Table of Contents:

Introduction

I. Permorphing the Past

The Cost of Performance: Oskar Schindler’s “Role” in the Holocaust
Jack Perry.................................................................pg 3

A Universal Language: The Importance of Narration in Martin Amis’ Time’s Arrow
Jordan Hall.................................................................pg 15

The Bastards of History: The Eminence of Culture and Social Ethics in Quentin Tarantino’s Inglorious Basterds
Lauren Williams.............................................................pg 26

Performing Re-Masculinization through Costuming in Rock of Ages
Ashley Carroll-McCarley...............................................pg 39

II. Permorphativity of the Moment

How Wharton’s Introduction Frames Ethan Frome’s Unreliable Narrator
Casey Smith.................................................................pg 51

New Beginnings: Staged Admiration in The Edge
Clence Patterson.............................................................pg 63

From Submission to Affection: The Performativity of Marriage in Their Eyes were Watching God
Tamara Beckham..........................................................pg 78
# Table of Contents

## III. The Permorphed Future

Performing and Veiling Deformity in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*
Tyler Key.................................................................pg 89

To Thine Own Self, Be True: Performance and the *Animorphs* Series
Chris Berry.................................................................pg 101

Suzanne Collins’ Transcendentalism: Reflection, Rebellion, and Restructure of Twenty-First Century America’s Sociocultural Landscape in *The Hunger Games*
Valerie Yearta.............................................................pg 112

Author Biographies.........................................................pg 127
Students in this seminar hit upon a marvelous portmanteau word for their title, one that both highlights the transformations that are central to the essays in this collection and calls attention to the role performance plays in defining the meaning of such “morphing” moments. The course out of which these essays grew was called “Fakes, Cons and Double-Talkers: Performance and Literary Deception.” Our subject was the variety of ways that texts represent or enact deception. We looked at characters who tell us about their own trickery and at unreliable narrators who are a little less forthcoming in their relationship to the reader; we examined stories told and purposefully retold from new perspectives within the same work; we considered how texts manipulate their audiences’ assumptions about gender, race and national identity to lead us in the wrong direction – or towards what the author sees as the right one; and we even looked at the way that an author’s carefully constructed public persona shapes a reader’s acceptance of a text and its ideas. Often, writers wish us to uncover the deception so as to re-examine the larger narratives we’ve become comfortable telling ourselves. We then become like detectives, pursuing uncertainty, sifting evidence and piecing together different shades of truth.

As students began to ponder their own contributions to this volume, many became interested in examining the ways that the lie inherent in performance – in putting on a costume, whether physical or verbal, and pretending to be something that you’re not – actually can enable the production of truth or even the pursuit of virtue. Several essays take up the question of performance as camouflage, including Jack Perry’s examination of Stephen Spielberg’s framing of Oskar Schindler, Tyler Key’s reading of deformity in David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest, Casey Smith’s assessment of Edith Wharton’s defense of her narrator in Ethan Frome and Lauren Williams’ reading of linguistic and historical reconstruction in Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds. Others chose to examine how performances reveal spaces of cultural crisis: Ashley Carroll McCarley takes up the depiction of 1980s masculinity in the film Rock of Ages, Tamara Beckham explores diverging conceptions of gender and marriage in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, and Chris Berry...
Introduction

considers aggression, gender and the complexities of young adulthood in K.A. Applegate’s *Animorphs* series. Others examined performance as a means of seeking to understand cultural trauma – Jordan Hall’s reading of the narrator in Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* – or of pondering the boundaries between civilization and the self, as in Clence Patterson’s reading of the class divide in Lee Tamahori’s film *The Edge* and Valerie Yearta’s exploration of the new Transcendentalism of Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*. Whatever its motivation, performance becomes a means of transforming perceptions of institutions, of cultures, of selves.

This collection is divided into three sections. Part I focuses on ways that authors or directors take up the questions of the past: how does performance position us to understand pivotal moments of political or cultural development in a clearer way? Part II focuses on authors who took issue with the performances that defined their own present. The essays in this section all examine, in one way or another, how an awareness of these performances might reconstruct the reader’s perception of the cultural and geographical factors shaping individual identity. Part III explores the imagined future as it performs and reconstructs elements of both past and present: since the future is always imagined, depicting the future is always a “permorphative” activity that draws attention to contemporary cultural anxieties as much as it draws the reader out of the present.

Dr. Maria Doyle
February 2013
I.
Permorphing the Past
With such titles as *E.T.*, *Indiana Jones* (then only a trilogy), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* garnishing his resume, at the turn of the decade—1990—Steven Spielberg took it upon himself to create an artistic masterpiece that would be as gut-wrenching as it would be heartwarming and as performative as it would be informative. In an *Inside Film Magazine* interview with Spielberg, the prolific writer/director/producer states that even in the earliest stages of his creative process when planning to make *Schindler’s List* (1993), he made a conscious decision to avoid making the film in the coveted “Spiegbertian” style. His knack for warm and fuzzy endings and mind blowing special effects encircles him in a “family film” aura, and superb direction of Steven Zailian’s screenplay adapted from Thomas Keneally’s Booker Prize winning novel *Schindler’s Ark* (1982) won him not only Best Director and Best Film, but the reputation of a truly didactic and awe inspiring film maker. Reading this film as a piece of literature, offers an opportunity to explore several avenues of possibility: On the one hand, a critic may assess the closeness with which Spielberg adheres to the novel and/or factual history; on the other, one may identify and explicate a number of signs and/or motifs utilized in the film to create meaning. Here, however, the general idea is to push the film, its images, motifs, and composition through a particular system, interpreting the film though the frame of performative theory in order to determine the role of performance in the film. As Schindler (Liam Neeson) says himself, “Not the work, not the work. The presentation.” On the surface level, of course, a film typically implies that there will be actors—playing roles, reciting lines, adopting manners not their own, and recreating specific characters in their own image; however, “performativity” as theory attempts to reach beyond this superficial concept of performance and grasp something a bit more abstract: meaning. As a bio-historical film, *Schindler’s List* makes use of a number of filmic techniques—including but not limited to: color pallet, blocking, and wardrobe—to reflect, even mimic, the internal thoughts and external actions of Oskar Schindler; in doing so, the film
encourages and, at times, forces the audience to identify with both Schindler and the Jews at Krakow. By approaching the film in this manner, Spielberg effectively creates a motion picture monument, not simply to memorialize the Holocaust or Schindler the man, but to set in stone the benevolent effect of Schindler’s list, which still to this day impacts the Jewish population in this area. Without this list, there would be no Jewish community of which to speak; as Itzhak Stern, Schindler’s accountant and subordinate business partner, comments, “The list is life,” (scene 29).

Color pallet

The opening shot of the film focuses on the lighting of two ritual candles. As the orange flames raise the frame cuts to a color shot a Jewish family performing a Sabbath ceremony of singing prayers. Though at first it is unclear, the color of this opening sequence indicates that the event is happening in the present moment. The scene offers a stark contrast as it reverts to the past in a black and white shot of hundreds of Jewish families exiting trains from the countryside and piling into the city limits under national orders. The shift in color startles modern viewers prepared to witness a historical drama done in classic Spielbergian fashion. The entire film, with the exception of a handful of scenes, retains this grey color pallet. For a film produced in 1993, Spielberg takes a major risk in shooting the film in this manner, so his reasons must be sound—even if they are elusory. Consider the white marble of the Jefferson memorial, the polished gun metal gabbro of the Vietnam memorial, the white stone of the Washington monument, or the eternal flame of Kennedy’s grave site in Arlington Cemetery. In this manner the film literally resembles a stone fixture, erected as a reminder of past events, and the repeated use of orange flames emphasizes the strength of the direct survivors, the spark of a newly reunited Hebrew nation, and the persistence of benevolence in the face of adversity. Furthermore, the color scheme roots the audience in the time period; as Michael Wildt and Pamela Selwyn suggest, “Spielberg… emphasized the ‘documentary’ character of his film by shooting in black and white,” (Wildt 241-242). This black and white ‘documentary’ feel to film effects the audience on 3 major levels: 1) it orients them within the space of time (past and present), 2) it insists on its own validity, and 3) it refuses them any sort of beautifying construct.
Spielberg first orients his audience, as mentioned earlier, with the smoke of the candle in the color filled frame dissolving into the smoke of the train in the subsequent black and white shot. This lets the audience know that they have moved backward in time. At the end of the film, Schindler’s more than 1,100 Jews cross a hill top heading out of Brunnlitz; this shot is then superimposed with a color shot of the remaining survivors in the present. For the epilogue (still in color) these survivors, their family, and the actors in the film pay homage to Schindler by placing stones on his grave in Israel. This one scene effectively proves that this film is a memorial to Schindler’s cause; however, this scene alone is not enough to win over the hearts of his audience. Instead, Spielberg relies on several moments when he breaks both the forth wall and his color motif. First, toward the end of the film, after Schindler had moved his factory to Brunnlitz and began housing his work force on sight, he reminds the man he simply refers to as Rabbi that it is the Sabbath and allows him to perform the customary rites. When the Rabbi lights the candle provided for him, it glows orange. Because the workers have been spared the gas chambers and are now enjoying a number of freedoms that had been denied them since the 1939 German occupation of Poland, This bright colorful flame bleeds onto the white washed screen a beacon of hope. However, such a small element is easily overlooked.

For the audience to truly identify with and remember the film, it takes something a bit more emotionally taxing. The girl in the red coat offers just this sort of overwhelming sentimentality. As she wonders alone through the streets of the Krakow Ghetto in the midst of “liquidation,” Schindler cannot take his eyes off of her. The look on his face is one of panic and helplessness, as if he would like to swoop down and rescue none other than her. While the black and white backdrop of the scene masks the blood-drenched sidewalks the tear filled blood-shot eyes, this beautiful little brown haired girl stands out as much to the audience as she does to Schindler. We identify first with her aimlessness and confusion, but seeing her from a distance and assessing Schindler’s reaction shots, we are forced to identify with Schindler’s seeming helplessness and shear nausea in the tumult intolerable cruelty. Though others argue that Schindler’s transition is a steadily gradual process taking place throughout the film, or that his most significant turning point comes when he decides to hire an elderly couple at the request of the daughter, I argue that
this moment, this little girl, has the deepest impact on Schindler. The next day, he confronts Commandant Amon Goeth in his villa at the Plaszow labor camp demanding, “Their mine!” He lays claim to these people, presumably, because they are profitable, but beneath the surface, Schindler become acquainted with these people and sees them as such: people. Later, the SS, forced to exhume the mass graves of their Jewish victims, burn the corpses in pile two and three times taller than a man; the bodies are lifted to the top by conveyor, and the men seem over-joyed if not maddened by the act. Here, Schindler notices a recognizable figure: Clad in her icon red coat, this name child rests in the haphazard grouping of bodies waiting to be burned. Upon her second introduction, the girl in red effectively engrains herself into the minds of the audience as well as Schindler.

Over the years, Spielberg’s reputation as a film maker has not rested fully on the critical reception of *Schindler’s List*; if so, he would have been ruined years ago. The critics’ bittersweet reception of the film retains a portion of irony, however, because Spielberg became the first American film maker to receive any kind of award for a Holocaust film. Their grievances center mainly on this ‘documentary’ style coupled with a fictional dramatization of actual events, which is misleading to viewers and values their emotional response over their personal edification, the first of four shortcomings of American Holocaust films that Frank Manchel, Professor of English and Film at the University of Vermont, mentions in his article, “A Reel Witness: Steven Spielberg’s Representation of the in Schindler’s List.” He also notes that: 2) this skewed emphasis of emotion is disrespectful of historical events, 3) it underestimates the intelligence of the audience, and 4) it is a “sin against the victims by universalizing the Jewish experience” (Manchel, 93). To put this into perspective, recall the medical examination scene. Old and young, man and woman, all of the Jews in the work camp strip naked and parade, in turn, across a line of medical personnel. The dehumanizing effects of this scene are both shocking and discomforting. The audience actually feels embarrassed for the prisoners. This scene does privilege an emotional response, but the scene is quite accurate to historical accounts and relies on the audience’s awareness of these events to grasp that emotional context, which negates Manchel’s second and third points. The film does ask the audience to identify with the Jews here, so the universalizing aspect of this experience extends beyond the screen;
however this point is at once reaffirmed and rebuked. While no one can fully commiserate with the people who actually experienced this humiliation, the audience is only asked to reflect upon it in hopes that they will be more likely to take a stand against even microcosms of such inhumane acts. Spielberg forces his audience to view these events through a dingy polarized lens. In his interview with *Inside Film Magazine*, he mentions this scene specifically saying, “It was hard on me to be there, I couldn’t look at it, I had to turn my eyes away, I couldn’t watch. It was easier to see it in black and white than it was in color,” (*IFM*). This is not to say that Spielberg shot the whole film in black and white to make this one scene more bearable; however, seeing the film in in assorted grays makes it a bit easier to swallow. Accordingly, Manchel tells his readers that “because such scenes have the ability to affect people’s values and attitudes, we assume that the most such attempts at authenticity can do is connect us to the event and stimulate our intellectual curiosity about the realities of the past and the possibilities for the future,” (96). Spielberg achieves just that in his shooting of this film: The black and white color pallet allows the audience to fill in certain imaginative holes; while it may lack an amount of aesthetic charm in this since, by forcing his audience to interact with the text, he encourages them to remember the film on a long term basis, react to it, and act upon it.

**Blocking**

While the color scheme becomes an overarching theme within a film, the organization of elements on screen, the blocking or staging, often takes on particular meaning within individual scenes that then translate back into these larger themes. Most well-made films take special care when considering how people, props, and backdrops appear within the frame, and Spielberg makes no exception in the making of *Schindler’s List*. For example, the audience first encounters Schindler in a very peculiar way at the onset of the film. As he gets dressed, the camera does not show his face; instead, it focuses on his hands. Two times in this sequence the audience sees him reach for wads of money, and each time he makes certain that he has all of it. The money is tucked away in drawers as if it is the last of his savings. As he enters the night club, the camera follows in behind him—still not revealing his face—meanwhile, he passes the maître d’ an undisclosed amount of money, at which point he is quickly seated.
Shortly after this he holds fifty Reichmarks just above his shoulder, and a waiter quickly greets him; he sends a round of drinks to an SS officer and his company. Next he gives another undisclosed, yet apparently quite a large sum of money to the maître d’ and buys out the club—except, of course, for the one table marked as reserved. Schindler knows that all of the money he is spending is actually meant to impress whoever plans to occupy that table. Five times before the end of the second scene, money is depicted on screen as speaking louder than words. Schindler is no stranger to the understanding that one must spend money in order to make money; however, this generalization typically implies that one is investing in a particular business venture or a series of businesses such as investing in the stock market. Instead, Schindler invests in his own social capital in order to make the necessary connections to gain the desired army manufacturing contracts that eventually will make him a very wealthy man. This means of social climbing is considered “conspicuous consumption,” which, as Wilfred Amaldross and Sanjay Jain describe, “It is generally accepted that the decision to purchase a ‘conspicuous’ product depends not only on the material need satisfied by the product, but also the needs such as prestige,” (Amaldoss 1449). Veblen proposed this concept at the turn of the century, so it was no stranger in WWII culture, and it is prevalent even today. By blocking these scenes in this way, Spielberg calls attention to this aspect of Schindler’s character, and eases the audience into the ensuing performance.

One of the most horrifying events in the film falls a little prior to the halfway point. As Goeth and his Nazi cohort of SS soldiers begin to cleanse the Ghetto at Krakow, Spielberg’s camera brings to life the nightmares of Hitler’s gradual move toward the “final solution,” the total extermination of the Eastern European Jewish population. Without any regard to human decency and a person’s right to life, the SS personnel round up the Jews within the Ghetto and shoot all those who do not comply. The entire scene becomes frantic, gunshots ring in the back ground, and as the Jews lump into groups and file out of their town of walled freedom, the fear and shock spread across their faces with haunting clarity. The actors, including the children, issue amazing performances here—as well as throughout the film. In congruence with historical conceptions of the Nazi as highly organized and methodical, this scene, along with many others throughout the film, illustrates juxtaposition between the Jews and their persecu-
tors. Spielberg depicts the Germans in ordered regiments, they follow bureaucracy to the letter, they follow orders without question, and they record everything; on the other hand, the Jews are shown in jumbled groups, disorganized, and lacking purpose. As the Jews clump together in haphazard conglomerates, the Nazis separate and categorize them. They systematically expel them from their makeshift homes, and when all is done, and night has fallen, they break out the stethoscopes and begin marking the improvised hiding spots. For the remainder of the night, Jew after resourceful Jew meets the same fate at the uncompassionate end of an automatic weapon. However, this is not to suggest that had the Jews been more organized they would not have met the same end; rather, it suggests that Spielberg effectively depicts the Jewish sentiment of helplessness in the face of apparent chaos alongside the Nazis’ historically accepted machine-like quality. The irony of this situation settles in the audience’s subconscious in a dubious sense of confusion and order.

Schindler overlooks the scene from a ridge while horseback riding with one of his many mistresses. By placing him in this position, Spielberg creates multiple layers of meaning. First, on the ridge, Schindler has a “God’s-eye” view of the massacre. However, he is both literally and figuratively above the situation; he is an untouchable—so to speak. Next, he is on horseback, which places him even higher above the circumstances and introduces a greater idea of class separation to the scene. Finally, he is in the company of his mistress rather than his wife, which illustrates his personal perception of existing above the law. On the other hand, the look of disgust painting his face demonstrates his lack of support for such violent and horrific actions. The audience, thus, acknowledges that Schindler is above the inhumanity but not immune to it. This event deeply affects him, and marks a turning point for his character. The audience, in comparison, also stirs with the perception of this moment in the film. Though, in reality, they exist on the hill with Schindler, the camera work forces them to confront the terrors first hand. By utilizing mid-range full body shots of executions, the audience witnesses the atrocities from a first person perspective. Also, the close-up reaction shots of the surviving victims firmly implant within the audience the sense of fear and dismay evident in the heavy atmosphere surrounding the scene. This is one of several scenes that Miriam Hansen, founder of the Dept. of Cinema and Media Studies at the Univ. of Chicago,
would say falls into the “impossibility of representation” category often criticized in the film (301). She argues that the film would have had a better critical reaction as a documentary (297), but I feel that the emotional effect of the film is critical to what she calls “public memory” (296), which is the ultimate intent of the film. Spielberg may not be able to capture the full effect of this moment in history; however, the emotional response of the audience ultimately enhances it “public memory.”

Wardrobe

Lastly, Spielberg taps into “public memory” through costuming: His apparent attention to detail, again, orients his audience in time and place; however, the accuracy with which he approaches the film’s costume design is second to certain symbolic goals. For instance, in the second scene, Schindler prepares to go out; the audience is not aware at this point to where or why; however, they draw a number inferences based on his choice of attire. He matches several ties to their corresponding sports coats, chooses from an array of cuff links, places a neatly folded handkerchief in his chest pocket, and, not withstanding, takes out what seems to be a high dollar wrist watch. To top it all off, on the left lapel of his jacket, he pins a gold button brandishing the national emblem, a Swastika. As Manchel would have it, “The camera introduces us to Schindler, the avaricious Nazi opportunist, by showing not who he is but what he is: a man preoccupied with a decadent lifestyle,” (88). The care with which he selects his evening wear and dresses himself indicates that he has important business afoot, business that requires him to look like he has a million bucks. In the following scene, the audience realizes that he is adorning himself in this way in order to fit a very particular model, a motive at the heart of “conspicuous consumption.” While in a night club filled to the brim with SS officers and other members of Germany’s elite, Schindler must stand out as a wealthy and patriotic businessman so as to earn the trust and admiration of individuals who have never even heard of him. This is an example of what Marjorie Garber would call “classing up”: When someone attempts to climb the ranks of society merely through appearances, they are, in effect, acting above their station; of course, as she reports, “…the social history of dress in the twentieth century suggests that political and economic motives are always at work, no matter how much “fashion” may seem to
have a mind of its own,” (Garber 23). For Garber’s purposes, this point relates to “rank and degree” and the “[promotion] of national industries and products,” which is also applicable to Schindler’s button; however, by dressing in this way in addition to possessing an already overwhelmingly charismatic persona, Schindler is better able to establish himself as a rich socialite rather than simply a social climber. On the other hand, the audience, with its outside perspective, is able to witness the power of appearances as Schindler puts on his front. The viewers do not necessarily pin him as a fraud, however. They merely find that one part of achieving a certain social status is to know precisely how to adopt the characteristics of that role and that style of dress is, in fact, a large part of such a transformation.

