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The Madness of Cannibalism and the Romance of Vampirism

by Charles Luke Barnwell

A census taker tried to quantify me once. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amarone.
—Hannibal Lecter, The Silence of the Lambs

IN 2003, THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE (AFI) polled roughly 1500 individuals about their opinions on the greatest screen villains in cinematic history (Schutt 1). Out of the countless options, those polled highlighted a certain cannibal psychologist as one of the most frightening villains to ever grace the screen. That man, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, is based on the character of Thomas Harris’s novel The Silence of the Lambs. For those unfamiliar, the film bases Lecter’s story as initially a B-story contrary to what one may presume is the main evil of the film. Instead, the film focuses on Clarice Starling’s rise through the ranks in the FBI and her search to track down the film’s “true” antagonist, “Buffalo Bill.” Regardless of the film’s multiple plotlines, it is Dr. Lecter’s taboo cannibalistic nature that provides the catalyst for the film. Yet, one must wonder the choice of cannibalism in the film as a muse for fear.

No matter how one may view a cannibal, one form of cannibalism brings a unified acceptance to cinematic audiences and the general population alike. Vampirism, the cannibal’s aesthetically pleasing and supernatural cousin, draws a young adult following in the form of multiple shows, films, and books with unrivaled success. Examples are plentiful—Twilight (2008), True Blood (2008-2014), Interview with a Vampire (1994), Buffy the Vampire
Slayer (1997-2001)—in which each paints the similarly seductive vampires into something much more tolerable than the cannibal. These four films or series manipulate the once feared horror figure and transform it into a broody and mysterious figure who attempts to live normally among humans. Vampire scholar Laura Wright writes regarding Twilight: “Meyer’s rewriting of vampire mythology strips vampires of their characteristic darkness and countercultural natures; these vampires like humans and want to be like them, so much so that they ascribe to a human dietary code and consume what most humans...consume, a diet centered around the bodies of animals” (354). Though the quote may be stretched to accommodate a few of the other texts mentioned, the modern vampire is nothing close to the polarizing figure of the cannibal. These vampires are simply misunderstood and can never escape the unfortunate hand dealt to them, and as a result, are not meant to be feared, but rather be sympathized with. Regardless of the vampire’s role in the film or book it is in, the connection between a vampire and cannibal will always remain; however, the question still lingers: why does American society in particular fear the cannibal, yet aestheticize a creature who participates in the same practices?

My claims lie within the intersections of the aforementioned terms “cannibalism” and “vampirism” in the French-Belgian horror Raw (2016, Julia Ducournau) and The Twilight Saga (2008-2014, Hardwicke, et al). Despite the obvious differences in the two, these films both portray the female coming of age story, but do so in a way that not only suits the cannibal (Raw) and the vampire (Twilight), but also connect the two through numerous connected scenes, likenesses in narrative, and an overall relationship between cannibals and vampires. In particular, I posit two assertions: Cannibals and vampires are synonymous with one another based upon the act of consumption, “othering” of the outcasted party, and the characteristics of madness that the protagonists in both films portray; and claiming the causes of cannibalism or vampirism are based upon sexual preferences, gender, and forms of psychosis. These claims are supported by several case studies, film studies, and an analysis of individuals who have dabbled in any type of cannibalism to gain power or energy as a vampire would.

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Perhaps it is the consumption of another human that strikes the unsettling horror associated with cannibalism, yet that same fear draws an unrelenting interest that creates the serial killers we know today—Jeffrey Dahmer, Issei Sagawa, Countess Elizabeth Bathory—and which seems to circu-
late within countless films, documentaries, or fan fiction based off of these maddened individuals. In an American society obsessed with the lust of murder, these individuals betray humanity by murdering, then push harder to betray humanity even further by consuming the victim. In a foreword by Diane Diamond in criminology professor David A. Bonn’s *Why We Love Serial Killers: The Curious Appeal of the World’s Most Savage Murderers*, Diamond claims the American captivation with the most unforgivable crimes originates from media’s portrayal of these men; simply, we never seem to forget the names of the infamous while the victims are quickly forgotten and cast away thanks to endless media coverage on their stories. Diamond writes:

All the publicity and public interest in these repeat murders has created a mom-and-pop group of Internet based memorabilia dealers. Selling everything from serial killers’ clothing, letters, locks of hair, and artwork to autographs, action figures, or even soil from the scenes of their crimes…[these vendors] make a living selling these items speaks volumes about our collective fascination with serial killers (VII).

The mere creation of memorabilia commemorating the horrible acts of these troubled individuals highlights the aestheticization of murder in the United States. Countless crime shows, films, and books exist for the mere reason that murder will always carry its weight on the entertainment market. We hang on every ritual and stylistic idiosyncrasy, starving for any small aspect that makes them unique. Diamond highlights the desire to give “cute names” to these real killers—the Zodiac Killer, Golden Gate Killer, “The Killer Clown” John Wayne Gacy—that “have little to do with the…ghastly actions of someone who kills over and over again” (VII). No matter how one views these individuals, there is a distinction in the perception of a serial killer versus a serial killer that is also a cannibal. A few months after the release of *The Silence of the Lambs* in theatres, authorities arrested Jeffrey Dahmer at the height of his crime spree. Shortly after his capture on August 12, 1991, *People* magazine published an article titled “Jeffrey Dahmer: Man or Monster?” The article reads: “[Dahmer] was a quiet man who worked in a chocolate factory. But at home in apartment 213, a real life *Silence of the Lambs* was unfolding” (Bonn. 10, 2.). At the height the cultural impact of *Silence of the Lambs*, media sought to connect the fic-
tional Hannibal Lecter’s action with Dahmer’s real actions. American media outlets pushed the terms “evil” or “monster” on Dahmer to alienate him from the typical killer, therefore dehumanizing the convicted serial killer. Dahmer was no longer a man, but instead only a monster or evil human. Bonn claims a possibility as to why media pushes a clear distinction between a “normal” serial killer versus the cannibal killer. He writes:

By linking him to Hannibal Lecter, the news media dehumanized Jeffrey Dahmer and framed him as a stylized super predator and cannibal…. after Dahmer was beaten to death in prison by a fellow inmate the cover of People magazine referred to his demise as the “Death of a Madman” (10. 1).

The use of terms “super predator,” “cannibal,” and “madman,” all play vital parts in understanding the cannibal’s role in society. The terms provide an insight into the media’s outlook on cannibalistic serial killers, which establishes two groups or “normal” killers and those who cross the taboo like in Dahmer’s case, cannibalism.

Despite the taboo placed on these categories, the cannibal’s acceptance into society is far behind any normal serial killer, let alone the fictional world of vampires. It is this exact intersectionality that beckons examination. Consider the victimology of most general male serial killings. Eric W. Hickey, the dean of the California School of Forensic Sciences, breaks down the percentages of serial murder in stranger-to-stranger violence in his book Serial Murderers and Their Victims. Hickey highlights a particular group of individuals who are prone to serial violence: women. He explains: “Young females, especially if they were alone, ranked the highest in general preference of offenders….Hitchhikers, students walking alone, women living alone or seeking employment, and women engaged in certain professions (such as nurses, models, and waitresses) sometimes or frequently increased their chances of being victimized” (207). Comparatively, we must examine the target audiences of the modern vampire, which happens to fall into the same group. In “(Un)safe Sex: Romancing the Vampire,” modern vampire scholar Karen Backstein claims the female-center narrative is the source of the following. She writes: “[The female] is the focus of the story, whether she’s narrating it (Twilight) or the active visual center of the screen image (Buffy the Vampire Slayer, True Blood)” (38). In the case of vampire fiction, the female is no longer just a victim like most serial killer or cannibal cases, but rather the
focus of the narrative. Instead of acting as just another name on the list, the female protagonist *is* the name on the list. We remember the “victims” in vampire horror versus those of cinematic or actual horror because of their places in the narrative. We replace the dangers of reality with the wonders of the supernatural, yet we still fall short of the acknowledgment of the shared connection between serial killings and vampires.

To better understand the connection between vampirism and cannibalism, one must distinguish the several types of cannibalism. In an 2016 article responding to his own quotes in *Real Crime Magazine*, Dr. Mark Griffiths asserts there are only seven possible reasons for one to resort to cannibalism: necessity for survival, control of population size, religious belief, grief, tribal warfare, or sexual gratification (1). It is from these seven reasons that the United States, like many other modernized civilizations, deem cannibalism as an evil act. Though it is resorted to in desperate times of survival—the Donner Party, Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, the Jamestown case of 1609—cannibalism remains a polarizing topic to any party who is daring enough to shed light upon it.

Before analyzing primary texts, several serial killers—including cannibals and true vampires—are worth dissecting. Beginning with one of the most horrific serial killers in recent history, the story of Jeffrey Dahmer highlights the the psychotic episodes most associated with cannibalism. Dahmer, most notably known for “[keeping] corpses around his home,” was often the victim of severe isolation that was fueled by the negligence of his parent’s looming divorce (Cawthorne 230). Often, Dahmer’s parents would leave him alone for days on end, forcing Dahmer to fill the voids of human connection in other ways. In the summer of 1978, Dahmer went searching to fill this void left by his parents. He wanted company. To him, anyone would do. Dahmer picked up an unlucky hitchhiker, Stephen Hicks (19), and took the man back to the Dahmer family home. The pair drank, told life stories, and enjoyed the company of the other; however, when Hicks decided it was time to leave, Dahmer reacted violently, hoping his newfound friend would stay a little longer. Hicks did stay longer. After Hicks insisted on leaving, Dahmer struck Hicks in the head with a dumbbell and strangled the remaining life from the man. Criminologist Nigel Cawthorne attributes Dahmer’s emotional starvation and overall fascination with death to the feeling of control. In *Serial Killers and Mass Murderers: Profiles of the World’s Most Barbaric Criminals*, Cawthorne highlights Dahmer’s cycles of murder. Cawthorne writes of “sex, companionship, and death” as equal parts in Dahmer’s psyche (232). Yet, these three traits never proved to be
enough for Dahmer, who eventually opted to “[eat] their flesh because that way they would be apart of him forever” (230). Often, Dahmer combined sex and death, but it was not until later in his murderous career that he opted to consume his victims. From Dahmer’s case, it is clear to see the link between cannibalism and the sexual gratification many killers like Dahmer experience in truly controlling their victims.

The second case of cannibalistic activity provide a deeper look into the sexual gratification Dahmer received in consuming his victims. The first, Issei Sagawa, a Japanese exchange student to Paris in 198, murdered his Dutch exchange student girlfriend named Renée Hartevelt in her apartment. Criminal psychologist Priscilla L. Walton uses identical phrasing to describe Sagawa’s act versus that of Dahmer’s. The term “possession” returns, furthering the simple notion that a cannibal eats to “possess” the victim forever. Following the murder Sagawa cut six kilograms of meat from Hartevelt’s body, bags the meat into labeled baggies, and photographs his work. As Sagawa attempted to dump the body, a local passerby noticed the contents of the bag. The passerby notified police, and a short time later, Sagawa admitted all to French authorities. Much like Dahmer, Sagawa went on to become a minor celebrity in his respective country. Sagawa went on to write In the Fog that details every moment before and after the murder as well as vivid details regarding the consumption of the flesh.

The third case of human consumption is much older than the aforementioned serial killers. From 1570-1610, Elizabeth Bathory (Erzebet Bathory in her native Hungaria), nicknamed “The Blood Countess,” murdered numerous individuals on any whim possible. The countess picked on mostly young and poor women who could disappear without much consideration from the public. Bathory tortured numerous abducted women, servants, and any other victim she could find. A majority of these women were virgins, much to Bathroy’s liking, for virgin blood was her preferred preservative of choice. Articles, claim Bathory’s consumption of human flesh and love for blood baths as a means to maintain her beauty and youth. Much like the cannibals listed above, Bathory’s choice to consume human flesh is a direct link to the desire the “absorb” energy or “preserve” the victims. In Serial Killers: Horrifying True-Life Cases of Pure Evil, criminologist Charlotte Greig highlights Bathory’s life as serial killer as a combination of myth and reality. Greig writes: “Bathory was said to be a vampire; her murderous exploits are part history part myth” (12.1). I suspect Bathory as the first cannibal-vampire hybrid due to her desire to keep her youthful nature.
Now, one must question, what makes Bathory a vampire and not a “normal” cannibal as the previous men? Dahmer and Sagawa could arguably fall into the same category of vampirism as Bathory. Dahmer consumed sexual and nutritional energy. Sagawa stated he wanted to “absorb” the qualities of beauty and height from Hartevelt. Yet, these two men are not considered the stereotypical vampire as Bathory is. Greig comments on this difference of perception. Greig writes: “The psychology of their bizarre blood-drinking ritual is complex, but as with the cannibal killers, it horrifies us, for here we see the breaking of another deep, ancient human taboo” (13. 1). Simply, there is almost little difference in the rituals. The gain of energy is parallel, the taboo is identical, and the choice of prey follows similar paths; however, the singular difference between the two is the public acceptance of the two parties by citizens and audiences. In “(Un) Safe Sex: Romancing the Vampire,” Karen Backstein writes: “across every medium… that particular type of vampire who serves as the narrative’s male lead and the heroine’s love interest—has transformed into a alluring combination of danger and sensitivity… a handsome romantic hero haunted by his lust for blood and his guilt for the humans he killed in the past” (38).

In contrast, the difficulty in aestheticizing the cannibal is highlighted in Backstein’s claim. The cannibal seldom can be an “alluring combination of danger and sensitivity” or ever possess a “[haunting for] his lust for blood and guilt for the human he killed in the past” for the killer possesses little remorse for his or her victim. Despite the cannibal and vampire’s mirroring rituals, the minute differences between the modern vampire and cannibal prohibit society from ever viewing them as related in any way. In contrast to the cannibal, the vampire exists in a world that deems it pleasing. At first glance, it is clear to see the negative connotation the former term has against the latter. As an example, it is of interest to highlight a portion from a cannibal text versus that of a vampire text. In James Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, an esteemed trading-post expert, Mr. Kurtz, is transformed into a “savage” by the African tribes surrounding the post. Conrad’s first person narrator, Charles Marlowe, explains:

The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we
were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories” (Conrad 2. 47).

From the excerpt, I would like to highlight the term “prehistoric men.” I imagine the term is used for lack of a better one to describe the sights Marlowe attempts to digest, but it draws an almost eerie portrayal of anyone different to the protagonist (a white male). Much like Marlowe’s arrival in a “New World,” the infamous Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas brought a similar portrayal of the natives of the area. Perhaps to create fear and a desire to return back to the explorer’s place of departure, Columbus’s native guides told stories of tribes that fed on human flesh, which as a result, led Columbus to coin his version of the term “prehistoric” by calling the natives “cannibals” (Burke 1). It is this fear of the unknown taboo of eating flesh that powers the “prehistoric” cannibal into his decisions to consume his fellow man. Contrarily, it is the aesthetically pleasing cousin that seems to draw an unrelenting praise from Gothic, Romantic, and modern audiences alike. This praise is clear in countless works of pop culture—Twilight (2008), True Blood (2008-2014), Interview with a Vampire (1994), Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2001)—in which each paints the similarly seductive vampires into something much more tolerable than the cannibal. These four films or series play with the vampire as a modern construct. Vampire scholar Laura Wright writes regarding Twilight: “Meyer’s rewriting of vampire mythology strips vampires of their characteristic darkness and countercultural natures; these vampires like humans and want to be like them, so much so that they ascribe to a human dietary code and consume what most humans...consume, a diet centered around the bodies of animals” (354). Though the quote may be stretched to accommodate a few of the other texts mentioned, the modern vampire is nothing close to the polarizing figure of the cannibal. These vampires are simply misunderstood former humans who cannot escape the unfortunate hand dealt to them, and as a result, are not meant to be feared, but rather be sympathized with.

Cinema’s portrayal of the respective modern cannibal and vampire produce the same polarizing distinctions serial murderers have versus cannibals. Though it may seem as if Raw and The Twilight Saga have little in common, numerous connections exist between the cannibal’s and vampire’s respective rises to power. Beginning with Raw, the opening scene takes place in the
assumed French countryside. A figure walks casually down a single-lane highway. The figure, which we will name “The Consumer,” is ominous, yet average in stature. The camera cuts to a passing car driving down the highway, then back to the original shot, but The Consumer is nowhere to be found. The car continues, then The Consumer jumps into its path, forcing the car to swerve into a tree adjacent to the road. The driver dies on impact, leaving The Consumer to do whatever it pleases to the driver. Much like the hunting of animals, the hunting of humans by serial killers and cannibals alike is the result of control and desire. In an interview with A&E, retired FBI profiler Dr. Mary Ellen O’Toole attributes the selection of victims to “a combination of [what is] available...accessible...and desirable.” (Janos). “The Consumer” follows the same selection template. In the opening scene, the victim—or food—is readily available and accessible for The Consumer to take. With little effort, it selects a victim, murders it in an apparent accident, and can leave the scene of the crime without a passerby spotting the event. I imagine the process of selecting and hunting the victim as a process of finding the most accessible and quality victim. After numerous slain victims, The Consumer has a type, though the audience lacks that information in the initial sequences. This preference is described as a process to Dr. O’Toole. She writes: “At first, you don’t know what you like and what you don’t like” (Janos). Paired with O’Toole’s description, it’s difficult to separate victim selection from a parent giving a child numerous foods until the child finds a few favorites that the parent can opt to feed the child in circulation. The same process applies to any serial murderer or cannibal. After numerous victims, numerous meals, the cannibal can pin down the exact body part or type of build as a prime candidate for consumption. These selections become part of the killer’s “signature” and display what Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek as “the unconscious of our desires” (Seltzer 2218). For example, Dahmer targeted a vast amount of homosexual men, performed intercourse, then murdered them out of guilt or self-deprecation. No matter the case, Dahmer’s homosexual unconscious desire forced the conflicted to man to face his fear of being different, then immediately erasing his wrongdoing by committing the vile act of murder in return.

The opening scene from the Twilight Saga’s first installment—Twilight—follows the same hunting template as Raw. Just as Raw’s opening does, the camera opens to a countryside. Most of the small details are similar; however, a few nuances change. Twilight begins in Forks, Washington, a town with little sunlight and an odd string of murders and disappearances.
caused by what the population deems as some sort of “animal control” issue. The scene opens to forest scenery where a deer grazes, birds chirp, and all seems norma. The camera switches to a first person point of view, then the camera pursues the deer. This version of “The Consumer” possesses an unrivaled aggression and chooses to catch the deer barehanded. Though the victimology of vampires is different based on combinations of origin and gender\textsuperscript{9}, the modern vampire\textsuperscript{10}, or the experimental vampire\textsuperscript{11}, it is vital to highlight why this version of the consumer opts for animal blood or flesh instead of human. In the previously mentioned Backstein article “(Un)safe Sex: Romancing the Vampire,” the author writes the modern vampire as a “story about self-control, about a man struggling to control his worst impulses” (38). These impulses catalyze the plots of both Raw and Twilight by forcing the consumers into situations often forcing difficult moral decisions; therefore, the Cullen family opts to describe themselves as “vegetarian” vampires. Vampire scholar Laura Wright furthers the examination of the Cullen family’s dietary choice in “Post-Vampire: The Politics of Drinking Humans and Animals in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Twilight, and True Blood,” Wright writes:

While Edward acknowledges that the use of the term “vegetarian” constitutes a kind of joke, the comparison indicates that such a diet is inherently unfulfilling; tofu and soymilk may sustain vegetarian humans, but they—like the blood of animals on which the Cullens subsist—are poor substitutes for the “real thing.”... a diet that leaves the vegetarian with an insatiable craving for what has been omitted: bloody meat.

The combined romanticization of a male vampire repressing his desires to eat his human lover with the unfulfilling nature of eating only animals proves to only strip the vampire of the dark nature it once possessed and instead replace it with a more romantic-based narrative. Perhaps Zizek’s “unconscious desires” play a role in the vampire’s life as well. Edward, a teenager who is perpetually 17 years old, falls in love with a relatively normal high school girl, who, unlike Edward, can age and experience a full life. I imagine juxtaposition of these two characters in a romantic setting as the constant longing by both parties to grasp what the other possesses. Edward may even see Bella as the perfect human to consume, stating Bella is “[his] own personal brand of heroin” (Twilight: 00:54-00:54.30). Between
Raw and Twilight’s respective openings, both scenes portray the drug-like nature of desire and beckon viewers to question what deep desires he or she must repress.

Raw and Twilight pay special mind to the diets of each film’s set of protagonists. In Raw, Justine, the sheltered teenage protagonist, follows her family’s tradition to go to veterinary school. Justine’s introduction into the film begins at a small diner outside of the school, where she eats with her family. The scenes opens to her face, asking the diner worker to serve mashed potatoes onto Justine’s plate. The worker asks: “no protein?” to which Justine replies: “no thanks, no meat” and grabs the plate and sits down with her parents (Raw: 00:2.55-00:3.05). After a few seconds, Justine spits out the food and a singular meatball falls out of her mouth, much to her mother’s dismay. From the visual cues, the family’s clear vegetarian lifestyle establishes meat’s taboo nature within the family. The mother bolts up, confronts the food worker off-screen, and exclaims: “This is unacceptable. We’re vegetarians!” (Raw: 00:4.10-04:30). From this sequence, it is Justine’s mother does not allow any dietary rule bending for a number of reasons. From only a few shots, viewers understand the strict rules Justine’s mother has created. Perhaps Justine “may be allergic” as the mother claims, or maybe the rule falls into the same category as the Cullen family morals (Raw 00:4.45-00:5.30). These stiff rules may be linked to a form of helicopter parenting that includes “high levels of warmth and support, but also high levels of [parental] control and low autonomy granting” (Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012). The helicopter parent does not allow the child to make many free choices, thus leaving the child to struggle to acclimate to life in a new environment. In the case of Justine, this dietary helicopter parenting pushes the young woman to try, both forcefully and voluntarily, new foods and experiences. Upon Justine’s arrival to the university, she experiences her first taste of meat in a veterinary school hazing ritual. At first, she resists heavily, but risks chastisement and embarrassment by the veterinary school “elders” who also endured the ritual years ago. Alexia, Justine’s sister, chooses to shove the raw rabbit kidney down Justine’s throat, telling Justine: “[to] not start the year by chickening out. [The Elders] are watching” (Raw 00:15.30-00:15-45) Justine is disgusted, but accepts the ritual as part of the school tradition and now understands that her “allergy” to meat was an exaggeration from her mother and therefore lifting the prior construct of the parent’s established rules. Now, Justine must decide what (or who) she wants to eat when she wants to eat it. In comparison, the Cullen family struggles with the same outside forces and “newly” minted temptations.
of human flesh. Outside of Edward, one “new” vegetarian vampire, Jasper, must convert to the Cullen family ideologies; however, his transformation from meat-eater to vegetarian acts as the inverse to Justine’s. Jasper must deconstruct free choice in order to assimilate into the Cullen culture, but Justine must do the inverse and construct free choice to fit in the veterinary school’s culture. As expected, there are numerous roadblocks for the opposing pair to endure. Jasper must repress his urges when Bella, a tasty human, walks into the Cullen family home. On the other hand, Justine must unleash her urges for meat to assimilate. The juxtaposition of the two characters, as simple as it may seem, provide a interesting commentary on what one must do to transition into a culture. While one crawls into the shadows, the other flourishes in the light of free choice.

Immediately following Justine’s introduction to meat, she begins taking extreme steps to increase her exposure to her new “personal brand of heroin.” In the dining hall, she sneaks a hamburger onto her trey. Adrien, Justine’s roommate and sexually conflicted love interest, is shocked, but jokes about Justine maybe being low on cash and why she may decide to steal a hamburger despite being a vegetarian. Justine simply replies: “Don’t know” (Raw: 00:32-00:33:30). Unsure of her primal desires, Justine must validate every choice she makes, which mirrors Twilight’s main romantic narrative. Edward struggles to keep the feelings of consuming Bella at bay. He must decide endlessly to love or eat Bella and describes her as in drug-like phrases. Wright continues in her article, “...the comparison indicates that such a diet is inherently unfulfilling…. [and animals] are poor substitutes for the “real thing” (354). For each character, the substitutes only push closer to the “real thing” Wright describes. Justine, who must stick to tofu and soymilk as substitutes for meat, and Edward, who must consume animals to fill the void, must refrain from violating family values; however, it is that very pressure that causes each character’s demise. As Raw continues, Justine’s love for meat only worsens. In Margaret Barton-Fumo’s “Pleasures of the Flesh,” she describes Justine’s treatment of meat as “tender kisses that quickly turn into vicious bites” (42). The “tender kisses” begin with her consumption of shawarma, then “turn into vicious bites” with her introduction to the raw chicken breast in her roommate’s freezer, and later the consumption of her sister’s severed finger. The same “tender kisses” to “vicious bites” is apparent in Twilight. The aforementioned “real thing” is now readily available to each individual, leaving the downward spiral to begin.
At the climax of the downward spiral, the audience views the conflicted Justine as relatively normal girl who struggles to find herself in her new world; however, the one distinction that separates the audience’s discomfort with Justine’s cannibalism versus the acceptance of the Cullen’s vampirism is simple: the supernatural world of vampires can and will never exist while the reality of a cannibal among us can and will happen on numerous occasions. Zoologist Bill Schutt describes this acceptance in *Cannibalism: A Perfectly Natural History*. He writes: “…[humans have] evolved along a path where cultural or societal rules influence our behavior to an extent unseen in nature. Freud believed that these rules and the associated taboos prevent us from harkening back to our guilt-free and often violent animal past” (288). *Raw* implements wonderful cinematic elements to create two forms of animalistic behaviour. First, notice a vast majority of camera angles in the film as downward as actors crawl, sit, or lie on the ground as animals do. Second, Justine’s consumption of flesh is animalistic. Justine chomps at the raw chicken and Alexia’s finger, but the degree of animalistic desperation only worsens. During a party, Alexia lures Justine to the morgue of the neighboring medical school, pulls body out, and watches an intoxicated Justine attempt to gnaw on a finger like a bone. It it this animalistic behaviour that separates Justine from any of the Cullens. Much like the Cullens, Justine must learn to control the carnal desires for human flesh and replace them with animals; however, this decision to eventually become a “vegetarian” cannibal comes at the cost of her sister’s mirroring downward spiral. As Justine represents the “good” vampire or cannibal like the Cullens, Alexia represents the antagonistic villains who torment the human population. She, like the villainous coven, opts to break every rule possible to scratch her itch for human flesh. It is then when the audience learns that she causes the many car crashes plaguing the area, which directly correlates to the “animal” attacks Forks, Washington suffers from in *Twilight*.

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The mirroring storylines in both films portray the serial killing cannibal and vampire as closely related cousins. No matter how one may view cannibals and vampires, the connection between the two remains in the animalistic desire to eat human flesh; however, society opts to accept the vampire and reject the cannibal despite an avid love for both the serial killer and cannibal. Regardless of the distinction, the line is drawn in the supernatural world, forcing a societal taboo against any cannibal, yet loving the
cannibal’s aesthetically pleasing cousin, the vampire. Between the plots of *Raw* and *Twilight*, the parallels in the stories between two distinct groups of individuals who prey on humans acts as the catalyst of discussion. To accept cannibals, society must deem animalistic behaviour as “normal” in comparison the same behaviours in modern vampire fiction.

**Notes**

2. “B-Story” refers to the secondary plot of the film. Consider Clarice Starling hunting Buffalo Bill as the “A-Story” or main plot.
3. Et al: Wyck Godfrey (1-5) Mark Morgan (1) Greg Mooradian (1) Karen Rosenfelt (2-5) Stephenie Meyer (4-5)
9. 19th Century Vampires texts such as Stoker’s *Dracula*, Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, and Rhymer’s penny dreadful epic *Varney the Vampire* all feature male vampires with female victims. Barring le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (female vampire, male victims), this was the case for most vampire texts of the era..
10. Mayer’s *Twilight*, Mead’s *Vampire Academy*, and *Vampire Diaries* all revolve around female protagonist that may become vampires later on. *Let the Right One In* by John Ajvide uses a female protagonist but an androgynous counterpart.
11. Plague vampires such as *The Strain* and *I Am Legend* use it as a type of plague.
12. The original screenplay for *Raw* could not be found online. Netflix does not have the original French subtitles, but only the English. As a result, only English quotations will be used.

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This Is What Depression Looks Like: Genius, Suffering, and Melancholia

by Richard Camp

Existential depression occurs when one confronts issues of existence such as life, death, disease, and freedom... While some people may experience this kind of depression after a traumatic event... gifted people may suffer from it spontaneously; that is, there is no apparent triggering event.

—Carol Bainbridge

Gifted and Depressed

ON AUGUST 11, 2014 WE LOST one of America’s most iconic figures, Robin Williams. Considered to be a genius of his art form, the Carnegie Film School graduate thrilled audiences for decades on the stage and on the screen. Some of his most notable works are Mork and Mindy, Mrs. Doubtfire, Good Will Hunting, Jumanji, Hook, Dead Poets Society, and What Dreams May Come. After a long and very successful career with films like these as well as many others, the tragic news of Robin William’s death came abruptly with much sadness and despair. Moreover, what was more heartbreaking was the fact that his death was caused from suicide. The world was left in disbelief that the man who once made everyone laugh and cry with his charismatic and bubbly personality had stolen from everyone by taking his own life. Still, what was unknown by all was that behind the scenes Robin Williams was suffering from severe depression, alcoholism, and drug abuse. Like many other artists, he was using his profession and the screen as a mask to
hide his pain as he fought his mental and physical battles in secret. He did, however speak on depression and sadness in his life. He is quoted as saying, “I Think the saddest people always try their hardest to make people happy. Because they know what it’s like to feel absolutely worthless and they don’t want anyone else to feel like that.” This statement could have been seen as a cry for help. Still, whether or not his depression was noticed and addressed, the method and attention to was not enough. He ultimately found death as the only solace. In retrospect, it is safe to say that he used his artistry as as a way to show his audience his happiness and his pain through his works as he played roles that mirrored his life. His lengthy struggle with divorce and parenting are shown in the film, *Mrs Doubtfire*. The happy, child-like Robin Williams is seen in *Hook*, and *Jumanji*. The good natured person who has a lust for life is characterized in *Dead Poets Society* and *What Dreams May Come*. Coincidentally, both these latter movies deal with artistry and suicide. All in all, his gift of creativity allowed him to step away from his pain momentarily and show the audience examples of his hurt and struggle through fiction. For Williams, these more dramatic characterizations may have been a remedy for so many others that saw on screen what pain they may face in certain situations. Still, as he worked to save others from pain through laughter and distraction, he was not able to save himself. Tragically, although there may have been cries for help, the extent of his inner struggle was never fully revealed until after his death.

