasters all my own. The officer who killed Prince Jones . . . was a sword of the American citizenry. I would never consider any American citizen pure. . . . I kept thinking about how southern Manhattan had always been Ground Zero for us. They

auctioned our bodies down there. . . . I could see no difference between the officer who killed Prince Jones and the police who died, or the firefighters who died.

They were not human to me. (Coates, *Between* 86-87)

This response is shocking because it rejects the expected reaction to a national tragedy. In response to a tragedy, the populace of a nation is expected to come together, to put aside differences in light of a common enemy. Instead, Coates uses 9/11 to again illustrate the chasm he feels between his experience of America and the “American Dream” professed by the privileged (white) people of the country. The violence he has witnessed, particularly the senseless death of Prince Jones, keeps him from identifying with the romantic visions of law enforcement, first responders, and leadership that had enraptured the country at this time. American tragedies are not his tragedies; he has “disasters all [his] own” (86).

Malcolm X’s speech addressing the assassination of JFK, as presented in Lee’s film, contains many of the same themes, suggesting Coates’s reaction to 9/11 was inspired by his mentor. Malcolm X opens by asking the question, “What do I say about this national day of mourning, so-called national day of mourning?” (*Malcolm X*). Inserting the phrase “so-called” immediately establishes separation between Malcolm X’s experience of events and the experience of mainstream America. Malcolm X does not consider himself to be a part of the mainstream American experience (what Coates refers to as the “American Dream”), and thus he refuses to participate in the despair felt by white America. This is the same strategy employed by Coates when he says, “I had disasters all my own” (*Between* 86). Both thinkers distance themselves from the tragedy by asserting that it is not their tragedy. They are unable to participate in America’s prosperity when things are going well, so they feel no need to participate in America’s sorrow when tragedy strikes. Malcolm X goes on to claim that John F.

Kennedy's death was a matter of "divine justice," the result of the white race's generational crimes coming back to haunt them (*Malcolm X*). The crimes committed by white people in the past, and no doubt continuing up to the time of his speech, prevent him from feeling compassion for the slain white president. He cannot separate them, the criminals and the President, in his mind. This serves as the inspiration behind Coates's statement, "I could see no difference between the officer who killed Prince Jones and the police who died, or the firefighter who died" (*Between* 86). The past crimes of law enforcement, as a cohesive entity, leave Coates unable to distinguish between the individuals that make up law enforcement, and therefore unable to feel real sorrow over the individuals' deaths. The similarities evident between Coates and Malcolm X's reactions to national tragedies show the intimate relation of their thinking.

Coates's description of Brown University as "the Mecca" provides the most overt connection between the work of Coates and the life of Malcolm X. In the later part of his life, Malcolm X took a pilgrimage to the Islamic Holy City of Mecca. In Lee's film, this scene is presented as a second conversion or awakening. Malcolm X says, "Once before, in prison, the truth came and blinded me. Well it has happened again" (*Malcolm X*). For Malcolm X, the visit to Mecca was comparable to the illuminating experience he had in prison, when exposure to the Islamic faith helped him to learn to read, to think critically about the role of the different races, and to pray to God. It was a time of revelation and epiphany. Coates adopts the language of Malcolm X to describe his own experience at Howard University: "My only Mecca was, is, and shall be Howard University" (Coates, *Between* 39). For Coates, his years at Howard had the same illuminating, revelatory feel of Malcolm's trip to the actual city of Mecca. At his "Mecca," Coates first sees the black race in all of its "dark energy . . . hot and incredible, exotic" (Coates, *Between* 40, 42). At his Mecca, Coates awakens to the universal plight of black people. He learns

that the black plight is not restricted to the streets of Baltimore, but “the black diaspora was . . . , in so many ways, the Western world itself” (Coates, *Between* 43). Given the strong connections to Malcolm X Coates has revealed through his other publications and through other sections of *Between the World and Me*, its reasonable to assume he consciously affiliated his own revelatory experience at Howard University with Malcolm’s “second conversion,” further illustrating how he patterned himself after his role model.

However, there is one subject on which Coates fervently disagrees with his mentor: religion. Lee, in his film, presents religion as a fundamental part of Malcolm X’s “awakening” in prison and the civil rights message he preaches near the end of his life. The member of the Nation of Islam that first speaks to the incarcerated Malcolm X teaches him how to read, but just as importantly he teaches him that “God is black” (*Malcolm X*). After his trip to Mecca, Malcolm X is convinced that the true practice of Islam is the only way “to remove the cancer of racism from hearts and souls of all Americans” (*Malcolm X*). Coates, in contrast, is an unequivocal atheist, thanking his grandparents for teaching him “to reject magic in all its forms” and never “consol[ing] [him] with ideas of an afterlife” (Coates, *Between* 12). This difference between the two thinkers undergirds even the strong connections they share; therefore, it is their main point of departure.

For instance, although Coates’s tribute to Malcolm X is laudatory, it is not composed solely of effusive praise. At one point, Coates describes Malcolm X as someone “who could be dogmatically religious one moment, and then broadly open-minded the next” (“Legacy”). In this statement, Coates sets up what he admires about Malcolm X, his open-mindedness, against what he perceives to be his main fault, his religiosity. In another instance, Coates says that Malcolm’s trips to Mecca, Africa, and the Middle East resulted in “a failure to forge a coherent philosophy”

(“Legacy”), perhaps in contrast to Coates’s own unflinching materialism. What Coates admired about Malcolm X was his unapologetic affirmation of the black identity, the black psyche, and the black body. His worldview was an unfortunate flaw. For Coates, Malcolm X “was ultimately more an expression of black America’s heart than of its brain” (“Legacy”).

This major point of departure between the two social thinkers is seen just under the surface of the major similarities between Coates’s memoir and Spike Lee’s film. For instance, the similarities between their reactions to national tragedies, while striking, also reveal the fundamental difference in their worldviews. Coates says of the first responders at 9/11, “They were not human to me. Black, white, or whatever, they were the menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could—with no justification—shatter my body” (*Between* 87). Coates is unable to feel compassion towards the police officers and firefighters at Ground Zero, because he sees them as a part of the same impersonal force that killed Prince Jones and could kill him or his son. This is consistent with his materialistic worldview. If there is no transcendence, nothing beyond the material world, it makes sense for Coates to think of the world as subject to impersonal forces, the “menaces of nature” (*Between* 87). Even his insistence on referring to himself as “a body” shows his dedication to his atheistic outlook. Neither he nor the first responders are “souls,” subject to the moral code or providence of a divine being. They are just “bodies,” subject to impersonal, naturalistic forces.

Malcolm X employs a different reasoning to explain his reaction to the assassination of JFK. Malcolm X ascribes the death of Kennedy to “divine justice,” explaining, “the Holy Koran teaches us that those who work evil will be condemned or punished or judged according to their works” (*Malcolm X*). This quote articulates a classic conception of Islamic justice. Malcolm X claims, “the white man has planted the seeds of violence . . . [the death of Kennedy] is justice”

(*Malcolm X*). Malcolm X relies on a transcendent, divine sense of justice, as taught in the Koran and the Bible in order to justify his lack of compassion regarding the national tragedy. JFK did not die as the result of impersonal forces, but as the result of a Just God who brought the white people's own sins against them. Although the reactions of Coates and Malcolm X have similar tones and result in the same lack of sympathy, the reasoning behind their reactions differs, showing how Coates reinterprets his mentor's thought to fit his own secular worldview.

Coates's use of the term "Mecca" to describe his time at Howard, while a strong link between himself and Malcolm X, also further illustrates how he adapted the life and thought of Malcolm X to fit his own situation and his own atheistic understanding of the world. Malcolm X's experience at the Holy City of Mecca was profoundly religious. At one point he says of his trip, "It was the only time in my life I have stood before the Creator of All and felt like a complete human being" (*Malcolm X*). In contrast, Coates takes the language of Malcolm's experience, purges it of its spirituality, and uses it to describe his own sense of awakening at a secular University, where he learns not of the "Creator of All" but of the diversity and beauty of his race. The similarity between the language used by both authors is belied by this one major point of departure. Coates has simultaneously aligned himself with his mentor while preserving one major point of difference.

Coates's rejection of religion allowed him to avoid the extremism seen in the first version of Islam with which Malcolm X aligned himself. Malcolm X's first conversion, which took place while he was in prison, was to the Nation of Islam. As presented in Lee's film, this small offshoot of Islam, founded by Elijah Muhammad, consisted of a bizarre cosmology that claimed the white man was quite literally a devil. This resulted in most of the strange, overtly racist ideology promoted by Malcolm X in the years directly following his release from prison. In

Lee's film, the character of Malcolm X professes "all white men are devils" and "the true nature of the white man is wickedness" (*Malcolm X*). By rejecting any notions of spirituality in the world, Coates is able to avoid this level of extremism. Although Coates draws his own clear line in the sand—between those "who believe that they are white" (Coates, *Between* 11) who uphold the American Dream, and the underprivileged, the black people—his materialism makes sure that he keeps all human on the same ontological plane. Inequality is a matter of power, not a matter of devilry.