While Manchel notes Schindler’s affinity for decadence (a valid point), Franklin Mixon—Economics professor at the Univ. of Southern Mississippi—and Len Treviño—professor of Global Business at the Univ. Miami and Washington State—take into consideration Schindler’s “strategic behavior” in their analysis of the film using game theory. Basically, they posit that “Schindler conceals his own type—via signaling—in the presence of knowledge about his rival’s type”—in the case mentioned above, he must deceive a number of SS officers, but for the most part of them film he participates in a figurative chess game with Goeth (494). They suggest three ways in which Schindler employs these “strategic behavior” tactics: 1) He complains about the negative impact that the execution of his employee (an old one armed man) will have on his profits, 2) He “pulls rank” on the soldiers at the train station after they mistakenly place Stern on a train to Auschwitz, and 3) He complains about the loss of man hours when Goeth sends his workers from the Krakow Ghetto to the Plaszow work camp (Mixon, 495). Schindler’s vestiges act as an extension of this strategy; while these situations require that he mask his true intentions in assertive dominance, his clothing insists that is equally powerful in both finance and social standing, so his threats appear less idle. Upon entering the endgame, Schindler’s concern turns to what Univ. of Pittsburg Business Administration professor Ray Jones refers to as “amenity potential,” a concept in which owner/managers possess the freedom to do with company resources as they see fit (Jones, 5). While those in control of business assets will typically invest funds seeking the highest possible gains, a business owner with “amenity potential” may not always seek the highest potential revenue gains over certain ulterior motives.
Based on Jones, Schindler uses his amenity potential to help his Jewish workers, a crime equivalent to treason and punishable by death, so he replaces his intention with that of an opportunist, so that it appears as if his only concern is his profit margins (14). Throughout the film, clothing or otherwise, Schindler must keep up appearances in order to meet his end goal: saving “his” Jews.

Though Schindler has the option of “classing up” with his ties and slacks, the Star of David acts an image of degradation for the Jews— as they have been forced to wear the patch as an emblem of dishonor and “otherness” in the eyes of the Aryan population. What, then, does it mean that Schindler wears a golden Swastika in nearly every shot right up until the last scene of the film? On the surface level, this piece of regalia is meant to symbolize Schindler’s patriotism. As the SS officials view this small but noticeable ornament, they are not inclined to question his loyalty. It appears, then that his “strategic behavior” poses a believable bluff. This point becomes evident by the third scene as Schindler, wearing a leather coat—an inherently expensive luxury item during the 1930’s and 40’s—accentuated with the luxurious accessory. He passes scores of Jews lining the streets outside of and the corridors within the Judenrat, a place for the Jews to convey largely ignored grievances. The camera focuses on the button in a close-up shot for a couple of counts. This technique works to create a separation between Schindler and the mass of star-wearing Jews. As they wait at a virtual standstill, Schindler bypasses them all without question. The pin acts as a passport, gaining him access to unreachable domains of power and leadership. Not a single character in the film mentions the button aloud until the climactic scene at the end of the film when he censures himself for not having traded it to save just one more life. In this scene, Schindler’s transformation reaches its final climax. He breaks into tears and begins to stammer around counting the lives that he could have saved. Itzhak and the Rabbi present him with a new piece of jewelry, a ring smelted from the gold filling of one of his loyal employees and engraved with a Hebrew phrase that translates, “He who saves one life, saves the world,” (scene 37). Though the audience is already well aware of Schindler’s chosen side in this conflict, this scene solidifies his change as he replaces the button with his new ring and exchanges his suit for a broad pinstriped prisoner’s uniform and retreats into exile. The irony, then, is that Schindler begins the film by adorning
the vestiges of an insider, though his right to belong on the “inside” is questionable, yet by the end of the film he gives up the insignia of his political affiliation and dresses himself in the dehumanized garb of a concentration camp prisoner. The choice of wardrobe, here, illustrates his transition visually as he becomes a political refugee much the same as his laborers—only now the tables have turned.

In the words of Manchel, “[Spielberg’s] entire career [has] been devoted to making sentimental movies with optimistic endings, always reassuring his audience that they can triumph over their fears if they have the will to do so;” however, he questions, “Is that an appropriate approach for interpreting the death of six million Jews?” (92). In an approach focusing on the performative nature of three fundamental aspects of the film’s *mise en scene* (color pallet, blocking, and wardrobe), this assessment answers: yes. The black and white documentary style of the film offers an air of truth to the film, while the staging and costuming introduce aesthetic and symbolic significance to a film wrought with the atrocities of the Holocaust. Though many critics debate the merits of the film based on these same constructs, the film does not attempt to generalize or oversimplify the Holocaust as a whole; therefore, I argue that the film effectively reaches the audience on a personal, emotional level in order to create a “public memory” in regards to this singular narrative. Thus, the film becomes a memorial not only for Schindler and “his” Jews, but also for the treacherous acts leading up to their rescue. The film imprints a lasting impression in the minds of its viewers, an impression which hopefully insulates the world population from recursive genocides in the future. Just as a funeral is not actually for the deceased, this film and other memorials/monuments affects the survivors and prompts reverence, remembrance, and ultimately action. In a decade when both Bosnia and Rwanda experienced local genocides, this film, and the predicate opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. earlier that same year, served notable contemporary purposes that cannot viewed as null in light of the film’s themes; however, many scholars have been exceptionally critical of the film for this very reason. I point to the glowing orange flame that frames this narrative in nothing more than hope. In keeping with his color scheme, this flame is always in the present, and it exemplifies the message of the film: We must maintain our hope for the future in order to ensure that it is one worth experiencing.
Works Cited


A Universal Language: The Importance of Narration in Martin Amis’ *Time’s Arrow*

**Jordan Hall**

According to Paul Ricoeur, “the truth of narrative is based on a notion of the narrativistic nature of time itself”, suggesting a union, a fluidity between time’s arrow and narration that is inseparable (White 171). Martin Amis’ 1991 novel, *Time’s Arrow* embodies this fluidity but with a time altering twist. The novel’s inverted chronology as a means to examine the monstrous attempts for justification of the genocide of millions during the Holocaust has often been a topic of key concentration. By using this technique, Amis is able to illustrate the utter infeasibility of understanding such acts of violence in accord with modern sensibilities. The narrator’s inability to deal with the healing (in violent reverse time), paired with his enjoyment of the “creation of a race” supports the ludicrous justification given by some Holocaust doctors post genocide, who only desired to “make Germany whole” (Amis 141). However, what remains to be examined in the text is the narrator’s categorization, role and acclimatization to the world in respect to the performative quality of the human mind and body that maintains the ability to comprehend the inconceivable, not necessarily for its face value but for the simulacrum it stands to represent. Although initially disoriented by the chronological shift, the audiences (both internal and external) witnessing Tod Friendly’s warped life quickly acclimate to the new world order. We become enveloped in the *story* being told and the familiarities utilized, suggesting that any given event can be rationalized if put into a narratological perspective with familiar pieces. Within Time’s Arrow, we, as the exterior audience, recognize the horrific actions taking place when our narrator does not; however, we recognize our narrator’s misunderstandings as justifiable. Amis incorporates universals such as narration, gender, familial ties and self identification based on an overwhelming power structure portrayed through a televisual lens by which the audience situates itself in order to stabilize the disorienting alterations to the universe and in doing so, draws attention to the performative nature of the presupposed innate aspects of humanity. The novel performs to illustrate the reliance we have on narration and
category within narration to understand the incomprehensible in life. Although we can acclimate ourselves to the text’s structure through our narrator’s provision of key universals that provide a mirror to our own world, the narrator misunderstands his reality due to his lack of narration and inability to relate to a framework.

Acting at the foundation of the text is the overwhelming attention paid to narrative structure. Amis seems to be drawing on several arguments made in Hayden White’s *The Content of the Form* on the importance of narration and narrativity in general while also keeping with the idea of categorization as that which determines societal conception. White’s text, which analyzes several revolutionary theorists and philosophers from the modern era (Foucault, Jameson, Ricoeur) situates itself as groundwork for my argument through its focus upon “narration [as] a manner of speaking as universal as language itself, and narrative [as] a mode of verbal representation so seemingly natural to human consciousness” to discredit the institution, would unravel the order by which we understand the world (White 26). I further his argument by defining what within the text situates it as a narrative by means of how Amis’ “imagination” produces “specifically human truth[s]” that correlate to the audience in order to read the text as reality and the narrator as humanistic.

Son of Kingsley Amis, acclaimed British author, Martin Amis began his authorial career by publishing his first works at the young age of 24. He has won numerous awards for his nuanced approaches to standard subject matter as well as his creative responses, via his literature, to living in the public eye. Often criticized for being too experimental, particularly by his father, Amis refuses to succumb to the criticism. Rather, he continues to push the limits of the English language while questioning the boundaries of narrative structure. *Time’s Arrow* brilliantly achieves the latter by inverting the structure commonly expected in narratives. Although accused of “profiting from the slaughtered of Auschwitz” by critics of *Time’s Arrow*, Amis does not focus on the Holocaust to situate the thematics of the novel, instead only utilizing the horrors taking place to highlight the inversion of reality (Amis 144). The focus of the novel does not rest on the Holocaust but only utilizes the horrors occurring to highlight our continued comprehension of the story despite the inversion of reality. *Time’s Arrow*’s chronology follows an inverse trajectory of time, in that the narrator watches, unnoticed, as his host body, Tod Friendly,
moves backwards from the moment of death until birth. Tod Friendly appears to the reader to be a typical older man living in melting pot America who occasionally receives weather updates from New York. He becomes a doctor, has various flings with countless women and eventually moves to New York and assumes the new identity of John Young, surgeon. After several years of flings and castaway women, John moves to Spain to briefly become Hamilton de Souza before finally settling in Germany under the name Odilo Unverdorben, a doctor under employment at Auschwitz. The compassionate acts that transpire under Tod’s various nomenclatures are repeatedly misunderstood by the narrator so that only when the narrative reaches the Holocaust does the world begin to “make sense” (Amis 129). The misinterpretations appear as kindness taken as cruelty, generosity as selfishness and of course, creation as destruction. Tod gives a crying child a toy to ease his or her lament yet the narrator witnesses Tod acting as the catalyst for the weeping by taking the toy to sell at a nearby store. Later comes the horrendous act of doctoring that the narrator associates with bodily mutilation and torture and then much later the experimental creation of a new race at Auschwitz. Oddly, the majority of the novel takes place during Tod Friendly’s occupation of the body. The narrator takes great care to dictate to the reader quite literally the ins and outs of Tod’s life such as mealtime, bathroom operations and gardening. The reader witness’s not only Tod’s exit from elderly obscurity but the narrator’s shift into a character as well. Through Tod’s experiences, the narrator experiences emotions across the board, truly becoming a character, rather than simply the bard of the tale, creating an invaluable relationship between the narrator and the external audience.

To begin unfolding the traditional concepts situated in the untraditional structure of *Time’s Arrow*, the reader must first examine the narrative voice present in the text, who acts as the conduit by which means we are allowed to observe the fictional world represented. Our relationship with the narrator is key due to our understanding of Tod’s life through his storytelling. Without a running conscious narration, the external audience would be left with a fairly hollow account of Tod’s life; such as it is, this is exactly what the narrator is forced to face, leading to his misinterpretations. As a secondary audience, we can acknowledge, through our historical consciousness of the events, our external understanding of time’s trajectory and also through the
narrator’s attempted assessments of the situations, the foundational veracity of the tale being told. Although often indeterminate, the importance of the relationship between narrative voice and structure is resolute. One cannot be fully understood without the definable presence and comprehension of the other. The narrator, who constantly refers to himself in varying tenses (I, we, my and his) presents the audience with a difficult persona to characterize within generalized categories. However, we relate to the narrator through his benevolent and intelligent character, his initial confusion and later acclimatization, his notions of abstractions such as “beauty, terror, love, filth, and above all power” and “general knowledge” (Amis 5, 8). This set of conditions situates him within our realm of understanding because of his relatable personification. Because of his rapport with the external audience and his use of ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’, we are positioned alongside his character for much of the novel, accepting the world he presents us with as a reality.

While attempting to relate to the narrator on a level transcendent of the “initial response” of “disorientation” shared by both audiences, the external spectator attempts to identify with the familiar to form a comprehensible reality (Diedrick). One medium by which the reader often identifies with a narrator is gender. However, the narrator in Time’s Arrow appears to self-identify with no gender, leaving the audience to assumptions based on external societal understandings of gender roles. Amis calls attention to the biological foundation of gender roles, without which we are left with flimsy constructions. Since the host body and protagonist in the narrator’s storyline is male, it could easily be asserted that they share gender as they share a body and for that reason, the narrator can be referred to in the masculine. His male identity could be argued based on his love and admiration of women and their bodies, specifically Irene and Herta, as well as his typecasting of women. For example, in the description of the other officer upon their arrival in Auschwitz: “he held his coffee cup as a woman does, with both palms curled around it, for the warmth”, thus establishing the existence and acceptance of gender typecasting situated in the novel’s world (Amis 117) However, the narrator has no body and is mindfully separate from Tod Friendly. Complicating the idea of a masculine narrator are the repeated instances of maternity expressed by our guide, creating in the narrator what Marjorie Garber calls a “transvestite effect” (Garber 36). As a transvestite, the
narrator epitomizes the “displacement, substitution [and] slippage” illustrated in the relationship formed between Tod and himself as well as by Tod and his own various personas (Garber 37). Garber goes on to suggest that the transvestite character “is the norm, not the aberration—that what we regard as “natural”” through theatrical representations of men played by women and women by men (Garber 39). More than simply a “gender parody”, the narrator’s unspecified sexuality functions to bind his own reality with the audience’s world, in which concrete identity has become obsolete and often limiting (Garber 338). He operates, in some ways, behind a veil in order to access a greater audience. What can be realized through his indeterminacy is “not masculinity or femininity, but the specter and spectacle of transvestism: transvestism as that which constitutes culture (Garber 346). We come to understand the narrator, not in terms of gender, but in respect to the roles he plays in the novel, specifically the roles of parent/child.

In accord with his maternal aspect and in certain light cast by Robert Eaglestone, author of The Holocaust and the Postmodern, the narrator and Tod take on the relationship of parent and child, an aspect of traditional life common across the board. At various points in the novel, the narrator associates himself as a parental figure to Tod, “…for instance—I look down on Tod, on John, as a mother might (mother night), and try to find hope in the innocence or neutrality in his sleep (Amis 69).” Post-Auschwitz, he remarks that “the Jews are my children, and I love them as a parent should, which is to say that I don’t love them for their qualities….., and only wish them to exist, and to flourish, and to have their right to life and love” (Amis 152). Established as a (post)modern narrator, exemplifying our own reality’s evolutionary gender sensibilities, Amis then directs our attention to the “slippage” between the roles of parental sentiments in that one can never exist solely as a parent or child but must be present in both roles. He then proceeds to develop personality based on Tod’s life as he watches the events that are not actually happening to his being. If transferred to a child of a participant/victim in the Holocaust, the relation can be made to the postmodern idea of being defined by experiences that didn’t actually happen to one’s self but to one’s predecessors (Eaglestone). The inconsistency of tense (I, we, our, he my, ect) draws attention to the infeasibility to maintain distinction between “personal and collective” memory, essentially drawing on the ques-
tion of where a veritable personality ends and the performance society expects begins (Eaglestone 73). As Eaglestone argues, “identity is not only personal, ‘who I think I am’ is embedded in various communities and so ‘who I think I am’ both constructs and is constructed by ‘who we think we are’.... ‘I’ and ‘we’ are circular” (Eaglestone 75). The narrator attempts to define himself in light of the story that becomes Tod’s life; however, his misinterpretations create a fragmented figure that eventually can only exist within a solitary sphere.

We can further apply this idea of parent to child relationship to the ongoing performative transformations undertaken by Tod. In real time order: he is born Odilo Unverdorben, who, out of the ashes of the Holocaust transforms into Hamilton de Souza who then gives way to Dr. John Young who finally transforms into Tod Friendly. Each is a ‘brainchild’ of the last, born out of chameleon necessity. While the narrator associates himself as one with Tod Friendly, for a lack of distinct personality, he grows apart from him as John Young and maintains even further distance as Hamilton de Souza. During the period marked by John Young’s existence, the narrator appears to be undergoing a transformation as well. He recognizes his solitary existence and “immortality consumes [him]-- and [him] only” while also expressing sentiments of jealousy towards John for his relationship with Irene (Amis 88). By the end of John Young, the narrator exudes human exhaustion and although he often uses “we”, he states at the beginning of chapter four that “by now John Young was pretty much on his own out there” (Amis 97). Throughout though, the narrator and his own external audience, the reader, remain intertwined in keeping with the established rapport that provides narrative understanding. However, when the narrator transitions into singular tenses upon his arrival to Auschwitz, proclaiming himself “I, Odilo Undervorben” and saying that he is “one now, fused for a preternatural purpose”, the external audience is pushed away in preparation for the inevitable severance of Odilo’s moral rapport with his life’s witnesses (Amis 116). Effectively so, the union between Odilo and the narrator creates a chasm between the narrator and reader. Eventually however, the relationship between Odilo and the narrator is once and for all severed due to the “failed magic” of the “creation” (extermination) of the disabled (Amis 130). When the mode of self representation then changes to “the three of us” or “Odilo and I” the narrator and audience are reunited in order to complete the journey (Amis 146,
A Universal Language

James Diedrick has also argued Robert Jay Lifton’s point that the narrator exists as a psychological double of Tod. To be more precise, the narrator “can be seen as that part of Unverdorben that Unverdorben disavowed” when he began committing the atrocities of Jewish extermination (Diedrick). As put by Diedrick, “in Lifton’s theory, “doubling” involves the creation of a “second self” that exists alongside the original self. In extreme situations, he argues, this second self “can become the usurper from within and replace the original self until it ‘speaks’ for the entire person’” (Diedrick). By usurping Tod’s individuality with his own during the Aushwitz chapter of their lives, the narrator, due to his maternal instincts, seeks to conceal Odilo’s atrocious actions by aligning his own benevolent character with Odilo’s. This appears to exemplify the relationship maintained by Tod and the narrator. We only know Tod through the narrator’s descriptions of his actions and although the novel claims they maintain separate spheres of reality, they share experiences and the narrator learns to form his emotional responses in light of Tod’s own surges of sensations.