In relation, other artist like Robin Williams who blessed us with creativity and artistic mastery are Kurt Cobain, and Ernest Hemingway. Aside from their talents, the common thread that link these people together is the fact that they are all victims of depression. Unfortunately, their suffering drove them all to committed suicide. Like Williams, in reality and in character, it is thought that “the outward appearance of these gifted individuals is one of happiness and fulfillment. Still, inside, they all commonly felt a void that drove them to death. Although the differential depends on the specific definition used, a reasonable estimate is that highly creative individuals are about twice as likely to experience some mental disorder as otherwise comparable noncreative individuals (Simonton 1). This tragic commonality brings to light the question: is there a possible connection between those with high intellect and creativity and depression? Many critics and theologists believe there is a direct correlation between the two. There is a strong argument that “the coincidence is too profound to be ignored in regard to the marriage between artistry, intelligence, and depression. For most great authors and musicians, “depression seems to be the most common
symptom, along with the correlates of alcoholism and suicide” (Goertzel et al., 1978; Ludwig, 1990; Post, 1996) (Simonton 1). In consideration of the reasoning behind this connection, it can be said that the artistic and intellectually gifted individual may not be guided by materialistic urges. They are also not wrapped up in the monotonous day to day routine of parenting, family life, and a 9 to 5 job. This reclusive lifestyle lends to the understanding that “disruption to personal relationships is another factor. People have to spend time away from home and work antisocial hours,” he said, (Rudgard) and instead of socialization, they are consumed within their creativity and chained to their art form as a distraction which may allow them to be open to different perspectives. However, it can be said that this freedom of artistry may lead to a clearer, yet, more morbid view of the world and humanness. This view, considered as an emptiness within them, may be the culprit that leads to their depression, drug and alcohol use, as well as possible death. No matter what the theory or hypothesis may be in relation to why they are depressed in spite of their success, the purpose here is to show how the struggle with depression appears. Although it surrounds us all and is evident in our daily lives, it is these individuals, the mainstream actors, musicians, and writers, like Robin Williams, Ernest Hemingway, and Kurt Cobain, who have given our generation the best example of what depression really looks like. The roles they play, the art the produce, as well as the masks they wear in public, are all coping mechanisms used to hide the true emptiness they feel inside. It is not until their death that this mask is removed. The person behind that mask is what is under the microscope here. It is this person that shows us best example of what depression truly looks like.

Melancholia

The experience of psychological depression has been described with a variety of metaphors. William Styron called it “darkness visible,” and Winston Churchill euphemized his bouts as “the black dog.” In typically grandiose fashion, though, Lars von Trier tops them all.

—Marc Mohan

In consideration of the life sufferings of those famed and lost individuals mentioned above, a movie that has tried to encompass all the aspects of depression is called Melancholia. This film was created by Lars von Trier, a renowned movie director who also suffers from extreme clinical depres-
Like many artists afflicted with this mental disposition, Lars uses this film as a therapeutic and scheduled way of combatting his depression. In relation, he says, “when I write, I can only write about myself. This is more or less a description of my own depression.” Subsequently, For Lars von Trier, this film is the most direct examination into the disease. The movie was released on November 11, 2011 and hosts the cast of Kristen Dunst, Kiefer Sutherland, John Hurts, and Charlotte Rampling. The significance of the release date, 11.11.11, is particularly interesting as it is presumed to be the day of earth’s destruction by some conspiracy theorists. Lars seemingly chooses this release date as the perfect mock to those theorists. He even includes the theorist’s assumed way of destruction, the looming collision of Earth and the rogue Planet X, as the cataclysmic end of the film. Adding to this, he obviously realizes that astronomers associate the planet Saturn with the disease, Melancholia. The movie follows this association with the naming of a rogue planet in the film, Melancholia. Lars divides the film into two parts: the first part shows us the emotional fall of the blushing bride as she allows her depression to take hold of her so intently that in one night she destroys her new marriage, her job, and her family. The second half of the film focuses on the science fiction aspect of the movie as Planet Melancholia is set on a path to destroy earth. This portion of the film also shows Justine’s rise from a dependent and depressed state. Part two begins with Justine requiring Claire’s aid to do most all trivial things. She needs help getting into the house, getting dressed and undressed, and moving about. Her depression has left her incapable of stepping into a bath tub because of her weakness. She also refuses to eat a meal because she says all the food tastes like ashes. Later, towards the end of the movie, and closer to the Earth’s devastation, Justine comes out of this deep depression and gains strength in the chaos as she transforms herself into a mentor for her sister and nephew in light of the inevitable end.

**Melancholia’s Art**

*I know these feelings, and I’ve painted similar images to depict the war within. To define depression would be impossible, but to help you get an idea of how it must feel to fight this battle, I give you the unadulterated imaginative dark mind. The mind of depression, the art of expression... the closest to the definition of depression you may ever see.*

—Katie Horner/Margarita Georgiadis
In accordance with the artistic aspect of those individuals who suffer from depression, the movie, *Melancholia*, incorporates the artistic view of depression as Lars von Trier includes so many famous artistic impressions and symbolisms within this film. One example of such impression is Sir John Everett Millais’ painting “Ophelia.” This painting depicts the death of Hamlet’s mother, Ophelia, as she is seen in a portrait floating in a river in Denmark. In the movie, Justine is looking at this picture in a book. Essentially, this portrait is recreated in the film’s intro with Justine in place of Ophelia. Another example of a famous portrait that is seen in the film is “The Hunters in the Snow,” also known as Return of the Hunters by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. This painting is also shown in a book in the film. Additionally, Andrew Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* is recreated in the table scene with the two sisters at the end of the movie. Likewise, Cavaggio’s “David with the Head of Goliath” is shown as Justine is placing the book with this picture open on the mantle. What is more than the artwork itself is the music used in the background that Lars chooses. The main score is “Prelude to Tristan and Isolde” by Mozart. This “song” {if you will} ushers the film and leaves the viewer in a sort of fog throughout. The opening scene introduces the song and the mood as all the images are in slow motion. Justine is seen for the first time with a very pensive look on her face. She is shown with dozens of dead doves falling around her. The next image that is shown is Justine standing amidst a cloud of moths with an illuminated background shinning on her. Moving from that scene, Lars now shows Justine drudging through an entanglement of grey yarn which metaphorically depicts her dragging her depression around, unable to disconnect from its strangle hold. From there, the viewer sees Justine’s deceased body, in a wedding dress, floating down the stream, in semblance to “Ophelia.” The last image from the opening scene that is shown is the sight of the smaller earth being consumed by a giant rogue planet. All the while, through all these strikingly sad sights and images, the music, “Prelude to Tristan and Isolde,” is playing as a reminder of Justine’s disposition. With the inclusion of all the various forms of artwork within the film, and also the point of choosing Advertisement as Justine’s profession, a career with the basis of artistic expression, “it is difficult to answer whether there is a relationship between creativity and mental illness given the various methods and populations that have been studied in pursuit of this question” (Fisher 2). Still, the idea is being eluded to by Lars von Trier, as he understands that some may see art as a better way of communicating the agony of depression.
An Outlook on Time

People with depression, a disorder characterized by obsessive negative thoughts and rumination, may struggle to give their full attention to the present moment. This can make it difficult to get absorbed in an activity, entering that “flow” state of consciousness that can make you feel as if time is flying by.

—Carol Gregiore

Collectively, the movie starts off with images in slow motion with falling doves, a collapsing horse, and a cloud of butterflies. This slowed time is symbolic of how a depressed person feels. These images of the opening scene of the film show depression in its purest form with dull colors, dramatic scenes, and warped time as all movement is slowed down. Everything seems to be either frozen or moving backwards. In relation, it has been said that the severely depressed person who suffers from melancholia feels this same sense of warped time and blurred reality. Commonly, there is the assertion that “subjective time passes slowly for people who are in a depressed state and they may use phrases such as ‘time seems to drag’ to describe their experiences” (Kornbrot 1). Lars von Trier shows us this element of warped time as we see the bride and groom arrive to their reception 2 hours late. Claire says, “I won’t even bother saying how late you are” (0:11:20). Even after this extreme tardiness, the party still lasts for several hours after. They have dinner, a toast, socialization, and then the bride goes upstairs to take a bath. All this time passes and the guests are still patiently waiting. Once she is done with her bath the focus is returned to the reception where Justine is now dancing with several different people while “Labamba” continuously plays in the background, endlessly. As a point of reference, “In Melancholia, Lars von Trier uses rooms in the mansion to stop or interrupt not only the flow of the diagenetic and non-diagenetic events of the film, namely the reception, but also the flow of Justine’s consciousness” (Renee). All this is to say, that Lars seems to keep us inside of Justine’s head during the entire reception. In this way, the viewer realizes that the distortion of time and the length of the reception is not about the guest show of patience. Instead, it is about how Justine sees time transpiring, slow and relative to her feelings.

Family Disfunction

When I heard about the genetics of my family tree, I felt two very different and conflicting emotions. On the one hand there was relief.
It WASN’T in my head. I didn’t just have a “bad attitude”. I had inherited something very real and very debilitating. But on the other hand, it felt like a death sentence. I was fucked. It wasn’t just a stage. I wasn’t going to grow out of it. This was a chronic illness that I would have to live with and manage my whole life.

—Amy Dresner

In connection to the reception, the bad apples of mood and emotions are revealed as Justine’s parents are identified and shown to also suffer from some sort of mental shortcoming. The idea of the apple not falling far from the tree is portrayed during both the parent’s individual toasts to their daughter. It is during these toasts that they both take the opportunity to banter with one another instead of wishing their daughter well. Dexter, Justine’s father, says,

My dear girl: You look…. Glowing today. And me, I’m just a little confused what with all the Bettys at my table. I’ve never seen you look so happy. So, what can I say without talking about your mother, my wife of yesteryear? Which is exactly what I don’t wish to do. But I don’t think I would be revealing any secret if I were to say that she can be rather domineering at times. (0:18:30)

The mother’s response is no less enticing. She lashes back by saying,

Domineering? What a load of crap. For those who don’t know who I am, I am Claire and Justine’s mother. Justine, if you have any ambition at all, it certainly doesn’t come from your father’s side of the family. Yes, I wasn’t at the church: I don’t believe in marriage. Claire, who I’ve always taken for a sensible girl, you arranged a spectacular party…’til death do us part… and forever and ever… Justine and Michael. I just have one thing to say. Enjoy it while it lasts. I myself hate marriage. Especially when it involves some of my closest family members. (0:19:21)

After this display of public dislike for one another and ignorance of their daughter’s condition, the mother leaves the reception and all attendees, and
retreats to her bedroom to takes a bath. It is during this time alone that Justine is able to appeal to her mother. Justine says,

Justine: Mom. I’m a bit scared.
Gaby: A bit? I’d be scared out of my wits if I were you.
Justine: No, it’s something else. I… I’m frightened, Mom. I have trouble walking properly.
Gaby: You can still wobble, I see. So just wobble the hell out of here. Stop dreaming, Justine.
Justine: I’m scared.
Gaby: We all are, sweetie. Just forget it. Get the hell out of here.

(0:44:00)

During this exchange between mother and daughter, one can see that Justine is trying to appeal to her mother about her uneasy emotions. The mother recognizes these feeling and tells her she should just stay away from people. Collaterally, the father, who is there with two young women, both name Betty, also leaves the party even though Justine begs him to stay. He leaves a note for her saying, “To my beloved daughter, Betty. I was proud of you as any father could be. I couldn’t find you and I was offered a ride home I couldn’t refuse. See you soon. Kisses from your stupid Dad” (1:02:57). The biggest point from this excerpt is the fact that the father forgot his daughter name. He calls her Betty which may elude to some form of Dementia. From these actions and slights in parenting, it is obvious that both of Justine’s parents suffer from some form of pain and depression. Contrarily, Justine’s sister, Claire, is the stable one that holds everything together in the family. Still, it can be argued that Claire is just as much of a disruption in Justine’s breakdown because she knows her sister is suffering from depression. Yet, she still puts her sister in the stressful situation of a large formal reception. After Justine fails to met the sister’s expectations, in spite of her disposition, Claire says, “sometimes I hate you so much” (1:00:52). From Claire, as well Justine’s parents, the all a more involved with their desires and dysfunctions. Never is it considered that Justine needed their help, and love.

Disaster is Imminent

In the face of overwhelming evidence that Depression and other psychiatric disorders are serious illnesses that can disrupt brain function, including the will to survive, why do we still use the term “suicide?”
“Suicide” is associated with the stigmatizing concept that those with psychiatric illness are intrinsically flawed or weak and want to die.
—Bennett L. Leventhal

As a culmination, the end of the movie brings together all of the feelings of depression into one climatic end, The World’s Disaster. Metaphorically, “the world” can be looked at in multiple ways. Justine’s world of depression, Claire materialistic world, and the World as a whole all collide here. For Justine, she has found an inner strength amidst the consequent end of all life on Earth. It is almost like she has taken on the persona of the planet, Melancholia. The closer the planet gets to the Earth, the stronger and more content Justine becomes. Her regard for the Earth and life is expressed here:

Justine: The earth is evil. We don’t need to grieve for it.
Claire: What?
Justine: Nobody will miss it.
Claire: But where would Leo grow?
Justine: All I know is, life on earth is evil.
Claire: Then maybe life somewhere else.
Justine: But there isn’t.
Claire: How do you know?
Justine: Because I know things.
Claire: Oh yes, you always imagined you did.
Justine: I know we’re alone.
Claire: I don’t think you know that at all.
Justine: 678. The bean lottery. Nobody guessed the amount of beans in the bottle.
Claire: No, that’s right.
Justine: But I know. 678.
Claire: Well, perhaps. But what does that prove?
Justine: That I know things. And when I say we’re alone, we’re alone. Life is only on earth, and not for long. (1:56:47)

The key point about the above quote from the movie is the idea of Justine’s coldness towards her sister’s uneasy feelings towards the end highlights the inversion of characters between the two. In the beginning of the movie, Lars characterized a weaker and more dependent Justine. This portrayal allowed the viewer to see the struggles of the disease. It was Claire, then the strong
one, who cared for and comforted her sister during these collapsing times. Now that the end is imminent, Justine is the one telling her sister to be strong, recognize the truth about the world, and accept her fate. In contrast, from the beginning to the end of the movie, the roller coaster of emotions displayed by Justine seems to now make since. Depression is something that she has not been able to rid herself of, no matter what the assumed remedy, and living with it was torture. The only way out for her is death. Ultimately, death, for the lifetime sufferer, is a relief. In the aggregate, Claire’s rational is totally different. She wants to live. She has a son whom she loves and a life that she desires to continue. This dualism between the two, depressed and non-depressed, further exemplifies the different perspectives. To those “normal” people, living life is not a punishment. Smiling and being happy is not a chore. Day to day tasks are not insuperable. Lastly, the thought of death, no matter what the cause, is unimaginable. Sadly, the depressed sees things totally different. The life they live is laboring. For Justine, like most severely depressed individuals, she sees the world as a doomed place, full of pain, that needs to end. Lars von Trier shows the enlightenment of Justine, as she finds peace in the worlds destruction, viewing the end as a non-suicidal way to die. All the while, Claire, who is consumed by more simple and personal interest towards survival or solace, is trying to figure out how to avoid the ensuing death and destruction. The weird balance between the two sisters is what the world is like. Some want the pain to stop. Some want to live forever.

Depression: The Person Behind the Mask

*It was realizing that I shouldn’t be ashamed of feeling these things, and that I wasn’t alone — learning that everyone goes through similar things... That being vulnerable is actually a strength not a weakness, and showing your emotion and being honest about it [is good.]*

—Cara Delevingne

There is a recent Facebook post that is being widely circulated that states, “This Is What Depression Looks Like.” In this post, the woman shows a picture of her kitchen sink filled with cleaned dishes. The point of the picture is not to show how well she had cleaned the dishes. The point is to show how many dishes had piled up over the two weeks when she was too depressed to clean her own home. She says, “And the worst part of it all, it’s not just with the dishes. The laundry, cleaning, dressing yourself,
taking a shower, dressing the kids, brushing your and their teeth, normal everyday tasks. It all becomes a nightmare” (Bhatt). This woman is opening up her home and her life to others in the world and showing them her pain. She is being honest and allowing her vulnerability to be seen. Contrarily, there is another similar post that is also being circulated on facebook that shows the smiling faces of a number of famous and highly influential figures in present and recent past that have struggled with and lost the battle to depression. This post features Kurt Cobain, Chester Benjamin, Avicii, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Verne Troyer, Anthony Bourdain, Chris Cornell, Simone Battle, Layne Staley, Mac Miller, Amy Winehouse, Robin Williams, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Brittany Murphy, Heath Ledger, and Chris Farley. All of these people were very successful and iconic figures in the public eye that commonly fought depression. Relative to their outward appearance in this post, Smokey Robinson and The Miracles wrote a song called “Tears of a Clown.” One of the lines of the song states: “Now if there’s a smile on my face, it’s only there to fool the public.” Although this song is about a broken hearted person trying hide his pain, the lyrics can be related to any one these smiling, yet depressed, individuals as they were not able to truly express their hurt. They hide their pain well until it was too late. Presumably, the smile they wore as a mask was used to protect their image, as it is believed that “depression is something that ‘strong’ people don’t talk about because they don’t want people to think they’re ‘weak’.” This may be true in our unforgiving society. Still, there needs to be more understanding and empathy when it comes to this mental disorder. The artist, unlike the common individual who made the post about her dishes, makes the mistake of trying to hide it. Therefore, for them the pain is never identified or addressed. It is estimated that “one in five adults are living with a mental illness, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. But because it’s so often frowned upon to talk openly about these issues, many people still don’t really know just how prevalent this is in our society. This is why celebrities can make such a positive impact when they use their voice to spread awareness” (Burke). Additionally, it can be assumed that their celebrity voice may allow for an earlier diagnosis and public acceptance of the disease. Early warning signs would save so many of these celebrities lives as well as so many others. Lars von Trier realizes this disconnect, and, therefore, gives us *Melancholia* as a way of exposing the illness. The film allows us to see firsthand the struggle and the deterioration of the person as they succumb to the the disease. Unlike the film, in real life we don’t get to see this pain. We didn’t get to witness Robin William’s demise. We could
not watch Kurt Cobain’s reclusive last minutes before he shot himself. We were not there to see Hemingway pen his last words before taking his life. Still, Lars uses *Melancholia* to give us, the viewer, a backstage pass to this struggle of depression and the toll it takes on the person and their loved ones. We see Justine lose her husband, her friends, her profession, and her family. We see her loss of strength and will. Then, as surrender, we see her bathing in Melancholia’s light as she peacefully embraces death. Ultimately, Lars allows us to see what depression really looks like long before the news of a suicide or overdose is reported to us through the media. This full-screen view adds empathy to the viewer perspective on depression and mental illness. It also adds more understanding on the what sufferings and battles loomed for the gifted person before the mask is removed and we are left to mourn their death. Depression is a real and powerful monster that is misunderstood, and this is what it looks like.

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Artwork by Robert Carter
Artwork by Margarita Georgiadis
Artwork by Robert Carter

Artwork by Margarita Georgiadis
Diaries of Madmen: Representations of Madness in 80s and 90s Rock

by Shawn Lynn

Diary of a madman
Walk the line again today
Entries of confusion
Dear diary, I’m here to stay
—Ozzy Osbourne, “Diary of a Madman”

BEFORE THE 1980S, BLACK SABBATH, WITH front man Ozzy Osbourne, released their album *Paranoid*. Featuring songs such as “Paranoid,” “Electric Funeral,” and “War Pigs,” the 1970 album makes use of bleak messages to paint a picture of society’s shortcomings. Society, however, interpreted the band and their album not as a satirical voice of reason but rather as an entity perpetuating negativity that causes listeners to fall into depression or satanism. Not entirely helping matters for the band was the suicide of a nurse who had the album playing on a turntable. The incident provided concerned consumers with ammunition against the band for apparently contributing toward suicidal feelings. Such an occurrence provides insight into how consumers reach conclusions about madness as a result of music media. Concerned listeners, typically holding conservative viewpoints, tend to demonize heavy metal music, leading to false conclusions on madness and mental health.

In this paper, I seek to define the terms by which consumers gain knowledge from popular rock music and its off-shoots. An examination of the
more popular bands and their songs allows for more argumentative stability, as the masses tend to arrive at claims based on brief exposure to the mainstream; therefore, an examination of more obscure bands in the genre would prove unnecessary. The bands under the mainstream umbrella include Ozzy Osbourne and Metallica in the 1980s and Nirvana and Tool in the 1990s. Both sets of bands feature songs that speak toward the rhetoric of madness, providing culture with a lens with which to gain insight into the mechanics and definition of madness.

Being that the studies span two decades also leads to a further analysis of the ways in which society learns about madness from the bands. The decade gap indicates that the cultures in those decades possessed their own definitions of madness and the music reflects this claim. As the years evolve, so too, does the music and its suggestions of madness. 1980s metal depicts madness in a highly-theatrical, performative nature, whereas 90s grunge and progressive metal reclaim madness as a personal experience, establishing the 90s musicians as Romantic poets celebrating individualism. Therefore, madness present in popular songs from rock bands in the 1980s and 1990s provides consumers with definitions of madness, reflecting their own culture, all the while enabling listeners an inside-look into mental health. The shift that occurs between the decades functions to show ever-evolving perceptions of madness, as cultures and insights into mental illness progress.

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Madness rhetoric, popularized in Michel Foucault’s writings, deals with the perception of the mentally deviant in society and how a culture will treat the mad. Foucault’s works establish madness as a construction, highlighting the historically specific discourses. In *Madness and Civilization*, for instance, Foucault states that the madman in the Middle Ages “became major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men” (Foucault 13). With madness as it relates to two specific periods of time, the 1980s and 90s, madmen in metal have their own place in their respective societies. Much like the Middle Ages or any time period’s reception of madmen, so to do the 1980s and 90s deserve examination. The two society’s perceptions and interactions with madness along with the manner by which the musicians continue the conversation with their music allows for a separation between the mad and the well. Whether the culture consists of towns that “drove them (madmen) outside their limits (Foucault 8) or a board of concerned women yearning
for warning labels on scandalous music, madmen will always face opposition. The madmen in music face the obstacle of attempting to become famous while endeavoring to showcase their messages to the public. Some artists, like those in the 1980s tackle this problem with theatrics, boldly parading madness as a spectacle for consumers to rebelliously enjoy, while the musicians of the 1990s approach madness in a way that humanizes the mad and connects with potential mad-listeners. Madness, then, functions on a musical and societal level to depict the madness of the musicians and reveal an inherent madness within civilization.

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Metal in the 1980s plays a pivotal role in the musician-consumer dynamic, offering its own definition of madness. To the artists in this decade, madness appears as an outlet to cast madmen in a horrific light that speaks to the performativity of the musicians and their goals in producing their songs. Overly theatrical performances reflect the commonplace notions inherent to 1980s society, a culture built upon change but hesitant to radical transformation. While artists like Ozzy Osbourne and James Hetfield appear as diplomats easing consumers to the idea of madness in music, their theatrics and rebelliousness say otherwise, indicating that they seek to brand madness in a countercultural manner.

Ozzy Osbourne, with his song “Diary of a Madman,” seeks to define madness as it relates to 1980s culture and the performative nature of the genre at the time. “Diary of a Madman,” released in 1981, features a singer struggling with mental illness, specifically manic depression, or bipolar disorder. Ozzy Osbourne’s dramatic singing and lyrics flow with madness rhetoric, depicting the turmoil of a madman:

Manic depression befriends me
Hear his voice
Sanity now it’s beyond me
There’s no choice

Accompanying Osbourne’s lyrics are over-the-top riffs and heavy drum-beats, signaling the intensity of the madman’s struggle. Powerful instrumen-
tals merge with wailing, lamenting vocals to produce a song that presents listeners with a moving anthem depicting mental illness. Stringed instruments, which enter toward the last half of the song solidify the sadness of the anthem. Despite the song’s apparent portrayal of mental suffering as an arduous human experience, the lyrics and theatrics speak to the performativity of madness, causing the song to function as a cultural marker that seeks to define madness on terms of stereotypes. Osbourne’s song provides his 1980s audience with a generalized viewpoint of madness, resulting in a skewed cultural perception of madness. While the lyrics speak to the concern of the mentally-scarred, the lyrics also further the performance of madness, draining the song of its seemingly progressive tone and furthering the song as a performance of madness, concerned with countercultural shock-factor. When Osbourne repeats lyrics connoting freedom from mental anguish such as “there’s no choice” and “trying to get out,” in addition to cliched madness words like “voices,” he achieves in promoting his sale of madness as a performance. Moreover, the album itself (Fig. 1) showcases the performativity of madness. Osbourne poses in a stereotypical madman pose with heavy satanic imagery present in the room.

Figure 1 Diary of a Madman
With tattered clothes and manic smile, Osbourne sells madness like a horror film. Robert Walser asserts in *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* that “the development of heavy metal coincides exactly with the period of the greatest popularity horror films have ever known” and that “both heavy metal and the horror film address the insecurities of this tumultuous era” (Walser 161). By evoking the horrific, Osbourne’s depictions of madness speak to the cultural climate of the 1980s.

The 1980s proved to be an integral decade for the consumer-musician relationship, especially for metal artists such as Osbourne. A decade known for its dramatic shifts in viewpoints on drugs, sex, and music, the 1980s demonstrated a yearning for a return to older American form. Hjelm, Khan-Harris, and LeVine write in “Heavy Metal as Controversy and Counterculture” that ‘the culmination of this concern was the congressional committee hearing in 1985, instigated by Tipper Gore, the wife of Senator Al Gore and spokeswoman of the Parents’ Music Resource Center (PMRC)” (Hjelm, Khan-Harris, LeVine 8). Gore (Fig. 2) served as a stand-in for all parents concerned for the well-being of their children who could consume aggressive forms of media. Such forms of media posed threat for Americans in the 1980s as “images of concerned (Christian) parents burning heavy metal records in the USA in the 1980s convey a powerful symbolic message—a claim—that these particular cultural products are inappropriate, even evil” (Hjelm, Khan-Harris, LeVine 8).

Figure 2 Gore and Baker at the Parents Music Resource Center committee hearing in Washington, D.C., on September 19, 1985. The PMRC campaigned to get the music industry to put warning labels on content with explicit lyrics (Newsweek).
Osbourne’s “Diary of a Madman,” then showcases madness and mental illness in a way that speaks to its performativity. By being a purposefully rebellious, controversial song “Diary of a Madman” functions to attack concerned citizens and their notions of protecting children from demonic music that allegedly threatens mental wellness. While this methodology is not wholly problematic, Osbourne’s approach does not seek to establish mental illness and madness in a way that advocates for a voice for the suffering, rather, his song depicts madness in a countercultural vein. Osbourne provides consumers, then with a view on mental illness and madness that places the madman in a freak show, a menace that society should fear, lest they abandon their political, Christian views to acknowledge the madman.

Metallica upholds the concept of portraying the madman in their 1986 song “Welcome Home (Sanitarium),” further defining the way 1980s music media consumers gained knowledge on madness. As a song produced later than “Diary of a Madman,” “Welcome Home” takes the baton from Osbourne’s song, revealing that the mid-80s metal song has unfinished business with selling madness as a countercultural concept. Released a year after the PRMC meeting, Metallica’s “Welcome Home” gives 1980s consumers a more aggressive and angry delivery on madness in music. Front man James Hetfield chooses a rage-fueled vocal delivery with harsh lyrics and moving instrumentals to bring a furious take on madness that works toward a shock-factor much like “Diary of a Madman.” In an interview, Hetfield revealed that the 1975 film One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest inspired the song. As a musician concerned with consumer reception, Hetfield’s decision to base a song around another form of media shows his concern with dispersing madness media. Hetfield evokes the film and madness when he grittily sings about a person struggling with mental illness and locked in an asylum:

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Just labeled mentally deranged
Dream the same thing every night
I see our freedom in my sight
No locked doors, No windows barred
No things to make my brain seem scarred
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Like Osbourne, his fellow rocker in the same decade, Hetfield depicts madness in a theatrical manner. Hetfield assumes the role of a madman as he angrily sings of an imaginary confinement in an asylum. The heavy guitar
produces an air of hostility and contempt toward the singer’s predicament, and the drums instill a feeling of anxiety and aggression. While the song does present the mentally disturbed in a sympathetic light, like Osbourne, the song’s theatricality deprives the tune of a fair assessment of madness, leading to more problematic depictions. The lyrics “Assuring me that I’m insane” and “Keep him tied, it makes him well / He’s getting better, can’t you tell?” (Hetfield) appear to highlight the turmoil of the madman, but instead sell the madman as a spectacle for 1980s listeners to fear. Hetfield’s characterization of the madman perpetuates negative stereotypes about madness, creating a disconnect between the listener and the subject of the song. Again, this concept speaks to Metallica, as a 1980s band and their penchant for selling over-the-top, rebellious madness. In *Damage Incorporated Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity*, Glenn Pillsbury studies and defines Metallica and its impact on the decades and its changing morals: “Throughout the 1980s many thrash metal groups…develop[ed] the particular aesthetic of shock and intensity that parents’ groups would eventually understand as genuine celebrations of violence, mayhem, and Satan worship” (Pillsbury 3). Metallica, then, acknowledges its presence as a force to combat 1980s culture. In fact, Metallica also focuses on “the celebration of a metal musical-cultural identity quite opposed to the glam metal scene” (Pillsbury 4). Hetfield’s madness as a consumer product manifests in the rebellious, materializing in its own brand of chaos. Within Metallica and their song “Welcome Home,” performativity of this madness provides consumers with an image that shows the madman as societal deviant, shocking others with his intense display of bedlam. While this notion appears to hinge upon Romantic individualism, madness as it relates to musician and consumer reaching a romanticized community does not develop in forms of metal until the 1990s.

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Unlike the 1980s, the 1990s proved to be a period of disillusionment, and with bands such as Nirvana leading the alternative culture, society gained new insights and relationships to madness in music media. Nirvana’s 1991 “Lithium” offers a different approach to gaining knowledge on madness because, unlike the 80s with its theatrics, 1990s rock and its deviations offer consumers a humanistic definition of madness, privileging individualism and casting the musicians as Romantic poets. Humanizing
madness enables the musicians to connect with their audiences, a tactic lost on 1980s listeners. Near the middle and end of the era, Tool, a progressive metal band, offered audiences with an artistic outlook on madness, solidifying the era’s emphasis on presenting madness as a feature ingrained in society that affects anyone in a culture.