However, Malcolm X's second conversion avoids the extremism of his time with the Nation of Islam and allows for a more fruitful consideration of the effect of religion (or lack thereof) in the thought of these two political activists. In Lee's film, Malcolm explains his trip to Mecca as fulfilling his desire "to fully understand the religion of Islam as practiced by 750 million Muslims around the world" (*Malcolm X*). According to historical sources, Malcolm X felt an anxiety concerning the disparity between what he was taught as a member of the Nation of Islam and the universal religion of Islam since the early stages of his career. Edward Curtis, for instance, recounts a series of instances that greatly disturbed Malcolm X. Curtis writes about a student grilling Malcolm X concerning a lecture on Islam he had given at Dartmouth. Malcolm's inability to respond fully to the student's questions distressed him, and he asked the student for literature from the Islamic Centre in Geneva (Curtis 90). Another time, students surrounded Malcolm, arguing that his belief in the white devil was un-Islamic. Curtis claims Malcolm was "quite disturbed" (Curtis 90). Malcolm traveled to Mecca at least in part to put these concerns to rest, and the result was the much less extreme expression of Islam expressed by Malcolm X in the final hour of Lee's film and the final years of his life.

Malcolm X's new religious identify, found at the Holy City of Mecca, resulted in a more inclusive social message. Malcolm's letter home from Mecca, as presented in Lee's film, read, "I have drank from the same glass and prayed to the same God with Muslims whose eyes were blue . . . and whose skin was the whitest of white. And we were all brothers. Truly. People of all colors and races believing in one God and one humanity" (*Malcolm X*). Malcolm's experience in Mecca resulted in a broadening of his message; it went from being a message solely for the black race, and aggressively set against any other group of people, to being a message for humanity as a whole.

In contrast, Coates's experience at the secular Mecca of Howard University limits his social message, placing him firmly within an African American, as opposed to a humanitarian, strain of thinking. At Howard, Coates first learned of a uniquely black history, a uniquely black art, and he began to focus on reviving and emphasizing these purely black expressions of identity. Although the discovery and celebration of marginalized art, literary, and historical forms is a very valuable enterprise, the exclusivity of Coates's focus and the abrasive nature of his rhetoric in general have prompted some critics to suggest that in *Between the World and Me*, Coates is simply trying to "police the boundaries of a unique black identity" (Reno 5). R.R. Reno writes:

[Coates] seems nostalgic not just for Howard and the fullness of the black experience, but also for the once sharp distinctions between black and white that were enforced by an overt racism. . . . It seems Coates must police the boundaries of authentic black identity, because Jim Crow no longer obliges. This policing indicates that Coates's outlook has become artificial rather than living, conjured rather than real. (5)

In this excerpt, Reno suggests that Coates's "nostalgia" for the uniquely black identity he found at his Mecca motivates the sharp line he puts between those who are authentically black and those who "believe they are white" (Coates, *Between* 11). In order to accomplish this, to establish this line, Coates exaggerates the racial problems facing America and refuses to acknowledge any progress.

While it is unfair to dismiss Coates's experience of America completely, as Reno gets dangerously close to doing, there might be some truth to Reno's critique. Surely there are still plenty of systematic racial problems in American society, but Coates does seem to sensationalize a few instances to the point of being slightly dishonest. For instance, Randall Kennedy takes exception to the section in *Between the World and Me* that claims, "Eric Garner was choked to death for stealing cigarettes" (Coates 46). Kennedy wonders: "Is that statement accurate? Did the officer choke Garner to death for selling cigarettes? Or did the officer, criminally over-reacting, choke Garner in order to subdue a suspect whom he perceived to be resisting arrest--an action that led to Garner's death? Those two formulations portray actions that are leagues apart morally" (89). Kennedy rightly distinguishes between the moral implications of the situation as Coates presents it and the situation as it just as easily could have occurred. By assuming the worst possible motive, and thereby sensationalizing certain stories when very real systematic racial problems still exist, Coates makes himself vulnerable to Reno's critique that he is simply trying to "police the boundaries of authentic black identity" to define more clearly the line between white and black (5). Furthermore, if Reno's critique is successful, it shows that while Malcolm X's religiously centered Mecca experience expanded his social vision, Coates' secularized adaptation narrowed his vision.

Finally, in the religion of Islam, Malcolm X found a plan and a hope for the future, while Coates' materialism leaves him without any real optimism. Nina Bosnicova suggests that Malcolm X, while sincerely religious in his own right, consciously aligned his message with a theistic narrative in order to place himself within the strongly religious African American tradition stretching all the way back to the slave spirituals (Bosnicova). Although he thought Christianity was too perverted by the white race, in Islam Malcolm found a "spiritual alternative for his black fellows" that would not require him to ask them "to wholly turn their backs on God" (Bosnicova). As presented in Lee's biopic, Malcolm X had a real hope that this strategy, born from his own authentic religious experiences, could lead to racial reconciliation: "As racism leads America up the suicidal path, I do believe that the younger generation will . . . turn to the spiritual path of truth, the only way left in this world to ward off the disaster that racism will surely lead to" (*Malcolm X*). In religion, Malcolm X finds both a strategy and a hope for the future.

Coates, left to a materialistic worldview in which all of society is left up to impersonal forces, finds very little place for hope. Many of his critics suggest that Coates goes from seeing racism as a systematic problem that must be addressed to seeing racism as a fundamental aspect of reality that can always be resisted, but never fixed. Melvin Rogers claims, "For Coates, white supremacy does not merely structure reality; it is reality" (Rogers). As a staunch atheist, Coates sees no transcendent ideals of justice or right society. Recall the differences in how Coates and Malcolm X react to national tragedy. For Malcolm X, it was an instance of divine justice, for Coates it was simply the "menaces of nature" (*Between* 87). Coates instructs his son, "You must resist the common urge toward the comforting narrative of divine law, toward fairy tales that imply some irrepressible justice" (*Between* 70). There is no "comforting narrative" because there

is nothing beyond the here and now; as Coates puts it “The god of history is an atheist” (*Between* 71). While Malcolm X’s worldview allowed for a hope in the future, Coates’s materialism puts all of the emphasis on the never-ending “struggle” (Coates, *Between* 71).

While Coates successfully imitates much of his mentor’s style, strategies, and outlook, their fundamental disagreement about the nature of the universe ultimately leads to very different messages. Malcolm X is able to find both a plan and a hope for the future in the religion of Islam, but Coates finds only struggle in his own atheistic worldview.

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Tim Sutton, PhD

“Easter, 1916”: Violence as Symbol in Ireland

The Easter Revolution in Ireland in 1916 was a well-designed failure. Its significance lay at the powerful intersection of sacrificial violence and compelling symbol. Ostensibly, the timing of the revolution meant to take advantage of the English military focus on the Great War. In reality, even the most ardent Irish revolutionaries knew the British would quell the revolution with little mercy. It was, after all, planned and carried out by poorly trained soldiers, poets, journalists, and political agitators: hardly the stuff to conquer an empire. The best the revolutionaries could hope for was to hold out long enough to be noticed internationally, to reveal the lack of authenticity in British promises for eventual Home Rule, and to spark a more sustained revolutionary spirit in the Irish people. All of these objectives were satisfied during the five days of violence that ignited in central Dublin beginning Easter Monday. Sixteen revolutionaries were executed without trial, which quickly turned the public—who initially judged the revolution as foolhardy and unnecessary—against the English. The well-designed failure succeeded.

But the nature of symbols, even those built on real acts of bloodshed, is always fluid. For it is the poem of a man not involved with the revolution in any material way, W. B. Yeats, that most succinctly commemorates the meaning of that week. “Easter, 1916” is an uneasy and conflicted memorial, despite the fact that such a revolution seemed to realize Yeats’s great hope for his nation. In 1907, Yeats insisted that “belief in the possibility of armed insurrection” against the English had successfully revived “old romantic nationalism” in Irish literature (*Early*

Essays 189). In the play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), he depicts a young man who abandons his betrothed to follow an old woman who personifies Ireland and join the 1798 revolution. The drama sentimentalizes violence, as the woman warns her prospective soldier, “They that had red-cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid” (139). But in “September, 1913,” Yeats complains that no men will take up the revolutionary cause of previous generations. Instead, they worry about religion, money, and family, while “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone” (7).

The Easter Rising proved that Romantic Ireland was alive and well, but Yeats hesitates in his support. In the first stanza, he disassociates himself from any part in the planning of the revolt. He notes that while he has seen the revolutionaries leave “grey, eighteenth century houses,” he has merely “passed with a nod of the head, / Or polite meaningless words” (5-6). This nod does not convey knowledge of their intentions. Yeats claims to have been “certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn” (13-14); apparently, Yeats has grown comfortable in an Ireland at peace with many flags flying over its capital.

Yeats composes a strange elegy in the subsequent stanza. He first writes of Countess Constance Markievicz, a daughter of English colonizers who embodied the aristocratic and atheological Ireland that Yeats idealized:

That woman's days were spent
 In ignorant good-will,
 Her nights in argument
 Until her voice grew shrill.
 What voice more sweet than hers
 When, young and beautiful,

She rode to harriers? (17-23)

The stanza is a meta-commentary on elegy itself, which usually purifies the deceased in its commemoration. Here Yeats uncomfortably exposes that purification process; he mocks it and implements it at once. (Markievicz, it should be noted, was given clemency because the British Prime Minister worried about the potential political fallout for executing a woman.) Yeats is more forgiving of the poets Padraig Pearse and then Thomas MacDonagh:

This man had kept a school
 And rode our wingèd horse;
 This other his helper and friend
 Was coming into his force;
 He might have won fame in the end,
 So sensitive his nature seemed,
 So daring and sweet his thought.

Neither poet's work is remembered for its aesthetic merit today. (Possibly Yeats was right about MacDonagh, but we will never know since he was, in fact, executed.) Pearse gets short shrift, however, since it was he who pressed for the revolution most virulently and valiantly fought. Like Yeats, Pearse knew the symbolic power of the revolution. He once proclaimed, "Blood is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood" (qtd. in Kearny 37). Unlike Yeats, Pearse lived out his rhetorical principles.