Although the narrator is defined in relation to Tod, Tod is completely unaware of the narrator’s presence, suggestive of the lacking connections in a world based on performativity. Ultimately, it is this one sided relationship that creates the misinterpretation. Whereas the external audience and narrator have a mutually established rapport, the narrator’s reliance on Tod is unrequited, creating an abscess in the understanding of Tod’s live performance and the narrator’s spectation. An “essential quality of performance” is “based upon a relationship between a performer and an audience” (Carlson 35). Aware of an audience, the narrator performs a story of rather film like quality, capitalizing on the postmodern idea of the “distinctly performative situation of storytelling” (Carlson 34). There is a cinematic quality given to our understanding of the novel from the beginning. For example, the narrator tells us to “watch” as Tod grows younger and describes the world he sees as a “film running backwards” (Amis 8). The focus on film suggests the finite performative quality of the world around the narrator. A film is consciously preformed and edited to suit
a set of expectations, desires, and nonnegotiable societal conditions; therefore, what we are reading can be understood to be tailored to an audience, whether it be the internal audience that creates the society in which Tod lives or a performance by the narrator to the audience remains indeterminate. At the moment of Tod’s retirement and his opening of the clock in his living room the narrator states that “the room was still circling around us. Counterclockwise” (Amis 24). Since this effect is purely cinematic and rooms do not actually spin, we are further displaced from the simulation of life presented by the text. Their world becomes less than a reflection of ours, transcending to “its own pure simulacrum” creating a furthered reading of the novel as narration, as a story not quite historical in form (Baudrillard 170). It is a backwards moving mirror of a representation of real life and yet it becomes the norm for the narrator. He accepts the ideals, the chronology and the categorization of it, suggesting the ease with which performance becomes natural. As they become natural for the narrator, they become increasingly natural to the reader, particularly with the reference to television reverting back to black and white: “there goes world opinion (Amis 84)”. At this moment we become heavily reliant on the narrator due to a cinematic effect that limits possibility, suggesting that the remaining part of the novel is not subject to interpretation or misinterpretation of the unperformed.

The narrator has “no access to his thoughts—but [is] awash with his emotions” suggesting that the only conceptions to be understood by the narrator are the unperformed, the natural (Amis 7). Seemingly, the only “natural” institution in the novel exists in connection to the various babies represented. The only lucid moments experienced by the narrator during which he glimpses time and thus Odilo’s actions as they truly are, occur when he nears an infant, dreams of infants or while he is experiencing Odilo’s infantile life at the conclusion of the novel. During each of these moments, the narrator recognizes time as it should be and yet refuses to apply this knowledge to his performance to the audience. In light of Odilo’s actions, the narrator seems to be refusing to admit to the audience the imperfections in his host. As the novel moves forward (or backwards), the dreams that once constituted the concrete for the narrator shift into undesirable realities: he begins the distinctly human decision of choosing which performances to believe. Since he does not have access to Tod’s narration or a contextualization of his actions within a narrative, the
narrator’s understanding of what is real and what is warped and further confused. In reference to the Auschwitz medical room that had previously haunted Tod’s dreams, the narrator states that “dreams are playful, and love to tease and poke fun at the truth” (Amis 127). The horrors he believed to be witnessing by Tod Friendly do not compare to those he could be experiencing, and in some ways, enacting, while at Auschwitz. He forgets the initial question of his relationship to Tod: “passenger or parasite”, instead becoming a unified being (Amis 8). The narrator believes what he has been taught to be reality, not what is innate, suggested by the temporality of childhood and the moments of lucidity. Despite his reservations of the “patina of cruelty, intense cruelty, almost as if creation corrupts” represented at Auschwitz, the narrator remains confident in Tod’s, or at this point his own, benevolence. This ability to overlook, “to remember what they want to remember” traverses from the inversed reality of the novel to the reader’s world (Amis 80). In contrast with the beginning content of the novel, the era of Odilio is comprised of less dialogue and more third person narration by our guide. He alludes to Herta disapproving in her letters but he fails to convey what exactly she says, the content of her misunderstandings, lending to the argument that the narrator is simply so desperate for the world to “make sense” without human suffering that he actually wills himself to ignore the opinions of others (Amis 129). This also connects to the break of rapport, based on the audience’s ability to contextualize real time actions through the obvious inversion of dialogue. The narrator refuses to admit to his audience, or to be questioned by them that which becomes the horrible truth. He acknowledges this through the overwhelming authority governing his character: that of power, creation and destruction.

Once the narrator is recognized as a coherent being, regardless of his bodylessness, the values of his world and that which determines his consciousness can be developed in terms of one specific binary that is challenged and yet defined by the structure. The categorization of creation and destruction is finite in the text and appears to be the overwhelming authority by which the narrator, and by association, the reader formulate world opinion within the novel. If the narrator’s consciousness is performative then that which influences his ideals are also performed through narration. Although he lives in a world dissimilar to the reader, he maintains a human construction of Self based on the familiar, allowing us to comprehend his character as
typical. That of power, of overwhelming existence-driving authority: creation and destruction at the hands of men enacting a “cultural performance”, who only “yield this special power because if the power remains unused, then it will become unmoored, and turn back against their own lives” (Amis 80). By the narrator asserting, in his own performance that his characters are also performing acts of power, he creates a dimension of the text that, without cultural norms and cultural narration, would be impossible to comprehend. The binary governing his thought process is that “Creation” he says “is easy, is quick” while “Destruction—is difficult. Destruction is slow” (Amis 15, 19). The inverted narration works towards the “substitution [of] signs of the real for the real itself” (Baudrillard 167). In other words, rather than a mere representation of reality, the backwards sequence of events that transpire through the narrators eyes becomes the invariably true version of his reality. For the narrator to understand this reality “everything [must be] metamorphosed into its inverse in order to be perpetuated in its purged form” (Baudrillard 177). The only real comes from the simulation of a hyper real state, one that can be understood and acknowledged through the narrator’s vision of Tod’s life on a backwards reel.

Although we may find the narrator’s misinterpretations bizarre in light of our own conscientiousness, his reading of what he sees is not so different from how we view our own reality. When a catastrophe, or any event for that matter, strikes, our final opinions are often formulated in respect to the popular mediums of the internet, news broadcast, and later, narrative recitations. We, much like the narrator would have been utterly perplexed and absolutely lost by Tod’s odd life, so reliant are we on narration as a means to understand life. To have a rapport equates to having common sensibilities. For the narrator, who knows his audience well, these sensibilities exist through binaries by which he envelopes us in his solitary, confusing world. Without narrative as a medium, our world lacks contextualization, analysis and above all, relatability, without which we could not converge as a society.

Works Cited

The Bastards of History: The Eminence of Culture and Social Ethics in Quentin Tarantino’s “Inglorious Basterds”

Lauren Williams

Traditional: hardly a word describing the risqué, “nouveau modern” cinematic literatures that are Quentin Tarantino’s films. His talent of disguising controversial social and cultural issues within his action films is unique, and what could only be described as “nouveau modern”. “Nouveau modern” defines his ability to weave sub genres into his action films to form hybrid genres. These hybrid genres feed America’s hunger for entertainment yet at the same time, function as documentaries. Instead of drowning viewers with a wordy documentary film or dry historic recount, Tarantino wheels his audience in with their love of action and violence to place social and cultural issues into their subconscious. Tarantino recreates history using a kind of “active history” method (which describes his recreation of history using violence and action as a tool to persuade his audience on the instability and unreliability of historical “truths”, by highlighting the probability of the film’s scenarios using justifiable reason based off the “truths” available to us in history books). Tarantino uses “active history” as a buffer to introduce controversial subjects such as: religion, politics, and sexual taboos. His 2009 film Inglorious Basterds, centers on the events that occurred in 1940 in Nazi occupied France. The actors who play historic characters, as well as Tarantino’s penciled in ones, are the key to the success of recreating history how the Tarantino sees it. Erving Goffman, an American sociological theorist of the twentieth century, believes the true success of a film, play, etc. lies in the actor’s performance.

He states, “Actors attempt to convey to an audience a particular impression of both the actor and the social scene. Through the use of scripted dialogue, gestures […] actors create a new reality for the audience to consider” (Goffman, 249).

In order to recreate history, the pieces have to connect logically; and, if the actors do not believe the reenactment, then the film cannot complete its task. Tarantino’s 1995 film Pulp Fiction debuted his talent for weaving social issues into an action film. Pulp Fiction was
riddled with taboo issues and sensitive subjects such as: homosexuality, religion, racism. An as stated before, Tarantino’s unique combination of poetic dialogue, satirical humor, and violence functioned as a buffer to disguise these controversial issues with humor and action so to maintain the audience’s attention.

The poetic script of *Pulp Fiction*, and *Inglorious Basterds*, forecast the mood and emotion of the film before the action commences. His signature opening scene involves two or more characters engaging in a long, wordy, yet mundane conversation. This allows dialogue to become the focus of the feature while, at the same time providing a disclaimer that the action in the film will underplay language fluctuations and dialogue. Several of his cast members stated that his scripts are poetry. Christolph Waltz, whom played Lt. Hans Landa in *Inglorious Basterds*, said in an interview with Charlie Rose that, “[Tarantino] is a poet” (Charlie Rose). In the opening scene of *Inglorious Basterds*, Nazi Lt. Hans Landa (nicknamed the “Jew Hunter”) converses with a dairy farmer about the Jews, where we learn Hans has come to his home to track down a missing Jewish family. A few things occur in this scene. First, Hans (German) speaks the Dairy farmer’s language: French. Tarantino wants his audience to become aware of a few points just with Hans’s language switch. Tarantino needs the film to be as realistic as possible with Hans having to speak the Farmer’s first language, but also he wants to highlight Hans’s level of intelligence. Tarantino also wants the double entendre of Hans literally speaking the farmer’s language and figuratively speaking the farmer’s language—in order to explain to him the purpose of his visit. In an attempt to seduce the dairy farmer and win his hospitality, Hans continues speaking the romantic language to transpose his character, in Nazi uniform, to a friendly stranger who has arrived for a visit. In the opening scene, the audience observes how, language allows Hans to transpose character without a wardrobe change; because, the dexterity of language yields flexibility to instantly alter the atmosphere—shifting audience’s reality.

Goffman believes, that in a scene like this Hans’ character is asking the audience to, “believe that the character they actually see possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be” (Goffman, 249).
As Hans tosses around pleasantries to the farmer and his family, the tone of the scene remains pastoral and friendly, because sunlight enters the home through the door. Goffman suggests, “those who use […] setting as a part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place” (Goffman, 251). When the door closes and the farmer and Hans are at the table with a single, small light lighting the entire room (simulating an interrogation room), only then is Hans able to begin his intimidation methods. Has asks the farmer to converse from French to English, and we later discover that Hans desired to speak English because he was sure French-Jews were listening to their conversation and did not want share their conversation with them. But for performance purposes, Hans desired to speak English in order to transpose back into a Nazi Lieutenant and taint the dairy farmer’s atmosphere making it foreign to him in his own home. When Hans begins speaking English, Tarantino demands his English speaking audience’s attention on Hans’ physical performance. Hans’ language shifts highlight his ability to transpose between cultures, as well as his ability to read scenes and adapt. When Hans and the farmer speak French, subtitles hinder English-speaking audience’s full attention. The impact of other languages on English speaking audiences render emotions of displacement and can cause one to feel foreign in their own country. The subtitles are purposefully distracting, to point out American’s ignorance of other languages and cultures.

In an effort to persuade the dairy farmer about the genocide of the Jews, Hans compares the Jew to the rat and the German to the hawk. Hans expresses his ability to think like a Jew stating, “the world a rat lives in [is a] hostile world. There are so many places it would never occur to a hawk to hide […] and I’m aware of what tremendous feats human beings are capable of once they’ve abandoned dignity”.

Immediately following, Hans says to the dairy farmer, that his “job dictates” that he must bring his soldiers in and conduct a thorough search of his home, and that, a reward for any information will be that, “[his] family will cease to be harassed in any way by the German military during the rest of our occupation of your country”. When Hans indicates that his job, as a duty to his country, obligates him to use force and violence, this introduces the dynamic of violence in the film. His statement provides structure for violence, which gives the audience a small sense of comfort in witnessing it because the
violence is not in cold blood. This rationalization allows us to see the Nazi’s as humane rational thinkers instead of “mass-murdering maniacs”. The moment Hans and the farmer begin to speak English; three cultures coexist in the room: German, French, and American. Because America operates according to the same logic that Hans expressed, even the most hated Nazi appears to be a humane, civilized person with rational thoughts because American, French, German and every culture in the world, operate using the same system of law and consequence. It can be argued that America pushes its values onto other countries because, America’s code of ethics are based on Christian religion which is historically notorious for forcing other cultures to adopt its values. Tarantino wants his audience to perceive violence as a consequential outcome for unlawful/immoral behavior. This essay will explore the reliability of signs and language; and, how both connect to the translation of culture—which indirectly relates to the process by which American society demerits unacceptable behavior based on their own contradicting moral standards.

Action film is a genre where one or more heroes are thrust into a series of challenges to achieve some kind of victory using physical efforts and violence—a fact that properly categorizes Inglorious Basterds as an action film. However, differentiating from his peer’s action films, the blood-shed in Tarantino’s hybrid action film is best described using the term “aestheticization of violence”. This high-culture/high-art use of violence in film and other media is what Indiana University film studies Professor Margaret Bruder describes as a, “stylistically excessive” depiction of violence in film illustrated in a “significant and sustained way” (Bruder). Before Inglorious Basterds, Tarantino’s track record of film generated from the film noir era. Film noir is a cinematic theme popular in the 1940’s and late 50’s which expressed a somber, down beat emotion to the viewer reflective of the ‘Cold War’ period when America was filled with emotions of fear, mistrust, bleakness, despair, and paranoia due to the threat of nuclear war. Tarantino incorporated emotions of film noir into his action films as a trope which symbolizes the tinge of moral conflict, futility and sense of injustice in America today. And like any work of art, the “work of art has meaning and interest, only for someone who possesses, the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (Bourdieu).
Violent, “hard-boiled” anti-heroes like the character Jules (an African-American assassin) in Pulp Fiction is an example of the heroes/moral “do-gooders” in his films and a popular character of film noir films. Before Jules would assassinate anyone, he would quote the Bible verse Ezekiel 25:17: “And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them” (King James Bible). However, Jules did not quote the verse verbatim. Tarantino’s tailored version contains remnants of the Bible verse, with the majority of the verse rewritten to present the historical text as Jules sees it:

The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother’s keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the LORD when I lay my vengeance upon thee. (Pulp Fiction)

The important factor here is Jules’ sense of entitlement to rewrite the Bible. Since the beginnings of America violence has removed the Native Americans, brought and kept slaves in America, civil wars, the invasion of Normandy and so forth. So, American history taught Jules that Americans have the right to kill so long as it is with good reason. The irony of Jules statement is in the line, “The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men”. Americans are the tyrannical evil men that do not “shepherd the weak”, instead they “strike down [...] with great vengeance” on those who are evil. Reciting his version/interpretation of the bible comforts Jules because it is a reminder of his duty as an American to eliminate evil (people who have wronged his boss). Yet, his words let his victims and the audience know that he dictates life and death not God.

Like Americans, German’s boast their patriotism and sense of superiority. In the rendezvous scene with Bridget Von Hammersmark, the film has the task of translating German into English with subtitles. Translations are sensitive and can be complex because, the
translator must not deprive the foreigner the elaboration of meaning that can be lost with sayings and slang specific to a culture. Because of this, American and German culture can be complex. Both cultures do not allot foreigners the luxury of the formal authority of language, because each culture has clannish sayings and gestures similar to a password that only a true citizen would know. When British officer Lt. Archie Hicox posed as a Nazi officer to meet with Von Hammersmark, he gestured the bartender for three drinks using his index, middle, and ring finger. Even though we learn that British officer is linguistically fluent before the rendezvous, his cultural sign language is not. His study of the language, and perhaps the culture, will never brand him as fluent because he will never be truly involved in culture. Unbeknownst to him, an authentic Nazi officer found him out because he did not gesture using the “German-three” which is done with the thumb, index, and middle finger. The Authentic Nazi officer did not tell Lt. Archie Hicox where he went wrong so not to give away a secret to an outsider. He simply told him that he gave himself away. Von Hammersmark (German born spy for the Americans and Britain), was only able to pinpoint the moment the plan went astray because she is an authentic German working for Americans. Von Hammersmark revealing the “German three” to the American’s proves to the audience that she is against the Nazi’s. She told Aldo that, “any other looks odd”. It is equally important that the film show Stiglitz’s merciless killings of the 13 Gustapo officers because Stiglitz matching the intensity of the Basterd’s as he killed the Nazi’s is culturally congruent. Anything less would seem odd to Americans. Even before this dead giveaway, the lower ranking soldiers and the Nazi officer remained skeptical of Lt. Archie Hicox authenticity because of the way he enunciated the language. The Nazi soldiers were unable to differentiate Lt. Archie Hicox from another ranking officer because he was dressed as a Nazi. The cultural signs and language are important because they are the only reliable markers differentiating one culture from another. It is important that Diane Kruger (Von Hammersmark) as an actress and Til Schweiger (Hugo Stiglitz) be native Germans, because their accents are important for the audience to believe them as German natives in order to consider them double agents. Jonathan Culler, author of *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* says that, “Identity is based on personal qualities with the best fit into a culture that shares at least 90% of
one’s personal qualities” (Culler, 109). When Aldo says that Stiglitz left the Nazi’s and became American, he was not referencing Stiglitz citizenship process, instead to Stiglitz shared beliefs with The Basterds. Albert Blumenthal’s study of the nature of culture, talks about “Spurious Sociological Nominalism”. This title refers to the idea that, “there are no such things as whole groups of cultural minds. There are cultural groups made up of non-interfunctioning cultural minds and those made up of interfunctioning cultural minds”. The idea of individuals within a cultural group having the ability to determine their status in culture supports Blumenthal’s theory that, “All groups of cultural minds are totality-groups” (Blumenthal, 881).

Lt. Archie Hicox was able to persuade the questioning Nazi officer that his accent was a result of his native village in the mountains of Germany, because culture has the ability to break into subcategories. The Jewish-American soldiers as well as Raine (Tennessee breed with a matching southern accent) spoke the same language but with varied accents. The Basters’ accents ranged from: deep-southern accent with a tendency to drag words out on the end and merge syllables, thick Boston accents with the tendency to pronounce “o’s” like “a’s”, as well as what a pedestrian American civilian would call an American accent – a correct pronunciation of American English without the hint of an outside origin or lazy pronunciation. In reference to linguistic signals, accents attach culture to a character, and culture separates even the Jew’s into different subcategories. If one of the Basterds with a Boston accent were to travel to Mississippi, native Mississippians would recognize him as a foreigner simply based on the way he enunciated his words. The identity of each character is designed to redirect attention from their actions, and focus on who they are as people; for the purpose of inviting the audience inside the psyche of each character through linguistic and cinematic signs. When a person relates to a character, that person draws on key physical and characteristic elements to connect them with a larger ideal in order to pass judgment on a person. Lt. Aldo Raine’s voice triggers the audience’s subconscious. The viewer will unconsciously scan a list of mental data to decide how to interpret his character. American audiences need Aldo’s Apache heritage and thick southern accent, because the south is known for its distinct culture and history unique to the United States—in order to wholly trust his point of view and respect him as a leader. When we hear Aldo’s thick southern accent, we automatically
begin digging through American history and our associated knowledge to pin stereotypes, temperament, culture, prejudices, etc. to his character as prerequisites for determining how we want to perceive him based on his anthropologic resume. It is important for the film’s success (in regard to the audience’s experience) that this sequence to occur because it discloses how the audience perceives the film from the inside out. In another interview with Charlie Rose, Tarantino expressed that, he likes the idea of making the movie everyone’s personal movie; because, he purposefully inserts ambiguity so that each member of the audience relies on their personal experiences, emotion, moral compass, to interpret the film and take what they want from it. Aldo has a rope burn on his neck. Tarantino wants the audience to fill in the characters past using the signs present in the film.