Nirvana’s song “Lithium,” from their widely popular album *Nevermind*, works toward the idea of establishing a community between musician and consumer, illustrating that perceptions of madness in the 1990s have changed, resulting in a different branding of madness than the 1980s. In this way, madness appears as an ever-present ailment that dwells in both artist and listener. Like “Diary of a Madman,” “Lithium” deals with a narrator struggling with bipolar disorder. Unlike “Diary of a Madman,” however, “Lithium’s” delivery and lyrics do not approach madness in a performative way but in a manner that speaks to people suffering with mental illness on a personal level. Lead singer Kurt Cobain’s dry vocal delivery mixed with an upbeat rhythm allow for a symbolic, humanizing depiction of madness. When Cobain sings

I’m so lonely but that’s okay I shaved my head
And I’m not sad
And just maybe I’m to blame for all I’ve heard
But I’m not sure

He manages to capture the confusing, cyclical nature of bipolar disorder, showing potential listeners that he understands madness as a mental affliction, not a spectacle to scare society. The upbeat rhythm and pseudo-pop song quality of the song furthers the symbolism of mental strife. To unaware consumers, the song appears like a harmless popular song, but to listeners who understand the meaning, the song serves as a companion with shared psychological trauma. In this way, “Lithium” reaches mainstream society in a Romantic manner, speaking on behalf of and privileging the individual. Marco Mula, in “Music and Madness: Neuropsychiatric Aspects of Music,” takes a psychiatric approach to understanding the musician-listener relationship. He cites various examples of musicians who have struggled with mental illness to show how the afflicted musicians effect consumers. Mula concludes that “if there is a link between musical composition and psychopathology it is through cyclothymia and bipolar disorder” (Mula 85). Cobain, who struggled with bipolar disorder represents this concept of
struggling artist who empathetically reaches his ailing audience. Moreover, Mula speaks to this connection when he states that “high school students showed a marked association between a preference for rock/metal music and suicidal thoughts, acts of deliberate self-harm, depression, delinquency, drug taking and family dysfunction” (Mula 85). In this way, both musician and consumer have an established sense of community through their shared struggles. Yotam Kramer’s “The Social Life of Death: Suicide and Self-Destruction in the Seattle Grunge Scene” passionately expounds upon this established community through his careful study of the era. “Grunge subculture, led by generation X or the first to be raised in the age of postmodernism,” Kramer explains, “had idealized mainly values of authentic expression of the most private internal content such as death, despair, pain and the striving for freedom” (Kramer 13). For 1990s listeners, the music of the decade serves as an outlet and counsel for their own forms of madness. Whether these consumers battle with madness as it relates to their mental health or their relationship with their rapidly-evolving world, they establish a bond with musicians like Cobain. Community does not appear in 1980s music and its depictions of madness, signaling that the cultural shift has placed new emphasis on treating the mad as humans and not horror movie monsters. This humanistic approach sets the rock of the 1990s apart from the last decade and casts the artists like Cobain as a Romantic poet speaking on behalf of the voiceless.

Tool’s 1993 hit “Sober,” along with its music video, cements the concept of Metal in the 90s reaching consumers on a humanistic manner, but “Sober” goes further to show the horrors of mental anguish while remaining empathetic, not performative. As a progressive metal band, Tool deals with the more artistic side of the genre. Progressive metal combines the heavy aesthetics of the heavy metal genre with careful compositions to produce a highly complex genre that frequently deals with psychoanalysis. “Sober” contains intricate drumming, profound lyrics, and its music video showcases grotesque imagery. This methodology allows society to explore deeper implications of madness, which leads to introspection and studying of society. Maynard James Keenan’s haunting song illustrates the connection between addiction and madness to offer a dark look at mental illness that is both thought-provoking and entirely human. Keenan personifies drug addiction as an ever-present “shadow…pointing every finger at me / waiting like a stalking butler.” The vocal delivery completely sheds any associations with performativity, speaking on a wholly humanizing level to sympathize with those struggling with the madness of addiction. A
song highlighting a true struggle enables Tool to reach beyond the speakers and strike a chord with consumers, drawing listeners into a shared struggle. “Sober,” as a composition that advocates for individuals fighting addiction functions on an entirely different level than its brethren in the 1980s. Madness in “Sober” manifests on a personal level, moving the listener while avoiding the polarizing, inhuman, and performative nature of 1980s metal.

Tool’s music video for “Sober” adds to the conversation in its visual representation of madness. The video makes use of stop-motion and dark coloring to present an uncanny and unsettling front-row-seat of madness to viewers. A scarred man (Fig. 3) lumbers around an abandoned house while curiously attempting to dig into a box and the house’s walls.

The house evokes a mad house, with the character walking around serving as an inmate of his own asylum. Addiction haunts the character, as he struggles to find meaning of his world and reach the root of his ailment. Such a symbolic imagining of madness allows Tool to interact with their audiences on a personal level. Any struggling drug-addict can identify with “Sober’s” message of drug addiction as a form of madness. Lena Wikland, in “Existential Aspects of Living with Addiction,” explores patients struggling with addiction, arriving at the point that addiction presents the addicted with its own set of challenges to fit in with a society and find meaning:
When lacking freedom and personal space, being unsure of who one is and of one’s place in relation to others, feelings not only of meaningless arise, but also of chaos. As has been shown the addicted person is constantly struggling to create meaning in a world where inner and outer experience do not match. Informants’ descriptions of life can be interpreted as a struggle in a chaotic world, striving to get some sense of control (2430)

“Sober’s” music video alludes to this intrinsic disordered quality of the addicted. The stop-motion puppet exists in his own chaotic world, serving as a stand-in for the mad addict who identifies with the Romantic message. An established community centered around ailing addicts dealing with their own form of madness enables Keenan to empathize with an audience he may never meet. In the conversation with madness rhetoric as it relates to music and culture, “Sober” works as a remedy to alleviate the problematic associations the metal of the 1980s presents to the world. As a popular song from its decade, “Sober” acts to give a voice to the people dealing with mental illness while not performing madness.

The shift from the performative to humanizing the individual, evident in cultural markers, allows the popular metal genres in the 1990s to reach another level in producing madness for societal consumption. As society evolves, so too do assumptions on madness. Madmen do not appear as crazed men in satanic clothing, rather, they emulate the style of their listeners, as both listener and musician in the 90s share struggles in their madness. “Lithium” and “Sober” work on the humanistic level, mirroring their culture and spreading new insights into how the madman fits into his society.

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Madness, as it manifests in metal throughout the 1980s and 90s, presents its societies with questions as to how to treat the mad, while also revealing that society has its own maddening problems that it should face. The manifestation of madness in 1980s metal signals a countercultural movement meant to shock the protected culture. A methodology such as this comes with its own set of problems. If the music of the 1980s is meant to speak on behalf of the madman, it is problematic to establish the mad as a freak-show
of a spectacle. Even though 1980s society had arrived at new understandings of mental illness, their musicians project madness in a manner that complicates any notion of progression. The performativity does nothing to advance acceptance of the mad, instead, the images of angry, rebellious madmen push back societal perceptions of the mad. Understanding that mental illness manifests in many forms acts as a remedy for this problem. The performers of the 1980s may act as delinquents, but their opposition toward society reveals that they are, in fact victims themselves. Both Osbourne and Hetfield struggled with addiction, and while they presented this form of madness in a negative light, their rebellion acts as a middle-finger to the society that oppresses the mentally afflicted. Therefore, while still problematic, the over-the-top metal musicians of the 1980s base their theatrics in some form of actual suffering, and even though consumers lose this connect, they gain a countercultural persona to stand by in the event that they realize they share some form of deviancy.

While some may argue that musicians of the 1990s display their own brand of theatrics in selling madness, it is worth while to note that both Cobain and Keenan did suffer with their own mental struggles, showing that evidence of performativity, if any, is rooted in actual madness. On April fifth, 1994, Kurt Cobain lost his battle with his own madness, addiction and bipolar disorder, and committed suicide. For this musician, madness had always been present in his life, and his music, which established community with many 90s fans, provides consumers with a legitimate form of madness, not rooted in any theatricality. As for Keenan, known for his hatred of fame, his fans, and his eccentricities, he exists as a modern madman who rejects any associations with society and instead tries to find deeper meaning in life while supporting his passion of wine-making. Artists in the 1990s, then, do not fall into the same category of highly-performative actors like their predecessors. Instead, these musicians fill the role of the successful madman with an outlet to disperse their own form of therapy both for themselves and for listeners.

Madness, as it appears in songs from rock bands in the 1980s and 1990s provides consumers with a lens into the realm of the mad. Society gains insight into its own madness as the musicians either reject or empathize with audiences. The shift that occurs between the decades shows an ever-evolving perception of madness, as cultures and insights into mental illness progress. Metal of the 1980s materializes into a highly-performative depiction of madness that functions to reject the uptight 80s culture, whereas
the disillusioned culture of the 90s gains insight into madness that speaks toward shared suffering. Both groups tackle the perception of the mad in their songs, in which consumers learn how madmen behave. Without musical icons serving as stand-ins for the underbelly of society, especially as it relates to the mad, society will never acknowledge its own shortcomings, nor will it evolve to accept madmen in civilization.

Bibliography
One Bad Day: Resisting Madness in *The Killing Joke*

by Jonathan Mackay

Introduction

WHILE WESTERN CULTURE CLAIMS THE TITLE of most advanced in understanding and treatment of mental health, mental illnesses often terrify those who do not suffer from them, likewise, so do the individuals who do suffer from them. The introduction of institutions in the saw every state in the US build one or more publicly supported hospitals for mentally ill patients by the year 1890, and housing these individuals fortified this ostracization, as the “sick” were swept under the societal rug, even for mild conditions that made conformity marginally more difficult for them (Diseases of the Mind).

While some mental illnesses are genetic, others develop as responses to traumatic events. Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD for short, serves as the most common example for this situation. The disorder itself can primarily be found in military veterans, but the condition’s presence is not limited to combat veterans. Victims of abuse are also liable to exhibit symptoms of this condition, particularly if it occurred at an early age. Bessel A. van der Kolk and Rita Fisler propose that trauma, and subsequently, PTSD, develops when an “inescapable stressful event overwhelms [one]’s coping mechanisms.” This suggestion implies that any individual in society can be overwhelmed by trauma, and therefore is vulnerable to developing a mental illness. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, maintaining this pattern of thought leads to the eventual assertion that everyone is
susceptible to madness. Having overcome the human mind’s initial defenses, the traumatic incident is then compartmentalized and repressed, but age eventually restores bits and pieces of this memory until it becomes “explicit memory (van der Kolk 522).”

*The Killing Joke* sees the Joker attempt to definitively defeat Batman by proving that he and the caped crusader are not so different after all, and that anyone is susceptible to madness, including the Dark Knight himself. His grand scheme, to kidnap and mentally break Commissioner Gordon, one of Batman’s closest and most resolute allies, falls apart before the Joker’s eyes; he and the reader are left to wonder how strong or weak an individual must be to overcome or succumb to madness.

**Memory and Trauma**

“Memories are what our reason is based on. If we can’t face them, we deny reason itself (Moore 21).”

The development of common sense arises from our subconscious, where unclear memories of our past experiences lie that have influenced our decision-making skills (Stanfill 1214). For instance, we may not remember that time we touched the hot stove, but knowing not to touch one becomes almost universal knowledge by the time puberty arrives. Oftentimes, these memories become buried in the subconscious due to the nature of the experience; our common sense could arise from self-preservation due to the painful or frightening nature of the event. In other cases, we may remember the situation vividly, but it still achieve the same effect of teaching us how to react in certain situations.

Batman lore has always hidden the origin of the Joker from its readers. For almost a century (the Joker debuted in the original *Batman* comic in 1940), readers have enjoyed or despised the Joker, yet only seen his actions in the present day. In some comic literature, such as Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, the Joker appears to remember multiple versions of his own past. Despite these anecdotes, the Joker’s past remains a complete mystery. Suddenly, in *The Killing Joke*, some backstory is finally unveiled for the Clown Prince of Crime. The reader discovers a depressing tale of a failing comedian who, unable to support his pregnant wife, resorts to a heist in order to make some quick cash to support his family. On the day of the job, Jack Napier’s wife and child are lost in an unspecified accident, and the job goes horribly wrong at the hands of Batman himself, ultimately leaving Jack disfigured and presumed dead; after Jack removes his disguise
helmet provided by his criminal recruiters, the reader sees the bleached face of the infamous Joker, accompanied by his hysterical laugh as heavy rain pours down. The dark conclusion of this narrative makes it clear that the character has finally “cracked,” the preceding events having gotten the better of him. The laughter depicted in this frame marks the passing of Jack’s sanity, and his rebirth as the madman known as the Joker.

The trauma depicted in this flashback proves sufficient to transform a man’s persona; naturally, the mind struggles to cope with this level of trauma.

Batman’s origin story is considerably more popular: witnessing the death of his parents during an alleyway robbery, young Bruce Wayne dedicated his life to fighting crime to fill the void their deaths left in his soul. If both characters experience such a tragic loss of close family, then why do they appear to be polar opposites?

**Photo-graphic Memory**

The fleeting nature of memory brings significance to those memories that humans are able to hold on to. These memories, however, are still subject to our own interpretation of how the event happened (Loftus 443), and could differ from the original experience. Photographs function as a popular tool for documenting memorable occasions, preserving the moment without the bias of individual memory. In the event that a memory is corrupted, photographs allow the for the re-presentation of the experience in the form of an image.

Graphic or traumatic memories become suppressed in the human mind in order for it to remain functioning at a high level. These memories often emerge as the result of psychotherapy experiencing a similar circumstance later in life which triggers the re-emergence of the original suppressed memory (Loftus 443). The cover of *The Killing Joke* features the Joker holding aloft a camera, along with a speech bubble saying, “Smile!” The character himself is flashing a comically wide grin. The camera plays an important role in the narrative, as the Joker uses it in his attempts to madden Commissioner Gordon by flashing graphic pictures of a crippled, naked, and abused Barbara Gordon, the Commissioner’s daughter. Gordon naturally turns away from these images and attempts to block them out, but the Joker’s torture ensures he at least retains a portion of the graphic content in his mind. In addition to these photographs, Gordon was in the apartment with Barbara when the Joker arrived and attacked them both. Planning to
kidnap the commissioner, the Joker knocks him unconscious before turning to Barbara and violating her; nearby, the terrified commissioner witnesses the beginning of this evil before slipping into unconsciousness. A fully grown adult, Gordon will unlikely be able to suppress the memories of these images and assault in his daughter’s apartment, forever scarred by her victimization. Having seen some of it before blacking out, the possibility of the commissioner retaining this as explicit memory exists, but the Joker’s photographs manage to re-present the disturbing experience, intensifying the reality of the situation.

Apart from its purpose as both a narrative and mind-wrecking tool (Doise), the camera in *The Killing Joke* also references the Joker’s backstory as Jack Napier. If readers and fans assume that the Joker is indeed unable to recall his past, as comic lore would have them believe, then the Joker would surely not be in possession of any memorabilia from that period, either. Having such an artifact could cause the joker to remember his own traumatic past, with unpredictable (but almost certainly disastrous) consequences. The cover image of *The Killing Joke* implies that the Joker holds the key to his own past, but has buried the images of it deep behind his now maniacal smile.

**Criminal Activity and Insanity**

As PTSD became more well-known in society, criminals and lawyers increasingly used it as a scapegoat in order to receive less jail time. The increase in popularity of PTSD in society during the 20th century made the symptoms more recognizable even for those who have never directly been exposed to it; these symptoms are also relatively easy to imitate (Sparr and Atkinson 608). Despite spending almost as much time inside Arkham Asylum as outside of it, criminals in the world of Batman are not granted a sentence based on an insanity plea. The asylum, converted to house the villains who are all deemed “criminally insane,” places each of them under maximum security. The Joker usually has his own special cell.

Due to the rise in use of the criminal insanity plea, another psychiatric study was performed on its effectiveness in a court of law. The Sparr and Atkinson study determined that a complete dissociative episode needed to occur in order for the insanity plea to be successful; H.V. and F. L. Hall contend that suicidal tendencies and substance abuse issues merge alongside criminal activity when insanity is at work (Hall 47).
*The Killing Joke* gives no indication that Jack Napier or the Joker struggle with substance abuse. It could be argued that the former’s “What’s the point?” attitude following his wife’s death hints at suicidal thoughts, but there is no clear indication that Jack has any intent to take his own life. While tormenting the Commissioner, the Joker goes on about how crazy the world is, and that insanity is the only viable option to survive in such circumstances (Moore 33.) This assertion coincides with the popular theory that mentally ill individuals are actually more perceptive than sane people, condemned to asylums and labels because their ideas do not make sense. The Joker, accepted as one of the most insane people in popular culture and in Batman lore (even by the characters in the universe), also operates as a criminal mastermind, conducting elaborate crimes while parading around Gotham as a lunatic.

How, then, does the Joker juggle these two mindsets that are supposedly on opposite ends of the spectrum? Upon becoming the Joker, Jack Napier vanishes from the world, never mentioned in the comic lore until this tangential narrative. The birth of the Joker, then, should be considered a permanent dissociative episode, where a new identity assumed the body of Jack. Having been declared insane by a vast majority of the characters in Batman lore, the Jack Napier could qualify could have a case for the insanity plea in a court of law based on his dissociation episode as the Joker. Two issues arise concerning this theory: first, the Joker does not transition between his criminal alias and his past persona as a failing comedian. His backstory is only revealed to the reader of *The Killing Joke*, not any of the characters in the text. Having mentally erased his past, the only other characters who could possibly be aware of his transition were killed by police during a chase; additionally, the Joker shows no remorse for any of his criminal activities, downplaying any chances of restoring Jack Napier and pleading guilty by insanity in court. Should Jack Napier have returned and pushed out the Joker, however, his lack of any accompanying issues such as substance abuse would damage his insanity plea.

**The Presence of Insanity**

*The Killing Joke* sees insanity affect (or attempt to affect) there characters: Batman, Commissioner Gordon, and the Joker. Each character experiences a traumatic event in their lives, but only the Joker resorts to madness as a coping mechanism and represses the memory. Batman vowed to protect others so that nobody else had to suffer as he did, and Commissioner Gor-
don insists at the end of the comic that the Joker’s arrest should be done “by the book” in order to prove that the justice system works (Moore 37). When Batman calls out the Joker for being the only one who cracked in the face of trauma, Joker cries out in disbelief as the pair continue their scuffle.

The resistance Batman and Commissioner Gordon exhibit to overcome the urge to slip into madness calls into question the Joker’s entire persona. His argument of the comic, that one bad day can drive a person mad, seems untrue given his opponents’ bad days and lack of insanity onset. Because the Joker does not exhibit any accompanying habits that are typical alongside criminal insanity, *The Killing Joke* suggests that the Joker chose to be insane, rather than simply went insane as the result of one bad day.

Earlier we touched on the criminal mastermind that the Joker has proven himself to be. Even within this particular comic, he breaks out of Arkham Asylum, manages to locate the Commissioner and his daughter in a private apartment, find his way there undetected while the city embarks on a manhunt for him, and kidnaps the Commissioner. Whatever plan the Joker had in place required expertise, both in plotting and execution.

The Joker also represses his past trauma, but it never resurfaces during any of his violent criminal activity. Particular stressors usually encourage traumatic memories to resurface, and given the Joker’s vast repertoire of extremely stressful crimes, at least a portion of his hidden past should have made its way to the forefront of his mind.

Not resorting to substance abuse or turning to therapy, the Joker has purposely selected insanity as his coping mechanism for the loss of his wife and unborn child. He buries their memory deep in his consciousness, ensuring it stays buried by plotting and carrying out dastardly crimes.

**Conclusion**

The emergence of insanity in society saw those who behaved differently than was deemed “normal” ostracized and locked away in institutions. These institutions, although designed to remediate and help improve the mentally ill, functioned more as prisons than the health centers or hospitals they were marketed as. In the mid-20th century, PTSD’s emergence saw new attention given to mental health, but those who suffered from PTSD were treated differently because of the common association with war veterans that the condition had. Mentally ill who were plainly mentally ill were not afforded the same courtesies. Along with the awareness of PTSD came the
increase in insanity pleas, as PTSD symptoms were known to the public and relatively easy to imitate. Some cases of PTSD involved repressed memories making their way back to the forefront of the human mind.

Alan Moore’s *The Killing Joke* offers a backstory for the most infamous insane character of all time: the Joker. His origin, however, reveals that his humanity was lost to the cruelty of the world and the subsequent madness that beset him. The narrative itself explores madness as a condition that can befall anyone, an argument the Joker makes and attempts to prove by kidnapping Commissioner Gordon and driving him insane. As the events of the text unfold, it becomes clear that the Joker simply gave in to madness too easily.

Research surrounding mental health does not provide a definitive answer on this topic. While insanity has not been explicitly linked to criminal activity, dissociative episodes can play a part in uncharacteristic criminal activity, but this plea is difficult to prove and usually comes with other warning signs.

Repressed memories have also been proven to re-emerge in the presence of stressors similar to the traumatic experience that was originally repressed; this can happen during psychotherapy sessions or during everyday life by coincidence; whatever the case, uncovering a repressed memory, or it becoming explicit, can have serious consequences on the human mind.

The Joker never uncovered his repressed memory in *The Killing Joke*; instead, he gave everything he could to prevent himself from remembering his family’s deaths, inflicting the pain he experienced on others in the world out of spite. His collapse and subsequent transformation into the Joker lead him to believe that everyone is susceptible to a similar fate, but Batman and Commissioner Gordon’s endeavors to thwart him prove otherwise; as it turns out, anyone can have a bad day, but one bad day does not spell the end of all the good ones.

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Creating a Safe Space to Heal: The Healing Power of Empathy in *Silver Linings Playbook*

by Joe Norton

*Silver Linings Playbook* removes the stigma of mental illness by proving that empathy and understanding are the key to healing the mentally ill. There are only two ways in which a person can view someone with a mental illness: an empathetic view and an apathetic view. Highlighting this binary *Silver Linings Playbook* reveals as well as challenges the treatment of the mentally ill in modern America and illustrates the importance of challenging conventional medicine, while also respecting modern medicine. Empathy as a healing force spawns firstly from the author of the novel *Silver Linings Playbook*: “I also worked with kids diagnosed with severe autism and at night I worked at a locked-down facility with people who had brain trauma and mental illness. My own depression and those experiences helped me come up with Pat” (Lopez 8). Understanding mental illness on a deeper level is essential when understanding and empathizing with an individual who suffers from mental illness. Misunderstanding mental illness and using the wrong treatment will further disintegrate any mentally ill person. David O. Russel created a movie that challenges societal expectations while also encouraging a healthy healing process for people suffering from mental illness.
It is important to explain the difficulties and symptoms associated with Pat’s bipolar disorder so that his actions avoid demonization. Chemical imbalances in the brain create the illusion of self-induced isolation and a sense that the mentally ill person has no desire to change when the opposite is usually true. Pat’s symptoms in the film are an amalgamation of bipolar and depressive tendencies employed to represent a broader range of mental illness: “…in bipolar disorder, people experience manic or hypomanic times as well as depressive episodes. Researchers at the Black Dog Institute have found that in bipolar disorder, depression is most likely to be of a melancholic or psychotic type” (Cowan 11). While Pat is an amalgamation, he is still used within the film to show the trauma associated with bipolar depression. Silver Linings Playbook creates a realistic image of mental health and the family interaction around the disorder. The infidelity of Pat’s wife, Nikki, is commonly a side effect of untreated bipolar disorder: “According to Gestalt psychology, a bipolar disorder has a significant role in pushing a love partner to the edge and forcing the other party to commit infidelities” (Taghizadeh 612). David O. Russel goes to great lengths to stay true to both the original novel of the same name by Mathew Quick while also creating a broader version of mental illness and its side effects in the film adaptation: “In current terminology, bipolar I disorder is more severe, with people having longer periods of high mood, and being more likely to have psychotic symptoms and be hospitalized” (Reuben 14). By relying heavily on psychological theory Silver Linings Playbook creates the sense of authenticity while avoiding a generalization of mental illness. The film works to not only challenge preconceived notions of mental care but also the unintended side effects of unmedicated bipolar depression. The film creates a sense of urgency in correcting societies way of dealing with the mentally ill. Love and understanding are placed at the forefront, with therapy and medication spotlighted as well. Pat Solitano highlights the destructive nature of mere institutionalization and questions societies place in treating the mentally ill.

Silver Linings Playbook skews the viewers perception of Pat in the opening sequence by creating a sense of sympathy while also distancing him. The protagonist, Pat Solitano, begins the movie with an insightful monologue that shows both his love of family and internal struggle to feel a part of society:

“What, are you kidding me? Sundays. I love Sundays. I live for Sundays. The whole family’s together. Mom makes braciole. Dad puts the jersey on. We’re all watching the game. Yeah, it drives me crazy,
and yes, I was negative…You didn’t even know that I loved it, Nikki, but I did. I just didn’t appreciate it, or you, before.” (0:17-0:35)

When Pat is seen facing away from the camera it is understood that he is a loner in a world that fails to understand his complexities. Pat’s monologue shows that while he wishes he could talk about his issues openly he is unable to do so. By using Sunday as a metaphor for family and belonging: “I think it’s easy to graft your emotions to a football team so Sunday is a hyped up day. You can’t talk openly about your problems, but you can always go down to the Vet [Veterans Stadium] and scream at the players” (Lopez 6). The author of Silver Linings Playbook created a link between family, healing, and football that is undeniably true. Sports are an outlet for all the angst that develops over the week and creates a sense of community and belonging even for the most othered individuals. Without a sense of community, a mentally ill person will worsen, and eventually reach a point of decay far too gone for modern medicine to cure. Societal treatment of the mentally ill is a major factor in the healing process and without an empathetic hand there will be no chance of healing.

An apathetic view is a destructive force that will ultimately result in the worsening of someone’s mental illness. There are three key features in an Apathetic view. The first is that someone with an apathetic view characterizes mental illness as a choice and not a physical disease. Secondly, the apathetic view presents the mentally ill as unable to rejoin society until they hide their mental illness. And lastly, an apathetic views mental illness as shameful, and secret; “It is a condition that a person may suffer from and a source of the strange behavior that disturbs other people” (Beck 209). Understandably not everyone has the capacity to understand trauma and chemical imbalances of the brain. The stigma carried by mental illness cannot be easily forgotten or ignored. America has a long history of mistreatment and misinformation concerning the mentally ill. Mental illness seems to create a blanket that then encloses everyone with an illness no matter how small or insignificant: “… they may also be seen as a solidary mass of strange people, with their own different culture and character. They will seem to be members of a team, acting together against the society of ordinary folks, with their own secret techniques of opposition and hostile motives” (Bernard 209). Failure to acknowledge different variations and degrees of mental illness creates an opportunity for mistreatment and ostracization. By applying realistic problems associated with bipolar depression the film works to gain viewer sympathy while also offering solutions to these prob-
lems. *Silver Linings Playbook* uses Pat Sr. and various other foil characters to present the audience with this indifference toward the mentally ill.

Pat Sr. comes to represent the Apathetic view but also comes to represent the view of society, as well as the view of the institution. Pat Sr’s Apathetic view of Pat’s mental illness brings up interesting points. First there is the idea that institutionalization is best for the mentally ill which is directly against Dolores’ belief that the home is the best place to heal. Pat Sr also seems to think that Pat can overcome his illness simply by deciding to change. And lastly, Pat Sr. views mental illness as shameful and secretive. Viewers see evidence of this in Pat’s photo not being hung on the wall but instead sitting on the table, below his so-called normal brother.

Pat Sr. is the undisputed authority figure in the Solitano home. When Dolores brings Pat home from the institution, she is challenging his authority and judgement on the care of their son. Pat Sr.’s apathetic view is one of disappointment, judgement, and anger (see Figure 1).

The father becomes an agent of normalcy in this scene. He wants to assimilate Pat into a normalized version of manhood, and while his intentions are pure, it is the execution of his inclusion that pushes Pat away. “When their (fathers) major role is to discipline and control, fathers are not unlike supreme beings. They are distant, controlling figures who are removed from biological processes” (Sanday 64). When Pat refuses to stay and watch the game with his father he is directly questioning the supreme rule of his father. This refusal to obey stems from Pat Sr.’s own apathetic viewpoint. Pat feels isolated by his father’s refusal to accept his mental illness and is therefore less likely to listen to his advice. Mentally ill people are less likely to take
the advice of someone they feel are against them. To achieve a breakthrough with someone suffering from mental illness it is important to approach them in a kind and understanding way.

An Empathetic view is knowing that mental illness is something they cannot control and is a chemical imbalance of the brain. Someone with an Empathetic view also views mental illness as uniqueness instead of something othering. And lastly, an empathetic view understands that the mentally ill can give back to society when their violent tendencies are controlled. By viewing mental illness as uniqueness, it creates the sense that these people have something to offer that people without mental illness cannot offer: “Recovery as outcome refers to symptom severity/existence, functional (in) dependence, and more standardized measures, whereas recovery as process refers to having meaningful goals, hope, and more positive personal experiences” (Rudnick 4). Recovery as a process and not an outcome is the basis of an empathetic view. Understanding that mental illness takes time to heal avoids the tendency of most institutions by employing true care and compassion into the healing process. Dispersing the typical cures Dolores and Tiffany can truly achieve a breakthrough in Pat’s thinking. Dolores (Pat’s mother) understands that work will be involved when she takes Pat out of the institution but does it anyways. Accepting the mantle of healer shows that Dolores is more committed than anyone else to cure her son.

Dolores is the physical embodiment of the Empathetic view. Dolores is the initial agent of Pat’s healing. She becomes a savior symbol to Pat when she removes him from the mental facility and brings him home. Even though the courts and the facility both say that he should remain with them she will not let go of the fact that she can heal Pat at home: “Their research has aided me in thinking about the asylum as one possible site for a lunatic to survive, recover, or expire, but it was one site among many, and not the social necessity historians have often assumed” (Yani 6). Dolores is aware that the institution is a place for healing but not her only option. The asylum while a place that can heal, is also a place where patients become so involved in schedules and routines that they become institutionalized. Dolores works to avoid institutionalization by bringing Pat home to finish healing: “I don’t want him to get used to the routine here. Eight months is already long enough” (2:02-2:23). This undying love for Pat is a driving force throughout the movie and comes to represent the Empathetic person’s inability to forsake the mentally ill and leave them to their illness. The stigma
associated with the asylum seeps out in all directions. Patients, family, and society all have a stigmatized view of mental illness and the asylum:

“... some of the consequences of mental illness are rejection, segregation, and isolation. That, together with the belief that patients with mental illness receive treatment in psychiatric institutions or mental hospitals, seems to consolidate the myths regarding people with mental illness in our society” (Gámez 14).

Dolores works to avoid Pat being stigmatized by removing him from the institution before he becomes so used to the routine that he is unable to break free and rejoin society on his own. Her love is tangible within the film and can be seen on her face in every scene. Creating a loving space for healing is essential in healing the mentally ill and without it no real change would ever occur. Without the empathetic view of a loved one there would be no reason for the mentally ill to heal. This support system of love and understanding paves the way for the mentally ill. The love and care that Dolores puts into Pat’s healing can be summarized in this image the film gives of Dolores (Figure 2). This empathy allows the ill person to create a change within themselves in order to live up to the expectations of the empathetic person, and not live down to the expectations of an apathetic person.