The entire poem can be read as Yeats's reassessment of his political positions in Ireland. Yeats never trusted the British, who promised the Irish Home Rule in 1912 but delayed its deliverance at the outset of the Great War. Yet a suddenly optimistic or naïve Yeats asks in the fourth and final stanza: "Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all

that is done and said” (67-69). Lines like these challenge the reader to judge Yeats’s political pivoting as honest and realistic or cowardly and contradictory—or some mix of these adjectives. It certainly takes bravery as an artist to publish these lines in light of his earlier call to arms. The refrain of the poem encapsulates Yeats’s mix of horror and admiration: “All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born” (15-16).

The various tensions in the poem evoke the diversity of opinions in Ireland concerning the revolution, which explains its historical weight (in addition to its many aesthetic merits, for which there is not space to discuss here). It is also true that a closer reading of Yeats’s views leading up to the revolution hint at his altered tone. In 1915, he criticized the growing spirit of violence in Sinn Fein and other Irish revolutionary groups: “All achievements are won by compromise and these men wherever they find themselves expel from their own minds—by their mind’s rigidity—the flowing & living world” (qtd. in Foster 61). Yeats works much of this language into the third stanza of the poem, where he remarks, “Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart” (57-58). In a 1916 essay on Japanese Noh plays, Yeats explains, “All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world” (*Early Essays* 165). Pearse disagreed, and he was willing to die for his belief. Referring to *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Yeats would later ask in the poem “The Man and the Echo”: “Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?” (11-12). This notion has been mocked, but Pearse probably would have sympathized with the viewpoint. One play did not inspire the revolution, but the romantic artistic movement of which that play was a part almost certainly did. The Easter Rising will be remembered by means other than Yeats’s poem, but the tensions and realism that poem embodies still endure in Ireland one hundred years later.

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Essay

Mary Elizabeth Taylor

The Psychology of Poetry: Unearthing the Process of Grief and Trauma in “Meneseteung”

After a traumatic experience, victims are able to find healing through adapting their lives to that experience; for those who are unable or choose not to adapt, their presents and futures are often tainted by the events of their past. Even when a person becomes seemingly adapted to the trauma, the emotions can sometimes resurface later in life. Alice Munro expounds upon this dichotomy as she writes of an odd, somber poetess named Almeda Roth. Although the reader is at first unaware of Almeda’s dismal family history, a catalogue of her poetry allows an insightful glance into her inner psychological state. Bessel Van der Kolk asserts, “All traumatized people develop their own peculiar defenses to cope with intrusive recollections and increased psychological arousal” – for Almeda, writing poetry is her defense (490). In fact, she writes in the preface to her book that, since childhood, it has always been the way that she personally “allayed her griefs” (Munro 51). Her poems serve as both a structural element and psychological motif throughout “Meneseteung,” and, as the narrator unfolds Almeda’s story, the reader observes many of the signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the poetess as well as in the way she processes trauma through the written word.

According to Bessel Van der Kolk, those who have been diagnosed with PTSD often process reality through the particular lenses of trauma: these lenses include intrusion, compulsive re-exposure, avoidance, inability to arouse, inattention, and insecure identity (492). These lenses are useful to understand the character of Almeda Roth, her psychological processing, and the way she orients her life around her past experiences. The first lens of PTSD is intrusions, which

range from nightmares to intense emotions to flashbacks. In “Meneseteung,” Almeda has vivid dreams; when she awakes after the night of the supposed murder, “she thinks there is a big crow sitting on her windowsill” (64). In this section of *The Black Hole of Trauma*, Van der Kolk also describes the phenomenon of a “trigger” event that activates dormant PTSD in patients because of their “biased perceptions” (493). The “murder” of the woman on Pearl Street serves as a trigger for Almeda: it brings back the suppressed emotion of her woeful past experiences, thereby activating her dormant PTSD. In some cases, patients of PTSD compulsively re-expose themselves to traumatic situations similar to those of their past experiences where they play either the role of the victim or of the victimizer (493). Almeda displays this lens when she chooses to re-expose herself to “the same bedroom she once shared with her sister Catherine” who died young, partly because she wishes to avoid “the large front bedroom, where her mother used to lie in bed all day, and which was later the solitary domain of her father” (56). In the end, Almeda avoids seeing Jarvis Poulter and isolates herself from the society. This could be an attempt to numb her feelings. After the trigger event, overstimulation causes Almeda to shut down – literally locking herself in her house – and she orients herself around “not feeling and not considering options for the best ways of responding to emotionally arousing problems” (Van der Kolk 496). Furthermore, she begins to see the world through a nihilistic and fearful perspective as “innocuous sounds provoke an alerting startle response” (496). Yet, despite all the parallels that the reader may draw from Almeda to the lenses of PTSD, this diagnosis is valuable to convey that her coping mechanism lies within her poetry.

Psychological research shows that writing is a proven therapeutic process for patients of PTSD. Adam Croom, for instance, provides evidence from various studies that “poetry interventions [are] effective in alleviating symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress

disorder” (4). When we experience a traumatic ordeal, the way we process that trauma is largely dependent on the way we remember it. To illustrate this concept, Cyril Burt describes a young girl who encounters a large dog while out playing in her neighborhood. The girl, fearful from the experience, describes the dog with emblematically descriptive language:

The dog, she says, was “almost as large as an elephant,” and “its eyes were shining like bulbs.” In fact, she might almost be making the whole thing up. But whether the story is true or whether it is sheer fancy, the main incentive is still the unnecessary, pent-up fear. Her utterance is no longer a call for help, but a means of relieving her emotional tension by some kind of outward expression. (Burt 271)

Similarly to the young girl, Almeda experiences various events that influence her poetry. She may be making the stories up, but she is nonetheless able to process her childhood memories by writing about them. Jacques Lacan references this use of figurative language as he draws a dividing bar between the signifier and the signified. He asserts that our inability to fully communicate stems from the gap between what we say and what we mean to say. He calls this dichotomy the “creative spark of the metaphor”— in speaking about one thing in particular, the use of language necessitates that we describe it in relation to something else (453). For example, male is male only because it is not female. Furthermore, a fig tree is only a fig tree because it bears figs. When language falls short of communicating what we intend it to – which, according to Lacan, happens often – then the words we use inherently “[flash] between two signifiers, one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain” (453). This explains the therapeutic effect of poetic discourse: figurative language expresses the inability to communicate our exact intent, and the reader must, therefore, search for meaning beneath the surface.

Although Almeda's poetry is the main focus of the short story, the narrator duplicates the poet's experiences by using similar metaphorical language, thereby using writing as her own therapeutic discourse. For instance, the narrator and the *Vidette* both remark that the townspeople are much more volatile during times of "hot weather," which signifies heightened psychological and emotional distress (55). The narrator also uses many images of death and funerals, which reflect Almeda's past experiences within her family. She indirectly references both cremation and burial when she says the road is "hot as ashes" and the people walking to church are like "tombstones . . . marching down the street" (69). Additionally, she describes Almeda's portrait on the cover of *Offerings* as if the poetess were in mourning: she is dressed in all black, and her eyes "seem ready to roll down her cheeks like giant tears" (50). Her perspective of Almeda's house focuses on its "lace-curtained windows [that] look like white eyes" stuck at the intersection of Pearl and Dufferin (53). This third-person omniscient point of view also allows for the narrator to process internally alongside her exploration of Almeda's psychological condition. In this way, the narrator becomes so closely intertwined with the Canadian poetess that the reader assumes a link between their sex and background.

As she echoes the poetess's sorrowful vocabulary, the narrator seems to deeply understand and embody Almeda's grief and trauma. Writing "Meneseteung," then, is the narrator's way of managing and adapting to her own feelings. The narrator plays an important role in "Meneseteung": she embodies Almeda's emotions, recounts her life story and displays a deep adoration for her poetry. However, the narrator may be unreliable because there is ample evidence to assert that she leaves out or changes many details of Almeda's existence. For example, the narrator acknowledges, "the countryside that [Almeda] [had] written about in her poems actually takes diligence and determination to see. Some things must be disregarded"

(Munro 61). This quote suggests that the narrator and Almeda both leave out certain details that may be too unacceptable to reveal – much like one would ignore a rubbish pile or a swampy yard. It seems oddly suspicious, too, that at the end of the short story the narrator confesses that she may be wrong; Almeda may not have taken laudanum or made grape jelly (73). All of her writing, it appears, was merely speculation. Yet, this possibility leads the reader back to Burt’s argument that, whether fictional or true, telling stories allows our unconscious minds to understand and integrate our experiences.

To continue this thought, it should by now be apparent that writing is a tool for positive psychology and post-traumatic therapy. Interestingly enough, Almeda’s doctor does not support writing poetry as therapy; instead, he advises against it: “Don’t read so much, he said, don’t study; get yourself good and tired out with housework, take exercise”– that is his cure for Almeda’s symptoms of psychological distress (62). During this time period, though doctors were unaware of the reality of mental illness such as PTSD, the culture largely dictated how womanly struggles were evaluated and treated. In other words, “the prevailing culture has a marked effect on the symptomatic expression of traumatic stress” (Van der Kolk 498). This rationalizes many of Almeda’s interactions with Jarvis Poulter, as well as comments from the narrator and the *Vidette*: any older, unmarried woman is likely to be insane, especially one who writes poetry. Therefore, the town seems to diagnose Almeda’s symptoms of psychological distress and collectively imposes a timid relationship upon Jarvis and Almeda. After all, they are both “not perhaps in their first youth but by no means blighted by the frosts of age. May we surmise?” (58). Society’s explanation for irregular – and even senseless – behavior was that, without a husband, older woman are expected to experience such panicked emotions.