The film forces the reader to fill in the blanks with many aspects of the film; however, some elements are simplistic. Character’s like Shoshanna are simplistic characters whom the audience can relate. The film begins with Shoshanna’s escape, and then the film follows up on her life later in the film because the film suggested she survived. Shoshanna’s background and personal struggles are necessary to draw audience’s empathy for Shoshanna’s character. The more we learn about Shoshanna and the more we witness her being harassed, the greater our hatred grows towards the Nazi’s. And, because of Shoshanna’s back story, the film lures the audience into supporting Shoshanna’s radical plan to burn the Nazi’s and commit suicide. The film feeds the audience their own subconscious need for a violent revenge against the Nazi’s, which forces them to question their own ethics. Blankenship considers the film a clever role reversal that traps the audience into confronting their morals:

If we feel excited to see Hitler and Goebbels get assassinated by Basterds, or if we cheer as the Germans on the cinema floor get shot from the balcony, then we are behaving just like the Nazis as they watch their propaganda film […] We have to be so thirsty for revenge that we can feel ourselves applauding for our movie just like Nazis applaud for theirs. A film that creates that kind of parallel is not just a collection of genre homages and fight scenes. It’s a sophisticated insight into how the hive mind affects us all, no matter which side we’re on. (Blankenship)
Blankenship confronts the contradictory nature of America’s morals, and the mirror Tarantino set up for every person in his audience to have a unique experience from the film because it causes one to look upon themselves to pin point how or why they contribute to Tarantino’s view of the world.

By committing the same crimes as the Nazi’s The Basterds are not differentiating themselves from the evil they wish to destroy. In order to highlight the contradicting moral standards of America, Tarantino flipped the scenario to the American’s as the violent figures in the film and violence by the Nazi’s is limited to one scene. Considering the audiences’ knowledge of the Holocaust, the film does not wish to portray the Nazi’s as cold-blood killers but rather a group who share similar goals of America. The only murder the audience witness is in the beginning of the film when the German soldiers shoot through the dairy farmer’s floorboards where Jews hide. Yes, this was a violent act, however the purpose of this scene was to gain the audience’s trust that the film’s historic recount happened as it says it happened. Tarantino is aware that the audience will bring their general knowledge and about the Nazi’s to the theatre, and structuring this act of violence in the beginning of the scene will win the audience’s trust from there on out. The larger goal of this scene is to show the act of violence without the bloody reality. We simply assume the Jews are dead because the dairy farmer cries and Shoshanna (who was hiding in another section under the floor boards) runs away. The focus of the feature is to show the raw reality of violence that the Americans commit. The flipped scenario is that the Basterds wish to carry out a counter genocide of the Nazi’s, because their actions against the Jews are immoral and in humane.

We are introduced to The Basterd’s immediately following the opening scene, yet one scene ahead of Hitler’s introduction. This scene is vital for the audience to view Lt. Aldo Raine in parallel to Adolf Hitler. Lt. Raine’s speech and personality share a few common factors with Hitler. The Jewish Basterds stand before him in a single file as Caucasian-American Lt. Aldo Raine addresses them as follows:

My name is Lt. Aldo Raine and I’m putting together a special team […] I need […] Jewish-American soldiers […] we’re going to be doing one “thang” and one “thang” only, killing Nazi’s. […] I sure as hell didn’t come down from the God-dammed
The Bastards of History

Smoky Mountains […] to teach the Nazi’s lessons in humanity. Nazi ain’t got no humanity. They’re the foot soldiers of a Jew-hating, mass murdering, maniac and they need to be destroyed.

The intersecting storylines in the film are strategically paced to construct the viewer’s thought process for them. Before we are introduced to Hitler, Aldo appears ahead of him, allowing us to view Aldo in parallel to Hitler. The structure of back to back introduction forces the audience to compare the two leaders of the film. The design highlights the equal amount of power Hitler and Aldo have over their subjects, the tyranny of their non-negotiable guidelines and objectives, but more importantly this directs readers to look upon Aldo as a mass murdering maniac. Aldo’s speech reminds the audience about the Nazi’s objective. However, after we learn of Aldo’s purpose, Hitler’s purpose alongside Aldo’s, seem almost identical and therefore hypocritical on Aldo’s part. Aldo and Hitler both desire to eliminate a specific group of people. Like Hitler, Aldo is not Jewish and differs from his troops. And, Aldo is a Nazi-hating mass murdering maniac with foot soldiers whom follow his command.

The Basterds wish to kill the Nazis using an “Apache revenge” type warfare – including (stereotypical behavior of the Native Americans) scalping each Nazi they kill, and with their own touch of engraving swastikas into the foreheads of the Nazi’s they temporarily set free as an intimidation method but also to make sure that people can spot a Nazi out of uniform. The Basterds are aware, that without signs, it is difficult to identify people as a part of a particular culture. Stereotypes about characters in the film are addressed as cultural markers because stereotypes and rumors, as Hans stated in the beginning of the film, “facts can be so misleading. Rumors, true or false, are often revealing”. Aldo’s nickname “The Apache” help us view him as a Native American because a nickname reveals something about a person’s character. When the audience sees The Basterds scalp the Nazi soldiers, it draws them back to Aldo’s introductory speech. Aldo claimed that, “Nazi ain’t got no humanity”. If Aldo did not have the nickname “The Apache” audiences might not pair his actions with his statements. Native Americans were viewed by colonizers as “savage” and “in humane” because of their primitive lifestyles and war methods of dismembering and mutilating their enemies’ bodies in war. The gruesome torture of beating Nazi’s to death and humiliation of
scalping, cinematically show compassion for the Nazi’s. According to American morals, the Nazi’s deserve to be killed in order to cease their sins against the Jewish people. But, the use Native American methods force us to view Aldo and the Basterds as savages—except with reason. The intensity of The Basterds, in all of their efforts to annihilate the Nazi’s, is for the viewers because this is a revenge film; and, American’s assume that the Nazi’s killed Jews with the same intensity—however, Tarantino does not give us Nazi savagery.

After witnessing the scalping, Aldo calls over German officer Sergeant and western type stand-off music commences plays as the sergeant walks alone toward Aldo and the film moves into slow motion, suggesting that he is pacing towards death. He then salutes Aldo in respectful military politeness. The film desires the viewer’s compassion for the sergeant because he is shown “respectfully refus[ing]” Aldo’s request to share information about the Nazi’s. Because, the sergeant understands the consequences of refusing, the goal is for viewers to identify with his actions and see him as an honorable and brave figure because of his patriotism. The film also comprised sympathy for German war hero Frederick Zoller, despite the number of people he killed. The film also wants audience compassion for Zoller. Introducing Zoller to audiences outside of warfare helps the film do so. Zoller is polite and friendly towards Shoshanna. The purpose of introducing Zoller, in uniform, with manners is to persuade viewers on the humanity of the Nazis. Further, the film shows Zoller’s shyness about being a war-hero, and his disgust with the violence that took place while he was at war. In America’s current time at war with the Middle East, Americans relate Zoller to an American soldier back in the United States from Afghanistan who may have killed the same amount of people as Zoller.

Tarantino purposely does a close-up shot of the scalping of Nazi soldiers, and draws out the scene where Aldo engraves a swastika into Hans forehead (along with his chilling wails) to add a cringe factor. Instead of American’s receiving the role of murderers as an insult, many critics found the film’s playful vengeance as a psalm for the American man. Mark Blankenship (Huffington Post) believes that the film makes it easy for us to cheer for murder and praise vengeful death, because the victims are who America considers immoral, therefore deserving of such punishment. Simply inserting reason and ration into the equation pushes culture to view the savage violence
as inherently good; but at the same time, Tarantino does not give the audience the luxury of saying the Nazi’s violence toward the Jews is not based on reason with motives to create a better world—the same motives as the Americans.

Structuralism defines society’s need to categorize and compartmentalize, and in respect to this method America must identify opposites. In order for America to be the “good” they must recognize an “evil” to define themselves against. In order for Shoshanna, The Basterds, and every contributing character in this film to commit their personal evils, they needed to personally rationalize their evils as inherently good. The complicity, or lack thereof, of society is the societal need to organize. As a result, individuals lose distinctive differentiating qualities and fall victim to the process of “people, in a word, becoming things” or the term: reification (Barry, 151). Shoshanna’s character demonstrates the cultural/societal demand for one to “keep it together” in situations. How one isn’t allowed their emotions, only the ones selected for you. Culler, believes that, “Identity is the result of certain actions […] Identity is a failure, [and that] the internalization of social norms always encounters resistance […] and we do not become who we are supposed to be” (114). A director’s ultimate goal with film is to persuade. Several directors like Tarantino, aspire to represent God’s point of view. In retrospect, one could say that Tarantino recreates the past in hopes of a better future. Or, go so far to say, that his affair with sadistic, controversial issues is a result of his failure to become who he was supposed to become, and his films are the reality of this result.

**Works Cited**

Lauren Williams


Blankenship, Mark. “Another Way to See “Inglorious Basterds””


Performing Re-Masculinization through Costuming in Rock of Ages

Ashley Carroll-McCarley

The manlier you are, the harder it is to understand what a woman wants: there is not a hint of female brain in you.
—Criss Jami, an American poet, essayist, and existentialist philosopher

In Bob Fosse’s 1972 Oscar-winning rendition of Cabaret, a musical set in Berlin during the Weimar Republic in 1931, Liza Minnelli performs “Mein Herr” dressed in an outfit resembling a man’s tux. Through this costuming, Minnelli’s character re-asserts her feminine identity and sexuality by using the outline of her outfit to emphasise the boundaries of what defines a man and a woman, and the exact opposite appears with the men of 1980s hair bands. Members of these bands wore feminine make-up, such as dark eye-liner, rouge, and lipstick, when they performed on stage and day-to-day. In addition, these men also possessed long, often teased-up hair and wore tight clothing primarily manufactured for women. In this era, the lines of sexual orientation often blurred, causing uproar within political and religious settings.

Most of the unrest within the rock and roll community derived from the gay rights movement and the AIDS epidemic. Commencing in the 1970s and carrying into the 1980s, “feminist and gay rights activists challenged the dualistic categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality,” with particular emphasis on the idea that “heterosexuality is more [...]masculine than homosexuality” (AM 208). Gay men and women struggled to attain civil and marriage rights as the AIDS epidemic swept the nation. On July 3, 1981, “[t]he New York Times prints the first story of a rare pneumonia and skin cancer found in [forty-one] gay men in New York and California,” originally named Kaposi’s Sarcoma and later acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS (NY Times). The article from the New York Times states that “most cases had involved homosexual men who have had multiple and frequent sexual encounters with different partners” and that “no
cases had been reported...outside the homosexual community or in women” (NY Times). With the population increase within the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transsexual community, wearing make-up as a form of masculinity did not make sense but was widely accepted. In *Rock of Ages*, directed by Adam Shankman, the characters Stacee Jaxx, Drew Boley, and Lonny all wear make-up and feminine attire which causes blurred lines between male and female key characteristics. Set in 1987, these characters center around the Bourbon Room, a bar on the Hollywood Strip, where Lonny and Drew work and Stacee Jaxx performs on stage. These men and their fellow rockers of the 1980s undermine the traditional gender binary as a means to re-masculinize their sexuality to construct a masculine manifestation defined within Native American culture. Within modern society, the same thing reappears with the emo/punk movement at the turn of the century and with a rehashing of the 1980s in films such as *Rock of Ages*. This Native masculinization resurfacing within American society highlights the prominent need to re-define one’s identity—both impersonally and sexuality—by “heading west” in both a figurative and literal sense.

In her book *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber outlines the strict differences in gendered clothing and how they define masculinity and femininity within acceptable societal standards. The principal of Brooklyn’s Boys and Girls High School, Frank Mickens, “made headlines” when he began banning status symbols, such as gold jewelry, expensive jackets, removable gold caps, and tape players causing no differentiation between lower and upper classes. This allowed students to cohesively function as one unit—both male and female—until he instituted a shirt and tie rule for the boys. This attempt at defining respectable masculinity in young adult boys caught on, for the boys felt that it would “add discipline” in their school as they prepared for the working world (Garber 22-23). The boys clothing seeks to define masculinity as modest, clean-cut with a tie that suggests professionalism and higher social class. According to Gibbings, “[t]he neckwear of each man proclaimed his current position in society[...]and his aspirations” (Gibbings 64). By having his male students wear ties, Principal Mickens hoped to invoke pride in how his male students viewed themselves and elevation in class. In addition, much like a guitar, the tie also represents an extension of the phallus that catches the eye from a distance—another reason
why women did not wear them. For women, Garber explains how “status symbol” or “trophy wife” positioned most women held and the rules that helped “put women in their place” (Garber 23). A few examples of rules society expected women to follow: “no women in pants,” “ladies must wear hats,” and “any woman entering a church must have her shoulders covered” (Garber 23). The women’s clothing aims to define femininity as concealing, modest, and “closed.” Society heavily enforced these gender markers, suffocating the ability to explore gendered identity; therefore, gendered markers eventually blur and shifted to represent the other sex. Women eventually began wearing pants, and people eventually accepted long hair and large hats as masculine and feminine in peaks and crests—one decade and not the other.

For males, the long hair and hat represented raw, American masculinity as originally represented by cowboys and Native Americans. Born in England and migrating to Canada in the first decade of the 20th century, Archibald Stansfeld Belaney adopted an Ojibw identity as an adult and dubbed himself Grey Owl (Sugden). Early on in his travels, he met a young Iroquois girl named Gertrude Bernard, who assisted in his transition from trapper to conservationist, and gave her the name Anahareo (Grey Owl 15). After his death in 1938, Anahareo wrote an autobiography entitled Devil in Deerskins where she describes her first sighting of Grey Owl, providing specific, vivid detail of his attire:

“His shirt and trousers were dark brown, brightened by a Hudson’s Bay belt and a much worn buckskin vest, which matched the moccasins on his feet. But what really set my imagination afire was his long hair and wide brimmed hat[…]. In my imagination, this man looked like the ever so thrilling hero of my youth, Jesse James, that mad, dashing, and romantic Robin Hood of America.” (Anahareo 180)

First, Anahareo makes an ironic comparison of Grey Owl to Jesse James as a Robin Hood persona for Jesse James never shared his stolen spoils with the poor (Stiles 172-175). Second, with this comparison, Anahareo suggests that Grey Owl’s appearance equates to a rebellious, American masculinity defined as white, European-American. In actuality, the long hair, leather clothing, and make-up, or face
paint, were iconic of Native Americans. By aligning a rebellious figure, like Grey Owl performing as a genuine Native American, to that primitive masculinity, this suggests that rebellion and performance against the norms of society equates to masculinity (Stiles 172-175).

As part of a campaign to link rock and roll music to masculinity, musicians and rockers burned massive amounts of disco records in 1979 due to their homosexual connotations (Carroll 327). Disco music stood in direct contrast with the phallic, pelvic thrusting connotations of rock and roll. Instead, disco eroticism performs through the entire body, with open ended repetition of rhythm and chords. This “openness” appealed to women due to body structure and role while dancing. Men tend to dance more with their hips rather than with their whole body (Amico 223). Rock and roll musicians and singers often danced with a guitar extending from their body with their hips thrusting forward. With the increase of population among the lesbian and gay community, many bands such as Aerosmith and Led Zeppelin felt the need to masculinize their music and their image, which leads to the assertion of original, primitive American masculinity. The rockers, performers and fans, resort to fashion and physical attributes that mimic Native American qualities of masculinity as represented by Grey Owl: long hair, fur, pants, lack of a shirt.

Although reflective of Native American masculinity, these physical characteristics also suggest an androgynous appearance. In Rock of Ages and in the hair band subculture, the male singers possess high pitched singing voices but wield guitars as phallic symbols, which suggests an androgynous appearance. Androgynous, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means to be “partly male and partly female in appearance,” (OED) but “in the case of bands such as Poison, we might understand androgyny as yet another tactic for dealing with the anxieties of masculinity” (Walser 128). With the gay rights movement taking place, men used this costuming as a means of recapturing a primitive, raw masculine appearance and persona. Much like the “tux” outfit Minnelli wears in Cabaret, these elements of feminine dress and make-up accent the boundaries between male and female, and this emphasis draws attention to these hyper-sexualized masculine features—both physically and musically. Judith Butler claims that if “gender is performance, a behavior learned and practiced since birth, then the music created by consumed by American men, like other conduits of culture, can reinforce gender norms by
Performing Re-Masculinization through Costuming

embodying ‘masculine’ qualities” (Carroll 325). For example, Led Zeppelin’s video of “Whole Lotta Love” featured a musical rendition of sexual intercourse and the band often performed wearing tight, but crotch-bulging, pants while the band’s guitarist wielded his guitar as an extended phallus with the body as the scrotum, the neck as the shaft, and the headstock as the tip of the penis. By juxtaposing these two together, bands drew attention to male masculinity and emphasized “technical virtuosity, misogynistic lyrics, and a bad-boy image,” as seen in Rock of Ages (Carroll 327).

The film opens with Sherrie Christian, a young girl who dreams of finding rock and roll fame and love, traveling west via coach to California. While on the bus, she flips through her records—Aerosmith, Poison, Lita Ford, and Arsenal—displaying a visual spectrum of feminine qualities existing in a masculine music genre. For example, Aerosmith wore long hair, make-up, and sung with a high-pitched voice while Lita Ford, a woman, displayed the same characteristics in her performances. The band Poison possessed a hyper-androgenized appearance and could pass as women with their extreme make-up and feminine hair-styles, as seen on their album over Look at What the Cat Dragged In. Although not present on the album cover, one can deduce from the present theme that the band members of Arsenal, primarily Stacee Jaxx, display strong characteristics of femininity, such as wearing a fur coat, thick eyeliner, tight pants.

Russell Brand’s character, Lonny—a rock and roll lover working at the Bourbon Room—exemplifies this blurring, and almost lacking, of well-defined gendered identity through costuming that suggests a personality more clearly “androgynous” than represented in Stacee’s self-presentation. Even though he doesn’t wear make-up, Lonny wears hairspray and teases up his hair, much like women in the 1980s; however, when Lonny gets ready for work, he uses the mirror behind the bar with haste instead of taking his time in a bathroom like a traditional woman suggesting a lack of concretized gender identity. Unlike Sherrie, who gets ready to meet up with Drew, Lonny wanted to look presentable under a rocker’s stereotype, not for society’s standards, through feminine products. However, Lonny’s dress reflects masculine characteristics of the 1980s: carefully ripped jeans, statement T-shirts, long hair. He even wears suspenders in every scene, which suggests that Lonny existed within a liminal space between male and female identities, much like Song from Henry David’s
Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*. Song Liling, a communist spy pretending to be a woman in love with Rene Gallimard, dresses and lives as a woman but possesses male anatomy, which he/she keeps hidden from Gallimard for several years. Once he finds out, Song loses all credibility as both a man and a woman and an identity can no longer be attached to him/her, and Gallimard loses his identity as well for he no longer can sexually and biologically perform a relationship with either sex (Hwang). For a twenty-first century audience, this lack of gendered identity positions them outside of their comfort zone, especially in extremely religion-based countries where gays and/or transsexuals are not accepted by society. By presenting Lonny’s character in this way, the film aims to both ease that concern and push people to extremes in terms of mindset and beliefs regarding sexual and gender identity.