Figure 2: Still from Silver Linings Playbook, (1:47:46)

An Empathetic view is not always the clear choice when deciding how to interact with someone with mental illness. And not everyone with an Empathetic view started out with that viewpoint. By witnessing the destructiveness that an Apathetic view can create the audience and characters in the movie realize that an Empathetic view can get the same result without
causing the repercussions that an Apathetic viewpoint does. The idea of an Empathetic view as a healing force exists within a paradoxical relationship with an Apathetic view. I want to argue that an Empathetic view would not be as healing without the presence of an Apathetic view. If Pat Sr never hit Pat during the wedding video scene then he would have never realized that an Empathetic approach would work. He would have continued to believe that the only way to insert change was that of Apathy. Without the presence of the Apathetic person there would be no visible benefits to the subversive Empathic view. Even though Pat is eventually healed of his mental illness, or at least learned to control it instead of vice versa, without the presence of an Apathetic person the Empathetic view wouldn’t have been the clear choice.

When Pat and Tiffany meet, they create a sub-culture based in mental illness, yet they refuse to allow that mental illness to be their defining traits. When they begin eating dinner Pat and Tiffany bond over sharing their history with medications. Creating this subculture based in mental illness allows Pat and Tiffany to define what mental illness and medication mean to them individually while also going against societal expectations that all medication is healing:

Tiffany (to Pat): What meds are you on?

Pat: Me? None. I used to be on Lithium and Seroquel and Abilify, but I don’t take them anymore, no. They make me foggy and they also make me bloated.

Tiffany: Yeah, I was on Xanax and Effexor, but I agree, I wasn’t as sharp, so I stopped (27:45-28:02).

Openly discussing medication is not considered socially acceptable which can be seen by Ronnie and Veronica’s facial expressions and intention to change the subject. Bonding over medications show that Tiffany and Pat exist on the fringes of society and fail to feel apart of something bigger than themselves. During this exchange Pat begins to realize that he has been comparing himself to sane people when he should have been comparing himself against other people with a mental illness or similar issue:

“He juxtaposes his clinically proven mental disorder against the behavior of “sane” people, which he finds irrational and unjusti-
fied. In this way, he highlights the bias against people suffering from mental health problems, which nevertheless originates from people who may also act violently but do not carry the stigma of a diagnosed disorder” (Perdikaki 18).

Pat realizes that he has created an idolized version of sanity for himself that has no basis in facts. This conversation also makes him realize that there are other people living in society that have similar issues yet they do not allow them to control them. This dialogue between Pat and Tiffany begins to transform Pat’s own thinking of his mental illness because another mentally ill person is showing him that he is not alone in his battle with mental illness.

Running becomes synonymous with Pat as well as Tiffany’s constant avoidance of their underlying emotions and problems. Pat and Tiffany’s relationship revolves around running. Their running is a physical act that represents how they run from their issues and mental illness. This physical act representing an internalized pain resurfaces later in the film in the form of dance therapy. The day after Pat and Tiffany meet Pat goes on a run that sets the precedent for their running relationship. At 36:10 Tiffany interrupts Pat’s run and her interjection stops the music. Not only does that show she can insert herself into Pat’s narrative but foreshadows her ability to stop the music that plays in Pat’s head when he has a delusional flashback. Tiffany also seems to possess the ability to know when Pat is lying:

Tiffany: What happened to your face?
Pat: Weight lifting accident.
Tiffany: That sounds like bullshit. Why’d you run by my house? Did our little conversation get you upset last night? (35:49 – 37:47)

Tiffany knows Pat lies to her and instead of letting it pass she digs deeper into what happened. She is aware she had an affect on Pat and is unrelenting in her pursuit of him. This deeper understanding could stem from her mental illness knowing his illness, or the empathetic view offering her deeper insight into his damaged psyche. Either way Tiffany is able to both match, and break down Pat’s apathetic view which leads to their breakthrough at the diner. Pat brings up Tiffany’s past during their first run and Tiffany demonstrates that healing lies in the acceptance of both mental illness and the past: “I was a big slut, but I’m not anymore. There’s always gonna be a part of me that’s sloppy and dirty, but I like that, with all the
other parts of myself. Can you say the same about yourself, sucker?! Can you forgive? Are you any good at that?” (35:49 – 37:47). Not only is Tiffany confronting Pat’s own apathy toward mental illness but she is forcing him to acknowledge that he is conforming to society’s idea of judgement and apathy. Tiffany also makes Pat acknowledge that the past is not always positive, but the past is what defines a person, so it cannot be forgotten.

Pat begins tittering on the edge of shame and acceptance concerning his mental illness and it comes to a boiling point when confronted by Tiffany’s unabashed acceptance of her past and her illness. Pat is desperately battling his preconceived notions of what it means to be mentally ill but Tiffany shows him there is a way to accept your past, heal, and move on all without losing sight of who you are. But when Tiffany mentions her sister and Nikki having a conversation about Pat he is consumed once more by his self-hatred and shame:

Pat: What do you mean? How am I? What does that mean?

Tiffany: Sort of like me.

Pat: Sort of like you? I hope to God she didn’t tell Nikki that.

Pat…. it’s just not right, lumping you and I together, I mean, it’s just wrong. And Nikki wouldn’t like that. Especially after all the shit you just told me.

Tiffany: You think that I’m crazier than you.

Nikki represents the model of normality to Pat. When confronted between self-realization and conformity he will always choose the latter when Nikki is concerned. This fear of society lumping the mentally ill is echoed again here. Pat only sees two options: sane or insane. For Pat there is no middle ground where he can happily exist. Tiffany confronts Pat with his own version of crazy when she laughs, knocks everything off the table, and subsequently storms out. Pat’s regret is visible, but he is still struggling between normalcy and self-realization. Chasing after Tiffany demonstrates Pat’s awareness of his conformity to societal judgements and his regret for doing it.

Pat’s apology does little to placate Tiffany because she feels betrayed by her own kind. Tiffany has no trouble analyzing Pat and his issues. She makes Pat aware that he is adhering to rules that were intended to other and hurt people. His judgement does nothing to change her past and only causes pain in the present:
Tiffany: You may not have experienced the shit that I did. But you loved hearing about it, didn’t you? You are afraid to be alive, you’re afraid to live. You’re a hypocrite. You’re a conformist. You’re a liar. I opened up to you and you judged me. You are an asshole. You are an asshole! (49:02 – 51:41).

Confronted with this knowledge that he is perpetuating the same trauma people have induced on him Pat goes into a stress induced hallucination. Just as before, Tiffany is the only person that can interject herself into Pat’s narrative and stop the music for him. Tiffany finds that she must confront Pat’s apathy with an aggressive, semi-apathetic view herself. Her truthfulness is something Pat desperately needs in a life full of self-imagined happy endings.

Instead of accepting that his marriage is over he continually spins stories in order to make his marriage seem perfect. Pat spends most of the movie creating fantasy endings for Nikki and himself. By failing to see that his relationship with Nikki is over, and was full of issues, Pat creates a standard of love that is unattainable and insincere. Even though Tiffany’s marriage was ended by death instead of infidelity she can genuinely critique her marriage and her faults within that relationship.

Tiffany: We were married for three years and five days, and I loved him. But for the last couple months, I just wasn’t into sex at all. It just felt like we were so different, and I was depressed. Some of that is just me, some of it was he wanted me to have kids and I have a hard I don’t think that makes me a criminal… (1:04:01 – 1:09:44).

Tiffany’s honesty and bluntness is life-altering for Pat. He finally hears the story that he has wanted to know since the first time he heard her name. This honesty from both sides begins forming a friendship in which true healing can take place. “Their friendships as well as their trust in each other play major roles in healing their emotional injuries” (Taghizadeh 614). Openness and trust in one another have long been an important part of group therapy. The fact the Pat and Tiffany start a subculture within society seems to intensify their ability to heal and love. The ability to emote with someone and see your own problems in their problems creates an atmosphere of safe healing and maturing. While empathy is a strong tool in the healing of the mentally ill there comes a point in which empathy must take on apathetic characteristics in order to subvert apathy and fully heal the ill individual.
Empathy is almost always a passive force for change unless an apathetic person is relentless in their persecution of the mentally ill. If an apathetic person stands in the way of an empathetic person for too long, then there is no other choice other than confrontation. Pat Sr. who thus far has been completely apathetic in his treatment of Pat is confronted by Tiffany’s aggressive empathy.

Pat Sr.: She’s fucking nuts! When you started spending time with her, it all fell apart. This is the fucking reason right here.

Tiffany: You think I fucked up the Eagles’ juju, don’t you?

Pat Sr.: Ever since, ever since he was with you, ever since—

Tiffany: There have been no games since Pat and I have been rehearsing every day and if Pat had been with me like he was supposed to, he wouldn’t have gotten in a fight, he wouldn’t be in trouble, maybe the Eagles beat the New York Giants.

Jake: She’s making a lot of sense, Pop. That’s all right on all counts.

Tiffany uses facts instead of emotions when confronting Pat Sr. Even Pat’s brother, Jake, who seems as apathetic and uncaring about Pat’s mental illness as Pat Sr. even agrees with Tiffany. She alters his view not by feeling he should change, instead she presented facts that supported her claim and allowed Pat Sr. to make up his own mind, just as an empathetic person allows the mental ill to choose their own path. This change in Pat Sr. also works to change the viewers opinion as well. Silver Linings Playbook uses individual characters to teach different lessons: “Movies in general tend to focus on individuals. Modern audiences can identify with individuals, see individual challenges as most relevant in their own lives, and delight in the performance of individual stars” (Beck 211). Instead of presenting a singular mentally ill person lost in a sea of normalcy Silver Linings Playbook creates multiple flawed characters to widen the possibility of connecting with viewers. By creating this community of the mentally ill, or odd, the film works to normalize therapy and the treatment of the mentally ill. Silver Linings Playbook offers a new way to view treatment while also providing therapy sessions, proper medication levels, and self-improvement.

Dance therapy has become popular again in the last few decades when treating non-verbal mental patients. They have found that people with the same conditions will dance in certain ways. Dance therapy also deals with
mirroring a lot. The idea is that by mirroring the dance moves of the mentally ill the therapist is better equipped to break through to them. Eventually the therapist will ask what the dance move symbolizes to the patient or patients. It is important to notice the similarities between dance therapy techniques when compared to the dance practices that Tiffany and Pat: “Mirroring, an exercise practiced in Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT), is considered by practitioners and patients to enhance emotional understanding and empathy for others” (McGarry 1). There is always a mirror present in the scene, which is utilized by filming their reflections instead of the subjects themselves. Danny, Pat’s friend from the asylum, is important because when he enters Tiffany’s dance studio, he joins a self-contained world where these three mentally ill people can dance and imitate each other. Even Tiffany is aware that dance is therapeutic for her and that Pat will benefit from it as well: “I’m not that great of a dancer but who cares its therapy and its fun” (1:04:01 – 1:09:44). Through their dance practices Pat and Tiffany’s bond grows deeper and more honest. It is to note that during this scene there are no words spoken between Pat and Tiffany once they begin dancing. The progression of their relationship is evident in the way they look at one another. Understanding each other in a non-sexual physical way lead to a slow healing of their sexualized traumas. This silent empathy must first begin in a non-sexual way for both because of their common thread of sexual trauma and/or sexualized issues:

“The most revealing feature of this movie’s treatment of odd people is the developing relationship of the hero and heroine, both former mental patients and troublemakers… We see in that developing relationship the beginnings of a subcultural formation in which people in similar conditions form a community with a distinctive culture” (Beck 211).

Their ability to interact with someone in a physical way enables them to trust humanity again. Pat’s marriage ended in infidelity, and Tiffany’s ended in her husband’s death while pursuing sexual healing between them. Both needed a community of trust and comfort before they were able to love anyone, especially themselves. The film deals with not just the healing of Pat but the healing of society and his family’s acceptance of his mental illness.

When the dance competition occurs (1:45:20-1:49:50) viewers see a physical representation of Pat and Tiffany’s relationship in their perfor-
mance. There are three separate, and unique sections in their performance. The first is slow and sexual which represents their original meeting. The second section represents the wild untamed chemistry that they share. The final performance shows that they are now ready to take chances even if they end in failure. When Dolores sees the chemistry between Pat and Tiffany (Figure 2, 1:47:46) viewers know that her goal was not to heal Pat of his mental illness and force him to conform but to find a way that he can feel secure in who he is while living his life to its fullest potential. The performance impacts Pat Sr. the most. Since being confronted by Tiffany’s aggressive empathy she opened his eyes to Pat’s pain and illness. She connected her relationship with Pat to the Eagles. He understood at that moment that Tiffany meant she had kept Pat out of trouble. After the performance viewers finally get an honest look into Pat Sr.’s mind:

Pat Sr.: Let me tell you, I know you don’t wanna listen to your father, I didn’t listen to mine but I’m telling you, you gotta pay attention to the signs. When life reaches out with a moment like this, it’s a sin if you don’t reach back. I’m telling you, it’s a sin if you don’t reach back, and it’ll haunt you for the rest of your days like a curse. You’re facing a big challenge in your life right now, at this very moment, right here. That girl loves you, she really loves you. And I don’t know if Nikki ever did, but she sure as hell doesn’t love you right now. I’m telling you, don’t fuck this up.

Viewers realize in this moment that Pat Sr. has an epiphany and realizes that complete normalcy may never be achievable for Pat but happiness is achievable. He is also aware of how Nikki treated him in her pursuit of changing him. Comparing that to how Tiffany treats Pat he sees the change for good and cannot allow his son to return to his obsessive delusions: “Human communities do not lack for ingenious ways of understanding oddness and dealing with it… there is also the awful possibility that actual deviations will call into question the adequacy of the theories we rely on to make sense of the world “(Beck 210). Pat Sr. has to rip down the pre-conceived notions that he created and deal with the real world solutions that present themselves in the film. He realizes that through love and understanding Tiffany and Dolores enacted change in Pat. They never forced him to heal but instead offered him understanding and avenues toward healing.
At the close of the film (1:56:04) viewers finally see Pat and Tiffany happy and seemingly healed of their self-destructive tendencies. This healing spawns from both understanding and the elimination of apathetic treatment. Without first being confronted by an apathetic view, the empathetic view will never find the strength to demand fair treatment and care. While empathy is a strong force for change it will eventually fall upon the patient themselves to decide if they wish to be healed or not. If Pat would have stopped looking for his silver lining, then he may have never been at a place to accept empathy and treatment. Tiffany’s insistence on Pat’s participation in her dance practice furthers the idea that mentally ill people need a like-minded community to find comfort and create a space to heal themselves that is free of the apathetic view of society. Silver Linings Playbook removes the demonized stigma that surrounds mental illness while also showing that the treatment of the mentally ill is a painstakingly slow process at times that requires commitment, understanding, and most importantly empathy.

Works Cited


“If I Just Go Mad Now”: Perspective and Absurdity in Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*

by Hannah Page

TWO AMERICAN-MADE ATOMIC BOMBS WERE dropped on Japan in August of 1945, revealing a newly shaped world where people realized humanity’s capacity to have the power to improve and grow, as well as the potential of the power to completely destroy humanity and the world. Both achievements of horror and impressiveness sailed into the eyes and ears of people around the world. Two decades after our first glimpse of nuclear holocaust, the moon landing ushered in a time of inspiration stemming from human achievement. Achievements in human ability and knowledge exposed the power humans possessed for the wondrous and previously thought of as the unachievable, as well as a new understanding
of the simultaneous power that humans possess to make obsolete the Earth and humanity, as well. How could humanity simultaneously be good and be monstrous? Humans had to reckon with the idea that the world was both good and horrendous: a mad world. Technology demonstrates humans’ desire for the continuance of the self but often results in the realization of the mortality of the self and humanity, often resulting in more complexity despite efforts to simplify life through the manufacturing and implementation of technology.

These sorts of existential issues are also explored in the post-WWII phenomenon of the Theatre of the Absurd, which captured playwrights’ interest particularly in the 1950’s. Douglas Adams had a fondness of existentialism, his favorite sketch in Footlight’s drama club being one where “…a railway signal man who caused havoc over the entire Southern Region by attempting to demonstrate the principles of existentialism using the points system…” (Gaiman 12). The Theater of the Absurd tries, as poetry does, to shock the audience out of complacency by challenging norms and comfortable views on issues. British poet Dylan Thomas sought to, as some critics have suggested, review the “similarity between the creative and destructive forces in the universe” (Poetry Foundation). In his 1946 poem “Fern Hill,” he replaces what would normally be written as ‘God’ with ‘Time’ instead, representing the shift in society at this time to view the universe in more concrete and non-hopeful terms.¹ The British contemporary poet Philip Larkin, quite the opposite in style to Dylan Thomas, expressed human boredom and fears in a distinct and inimitable voice.

Philosophers and writers of literature have puzzled over the absurdity of the human condition for a long time. The study of absurdity “began with Tertullian, an early father of the church, who argued that the surest sign of the truth of Christianity is its absurdity” (Tim Wynne-Jones). Philosopher Thomas Nagel’s publication entitled, “The Absurd,” eeks to make some sort of assessment of human absurdity and its origins. Amy Kind in her essay “Life, the Universe, and Absurdity”, provides an analysis of Nagel’s thought that the struggle between our internal perspective and external perspective, and this has struck me as quite important in understanding Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*.

My paper and thesis revolve around reckoning absurdity to existence, the meaning—if any—of existence, and the struggle between sense and nonsense that perhaps leads to madness. Does absurdity lead to our madness? Or is our post-Atomic madness a sign of the absurd powers humans have
managed to harness Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy—comprised of five books—is the first one in the series and draws on many motifs and themes of science-fiction and absurdity. *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* revolves around protagonist Arthur Dent post-destruction of Planet Earth. This destruction of the earth, he soon learns, is because of the alien Vogon’s desire to make room for a super-highway in outer-space, and this otherworldly science-fiction encounter is only the beginning of a satirical English Sci-Fi that continues to turn the reader’s world upside-down—even when that world has been evaporated in favor of an alien super-highway.

Absurdist thought has travelled through centuries to the current day, where people still find meaning and release in philosophizing through absurdist means and writing in such genres as science-fiction which proves to be a good conductor of the absurd and irrational. Although Douglas Adams’ work has the components for being in much conversation with madness and absurdist critical theory, Ellen Opdahl in her thesis *DON’T PANIC! A Study of the Absurd as an Expression of Anxiety and Existentialism in Douglas Adams’ The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,* observes that “…surprisingly little has been written about [The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy] in the context of absurdity” (1). Science-fiction is an important genre of literature as it adds to the idea that “…literature, fiction, is the only possible meeting-place between madness and philosophy, between delirium and thought....” (Felman 48). Science-fiction further pushes the idea that humanity lives in repulsive opposition or inability to accept reality, as author Van der Colff says: “The subjective cocoon of “reality”—whether real or imaginary, whether born of dreams or psychosis, whether an illusion sparked by other “intolerable realities”—remains elusive” (One is Never Alone with a Rubber Duck 31). Current day, science-fiction proves to be an especially potent conductor of the absurd and irrational. This genre challenges our beliefs in an entertaining and thoughtful way by turning our world and beliefs inside out.

Nagel published his first book in 1970, and *Hitchhiker’s Guide* was published as a book in 1979, having first been produced as a radio show in 1978, so Nagel was positing and putting forth these thoughts and sentiments during the time that was *Hitchhiker’s Guide* was being conceived and received by audiences. Nagel explores the internal and external perspectives of humans. Arthur is the insider from Earth turned outsider to the universe upon the slow-burning realization that the world has the potential for people in it “…find different perspectives…” (van der Colff 2). From the
internal perspective, things matter deeply to one, while from the external perspective, things don’t carry as much weight. How can something be both important and unimportant? The reckoning between the ideas that the exact thing can be both vastly important as well as wildly unimportant can have a maddening effect on a human. Andrew Scull in his work *Madness in Civilization* explores a similar notion. Is madness outside us or within us? Is madness the reconciling of both of these actualities, or perhaps the reconciliation of reason with unreason? Shoshana Feldman also raises questions and observations about madness in culture and society. Does madness arise directly from peoples’ attempts at voicing madness? From “... humankind’s ludicrous attempts at imposing meaning on an indecipherable universe” (Van der Colff 127)? Science-fiction both explores the external demonstration of technology and production of a society and the imminent or hypothesized future, as well as delving into the shared and unique internal struggles and surmises or summations of human experience.

One of Nagel’s primary observations and arguments is the attempt at reckoning between the internal perspective and external perspective in humans observing their circumstances. Douglas Adams sometimes demonstrates this philosophical outlook in one character over the course of the novel, and sometimes he demonstrates it through the juxtaposition of two different characters. In one scene, Slartibartfast, the constructor of the coastlines in Norway, reveals to Arthur the reality of what he knew of as the Earth. Here, Slartibartfast is describing to Arthur the making of the Earth and its original purpose of making—which proved to be an extremely difficult task to even do—the Question to the Universe, which proved to be unsuccessful due to its sudden and untimely detonation for a different lifeforms’ endeavors and other lifeforms’ inability to construct The Answer to The Question:

“You know,” said Arthur thoughtfully, “all this explains a lot of things. All through my life I’ve had this strange unaccountable feeling that something was going on in the world, something big, even sinister, and no one would tell me what is was.”

“No,” said the old man, “that’s just perfectly normal paranoia. Everyone in the Universe has that.”

“Everyone?” said Arthur. “Well, if everyone has that perhaps it means something! Perhaps somewhere outside the Universe we know…”
“Maybe. Who cares?” said Slartibarfast before Arthur got too excited. “Perhaps I’m old and tired,” he continued, “but I always think that the chances of finding out what really is going on are so absurdly remote that the only thing to do is to say hang the sense of it and just keep yourself occupied.” (192-193)

The characters throughout the book reveal issues within themselves that are very similar to realizations and conclusions made in theories of madness and absurdity. Some characters wish to explain things or try to figure out how to explain what is going on in the universe. Arthur, in the above conversation, is a philosopher of sorts, Slartibartfast having long-since lost that part of himself. He does not care that something bigger was going on in the world, only that he is able to keep himself occupied somehow. Slartibartfast then explains how his approach to life as being a common approach to life in the universe: in such passages as found when Slartibartfast finishes talking to Arthur and the narrator speaks for a long while, “Those who study the complex interplay of cause and effect...say that we are powerless to prevent it. ‘It’s just life,’ they say.” Kind remarks on Nagel’s viewpoints on the intersectionality of humans’ views and interpretation and re-interpretation of their own life and existences: “Once I detach myself from myself and step outside of the context of my ordinary concerns, I see myself objectively as simply ‘a small, contingent, and exceedingly temporary organic bubble in the universal soup’. And from this perspective, it is hard to see how any of the things that I normally take to matter so deeply really even matter at all. The two perspectives thus inevitably collide, and according to Nagel it is this collision that accounts for absurdity” (Kind 88-89). The realization that something can matter and also not matter at the same time results in further complexity and realization on the irrationality and absurdity of existence and this soup of experiences that we call life.

Characters in *Hitchhiker’s Guide* are often trying to voice madness—their own, or viewable madness or unexplainable nuances around them—or trying to silence madness around them. This action of characters trying to voice their madness is evidence of them trying to actuate their state or action of being (Van der Colff 125). As some literary theorists or researchers suggest, the struggle of madness in the human condition comes from trying to both accept and counter the madness which runs through society. Is madness a coping mechanism or repellant for self-destruction? Is madness induced to cope with unpleasant or sudden change? Philosophers such as Thomas Nagel, however, posit that the only way to cope with absurdity or madness...
of humankind is to accept or view that absurdity is not actually a problem. Some critical writers even suggest that madness can be found in the very writing and arguing of madness. Writing about madness can often result in writing madness itself (Felman).

Literature is collective memory and humans form understanding through connections to the things they do know, or, have control over. Time and time again, the characters in Adams’ novel try to reconcile their odd positions and situations in the universe. At one instance, Ford and Arthur just so happen to be rescued by the Infinite Improbability Drive. As they are travelling through different places in space, they see worlds expanding and contracting, and very weird things within these spaces of moving liminality. Adams’ “…absurdism has a way of rushing up to you and smacking you in the face”, as Tim Wynne-Jones says. As Shoshana Felman writes of what Foucault believed: “…many French intellectuals have repeated Foucault’s claim: madness is, primarily, a lack of language, an “absence of production,” the silence of a stifled, repressed language” (Felman 14). Characters throughout this book, un-stifle their language, using it as a way to try and connect with others through the ride that is *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.*

“Good God,” said Arthur, “it looks just like the sea front at Sou-thend.”

“Hell, I’m relieved to hear you say that,” said Ford.

“Why?”

“Because I thought I must be going mad.”

“Perhaps you are. Perhaps you only thought I said it.”

Ford thought about his.

“Well, did you say it or didn’t you?” he asked. “…perhaps we’re both going mad.”

“Yes,” said Arthur, “we’d be mad, all things considered, to think this was Southend.”

“Oh yes.”

“So do I.”

“Therefore we must be mad.”

“Nice day for it.”

“Yes,” said a passing maniac.
Ford and Arthur are trying to make sense through connections to familiar things. They are obviously (maybe not too obviously, though, given the nature of the novel) not in Southend in England; but, they use this connection to try and make sense of an infinitely improbably moving liminal space. The thing that they connect to this place is a seashore. A sea is something that nobody can have control over, so it’s interesting that the thing they connect this place to is a place of constantly shifting tides, constantly shifting views and perspectives. They find solidarity in both realizing they are sharing this strange experience that is beginning to shift the perspective primarily of Arthur. They find consolation in acknowledging a shared madness, a condition that already exists in this shifting space between universes as is signaled by the presence of the random maniac in this passage. Sharing madness seems to be a simple thing that can be done to grope around trauma to understand our place.

The text is in essence a series of jumpings from place to place within the galaxy that are not quite a fluid and logical story. The subject matter of this novel and the unique way in which plot and context is approached mimics the Theater of the Absurd which was popular at the time of the publication of *Hitchhiker’s Guide*. Douglas Adams’s work is similar to the absurdist play by Irish writer Samuel Beckett “Waiting for Godot”. This story “...revives some of the conventions of clowning and farce to represent the impossibility of purposeful action and the paralysis of human aspiration” (Baldick qtd. in Van der Colff 126). All events that happen occur from across a spectrum of improbability. Comments inserted from the narrator do not pertain to the forward or progressive movement or obvious significance of the story, but rather, offer obscure references to the nonexistent. The book delves deeper and deeper into absurdity, suggesting the book is representing a type of madness, or at least reporting madness. The *Hitchhiker’s Series* “...portray a ludicrous universe in which a number of rather farcical characters employ” (...) “improbable resources” (Van der Colff 126). Douglas Adams is no foreigner to writing ludicrous plots in his stories for he was in fact the man who wrote the show that Neil Gaiman described as unnoteworthy, in which Ringo Starr is mistakenly given the powers “...to travel through space, to do flower arranging, and to destroy the universe by waving his hand” (Gaiman 15). The Preamble to *Mostly Harmless* even suggests unchronological happenings as nearly a philosophy of the universe: “Anything that happens, happens. Anything that, in happening, causes something else to happen, causes something else to happen. Anything that, in happening, causes itself to happen again, happens again.”
It doesn’t necessarily do it in chronological order, though” (*Mostly Harmless* 631-634). Douglas Adams unapologetically presents his stories as plotless and presents the world as plotless happenings as well, where straining for comprehending these seemingly random happenings “…is indeterministic and [that] the future is open” (Burton 17). Neel Burton explain that “[s]ome scientists and philosophers have argued that if the movement of subatomic particles is random…” and explains that if this is true, that the world may very well be random and that societal concepts of free-will “…enables us to relate our present self with our past, future, and conditional selves” (Burton 18). Adams abstains from giving his readers a plot to hold onto, allowing them to explore the story and self in an absence of a feeling of place and ordinary perspective.

The story’s lack of real plot or cause-and-effect is further evidenced by passages such as when Zaphod reveals to the group his revelation at his realization that whatever he thinks of doing just sort of effortlessly happen. This passage begins with him explaining why he stole the Heart of Gold SpaceShip in the first place: “…to look for a lot of things” (144). To this, the other characters seem a little exasperated, much like Arthur feels throughout most of the book. When he is prompted to reveal what he is looking for, he remarks that he actually doesn’t know. “I don’t know what I’m looking for.”

“Why not?”

“Because…because…I think it might be because if I knew I wouldn’t be able to look for them.”

“What, are you crazy?”

“It’s a possibility I haven’t ruled out yet,” said Zaphod quietly. “I only know as much about myself as my mind can work out under its current conditions. And its current conditions are not good.” (….) “I freewheel a lot. I get an idea to do something, and, hey, why not, I do it. I reckon I’ll become President of the Galaxy, and it just happens, it’s easy.” (….) “And then whenever I stop and think—why did I want to do something? —how did I work out how to do it? —I get a very strong desire just to stop thinking about it.” (144-45)
Zaphod’s experience through life seemed easy and desirable because of its ease. Zaphod’s approaching the easiness of his life with skepticism—leaving his internal perspective to perhaps an external one—leaves him feeling confused and askew as to the weird workings of his life. He has lived within one perspective, but when he finds himself questioning his life, he enters a different perspective and dialogue with himself. What if his life isn’t what he always thought it was? What if the thinking of and reckoning of these two realizations is only a short glimpse into the madness of life?

Literature has long been understood in conversation with madness and “…the symbolic expression of such complex inner experience” (Feder 4). Those who write poetry often talk about poetry as a way to organize thoughts and madness: a way to make sense of what cannot be made sense of, or a way to make sense of human trauma of living. Nicholson remarks on the interesting changing ideas of the artist and writer when he writes, “With the shift toward a psychological view of madness that finally took shape in the nineteenth century, what was traditionally linked to sacred knowledge and prophetic voice was reduced to a consummately profane disease: madness became mental illness” (Nicholson 134). Nicholson also recounts that, as Foucault stated, as civilization neared the 20th century, Western civilization began isolating the ideas of madness and art, while at one point, madness was nearly considered sacred and necessary to produce art. The Vogon poetry in Hitchhiker’s Guide is thought of as torture. Why does Adams choose to pose poetry as a conveyer of madness—not a way to organize madness, but a way to induce madness? And what is gained from the reading and analyzing of this poetry? Arthur knows how to manage this particular world, though, and knows how to throw his voice to match that of Vogon poetry. He delves into another language to try and save his life.

What is interesting is how Arthur is trying to connect with the poetry and use it as a way to escape the Vogons while Ford is bewildered and confused at what he is trying to do. But even after Arthur’s best attempts to sway the Vogons to not kill them so they can ultimately escape—Ford even joining in—doesn’t work. They’re thrown out and are described as popping out into space looking like ‘corks from a toy gun’, like they’re not worth a lot or don’t mean a lot in the grand scheme of things (Adams 75). What works in saving them is the Heart of Gold spaceship that only manages to pick them up on an astronomical off-chance through the Improbability Drive. Arthur’s attempts to stop the Vogons from killing them is just textual play
and results in no plot movement. The plot movement occurs only because of improbable external sources which seem absurd and to reveal the absurdity of coincidence and occurrence in the universe.