To convey all these complexities of Almeda's life, the narrator uses her poetry as a transitional element in the story. Interestingly, it appears that "Children at Their Games" is the sole exception. Out of all the poems she describes in the beginning, the narrator includes a small excerpt from the only poem not included as transitional material between chapters of the main narrative: "Come over, come over, let Meda come over" (52). Although the exact meaning of this poem and why it was not included in the larger story's transitions is unclear, it surely describes a ghostly and haunting experience of being alone. Perhaps this particular poem connects the grown character of Almeda Joynt Roth with her childhood self, "Meda," which is the name carved on her gravestone (73). Almeda's poems are somewhat elementary and seemingly only structural elements, yet they reflect fears of loneliness and death buried deep within her subconscious. For instance, "The Gypsy Fair" appears right before the event that serves as a trigger for Almeda's PTSD. This poem is about a young girl whose family is taken by gypsies, and she is never able to get them back (52). The excerpt is from the end of the poem as the speaker looks back with regret at how she was powerless to rescue her family:

The Gypsies have departed.
 Their camping-ground is bare.
 Oh, boldly would I bargain now
 At the Gypsy Fair. (62)

At the start of this particular section in the short story, Almeda's reactions unearth her imbalanced psychological state. The narrator reveals that Almeda "suffers a good deal from sleeplessness" and often takes nerve medicine (63). Furthermore, when Almeda awakens from sleep, "the night seems fiery hot and full of threats" only until she realizes that she is simply hearing the usual noises of Pearl Street (63). She hears a "stream of abuse that contains all those

words which Almeda associates with danger and depravity,” and her associations with these words emerge only because of her familial experiences in the past (63). In an effort to process this traumatic experience, she refers to the drunken woman as a “wheelbarrow,” yet another use of figurative language (64). When Jarvis makes the remark, “there goes your dead body!” Almeda once again feels “hot and dizzy” (67). Just like the speaker in “The Gypsy Fair” cannot escape her regrets and shame, Almeda realizes in this section that she cannot escape the traumatic deaths of her family and overcome her lingering grief.

In addition to using Almeda’s poetry as transitional components, the narrator also observes that “no poem is unrhymed” in *Offerings* (53). This appears to be true, but upon closer inspection not all poems’ rhyme schemes are the same. In fact, there are three different variations. The most recurrent is ABCB, which is simultaneously jovial, solemn, and reflective. ABAB is next in terms of frequency of use – these poems are both mystical and hopeful. “A Visit to My Family” is the only poem with a five-line stanza, and its rhyme scheme is more haphazard. Its description is also the shortest and most dismal: “a visit to the cemetery, a one-sided conversation” (52). When the narrator quotes each poem throughout the story, the subsequent section echoes its distinctive theme, tone, and truth. That being said, the narrator incorporates Almeda’s poetry into her own form of art: relaying the story, whether made up or true, of “our poetess” (50).

Oftentimes fictional stories are the most intriguing stories. Since poetry provides a way to process trauma and grief through the use of figurative language, those who have the greatest need to process would presumably write the best poetry. Burt’s argument aligns with Munro’s short story when he concludes that insane, drunken, and exhausted authors have written some of

the best poetry; Goethe, for instance, “wrote his finest novel during a dreamy trance” (275).

Almeda, then, goes to write her finest poem during a bloody, hot attack of her past trauma:

Of course, Almeda in her observations cannot escape words. She may think she can, but she can't. Soon this glowing and swelling begins to suggest words – not specific words but a flow of words somewhere, just about ready to make themselves known to her. Poems, even. Yes, again, poems. Or one poem. Isn't that the idea – one very great poem that will contain everything and, oh, that will make all other poems, the poems she has written, inconsequential, mere trial and error, mere rags? (70)

“Meneseteung” carries the notion that “the best poems, the best stories, and the best pictures, are largely products of the mind's unconscious workings” (Burt 276). Interestingly, everything in the scene where Almeda finds inspiration to write “the poem of all poems” happens behind locked doors – Almeda locks the back door, and then “locks [the front door], too” (68). This enclosed space represents her unconscious mind working beyond her conscious thoughts in an effort to process the traumatic experiences she has undergone.

As Alice Munro's “Meneseteung” progresses, Almeda Roth displays many of the various characteristics of post-traumatic stress. From writing poetry, to locking herself alone in her house, to waking up intensely hot – this diagnosis reveals her ability to cope by using the written word. Both the narrator and Almeda use figurative, sometimes fictional, language in order to process their thoughts, emotions, and grief. Almeda's poetry becomes both a transitional device and a coping mechanism: it reveals the deeper psychological explanations to her actions as well as her inability to fully communicate the significance of her past ordeals. After the trigger event, at the height of her panic, within her unconscious mind arises the greatest work of poetry she has

yet to conceive: “Meneseteung.” It seems only fitting that Munro would make this the title of the larger short story. She seems to suggest that the narrator, too, writes her greatest piece of art upon revisiting the traumatic and dismal past of the late Almeda Roth.

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Commentary

Emily Youree

Insignificance and Isolation: Kim Addonizio's "Man on a Corner"

At first glance, Kim Addonizio's poem, "Man on a Corner," appears to be a straightforward narrative. However, upon closer analysis through a new critical reading, the poem contains a complex series of tensions. Through the poem's specific example of a homeless man and his dog on a street corner, the author addresses class relations and how the middle class tends to view the poor and homeless. Through subtle literary devices, Addonizio examines the tension between the well-to-do and the "invisible" people, finally resolving that the latter are just as significant as the former.

From the beginning of "Man on a Corner," Addonizio makes use of literary devices, including alliteration in the second through fourth lines, to set the stage for her poem's message. Line two repeats the syllable "b" twice: "against the bank's brick wall on his blanket, while" (2). The repetition of the letter emphasizes the mundane, grubby reality of the man's situation. The bank, the brick wall, and the blanket are all three tied together as essential parts of the man's bleak daily life. In the next two lines, the "f" sound appears four times: "a florist carrying in bouquets, the mild/fragrance of the flowers a brief antidote" (3-4). The florist, flowers, and fragrance are all linked, as well as the word "brief," emphasizing the fleeting nature of the respite, and perhaps suggesting that all such respites are short lived. Just as the smell of flowers is a relief, so the soft, breathy "f" sound is a brief interlude from the blunt subject of the poem.

The next lines begin to examine the main tension of the poem: the man on the corner versus those around him. In lines six and seven, Addonizio writes: "to the exhaust of a bus, just

releasing/its passengers; they swirl around him, like notes.” Line six enjambes on the word “releasing,” tying the action of releasing to the word “exhaust” earlier in the sentence. However, the enjambment resolves with “its passengers” in line seven. By connecting “releasing” to both “exhaust” and “passengers,” the speaker compares the people on the bus to exhaust. They are artificial, unseeing and unfeeling, and when they are released from the bus they swirl around the man and dissipate, no different to him than grey fumes. More than just this specific man versus the world, Addonizio explores the broader tensions of the middle and upper class versus the poor, isolation versus community, a meaningful life versus an insignificant one.

The speaker further examines these ideas in the extended alliteration present in lines six through nine:

to the exhaust of a bus, just releasing
its passengers; they swirl around him, like notes
of some random music, scattering in the increasing
dusk.

The letter “s” is repeated extensively throughout the four lines, connecting a long string of words and creating the hissing sound of bus fumes and unintelligible conversation. Once again, the passengers are connected to the bus exhaust. They are also compared—both outright and through alliteration—to notes of music. At first, this seems like a sudden shift to a positive tone, especially when compared to the choking exhaust of a few lines before, but upon closer inspection, it is still in line with the previous descriptions. They are “random” notes, without pattern or direction, and they pass by the man like noise: clearly heard, but immaterial and untouchable. The third noun to which the passengers are alliteratively linked is “dusk,” indicating the murky, greyish quality of the people drifting past him (8, 9). Their motions are

alliterative as well: they are released, they swirl, and they scatter, ineffectual as vapor. The man on the corner is insignificant to them, so they pass him by, as much good to him as exhaust or tuneless music. They have no eyes to see the man before them and no hands to help him. Among a crowd, he remains in isolation.

Line nine marks the reintroduction of a significant character: the golden retriever mentioned at the poem's beginning. Since people are naturally sympathetic toward animals—especially domestic ones such as a golden retriever—the reader connects to the dog from line one. Addonizio makes good use of this connection, knowing that the reader will empathize with the dog as much as or more than they would a human character. In lines nine through eleven, she introduces a question through the dog: “dusk. Now the prone dog lifts its head/and looks at him, as though a sudden thought's/occurred to it; the man slumps, dead” (9-11). As an unnamed idea occurs to the dog, the reader begins to imagine what the dog is thinking, whether it is just realizing the man's isolation, or noticing the people passing him by. For a few lines, the reader is in suspense as to what the dog will do next.