Drew, the “dreamer” of these characters, attempts to re-masculinize the male gender without resorting to the use of make-up and revealing clothing. Although he wears carefully ripped jeans with holes close to his crotch and, at one point, wears purple glam rock glasses shaped like stars, Drew does not wear make-up or show off his chest while immersed in the 1980s subculture. However, he does wield a guitar as a phallic symbol at Tower Records, a record store on the Hollywood Strip that sells rock and roll records, and when he performs on stage at the Bourbon Room. In both situations, he completely immerses himself in the rock and roll subculture. Later when he removes himself from the rock and roll lifestyle and places himself in a “Hollywood” setting, Drew undergoes a transformation that emasculates him and leaves him stranded in a liminal space, similar to Lonny. Once discovered by Paul Bill, as played by Paul Giamatti, Drew begins wearing heavy eyeliner and wearing a bandana, like Stacee Jaxx, in hopes that his rockstar career will take off. During this transformation, Drew looks almost identical to Stacee, except that Drew wears a leather jacket instead of a fur coat. Either way, both jackets reflect the Native American use of animal hide a means of asserting masculinity. However, this rocker transformation does not last long, and Drew must undergo another transformation—induction into a boy band. During this transformation, he loses his shaggy haircut and receives a short, slicked-back hairstyle and dresses in baggy clothes that hide his sexual anatomy, forcing him into an androgynous grouping. Members in a boy band resemble of young children—think Justin Bieber or a young Justin Timberlake who were criticized for
Performing Re-Masculinization through Costuming

their feminine appearances and singing capabilities—caught between childhood and puberty, between feminine and masculine:

“Heavy metal’s androgyny can be very disturbing, not only because the conventional signs of female passivity and objectification are made dynamic, assertive, and transgressive, but also because hegemonic gender boundaries are blurred and the ‘natural’ exclusiveness of heterosexual male power comes into question.” (Walser 133)

When transformed, Drew, once masculinized by the rock and roll subculture, transgresses to a pop/rap culture that threatens the structure of the hair band masculine identity and persona. When Drew’s band, the Z-Guyeezz, performs at the Bourbon Room, the crowd, composed primarily of rock and roll fans, reacts negatively and boo loudly which suggests the group lacks masculine qualities that rockers like Stacee Jaxx possess.

Stacee Jaxx, as played by Tom Cruise in Rock of Ages, represents re-masculinization, which Drew fails to achieve with the boy band, primarily through his appearance and persona. When first introduced on screen, Stacee Jaxx appears in a “dressing room” that resembles a lair with Gothic architecture and elements of darkness accompanied by four “naked” women in a large bed. When he gets up from the bed, the audience sees Stacee wearing a leather garter belt with a snake-like figure erupting from his crotch while downing the remainder of a bottle of liquor. Couched with long hair, make-up and finger nail polish, Shankman rehashes the ideals that this subculture represents a desirable life filled with drinking, music, and sex by hyper-sexualizing his masculinity with feminine accents. Later, when Stacee arrives at the Bourbon Room, he wears an outfit similar to the image that Axl Rose, the singer from Guns N Roses, adopted in his early career: bandanna tied around his head, long straight hair, aviators, fur on his coat, tight pants, shirtless, tatted body. In the visual comparisons of Appendix A, both Axl Rose and Stacee Jaxx choose a persona, or “costume,” that mimics Native American masculinity in the same way as Grey Owl—long hair, fur coat, tight leather or leather-like pants. This adoption of this particular costume emphasizes the innate desire to figuratively head west and seek one’s Manifest Destiny. The life of fame, excessive women, and constant intoxication has shell-shocked
Stacee. Throughout the movie, he seeks meaning in his music and life and an alternative to the nostalgia that accompanies encroaching age in one’s career.

In the twenty-first century, a revival of the 1980s culture has swept the nation causing a refocus on how people currently perceive the 1980s and how society reflects the influences of that subculture. Walk into any retail store or troll the halls of a local university, leg warmers, leggings, leather jackets, “big” hair, neon colors, Converse all scream 1980s, and so called eighties children cling to these defining objects. The return to relationships and aspirations of the high school years for now middle-aged parents reflects a continued attachment to non-perverted cultural forms associated with adolescence. At the turn of the century, a different kind of revival surfaced that greatly resembled and differed from the 1980s rock and roll generation: the Emo movement. According to Andy Greenwal, author of Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers and Emo, the Emo genre emerged from the hardcore punk scene of the early-1980s in Washington, D.C., both as a reaction to the increased violence within the scene and as an extension of the personal politics espoused by Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat, who turned the focus of the music from the community back towards the individual (Greenwal 12). Although derived from a culture far less mainstreamed, the Emo genre involves loud singing, heavy guitar, and heavy drums, much like 1980s music. Although similar, middle-aged adults and parents, who grew up in the 1980s, reject this genre claiming that it lacks the meaning and depth, something Stacee attempts to reinsert in his music. The Emo genre also shares similar attire traits, such as dark leather clothing, tatted bodies, long hair, and tight pants, and members of the Emo genre often receive backlash for lack of masculinity. In the case of the Emo genre, there doesn’t exist a re-masculinization. Members of the Emo genre forced feminity on their persona, celebrating homosexuality and transexuality, but most lack the drive for Manifest Destiny (Greenwal 15-27). For them, emotions and feeling “something” mean more than “heading west” to seek out the nostalgia of adolescence.

The Native American masculinity reflects the need to “head west” as a mode of defining one’s identity, and Stacee Jaxx’s costuming of re-masculinization works best because it appeals to both male and female expectations of masculinity. For women, primitive, New World masculinity invokes erotic desire while men utilize this image
Performing Re-Masculinization through Costuming

to reassert their masculinity. This “go west” ideology provided a foundation for the 1980s that allowed people to investigate their sexual and gender identities while accessing both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Appendix A: Visual Representations between Stacee Jaxx, Axl Rose, and Grey Owl

![Stacee Jaxx played by Tom Cruise in Rock of Ages](image1)
![Axl Rose of Guns N Roses](image2)
![Grey Owl](image3)

Works Cited

Ashley Carroll-McCarley

Walser, Robert. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. 
II. Permorphismativity of the Moment
Edith Wharton’s *Ethan Frome* was published in 1911. The text’s structure features an unnamed narrator appearing at the beginning of the novella who disappears a bit before halfway when the main frame of the text, a third person narrative about Ethan Frome’s past, begins. Once the main frame closes, the novella returns to the original narrator as to remind the audience of how the narrator’s insight provides a reason for the present situation at the Frome house. Eleven years after the original publication, the novella was republished but this time with the addition of an autobiographical introduction. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Porter Abbott defines paratexts as the “material that lies somehow on the threshold of the narrative” (Abbott 30). Abbott also notes that “this tangential material can inflect our experience of the narrative, sometimes subtly, sometimes deeply” (Abbott 31). As a paratext, Edith Wharton’s introduction undoubtedly inflects readers’ experience with the novella as she discusses her personal background, one significantly similar to the background of the novella’s narrator, as well as her reason for writing *Ethan Frome*: “I had an uneasy sense that the New England of fiction bore little—except vague botanical and dialectical—resemblance to the harsh and beautiful landscape as I had seen it[…]. I give the impression merely as a personal one; it accounts for “Ethan Frome,” and may, to some readers, in a measure justify it” (Wharton v). Wharton blatantly asserts that, because of her personal experience, her fiction gives a truthful depiction of New England whereas previous authors had gotten it wrong. Wharton’s proclamation that her narrative serves to deliver truth shapes the audience’s trust in not only Wharton but also her narrator. Wharton’s claim to revealing a truth in writing the novella and also asserting the narrator’s tale as not “artificial” but authentic becomes problematic when textual evidence proves the narrator has unreliable tendencies. Examining the narrator’s unreliability in contrast to Wharton’s framing of him reveals the performative nature of the introduction in that it creates expectations within the audience then undermines those expectations, which directly affects the reading of the text and this idea of “truth.”
To understand the unreliability of the narrator, one must first comprehend the problematic way Wharton’s introduction defines the narrator’s purpose and shapes how the reader perceives him. The republishing of the novella with the addition of the introduction evokes questions about the purpose behind this sort of paratext. In 1912, the year following *Ethan Frome*’s original publication, *The North American Review* questions Wharton’s structure of the text: “[For], as the well-told tale unfolds, a return to the omniscient third person is inevitable, so that we might as well have been spared the first person in the beginning” (*North American Review* 139). While the article praises Wharton’s overall work, the presentation of the tale serves as the only critique. *Ethan Frome*’s introduction seems to serve as a response to the negative backlash surrounding Wharton’s choice of narrative construction and use of a narrator as a means of relaying Ethan’s tale. A defensive tone about her reasoning permeates the few introductory pages, directly suggesting her introduction is a response to such critiques: “This was my task, if I were to tell the story of Ethan Frome; and my scheme of construction—which met with immediate and unqualified disapproval […]—I still think justified in the given case” (Wharton viii). Wharton explains the presentation of her narrative by saying, “Every novelist, again, who ‘intends upon’ his art, has lit upon such subjects, and been fascinated by the difficulty of presenting them in the fullest relief, yet without added ornament, or a trick of drapery or lighting” (Wharton vii). “Added ornament” to Wharton, entails the misinterpretation of her subjects—subjects who she describes as inarticulate. The people of Starkfield, a made up name given to a town Wharton actually lived in, are, to Wharton, simple, and “any attempt to elaborate and complicate their sentiments would necessarily have falsified the whole” (Wharton iv). For this purpose, Wharton suggests the necessity of an outside narrator to deliver the complexities of the tale in a manner she asserts as more truthful. Education makes the narrator capable of doing this whereas she believes the simple-minded natives of Starkfield are not: “It appears to me, indeed, that, while an air of artificiality is lent to a tale of complex and sophisticated people which the novelist causes to be guessed at and interpreted by any mere looker-on, there need be no such drawback if the looker-on is sophisticated, and the people he interprets are simple” (Wharton viii). The educated outsider role directly connects Wharton to the narrator. Both of them assert truths
about the “simple” people they observe. Wharton does so through the writing of *Ethan Frome* and within the introduction while the narrator does so within the main frame of the tale as he hypothesizes the reason behind Ethan’s entrapment. By asserting a truthful air to her own purpose as well as the narrator’s, Wharton influences the audience’s trust in the narrator and her reading of him before they ever begin reading the main text.

In the introduction, while talking about the narrator, Wharton says, “If he is capable of seeing all around [the people he interprets], no violence is done to probability in allowing him to exercise this faculty, it is natural enough that he should act as the sympathizing intermediary between his rudimentary characters and the more complicated minds whom he is trying to present them” (Wharton viii). Discrediting her “rudimentary characters” and crediting her narrator with the only delivery of truth enables audiences to overlook the amount of knowledge Mrs. Ned Hale actually displays. Wharton specifically states when defending the purpose of her narrator and his first-person frame that allowing a “village gossip,” or a rudimentary character, to enlighten the audience with Ethan’s past “should have been false to two essential elements of [her] picture: first, the deep rooted reticence and inarticulateness of the people [she was trying to draw], and secondly the effect of ‘roundness’ (in the plastic sense) produced by letting their case be seen through the eyes as different as those of Harmon Gow and Mrs. Hale” (Wharton viii). This asserts that only the narrator is even capable of depicting what really happened with Ethan Frome for the audience as well as presenting a better picture of the culture around him. Mrs. Hale’s education, however, undermines the label of “inarticulate” and also suggests that she is not so different from the narrator. As proven with the introduction, Wharton places a significant value on education. Part of the narrator’s credibility derives from his education that grants him with certain capabilities one would think rudimentary characters would not possess, yet the narrator notes Mrs. Hale’s education in the opening frame of the narrative: “It was not that Mrs. Ned Hale felt, or affected, any social superiority to the people about her; it was only that the accident of a finer sensibility and a little more education had put just enough distance between herself and her neighbors to enable her to judge them with detachment” (Wharton 10). While Mrs. Hale’s education level does equal that of the narrator’s, it does justify her significance in the
text as a character that highlights a lack of objective truth presented in the novella.

Significantly, the passage above also lends to another element of character traits that entail credibility—detachment. Both Wharton and the narrator, according to Wharton, are superior through a sense of detachment as outsiders. In “New England in The Stories of Edith Wharton,” Leach describes her as a “sophisticated [person] whose worldliness gave [her] a detached attitude towards place and mores,” and she goes on to say that “one must concede to her an awareness of certain general features of New England life, such as that in the mountain villages like Starkfield […] with [its] lack of culture and economic opportunity, rapidly being depopulated by the more ambitious and talented young people, and serving instead as a refuge for the old people and those defeated in spirit” (Leach 96, 98). Detachment, in this instance, entails an ability to observe and interpret one’s surroundings better than one with attachments can. Despite her “rudimentary character” label, Mrs. Ned Hale, too, can observe and interpret her surroundings, albeit in less depth, as a partially educated, detached insider. No, Mrs. Hale does not have the credibility of the narrator, since the text suggests she stands only just above the townspeople education rather than on the same level as the narrator. However, without the introduction shaping a reading of her, her social standing as someone knowledgeable and somewhat above other Starkfield natives, importantly, gives way to a better understanding of the narrator’s hypothesis as just that—a guess.

As an insider, Mrs. Hale also serves as the only character that knows the facts about what really happened with Ethan, Mattie, and Zeena, and Mrs. Hale’s knowledge calls attention to the unreliability of the narrator through his lack of objectivity. The narrator notes, “Though Harmon Gow developed the tale as far his mental and moral reach permitted there were perceptible gaps between his facts, and I had a sense that the deeper meaning of the story was in the gaps” (Wharton 7). Harmon Gow and Mrs. Ned Hale easily fall into the same category of informants for the narrator, the rudimentary characters, but the difference between them are significant and point to Mrs. Hale’s knowledge. The narrator cannot liken Mrs. Hale’s mental capacity to Harmon Gow’s. Herman Gow leaves gaps in Ethan’s story for the narrator to fill because he does not know what fills them. The gaps Mrs. Hale creates, however, reflect a withholding rather than a
lack of knowledge. Importantly, the narrator desires to acquire the information he knows Mrs. Hale has: “I had great hopes of getting from her the missing facts of Ethan Frome’s story, or rather such a key to his character as should co-ordinate the facts I knew […] but on the subject of Ethan Frome I found her unexpectedly reticent. There was no limit of disapproval in her reserve; I merely felt in her an insurmountable reluctance to speak of him or his affairs” (Wharton 10). Mrs. Hale refuses to share the facts she has with the narrator, and his desire to know the facts points to his ignorance on the topic. Someone in Starkfield aside from the people directly involved clearly knows of Ethan’s past and refuses to elaborate, which complicates Wharton’s introduction, but the narrator still guides the tale with assumptions. The readers are left to trust someone who does not know the truth because the opening frame sets up a genuine interest in Ethan Frome’s past, but direct confirmation of the narrator’s hypothesis never occurs within the text. In turn, the introduction actually suppresses further commentary about the ending of the text. Reading the text with a focus on the narrator’s interpretation as only a hypothesis creates more suspense within the novella without the inclusion of the introduction because the audience feels less certain of the narrator’s answer as the correct answer. This gives the novella more mystery, and a greater sense of the novella lacking closure enables further speculation as to why. No one’s role changes in the absence of the introduction, but it does shape the trust given to the narrator. Audiences may not feel a lack of closure because the introduction so greatly influences trust in the narrator that audiences may simply accept his version rather than realize the narrator is even seeking closure at the novella’s conclusion by questioning Mrs. Hale. Though likely not Wharton’s intention, the introduction, serving to justify the narrator’s role, removes some of the reader’s duty to interpret because it seems as if the narrator has already interpreted everything for them.

Hermon Gow, first, points out one of the most important and easily overlooked elements of the tale—the friendship between Mattie Silver and Mrs. Hale (Wharton 11). Their friendship provides Mrs. Hale with direct access to the events surrounding the “smash-up,” and more significantly, the narrator looks to Mrs. Hale to gain access to the truth—again highlighting his “vision of [Ethan’s] history” as only one egregious assumption (Wharton 25). The narrator claims “it was that night” at the Frome house that he gains the clue
to Ethan Frome that allows him to develop his hypothesis of what happened, and, immediately following this proclamation, Wharton’s three famous lines of ellipses carries the readers from present-day Starkfield to the narrator’s theory of Ethan’s past, narrated in the third rather than first person perspective. However, when the frame-within-a-frame closes with three more lines of ellipses and the narrative returns to the original setting, the narrator significantly returns to Mrs. Hale and continues to try to obtain facts from her despite having already proclaimed that he had figured out Ethan’s mysterious past before the main frame of the text began: “Beneath [her] wondering exclamations I felt a secret curiosity to know what impressions I had received from my night in the Frome household, and divined that the best way of breaking down [her] reserve was to let [her] try to penetrate mine” (Wharton 176). This part of the narrative most significantly points to the narrator’s unreliability because his efforts to pry facts out of Mrs. Hale work and, in turn, present the readers with more facts surrounding what happened with Ethan, Mattie, and Zeena than previously presented throughout the bulk of the novella. Mrs. Hale tells the narrator, “I don’t believe but you’re the only stranger has set foot in that house for over twenty years. He’s that proud he don’t even like his oldest friends to go there; and I don’t know as any do, any more except myself and the doctor” (Wharton 176). Mrs. Hale significantly points out that the narrator is, in fact, a stranger, and she also demeans his invitation into the Frome house by revealing that not only has she been in there, too, but she goes frequently. More important than Mrs. Hale’s access to Ethan, Mattie, and Zeena’s present is her access to their past directly after the smash-up:

It was just awful from the beginning. I was here in the house when they were carried up—they laid Mattie Silver in the room you’re in. She and I were great friends, and she was to have been my bridesmaid in the spring…When she came to I went up to her and stayed all night. They gave her things to quiet her, and she didn’t know much till to’rd morning, and then all of a sudden she woke up just like herself, and looked straight at me out of her big eyes, and said…Oh, I don’t know why I’m telling you all of this (Wharton 178).
Mrs. Hale does not finish telling the narrator what happened either, but Mattie clearly shared with her enough about what had happened to make Mrs. Hale feel Mattie would have been better off dead: “[It’s] a pity she did [live]. I said it right to our minister once and he was shocked at me. Only he wasn’t with me that morning when she first came to…” (Wharton 181). This neither confirms nor denies the narrator’s hypothesis, but it does highlight that he and the readers still do not know the concrete truth at the story’s end.

Despite never knowing all of the facts surrounding Ethan Frome’s past, the overwhelming amount of attention the narrator pays to similarities lends to the biases that also point to his unreliability. The narrator constantly draws positive connections between himself and Ethan which enable biases to form that appear within the narrator’s hypothesis of Ethan Frome’s past. In “A Barrier of Words,” Miller suggests that the narrator “sets himself up as Ethan’s alter-ego,” a claim easily backed with the narrator’s continual focus on their similarities as well as appearances from his own past in his vision of Ethan’s (Miller 15). Most often, the narrator focuses on similarities with education, which also echoes Wharton’s connection to the narrator. The narrator says, “Only once or twice was the distance between us bridged for a moment; and the glimpses thus gained confirmed my desire to know more” (Wharton 15). The instances that the narrator notes are their familiarity with Florida and Ethan’s potential interest in science when the narrator leaves a biochemistry book in Ethan’s sled. The narrator begins to prescribe qualities to Ethan that suggest he wants them to be true: “I was sure his curiosity about the book was based on a genuine interest in the subject” (Wharton 17). He also mentions that while at the Frome’s house, he stayed in a room “which seemed in happier days to have been fitted up as a kind of writing room or study” (Wharton 176). No other character mentions anything about Ethan having an education. Within the narrator’s vision of Ethan’s past, he inflates Ethan’s interest in the bio-chemistry book into Ethan having begun an education and a career that were interrupted by his mother’s sickness. Significantly, the narrator also tells Ethan that he had once had an engineering job in Florida, but, in the main frame of the narrative, it is Ethan who has a past in engineering: “A slight engineering job in Florida, put in his way during his period of study at Worcester, increased his faith in his ability as well as his eagerness to see the world” (Wharton 71). The narrator so closely
Casey Smith

identifies himself with Ethan that he blatantly installs elements of his own life as Ethan’s—elements that fail to even seem believable in Ethan’s case. Had Ethan had such an opportunity to get away, or if he had even briefly gotten away, Herman Gow or Mrs. Hale would have likely mentioned something as extreme as a near escape from Starkfield because that makes Ethan’s story even more tragic. Instead, Gow only says, “Most of the smart ones get away,” (Wharton 9). Miller suggests that “the narrator measures Ethan’s success against his own; unlike his protagonist, he has escaped provincial life and found meaning in his vocation” (Miller 17). The main frame, then, may very well consist of a version of the narrator’s own background followed by what the narrator perceives as capable of entrapping men like Ethan and him.