The story finds the characters wrestling with the desire to understand things around them. Arthur wants to know what’s going on, Zaphod has this same obsession with understanding everything. There’s even the Deep Thought computer where they literally ask it the Answer to Life. When it doesn’t give them a clean-cut answer, or what they think constitutes as a clean-cut or desirable sentient-centric answer, they are not exactly thrilled, not questioning that the answer to the Ultimate Question may have nothing to do with them, much like humans desire to understand things from their perspective. They then realize they must also know the Question to Life. Even the mice want to know too and will cut open Arthur’s brain to get the answer because they are so obsessed with figuring out life. Characters desire things to be one way, or questions to have a certain answer tailored to their desires and view. These characters, too, though, living in a world built on layers of improbability, encounter issues because of this improbability. Their desires, apart from Zaphod’s, rarely reach the fruition they desire or in the way they want. “Human brains are not immutable organs that we are born with. To the contrary, they are remarkably plastic, and they remain so through our lifespan. Our social and psychological environment continuously influences how our brains develop and function in the most profound ways, such that the social becomes built into, and helps to shape and transform, the biological” (Scull 757). The continual presence of the improbable and potential for the improbable makes way for a universe that is plastic and changing itself and possessing the potentiality for differing and shifting perspectives.

Early on in the text, the narrator gives backstory and information that does not seem to be understandable and rather absurd to a reader not from the sci-fi universe in *Hitchhiker’s*. Obscure and absurd information is given as though it is common-knowledge, leaving the reader finding themselves needing to piece together this information given to them.

“He sat down on one of the mattresses and rummaged about in his satchel. Arthur prodded the mattress nervously and then sat on it himself; in fact he had very little to be nervous about, because all mattresses grown in the swamps of Squornshellous Zeta are very
thoroughly killed and dried before being put to service. Very few
have ever come to life again.” (51-52)

While Arthur doesn’t know this about the mattress, and neither does the
reader, the way the text talks remarks about this particular thing makes it
seem as they’re just referring back to something the reader already knows
or has some connection to. Many different random pieces of random uni-
verses get put together and readers are trying to make sense of it. It’s like we
are being Babel Fishes of the story, trying to translate these random bits of
meaning into the galaxy so we can understand it. When missiles become a
whale and a bowl of petunias, the whale contemplates existential ideas in a
peaceful way for a short moment, harnessing more philosophical thought in
a few moments than many people attempt to harness in a lifetime (Adams
135). The book offers readers several short humorous snippets like this of
narrative and story that do not link directly to the book and makes readers
view the humorous and maddening cycle humans have at trying to impose
meaning into everything. Adams uses humans and non-humans alike to
make readers think about “…humankind’s ludicrous attempts at impos-
ing meaning on an indecipherable universe” (Van der Colff 127). Readers
are invited into the story to read it as a fully-functioning and fully valid
world despite their lack of understanding of it. By the author attempting
to make the story feel approachable to everyone who reads it, the readers
can feel validated by their attempt at trying to assimilate and understand
this valid world.

Arthur gets frustrated with people not understanding how important
Earth was to him and all that. Humor lies in the fact that he is so upset with
finding out his house is going to be demolished, and then minutes later,
the entire fricking Earth is being destroyed. Like that’s a bad Thursday (he
can never get the hang of them). This speaks to how humans think the tiny
bit of what they understand of their world or what they think of this world
is so important, when really there’s always so much more that they don’t
know. When we are informed that what we view as the most important
in the universe is actually not the most important, it forces us out of our
internal perspective, as philosopher Thomas Nagel posits, and forces us to
view our world and worldview from the external. The tension in humans
comes from this tension and reconciling between the internal perspective
and external perspectives.
The notion of Earth-centrism is echoed through this book, speaking also to preoccupation with consumerism. Arthur gets frustrated with people not understanding how important Earth was to him. What I think is funny is that he is so upset with finding out his house is going to be demolished, and then minutes later, the entire Earth is being destroyed. This suddenness of unannounced destruction of what is most important to Arthur speaks to how humans think that the tiny bit of what they understand of our world or what we think of our world is so important, when really there is always so much more that we do not know. But being told what you believe to be normal of the world isn’t actually what is normal or even exactly true, results in a type of inducement of madness. What we can deduce of Arthur, as found in the first picture we are given of Arthur and his bland but consistent English life, is that he lives a life of which he is happy. His world is what is most important to him, and yet “…Nagel concludes that we’re better off ‘simultaneously engaged and detached, and therefore absurd, for this is…the result of full awareness’” (Kind 91-92). This book speaks to this idea of subjectivity of importance, and how one reacts to the consistency of common-place life in often an unwilling manner.

This book evidences the Fordism theories on efficiency. Ford Prefect determined his name by deducing that automobiles seemed to be most important on the Earth, which he labels as ‘mostly harmless’ in his travel companion “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy”. “Paralleling the Fordist philosophy that increased efficiency determines the policy for all policy and practice, Earth, having no use-value, becomes disposable. All material and labor become exchangeable and disposable in order to serve the greater good: production” (McFeaters 174). The Earth is evaporated because the Vogons want to expand a super highway through the universe. The Earth and everything inhabiting it becomes exchangeable for a highway system, much like Arthur’s house was exchangeable for a highway. The theme of consumerism runs through the book. From the very beginning where the narrator offers money as the source of so much strife in humans’ lives: “…most of these [suggestions to the problems of unhappiness] were largely concerned with the movements of small green pieces of paper” (1). This sentiment is also echoed on page 116. Consumerism and the desire to conquer is the root of much absurdity and strife.

Marvin is produced to serve humans, describing himself as being a “manically depressed robot” (136). He is so depressed and is so influential in this mental illness that he drives a computer to commit suicide and characters
to become exasperated at his unhappy musings such as how he hates oceans (Adams 149). Marvin, a robot, is most aware of madness of world and self. Heidegger does in fact write that, “Technology is a way of revealing” (12). Marvin recognizes that humans made him and is then depressed at realizing that humans made him depressed. He is programmed to have the melancholy personality he does, driving him to feel mad within a world that Neel Burton argues that peoples’ “pattern[s] of thinking, behaving, feeling” is to some degree programmed, too (7). Other technological machinery in this book exude a much more different personality than Marvin. Technological characters such as Eddie the Shipboard computer (117) seem to be very happy as inferred from passages such as “Hi there! This is Eddie, your shipboard computer, and I’m feeling just great, guys, and I know I’m just going to get a bundle of kicks out of any program you care to run through me” (117). This ecstatic attitude of having orders given to it as a piece of A.I is quite different from Marvin’s depressed attitude of trudging along whenever given any type of instructions to him.

If “…personality can simply and effectively be defined as a person’s pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving,” then Marvin, a product of a group of people’s hands, Marvin, we can then conclude, is an outward reflection of that particular society’s view of themselves and their perspective and understanding of the world and its irrationality (Burton 7). By this same logic, any A.I depicted in this novel is also a reflection that same society. The depressed and happy technologies are both differing but simultaneous introspections into the internal and external perspectives of our society. Science-fiction, at the base understanding of it, often incorporates futuristic technologies, but is always tugging towards the internal happenings of humans. “SF is not exclusively directed “outward” and into the future; its point of view is quite often redirected “inwards”, i.e. towards ourselves” (Erkenbrecher 7). Douglas Adams traversed various countries with zoologist Mark Carwardine and is quoted in One is Never Alone with a Rubber Duck as saying:

“I think one of the reasons I was very interested in doing this is, when I was doing Hitchhiker I was always trying to find different perspectives on everyday things so that we would see them afresh. And I suddenly realised that the animals in the world, because they all have completely different perceptual systems, the world we see is only specific to us, and from every other animal’s point of view it’s a completely different place.” (2)
Adams learned about how life is interpreted totally differently from animals and humans, and through this, realized how interpretation of life changes from person to person, this driving him to want to explore different perspectives. Having Marvin be so human and carry such a human personality and mental illness acts as an integral part of further exploring the confusing nature of humankind throughout the novel.

Adams’s use of writing A.I. and robots—common motifs of science-fiction—as perpetrators of human tendencies, obsessions, and predispositions is another way for him to get at humans and another way for humans to read about themselves. Marvin is not simply an outward example of futuristic sci-fi tropes, but a mechanism by which his musings and complaints are mirrored by humankind’s own musings of futility from an irrational world. “Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology “spiritually in hand.” We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control.” (Heidegger 5). Marvin’s programmed depression acts as a way that sedates him from fully functioning on his own, conditioning him to rely on doing what the humans and humanoids tell him. He is expected to follow orders, having been made by the humans and being expected then to serve them as technology.

Douglas Adams uses motifs and themes of science-fiction to construct an absurd world that explores humans’ madness at construction of meaning, obsession, and existentialism in The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy. He masterfully uses robots, technology, and aliens, weaving them into a grand story, to explore the difficulty, complexity, and absurdity of humanity. Experiences, viewpoints, and items of import to us, are in fact important to us and where we come from, but sometimes gaining a different viewpoint can help us gain a new and world-altering perspective.

Notes

1. On the discussion of higher power, morality, and madness, see (Kind 81-82). “Granted, our doing so ensures that our earthly lives have meaning for the mice. But it in no way ensures that our lives have meaning for us. Likewise, then, although it might be the case that our playing a part in God’s plan for the universe has meaning for God, it’s not clear how our lives would thereby have meaning for us.” “The answer to the Ultimate Question may have nothing to do with us.”
Works Cited


Portrayals of the “Mad Genius” Trope in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *A Beautiful Mind*

by Clare Robinson

“But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.
“Oh you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here.”
—Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

THE TROPE OF THE ‘MAD GENIUS’ appears frequently in both fictional and nonfictional literature and film. In fictitious depictions the “mad genius” is usually a scientist in pursuit of knowledge, and this usually results in tragedy or ostracization from regular society. Several depictions of the mad genius or mad scientist in fiction portray the characters as evil, which usually indicates their “madness.” Other fictional mad geniuses are portrayed in from a comic angle, meant to appeal to a younger audience. The villain’s madness is a used due to the familiarity of the trope, seen in characters such as Plankton from *Spongebob* or Dr. Doofenshmirtz from *Phineas & Ferb*. In animated depictions, the mad genius usually functions
as a tool to showcase the antagonists villany. These characters are “mad” in order to give context for their evil motives, which is to gain power. In these shows or films, the mad genius has little to be explored in terms of complexity. It is evident that they are evil due their insanity. On the contrary, the comic ‘mad genius’ exists in characters such as Doc from Back to the Future, sporting the iconic crazy white hair and lab coat that the mad genius character is stereotyped as in most depictions. Occurrences of the more chaotic-evil mad genius types crop up, mainly in film portrayals, such as the Joker in both the animated depictions and the portrayal of his character in The Dark Night, the late Heath Ledger’s most acclaimed role. The commonality between all of these mad genius characterizations is the stereotype of the link between creativity and genius, and how it usually results in insanity.

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein shows the other side of the mad genius trope, where more complexities arise within the archetype. Victor Frankenstein drive for knowledge and “fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature” (21) results in his madness, but his intentions are not inherently evil. He allows his obsession with scientific advancement to take over his life and ostracize himself from society and his family. His creation of the Monster is a result of his pursuit of knowledge and creation. His desire to create life and go beyond the science of his time results in tragedy and destruction. Victor’s obsession with science stems from his need to create and possess. When Elizabeth is brought into the family, Victor is immediately obsessed with her.

Everyone loved Elizabeth. The passionate and almost reverential attachment with which all regarded her became, while I shared it, my pride and my delight. On the evening previous to her being brought to my home, my mother had said playfully, “I have a pretty present for my Victor--tomorrow he shall have it.” And when, on the morrow, she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift, I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally and looked upon Elizabeth as mine--mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on her I received as made to a possession of my own. We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin. No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me--my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only.
Victor’s mother refers to Elizabeth as a “present” for him and he claims that “she was to be mine only,” which indicates that Victor’s desire for love is actually his desire to possess and control things, which leads to his need to be “creator.” Victor ignores the good things in his life, his family and love for Elizabeth, and focuses all his efforts on science. Victor craves knowledge, control, and in turn power. Victor encompasses the stereotype of the mad genius in which he obsesses over his work, and love is his driving force, for revenge as well as reconciliation. His obsessions with the pursuit to create and his obsession with love leads to his suffering and his inability to live a normal life. Shelley’s portrayal of Victor’s mad genius shows the negative aspects of the archetype. Depictions of the mad genius in fiction are concerned with enforcing the archetype of the mad genius as a warning that pursuits of knowledge lead to obsession and result in tragedy. The focus is more on what drove Frankenstein to insanity, his obsession, rather than an actual mental illness.

1. The Mad Scientist and Mad Artist

Victor Frankenstein is the most well known depiction of the “mad scientist” archetype. In film portrayals, whether it be Gene Wilder’s comedic adaptation or the more youthful depiction of an adolescent Victor, a “science nerd” who loses his beloved pet dog and eventually revives him in *Frankenweenie*, the notable stereotype of Victor as the estranged ‘mad scientist’ figure

Ann Stiles explores the evolution of the mad scientist trope in her critique. She comments that “[t]he now-familiar trope of the mad scientist in fact traces its roots to the clinical association between genius and insanity that developed in the mid-nineteenth century” (319). In terms of literary depictions of the “mad genius,” the line between good and evil is not so clear. Ann Stiles explores the stereotype of the ‘mad scientist’ in her journal piece and she claims that “A second stereotype, the “unfeeling scientist” who has “suppressed all human affections in the cause of science” is clearly a legacy of Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein” (323). The notion of Victor being what Stiles refers to as the “unfeeling scientist” who has nothing but his obsessions left indicates that the mad genius trope in fiction tends to follow the themes of loss, tragedy, and isolation being the only outcome for these characters. The “mad scientist” can not achieve happiness or normalcy. Figures like Nash get their sentimentalized and idealized “happy ending” because it’s what the audience wants, and the audience wants tragedy for the mad genius in fiction.
The mad artist exists in the creative field, whether they are a musician, artist, or literary figure. Famous examples of the mad artist genius would be figures like Sylvia Plath, Vincent Van Gogh, and Mozart. These figures operate as the tortured artist, they are the artist who operate under the stereotype that behind creative genius, there is also insanity. Both the mad scientist and mad artist continue to exist as stereotypes and tropes in film, literature and even popular media today. The cliche is hard to avoid at times, at most people want to see familiar tropes in fiction, and they are hard to ignore or change. However the stereotypes are not just overused, they play a significant role in shaping our views on mental illness. Playing into the stereotypes around the mad genius trope allows the stigmatization, romanticization, and erasure of mental illness to flourish.

II. Is There a Link Between Genius and Madness?

The main issue with the stereotypes associated with the mad genius is the notion that there could be a link between genius, creativity, and madness. This link suggests that genius, creativity, and high intelligence all correlate in some way. Kaja Perina explores the issues of genius, creativity, and psychopathology, specifically in relation to mathematical genius Alexander Grothendieck, and she in turn comments on John Nash as well. Perina suggests that “[h]igh intelligence is a protective factor in those with a genetic predisposition to develop schizophrenia, and the ability of Nash’s brain to control symptoms of the disorder might have derived from his superior executive function” (89). According to Perina’s take, Nash was able to “control” his hallucinations due to his intelligence. Perina goes on to claim that “[w]hile creative types are more mentally stable than are noncreatives, the correlation reverses in the presence of exceptional creativity” (76). This notion that mental stability relies on creativity is enforces the idea that creativity and genius must be connected, which is a concept which many have tried to prove. The link between creativity and psychopathology is explored in an article titled “Mad Genius Revisited: Vulnerability to Psychopathology, Biobehavioral Approach-Avoidance, and Creativity.” The article suggests that “from an empirical perspective, current findings suggest that vulnerability to psychopathology explains limited variance in creativity”(681) and that “being (highly) creative may threaten mental health”(682). Psychopathology is often associated negatively with creative genius. The notion that to be creative and a genius you must suffer from a mental disorder has been a stereotype overused in fiction and media. Simon Kyaga comments
Increasingly studies using sound methods have investigated the question of a link between genius and madness or more specifically creativity and psychopathology. Nancy Andreasen, for example, demonstrated increased risk for affective disorders (depression, bipolar disorder) in general and for bipolar 4 Creativity and Mental Illness disorder in particular in 30 creative writers at the University of Iowa writers’ workshop, compared to healthy controls (1987). Similarly, Kay Redfield Jamison found increased risk for affective disorders in 47 British writers (1989). Arnold Ludwig used reviews of biographies published in the New York Times book review between 1960 and 1990 as selection criteria, identifying 1005 eminent individuals (1992, 1995). Based on their biographies, he found an overrepresentation of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia-like psychosis and depression in the creative arts group (3-4).

The commonality in these searches for links between creativity, insanity, and genius all seem to question whether genius is the result or cause of insanity. Some are not sure of the certainess of the link between genius and insanity and others insist on the connection being valid. An article titled “Link Between Genius and Madness” touches on the link between genius and schizophrenia, with a gene called DARPP-32. The article goes on to state that “[t]hree quarters of people inherit a version of the DARPP-32 gene, which enhances the brain’s ability to think by improving information processing by the prefrontal cortex - the part of the brain that orchestrates thoughts and actions.” Whether or not a biological link or some other link exists for connecting madness with genius, the stereotype continues to prevail in film, literature, and in society in general. Discovering the link may not be the key to ending the the stereotype. The mad genius stereotype highlights the underlying issues with the stigmatization, romanticization, and even erasure of mental illness in both fiction and nonfiction.

III. Mad Genius in Fiction versus Nonfiction

Depictions of madness and genius in fiction differ from their counterparts in nonfiction. The message or moral of the mad genius narrative is sentimentalized in nonfiction depictions such as A Beautiful Mind. The film attempts
to tug on the audience’s heartstrings with the sappy message: “Perhaps it is good to have a beautiful mind, but an even greater gift is to discover a beautiful heart.” This line is spoken by Nash in the trailer, who is played by Russell Crowe, but it is ultimately cut from the movie. This quote is designed to invoke the romanticized and sensationalized feelings from the audience. Its purpose is to sentimentalize the film and draw attention to the actual purpose and feeling the film wants to convey. It erases the struggles Nash faces with an actual mental disorder by insinuating that love is the answer to all of his struggles. By referring to Nash’s genius as a “beautiful mind,” the film draws more attention to his genius rather than his schizophrenia. While Shelley’s *Frankenstein* operates as a warning for the obsessive nature of the mad genius, *A Beautiful Mind* showcases the romanticization of mental illness. Both texts problematize mental illness depictions in both film and literature, and further problematize the stereotype of the mad genius.

The film *A Beautiful Mind* introduces characters in Nash’s life who he believes are real, then it is gradually revealed they are hallucinations. Nash’s discovery of his mental condition causes significant problems with his work life as well as his personal life. Though Nash faces struggles with his mental condition and his home and work life, the film attempts to portray the positive side to his condition. He is able to find love and build relationships, which molds him into being a better person. His good friend Charles who acts as his conscious and his guide is revealed to be a hallucination, though he is a positive influence in Nash’s life. The negative aspects of his schizophrenia are depicted through his mental instability and his paranoia. He hallucinates a man called Parcher who convinces him that there are Soviet spies out to get him. In a pivotal scene, Parcher attempts to convince Nash to kill his wife because she “knows too much” but Nash is able to overcome his hallucinations and is able to realize that they are not real.

The film’s angle on Nash’s life and his schizophrenia is the “love conquers all” motif. The notion of love as a cure for insanity perpetuates the romanticization of madness and genius. Certain narratives push for the “mad genius” stereotype in film and in literature. The mad genius is often depicted as a “tortured soul” who needs saving from their own brilliance. This stereotype perpetuates the notion that brilliance and madness coincide, and that one cannot exist without the other. Nash’s brilliance is what ultimately allows for him and his wife to first meet.

In his nobel acceptance speech Nash claims that his wife and her love is the only reason he was able to be there. “I’ve made the most important dis-
covery of my life. It’s only in the mysterious equation of love that any logic or reasons can be found. I’m only here tonight because of you. You are the only reason I am... you are all my reasons.” Nash claims in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize that love is the only reason that he was able to be there to accept the prize, that his wife was his saving grace, and was the one to help him overcome his struggles. This insistence on love being his cure plays into the trope of the sentimentalization of the “mad genius” and further proves the sentimental feeling the film wants to convey. This further draws the attention to the sensationalized themes of love and hope in the film, and this is the angle the film wants to follow. The film pushes for love to be Nash’s saving grace. Only through love was Nash able to overcome his hallucinations and continue with his work. By reducing Nash’s own genius and capability, the film allows the romanticization of the “mad genius” to flourish.

IV. Sentimentalization and Romanticization of the Mad Genius

Romanticization and sentimentalization of genius and insanity, in both fiction and nonfiction, is a prevalent through either ignoring or erasing the mental disorder. In A Beautiful Mind Nash is praised for being able to recognize his hallucinations are not real. “I’ve gotten used to ignoring them and I think, as a result, they’ve kind of given up on me. I think that’s what it’s like with all our dreams and our nightmares, Martin, we’ve got to keep feeding them for them to stay alive.” At this point in the film Nash has learned to overcome his hallucinations by ignoring them. They are still there, but they do not bother him anymore. This take on his ability to so easily overcome his schizophrenia plays into the sentimentalism the film wants the audience to experience. The film depicts Nash’s hallucinations as something that can be overpowered and he is conveyed as the “hero” who wins in the end. This perpetuates the trope of mad genius who has to find purpose to overcome their “demons.” Because of his genius, Nash is praised for “overcoming” his mental illness, despite the fact that it never truly disappears from his life. Nash’s ability to basically cure himself plays into the romanticization of his mental illness.

For fictitious characters like Victor Frankenstein, his madness is scientific pursuit, the issue of a mental disorder is all but ignored or not touched on. By over-stereotyping the mad genius figure, the actual mental illness the character suffers from is erased or romanticized; which further stigmatizes mental health issues and continues to glorify mental illness as well. It proves that characters
who suffer from a mental disorder, who are also highly intelligent, are meant to exist only under this stereotype that leaves no room for reinventing the trope in a positive light, due to the stigma around mental illness.

Rather than being stigmatized and isolated, people with schizophrenia and schizotypal traits may be seen as gifted or blessed, and accorded an important social role and attending high social status. That the illness has a better outcome in traditional societies may have much to do with the fact that people living in these tight-knit communities see mental disorder more as a part of life than a sign of illness or failure, and enable people with conditions that might otherwise be diagnosed as mental disorder to occupy an honorable place in their very midst (Mad Genius: Schizophrenia and Creativity).

Emphasizing on schizophrenia as being a blessing or a “gift” further proves the romanticization of mental illness. Many scholars have attempted to explore the notions of madness and genius, and the link between the two, and some of these authors and scholars play into romanticizing madness genius. One article titled “Insane, Poetic, Lovable: Creativity and Endorsement of the Mad Genius Stereotype” touches on the issue of romanticization of creativity and insanity.

People who may ordinarily feel that mental illness is a burden or a difficulty may consider it differently when considering illness in terms of creativity. Mental illness being expressed as a mood disorder may then become “madness,” and everyday battles with depression or mania may be inflated to be struggles with the muse[...]. Creativity may be one of the few arenas in which mental illness may be perceived differently. Instead of being portrayed as something to be feared or avoided, mental illness has been shown in a more positive (if idealized) light (150).

Despite the authors concern over the idealization of mental illness in regards to genius and creativity, the stigma around it only continues to be perpetuated with the continued use of the mad genius archetype. Harry Eiss is another author who also explores the notions of madness and genius with his book...
As a reading of the text will prove there is nothing at all degrading about being insane[...]; those deemed insane are perhaps the only ones who fit the category of genius, the artists, shamans, perhaps even saviors, condemned, ridiculed, some confined to institutions, at least one crucified[...]. They are the humans of the highest level, the ones who have connected to the mysteries of existence beyond the meaningless physical world of the body, the ones giving us the only maps that really matter, the maps of meaning and value (“A Few Notes,” XIII).

Eiss’s view that genius and insanity go hand in hand sentimentalizes and romanticizes mental illness. The mad genius trope perpetuates the belief that genius is a saving grace for the mentally ill, because it allows for artists and mathematicians, and other such ‘geniuses’ to excel and advance in society, despite their mental disorder. This mindset continues to stigmatize mental illness, in both fiction and reality.

V. Mad Genius and Gender

Insanity and genius is historically romanticized in male figures. Women in real life who could be considered mad geniuses, such as Sylvia Plath, are not given the same caliber as their male counterparts. Men hold power as being the figures who can be insane and highly intelligent, and be praised for it rather than condemned or slighted. The Joker, despite being a twisted psychopath, is regarded as one of the best villains in comic book history. Female mad geniuses are used as comic relief, like Izma in Emperor’s New Groove, or as the evil sidekick, such as Dr. Maru in Wonder Woman (2017). These mad genius women are the antagonists, and there madness makes them the villain. Stiles comments on the mad genius and mad scientist and how women are not usually considered mad geniuses. Stiles comments on how nineteenth century scientists claimed that the highest level genius was reserved for men, and how only a few women such as Emily Bronte, could be considered among the same caliber as their male genius counterparts.

The foregoing discussion suggests how racial, national and gender stereotypes undergirded theories about genius and leant them a
measure of cultural authority. While the genius described by late Victorians was definitively male, his masculinity was undermined by the suggestion of hysterical effeminacy and his refusal of heterosexual procreation. Moreover, his social and political loyalties came under scrutiny. Lombroso declared, “in men of genius, the love of family and country is either absent or less strong than in other men. These cultural stereotypes, buttressed by scientific authority, crystallized in late-nineteenth-century fictional portrayals of mad scientist (331).

Power plays a significant role in shaping the stereotypes around the mad genius trope. Men historically hold that power above women. For men, genius alongside madness is accepted and men are considered “innovative” and “forward thinking” while a woman would just be considered crazy and get thrown in an insane asylum. Historically women have always been pushed to the side in terms of representation and being able to hold positions of power. When you think of a “mad genius” a woman would not typically cross your mind. The few women that could be considered mad geniuses are the artistic mad geniuses, the authors, the poets. The mad genius is either the protagonist or the antagonist, and males have overwhelmingly filled those roles in film and literary depictions of the trope. Women do not receive many chances to shine or share in the sentimentalism or idealism associated with male mad geniuses.

The mad genius trope not only continues to stigmatize mental illness, but also allows no room for advancement with equality in for the representation of women in these roles. Though including more women mad geniuses may not be the solution, as the solution may just to abolish the trope altogether in both literature and film.

VI. The Trope of ‘Mad Genius’...Why Won’t it Go Away?

The appeal of the mad genius trope in literature and media is the continuous desire to have a “tragic hero” figure who is lost and needs saving. The appeal of the character Victor in Frankenstein is he is a character who cannot be saved. He drives himself to his own tragic end. He created the Monster and he is ultimately responsible for his own demise and losing all of those he held dear. Nash is a figure who is supposedly saved by “love” and love acts his ultimate cure. Both of these mad genius characters play into the
continuing romanticization of mental illness, for *A Beautiful Mind*, as well as erasing mental illness issues in *Frankenstein*. The integral issue with the mad genius archetype is it plays on the idea that genius and insanity go hand in hand, and pushes the narrative that madness can be cured with love, or other romanticized ideals. Schizophrenia is condition that has no known cure, and is labeled as a chronic illness. Schizophrenia has no known cause, however there are speculations that the condition can be passed on genetically.

**Works Cited**


High School is Madness: Commonality Between Outsiders in *Be More Chill*

by Abdur Thomas

FOR THE MAJORITY OF US THAT have endured public high school, we can agree that high school is hell. Instead of focusing on class, most of our time was focused on trying to develop an identity that is our own while also trying to fit in with the crowd as a way to create friendships. Balancing this sense of identity with social acceptance drives a certain madness within each student. The type of madness can be separated into three groups. Group A is the home of the social outcasts. The students who would rather develop their personal identity at the loss of cohesion with the collective. Group B is the collective itself. These students chase after a golden social ideal where they are accepted by everyone within the community. Usually, this group will do anything to be accepted by their peers. Group C is the golden ideal that Group B wants to achieve. They do not have to chase after popularity because of their inherent identity is based in popularity. In the minds of
the students in groups A and B, Group C is full of Gods. These students are the ones born with advantages. Whether it be academic, physical, or emotional, these students were born with a gift and are not afraid to flaunt it around the less fortunate students in Group A and B. Only a few can transcend into the level of social stardom if not born into it. Ultimately, people want to be in Group C. Unfortunately, students do not realize the mental strain that comes with being in Group C.

Think about the most popular person from your high school. The attractive guy or girl that can do nothing wrong in the eyes of the other students around him. You probably pictured a senior in high school with a Greek god or goddess like physic. One that can make a person swoon with just a look in his or her direction. A person who would never have to fear social anxiety or deal with any of the issues that come with being a teenager. Although every student believes that his mythical person exists, no one is infallible. The “adolescent perfection” that every student is after becomes oxymoronic; adolescence is about figuring out who each individual is as a person and leads to some of the biggest physical and psychological changes a person will face in his or her life. How can a person be thought of as perfect when his or her life has barely begun? In Joe Iconis’s musical Be More Chill, a commentary on how adolescence perfection is unattainable, this anxiety-free deity is played by a 34-year-old man that fails to conform to the appearance of the prototypically popular high school teen. He wears a sparkling trench coat that highlights the imperfections of his face and hides what could be a toned body. Instead of being the focal point of every student inside of the high school, Joe Iconis makes him only visible by two students for the majority of the musical and makes him into a Super Quantum Unit Intel Processor, or SQUIP for short. Although the SQUIP has a plethora of human characteristics, he takes the shape of a pill, waiting to be digested by any kid that aspires to be popular within any social setting. He is sold as a commodity to anyone willing to give up his or her life for the chance to be accepted by his or her peers. The SQUIP is presented as nothing more than a virus that infects people’s minds in order to spread himself into the next subject that needs a boost in their popularity. Understanding and enjoying musical theatre requires a sense of willing suspension of disbelief. You have to believe that this 34-year-old man is the social ideal that all students want to reach.

In Joe Iconis’s musical Be More Chill, each student goes through their own form of madness, which can fit into three categories: madness of the
outcast, madness of the collective, and the madness of the superego. The madness of the outcast follows how the outcasts of the musical have an inability to assimilate into the collective’s society, whether because of isolation or a lack of the intricate understanding of the social rituals required to pass as a member of the collective. They do not know the appropriate phrases and actions that would gain them access to the imaginary world of adolescent perfection. At the same time, the collective follows a type of madness that drives them to do absolutely anything to survive in popular culture, no matter who it harms. The superego figure features the same type of madness as the collective, although it has an extra step of finding anything below it as inferior and needing a conversion towards her perfection. Joe Iconis’s Be More Chill explore the social madness of American high schools while also commenting that the only way to escape the madness of high school and the fabricated idea of adolescent perfection is to escape the system of shady students and manufacturers that hunt for students to exploit their weakness of needing peer acceptance.

“I follow my own rules / And I use them as my tools / To stay alive / I don’t wanna be special, no, no / I just wanna survive.”