The man's insignificance and isolation returns and is taken a step further in lines eleven and twelve: “occurred to it; the man slumps, dead/or dreaming, figure in a drama not.” At “dead,” the reader is shocked and a bit appalled, wondering if the man's death is the thought that just occurred to the dog or, if it is real, how long he has been dead. When the enjambment resolves with “or dreaming,” the reader can breathe a sigh of relief. However, Addonizio does not include this enjambment for simple shock value. The uncertainty regarding whether or not the man is dead emphasizes how little he—or people like him—matter to “regular” people. He is so isolated from them that they think of him as much as the bus exhaust does. He could be dead, or he could be asleep. Who knows? Who cares?

The form of the poem appears to be free verse at first glance, but upon close reading, readers identify the structure as a sonnet: it contains fourteen lines, consisting of three quatrains and a couplet at the end. Also like a sonnet, the message of the poem appears in the final couplet. Although most of the poem deals with the bleak surroundings of the man on the corner, the last couplet reveals a hint of hope: “of the dog’s making, but all it knows/of love; it shifts, sighs, lays its head close” (13-14). The enjambment of “all it knows” resolves into “of love” in line fourteen, but the pause on “knows” reveals a deeper meaning. Not only is the man all that the dog knows of love, he is all the dog *knows*. In spite of all the people who pass him by and dismiss him as insignificant, the dog chooses him, loves him, and declares that he is just as important as the people swirling around him—perhaps more important. He is not in complete isolation. After twelve lines of being invisible and alone, the man on the corner—and those whom he represents in the world—matters.

“Man on a Corner” is more than a narrative poem: it is a social commentary. Through the poem’s example of one man and a dog on a street corner, Addonizio questions how the upper and middle class view the poor, asking if the homeless are really nothing more than obstacles momentarily parting the stream of evening commuters. She asks if they have any sort of meaningful lives, or if they are even capable of living a meaningful life, since they are isolated from society. At the end of the sonnet, as the dog lays its head close to its master, Addonizio provides an answer: just as the dog accepts the man and cares about him, so the exhaust-like commuters should notice and care about the man. The poor, the homeless, and the “invisible people” are capable and worthy of being loved, and their lives have meaning. According to Kim Addonizio, the man on the corner is more than exhaust.

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Bailey Bridgeman

Why Wolves Can't Speak Latin

In an interview with *The Times*, Wes Anderson discusses the making of *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, specifically the widely disputed wolf scene that occurs immediately after the climax of the film. When considering the importance of the seemingly random yet empowering scene, Anderson states, “That scene is why I’m making the movie” (Rifkind). A cursory viewing of the film suggests that the wolf scene serves as an empowering moment where Mr. Fox triumphantly confronts his “phobia of wolves” and embraces his inner wildness. While this interpretation contains substance, I argue that the wolf scene emphasizes Mr. Fox’s scientific worldview as the reason for his alienation from himself and, in turn, the natural world.

In the original story told by Roald Dahl, the wolf scene does not occur. While adapting the children’s book into a full-length film, Anderson had to extend elements of the plot, thereby reaching beyond the original concerns of Dahl’s work. While the book focuses on a single plotline with the fox vs. human conflict, Anderson chooses to focus the attention of the film on Mr. Fox’s struggle with embracing domesticity and fatherhood. As the Fox family continues to grow, Mrs. Fox requires that Mr. Fox find a safer line of work, namely that he stop his thieving ways and write for an irrelevant newspaper instead. While Mr. Fox desires to obey his wife’s commands, he finds himself dissatisfied with his new line of work. In an attempt to regain his spirit, he plans one more heist but finds himself in a situation that places him and the rest of the local animal community in danger.

When the animal population declares war on the local farming businesses, Mr. Fox begins referring to his fellow animals by their biological names, using Latin binomial nomenclature. Using rigid scientific definitions forces Mr. Fox into a narrow, linear view of his identity as a fox. He refers to himself as *Vulpes vulpes*, which reaffirms the influence of science on his understanding of himself. A recurring theme in the film is Mr. Fox's inability to understand what it means to be a fox. There is a constant tension within Mr. Fox's actions as he moves between the polished world of human civilization and the untamed environment of his natural instincts. Anderson perfectly exhibits this tension in a dinner scene where Mr. Fox, while wearing a sweater vest, states his concern about the fluctuating housing market then proceeds to ravenously devour his meal. The juxtaposition of Mr. Fox's wildness and tamedness creates the tension that momentarily resolves in the wolf scene.

Immediately following their triumphant retrieval of Kristofferson, who was held hostage in enemy territory, the victorious foxes stop their motorcycle to embrace the sight of a wolf lingering on an icy cliff on the side of the road. Stunned by the beauty of the wolf and confronted by his "phobia," Mr. Fox attempts to converse with the wild creature. Mr. Fox invokes the wolf with its scientific name, *Canis lupus*, and proceeds to introduce himself with his own scientific name. He quickly realizes that the wolf does not speak English or Latin when he receives a blank stare in return to his greeting. He then comically addresses the wolf in French, but also to no avail. The wolf does not understand the human language used by Mr. Fox because the social construction of language does not exist within the wolves untamed environment. Likewise, the scientific categorization used by Mr. Fox does not translate into the wolf's experience. Mr. Fox sees the wolf as "other," while the wolf sees Mr. Fox as a fellow member of the animal kingdom.

It is not a coincidence that Anderson chooses to use a wolf in this scene rather than any other predatory animal. Foxes and wolves share similar body and facial structures, especially in the animation, which makes the wolf and fox appear similar in size. When Mr. Fox raises his fist in one last attempt at communicating with the wolf and the wolf raises his paw in return, Mr. Fox recognizes the solidarity between the wolf and himself as creatures sharing in a common animal experience. Through this moment, Mr. Fox gains a greater understanding of what it means to be a fox. He moves beyond the arbitrary construction of species conferred upon the natural world as a means of separating the animal kingdom and recognizes his place as a member of a thriving habitat, where he can follow his instincts free from the social pressures of civilization.

Immediately following the wolf's departure from the scene, a train quickly speeds through the background of the landscape. This fleeting moment in the scene reinforces the influence of Mr. Fox's environment, which is saturated by the authority of science and technology. While the audience hopes that Mr. Fox will continue to break free from the confines of scientific thought, the train serves as a cautionary sign that people, or foxes, construct their identity from their environment.

In the wolf scene, Anderson makes a profound claim about the social construction of identity. While this statement directly applies to Mr. Fox in the film, hopefully it influences the perspective of his human audience. In a contemporary social climate that draws battle lines between people who differ from one another, Anderson reminds us that shared experiences have the ability to bind us to each other.

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Review

Jud Potter

***Shin Godzilla* Updates the King of Monsters for a Contemporary Audience**

Toho, the original company behind the King of Monsters, is back, and that is cause for celebration. After a string of misfires from American production companies, Godzilla returns home to Japan for the first time in a decade. The movie is entitled *Shin Godzilla: Godzilla Resurgence*, and resurge he does.

--The Monster Arrives--

The film starts with an odd, “natural” event occurring in the water just off the coast of a major Japanese city. We are shown title card after title card introducing various bureaucrats and government officials debating about the best way to investigate this odd phenomenon. The number of people and titles is overwhelming until you realize the film is humorously pointing out that there are far too many officials to respond quickly and effectively when disaster strikes. A particularly amusing edit shows one meeting abruptly ending with the title card, “several hours later,” which cuts to all of the same people talking in circles about the same thing—the only difference being that they are in a different room.

Before any plan can be implemented, Godzilla leaves the water and enters the city, and everyone is caught off guard. This creature is not Godzilla, at least not as we have seen him before. This creature has huge, squid-like saucer eyes and no arms. It pushes itself through city streets like a plow through dirt until it reaches the river. The creature swims through the water, causing the river to flood its banks. We see water rushing down streets and alleyways while helpless pedestrians flee. Many people barely avoid the fast-moving water filled with dangerous

debris from the city. The images are striking, and this is the scene in which some of the central ideas of the film come into focus. These images are evocative of footage from the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in 2011.

--A Little History--

The 1954 *Godzilla* endeavors to address the horrifying nuclear conclusion of World War II in Japan. The older version of the creature is a slow, lumbering beast that burns everything with fire and leaves radiation in his footprints. In that film, director Ishirō Honda goes so far as to create the beast's roar and stomping from several sounds that evoke the idea of war, including air-raid sirens and exploding bombs, respectively. Hearing the beast's roar and footsteps in theaters, war veterans and civilians who experienced those sounds as actual indicators of danger would have had a tremendously visceral and moving experience. *Shin Godzilla* endeavors to do the same thing, but instead of the nuclear end to the Second World War, its monster explores the emotional fallout of the earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent nuclear meltdown at Fukushima in 2011.

When we see people running scared from floodwater in the middle of a city, it is important to realize the context for that fear. Moreover, the inefficient bureaucracy that plagues the first two acts of the film resembles the real bureaucratic nightmare that happened only a few years ago in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. However, just when we feel we have an idea of what the film is going for, the armless, squid-like Godzilla stands up. It grows arms and moves back into the sea.

--A Familiar, City-Stomping Behemoth--

In the first act of the film, Godzilla represents the earthquake and tsunami that led to the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima. When he returns in the second act, it is the embodiment of the

meltdown itself. The beast reemerges and, fittingly, lumbers directly to the nearest nuclear power plant to feed on the radiation. The cinematography here is gorgeous. There is a particular wide helicopter shot where Godzilla steps through an electric power plant, and the entire grid goes dark around him. When the city goes dark, the only light present is coming from his bioluminescent spines, which cast a ghostly pallor over the city. It is important to note that his bioluminescence is reminiscent of many deep-sea creatures that actually exist. That, along with his sharp, uneven fangs and tiny fish eyes (which have not grown since his body did) thematically identifies Godzilla as a natural disaster rather than the result of cavalier experimentation and deployment of nuclear weapons, a thematic departure from the original film. However, the monster from *Shin Godzilla* has more in common with the original 1954 monster than any of the intervening interpretations. Later incarnations of the King of Monsters have made him into a more friendly, relatable monster that is often played as a protagonist against other monsters. These interpretations lose sight of the thematic resonance that Godzilla can have when coupled with real-life disasters. *Shin Godzilla* gives us a refreshing return to the iconic original monster, that is, to an alien, destructive force.