Along with the similarities the narrator sees in himself and Ethan, his fascination with Ethan Frome directly contributes to further biases and the questionable scenarios they create in the main frame. In the beginning of the novella, the narrator displays nothing less than admiration for Ethan, leading to too many biased opinions for him to be reliable. Whereas most of the townspeople seem to acknowledge Ethan’s sadness and have respect for him, the detail the narrator uses to describe “the flight of a man like Ethan Frome” gives Ethan a heroic persona in the narrator’s eyes (Wharton 7). At one point, the narrator even likens him to a “bronze image of a hero” (Wharton 14). When the narrator blatantly shows favor to Ethan and repeatedly associates himself with Ethan’s character, the lack of room for another protagonist within the narrator’s story becomes evident. Since Zeena and Mattie both must star in the main frame, that leaves only secondary or villainous roles for them. Before the narrator stays in the Frome house, Zeena’s name only appears twice in the narrative. The narrator notices “the post-master would hand [Ethan] an envelope addressed to Mrs. Zenobia—or Mrs. Zeena—Frome, and usually bearing conspicuously in the upper left-hand corner the address of some manufacturer of patent medicine and the name of his specific” (Wharton 5). The second mention of her comes from Hermon Gow when he says, “his wife Zeena, she’s always been the greatest hand at doctoring in the county” (Wharton 13). From these brief details, even a complimentary detail, the narrator constructs Zeena as a witch-like villain, thus highlighting the biased opinions the narrator holds. With the textual evidence given, the narrator could have just as easily
formed a vision about a sick woman who had helped Ethan with his
dying mother and was repaid by having Ethan cheat on her with her
own cousin then her being left to take care of them both after their
failed attempt at suicide to escape her and Starkfield. It is essentially
the same story, but with a different protagonist—one the narrator
does not share similarities with.

Considering the textual evidence surrounding the depiction of Zeena
and Mattie suggests an agenda on the part of the narrator. Because
the narrator so closely identifies with Ethan, he can only see outside
circumstances keeping Ethan Frome in Starkfield because the narrator
believes that men like them have the means to escape, echoing Gow’s
commentary. The outside frame and details from Harmon Gow and
Mrs. Hale suggest that the sickness of Ethan’s mother originally keeps
Ethan in Starkfield: “Then his mother got queer and dragged along for
years as weak as a baby” (Wharton 13). The narrator interprets Ethan’s
mother as only the first woman to contribute to the entrapment of Ethan
Frome. The narrator’s depiction of Zeena and Mattie within the main
frame seemingly derives from his witnessing Ethan pick up Zeena’s
medicine at the post office, Mattie’s crippled state, and the significant
“woman’s voice droning querulously”—the last detail before the nar-
rator says, “It was that night that I found the clue to Ethan Frome, and
began to put together this vision of his story” (Wharton 25). This sug-
gests that not only are the women in Ethan’s life the “clue” the narrator
needs, a reason for the entrapment of a man like himself, but after this,
the narrator proceeds into a tale where the women, particularly Zeena,
are to blame. In fact, the narrator even portrays Zeena as frightening
and very gothic within the main frame of the text:

The door opened and he saw his wife. Against the dark back-
ground of the kitchen, she stood up tall and angular, one hand
drawing a quilted counterpane to her flat breast, while the other
held a lamp. The light, on level with her chin, drew out of the
darkness her puckered throat and the projecting wrist of the
hand that clutched the quilt, and deepened fantastically the
hollows and prominences of her high-boned face under its ring
of crimping pins (Wharton 53).

This representation of Zeena’s appearance in the text creates the image
of a witch or Medusa with the crimping pins. In combination with her
bitter personality, the narrator’s hypothesis suggests that Zeena is not only a woman responsible for trapping Ethan, but a powerful woman that borders supernatural with her loathsome physical and mental traits. This supernatural element arises again when Ethan and Mattie have the house to themselves but Ethan “felt as if Zeena were in the room between them” (Wharton 84). Martha Banta likens Zeena to a ghostly figure in “The Ghostly Gothic of Wharton’s Everyday World,” and, here, it is as if her ghost looms to prevent Ethan from acting on any self-serving impulses with Mattie. Even in Ethan’s attempt to forever escape with his and Mattie’s suicide attempt, Zeena prevents this from happening with another ghostly occurrence: “But suddenly his wife’s face, with twisted monstrous lineaments, thrust itself between him and his goal, and he made an instinctive movement to brush it aside” (Wharton 170). With this brushing aside of Zeena’s eerie presence, Ethan slightly turns the sled causing he and Mattie to miss their intended mark on the tree and trap them in a life they do not want to be in. Mattie, too, becomes a source of Ethan’s entrapment and misery in the end as she becomes a mirror of Zeena’s negative qualities in her crippled state. The narrator directly describes her as “witch-like” in the Frome kitchen during his visit at the Frome farm where Mattie, not Zeena, complains constantly (Wharton 174). Herman Gow reveals that Ethan’s mother first holds Ethan back, and then the narrator suggests Zeena holds him in place and Mattie helps keep him there. The narrator’s biases assist in forming the answer to his question—villainous women prevent “the flight of a man like Ethan Frome.”

In the *North American Review*, the reviewer refers to the outside frame of *Ethan Frome* as “an unnecessary intrusion of a masculine ‘I’” (*North American Review* 139). If this critique of presentation, then, serves as Wharton’s purpose for adding the introduction to the republication of the novella, the introduction then becomes a means of refocusing audiences’ attention to positive aspects about her narrator and chosen form of delivering the tale by shifting the focus to the importance of story-telling. Writing to an educated audience, Wharton argues that having an educated mouthpiece provides her story with more depth and credibility. Textual evidence, however, proves that the narrator has biases, factors in unsubstantiated evidence, and generally lacks the objective truth that one of Wharton’s “rudimentary characters” possesses. Considering the end of the novella, Wharton never offers an objective truth. The audience is left only with what
could be considered a subjective and almost emotional truth, since the narrator’s vision derives from an emotional connection he shares with Ethan Frome. Perhaps Wharton’s introduction poses the idea that no story is unbiased or completely objective, and she suggests that it is necessary to have subjective interpretations of people or places typically stereotyped or relatively unexplored, like the New England she seeks to deliver a truth of or the vision the narrator has of Ethan. Both are subjective. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the introduction to the text, in fact, diverts the reader from further exploring the lack of closure in the text. New Criticism even suggests that “meaning [resides] in the text and the reader’s task [is] to explicate this meaning on the basis of what [is] there,” and Wharton’s introduction distracts readers from their task (Harker 5) Regardless of objective truths, subjective truths, or a lack of truth altogether, as a paratext, the introduction undoubtedly inflects the audience’s reading of Ethan Frome, whether “subtly” or “deeply” as Abbot says, and, in this, case it subtly allows readers to overlook the narrator’s unreliable tendencies that textual evidence displays.

Works Cited

Miller, D. Quentin. “A Barrier of Words: The Tension between Narrative Voice and Vision in the Writings of Edith Wharton.” American
Casey Smith


New Beginnings: Staged Admiration in *The Edge*

Clence Patterson

In Lee Tamahori’s film, *The Edge*, the performances of Charles Morse (Anthony Hopkins) and Robert Green (Alec Baldwin) set within the northern wilderness reveals how in the uncivilized wilds the natures of each character are portrayed as opposite to how each character would perform and adhere to the rules of their social hierarchy. The crash that strands Charles and Robert in the wilderness becomes a method for David Mamet, the original screenwriter and the director, Tamahori, to begin an analysis of necessitated camaraderie as well as a study of performances without the “civilized” rules that govern an individual within survival circumstances. Charles Morse represents the higher-echelons of society, as he is a billionaire. On the other hand, Robert Green represents the middle class or “everyday Joe” with his more modest profession of a fashion photographer. By setting up these jobs in the beginning of the film, Tamahori’s film becomes a binary between the less fortunate and more fortunate classes. However, inevitable traits associated with each class, which he portrays through characters such as Robert Green and Charles Morse also tag along to influence the viewer’s reading of these two characters. Critics such as Kevin Alexander Boon discuss how Mamet’s career before *The Edge* featured stories focused on a character’s flaws. However, *The Edge* shows the more admirable traits of Tamahori’s characters guiding the audience to sympathize with them. Mamet commonly centers his stories and films around a consumer society and the overall focus would be the inevitable capitalistic nature of the world. However, *The Edge* marks Mamet’s journey into becoming a real author according to Yannis Tzioumakis in his article “Marketing David Mamet: Institutionally Assigned Film Authorship in Contemporary American Cinema”, documents Mamet’s journey as a struggling author and playwright by showing the complexities of the human character rather than the black and white aspects of a capitalistic world.

David Mamet’s style of writing before *The Edge* focused on the flaws of each character or rather, “the characteristics he lacks” (11) according to critic Kevin Boon in his article “Ethics and Capitalism in
the Screenplays of David Mamet” where Mamet’s writing style is discussed in depth around each of his works plus the progression of his style as well. Accordingly, “The Edge is the first story to take place in the wilderness, not controlled by capitalism,” (12) noted Boon which sets up The Edge as a foray into new territory for Mamet, which is shown by his portrayal of Charles’s better or commonly known traits as things of importance rather than his capitalism. Yet, Mamet’s style to show flaws still exists in such instances as the compass Charles creates leading the group in circles, so Mamet still has some of his older methods present, but in the end the new edges he adds to the piece turn it into one of his wider viewed films. Charles follows the “compass” without thought to any complications or outside influences that may violate his plan. Furthermore, Mamet “considers the actor to be a communicative vessel mediating between the text, the stage, and the audience” (Collard 3). By showing that even Mamet uses his lines to bring questions to the audience in his article “Living Truthfully: David Mamet’s Practical Aesthetics” Christophe Collard shows the evolution of Mamet’s previously Capitalistic focus evolving into a more broadened narrative allowing for interpretation to occur based on the readers opinion. Charles is Mamet’s attempt at a more ethical character, one who is not interested in money, which was Mamet’s main focus in previous works, but instead the human relationships Charles develops and the resulting actions from them are important, such as Charles becoming companionable.

The beginning of the film sets the characters up to view Charles as an eccentric billionaire with a young, trophy wife and paranoia to match his wealth. Charles is rather jaded and Tamahori depicts this when Charles asks Robert right before the plane crashes “how are you planning on killing me?” The idea that a supposed friend of his is out to get him for either his money or wife sets up Charles as a world-weary and reluctant individual overall. Before the crash into the neutral wild landscape of a harsh north Charles accepts his role as a suspicious billionaire, yet after the crash Charles changes drastically. He even goes so far as to say that he may not even go back, back to the society or the world in general is left to the viewer’s interpretation and he wishes to say that he “started his life over” which no man has ever done. He states this towards the end of the film when he begins to understand that he actually will return back to the social role he previously inhabited. The viewer begins to see Charles evolve into a
more reliable character compared to Robert and Stephen, and thus, Charles gains more favor in the eyes of the viewer. Performing on his more base traits rather than the societal ones, Charles instead becomes knowledgeable as well as capable of interacting with others around him much easier than before. The nature’s neutral status deactivates the social traits associated with Charles due to his position as a billionaire, which he himself perpetuated, and instead allows for a more impartial Charles to take charge and adopt the role as the “hero” for Robert and begin the new life for himself in the process. Tamahori’s foray from his normally action centered films such as *XXX: State of the Union* (2005) or *Die Another Day* (2002) in his later filmography illuminates how different *The Edge* (1997) interacts with the reader. Tamahori invents a more optimistic character and society connecting the reader faster with the role Charles adopts and shifts the focus into how quickly evolving Charles is in comparison to Robert who stagnates. The film centers on the changes of Charles and to the people around him opposite to how his other films would center on how the characters would change the society itself rather than invest in their own self-change. The scene with the plane crashing becomes the catalyst for Charles who figuratively shines through to the audience by saving Robert. Robert and Stephen assist Charles occasionally in the beginning after the crash, but Charles’s evolved character draws the attention after Stephen’s death by planning how to kill the grizzly after Robert and him both. Charles gains a form of power over Robert through his knowledge. Due to the recognition of power of Charles over Robert, the viewer’s perception leans more towards seeing Charles as dominant.

The beginning of the film may be set in a cabin, a place of “cultured” or “civilized” land and boundaries, but the narrative turns towards the wild in order to unearth the dynamics of the human character as well as to change the performance given by each character through the seclusion. The crash of the airplane and subsequent journey in the wilderness allow the traits of each character to become fluid due to the circumstances constantly changing in the groups flee for survival. The viewer sees traits that are actually just a human characteristic related to the characters, rather than a trait associated with the social classes of each: Robert, the middle class entrepreneur, and Charles, the declared billionaire. Although, at times, the narrative may downplay Charles’s knowledge, it is what inevitably guides Robert
and Charles to survive against the wild grizzly bear stalking them. Mamet’s writing style turns the film into a study of the human character and its better traits through Charles. Charles’s willingness to save Robert in the end, even after Robert’s attempted murder, contributes to the audience’s sympathy or identification with Charles as well as to further turn him into a hero figure. Even though Charles is seen as wealthy, his descent into the wild features Charles as the hero of the story through his innovative use of knowledge. Thus, in a sense, Tamahori shows the superiority of a “higher” education leading to the better survival of the group or at least the traits that Charles has as a representative of the “higher” society causing a reaction in the minds of the viewer to perceive Charles as dominant. Charles not only transcends the social boundaries set from his previous lifestyle in The Edge but also his own self-transcribed boundaries by reinventing himself through his journey with Robert and creates a new self during the journey.

One part of the film has Charles’s character instilling drive in Robert’s by getting Robert to say what he is going to do. The bolstering of Robert cements the relationship between the two as one where yet again, Robert is beneath Charles. Gorman Beauchamp states that, “Utopists view man as a product of his social environment” (1) and in an environment such as the wild one would expect a character to become, savage and ruthless like Robert’s. Yet, Charles still has innate qualities that separate him from even Robert who he grows a bond with causing his character to be an exemption to this idea in Beauchamp’s article, “Imperfect Men in Perfect Societies: Human Nature in Utopia”. However on the topic of Utopia Lisa Garforth’s article “Green Utopias: Beyond Apocalypse, Progress, and Pastoral” she states that “in short, the …utopia rejected the structural blueprint in order to reinvent utopia as a space of estrangement and critique.” The wilderness that Charles finds himself stranded in sets itself up as a place of constant critique as everyone of Charles’s and even Robert’s actions are analyzed for emotions that would depict them as giving in or quitting. Yet, the supposed utopia of nature becomes disjointed after Charles finds the way back to John Hawke’s cabin, the 2nd cabin, and returning the duo of Robert and Charles back into a semi-civilized setting which causes them to bring back the masks that each uses for society back home.
The cabin that the group finds themselves in on Charles’s birthday acts as a link for civilization to the viewer later on in the movie by automatically becoming the reference point to that “back home” place Charles and Robert constantly refer. Interpreted still as a part of society due to Charles and Robert playing their roles, such as Charles being the loner and a target for his wealth or how Robert is working even on vacation to get his next big break causes the viewer to link the future instances of the cabin in the movie as a part of society, therefore it still contains the rules of that society. Bound still by the rules of society, Charles and Robert still maintain their societal personas while still within the space unlike like when in the wilderness setting this in the viewer’s mind as a point of hierarchal reference. Portrayed as the character that necessitates focus in the sense that Charles is important, wealth wise, as shown by everyone using his birthday for an excuse to go to a cabin links the reader to perceive Charles as synchronous with his money. Compared to the wild the cabin stands as a space in which people still adhere to the personas they have within society. Robert is hard working to further himself while Charles merely becomes isolated because of his distanced persona and how he is constantly alone and watches the others to see or imagine what they want from him, which the film focuses on by showing scenes where he is always put on display for either reading a novel or him answering a question. The owner of the cabin he visits even says “it would only cost you 20 million” embedding in the viewer’s mind that Charles is the billionaire when present at the cabin. When the characters arrive and get out of the plane, Robert interacts with the others and is shown smoking, normally a social habit. Therefore, the film centers Robert more as a social character among the group in comparison to Charles’s character who gets off the plane and keeps a distance from the others, even his wife. Such a physical distance arranges the social dynamic so that Charles becomes different than the others in his group, even his younger wife. Once he gets separated from this environment though his character evolves in leaps and bounds while Robert’s seems to stagnate or regress back to societal chains. Robert attacks Charles after coming back into another “social ground”, the cabin of a Native American which links to the original cabin at the film’s beginning. This journey back into a hierarchal ground forces Robert’s character to stagnate and regress
back to his societal chains due to his weakened sense of character and inevitably leads him to attempt to take out his opposition, Charles.

One character in *The Edge* actually metaphorically gives Robert power in comparison to Charles but ends up merely becoming an obstacle on the path to prove Charles as superior to Robert. The character, Stephen, becomes a metaphorical object to be possessed in a figurative battle of control between Charles and Robert. The first event which becomes a dispute to the reader of control within the wilderness would be the airplane crash which has Stephen locked within the plane unable to detach himself from the seatbelt. Charles frees Stephen with a knife and takes him to the surface of the lake saving his body from the depths. Yet, Tamahori stages Robert to carry Stephen to dry land where he is revived through mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The reader learns immediately of an advantage of Robert and Charles through this scene. Robert physically lifts Stephen to bring him to safety displaying to the viewer his physical capabilities compared to Charles. Yet, Charles knows to free Stephen with the knife in the cockpit of the sinking of the plan as well as how to revive Stephen. Tamahori sets up the wilderness as a proving ground of sorts where inevitably Charles shines out as a character more worthy both morally and metaphorically in the end. Stephen dies off after a bear attack freeing the viewer to interpret the rest of the actions after as being based on the skills they had shown in the beginning, Charles’s intelligence and Robert’s physical capabilities but still relying on Charles’s intelligence for guidance when necessary.

Forced to face obstacles and hurdles along the way Charles aids Robert in surviving the wilderness According to Orison Marden, “obstacles are like wild animals…if you look them squarely in the eye, they will slink out of sight.” The obstacles of the northern wilderness in *The Edge* cause many complications for Charles and Robert, but through Charles knowledge and perseverance the obstacles are triumphed over one by one. The wild is a romanticized concept where nature is perceived as something untamable, almost unmatchable in a sense. Yet, Charles and Robert face the wild and overcome its obstacles through Tamahori’s directorial manipulations. The white northern wild’s that Charles and Robert find themselves in mainly consisting of a vast forest where the only means of survival are reliance on each other and on Charles’s eidetic memory conceptualizes for the audience the personas of both characters as “legit” or proven
as the baser ones by leaving them in the neutral landscapes of the white north. The main obstacle other than food is the survival against the grizzly bear that has already eaten Stephen and subsequently continues to stalk Charles and Robert in hopes of getting more food due to his blood thirst as a “man killer”. By placing Charles and Robert in the wilderness, Mamet focuses the viewer on the traits shown by each character combating the gentle but smarter Charles metaphorically against the greedy and reliant Robert. However, Robert loses the advantage of physical capability once Charles learns he can apply his knowledge to the wilderness easily. Charles becomes more hands on by way of his knowledge to trap meals and giving directions through his hand-made compass. However, before in the cabin he was a recluse and only known for his money, now he has become associated with his knowledge of survival skills in the wild. Charles’s character changes into a self-reliant dictionary able to apply his vast knowledge to perpetually survive within the wild if necessary. In a sense, the wild forces Charles to rely on his knowledge, thus his age, to learn how to survive forcing Charles to evolve into a dominant character that can survive and aid others through his own skills and becomes a “hero” figure to his companions.