–Jeremy Heere.

Jeremy is a social outcast that has a desire to evolve his status into the collective and, similar to the collective, he is willing to do anything in order to reach his goal. Jeremy is willing to relinquish control of his personality and identity to a superego figure in order to develop into an acceptable human in his high school society, which depicts how an outsider can never reach their ideal social lives without completely destroying himself in the process. In the first song of the musical, Jeremy expresses his hatred for the
outcast role he plays: “I don’t wanna be a hero / Just wanna stay in the line. / I’ll never be your Rob DeNiro, / For me Joe Pesci is fine. / So I follow / my own rules /And I use them as my tools /To stay alive. /I don’t wanna be special, no, no /I just wanna survive” (More Than Survive). Jeremy uses paradoxical statements to describe his ideal position in life. He says that he does not want to be the main character of a story, yet he also says that he wants to be similar to a famous secondary character. He says that he only wants to be acceptable enough to survive, yet he compares his ideal identity as an academy award winning actor. Although Jeremy acts as if he would like to be in a liminal space between an outsider and the collective, he is envious of a superego-esque figure. Jeremy’s radical outcast appearance prevents him from seeing the schism in his logic; he is so far removed from the idea of the collective that he sees everyone with a higher social status as his as a messiah. Jeremy’s madness manifests through the idea of his distorted perception of what survival is.

Once Jeremy finally meets the SQUIP, he surrenders control of his personality to him almost immediately, which suggests that living in a shell of oneself is better than living outside of the social construct of the collective. Within minutes of meeting the SQUIP, Jeremy decides that the SQUIP’s analysis that Jeremy is currently a waste of space is correct: “Jeremy: Everything about me is just terrible. / Everything about me makes me wanna die” (Be More Chill—Part 2). Jeremy sees himself as less than human. Jeremy wants to be relieved of his mental handicap that eliminates his ability to be part of the collective. The SQUIP allows him to do this, but he has to sacrifice his very thoughts and body in order to in it. With such an extreme, it begs the question of “is Jeremy still Jeremy?” Although Jeremy still has the ability to control his actions physically, he is a slave to whatever the SQUIP demands if he wants to achieve his final goals. This mirrors how students today are manipulated into buying themselves into “coolness” today; Students are almost forced to buy new technology yearly if they want to be kept in the collective. Although these students let go of their individuality (having to have the newest iPhone instead of their special android phone, being forced into buying a new laptop because the one that came out this year has an inch longer screen), the students believe that they are buying themselves into not only happiness, but also buying themselves into “coolness.”

Although adolescence exploitation may seem like a new concept created through the heavily monitored social media phase the world is going through, the exploitation has been occurring since before iPhones and
Facebook were created. In Alissa Quart’s non-fiction novel *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*, she explores the first moments in her life where she realized that the clothing people wore made a statement about him or her:

Given my limited allowance (not enough to afford the matching shirt), I knew I would never be mistaken for one of the normal girls in my class. Those girls had shiny hair and perfect Gloria Vanderbilt jeans with white swans embroidered on the back pockets. I attempted to explain the sportswear semiotics to my mother, an earthy feminist, and she responded with solicitous confusion. Why were all these pricey things so necessary? she wondered. Why was normality important? The answer, of course, was simple: The Jordache Look! (XV)

Alissa Quart had her first brush with wanting to fit in. The reason she felt as if she could not fit in was not because of her personality or her reluctance to accept the collective’s thought patterns; she did not fit in because she could not afford to. To become a part of the collective, there is a financial gap that prevents everyone from joining it. She also considers the girls that could afford the most expensive clothing around to be the “normal girls.” The high-class representatives inside of the school are seen as the average standard instead of the privileged exception. At the same time, she is willing to buy as much as she can afford in order to lessen the gap between herself and the popular girls in her class. This demonstrates the key value of branding: keep the prices high in order to limit what the average person can reach. If everyone could afford outfits that lead to instant popularity, then everyone would buy it until the clothing loses its value and its social significance. The key is exploit the adolescent’s obsession to conform to
allow him or her to get closer to his or her ideal social standing without allowing a complete acquisition. The SQUIP in *Be More Chill* acts in a similar way; the SQUIP limits who has access to him and requires a high monetary donation in order to be accepted into the collective. Adolescents make for a profitable market that companies are willing to exploit until they grow out of it.

In *Be More Chill*, the outsiders have a complex surrounded around not being noticed, even when they are the center of attention, since they have been taught throughout their lives that they are not the person people are watching, which suggests that the madness of the outsider does not allow the outsider to see above their preconceived notion that everyone around them is more important and interesting. Even after Jeremy implants a computer into his brain that selects all of his responses at school and his personality, Jeremy still refuses to believe that he has a higher social status than anyone in the school or that he could be the center of attention: “Still not gonna be the cool guy, but maybe not so left out / Of all the characters in school, I might be the one who the story’s about / Now that someone’s helping me out” (More Than Survive—Reprise). Jeremy’s brain fights against him; Jeremy has the latest technology that should instantly buy him into the collective, yet he still has issues with believing in himself. Jeremy is as close to adolescent perfection as possible for a teenager thanks to the SQUIP, yet he only feels slightly better than he did before the life-altering change. Not only does the outsider need to improve his or her connection to the collective physically, but he or she must also rewire the brain into thinking he or she is not worthless.

Jeremy’s relationship to the SQUIP is similar to the consistent relationship that American students experience with social media on a day to day basis; he struggles with letting his group identity mix in with his personal identity. Once Jeremy is faced with the choice to either keep his best friend or to leave his friend to better fit into the collective identity, he decides to follow the popular kids into stardom: “JEREMY: I already know what it’s like to / Be the loser / I should find out what it’s like to / Not be the loser…. I wasn’t sure before / But now I wanna’ go all the way / And more. / So gimme that / Upgrade, upgrade, upgrade / Gimme that JEREMY & ENSEMBLE: Upgrade, upgrade, upgrade. JEREMY: Tried to be genuine and true / But now it’s time for something new” (Joe Iconis, Upgrade). Jeremy knows that he does not properly integrate into the world of the collective, but he decides to relinquish his identity for a small chance to be
accepted. He lets his individual personality become infected by the virus that is the collective thought process. It is impossible to have the exact mental temperament as the collective body, so students must make a compromise with themselves; if they are willing to let go of what makes them unique, they may have a chance at becoming popular. Over the years, Dr. Valerie Barker has studied the effects that social media has on the people who use it. In her study entitled “Older Adolescents’ Motivations for Social Network Site Use: The Influence of Gender, Group Identity, and Collective Self-Esteem,” she says,

“Mass media provide adolescents [Social identity gratifications] SIG—opportunities to identify with ingroup members who look and act similarly to each other as well as to compare themselves to outgroup members. Identification has a role in mainstream media selection; thus it may be that adolescents also choose social media to facilitate intragroup—intergroup relationships in addition to interpersonal ones.” (209)

The students need social media to test the waters and to figure out what groups they may be able to pass in and what groups they should outright avoid. Social media is used as a sort of proving ground where students can easily facilitate which sections of their personal identity can infiltrate into the highly selective adolescent groups. Social media decides which interpersonal identity traits are allowed to stay with the owner as he or she transitions into popularity. Once Jeremy is given the chance to upgrade the SQUIP’s database, he is intentionally forfeits his interpersonal identity along with his long-lasting friendships; Jeremy decides that fitting in with the collective group identity is more important than his own.

At the end of the musical, Jeremy finally stops the SQUIP from taking over his body and decides to finally be himself, which suggests that the way to escape the madness of the outsider is to completely ignore the idea of adolescent perfection and to become a sentient person. Jeremy decides that, although he can still hear the SQUIP telling him what to do, that he will ignore him and live the life that Jeremy Heere wants to live: “There are voices in my ear / I guess these never disappear. / I’ll let ‘em squeal and I will deal / And make up my own mind / Might still have voices in my head / But now, they’re just the normal kind” (Voices in my Head). The SQUIP is still inside of Jeremy, but he has decided that he cannot let it control his
life. Jeremy Has decided to become anti-corporate. Jeremy knows that the people around him will continue to chase the idea adolescent perfection, but he has transcended from this. He has decided to be his own person. Jeremy even accepts that everyone has this type of thoughts about wanted to join the collective, but he feels as if he has mentally matured to the point that he does not need outside validation for his personality. The only way to beat the exploitation of adolescent conformity is to ignore the popular choices and to have everyone decide their own actions. He also makes the distinction that it is normal to have voices that want to fit in, but he also knows that these voices become abnormal whenever they start to take over the body and mind. In moderation, collective acceptance can be acceptable to a successful outsider.

CHLOE: So Jenna Roland said Madeline told Jake / I’ll only have sex with you if you beat me at pool / And then she lost at pool. / Deliberately. BROOKE: That is so awesome! CHLOE: Brooke! BROOKE: I mean slutty. (Iconis, More Than Survive)

In Be More Chill, the majority of the supporting cast represents the collective and how anything will be and can be done in order to fit into what each person believes the collective wants. These students buy the latest in fashion, technology, and friendship. Unlike Jeremy, an outsider that has the chance to glance into the view of the collective and walk right back out, the people that are already inside of the collective have no chance for redemption. These students are only left to chase after an adrenaline high whenever a new device or piece of gossip is released. These students live to be the first one to know or buy information or technology that may put them a step ahead of the others: “CHLOE: So Jenna Roland said Madeline told Jake / I’ll only have sex with you if you beat me at pool / And then she lost at pool. / Deliberately. BROOKE: That is so awesome! CHLOE: Brooke! BROOKE: I mean slutty” (Iconis, More Than Survive). Chloe hears a story about her friend, Jenna Roland, and decides that the best move for her socially is to tell every other girl at school about it. This is because people do not know this information, which makes her seem “cool.” This also presents a paradox: in order to be cool, one must have information that others do not know, yet one must share this information in order for the “coolness” factor to increase. Almost as soon as a person gossips to another student, that popularity goes away. It keeps the collective on equal foot-
ing, which is counterproductive since all of these students would like to be above the collective.

There is also an element of meanness in the female community that equates to popularity, which suggests that the collective is willing to decrease a person’s social standing or mental health in order to pursue more popularity. In Don E. Mertan’s study, “The Meaning of Meanness: Popularity, Competition, and Conflict among Junior High School Girls,” he examined a popular group of girls inside of a junior high school to see what made them popular and how it affected them. Within his study, he discovered that most of the other students were afraid of the popular girls through interviews with them: “Brenda characterized the clique in terms similar to those noted by the ethnographer: ‘Well, everybody liked us. Everybody thought highly of everyone in the group. A lot of kids were scared of us. Scared that we were going to beat them up or that we wouldn’t be friends with them’” (Merten 178). The popular girls used meanness as a vehicle to force their peers to want to be friends with them. By being mean, they protected their social status since none of their peers would spread any negative rumors while also lowering the social value of their peers by spreading negative rumors. The collective uses this balance to elevate themselves whenever possible. Since it is nearly impossible reach above the social status of the collective, the collective creates a pseudo increase in reputation by diminishing the reputation of everyone around them. This is exactly what Chole does in the opening scene of Be More Chill. She attempts to lower another student’s reputation in order to feel more important.

In the collective, the only worry the students have is about advancing in the social hierarchy of the community, which suggests that adolescent exploitation evolves into a dependency on gratification from peers. In the musical, the collective takes actions that are strictly done to become more popular. Jake, a part of the collective, attempts to date Christine for the fact that it will make both of them more popular at school since dating is the peak of adolescent desire:

JAKE: Never hung with a girl like you before / I don’t know if you know it / But I am sure / That, for me, you are an upgrade (Upgrade) / Upgrade / Let’s be each other’s / Upgrade (Oh wow) / Upgrade. CHRISTINE: Well I am flattered / This is new. / Still, I’m not sure / What I should do. JAKE: You gotta’ take the upgrade. (Iconis, Upgrade)
They refer to each other as “upgrades,” suggesting that they will allow each other to reach a new level of popularity at the school. Also, the word upgrade references the type of upgrades one would get on their phones. An upgrade completely replaces the old with something shiny and new. Jake is planning to do the same thing to Christine. The sole reason he is interested at this moment in time is that Christen will elevate his social status, but as soon as he finds a better upgrade, she will be thrown to the side for his own personal gain. Since Jake is used to having all of the expensive technology that allows him to fit in with the collective, he is forced to find other ways to advance within the collective. He is addicted to the gratification he receives once he finally gets a product that the collective cannot attain. Jake’s attachment on his personal image is a commonality between all adolescent aged students. The adolescent years are used for intrapersonal thought and the harshness that adolescents put on their social appearance strains their connection with themselves. In a study entitled “Friend Networking Sites and Their Relationship to Adolescents’ Well-Being and Social Self-Esteem,” Drs. Patti M Valkenburg, Jochen Peter and Alexander P. Schouten examines the adolescent mind and the priorities interpersonal priorities they naturally adhere to:

Adolescents often engage in what has been referred to as “imaginative audience behavior”: they tend to overestimate the extent to which others are watching and evaluating and, as a result, can be extremely preoccupied with how they appear in the eyes of others. On friend networking sites, interpersonal feedback is often publicly available to all other members of the site. Such public evaluations are particularly likely to affect the development of adolescents’ social selfesteem. (585)

It is natural for adolescents to worry about the thoughts of their peers when it comes to their own personality. The issue comes with the addition of social media. Social media makes the student feel the overwhelming presence of the peers at all times; social media opens a gateway into every personal event in everyone’s life. Instead of the students thinking about their peers’ thoughts towards them, they are seeing them in real time on Facebook and Instagram; Students no longer have to guess and think about the possible reactions their classmates have. This promotes the idea that students are required to wear a façade every second of their lives. Instead of allowing Jake to explore his preferences in relationships, the collective forces him to
date someone they see as accessible and better. His interpersonal connections completely trump over his intrapersonal thoughts.

Within the collective, any source of information is important, even if it is false information. Since the collective is full of individuals who have done and heard the same pieces of information in their thirst to appear cool, the collective values information more than the collective’s technology itself. In the song “The Smartphone Hour (Rich Set a Fire),” every student inside of the collective spreads misinformation about a fire at the Halloween party in order to receive attention from their classmates: JENNA, CHLOE & BROOKE: When Rich set a fire and he burned the house down / When Rich set a fire and he levelled the town. [ALL:] When Rich set a fire and he fled to Bombay / When Rich set a fire ‘cause he knew he was gay / When Rich set a fire and he melted his head / When Rich set a fire and he’s totally dead / When Rich set a fire and he burned down the house (Iconis, Smartphone Hour). In this moment, everyone within the collective is spreading any rumor they hear in an attempt to tell someone that does not know about the fire yet. They do not fact check their information; they move it to all of their friends as soon as they hear it. The only fact that is true is that Rich set a fire. Unfortunately, this gains each person within the collective an increase in their popularity. Joe Iconis is directly critiquing the teenage use of social media. At the press of a button, teens are allowed to spread any misinformation that they find, which leads to happiness for some and profound sadness for others. The idea is that anyone who discovers new information will be the first to report it, which ensures that people will give them more attention and allow the sharer to accumulate “cool points.” Although this may seem like an exaggeration created through theatre, research has been made that proves students are more likely to promote information and pictures if their peers receive a high about of likes and responses from it. In a study entitled “The Power of the “Like” in Adolescence: Effects of Peer Influence on Neural and Behavioral Responses to Social Media,” Drs. Lauren Sherman, Ashley Payton, Leanna Hernandez, Patricia Greenfield, and Mirella Dapretto used an Instagram-like platform in order to study how peer response effected personal opinion:

We found that the popularity of a photograph had a significant effect on the way that photograph was perceived. Adolescents were more likely to Like a photograph – even one portraying risky behaviors like smoking marijuana or drinking alcohol – if
that photograph had received more Likes from peers. This effect was especially strong for photos they themselves had supplied. Adolescence is a period during which self-presentation is particularly important, including on social media; thus, this significantly greater effect may reflect the relative importance of self-presentation versus providing feedback to others. (1032)

The students wanted to enjoy the same things as their peers. It did not matter if these behaviors were things they supported or not; they wanted to be a part to the collective introduced by social media. Since a student does not need to create an elaborate plan to express their interests in what their friends are doing, they are more likely to endorse their peers behaviors; a “like” is all that’s needed to let everyone know that you are “cool” and part of the collective. At the same time, it entices students to present themselves in ways that the collective approves of. In Be More Chill, this includes being the first person to relay information to the collective. As soon as one person lies to the collective, it is accepted as an activity to exploit to the entirety of the collective members.

In conclusion, Joe Iconis’s musical Be More Chill allows an inside look at the insanity that outsiders and the collective have to endure in order to maintain a semblance of theoretical adolescent perfection. Adolescence is a time in everyone’s lives where nothing makes sense; people are not the person that they thought they were, yet social media does not allow students to explore who they have become without repercussions to social standing and his or her interpersonal identity. In order to escape adolescent perfection, students must first understand that the thirty-year-old cool guy that always knows exactly what to say is not the perfect life for an adolescent. The adolescent life is full of imperfection; imperfection that leads to a fully realized personal identity that no one can take away. Social media is harming the very fabric that adolescence is strung from; it does not allow students to have personal time to figure out their personal life. Do not strive to be a part of the controlled collective. Try to be an individual with unique traits.

Works Cited

The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families


Foreword

MADNESS IS INHERENT IN MODERNITY. Turn on the news, read the paper, get online, read a book, watch a movie, walk down the street, play a game: it’s there. The issue with these examples is that nearly all of them have been analyzed, discussed, and written about ad nauseum – except one: video games. Video games are an untapped medium. Only within the last decade or so has the world of gaming come into the mainstream with big hits like the newcomer and kid-friendly Minecraft or the competitive Call of Duty franchise. And it is only with the advent of enhanced graphics capabilities, advanced computation, and accessibility, that video games have begun to reflect reality: art imitates life. Like literature or film, gaming has genres: Horror being one of the more categorically underrepresented (as in most mediums). Until the last decade or so, this has been a relatively universal
truth; horror as a genre has been seen as ‘less intelligent’ or ‘shallow’ in its content. We have novels like *Wuthering Heights* or *The Haunting of Hill House* that take those assumptions and tropes and delve into the commonalities of human interaction and curiosity – they aren’t merely written to invoke fear or unease as the stigma suggests. Even some of the more mainstream and ‘less literary’ authors like Stephen King and Dan Simmons still root the horror where it belongs, at the heart of the human condition. I bring up these examples because in a long history of literary snobbery, Horror as a genre has been largely stigmatized and ignored as being of literary merit. Video games now, much like literature in the past (and still now to an extent), are equally or more so stigmatized. What merit can pictures on a screen that someone controls possibly have? Video games are made strictly to entertain and be ‘mindless fun’, right? Maybe in the days of Pacman, but in the modern era, narrative driven games are becoming the new baseline, with the Horror genre as an increasingly respected and created force of popularity.

I. A New Addiction

In those early days, video games captivated an ever-growing audience of intrigued Americans and Japanese with each country eventually becoming a major player in importing talent and taking risks in the virtual entertainment market; those early days where the graphics were painted inserts with strung lights inside those pinball machines that occupied a corner of every pizza parlor, barbershop, or dime-store on Main Street, America. Maybe if the shop could afford it, they would import a *Periscope* machine from up-and-comer Sega – though it cost a whole twenty-five cents to play it; those childhood pleasures of distraction while Mom shopped to spending a week’s worth of allowance on *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, or *Asteroids*; gathering a group of friends to waste the day down at the local arcade; begging Mom and Dad for a Magnavox Odyssey for Christmas to play *Table Tennis* or *Haunted House* after dinner (Kent). Video games have been magnetizing devices since their inception, but what is the driving factor behind their addictiveness and appeal? What brought people in droves to packed arcades in the late 70s and much of the 80s? What influenced parents to spend hundreds of dollars on home consoles when the technology still wasn’t quite there, where games lasted minutes in reality but still conjured hours of imaginative entertainment from the comfort of the living room? Why did the world buy into the concept of video games when film was reigning king and books, comic or literary, still held such merit? What madness caused the birth of this new addiction?
From the earliest age of home Pong consoles, pong-like systems called clones, and burgeoning arcade dreams, video games have been a form of entertainment, first and foremost, no questions asked. The problem with that line of thinking is that, much like Pong, it is trapped in the 70’s where it originated. The history of video games and their influence on society has evolved since the arcades and home consoles of the 70s and 80s; a collection of pixels on the screen depicting a rough estimate of what its real-life counterpart could be is now an almost perfect polygonal representation of what it wants to imitate; there are more than four directions in which to direct your character or perform an action or examine the surroundings; there is three-dimensional depth and a closer connection with the brain the perceived reality on screen. Video games are more real now than ever before, and the human brain isn’t quite sure how to handle the fact. Progress is all well and good, but why was it necessary to move beyond pixels and basic gameplay mechanics; what is it that is at the heart of the link between the human brain and the perception given by video games and why is it needed? The answer lies in the concept of “mimesis.” Mimesis is a term that applies directly to human creation of art and its ilk; The University of Chicago defines mimesis as “a figure of speech, whereby the words or actions of another are imitated” and that “the deliberate imitation of the behavior of one group of people by another as a factor in social change” (Puetz).

There are three main identifiers of mimesis: representation, imitation, and expression. Art imitates life is the famous quote that seems to encapsulate any discussion on the subject and the concept of mimesis lends itself heavily to proving the quote true. With representation, the artist inserts a human element into the work: actual humans, human movement, human behavior, human speech patterns (Puetz). For the early video games, representation came in the form of human interaction, meaning that the pixels that lined up on screen represented an action and the controller was the human element in performing that action. Even before virtual games, pinball was much the same in terms of psychological attraction, like controlling a painting. The hand-eye coordination, the connection between the brain and the objective were tested even then, which is where the attraction lies: push button, get reward. For pinball, the lever releases the ball into the cabinet, where the player utilizes the bumpers to light up various sections of the machine to gain higher score: simple.

Yet after a time, the aesthetics and gameplay design for pinball likely just wasn’t enough to stimulate the ever-absorbing mind of constantly stimulated
gamers, so virtual games came to be. Unlike pinball, virtual game designers’ efforts needed an evolution from the painted cabinets of yesterday; a collection of pixels on screen in a rough shape of something recognizable for the brain was necessary. The utilization of imitation allowed for a deeper connection of the brain with what the player saw on screen (Puetz). From the earlier arcade titles like *Periscope* in the 60s and subsequent alterations and copies of the formula, to the home Pong consoles, the Magnavox Odyssey, the Vectrex, up through the Commodore 64, and Atari family of consoles, graphic designers, coders, and games artists used the imitation technique to create the virtual representations of E.T., knights of the Round Table, Indiana Jones, etc. that modern gamers could identify in an age of action stars, mascots, and the need for a more interactive experience. The novelty of group gaming started to wear off once the variety of machines began to stagnate in the early to mid-80s, where home consoles began to rule. The home console soon overcame the popularity of the arcade as affordability became less of an issue for most basic consoles, leading gamers to remain in the living room for their gaming sessions instead of in the arcades, which eventually led to the decline and ultimate death of the arcade. Home consoles, too, had the luxury of multiple game releases to come out for a singular console instead of needing a brand-new machine for each game like many arcade cabinets. The subsequent change in social and financial dynamics regarding the value of video gaming ultimately allowed for companies and their games designers more flexibility with their expression, the third identifier of mimesis, pushing the medium forward graphically, sonically, and interactively, with the capability of creating more believable worlds, characters, goals, and ultimately more than had ever been put into a video game before, increasing the connections players would have to what happened on their screen. No longer having to design around a singular cabinet with a much higher cost than a cartridge or code imbedded into a home console, the monetary aspect of producing a video game began to allow for more risks in gameplay changes and graphical upgrades which continued to develop into the boom of the late 80s with the Nintendo Entertainment System (Kent).

With the advent of Nintendo’s home console, the 8-bit processing power gave designers the ability to add more pixels per square inch, which accounted for higher detail and an expanded realm to incorporate different playstyles and gameplay functions previously impossible on systems of the past. This 8-bit architecture in addition to adding higher graphical functionality also allowed for a slightly increased sound set which made
room for higher quality sound files on the game chip. No more were the
droning, repetitive, low-byte sounds of the old days – now video games
could have proper soundtracks, many like *Super Mario Bros.*, or *Donkey
Kong*, or *Tetris*, becoming instant classics due to the enhanced hardware
capabilities. At this point in the video game time-line, games were start-
ing to come more into their own as an art form because of these increased
hardware capabilities. Breakout games like *Final Fantasy* gave the world
one of the first realized virtual Role-Playing games with a focus on story
where other games like *Ninja Gaiden* and *Castlevania* were praised for their
gameplay innovation. Certain hybrids of the genres also seeped through
in this era like the cult classic *Sweet Home*, which many say serve as the
blueprint for many contemporary classics of story-based games and a kick-
start to the Horror subgenre; and as journalist Alistair Pinsof describes the
game: “The limitations of the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System) keep
it from being truly horrific, but Capcom still managed to design a game
that gets under your skin” (Pinsof). As with the rest of the world, technol-
ogy as a whole was advancing at a rapidly increasing rate, with electronic
consumerism breaking out largely in the late 80s and early 90s, which led
to more system and game sales and increased demand for consoles to keep
up with the ever-advancing home computer scene. Soon games like *Doom*
and *Monkey Island* became the standard for how a game should look and
play on contemporary hardware and consoles were falling behind, though
the most popular mainstream games were generally on the Nintendo Entert-
tainment System, which was more accessible than the thousands-of-dollars
home computer systems of the time; the psychology of value over substance
played a large role in console success.

Evolving from more than just pure entertainment, video games as a
medium began to look and perform much better around the 16-bit era
of the early to mid-90’s. The advancement of this generation led to more
detailed environments, characters, and worlds than the previous 8-bit tech-
nology, which let starry-eyed gamers become even more engrossed in the
fantasies that they played out with their own two hands. The Role-Playing
genre took over this era of gaming in great fashion; unheard of hours of
content and narrative held the central appeal for many games coming out of
Japan, including classics like *Final Fantasy II* and *Final Fantasy III*, *Chrono
Trigger*, *Earthbound*, and more. With the huge fiscal and popular success
of these games, executives, developers, and consumers alike began to real-
ize the ever-growing potential of video games as a narrative and artistic
medium. In this era, games began to include a narrative focus in addition
to great gameplay, adding to the replay value and value-per-dollar that was important in an era of 70 to 100-dollar video games (in some areas of the world). Whereas in the past, the novelty of the video game was so fresh, graphics and performance took a back seat to pure gameplay; however, once gamers grasped a sense of entitlement with their entertainment, the psychological connection with inherent game value as well as substance was skewed, causing a disconnect between what gamers wanted and what developers were giving them. With this realization, video game developers were able to take more risks and innovate instead of stagnating in an era of side-scrolling platformers and beat-em-ups that did nothing to drive the medium forward.

While the hardware of the generation essentially doubled, there remained the problem inherent in games only able to exist in two dimensions. Sure, games like *F-Zero* and *Starfox* existed, but not every game could afford to have a special chip inserted into the cartridge to allow for the console to access the memory necessary to render the extra graphics, which were after all, still not fully three-dimensional. In a constantly evolving technology scene, games in the mid to late 90s became even more lifelike and intuitive to control; most of those games, however, could only run on home computers: games like *Half-Life* and *Quake* began setting the standard for modern graphics and controls. The gaming world was ready to move on from two-dimensions and evolve into something new. And so, after the 16-bit era, came the primordial age of polygon use and three-dimensional worlds represented in video game form. The two main pioneers in this era, the Nintendo 64 and Sony PlayStation, used drastically different methods of rendering 3D. Where the Nintendo 64 used a more conventional style of arranging polygons into rough shapes, stretching and turning them to fit like a puzzle, the PlayStation’s method of rendering was more experimental with flat, pre-rendered backgrounds that were rendered again behind the polygonal characters on screen, often with an odd dot-like layer over backgrounds where the rendering software had conflicts in the game engine. These glitches are a prominent feature in many classic PlayStation games and often found a way to add to the atmosphere and art style of the affected games, such as genre darlings *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*.

From the inception of these new consoles with graphics and gameplay capabilities comparable to some home computer games, the power of the player had never been greater. Fully detailed models of human beings and human-like creatures, more detailed and recognizable world elements as well
as a higher capacity for realistic sounds and higher quality music allowed the first fully 3-D console generation to explore the boundaries of what made a game enjoyable and attractive to the common gamer. More games were being made in concordance with big-hit action movies like *Armageddon*, *Die Hard*, etc. as well as Disney film tie-ins, so many companies began utilizing these influences in more original ways now that the technology was there and coming off the high of 80s camp-horror and the popularity of straight-to-video dreck of the back-aisles of rental stores, games designers and writers began to fully realize the capabilities of a three-dimensional world and the most realistic graphics ever possible and began to innovate.

*Resident Evil*, for example, is often considered the pioneer of modern 3D Horror by genre enthusiasts and game historians for a multitude of reasons, including its unique control scheme and level of gore and terror, leading to one of the first Mature ratings for a 3D video game. Developed by Capcom, a Japanese studio, in 1997, Resident Evil’s hold on the third-person shooter and Horror genres led to the game becoming a western blockbuster with reviewers praising its risks, its complex puzzles, interesting narrative, and unparalleled atmosphere and graphics. *Resident Evil* is one of the first true zombie games and is part of what is now called Survival Horror, which is a subgenre of Horror that emphasizes inventory management, ammo management, health management, and general survival.

*Resident Evil* isn’t a game that could have been easily translated into video game format in any era other than PlayStation and onward because of the inclusion of 3D graphics. Lead Programmer for the game, Yasuhiro Ampo stated in an interview with review site Gamespot that: “The concept for Resident Evil came about at the dawn of the PlayStation era, where games were moving from 2D to 3D visuals. I am told that the chief of consumer products at the time had a very strong desire to ‘successfully create a brand new genre of horror gaming that had never existed before.’ I don’t think that anyone, including the chief himself, ever dreamed that this would be such a long-lasting franchise that’s grown to be what it is today’ (Butterworth). So much of *Resident Evil* relies on the user’s ability to manipulate their surroundings. For example, there is a segment of the game where the player is thrown into a series of tight corridors with fixed camera angles set up in the most disadvantageous ways; after a certain point, the player runs into a zombie blocking the hallway, but if they turn around (using the complicated 3D controls) they are transitioned onto a screen with another zombie, with room to maneuver around if the player is quick and...
agile. This is one of the many scenarios in the game that is enhanced by its extra dimension compared to the generation that came before. With the advent of 3D, the Z axis was now unlocked to developers, not just X and Y. The player scaled real stairs, moved vertically, horizontally, inward, and outward – completely in control of their direction. Psychologically speaking, having as much control as players could now have would have much greater influence over their mental connection to the game and the events therein, enhancing the experience even more so in a genre such as horror.