--There are People in These Movies Too, Right?--

Kaiju films have an interesting relationship with their human characters because most audiences want to see a monster destroy a city, and any personal drama that gets in the way of the action is unappreciated. Most of the time, Godzilla films (with the exception of the original) have obligatory character work that is shallow and, quite frankly, grating and irritating. However, *Shin Godzilla*, like the original, makes characters matter to the audience because they matter in the film. These characters give the film a level of emotional reality that helps audiences relate to an otherwise fantastical situation. For example, one of the most well-written characters

in the film is an American-born Japanese woman liaising between Japanese and American interests as an ambassador during the Godzilla crisis. Over the course of the film, we learn that she wants to become President of the United States someday. She does not fall in love, refreshingly, with the male lead in the third act. There are several multi-layered characters like her in the film, and their complex internal lives give us something to emotionally invest in between scenes of apocalyptic destruction.

Our protagonists begin the film relatively spread out among various groups of people having unproductive meetings. However, as decisions are made and situations get worse, they begin to come together, and we realize that the heroes of the story are the ones who are willing to do their jobs selflessly. They contrast with some government officials who are more interested in serving (or in some cases, preserving) themselves. In this respect, this film honors the heroism of those who showed up and did their jobs despite personal risk in 2011. For example, the film makes heroes of the rescue crews who went around saving people during the tsunami. The protagonists of *Shin Godzilla* are perhaps even more reflective of the firefighters and Fukushima power plant employees who selflessly risked radiation poisoning by remaining in the plant to minimize the damage far past the point at which it was safe to do so.

--A Tale of Three Cities: Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and Fukushima--

Later in the film, when the momentum of the conflict has swung from the people to Godzilla and back again several times, we get a scene in which Godzilla is seemingly under control for a moment. Godzilla has depleted its energy by deploying destructive beams of radioactive light. He stands dormant, sleeping in the middle of the city. The scientists understand that he will only be asleep for a few days. The global powers, especially the U.S., want to nuke the beast, destroying any chance of it leaving Japan. In a savvy moment of political insight, the

United States of the film is all too eager to destroy the beast and the city along with it. The Japanese people in charge want to take care of the problem without the “help” of the United States dropping a nuke on them. The irony of the situation is not lost in the film. One character says to another that “the postwar period never really ended.” This is a reference to the way in which the U.S. dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war and subsequently directed the rebuilding of Japan’s infrastructure and culture. The film and the protagonists focus on a single goal at this point: to prevent this catastrophe from happening again at all costs. They are able to negotiate a small window of time in which they can implement a plan to defeat Godzilla. Their plan is to fill Godzilla with enough nuclear coolant to still his radioactive body. When they are delivering the coolant in the climax of the film, they use large pump trucks, the same kind of trucks used to deploy coolant into the nuclear plant at Fukushima in real life.

--Living in His Shadow--

In the end, they are able to get just enough coolant into Godzilla so that when he dramatically rises to his feet at the last second, he freezes solid. However, he is too big to move and will remain frozen in the heart of the city, like just another skyscraper. This is a poignant way to end the film. During the film’s coda, as the protagonists talk to one another about the permanence of Godzilla, he stands looming in soft focus between them. The final shot is a slow pan up the tail of the beast. When we reach the end of the tail, we realize that the sharp edges and odd angles of broken skin are actually parts of people and human bones embedded into the flesh of the tail. These angular, harsh human figures are not unlike the infamous and terrifying silhouettes of those turned instantly to ash during the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leaving behind only scorched, ashen shadows. *Shin Godzilla* reminds us of the legacy of its 1954

predecessor and of the horrors of nuclear activity gone wrong. The immovability of this horror from the city center means that the experience cannot be removed from those who experienced it, just like the events of 2011 were watershed moments for countless people and families who lost homes and loved ones. This sort of trauma is not something one blithely moves past. This kind of shock sticks to a society, the same way those bones are stuck in Godzilla's tail. Although people will not be able to forget what happened, they will learn to live with it, given time. The city will rebuild around the monster, but this time, they will have to build *around* him, incorporating the trauma into whatever comes next. This movie is Kaiju cinema at its best. Well-made Kaiju disaster films not only help us process the disaster and tragedy that we experience but also give us perspective. Our small daily problems can be made insignificant by real catastrophes, such as the natural disasters in Japan in 2011 or the events in New York in 2001. These movies remind us that life is fragile and that it can change in an instant. They remind us to savor every moment of life and live as selflessly as we can because there is no way to predict when Godzilla will strike again.

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Commentary

Hudson Reynolds

***broken\ground* Reflection**

Chris Lawson and Margaret Wrinkle's 1996 documentary short *broken\ground* authentically and thoughtfully captures the problem of the racial divide in Birmingham, Alabama. Their compilation of interviews with both white and black interviewees articulates the racial partition resulting from fear, lack of communication, and refusal to address the problem of racism head on.

The film opens with repetitions of the common and misguided phrase, "Race does not matter," overlaid with footage of police brutality and racial segregation. Though we can easily deconstruct race and discuss its arbitrary nature, we cannot simply disregard it because societal institutions have forced us into races. Though race is a social construct, deciding it simply "doesn't matter" only perpetuates the problem. Many of the people interviewed in the film discuss this problem/issue in detail. People whom society labels as "white" and "black" hold completely different realities from one another because they view society in completely different ways. The ongoing American history of black oppression cannot simply be dismissed with, "Race does not matter, so why are we even talking about it?" People who talk about race in this way only wish to avoid the often uncomfortable conversation about how "white" people and "black" people are different because of society's labels and differing treatments.

Admitting that racial differences exist seems especially difficult for "white" people because addressing the differences shines light on white privilege. Many people are comfortable believing the "American Dream" that we are all given an equal chance from birth to make our

own success through hard work. With the suggestion that minorities are living in a completely different society where they must overcome racial prejudice and combat a social system built against them, the happy illusion of everyone having an equal chance in this country quickly falls apart. This upsets “hard working” white people because addressing white privilege concedes that they had advantage over others rather than fairly earning their success. When people say phrases such as, “Race does not matter,” they remain part of the problem of racism.

So how can we solve racism in Birmingham and America? Can we answer this question through a forty-six-minute documentary and a three-page paper written by an undergraduate? No. But I reiterate what the film so excellently illustrates: racism is a constant internal battle. Society has ingrained racism into our minds. It is only through communication with opposite races that we can combat racism. We cannot close ourselves off by communicating only with like-minded people and people of our own race. Though we rarely see racism in the clownish form that one of the white interviewees references when saying that the mixture of white and black people are a threat to America, racism takes other divisive forms.

Many of the white interviewees illustrate the more subtle forms of racism within their discussions of the difference between black and white people. One white man describes black men as uneducated, with many children and lovers, and describes black women as uneducated and slow. This response shows that people still rely heavily on stereotypes rather than actually getting to know people of opposite races. People rely on media representations and racial metanarratives that only result in more division. *broken\ground* makes an excellent point in emphasizing the need for communication about race. It is only when we address the racist rhetoric ingrained into our minds that we can truly begin healing. Perhaps the most haunting interview the film contains involves a white woman expressing with incredible vulnerability how

she could not get away from the looming thought that she was better than black people. It was only when she discussed these horrific intrusive thoughts with her black friend that she was able to move past them. It takes incredible amounts of courage to show that much vulnerability, but to truly communicate about race and truly understand perspectives of other races, we must be able to show vulnerability and genuine care.

We are at a critical point for race relations in Birmingham and in our nation. Police brutality against black people is still a daily occurrence, the Ku Klux Klan are active and are leaving fliers in our city, and a racially provocative candidate was just elected into the Oval Office. Togetherness is critical so that we do not drift farther from one another. In these divisive times, we need communication and understanding to stomp out the perpetuation of racism. Bryan Stevenson discussed the need for understanding in both the documentary and his Davis Lecture. He stated that we must put ourselves in uncomfortable situations to gain understanding of different perspectives. We need to have discussions on how we genuinely feel about race and about what we can do to help one another. If we are to mend the deteriorating race relations of our country, we must fight our own misunderstanding of people from differing races. We must combat the temptation to avoid the uncomfortable discussion of race altogether and face the challenge directly in this time of rampant racial division.

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Lindsey Brodt

Lesvos, Greece

I heard once that Catholics all sing the same liturgy for a specific reason. When God, who is outside of time, hears all the voices, from all the different ages of man, they blend together in soulful harmony. For Him, languages and cultures and experiences converge to make music.

These are the voices I met at a refugee camp called Moria, in Lesvos, Greece, between February and May 2016. The beauty and pain of their stories cannot be separated from one another.

...

A family invited us to drink chai in their tent, and of course we accepted. We all sat, drinking lukewarm tea and eating Syrian-style trail mix. The family consisted of a former body builder from Damascus, a university student studying tourism, and a one-year-old baby. What I remember most is how normal everything seemed. If I had not been sitting in Moria, I would have guessed this was an average dinner out with some friends. At one point, the man talked about his experience there. He said this was not living. He said they couldn't do anything all day, and when night came; they could not have sex, because they were not in the mood. How could they be in a place like this? As we left, he gave a request: if we get sandals, remember his wife.