Robert Green’s character interacts with Charles throughout the movie as more of a foil character, one that moralizes Charles further in opposition of each wrong thing Robert end up doing. Even though Robert actually could be constructed as the social point at the beginning of the film by showing his portrayal as the start of every scene talking or goofing around with everyone, he still becomes known for his truer traits within the wilderness where he lacks the necessary skills to survive on his own. Robert only maintains a slight advantage over Charles through his youth as he ends up carrying Stephen up the hill for resuscitation after the plane crash. Robert even admits that “it puts things into perspective don’t it?” right after escaping a bear attack. Unlike Charles, Robert does not possess an eidetic memory or time to read books on wilderness survival due to his ambitions on moving up in the world which forces him to rely upon Charles’s wit for his very survival and becomes the point to which the reader will compare Charles changes. Tamahori portrays Robert’s character as the crux for the inevitable shift of emotion onto Charles, Tamahori gathers all the traits of Robert for the viewer to witness by throwing him into a place he is unfamiliar with, the wilderness. Robert’s char-
Clence Patterson

acter lacks the survival mentality that Charles has from being within a man-eat-man world like the higher society and therefore, Robert loses a majority of the viewer’s attention to Charles in the process.

Charles Morse’s character truly shines after the plane crashes into the lake and the group is forced to trek through the wild and survive while outrunning a savage grizzly trying to attack them. Even right after the crash of the plane, by a flock of birds coming through the windshield, Charles still saves Stephen by cutting him free from his stuck seatbelt while underwater. Unlike Robert, Charles saved Stephen. While Robert merely found the exit after seeing the dead pilot leaving as quickly as possible due to his instincts of self-preservation, thus his greed for life, to drive him away without even looking to see if Stephen had survived unlike the pilot. After dragging Stephen to land Charles yet again saves Stephen even further by resuscitating him. The camera focuses exclusively on Charles’s face during a majority of the scenes and it is through this focus that the face becomes a permanent aspect of the film from which the audience gains perspective on how the world sees Charles as well as how Robert sees him during the foray into the wild. The audience can draw emotional expressions from his face as well as highlighting Charles as the character who takes lead and becomes a conquering hero so to speak. Even though Charles loses the book that actually tells him how to survive within the wild, ironically called *Lost in the Wild*, he still emerges as a character that can overcome even the random foray into the wild, Charles consistently calms the group down and forces them to think about the situation they are in, instead of acting on impulse as they want to do. At points, Stephen and Robert convince Charles to keep going on, but for a majority of the film Charles takes the lead and who keeps spirits high by saying or asking random things such as, “Did you know you can make fire from ice?” or even “you can season meat with gunpowder” and through his spouting of random tidbits the attention of the others remains on him and his knowledge repertoire instead of the possibility of death around every corner.

Charles becomes a character whose usefulness lies in his knowledge and general levelness in the situation; he adopts the role of leader or morale booster for the group. Charles’s leadership abilities develop through his continuous interactions with the group as well as being forced to develop plans under physical duress. Figuratively, Charles proves himself on the battlefield by assisting his soldiers, Stephen and
Robert, when the need calls for it and he notices them struggling emotionally with their own survival. Leading others motivates Charles to utilize his knowledge base in order to calm the group as well as to assist in their continued existence by leading them away from the dangers of the wild, be it a bear or hunger and being lost. Using his eidetic memory in the scene following them escaping from the crash Charles remembers that, “most people lost in the wilds die of shame because they didn’t do the one thing which would have saved their lives, thinking” distracting Robert and Stephen from what just happened. However, this also helps to reinforce his knowledge as pivotal to the viewers but also to begin to construct his new character in the wild as a survivor who can be a wild man both learned yet civilized as well. Unlike Bob, Charles can apply his knowledge of the wild in a practical sense thus saving the group from the winter and vigor’s of the northern wild plus a bear for a time, instating Charles as the de facto leader and an indispensable character for the viewer as well as Robert. Charles’s knowledge of the wild comes from Lost in the Wild, which sunk to the bottom of the crash site in a cut scene in the film, thus cementing in the viewer’s mind that all the knowledge he spouts out is actually from memory and inevitably a useful skill. Even in the wild Charles becomes top-man in a sense merely due to his inherent abilities, while the other two become reliant on his character as they have none of his abilities even though they are younger. Charles’s eidetic memory allows him to know that “thinking” will save him from dying of shame in the wild and he uses it to lead the ragtag group through the wild. He demonstrates his knowledge through specific actions such as when he fashions a compass from a magnetized, on his shirt, paper clip to point south due to the magnetic force of the poles assisting the group in choosing a direction to travel in rather than wandering aimlessly without hope. Even if the compass ends up being compromised due to his metal belt buckle Charles’s knowledge leads the group uncomplainingly for the majority through the wilderness and through his unique character traits he keeps the group hopeful and further cementing him as Robert’s superior as well as a character to focus on for morale.

Bob (Robert’s nickname) complains of Charles’s all-around usefulness as an injustice since usually “money folk sit up there drinks and golf, but get you in an emergency and you bloom…you make me sick”. Bob’s character cannot associate the wealthy societal ste-
retype with Charles lawfully due to the different type of society in the capitalist world and the more primal one in the wild. Bob expects Charles to crumple under the strain of being out of his element, but the wilderness turns out to be more like the former capitalistic society than Bob planned and Charles thrives. Charles suggests that due to Charles’s pampering from his vast fortune Charles should collapse under the strain of being without his material possessions and societal links to strengthen him. Charles becomes the embodiment of the perfect man in a sense, thus Tamahori has cemented Charles as the conquering imperialist who can mix his cultured skills with the wild nature of the north even though his cultured attitude would normally be seen as ridiculous in the wild. Instead, Charles becomes the self-made man in this story line. Calling him self-made calls into question the worth of the other characters in relations to his own. Robert merely exists as an associate to Charles’s company, a tag on for his wife Nikki, and relies on him for his money and even Charles’s wife for his next big break. His reliance even transitions to the wild and how he further relies on Charles to keep him alive. Later on in the film Robert attempts to shoot Charles with a gun they found in a hunters cabin, but Charles turns it around on Robert by using the landscape to lure Robert over a bear trap. Due to his regression back to a capitalistic persona Robert lost any natural instincts he had and through this regression he lost the natural instincts that may have helped him survive better, almost like throwing a domesticated puppy into the wild and expecting it to survive. Even then Charles shows his worth in comparison to Robert by risking getting attacked again by assisting Robert in escaping from the spiked pit and even transporting him to where the rescue chopper lands. Charles knows something like this will happen eventually due to his previous paranoia and even alludes to it but warning to not “go native on me Bob” and has time to plan for the inevitable betrayal he sees Robert committing. Robert has “gone native” and regressed back to the mentality of the hierarchal system and attempts to end the competition he has with Charles. Yet, ultimately Robert is proven inept at killing Charles and gets wounded in the process.

Although the two characters may get along by necessity such as in the scene where they circle themselves in fire and wait out the bear stalking them, which does not exclude their backgrounds from the equation. Mamet sets up Robert’s character as a main foil to increase
the viewer’s respect for Charles’s character in comparison to Robert’s bad traits. The film further cements this by having a majority of the walking scenes to do a cut of where Charles is leading the group and it focuses on his face whenever it zooms in as well. The camera zooms into Charles’s face to attach that face with the traits that are portrayed in each event such as Charles saving the trapped Stephen or his caring for the sickly Robert after his trip into the pitfall thus using Charles’s character traits as a moral point of the film which grasps the viewer’s attention to how much better Charles was in comparison to the greedy and deceitful Robert. The relationship between Charles and Robert becomes the catalyst for the audience to analyze the traits of each be it Charles’s almost pious nature or Robert’s more down and dirty character. Charles is known to be a billionaire, while Robert merely uses photography to make a living, which places him below Charles on the social scale. The traits that Charles has transition over to his foray into the wild, while Robert’s traits greed, jealousy, insecurities merely do not transition well due to his future reliance upon Charles and inevitably become his driving point to rely on Charles as his greed drives him to keep Charles around as well as his insecurities on surviving by himself. These traits are his knowledge shown through his constant quotations or in the scene where he traps a squirrel for food, wealth as shown through his billionaire wife, or even his age/experience with his gray hair and accumulated paranoia.

The knowledge Charles has ultimately resulted from his lack of struggle in the capitalist society. The advantages his knowledge gives him becomes apparent each time Charles shows himself superior to Robert, such as when he allows Robert to live. Even though Robert tries to kill Charles, Charles still assists Robert in the end in surviving which advocates Charles to the viewer as a figure to sympathize and the performance of Robert’s dependence on Charles further guides the viewer into admiring Charles. Charles creates a trap to capture an animal for food and he even knows how to shape spears to fight off the wild grizzly. Charles’s knowledge is the main advantage to their health and it gives Charles an advantage over Robert in the eyes of the viewer as well. Charles has information of an old Cree saying, “why is the rabbit unafraid? Because he’s smarter than the panther” and in the film a knife portrays the rabbit smoking a pipe on one side of a wooden knife while on the other the panther awaited. Charles figuratively becomes the rabbit within the film while Rob-
ert is the panther waiting to strike. The knowledge Charles has on the wild grants him protection from Robert so long as he is useful, thus delaying Robert’s urge to kill Charles. The rabbit, Charles, can smoke in peace because it knows the panther needs it. Robert does not try to attack/kill Charles until the two reach a hunter’s cabin or a “civilized” area where Robert can survive on his own. Robert points a gun at Charles that he finds and tells him to go outside in order to be killed switching the power play between the two temporarily in this instance. The second cabin is a point to where Charles and Robert reenter into society in a sense, they adopt back roles and ideas that they had in the first place. The civilizing aspect of the cabin is what causes Robert to remember his plan to take Charles’s life and Charles realizes it when he asks Robert, “What can’t you do it sober?” This dynamic between the two that had been developing into a friendlier and even teacher/student bond devolves back into the previous one where Charles needs to watch his back from a possible up setter, i.e. Robert. Even Robert’s attack on Charles with the gun could be seen as a forced reaction to the cabin, Robert perceives Charles as a threat again to his future and he sees that he must eliminate it in order to continue his upward journey into the echelons of society. At this point of the film it is doubtful whether or not Robert wants to kill Charles or if he thinks that it is a necessity, maybe even it could be that through their journey Robert has seen the depths of Charles’s character and found himself wanting in the process.

Yet, Charles proves more knowledgeable yet again by maneuvering Robert straight over into a bear trap. Charles forethought and knowledge proves to the viewer that he really had no reason to fear the panther; his survival skills trumped the gun. Charles was still aware of the nature around him while Robert had reverted back to his reliance upon the previous world. Robert was impaled on the spikes in the pit; at least his leg was impaled thus immobilizing him due to the injury. The constant awareness of Charles in this point could be analyzed so that it is merely Charles’s “civilized” instinct coming back so that he is aware of all the potential backstabber and he knows that everyone wants something from him. The advantage seems to be in Robert’s court due to him having the gun as an equalizing agent, yet Charles’s memory yet again saves him in the end since he remembered that the pitfall was present before it was covered in snow and thus he could maneuver Robert to fall into the pit impaling his leg all the way.
through and thus crippling him. Charles confronts Robert on what he is doing creating the dynamic of a superior questioning a subordinate which causes Robert to figuratively snap and force Charles at gunpoint out of the cabin and into the wild. Forced to drink before the act, Robert conceptualizes his attack on Charles as a necessitated act provided to him by his societal chains. However, Charles’s good will benefits Robert as Charles takes pity on Robert and assists him out of the trap. Charles’s character becomes symbolic of his traits. His knowledge is shown by the constant struggle in the wild and overcoming each obstacle presented, be it the ravaging bear or the necessity for food. His wisdom and age are shown by him being able to forgive Robert and save him from the trap even though Robert had just attempted to kill him. Tamahori links Charles’s character to a pious and forgiving figure and by doing so, the performance of Charles becomes one related to a triumphant and knowledgeable warrior rather than the reclusive scribe he was in “civilized” country.

*The Edge* is a fast paced movie where the main action happens in the wild. Charles’s character becomes the center of an action packed movie where the only means of their survival is outsmarting the Kodak bear after hunting them. As Jeremy Withers points out in his article “The Social Construction of Nature and Oliver Stone’s *Natural Born Killers*” that “Perhaps the most widely remarked on are [a nature documentary’s] tendencies to feed our culturally encouraged desire for speed and conflict, making non-human nature itself seem slow and uneventful by comparison” (6) and indeed the focus of the film on Charles seems to only be motivated when his life is on the line by staying one step ahead of the bear and going against his reclusive nature to include Robert in on his survival plan. The forced inclusion of Robert into Charles’s continued survival merely relates to the viewer that even in times of duress Charles can create a temporary bond with another in order to maintain their existence. The lack of a proper bond from killing the bear merely becomes Tamahori’s way of continuing the struggle of the less fortunate Robert to topple the more fortunate Charles. The static nature of the wild does not always remain still and slow, the bear becomes the embodiment of nature’s wrath figuratively and forces Robert and Charles to change their personalities or risk death. But the question of whether or not that nature is perceived as static becomes apparent as well. Charles’s character traits are static but they insert themselves in different ways
than previously used in his life. His knowledge of random facts are used to bolster the groups attitudes as well as actually being put into practice such as making spear tips harder by blackening them in fire or even how to tell a bear pitfall from regular ground. Charles’s benevolence actually seems to be the driving factor for the audience to latch onto, after all the movie is so fast paced that only rarely is the emotion focused on in parts other than anger and Charles’s character is the focused on one even.

Charles’s character develops into one that lacks the earlier factors of solitude and nearly a do not approach persona through his sarcasm and instead through the duration of the film he becomes a character much more emotionalized and moralized than Robert’s, who in turn stays greedy and driven by need. Charles selflessly keeps the others alive in the wild and shows that even in a place such as the wilderness of the north, where the daylight ends at 4 p.m. and flocks of birds will crash into your plane, where he can still come out on top figuratively through his own character traits. The film is structured to set the viewer up into seeing the nature of the north as a point to more easily analyze the traits of the characters due to the “lawlessness of the landscape”. The Edge evolves into a film that questions the human mentality within the wild and how acculturation affects the minds of the stranded individuals. Charles’s character, through Tamahori’s manipulations, evolved into one who can easily say my friends died so that I could be here and actually mean it. Charles does not talk to any of the reporters until he has given his wife Robert’s watch and even then it was to tell of the sacrifices of his friends. The evolution of Charles from a reclusive billionaire with no friends to one who actually learned what it meant to have some, even if briefly, gives the audience the mental image of Charles as a changed man who plans to better himself and potentially maintain his lack of societal bonds as well.

Works Cited


From Submission to Affection:
The Performativity of Marriage in
*Their Eyes were Watching God*

Tamara Beckham

“Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” Janie informs Pheoby once she returns to Eatonville after doing just that: going to God and finding out about living (Hurston 183). Janie, the novel’s protagonist, only tells Pheoby, her best friend, about the life and times that she a Tea Cake share. Performativity connotes the use of both verbal and non-verbal forms of expressive actions to communicate meaning and reveal preconceived notions set by society. Verbal forms include not only what is said, but who said it, how it is said, who is around to hear it, and the reactions of those who hear it. Non-verbal forms include appearance, surroundings, and tendencies that work to announce and scrutinize race, gender, class, and even age. African American Literature specialist Dr. Jennifer Jordan summarizes the text by claiming: “*Their Eyes were Watching God*, a novel that reflects Hurston’s ambiguity about race, sex, and class” and “The novel is seen as a vehicle of feminist protest through its condemnation of the restrictiveness of bourgeois marriage and through its exploration of interracial sexism and male violence” (Jordan 107-108). The ambiguity about race, sex, and class that Dr. Jordan refers to is present in the three marriages of the novel’s protagonist.

Overtime, the definitions and expectations of marriages change. This bond originally began as a business contact to ensure the well-being of kids since women were denied the right to work for wages. Then, society deems marriage as a bond for procreation. Marriage, as viewed by society today, connotes commitment, love, and a yearning to spend the rest of your life with the significant other. In Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes were Watching God* Janie Mae Crawford marries three times. Hurston invites readers to witness Janie’s quest for love through various marriages to men with varying social statuses and expectations of their woman—Janie. Each marriage ends differently, however each marriage performs in multiple fashions through the use of numerous tactics to deceive different characters for diverse
reasons, but ultimately reveals the community’s expectations of Janie as a married woman. Varying ideas of matrimonial practices in Their Eyes were Watching God highlights the ever-changing idea of marriage in order to expose the devaluation of marriage due to society’s preconceived notions of identity categories.

Janie’s forced first marriage reinforces traditional views of marriage to expose the expectations of the Florida society—Eatonville—in which Janie lives with her grandmother. Janie’s grandmother, along with the rest of the townsfolk in Eatonville, accepts and expects a young girl like Janie to marry an older man like Logan Killicks because of his possessions. Janie’s grandmother—Nanny—demands that Janie marry Logan Killicks to ensure Janie’s security once she is no longer living to raise Janie: “‘Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah want you to have, baby, it’s protection. Ah ain’t gittin’ ole, honey. Ah’m done ole. One mornin’ soon, now, de angel wid de sword its gointuh stop by here” (Hurston 14). It is a well-known fact throughout Eatonville that Logan Killicks owns sixty acres of land—enough land to guarantee Janie’s wellbeing. Marrying Logan makes Janie the heir of the sixty acres—Nanny’s concern. Marriage in the early times was not a personal affair between two consenting individuals, it was more of a business contract or a security measure to ensure that women were well-off because they were denied the right to work for wages or a means for the bride’s family to gain whatever inheritances the groom offers. Janie’s marriage to Logan provides readers with an understanding of the idea of marriage. For this particular Florida community, marriage is all about the stuff. Women marry men with stuff to be certain that they have stuff for their survival and the survival of children, if any. Although Janie’s interpretation of marriage is the total opposite, she marries Logan.

However, Janie does not marry Logan because of his stuff; she marries him due solely to obedience towards her grandmother. The marriage, however, turns out quite the opposite of what Janie imagines. Janie cries to her grandmother about Logan not being a lovable person and her grandmother retorts: “You come heah wid yo mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo’ bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hats tuh you and call you Mis’ Killicks, and you come worryin’ me ‘bout love” (Hurston 22). In ancient times, marriage was an institution where economic, political, and religious influence far outweighed the
Tamara Beckham

consent or choice of the individuals who were actually going to get married. Almost all marriages were arranged, though Logan practically begs for Janie’s hand in marriage. These were the times when marriage for women was nothing more than an event where they were sold as property to somebody—usually somebody who the women did not want to own them—in Janie’s case, Logan. Once Janie learns that her marriage is based upon stuff and not love, she does not sink into a world of depression; instead, she attempts to make the best of her arranged marriage. She performs the duties that she feels the wife is accountable for, but soon grew tired of the bore of her marriage: “So Janie waited a bloom time and a green time, and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand at the gate and expect things….She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (Hurston 23-24). Janie is prepared to suffer through her marriage with Logan until his slave master mentality shows.