Series creator and Director Shinji Mikami said in his interview with Gamespot that: “The meeting that got the ball rolling on Resident Evil was in 1993. We were in Capcom’s Osaka development studio and my current boss, Tokuro Fujiwara, called me in to talk to him. He said that he wanted us to make a horror game using systems from Sweet Home, which was a horror game for the Famicom that he had directed. I was actually a big fan of Sweet Home, and he was someone that I really respected, so I was excited about the project from the beginning. But I was a little worried about how well a horror game would really sell. I think that feeling had some influence on RE’s development.” Ampo responded as enthusiastically about the influence of Sweet Home stating that during development he was “told” to play the game for research purposes. As far as Resident Evil pushed the genre, and the medium, forward, the bones of the game weren’t set into place by accident or even in recent memory: Sweet Home served as the blueprint for the Resident Evil series and many similar contemporary titles to come.

II. The Birth of a Genre

The Horror genre has often come under fire for being pedestrian or lowbrow: cheap jump scares, bare-bones plots, poor writing, poor pacing, etc. In the past, however, the Horror genre has had the misfortune of having Hollywood attempts at “scary” pave the way for the high-volume of imitation, straight-to-video, films that rip off decent ideas that still flopped at the box-office: the Horror genre began to stagnate just as it was taking off in the west in the late 80’s to early 90’s. Long gone were the days of MGM monster movies ala Dracula, The Wolf Man, and Frankenstein and the respect of their kitsch and influence in contemporary cinema and the age of wanna-be Michael Myers and Jason Voorhees was dawning (New York Film Academy). In the east, however, Horror was still a yet to be fully fledged genre as film was largely kept in service of faithful historical retellings and myth and folk-tale adaptation (especially in China and
Japan). These genres often had mystical or supernatural elements within them, but the psychological aspect of dread or fear was not their primary function, but to educate (See Akira Kurosawa’s films). There were only a handful of directors exploring the Horror genre in the east, most notably in Japan and with minimal success. *Onibaba* was released in 1964 which blended that common aspect of folk-tale adaptation with a stronger bite than consumers were used to, sparking interest in the more horrific side of those common folk-tales. Only a few notably influential films came from the intrigue of *Onibaba* throughout the decades: Kobayashi’s *Kwaiden* in the 60’s and Obayashi’s *Hausu* in the 70’s. Japan specifically saw a lot of camp during the same years as the west, with a great deal of poor imitation with a higher volume of bad than good: it wasn’t until the late 90’s and into the 21st century that Japanese horror (also known as J-Horror) came into its own (Buscher). There was, however one film that spawned a game of the same name, released on the NES, that many, including video game critic Alistair Pinsof, say serves as a blueprint for modern horror games.

*Sweet Home* is an odd hybrid of RPG (role-playing game), Adventure, and Horror; released in December of 1989, it was one of the first of its kind and it was a game changer. The concept of *Sweet Home*, to the modern consumer, is quite the tried and true formula: a group of investigators enter an abandoned mansion to recover the late owner’s valuable frescos, only to be met with heavy resistance from the plethora of ghosts, ghouls, and the like that inhabit the now mansion-turned-horror-house; it is now up to the player, utilizing the various skills of each investigator to traverse the house and discover the secrets of what happened there. Even today, that formula, while some might dismiss as cliché, is malleable enough to be shaped into any number of original ideas, though in an age where it grows harder each day to be original, *Sweet Home* managed to knock it out of the park in its heyday of 1989.

Following in the footsteps of insanely popular *Final Fantasy*, *Sweet Home* offers gamers a familiar menu-based selection battle-system, which honestly takes more cues from the Japanese sweetheart *Dragon Warrior* series, borrowing not only parts of the battle system, but the save-anywhere function (something not common in games of this era) and the party chat system. Within the mansion, players can group with up to 3 of the 5 investigators or go solo while exploring; utilizing the party chat system is incredibly useful for figuring out in-game hints and how to progress when the way seems blocked. Several lines of dialogue are included in the game for each
investigator at seemingly every turn, which is something that was never seen in a game prior to *Sweet Home*, though it borrowed its system from *Dragon Warrior*, the advanced level of the system was unparalleled. The inclusion of this system serves not only to help the player progress in the game, but it gives players an opportunity to get to know the other investigators and increase the level of risk the player takes leaving those now familiar friends in that one room while they explore further, not knowing if leaving them behind was a good or bad idea: a monster could enter the room, too strong for a single person to defeat: or that other person could venture into another room by themselves and become lost, the player ultimately having to find them in order to progress, halting said progress and increasing player anxiety. These seemingly simple systems often have the most depth in games dependent on inter-game relationships.

The story of *Sweet Home* isn’t something that’s discussed at length around a round table of literary enthusiasts, but there is something about its simplicity and focus on the player and their relationship with the characters in the game and their reactions to what happens to them in the mansion, that the story then becomes that of the players and not what was written explicitly in the game’s script. This level of player inclusion and focus is something that hadn’t been explored in the past where the most a player could do was press a button every few seconds, stimulating the brain at its most basic level: *Sweet Home* makes the player think. Pinsof says it best while discussing the innovations and inclusions with *Sweet Home*’s relationship to the player:

The best games on the NES weren’t known for their stories. In fact, other than adventure games, no games back then were. I wouldn’t say *Sweet Home* has a particularly original or complex story, but the way it is told is innovative for its time and keeps it from feeling dated. *BioShock* may have popularized audio/diary logs in recent years, but *Sweet Home* did this way before anyone else. Most of the game’s story is conveyed through secret messages, diary entries, and notes laid around the mansion. Unlike *Resident Evil*, each of these are limited to a sentence or two, so you won’t have to read pages full of nonsense in order to get to the point. At the same time, important notes can often be vague enough to leave open multiple interpretations of the game’s story. If you ignore
most of the notes, you'll still be able to follow the plot, but you'll be missing out on the details.

Another storytelling innovation in *Sweet Home* is the use of cinematic moments that restrict the player's actions. These scenes force you to play a role as you follow a character and watch events unfold. One scene has you following a strange man, while you trade lines of dialog. I was blown away by it, since I can't think of another game of its era that tried to do anything remotely similar. It's a great storytelling device that pulls you into the game's world and makes you feel vulnerable. (Pinsof)

The various gameplay elements outlined by Pinsof that are incorporated directly into the storytelling of *Sweet Home* show just how tightly connected and planned out every aspect of the game truly is *without* sacrificing player experience for a controlled narrative or setting. The game rewards players' exploration by revealing that the one item on the wall ten rooms ago was actually a lever to enter the room the player is in right now and now that room has renewed purpose and the player gets that ‘a-ha!’ moment that keeps them glued to the screen and feeling accomplished – that's just good game design. The balance of narrative and designer control versus player control is a key aspect of maintaining a good relationship between game and player for many reasons: if the narrative feels forced, gamers often feel like what they're doing doesn't matter – it would happen anyway – it's like the player is on a rollercoaster and they're leaning left into the turn that would happen with or without their help. Player control is important in this way because video games are all about player input and manipulation and if the narrative is important enough to the overall game experience, the gameplay and narrative must marry in a way that is inclusive to the way that the player wants to manipulate that fact. *Sweet Home* does this with its cast of characters, whose respective abilities can and need to be utilized in certain ways that are ultimately up to the player, as well as reward exploration with the many notes and diary entries that can be found littered around the mansion.

Player psychology is an important monitor in *Sweet Home*: there are often rooms that serve as checks (a term taken from *Dungeons and Dragons*, referring to a “skill check,” where the player cannot progress unless a criteria is met) that are less of a mechanical level check, for example showing that the player has a certain item or combat level or etc., but a psychological
check where a “scary” enemy is placed that is often a strong opponent and has something creepy to say or a disturbing visual to show (See below).

Game designer Richard Rouse (noted for his work on the 2004 PlayStation 2 hit *The Suffering*) notes in his essay *Match Made in Hell: The Inevitable Success of the Horror Genre in Video Games* that:

> Horror is … ideal for games because it presents a familiar world but with enough of a twist to make it seem fantastic and special. Horror stories are typically set in highly recognizable locations that players can identify but which have been invaded by some evil force. This force has often altered the rules of the world in some way. Thus, horror can be used to introduce unique gameplay mechanics based on this altered reality…A horror game can introduce a supernatural element which justifies why the player has unique abilities, why he is hearing the thoughts of others, why bizarre enemies can materialize out of nowhere, and so forth. (Rouse, 17)

This observation by Rouse puts the mentality of horror game developers into perspective, as the approach makes great sense – the fantastical doesn’t need to be explained to the player for them to understand that they are in a fantastical situation. Again, the consistent marrying of narrative and gameplay is what makes a game like *Sweet Home* work as well as it does: the game produces its core elements to the player and allows for the manipulation that makes video games such an entertaining and interesting medium to begin with. The psychology of this effect is a trusting player that will continue the game and ultimately finish with a sense of accomplishment.
– gamers usually don’t enjoy being patronized or having their hand held: trust goes a long way in a gamer’s mind. Like the game that would take much inspiration from *Sweet Home*, *Resident Evil* programmer Yasuhiro Amo confirms the sentiment behind the direction of both games, stating that “The director had placed a strong emphasis on having the player “live their own storyline through their experiences,” rather than showcasing a pre-packaged storyline. The multiple endings and split pathways (of *Resident Evil*) throughout the title were created in correspondence to this vision” (Butterworth). Rooted in the gameplay, *Sweet Home* makes the player squirm by forcing them to use candles, a finite commodity, in the game to light up dark rooms which limit the player’s view, causing a sense of vulnerability and susceptibility to monster attack or any of the game’s devious traps, trusting the player to make the right choices. Later in the game, it is possible to restore power to the mansion, but only after being exposed, wandering the house in the dark, not knowing if that candle that was just lit was the last one that might be found for a while or not. An event within the game like that gives the player a sense of relief, one Pinsof suggests that “you can imagine the fictional characters (share).” That quote really stabs at the heart of what *Sweet Home* is: a game about the player experience, not the feedback from just the psychological effect of controlling the game, but the immersion into the game world and living the story instead of simply watching it unfold. That’s what games, in general, do that other mediums lack in some respect: a reader can only imagine so much of what they are reading and have no control over the narrative – the reader can flip to any point of the story, even the ending, whenever they please, ultimately holding a place outside the story that gives them an omnipresence that detracts from the story experience. The same can be said for film or TV to an extent: there’s always an ending to a film or show that is impossible to avoid – the watcher can stop watching at any given point, only a voyeur into the world they are viewing with no control on the outcome. With video games, the game is never played the same way twice: some games have different endings that are achieved in a multitude of different ways, over different playstyles. The focus is on the player experience and their relationship to what they’re experiencing, not just what is happening on screen. There is a much broader spectrum on which a player can experience and be directly involved in a game world that puts the video game medium on a different rung of the entertainment ladder where other mediums simply cannot reach.
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Madness in the Apocalyptic Society

by Christa Watkins

Have you ever had to kill people because they had already killed your friends and were coming for you next? Have you ever done things that made you feel afraid of yourself afterward? Have you ever been covered in so much blood that you didn't know if it was yours or 'walkers' or your friends? Hub? Then you don't know.

—Michonne, The Walking Dead

SURVIVAL CAN PUSH SOMEONE TO EXTREMES in every way imaginable. We have seen this happen time after time all throughout history. The quote above illuminates the lengths that people can be pushed to in order to survive. The character Michonne that speaks the above quote is a strong African American female lead in the show, The Walking Dead. She has become a staple for survivalism in the female and African American community. Michonne, a samurai, fights her way through this feared time of the apocalypse with Rick Grimes and his loyal “family” throughout
out the show. During a time where survival is key, people are faced with a choice to fight for their life or run. We see this common theme in literature and television today. For example, Michonne and Lauren, another African American female survivalist from the novel, *Parable of the Sower*, by Octavia E Butler, are both faced with this crucial need to survive during a time when the American world has completely vanished. Lauren is a teenage girl that is living during the apocalyptic time in America. Lauren is gifted with “hyperempathy” which is a mental disorder that causes her to feel others pain and pleasure. This gift helps her in her survival by helping her “feel” when others in society are only worried about themselves and their survival. Lauren is convinced that her walled community needs to prep for survival using packs and other means, and she is correct, for one day her community is attacked and they are forced to leave. Michonne and Lauren also both carry survival packs and are constantly refilling them when they can to continue their supply. Their status as “others” in a predominately-white society dissipate as the society fails. Everyone is equal in the eyes of death and survival. They continue to survive despite their skin color, gender, or experiences from their past life. Survival is key in the apocalyptic society. People constantly entertain the idea of a time that the society collapses, and we have to fend for ourselves. There are shows, websites, and books that exist simply to entertain and prepare society for the “Apocalypse”. One common thread we see all throughout this type of literature, websites, and television is the survival pack/kit.

A survival pack is a backpack or bag that is filled with items that are necessary to survival, and they have become more popular as of the 2000’s. This is when apocalyptic television shows, novels, graphic novels, film, and video games exploded post 9/11. The more Americans were exposed to this type of entertainment, the more they wanted to prepare for these type of tragedies. The staple of apocalypse has created a type of madness in the world. Not only do we see madness play out in these shows, novels, and video games, but we see it in our own communities. This entertainment field has spun a whole reality of its own. There are even groups of people that band together to prep for “doomsday” or extreme emergency. According to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC)*, back in 2016 Mr. Dan O’Hara of Ohio organized an “Atlanta Preparedness expo,” with Atlanta being one of many stops that he will make in order to help people prepare for end times. This expo is where survivalist and doomsday preppers gather to buy items needed to prepare for the end of society as we know it. At this expo, Vendors sold “everything from body armor and riot helmets to fire starters, water filtration set ups.
and seeds” (Kempner, AJC). O’Hara has spent “close to $25,000” stocking up for a year’s worth of survival (Kempner, AJC). This one expo is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to survivalism. There are websites, television shows, books, magazines, etc. that are dedicated to preparing people for the end. The survival pack is all about this, keeping a person ready for the Apocalypse. However, consumers no longer need to spend 25K in order to have a survival pack; most websites sell survival packs ranging from $60-$300. These are packs that are already equipped with items needed for survival.

The apocalypse comes with all types of fears, anxiety, and most importantly madness. All normalcy and morals are completely abandoned. People kill, steal, and destroy others just to survive. Therefore, when prepping for the apocalypse, and protecting yourself from the crazy, what needs to be packed? According to the website, The Ready Store, which is a website dedicated to survival packs, a survival pack should include items such as: a first aid kit, a flash light, body wipes, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, a tarp and thread (to make a tent), hand warmers, band aids, antiseptic wipes/cream, matches, etc. This is all listed under a “1 person, 72 hour survival kit.” While preparing for this paper, I decided to participate in this culture of doomsday prepping because it is better to be prepared! Therefore, I made my own survival pack. In my survival pack I included 2 MRE’s (meal ready to eat) a meal that is used in the military, a flash light, hand warmers, matches, tarp and thread, a gallon of water, Band-Aids, Neosporin, antibiotics, a gun/ammo, a knife, other nonperishable food items, and a change of clothes (including shoes). This pack would ideally help someone survive at least for 3 days.

Survival Packs have been used all throughout history. One of the main events that used survival packs (in a different type of manner) would be the holocaust. During the Holocaust when Jews were ripped from their houses, they would often try to pack a bag of things, or stuff survival items into their pockets or coats. We see this in trope in both fictional and non-fictional accounts of the holocaust, and one specifically that comes to mind is Between Shades of Gray written by Ruta Sepetys. This book is about the Lithuanian holocaust. This novel centers on the character Lina, a fifteen year-old girl. When her family is taken, her mom packs a small bag with things they might need and shoves all the jewelry she has in her coat pockets in case it might help them in the future. Survival packs have been around for a very long time. Survival packs are also carried by every soldier in the military when they are sent out on missions. There is no surprise that this items has become so popular in the last two or three decades.
In *Parable of the Sower*, by Octavia E Butler, the unthinkable has happened to America, the apocalypse has come. American society has gone to hell; there are no rules or morals in the world except in Lauren’s tight knit community. Lauren, a fifteen-year-old girl, is the main character of this novel. Her dad runs a community that lives behind walls in order to protect themselves from the madness that encompasses the outside world. Lauren believes that one day her family and community will be forced to leave the community, so she has made herself a survival pack. Lauren, the first person narrator, explains, “I assembled a small survival pack for myself-- a grab-and-run pack. I’ve had to dig some things I need out of the garage and the attic so that no one complains about my taking things they need. I’ve collected a hatchet, for instance, and two small, light, all-metal pots. There’s plenty of stuff like that around because no one throws anything away that has any possibility of someday being useful or salable” (104). She packs away things like money, water, matches, clothes, shoes, bandages, toothbrush, soap, comb, feminine products, aspirin, alcohol, thread, needles, pocket knife, non-perishable foods, bags for storage, a gun, bullets, etc. (104-105).

We also see survival packs in the television show, *The Walking Dead*. Characters like Rick Grimes, Glenn, and Daryl carry packs with items in them that helps ensure the survival of themselves and their group. In the novel Parable of the Sower, and the television show The Walking Dead, we not only encounter the same object like the survival pack. We also encounter the reoccurring theme of madness caused by survival. When people are pushed too extremes in order to survive they are often pushed to an animal like instinct. This instinct can cause them to lose their sense of morals which creates this “normal” stereotype we have in our culture today. When pushed to this extreme they are no longer considered normal, but they are now “mad” or crazy.

**Normalcy vs. Madness**

*We All Go A Little Mad Sometimes.*

–Norman Bates, *Psycho*

According to the article, “What do we mean by ‘Normal’?” written by Eric R. Maisel, Ph.D. in Psychology, “The matter of what is normal can’t be and must not be a mere statistical nicety. It cannot be and must not be ‘normal’ to be a Christian just because 95% of your community is Christian.
It cannot be and must not be ‘normal’ to be attracted to someone of the opposite sex just because 90% of the general population is heterosexual. It can’t be and must not be ‘normal’ to own slaves just because all the landowners in your state own slaves” (1). Normal is often thus. Normal in our culture today is often defined by the societal morals that are placed in our households or communities. People are expected to behave or exist in a particular manner based on what is “normal” or socially acceptable based on their societal surroundings. When these morals are challenged or taken away by a person or group of people, this is “madness” coming into play. Being “normal” is complying with society’s stereotypes and expectations, if one diverts from this path they are considered abnormal or crazy. Morals are the guidelines of society, we can see this all throughout history and literature. For instance, here in Georgia, the guidelines of society tend to be skewed by Christian beliefs and ideals because the Christian community or church crowd dominates the south. This leads to the belief that all people should have a faith, hospitality, and live a conservative life style. If these morals or ideals are broken, then the normality of the environment is also broken.

Lillian Feder, author of *Madness in Literature* states, “The term madness is currently used to describe a wide variety of contradictory attitudes and almost any conduct that can be either justified or attacked as extreme…” (1). This definition points put the above statement, madness can be something as simple as not following the straight light that society sets for their expectations of life. If someone ventures from societal expectations, this is considered “contradictory behavior” that will be considered “extreme” and crazy. Morals and ideals in a society define what is normal and what is madness, without these morals or ideals is, everything would become what society knows as madness. Which is what is displayed throughout the text *Parable of the Sower*, and the television show *The Walking Dead*.

Lauren, from *Parable of the Sower* appears to be normal to everyone except her family. She follows the societal norms and the morals/rules that are set within the walled community. She is considered abnormal though because she has a condition called “hyperempathy” that was created from a drug her mother used while pregnant with her. This condition plays on an “empath”—someone who can share emotion with others. In Lauren’s mind, she shares everyone’s pain and pleasure. She mostly shares other people’s pain, and this is why she guards this condition with her life. If her condition is found out by the wrong person it can very well kill her. Since
she has the condition it makes her abnormal, she is not like everyone else. Especially with this being a possible mental illness, it all being in her head, it gives the reader the vibe that maybe she is mad.

We also see the challenging of normalcy in the television show *The Walking Dead* through Rick Grimes entire group. They are constantly having to walk a fine line of what is normal and crazy during this time. They have to battle with thoughts of killing other humans, stealing, and fighting in order to survive. There are many times they have to break rules of their previous society, or even their own morals so that they will live another day. For example, the very first episode starts with Rick Grimes, the main character, pulling up to an abandoned gas station surrounded by cars, dead bodies, and other decaying/unused objects. The viewer is looking around at the damaged caused by the madness in this society. While walking around this gas station we encounter our first zombie, a small girl. We see her from the back, as does Rick, which makes us think at first that she is not a zombie. Rick speaks the first line of the show, “Little Girl!”. He tells her not to be afraid and when she turns around, he sees that she is a zombie. He hesitates when she starts toward them and then he is forced to shoot and kill her. This one scene illuminates the madness of the society and the length of madness that Rick is pushed to. He is forced to kill this “undead” girl, which to him he still sees as a “little girl”. This breaks his morals and societal expectations because even though she is no longer herself and she is a zombie, she was still a human at one point in time. This television show continues to break societal expectations to more extremes as it progresses, which represents how society falls further during the apocalypse. In seasons three and four of *The Walking Dead*, the viewer watches Rick Grimes and his crew battle against a seventy-person town ran by “The Governor”, an evil-minded man that has no issue killing anything or anyone that stands in the way of what he wants. The viewer watches and experiences Rick Grimes and other main characters of the show losing their sanity and slipping further into “madness” through having to defend their own and kill other human beings to survive.

The whole topic of what is “normal” and what is “madness” is controversial because of the fact that psychologist cannot actually define these terms. These terms often vary from person to person depending on what they believe to be normal or crazy because of the environment in which they were raised. One thing that is brought to light within the texts discussed above is that during a time where people are pushed to break basic human
moral in order to survive, madness becomes normality. It becomes normal to kill, steal, destroy, and to do anything to live.

**Parable of the Sower**

*That's all anybody can do right now. Live. Hold out. Survive. I don't know whether good times are coming back again. But I know that won't matter if we don't survive these times.*

—Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

*Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E Butler concentrates on the types of madness that people will experience during the end times. Butler explores madness in a manner to illuminate that during the time of the apocalypse; people will say and do anything they have to so that they can survive. Butler illustrates this madness through mental disability, crime, violence, and survival throughout this text.

In his study, *The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower*, Jerry Phillips explores the idea of the Utopia and Chaotic society that is displayed within Butler's novel:

“In 2024, Los Angeles has become an “oozing sore” (96), a “carcass covered with too many maggots” (8); “there are fewer and fewer jobs”-children are “growing up with nothing to look forward to” (13); “debt slavery” is rampant-in general, “workers are more throwaway than slaves” (291); “there are too many poor people” (47)-”living skeletons” (79) are everywhere visible; “thieves, rapists and cannibals” haunt the streets and freeways (259); “crazies” have banded together with no other purpose in mind than to “burn-the-rich” (145); “private armies of security guards” (104) protect “estates, enclaves, and businesses” (35); “there are at least two guns in every household” (34)-gunfire is so common people no longer attend to it. Those who have eyes to see are sharply conscious of the fact that “things are unraveling, disintegrating, bit by bit” (110), that, fundamentally, “the world is falling apart” (247)” (3).

Mr. Jerry Phillips brings to light the suffering and madness that is taking place in this doomsday society. These quotes taken from Parable of the Sower completely envisions what it would be like to try and survive in this
state of madness. There are “too many poor people” (47) so they will be left to kill, steal, destroy, and commit crimes in order to live. There are the “crazies” that want to burn everything down, burn people alive, and cause chaos. The world is completely falling apart and thus leaving people to fend for themselves. Having to survive in a time like the one described, one has to evolve and adapt. In a society where all there is, is madness, does madness become normality? It becomes normal for people to kill, destroy, steal, and commit crimes. Aspects that were once considered madness in terms of societal expectations became the new normal expectations.

In the beginning of the novel, the reader immediately experiences the madness of the outside world. The people from the walled community are traveling to the church outside of the walls in order to baptize Lauren and other children. While riding her bike, Lauren is looking around watching the people on the streets, and all the chaos that unfolds. Lauren says it is crazy to live without walls to protect you and that the people who live this way are mad; “They’re desperate or crazy or both. That is enough to make anyone dangerous. Worse for me, they often have things wrong with them. They cut off each other’s ears, arms, legs. . . . They carry untreated diseases and festering wounds. They have no money to spend on water to wash with so even the unwounded have sores. They don’t get enough to eat so they’re malnourished-- or they eat bad food and poison themselves” (11-12). This quotation demonstrates the fall to madness that the society experiences due to the fall of the government, lack of food and water, and other necessary survival essentials. When humans are forced to live in a society as the one Lauren is living in, they are forced to fight to survive or run/give up. In this society, crimes and violence are a constant aspect because these two things are how people survive. People kill others, cut off body parts, and leave wounds untreated. They are malnourished and sometimes poison themselves by eating bad food. The madness going on in the world in turn creates a “desperate” or “crazy” personality in people. This personality manifests in order to help people fight and survive in this crazy time. This is the classic fight or flight psychological reaction. This novel toys with the idea of America battling with what other countries are already going through. It challenges the American attitude of nothing being able to touch them or threaten their civilization.

In this novel, the walled community constantly longs for the “the good old days” (8). Within this community, the adults are trying to hold on to the American dream. They are trying to live as normal of a life as pos-
sible and to have the same lifestyle for their children that they had growing up. Living inside of these walls is also a type of madness in this text. The claustrophobia of this town and holding on to values when there are none causes a type of madness in the people. The white people are trying to hold on to their white privilege. Keith is going crazy, sneaking out, and participating in crime/violence. Richard Moss put together his own religion and claims that men should be patriarchs, and he has multiple wives. He picks up poor women off the street and gives them a home if they agree to be his wife (45). Lauren is participating in the madness of prepping for survival. When she tries to talk to others about this, she is shut down and told that she is scaring people. In all reality, people are just ignoring the fact that the world is no longer normal, they are in denial and do not want to hear the truth from Lauren so they dismiss her because she is being “crazy”. In order to survive, people have to adapt and participate in the madness that is taking place on the outside of the walls. Another way we see madness within the walled community is through her father’s absolute conservative madness. He refuses to believe that the past is forever lost. He continues to put this facade on to everyone that as long as they are inside the walls that everything can remain normal. He continues to hold church/faith to a high standard in a world that faith is no longer a value. He will not listen to Lauren when she is warning him that they need to be prepared to leave the community. He just continues to live in a conservative fantasyland.

We also see madness through the crime a violence that her brother does and has inflicted upon himself. After spending time in the gang crowd, leaving the walled community to participate in the outside madness, Lauren’s dad and her step mom undergo the identification of the dead body of their son. After this identification, her dad gets her and other people together from the community and shares with them what had been done to her brother: “Someone had cut and burned away most of my brother’s skin. Everywhere except his face. They burned out his eyes, but left the rest of his face intact-- like they wanted him to be recognized. They cut and they cauterized and they cut and they cauterized. . . . Some of the wounds were days old” (135). Not only does this gruesome scene illuminate the madness of the world during the apocalyptic times, it also illustrates what all goes on outside of the walls. It shows gang activity, drug activity, and violence that we see even in our society today. Then this activity is enhanced by the madness that the apocalyptic society places on those trying to survive. They deal drugs or are involved in gangs in order to provide for their family as
Keith did. Keith would earn money and bring it home to Cory. Hearing about his skin being burnt off, his eyes brined out of his head. The reader knows that it was a person on “pyro” that had to of done this, which is a drug that causes people to go crazy and want to burn everything. We also see the madness through this drug that caused people to do this to Keith. It was also clear that he has several day old injuries, so he was tortured most likely by a member from a gang or someone he pissed off during a drug deal. This act highlights the madness that gangs, drugs, crime, violence and the apocalyptic society forces on people so that they can survive.

Madness also manifests in this novel through Lauren and her mental illness. As explained above, Lauren has a mental illness known as “hyperempathy”. As stated before, this is an effect of the drug her mother took while pregnant with her and it causes Lauren to experience both the pain and pleasure of others. Lauren’s disorder breaks the standards of society so she is seen as mad within her household and people who know about it. Even her father believes her to be crazy and delusional: “He has always pretended, or perhaps believed, that my hyperempathy syndrome was something I could shake off and forget about. The sharing isn’t real, after all. It isn’t some magic or ESP that allows me to share the pain or the pleasure of other people. It’s delusional. Even I admit that” (12). Her father puts these expectations of madness on Lauren so much that she even believes that her condition is in fact delusional. It is almost as if her father believes that she is faking it to a degree, that it is not real, it is all in her head. This type of madness can also be considered othering because Lauren is considered an outsider for being different. She is treated different from her brother Keith and the other children in her community. She is treated as different and this in turn could cause her to become even madder, being unable to trust anyone with her secret, even her family. This could also be considered madness because Lauren is forced to care for others in a time where that does not happen anymore. People kill with no remorse, but she is left to think about the worth of killing someone because of the pain she will endure.

All of these types of madness manifest themselves because people are being pushed to the extreme. It is basic human instinct to desire to live and prosper. In order to do these things in an apocalyptic society, it is a must that madness takes part in who people become. The societal standards that we know now become skewed and cause things to invert. Madness now becomes normality.
The Walking Dead

_The world we know is gone. But keeping our humanity? That's a choice._

—Dale, _The Walking Dead_

When thinking of _The Walking Dead_, one question comes to mind, “What would I do in this situation?” This is a common question that people can relate to even in today’s society. Everyone goes through their own specific situations and react in different manners. So if the world we know really was gone, how would a person survive? What would be their actions? _The Walking Dead_, 2010 television hit based off the comics written by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard puts this question to the test with Rick Grimes and his crew. This television show highlights the different events that people have to go through in order to survive during a time like the apocalypse. The different events that happen like having to kill a walker, or even a human, spark a piece of madness in the brains that have to do these things. The characters break what once were morals/ideals and go mad in order to survive.

The show starts with Rick Grimes, the main character pulling up to an abandoned gas station surrounded by cars, dead bodies, and other decaying/unused objects. There are no words during the first 4 minutes. We are simply looking around at the damage caused by the madness in this society. We are shown the madness of the outside world in this manner, much like we see this madness in _Parable of the Sower_ through Lauren looking around. While the audience is seeing all the death and destruction this new world has left, Rick is walking around this gas station. The audience encounters their first zombie, a small girl. She is shown from the back, which makes Rick think at first that she is not a zombie. She is walking, bends down and picks up her teddy bear, and continues to walk away from Rick. The action of her picking up her bear and the way she walks leaves the audience and Rick to believe that she is human. Zombies do not care about their teddy bears and tend to walk with a limp at least. After seeing the girl, Rick speaks the first line of the show, “Little Girl”. He tells her not to be afraid and when she turns around, he sees that she is a zombie. He hesitates when she starts toward them and then he is forced to shoot and kill her (00:02:40-00:04:20). These 2 minutes exhibit both madness and normality. Madness of the outside world is shown through the grotesque bodies lying around the street and inside cars, the broken down and rusted cars that are no longer used, and the ran down gas station. Madness and
normality in terms of survival is illustrated through Rick’s fight or flight response in killing the “little girl”.