...

Moria became a detention center, and everything changed. People stayed for weeks and months at a time, waiting to be granted asylum or deported. We couldn't give out enough clothes to everyone there, over 4,000 people, so we decided to hand out detergent. We physically could not sort and distribute clothes fast enough to keep up with the constant influx and shifting of people. So we decided that allowing people to wash the few outfits they had was the wisest short-term solution. Someone went to town and picked up all the powder detergent they could find. Then, locked in the clothing tent, we bagged hundreds of packets of detergent. We began our only job for the day: handing out detergent to every family in the camp. At first glance, this seemed like a simple task. However, when people knew you as the volunteers that give out clothes, and no one was doing that, things got wildly chaotic. Unfortunately, everyone in the camp knew the English word "tomorrow." More often than not, "tomorrow" at Moria did not mean the day after today. It usually meant that there was not a set time, and it would probably take a week or more. So when we tried to tell people that we would hand out clothes again tomorrow, they were not pleased. It broke my heart. But, with a severe language barrier combined with an unstable situation, "maybe tomorrow" was as accurate as possible. And so, there we were, handing out detergent near the front of the compound. At one point, a Syrian woman, followed by her two daughters approached me. She pointed at her shoes, indicating they weren't good. I told her "I'm sorry" and shrugged. She grabbed my hand and started yelling at me in Arabic. She yelled and yelled and held my hand. I just listened, nodding along at her points. After a few minutes, she calmed down and smiled, and maybe laughed a little. We both, without having to speak the other's language, knew how hard and frustrating the situation was

for everyone. Neither of us could fix it, and she needed to vent. She kissed my cheek and went on her way.

...

Every morning, after people left the rooms of the family compound, we cleaned every bunk and refolded all the blankets. If any were soiled, we threw them in a pile to be washed. It took several hours. After finishing on this particular day, I was asked to pick up trash. There were normal kitchen-sized trash cans outside of each room, overflowing with discarded food from dinner. Along the corridor, there were several small dumpsters. My job was to dump all the food into the dumpsters and replace the dumpsters with empty ones, from the hill outside of the family compound. So I began, unlocking one dumpster and rolling it to one end of the level. Three Syrian boys saw me and realized the dumpsters moved. They loved it. We made a game of running as fast as we could from room to room, putting the trash in as fast as possible so we could keep running with the dumpster. I would sprint, pulling the trash, and then stop suddenly. They seemed surprised each time. After a moment of hesitation, they followed me to dump trash. We raced to put trash in the dumpster, then ran. They laughed and laughed as they ran alongside a giant rolling trashcan. People sitting in the doorways smiled as we rushed past.

...

As I sat in the clothing tent, sorting through men's pants, a boy named Himyat joined me. He sat on the bench opposite me. I looked at him and asked "family?" He listed off every member of his extended family, back in Afghanistan. Eventually, through charades and broken

English, I pieced together his story. Himyat and Sami, his friend, were both eleven years old and from Afghanistan. Back home, they lived in the countryside near Herat. Himyat's father had two wives, so he had many brothers and sisters. His own mother had five children. His father was killed in a car, either from a shooting or a bomb. I suspect the Taliban was involved.

Either way, I think that specific tragedy prompted both boys' journey. Himyat left with his uncle and cousins, while his mother stayed with her other children. Sami and his parents also travelled with them. From Afghanistan, they travelled through Iran in order to cross into Turkey. Typically, the journey is made up of a lot of walking and hitch hiking when possible. Some people fly into Iran and walk to Turkey, but I do not believe they were able to afford that option. Sometime during their journey in Iran, the police caught Sami's parents. They were deported back to Afghanistan.

However, Sami continued the journey with Himyat and his relatives. Once in Turkey, they had to cross the Aegean Sea by raft into Greece. This crossing can take up to nine hours in a small rubber boat built for fifteen, but holding fifty. Once in Greece, they were put in the Moria detention center. They hoped to go to Germany, to reunite with one of Sami's brother there. And we just sat in the clothing tent, sorting clothes and laughing and talking about our families.

...

We headed up to the family compound, past the registration area, W.C., and medical tent. Many days, there were special cases in which families that were allowed to stay in the family compound all day. The reasons vary, but on that day, one family was allowed to stay because of their twenty-six-day-old baby. The mother left Iran pregnant and gave birth sometime while

walking across the snowy mountains to reach Turkey, before crossing the Aegean in a raft. The family had several other children with them. Another family was also allowed to stay in the compound all day because of a sick three year old. The siblings from both families, four boys and a girl, were standing near the gate when we returned, playing with chalk with some other members of our team. We all started playing with them; the guys on our team started picking up the little boys and being silly. We ended up having piggyback races across the length of the compound. Two team members grabbed the feet and wrists of a kid and swung him. We played soccer. The kids laughed and laughed and begged for more. No one had played with them in a while. After we were worn out, we colored with chalk. We drew flowers, hearts, rainbows, and sunshine. One of the fathers joined us and began to draw a picture. After a while, it became clear that he was drawing a picture of his journey across the water. He drew a boat, with stick figures, except they were all covered in blood.

Quickly after that, we were called away to begin letting people back into the family housing. At 3:30, they lined up at the gate, and we let them in, one family at a time. That day, I was a runner, so once they were assigned to a room, I directed them there. I helped people with their bags and gave lots of smiles. We started on one end of the housing unit, and filled the rooms all the way down, and then moved down to the next level. The process got pretty complicated and tricky. On this particular day, we had one man that was dissatisfied with his living arrangement and was causing a holdup with the sorting process. Another man, named Emir, stepped up and began translating between English and Farsi. He told this man that it was not possible for anyone to have a room to themselves, especially with such a small family. He also told the man everyone needs to be flexible, so that we can get everyone housed. That way no one will have to spend the night outside. After almost an hour of Emir explaining and insisting,

the man understood. Emir spent the rest of the time while we were placing people, floating back and forth between rooms and translating as needed.

When the rest of my team went down to move people on the next level, I stayed and managed the gate. Basically, I let people in and out of the family compound on that level. It was not a difficult job, but usually there's a steady stream until bedtime. While I was up there, Emir came by and began to tell me his story. From Afghanistan, he is the oldest of four: two brothers and a sister. She's ten. He worked at a small bank and loan office, but was previously in the military. When the Taliban invaded his province, his mother told him to leave or be beheaded. So he left with some members of his extended family. They flew to Iran, where they then travelled to Turkey, ducking from police like thieves. He said one hundred people died in front of him in the water. Now, he was in Moria for the week. After that, he asked me how long I was staying. When I said three months, he responded, with pity in his eyes, that it must be really hard for me to see everything that was happening there and be away from my family.

...

I sat at the gate, cold and tired. Because it was still winter, the night was dark and the chill biting. I rested, with wool socks and winter coat, shivering under the huge barbed wire fence. I was on the graveyard shift, and my responsibility was to check bracelets of those coming and going into the family housing compound. Moria was a former military prison, so families were placed within the gated barracks to sleep. It had three levels, each with nine different rooms; hundreds of people could squeeze into this area. At the peak, thirty to forty people slept in each room. Each room had half a dozen bunk beds, mats, and UNHCR grey blankets. I had

one of those wool blankets wrapped around me that night. Since only families with children were allowed to sleep in this area, I had to make sure only authorized people entered the room. It was a pretty slow job at night, because people usually stay in their rooms. The insanity occurred when a new boatload of people arrived and needed a place to sleep at three o'clock in the morning.

However, this night was quiet. Eventually, a man came up and began talking to me. A florist named Mustafa, he had left Syria with his mother. He told me that the only reason he had left was so that his mother could get some kind of medical treatment that she could not get in her home country. So they travelled together to Turkey, where he said the conditions were unbearable, similar to those of wild animals. He hoped that she would receive good hospital treatment in Europe. Because of the slight language barrier, he couldn't communicate exactly what his mother needed. We began to talk of life in Syria and the United States, and I uncovered a deep interest of his: American movies. His favorite was *Gone With the Wind*. We talked about other things that I have since forgotten, but I will never forget the chill in the air as I sat by the gate and he stood. It somehow felt so normal, and utterly surreal. An American girl and Syrian man should not be talking about a movie from the 1940s, in the middle of the night, in Greece. Yet we did. And it was good. Eventually, because of how cold it was, I started shivering a little. He walked away. A minute or two later, he came out of his room with a black hat in his hand. Insisting it was clean, he put it on my head. To keep me warm, he gave me his hat.

...

We went to every RHU (Refugee Housing Unit) and camping tent, when taking a census, and asked the size, nationality, and breakdown of each family. One day, we went to one where a man insisted we come inside and smoke hookah with him. He was from Afghanistan, along with the rest of his family, and they were sharing a tent with a Syrian family. After we kindly declined to smoke with him, a Syrian family also living there insisted we sit with them a while. The family consisted of a woman in her late thirties, a girl who was nineteen, and two small children. The woman told me she also had a child in the hospital. The mother's name was Hepa. I sat with her children, while she lay in her blanket and talked to me. Initially, we talked about the landscape of Syria. She told me of beautiful green mountains and wildflowers. She hoped I could visit someday. Calling it heaven, she told me when the war was over, she would return immediately. She repeated that word several times: immediately. Her husband went to Germany to prepare a place for her and their children. That was a year and a half ago. She told me she missed him so much, and all she wanted to do was hug his neck.

She then told me a little about her own journey. Hepa and her family walked from Syria to Turkey. Her youngest child was barely a toddler. They hitchhiked mostly, but she said at one point she had to walk a stretch of thirty kilometers. At some point, they were caught, and they all spent the night in jail. When they were crossing the Aegean, in flimsy rubber rafts, two men drowned in the boat with her. All she could do was try to shield the eyes of her children.

We also talked about movies. As with almost everyone I spoke to, *Titanic* was her favorite. She also liked *Friends* and *CSI*.

At some point in the conversation, she apologized to me that she couldn't get out of bed. She said she didn't know what to call it in English, but she had the "lady sickness." Her older

daughter giggled. They asked if I was married and seemed surprised that my answer, “I haven’t met the right person,” was a sufficient excuse in my culture.

Later, she asked me if I was a Muslim or a Christian. I responded Christian. She pulled out an Arabic New Testament from under her blanket. She read a little to her daughter in Arabic. Hepa told me she had been reading the New Testament and liked it. She said she loved Jesus because Allah spoke to him. Like Muhammad, or another of the prophets, Allah spoke to him. I told her she should read the story of the woman at the well. I told her it was my favorite. We talked a little more about Son of God versus holy man in the different faiths. She said she’d enjoyed reading and would continue.

...

Himyat got a skateboard. Or maybe Sami did. They shared it. They started by cautiously rolling it around the clothing tent. One of the volunteers joked about borrowing it. When she was out of earshot, Himyat joked to me about how if she got her hands on it, she would be so bad that she would injure herself and the police would arrest her. He communicated this through signs and gestures, which made me laugh and laugh.

We had to go to another camp to pick up donated clothes, and as we were leaving, Himyat and Sami joined us with their skateboard. During the night, the police had changed the rules to allow children to leave the camp premises, but they still couldn’t leave the eyesight of the guards. They skateboarded up and down the road, enjoying the freedom. It was hard to leave them behind on our errand. If we had been caught bringing them, we would have jeopardized their asylum claim.

When we returned and drove the car into the camp, kids started banging on the door and asking to be let in. So, we stopped and let a few in. Then, we stopped again and let more in. Eventually, we had ten people crowded in the front seat, and the entire back of the van was piled with stuff. I had to hold the door closed. The boys piled in and just beamed and beamed.

...

Doing a census one day, I was invited into the RHU of a family from Syria. They lived near the W.C., at the foot of the hill. They told me a man had burst through the door in the middle of the night, drunk and violent. He harassed everyone and wouldn't leave until all the men who were sleeping in that tent forced him out. Visibly shaken, the family asked to leave. They wanted to leave the compound and go somewhere else. Another camp, maybe more family friendly. Or something like that. It broke my heart to tell them that was not possible, and even if it was, they were safest at Moria. Young men, bored with the frustrating stillness of the day, would sneak through the fence, and walk to Mytilene to buy liquor. Then they'd get smashed. They'd take out the frustrations of the day through violence. I can't forget the look on their faces as they begged to be moved. They told me the police did nothing, which was true. I told them I would talk to my boss and see if we could spare a few people to patrol around at night, to increase a sense of security.

Jeremy told me no. He said no. Even though the Greek police were failing, we didn't have the people to spare.

...

In the clothing tent, Sami and Himyat helped me sort clothes. I was sorting through men's pants, and they were helping. When I moved on to the dresses, I would hold them up to them and say "For you?" They would laugh and laugh and pretend to be girls. Especially Himyat. He loved it. We came across a huge white dress, and Himyat put it on. He pranced around the clothing tent, pretending to be the Pope. He kissed people on the head and blessed them.

...

Most people arrived at the camp in the middle of the night, after crossing in a raft. So they came very wet and cold. One night while we were on shift, it stormed. I was outside of the clothing tent, doing crowd control. We had set up police barricades, like those used during a parade, to mark a line into the clothing tent. They went in a side door and came out the front. In the front hallway, they waited while we grabbed clothes for them from behind the curtain. I stood at the entrance door, letting people in as needed. This night, I stood in the rain. I didn't put my hood up in time, so the inside of it was soaking wet, and I didn't have a hat. Other than that, I was mostly dry. Or as dry as I could be in a rainstorm. We had five boats come through that night. All of the people were soaking wet and standing in line shivering. One man yelled out to me: "Hey miss, miss. You need to put a hat on. You're going to get sick. Your hair is wet." In the midst of his recent trauma, soaked condition, and shivering neighbors, he cared about my wet hair.

...

We had to say goodbye to a teammate one day. At the end of her shift, we all walked to the gate holding hands. I held Sami's hand as he walked beside me in his blue fleece. She held each of them and told them she loved them. They held onto her and wouldn't let go. She cried, and they cried. They wouldn't let go. We all cried together. The boys wouldn't let go. Finally, we had to pry them off of her and walk away. We were all crying. Suddenly, Himyat tried to run up and join us on the other side of the compound. The Greek police stopped him. So he ran along the chain link fence and stopped near to us. He just sobbed, with fingers interlocked in the fence. I looked back and saw him standing there, hysterically sobbing against the twenty-foot-tall fence.

...

After having been gone for a couple days, when we went back to shift, I saw Himyat across the corridor of NGOs, near the clothing tent. His face lit up, and when I got closer, he ran up to me and held me tight. At this point, he barely spoke any English, but I could hear his muffled words: "I love you." I held him tighter and whispered it back.

...

I love the idea of church liturgy. I love the idea of God listening to all the songs, outside of time. I love the idea of time being fluid, and that it can be experienced over and over and all together Right now, I look out over the water into Turkey. I can touch every rock and smooth

stone. I'm hugging Himyat, as he whispers, "I love you." The heat and smell of tea fills my face. I can smell the UNHCR wool and the odor of thousands of people. I feel the cold and sunshine. I walk through Moria, smiling and waving at every face. I'm in every moment. I stand in every good and beautiful memory. And together, each memory sings. Outside of time, I experience each simultaneously. I don't have to leave them behind, because they are happening now; the music sings just for me.

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Poetry

Ryan Lally

Cutting Down Trees

Logging is a theory of alienation:
Crippled old men crumble against
The crust of their earth—
They fall, like the breath of the clouds,
Swooning and suspended
From their rattling roots
To recline against mud, that matted rain;
My heart is chalked in sawdust.
The quiet inversion of a shadow
Collapses under the trajectory of my image
And I hear the brittle click of my spine,
The corpse-grinding symmetry.

And I know, too, that I live by a theory of physics,
As I wash sap from my hands
In the new sink we bought last August,
A mirror-plated business to replace
Our sticking brass, belting out alto
In little drips that stopped me
Just before sleep, as if the darkness was a dreaming,
Catching me soon,
Just before falling.

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Poetry

Ryan Lally

Flexing My Hand in Low Humidity

Suddenly I gesture softly,
The back of you, unpolished skin,
Tears like white seas, wondrous dross.
I run a finger along your roughness
Choking back the flutes of red.
These dead little droplets root like pigs
And I wipe my tongue against dry skin
Struggling to be the pragmatist.
A fine pelt of hair flakes against
These tan and dying strains of life.
Show me the time I burst
A knife through the pit of an avocado
And tickled a bone in the palm of my hand. Mark
The compressed stain along my thumb when you lingered
Too long with a frying pan. Remember all the simple scrapes
That festered crust on my knuckles?
Forgive me if I abused this little part of me.
These little wrappings that stretch
With the years crumble back with the oncoming
Novembers, Decembers, knife nicks, and loose nails. Twenty years
And we've taped ourselves back
Together with every last purple shimmer of afternoon.
How vain, how fantastic.

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Poetry

Clayton Long

The Model Viking Ship

There it sits
Commanding glory
Atop the voiceless stereo
The model Viking ship
That has never seen battle

Its body, flawed, tactically
Gaps between popsicle sticks
Make floating impossible
As does any rogue splash
Risking Elmer's work to the waves

Its glorious flag on mast
Screams wildly of intimidation
And an inability to color within lines
While bottlecap shields rest on the side
Put to use by Vikings long docked

It sits as a retired war vessel
Whose rust tells captivating tales
Enamored by all that hear
Of war formerly raged
Upon dark and wrathful seas

No stories shall be told by the vessel
As it splinters mutely in place
Other than those that one can see
From the permanent mount
Atop the bookshelf in a boy's room.

Poetry

*Maya Quinn***Jemma the Great**

One rectangle turned into two, a crease rested at its center.
Faded typeset characters signify the end of the adventure.
The ticket tucked away from bright Vegas lights
in my tiny hands. "Dinner's ready. Git in here."
My toes burrowed into the cigarette ash carpet
As I shuffled through the dimly lit hallway.
The squirrels scuttled against the studs in the drywall.
She stood there, in the archway of the kitchen.
Her swollen beer belly looming,
several years past due.
"You're old enough to get fix-ins."
Aunt Jemma's voice graveled out,
As she thrust the fine China plate towards me.
My eyes followed her as she traveled away,
beginning a ten thousand pieced journey
on the liquor soaked table. I teetered into the living room,
and met the flick of a lighter
and tapping of acrylic nails fumbling with a puzzle piece.
I crouched beside her with eyes wide,
engulfing the growing scene on the table.
"Germany. You ever seen it?" I shook my head,
her eyes now like the embers of her cigarette.
She revealed a box beneath the table. More tickets
reading Germany, Argentina, China . . .
Even a piece of Berlin's fallen wall.

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Contributors

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