Michael Shermer details in his work, “Here be Zombies” about the fight or flight response in terms of *The Walking Dead*. Shermer explains that, “Zombies, for one thing, fit into the horror genre in which monstrous creatures—like dangerous predators in our ancestral environment—trigger physiological fight-or-flight reactions such as an increase in heart rate and blood pressure and the release of such stress hormones as cortisol and adrenaline that help us prepare for danger” (1). This type of physiological reaction is displayed through the moment Rick realizes that the “little girl” is a member of the undead. He stumbles back, panic crosses his face for a moment, and then he pulls his gun and shoots her. One can assume his heart rate and blood pressure spiked, and his adrenaline kicked in which helped him make the choice to fight for his life. Through this basic human function, he displays a side of madness and normality. It is normal to hesitate or to take a step back to consider things before a reaction occurs. However, madness occurred here when he took the life of the girl, even her being a member of the undead. In order to kill, to survive in this time, one has to be mad to do it.

Each time a person goes mad in this television show, it gets more extreme. One of the most shocking moments of the show uses the characters of Carl, Rick’s young son, and Lori, Rick’s wife and Carl’s mother. In season 3, episode four, Carl’s sanity is put to test when he is forced to kill his own mother. In this episode, Rick Grimes’ wife, Lori, is pregnant and going into labor. She is forced to deliver her baby in a closet surround by zombies on the outside. Her son, Carl, and Female protagonist Maggie deliver the baby via C-section. Lori sadly loses too much blood and dies during childbirth. At this point, the zombie disease is airborne and Carl knows that she will turn if they do not kill her brain. Carl, just a young boy, is forced to shoot his own mother in the head so that she will not become a member of the undead. He is forced to do this in order for the rest of his family to survive (00:38:30-00:39:30). Once again, a character is faced with choosing to survive through madness. This moment is even more extreme than other cases because Carl kills his own mother. After killing his mother, Carl mourns for a small moment and then leaves her body to be eaten by a zombie. This experience pushes Carl and Rick to a point of no return from their madness. From this point on, the two characters ditch their morals
and past societal ideals and take on madness. They kill, steal, and destroy so that their group can survive.

Another instance where a character is forced to go mad in order to survive takes place in season four, episode eight. Rick Grimes and his crew have been feuding with “The Governor” and the people of Woodbury. The Governor attempted to attack Rick’s crew, but he failed. Months later, he returns with a new crew to take the prison. The Governor takes hostages the characters Michonne, the samurai, and Hershel, the doctor. The governor has them kneeled at the fence and demands Rick to come talk to him. Rick approaches and tries to first, find a “normal” way to negotiate. He says that they can share the prison, that no one has to die. The governor refuses and tells him to leave. Rick urges him that they can get along that. The governor gets angry, snatches Michonne’s sword and puts it to Hershel’s neck. Rick then pleads with him telling him, “We can let go of all of it, and nobody dies. Everyone is alive right now. Everyone has made it this far. We’ve all done the worst kinds of things just to stay alive. But we can still come back…we are not too far gone. We get to come back. I know we all can change” (00:28:50-00:29:50). This is Rick’s attempt to save everyone from the madness of the past and the madness that is about to happen. Rick is pleading in a “normal” way, saying that they can indeed come back from the horrible madness that they have endured. He believes that they do not have to have madness in order to survive anymore; they can all live together in the secure structure of the prison. This is Rick’s last attempt to save his humanity and normalcy. Everything falls quiet, and then all madness breaks loose. The governor beheads Hershel, and Rick again has to choose between fight or flight. He runs back to defend his home with the rest of his family. They fight until all of the Governor’s people and the Governor himself are dead. Rick Grimes and his entire crew kill other human beings in order to survive. They commit a type of crime that would put someone away forever in the society that we live in now. There is something in the brains of humans that causes them to do whatever they have to in order to survive.

Overall, survival can make people do crazy things. In the apocalyptic society, morals and ideals that set standards for what is “normal” is thrown out the door. New societal expectations becomes protect your own at all costs. People no longer think, they kill and ask questions later. Perhaps, in the apocalyptic society, it is not so crazy to be mad. Madness is in fact the new normal.
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GREEN SCALY SKIN; RED, GLARING EYES; tentacles for a mouth; and waxy bat wings. This is the cultural icon, Cthulhu. Despite multiple cameos, the opening sequence of ‘Rick and Morty” being among them, many do not know this monster’s name or the name of the man whose mind Cthulhu sprang from. So, who is the man who spawned this terrifying creature? Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born August 20th, 1890 in Rhode Isl, U.S.A. (Bullock).

Sadly, this genius of the horror genre mind and imagination was steeped in racist bigotry and Anglo-Saxon supremacy. To understand his worldview and the assumptions that underpinned his early work, and slightly in his later work, an understanding of 19th and 20th-century eugenics is needed. Eugenics was the desire to eliminate so-called undesirables from society by use of forced sterilization and other tactics to prevent certain groups from reproducing and having children. It positioned light skinned Europeans, mostly of English descent, above other racial and ethnic groups. Within Lovecraft’s universe, the basic principles of eugenics, that of a racial hierarchy, is embedded within the story. The idea of eugenics was started by the cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton (Matinez, 2017). Eugenics relied on a simplistic understanding of genetics, often understood only in Mendelian terms. Eugenics was very popular in western countries and programs of forced sterilization spread. The fever for eugenics found its ultimate form in Nazi Germany after which popularity dwindled rapidly. When Lovecraft refers to a character as “mixed”, it is not a benign statement of
simple description; it’s directly tied to a belief in racial hierarchy and white supremacy.

In my research, I will be using and focusing on H.P. Lovecraft’s text, “The Call of Cthulhu”. I will explore the relationship in Lovecraft’s texts between knowledge and madness, and how reality is presented as dangerous and humans as insignificant. These concepts ultimately point to Lovecraft’s racial anxieties, which are threaded through “The Call of Cthulhu”. I will sort through and uncover how Lovecraft’s racialized fears are the possible impetus and undercurrent of his fears. The primary anxiety of Lovecraft’s is non-white groups and cultures. Racial eugenics at Lovecraft’s time would characterize people of color as lacking knowledge and primitive, and as a danger to the gene pool and civilization in general. Lovecraft maintains this derision but positions these groups as holding an ancient knowledge. These groups become devilish ambassadors to beings of cosmic obliteration.

These groups, far from lacking knowledge, hold the ancient secrets of humanity and the entire planet, the knowledge that is not held by the many white university professors that appear in “The Call of Cthulhu”. Thus, by proxy or directly, Cthulhu is a power that non-white, non-western groups hold. Lovecraft’s response to this is to have white characters either die or go mad at confronting this power. In “The Call of Cthulhu”, even white characters that survive contact with Cthulhu initially soon die afterward. These survivors encounter a black or brown sailor and die mysteriously, directly implicating the sailor in their death. Despite the clear revulsion Lovecraft projects and establishes in his texts toward people of color, there is a feverish interest in Cthulhu and what is promised by his rising: humans being taught the power of gods and relishing a bloody orgy in a world warped beyond imagination. Exploring Lovecraft’s work reveals how an individual author’s anxieties are often the bedrock of their writing, for better or worse. Madness is such a malleable concept, both in a literary sense and as a cultural construct, that it can be a direct line to the heart of a text. How madness is understood in a text is a gateway to the writer’s hidden consciousness. My research will indicate how madness acts as a repository for what is feared, degraded, yet holds a strange power that goes outside established norms of where power is supposed to be established. Perhaps most intriguingly, the implied cure to Lovecraftian madness is complete ignorance of the grander truth of reality. The horror conceptualizations in Lovecraft’s text flow from his racial anxieties, underpinned by eugenic theory. The Lovecraftian universe is an expression of Lovecraft’s fear and
anxiety, which is predominantly racial phobia. Madness is used in this setting as a nexus of interfacing between Lovecraft’s safe, white world, and racial and cultural Otherness. Despite Lovecraft’s fears, the very fact he writes and has his characters explore such territory complicates a diagnosis of simple fear and hatred of Otherness. Others hold a power and knowledge that is both seductive and dangerous in Lovecraft’s world.

There is a shared conceptualization of madness from Michel Foucault’s analysis of the historic, “Ship of Fools” (Foucault, 7) and how Lovecraft plays with nautical themes. Cthulhu himself is located under the sea. There are two literal ships in the text, the Emma and the Alert. The Emma holds Johansen and crew, the Alert carries cultists that are described as “half-castes” and the boat is of “evil reputation”. The indication from the narrative is that the Alert would be the ship of mad fools, rejected by the waterfront community and western civilization. But due to the fact that it is the cultists of the Alert that have the knowledge of Cthulhu and are thus heirs to its power, the Emma seems to be the true ship of fools. The Emma’s crew are blundering around in a world that they think they understand but actually have no clue. The Emma happens upon the city of Ry’leth and Cthulhu, The Alert was heading there with an awareness and a purpose. This juxtaposes the two ships and turns the assumptions in the text and the narrator on their head. Both ships become a ship of madness for both secretly symbolize the opposite of what they are believed to symbolize. The Emma is supposed to symbolize knowledge and power but instead holds ignorance and powerlessness as they are swept towards Cthulhu unawares. The Alert symbolizes ignorance and low status, in other words, a type of powerlessness, yet they hold the true knowledge, purpose, and power of the texts universe.

“Love of Knowledge is a Kind of Madness’ Competing Platonism in the Universes of C.S. Lewis and H.P. Lovecraft” by Guillaume Bogiaris’ analyses the quest for knowledge in Lovecraft’s texts. Though Bogiaris doesn’t focus on “The Call of Cthulhu” specifically, I think his analysis will be helpful in my paper.

In Lovecraft’s differing interpretation, however, the ladder leads to some knowledge, but that knowledge leads to danger and madness. Contrary to Lewis, Lovecraft’s answer to Plato is that the world, although indeed made, was not made for us; there are questions with answers it is better not to seek. The proverbial exterior of the
cave, in Lovecraft’s terms, is a place where human beings find only terror, and where the mind takes refuge in madness in a last-ditch effort to save itself. The only reasonable course of action for the Lovecraftian hero who has caught a glimpse of this reality is to return to the realm of men before it is too late. (Bogiaris, 23-24)

Bogiaris’s analysis mirrors my own, though I come at it from a perspective of race and madness. I believe that coming to the same finding from different perspectives of analysis actually strengthens both my own and Bogiaris’s arguments. Bogiaris’ argument seems to be more of a global perspective of how Lovecraft constructs reality in his texts, whereas I dig into the direct reality of Lovecraft’s construction. The platonic understanding of the universe is referring to the cave allegory and the nature of reality and the search for knowledge. Indeed, as Bogiaris’ states, Lovecraft

In Alejandro Omidsalar’s text “Posthumanism and Un-Endings: How Ligotti Deranges Lovecraft’s Cosmic Horror” offers me an opportunity to diverge from the standard academic perspective and attempt to add a new layer to it. Omidsalar states: “in the Lovecraft and Cthulhu Mythoi, mere awareness of Cthulhu or its ilk’s existence constitutes a realignment of perception regarding humanity’s primacy” (Omidsalar). Omidsalar succinctly summarizes the impact of cosmic horror in Lovecraft’s universe, but does not dive deeper into the specific human perception that is realigned or shattered, as I would put it. It is not simply human primacy that is reconfigured; it is white supremacy and racism that is realigned. This is astonishing coming from a writer that is indeed blatantly racist. “The Call of Cthulhu” is not a clever dig at racist belief systems by a satirical progressive; it is written by a eugenicist and racist. The overall reality of the universe contradicts the beliefs of the writer himself.

During the examination of the Cthulhu statuette, the narrator references the odd language inscribed on the surface, stating: “They, like the subject and material, belonged to something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it; something frightfully suggestive of old and unhallowed cycles of life in which our world and our conceptions have no part” (Lovecraft, 8). Lovecraft reiterates the distinction between races by creating separate worlds of knowledge, white men being withheld from a larger, deeper history of humanity and kept in the dark about Cthulhu. This flips the common narrative of white men holding all knowledge and power while barring people of color from that power and knowledge. Despite Lovecraft’s
racism, he has flipped the script and granted power to the ‘Other’. At the same time, it creates a deeper estrangement based on racial lines. It deepens racial differences. It creates two conceptual spheres. Further, people of color that aren’t a part of the cult are still aware of the cult and have some knowledge of it. They fear it, but this still puts them in the same sphere as the cult. This Other sphere is also considered a horrific cult that serves an evil behemoth, but even Cthulhu’s evilness is dampened by the descriptions of the future apocalypse.

On describing the result of Cthulhu’s awakening, the narrator paints a surprising future: “The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the great old ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated old ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom” (Lovecraft, 13). All men? Does this suggest dissolution of racial hierarchy? It is specifically all men, not some men or white men. And non-white characters are pushing forward towards this doomsday that is not a doomsday. This describes a version of reality that has radical equality. Beyond that, the final words, that it will be a “holocaust of ecstasy and freedom” are distinctly positive, besides the Holocaust aspect. There is a yin and yang aspect to the narrator’s descriptions. Its equal part positive and negative, inducing a strange cognitive dissonance for the reader, mirroring the overall cognitive dissonance experienced by the narrator and other white males of the story. The old ones are “liberated” yet so are the humans who transcend their humanness. The description of the orgies of death ring hollow, for old ones, don’t die, and humans will become like “the great old ones.” So the killing that is referred too would not cause death. Interesting that the coming of the old ones does not result in the destruction of humans, but in an odd sort of liberation. The coming of the old ones is framed as positive in a way. Freedom is particularly interesting, for that is a highly regarded value of America. Cthulhu would cause all current ways to be discarded. Lovecraft captures the sense of sublime in the hints of absolute destruction and absolute liberation.

The second segment of the “Call of Cthulhu” details the meeting of the narrator, several academics, and a police inspector; Legrasse. They pool their knowledge and Legrasse recounts his encounter with the cult in a swamp, dancing and worshipping a similar statuette while dead bodies of the cult’s victims swayed above them on poles. This section shows a juxtaposition
between the power and knowledge of the white men and white world, and the alternate power and knowledge of the cult, comprised of “mulattos” “half breeds” and “negroes”, as the narrator calls them.

During the second section of the “Call of Cthulhu”, Legrasse recounts his encounter with the swamp cult, describing the atmosphere of the environment thusly: “The region now entered by the police was one of traditionally evil repute, substantially unknown and untraversed by white men. There were legends of a hidden lake unglimped by mortal sight, in which dwelt a huge, formless white polypous thing with luminous eyes” (Lovecraft, 10). Firstly, the land is stated to be evil, but importantly its “untraversed by white men”, inhabited by brown and black men. Within this land “untraversed by white men” is a white creature, evil in its aspect. Police are a symbol of power, in America that power has been used as a tool to disempower brown and black people and indeed to brutalize them. Yet police have an image as protector of peace and enforcer of order, a balm against chaos. Given the history of racist abuse, you can see how this is a shallow view of the police. So we have a cavalry of brave white men entering this dangerous land, conquering it in a way, for white society. And in this land, we are met, though not directly, with a white monster. It’s a white monster, not black or shadowy, which would be logically consistent in the racist context. Making the creature white aligns it in many ways with the “white men”, who have never traveled it's lands. The white monster is more a reflection of the “white men” than the non-white cultists and their evil cult. A representation of whiteness or racism? Both? It’s in a lake, which is traditionally a place that holds significance, King Arthur and the lady of the lake, getting Excalibur for example. Water, in general, symbolizes the unconscious and emotions. That this lake was unglimped by mortal eyes indicated that it held something very dark and evil. We don’t get to see this dark creature in person. We get to see Cthulhu, but not this white creature. One of the men does hear wings (look into that character) This creature is formless, undefined, not ordered or structured. It’s referred to as polypus, a diseased growth, malignant, cancerous. Luminous eye, light means insight, but to have luminous eyes, in this case, draws images of a blind beast with cataracted eyes that blind the seer as much as the creature itself. One line of possibility, I’m not sure of yet, but it’s possible that there is a counter-narrative embedded in the story, not purposefully laid by Lovecraft, however. Could this white monster, that the heroes do not face or see, represent the very racist beliefs that the narrative espouses? Is this white monster the murky embodiment of white supremacist racist ideas
that are incomprehensible to the white police and Legrasse? This suggests that within Lovecraft’s psychology, there was perhaps a subtle resistance, not conscious, to his own racist, eugenicist belief system. This is a very hopeful way of looking at it.

After Legrasse and his men apprehend the cultists, they interrogate the only member considered sane, a man named Castro: “What the police did extract, came mainly from an immensely aged mestizo named Castro, who claimed to have sailed to strange ports and talked with undying leaders of the cult in the mountains of China. Old Castro remembered bits of hideous legend that paled the speculations of theosophists and made man and the world seem recent and transient indeed” (Lovecraft, 13). A Mestizo, commonly considered a slur that describes someone of mixed racial heritage, is the character that bridges the world between the Cthulhu cult and the white world of the police. Castro imparts this information, his very status as a Mestizo reiterates his position as a bridge for the police. His race is used as a way to cement and point to his role within the narrative itself. This is, of course, a dehumanizing way to use a character, but that is par for the course for Lovecraft. Who can have knowledge of Cthulhu and how deep that knowledge is, is racialized. Vague dream information can be imparted without consequence, but the deeper the knowledge and understanding are, the more at risk the white characters become. Johansen and the narrator’s grand-uncle Angell both die as a result of gaining full knowledge and awareness of the Cthulhu world, and the narrator himself muses that his end could be near. The world that is mentioned, “man and the world” is the western white world. The nexus of information is shifted to China. These Chinese cultists have purportedly learned the secret to immortality. It’s a kind of interconnected community, outside white society’s awareness, where information is shared among people of color. It’s unregulated by racist ideas or strictures. Some of the squatters were considered ‘good’, non-threatening. “From mankind, as we know it”, again, “we” are educated white men, because some members of mankind know exactly what the statuette is and the language it has. Separating known and unknown, in a way, separating the powerful and the ignorant, this flips the common script. White men are supposed to be powerful and knowledgeable, but Lovecraft has given that role to non-white men. “Our world and conceptions have no part”, again separating the white world from non-white, and suggesting that the white world is shrouded in ignorance. The white male characters are ignorance of a great power and the future of the earth and all humans, a profound ignorance. This is the paradox underlying Lovecraft’s world.
He believed the exact opposite of his created world, the hidden reality of his world.

In the second section of the story, Inspector Legrasse recounts his encounter with a segment of the cult performing a murderous ritual in a swamplike biome: “Only poetry or madness could do justice to the noises heard by Legrasse’s men as they ploughed on through the black morass towards the red glare and the muffled tom-toms” (Lovecraft, 11). Legrasse and his men are passing through a marsh literally and figuratively: a morass of differences and knowledge between themselves and the non-white cult members. Only with madness, or poetry, could the sounds of the cult be intoned, comprehended. This establishes a connection to madness as a form of knowledge. Only with madness could the white police understand the sounds of the cult. Madness is generally understood as flipping one’s perception upside down, obliterating preconceived ideas and replacing them with incomprehensible thoughts. Madness is thus a way of making sense of the madness of the cult, however, the cult isn’t mad. The cult holds true knowledge, true comprehension. What madness is to Legrasse and his men is the barrier of their own ignorance.

Legrasse dehumanizes the non-white cult member by aligning them with animals: “There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other” (Lovecraft, 11). Here the non-white cultists are directly associated with animals; beasts. This harkens to racist beliefs that white people are less animalistic and non-white people are bestial on a physical, moral, intellectual, and even spiritual level. There is a dance around directly describing things, in this instance noise. The reader is made to infer. This might increase the horror, but it also forces the reader to create the sound of these dark-skinned humans who are labeled beast. The reader is made to join in with the story; the reader is not allowed to remain an inactive observer in the dehumanization of the cult people.

Legrasse continues to describe the cult in negative animalistic terms, but in this description an odd positive note appears, hinting at an envy of the freedom of the cult and its frenzied members: “Animal furry and orgiastic license here whipped themselves to daemonic heights by howls and squawking ecstasies that tore and reverberated through those knighted woods like a pestilential tempests from the gulfs of hell.” Again, strange little positive aspects are associated with the darkness of the cult: “ecstasies” is positive and denotes a letting go of sorts, the word “orgy” adds a subtle allure as
well. Another example: “daemonic heights” rather than lows. This is a ceremony that is oddly elevated through word choice. Interestingly, Lovecraft comes from a Christian worldview, and here invokes Christian vocabulary: daemonic and hell, yet Lovecraft’s world is distinctly non-Christian. The reality of the world is that cosmic creatures beyond human comprehension rule existence. There is no god or Jesus, only Cthulhu and the other eldritch horrors of the Lovecraft pantheon. So, Lovecraft takes the religion and morality of Christianity and makes it one more point of ignorance among the white civilization. Every pillar of white European civilization that is held as truth and stability is shown to simply be evidence of white civilizations ignorance to the greater reality, non-white cultures and peoples that are seen as inferior are holders of true knowledge and true power in Cthulhu’s world.

The third and last segment of the story is comprised of learning about the Emma’s voyage and subsequent encounter with the Alert and finally Cthulhu itself. The narrator learns of Johansen’s suspicious death and acquires Johansen’s journal. Reading it, he meets Cthulhu by proxy, coming up against the reality of Cthulhu, the final act which shatters his belief in the white structures of power and knowledge he had believed his whole life and been indoctrinated with.

In Johansen’s journal of the events of the voyage of the Emma, he tells of the encounter with Cthulhu on the sunken city Ry’leth. According to Johansen; “The thing cannot be described---there is no language for such abyssms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order” (Lovecraft, 23). Johansen claims that language fails him, language is a form of order. Language is the primary mode of understanding; even our thoughts are constructed with language to create clarity and to communicate. This creature that defies language is the creature that has been worshiped and heralded by fringe communities connected as the cult of Cthulhu. These individuals, notably non-white, hear the call of Cthulhu; understand the communication of this being. There is something about Johansen losing communication at the sight of Cthulhu when at this moment in the narrative, the cultists hear his call and comprehend it. The cultists gain communication, a form of global communication, as Johansen loses it. The shifting world order that Cthulhu promises, one of radical equality, not just between people, but between humans and the great old ones, silences Johansen. He is silenced by the embodiment of Cthulhu. Again, this creature that will liberate humanity
from death contradicts order, just like the cult contradicts the order of the racist social order. In the cult, non-white men are aware of knowledge, have the upper hand, are involved in a great project that spans throughout time and beyond. The fact that Cthulhu is a contradiction of matter, force, and cosmic order is not a simple description. It is how Cthulhu affects the social order, the material of life to humans. Cthulhu promises to upend that order established by white men. The ‘proper order’ of things, how things ‘should’ be, built on the work of white men in a lineage of classics, Cthulhu promises to wash that aside to reveal the true essence of reality. Johansen claims it “cannot be described”, he can’t describe the alternate to his order, his known reality of embedded, implicit racial hierarchy. Yet Lovecraft himself is clearly grappling with these concepts, but on an unconscious level, he is operating on the same level as his white characters, yet he has and represents the same cosmic power Cthulhu has because he is the author, the creator, of the Cthulhu universe.

While reading Johansen’s journal, the narrator notes the similarities between Wilcox the sculpture and Johansen’s descriptions of strange planes of existence and its architecture: “I mention his talk about angles because it suggests something Wilcox had told me of his awful dreams. He had said that the geometry of the dream-place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours” (Lovecraft, 22). Non-Euclidean, indicating distance from the established understanding within the western lineage of thought, starting from the recovery of ancient Greek knowledge in the Renaissance to the time in the story. This further cements and reiterates the dichotomy between the world of western knowledge and this new Cthulhu knowledge base. Due to the racial world of this story, we can see that this alternate world of Cthulhu, a world that white men do not know of, is constructed as beyond the knowledge of white men in the story. The fundamental pillars of knowledge in the Cthulhu world are separate from the fundamentals of the western, white world of the story. The Cthulhu is non-Euclidian; its fundamental fabric defies the western knowledge of the world. There is deeper knowledge, deeper power, in this Cthulhu world, a non-white realm of knowledge. The deeper power comes from the fact that the geometry of Cthulhu can incorporate and contain Euclidean geometry, but Euclidean geometry shatters as a concept in the face of Cthulian geometry. More so, this realm is loathsome, it’s cast in a negative light. It’s seen not just as a different form of reality, but a chaotic, confused realm where things do not make sense. This is because it throws white knowledge into chaos.
While reading Johansen’s journal, the narrator reads of the encounter with the Alert: “Of the swarthy cult-fiends on the Alert, he speaks with significant horror. There was some peculiarly abominable quality about them which made their destruction seem almost a duty, and Johansen shows igneous wonder at the charge of ruthlessness brought against his party during the proceedings of the court of inquiry” (Lovecraft, 21). This is another direct dehumanization of the non-white cult members. Their absolute destruction is barely justified. There is a sense that they should be exterminated. That a systematic destruction is justified. This alludes to both eugenics and Nazism. The ruthlessness is attempted to be excused. This harkens to eugenics where justifications are constructed that prop up a system of dehumanization and extermination. “Some particular quality” was said to justify killing all the crew of the Alert. Every last one. The Alert did attack first, but in a civilized society, taking prisoners after a victory is seen as proper rather than wholesale slaughter of one’s enemies. This paints the crew of the Emma as the ones with an “abominable quality”. Yet, due to their whiteness, their alignment with the ‘proper’ power, they are subtly excused in the narrative as being justified. Meanwhile, the crew of the Alert is constructed as deserving of their slaughter by references to their “reputation”.

The narrator recounts a report stating: “The Alert was well known there as an island trader, and bore an evil reputation along the waterfront. It was owned by a curious group of half-castes whose frequent meetings and night trips to the woods attracted no little curiosity” (Lovecraft, 19). This establishes the cultist as less valuable than the crew of the Alert. It primes the reader to prejudge the Alert and the Emma. The narrator wants you to see the cultists of the Alert in a negative way, yet throughout the text, the standards that would hold the cultists as lesser are shown to be based on hollow pillars, and these pillars are collapsed by the revelation of the true reality of the texts universe. These implications are not fully explored in the text, nor does the narrator realize how his world knowledge has been collapsed. Instead, the white men who gain the true knowledge go mad and die. The text stops short of it, and the characters are cut off from it; the ultimate realization that it is their world, the white civilization of Lovecraft’s world, that is mad. It is the realm of false knowledge and ignorance to the cosmic reality.

As the Alert is degraded, the Emma is praised and presented as good: “Our Auckland correspondent gives the Emma and her crew an excellent
reputation, and Johansen is described as a sober and worthy man” (Lovecraft, 19). And yet they were charged with ruthlessness and justified it by claim an abominable quality of the Alert crew justified it. How is that sober? The way the two ships are described mirrors the way white society and civilization constructs the character of race.

Lovecraft developed and poured himself into a world of his own making. A world that shows the worst of human ugliness. It shoes racism and cruelty, dehumanization. The word dehumanization gets thrown around a lot, it is losing its impact, so I will describe it to give it power again: dehumanization takes all the complexities of a human individual and stripped them away, forcibly imprinting a cruel stereotype, a set of assumptions and expectation, on a human that is struggling to live just like any other. And Lovecraft does indeed wallow in this, chose it when he could have resisted. He was worse than a coward, as he needn’t be so racist according to his cultural time frame. He wanted to feel superior and a part of something greater, and he found that in the allure of racial superiority. And yet, the undercurrent of his universe, as displayed by The Call of Cthulhu, reveals that there was also the diametric opposite of the hidden within his tale, hidden from the characters, and I believe hidden from Lovecraft himself. In this story, we see the meeting of human contradiction, a fierce belief in the rightness of your world and your reality, facing against the overbearing, uncaring reality. Reality does not care what people wish it to be, it simply is. So here is the real conundrum, because the Call of Cthulhu is not reality, it is fantasy, conceived and written by a white man of the 19th and 20th century. A eugenicist and racial supremacist. Lovecraft’s story is madness, in and of itself. It reveals the split within a single mind, how the writing that flows from someone can have hidden truths within it, beyond the control of the writer. So what is control but an illusion? A madness?

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Notes on Contributors

Name: Richard Camp
Age: 45
Admission Date: 08/10/17
Admitted For: Psychosis, Delusions of Grandeur
Notes: Richard believes he is a super hero. He also has beliefs that he has higher intellect, strength, and invulnerability. His level of psychosis is further heightened by Richard's belief in the “villain.” Although these villains are never identified and believed to be hallucinations, Richard is insistent that they are real and that it is up to him to fight them.

Name: Shawn Lynn
Age: 23
Admission Date: No one knows, he’s been here forever.
Admitted For: Bipolar disorder, suicide attempts, psychotic episodes. Psychopath?
Notes: Extremely charming and manipulative. Warning. DO NOT get too close.

Name: Joe R Norton III
Age: 27
Admission Date: October 1st 1991
Admitted For: Complete Break from Reality
Notes: Melancholia when writing, unable to distinguish reality from the stories that he writes, and self-induced isolation.

Name: Hannah Page
Age: 22
I am an English major and a creative writing minor, graduating with cum laude and from the Honor’s College. If the University of West Georgia were an asylum, I would have been admitted for writing-induced isolation, believing the worlds I read about in books are real, and Lesesucht (18th century German word for the obsession with reading).
I am attending West Georgia in the Spring as a Graduate Student in order to continue my endeavors in English. I plan to get my Doctorate in Creative Writing or Linguistics and continue to write such interesting and fulfilling things as this Capstone was to research, plan, and write.

I want to take this time to thank the incredible Professors in the English department at the University of West Georgia for being so encouraging and inspiring through this journey of being an Undergrad.

Name: Clare Robinson  
Age: 24  
Admitted August 2018  
Admitted for talking to myself and having an overactive imagination.

Name: Stanley Connor Toney  
Age: 27  
Admission Date: August 8th 2018  
Admitted For: Refusal to Acknowledge Reality  
Notes: Subject has been blindfolded upon request as he constantly shouts how “nothing around him is real” and “it doesn’t make sense” that he “doesn’t have control” over his actions here. He has been upsetting the other inmates by accusing them of being virtual and made of code, causing them to overreact and fight amongst each other. The other raving patient, Tanner, is the only one that doesn’t seem to have any reaction to subject Connor’s words: strange. Take extra precaution with this one, as he is paranoid beyond comprehension, therefore making his actions highly unpredictable.

Name: Christa Watkins  
Age: 22  
Admission Date: August 15, 2018  
Admitted For: Extreme Paranoia  
Notes: Patient continually mumbles to herself about the end of the world, and believes zombies are after her. Patient seems to believe she is a character from *The Walking Dead*. She has violent tendencies; do not approach her with anything sharp.
Name: Tanner White
Age: 25
Admission Date: 2014

Admitted For: Deranged delusions, paranoia, and violent idealization.

Notes: Patient exhibits a paranoid fantasy, believing in the existence of a so-called “Cthulhu cult”. Patient claims Cthulhu is an evil entity that is beyond time and space and that a cult is trying to resurrect said entity. On a regime of Anti-psychotics.