Once Logan begins to treat Janie like the mule that her grandmother warns her about, Janie realizes that she cannot stay with Logan. She is not happy with the way Logan treats her although her grandmother warns her that “de nigger woman is de mule uh de world” (Hurston 14). Her grandmother’s advice foreshadows the work that Logan will expect Janie to perform. Though Logan plays in Janie’s hair when they first marry, he could care less about her appearance. Once he realizes that Janie has been “spoilt rotten”, her hair becomes less attractive and Logan takes on a slave master persona (Hurston 25). Logan informs Janie that his last wife had no problem helping inside and outside of the house. He obviously expects the same from Janie. When Janie is informed that she will be getting a mule to help with the fall’s plowing, readers witness what Pearlie Mae Fisher Peters calls the assertive woman—one who stands out as the main characteristic figure in Hurston’s fiction, folklore, and drama. This woman’s omnipotent presence is felt largely because of the profound sense of individualism she conveys in crucial scenes of dramatic verbal confrontation” (Peters 3). In her book, *The Assertive Woman in Zora Neale Hurston’s Fiction, Folklore, and Drama*, Peters also analyzes the assertive woman as an igniter of hostility and physical violence through her aggressive stance. Once Janie’s assertive side is introduced, it never disappears. From that point in the novel, readers witness Janie’s quest for individualism on her own terms. Once she realizes that Logan will never treat her as
she wishes to be treated, she decides that she cannot live this miserably from day to day. Unfortunately, Janie cannot leave Logan without another source of security. Fortunately, Janie meets and is immediately attracted to the cityfied, stylish dressed man in shirts with silk sleeveholders who asks for water when he passes by Logan’s house. Janie hints that she is debating leaving Logan and once he gives a nonchalant attitude, she decides to leave with Joe Starks. Joe promises Janie all of the things that she wishes for. She feels that a man younger than Logan will bring her much happiness and love. While, Janie’s second marriage starts as a promising one, she soon realizes that her second marriage is not much different or better than her first.

Janie’s second marriage to Joe Starks illustrates a progression towards Janie’s idea of marriage. Janie’s second marriage, though not forced by her grandmother, is still socially accepted because Joe is older, though not as old as Logan. And Joe still has stuff to guarantee Janie’s wellbeing. Society assumes that by Janie being the mayor’s wife that she is automatically happy, but that is not the case, as Janie learns soon into her second marriage. The women in the town praise Janie for her title of mayor’s wife. The women and men of the up-and-coming community praise Joe and heed to his every command: “That’s the way it went, too. The women got together the sweets and the men looked after the meats” as Joe dictates for the lighting ceremony for the new town (Hurston 42). As a couple, the two receive much admiration. Joe has a beautiful, young wife and Janie has the smartest husband. At first, the two agree with the town folks’ opinions of each other, but as the marriage declines, so does the love between Joe and Janie.

Janie admires Jody—the nickname that Janie gives Joe—until she realizes that Joe is not a slave master like Logan, but a father figure. Janie admires Joe when they first marry, then loathes Joe after her suppresses her voice and identity. After hearing Joe’s promises of royalty-like treatment, Janie begins her life as Janie Starks while not properly ending her reign as Janie Killicks. Janie’s marriage to Joe starts off nothing like her first marriage. Joe buys her nice things, he satisfies her sexually, he reminds her constantly of her beauty, he does not treat her like a servant and most of all he does not make her work the fields. He talks to her in rhymes which Janie appears to enjoy the most: “You behind a plow! You ain’t got no mo’ business wid a plow than uh hog wid uh holiday…A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo’self and eat p’taters
Janie, upon hearing what Joe has to offer, leaves with Joe in hopes of being part of the creation of a black town. Once Joe’s plans of success fall into place, Joe’s true plans for Janie begin to surface. Janie quickly realizes that Joe is jealous of her youthfulness along with her independence and the recognition that the townspeople Eatonville give her because of her liberty. Both readers and Janie get a taste of Joe’s jealousy when he insists that she tie her hair when she is in the store: “This business of the head-rag irked her endlessly. But Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store” (Hurston 51). And as a father figure, Joe often lectures Janie saying that “It would be pitiful if Ah didn’t [think for Janie] Somebody got to think for women and chillum and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves (Hurston 67). Once Janie grasps the fact that Jody does not want her to have a voice of her own and he controls her appearance, she knows that her second marriage is a failure. Instead of running away from her problems as she did with her first marriage, Janie learns to hush. She learned to say nothing, no matter what Joe did. She learned how to talk some and leave some. This practice of not saying anything became routine until Janie notices that something about Joe is already dead (Hurston 73). Janie’s second marriage fails. She continues her daily routine in the store after Joe dies. As a matter-of-fact, the only visible change after Joe dies is the removal of the head-rags (85).

Even though Their Eyes Were Watching God does not meet the black feminist demand that a heroine achieve both individualism and social commitment, it does skillfully expose, through its delineation of Janie’s marriage to Jody Starks, the devaluation and aloneness of the middle-class woman whose sole purpose is to serve as an ornament and symbol of her husband’s social status. However, Janie will not stand as an ornament. The townsfolk do not view Janie as an ornament either, and once Jody knows this about, her publically denounces her: “‘Thank you fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home,’” (41). During her first marriage, she insists that her place is in the home, but in her second marriage, she is assigned a place. Joe takes away Janie’s voice and her freedom of choice—or the lack thereof.

As a result of Joe’s authority, Janie’s quietness backfires. Joe is upset with Janie for unintentionally wrongfully cutting tobacco and
they argue in the store, in front of the customers, about the tobacco. Joe starts insulting Janie about her age and talking in a tone that puts her in a child’s place. Joe expects Janie to endure his criticism turned disrespect in silence, but Janie is fed up with Jody. For this reason, Janie publicly challenges Joe’s manhood retorting: “Talkin’ ‘bout me lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life”; and he publicly slaps her across the face: “Joe Starks didn’t know the words for all this, but he knew the feeling. So he struck Janie with all his might and drove her from the store” (Hurston 75-6). At this point, Janie’s insult to Joe’s manhood is Janie’s ultimate act of assertiveness. Joe demands obedience, and although Janie is obedient, she does not respect his suddenly stern personality. Once he changes, she changes. Jody’s expectations of Janie’s appearance cause Janie’s ultimate unhappiness within their marriage. It is quite obvious throughout Janie’s second marriage that her husband is jealous of her graceful aging. But, Janie maintains the store until a younger man comes and sweeps her away from the solemnity. Janie’s third and final marriage works out better than the first two attempts. Janie’s third and final marriage to Tea Cake fulfills her expectations of marriage, but completely negates the expectations of the Eatonville porch-sitters. Once the Eatonville citizens notice that Janie and Tea Cake have a thing, everything that Janie did was wrong:

Tea Cake and Mrs. Mayor Starks! All the men that she could get, and fooling with somebody like Tea Cake! Another thing, Joe Starks hadn’t been dead but nine months and here she goes sashaying off to a picnic in pink linen. Done quit attending church, like she used to. Gone off to Sanford in a car with Tea Cake and her al dressed in blue! It was a shame. Done took to high heel slippers and a ten dollar hat! Looking like some young girl, always in blue because Tea Cake told her to wear it….Tea Cake and Janie gone hunting. Tea Cake and Janie gone fishing. Tea Cake and Janie gone to Orlando to the movies. Tea Cake and Janie gone to a dance…. Day after day and week after week. (Hurston 105)

The citizens of Eatonville also feel that Tea Cake is too young for Janie: “‘But, Janie, Tea Cake, whilst he ain’t no jail-bird, he ain’t got uh dime tuh cry. Ain’t you skeered he’s jes after yo’ money—him bein’ younger than you?’” Pheoby expresses to Janie after hearing the townspeople talk about her friend’s new relationship with a man younger than she
Tamara Beckham

(107). Pheoby also reminds Janie of “how the young men is wid older women. Most of de time dey’s after whut dey kin git, then dey’s gone lak uh turkey through de corn” (108). The citizens assume that Tea Cake is too young to own anything. Therefore he has nothing to offer Janie and is showing interest to take the money that her deceased previous husband leaves her. From the reactions of the townspeople, the relationship between the former mayor’s widow and a boy that is fifteen years younger than her is unorthodox. According to the people of Eatonville, after nine months, Janie should still be mourning the loss of an abusive husband who thought that he was God. However, these same critics shook their heads in disbelief at how Jody treats Janie during his last days. Janie, being the assertive woman that she is, does not let the beliefs of the Eatonville people stop her from finally living the life that she imagines as a young girl living with her grandmother.

Despite the concerns and jealousy from the community, Janie leaves Eatonville to start a new life with Tea Cake. She informs Pheoby of her departure and tries her best to make Pheoby understand why she is leaving: “’Cause Tea Cake ain’t no Jody Starks, and if he tried tuh be, it would be uh complete flommuck. But de minute Ah marries ‘im everybody is gointuh be makin’ comparisons. So us is goin’ off somewhere and start all over in Tea Cake’s way. Dis ain’t no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma’s way, now Ah means tuh live mine” (Hurston 109). In this scene, once, again, Janie basically informs Pheoby that she is wants love and is tired of marrying because of reasons that society approves of. At this point, Janie does not seek the approval of those around her, she simply follows her heart: “She is an independent-minded woman who eventually finds authentic love with a man who gives her every consolation in the world including personal freedom and verbal contentment (Peters 127). With Tea Cake, Janie openly expresses how she feels and never worries about how her husband will react if she says or does something that she does not approve of: “‘First thing, though, us got tuh eat together, Janie. Then we can talk,’” Tea Cake tells his wife when she worries about Tea Cake cheating on her during his late night outings. The love that Janie and Tea Cake possess for each other is the same love that Janie hopes for in her previous marriages. The treatment that Janie receives from Tea Cake brings her contentment.

Tea Cake’s free spirit allows him and Janie’s love to last. Tea Cake sincerely loves Janie and is not interested in her dead husband’s money
as the citizens of Eatonville assume. In fact, he does not even allow Janie to take Joe’s money with them when they leave Eatonville to escape the malicious tongues and eyes of the townsfolk. And while the Eatonville citizens seem disgusted with the mayor’s wife running off with someone fifteen years younger, both Janie and Tea Cake along with critics feel that “Tea Cake and Janie have the perfect relationship of man and woman, whether they be black or white” (West 108). He does not try to control what Janie wears or who she talks to nor does he assign roles to her, he allows her freedom. He is a complete gentleman who proves the bad-mouthers wrong about his intentions with Janie. When the two first meet in the store, Janie is surprised that Tea Cake invites her to play checkers since Joe denied her any fun: “Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice” (Hurston 92). Tea Cake allowing Janie to be an individual rather than attaching a title to her is what attracts Janie to such a younger guy.

As an individual, Tea Cake does not dictate Janie’s appearance. Unlike Logan, he does not make her the mule of the world. He loves to see her in vibrant colors. Unlike Joe, Tea Cake makes time for fun and he does not make her tie her hair up:

Then Tea Cake went to the piano without so much as asking and began playing blues and singin’, and throwing grins over his shoulder. The sounds lulled Janie to a soft slumber and she woke up with Tea Cake combing her hair and scratching the dandruff from her scalp. It made her more comfortable and drowsy.

“Tea Cake, where you git uh comb from tuh be combin’ mah hair wid?”

“Ah brought it wid me. Come prepared tuh la mah hands on it tuhnight.”

“Why, Tea Cake? Whut good do combin’ mah hair do you? Its mah comfortable, not yourn.”

“It’s mine too. Ah ain’t been sleepin’ so good for more’n uh week cause Ah been wishin’ so bad tuh git mah hands in yo’ hair. It’s so pretty. It feels jus’ lak underneath uh dove’s wings next to mah face.” (99)

Tea Cake flattery for Janie is so sincere that Janie feels that it is untrue. But, Tea Cake ultimately convinces Janie that she has his heart. Janie’s freedom to be herself creates Janie’s ultimate satisfaction with Tea
Tamara Beckham

Cake. Tea Cake does not want Janie to make her work. He does not want Janie as ornamental. Tea Cake wants Janie for the same reason the Janie wants Tea Cake: love. Also, Tea Cake pleases Janie sexually. Tea Cake may be younger than Janie’s previous husbands, but he proves himself a man by making Janie the happiest woman on Earth during their time together. Unfortunately, Janie and Tea Cakes marriage ends when she kills him because of the rabies attack on his body. Fortunately, though, Janie completes her quest and knows what it feels like to be wanted by someone that she genuinely wants.

_Their Eyes were Watching God_ reads as a young girl who yearns to find happiness and freedom at the same time. Her first marriage fails before it even starts simply because it is not who and what she wants. Janie’s second marriage starts out promising, but turns for the worse. While Janie chooses to manage through her second marriage, her husband’s death ultimately relieves her misery. Her third and final marriage encompasses everything that Janie attempts to make from her first two marriages, but she ends up having to kill the only man that she loves because he loves her. All in all, Janie’s three marriages along with life itself create for Janie an image of individualism. While the text does read as a love story, Hurston’s novel draws on the movement towards individualism for women. The story reads as Janie’s bildungsroman. Today, the true definition of marriage is so skewed that marriage is not as highly praised as it once was. Fortunately for Janie, she experiences love and finds out who she is as an individual before society’s corruptness begins to assign identities.

**Works Cited**


III. The Permorphed Future
Performing and Veiling Deformity in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*

Tyler Key

It should be no surprise that David Foster Wallace’s novel *Infinite Jest* revolves around a continuum of characters addicted to various substances, considering the author’s stint in a few halfway houses in the early Nineties. The novel itself, a gargantuan, thousand-page work containing multiple convolving plots and subplots that refract and modulate without the guy-wire of chronology, examines addiction—to substances, entertainment, performances, expectations—on scales ranging from the intercontinental and political to the personal and harrowing. The addiction to entertainment and the perpetual cycle of watching Wallace notes in his essay “E Unibus Plurami” lies at the veiled core of the futuristic novel, in which filmmaker James Incandenza produces a fatal film also titled *Infinite Jest*. Incandenza uses a “lens to blur things in imitation of a neonatal retina,” inducing a “blur that’s more deforming than fuzzy” to frame his usually veiled muse Joelle Van Dyne muttering motherly coos (222). Deforming, here, is the key word—as we can infer it to be the result of the addiction-constructed cage. Wallace labels Joelle deformed; she joins a support group called the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed (henceforth abbreviated as UHID) and “don[s] the veil” of the group, which purports to publicly hide its members (598). In a novel decidedly focused on the effects of addiction and the resolution thereof, the veiling of deformity throughout alters certain presumptions about the nature of beauty/disfigurement and the identity of the “Hideously and Improbably Deformed.” In the context of addiction to entertainment, which Wallace notices affecting the literature produced by his peers and forebears, Joelle’s performance of deformity via the UHID veil seems to both assume and deny a postmodern philosophy in engaging with the pervasive ironies of postmodernism and mass-culture’s osmosis of them. The black veil of deformity, as a referent as well as a symbol, furthermore reaches toward and simultaneously recoils from a pseudo-Gothic emphasis on a meaningful surface and the narrative seduction necessitated by those Gothic tropes. As a performative and obfuscating object, the veil assumes the roles of an arbiter
of meaning and, on the surface, a solution to the endless loop of self-reference and irony purveyed by postmodernists like Barth. But in a novel as encyclopedic as *Infinite Jest*, Wallace situates the veil of the deformed and its organization within a larger framework of solutions—of which Alcoholics Anonymous receives the most favor—and the veil’s context within this framework colors how we understand it as a solution and referent. In a novel so dedicated to delineating the plight of the addicted, Wallace’s text also seems concerned with the figurative veils of language and structure, as well as how his readers notice distinct shifts in the UHID veil’s specific context. In essence, the veil performs a role obverse to the novel; in its self-containment and self-reflexivity it parodies and rebukes Wallace’s postmodern forbears like Barth, yet also illuminates a desire for expressionistic communication by contrast.

Deformity, strictly on a lexical basis, implies an audience: a normative group of things well-formed. In *Infinite Jest*, however, very few characters possess a sense of well-formedness for which to judge deformity and non-deformity or distinguish between the two. Joelle van Dyne, also known as “Madame Psychosis” while performing her radio show, distinguishes this for herself. If we accept prima facie that Joelle is in fact deformed by facial acid burns, then the veil—the frame of performance—becomes a function not of a normative group but of self-policing, of concealing the “gigantic sense of shame about [her] urge to hide” (Wallace 534). Joelle, in a dialogue with halfway house resident Don Gately, describes the function of the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed:

In other words you hide your hiding. And you do this out of shame, Don: you’re ashamed of the fact that you want to hide from sight. You’re ashamed of your uncontrolled craving for shadow. U.H.I.D.’s First Step is admission of powerlessness over the need to hide. U.H.I.D. allows members to be open about their essential need for concealment. In other words we don the veil…and stand very straight and walk briskly…but now completely up-front and unashamed about the fact that how we appear to others affects us deeply (535).

Though presented as a kind of joke—as Wallace does with other psychopathological double binds in the novel—the double bind behind
Performing and Veiling Deformity

the UHID veil functions as an extension of the self and of the agency of the veiled. The veil conceals, then, the desire to conceal, thus allowing the member, Joelle, to hide publicly, though paradoxically. Joelle furthermore, in her second discourse about the Union, seems to “drift in and out of different ways of talking,” as Gately states it, where she abandons her quaint colloquial speech and assumes a turgid, academic stance (535). The veil, then, serves as a prop in a performance of her UHID membership, in which she constructs and delineates the plight of the deformed to her audience, Gately. Gately, though, is keenly aware of Joelle’s speech’s performative quality: he notes the verbal posturing and manipulation by asking “what deformity [Joelle is] not hiding the fact that [she is] hiding under that thing” and the ways in which she obfuscates when confronted with Gately’s curiosity concerning the nature of her deformity (537). Her posturing and elision indicate that same self-conscious desire to hide she delineates in the previous section. Yet, at a crucial juncture in the conversation, Joelle answers Gately by claiming herself “so beautiful [she is] deformed,” and listing the malicious consequences of that beauty (538). Do we, the collective reader, believe this claim? Neither the narrator nor any other character provides any clear-cut verification, except that Joelle appears unveiled in Incandenza’s fatally entertaining film and Orin proclaims her the “Prettiest Girl of All Time.” The veil, in this respect, signifies both an agent of self-reclamation and of elision, while also surfeiting the postmodern notion of narrative indeterminacy, a topic Wallace sees, in his generation, as a product of mass-entertainment replicating the irony purveyed by the postmodern avant-garde.

In his essay “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,” Wallace describes the problems facing writers emerging from an age where televisial entertainment and its self-perpetuating cultural import has become something normative and intransigent, a force unseen but resonating with everyone with a television set. Wallace, in describing the ways in which commercials and shows perpetuate a tyrannizing, hip irony, sees televisial entertainment “pointing at itself, keeping the viewer’s relation to his furniture at once alienated and anaclitic” (A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again 57). He continues his exegesis of American television and its ironic performance during the late 1980s and early 1990s by claiming television “takes elements of the postmodern—the involution, the absurdity, the sardonic fatigue, the iconoclasm and rebellion—and bends them
to the ends of spectation and consumption” (64). Joelle’s veil, then, becomes something resembling this kind of entertainment: it at once keeps her audience (Gately, to use the previous example) at a distance, obscured behind the dark linen, creating a shroud of uncertainty and indeterminacy, yet also draws attention to itself as a shroud. The veil seems to desire to deflect attention away from itself, but instead resolves to direct the gaze upon it. Its ends become the opposite of its means. Considering this, the veil frames Joelle’s actions in order to allow her a space in which to perform, and performance portends entertainment, at least for Wallace. However, the frame of the veil may signify a stage or place for Joelle to perform (as she exhibits in her “Sixty Minutes More or Less with Madame Psychosis” radio show, broadcasts of which Wallace ‘transcribes’), it also appeals to Wallace’s sensibilities about television, which “legitimize absurdism and irony as not just literary devices but sensible responses to a ridiculous world” (65). At root, the absurdity of the veil and the UHID program as a construct respond to Wallace’s near-future setting in much the same way as those writers of “Image Fiction” respond to a world they proclaim ridiculous. However, the veil’s connotation of an indeterminate postmodern response illuminates the veil—and thus Joelle, by implication—as a logical conclusion to the kinds of self-conscious, self-reflexive, ironic postmodernism heralded by writers like John Barth. In effect, Joelle’s performance of these values and the narrative strategies Wallace employs seek to supplement the deficiencies he notices inherent in that mode of expression.

Barth, with a critical eye on fiction in his present, examines the trends of metafictionist Jorge Luis Borges in his essay, “The Literature of Exhaustion.” As a fiction writer, Barth lauds Borges for being one of his contemporaries worthy of succeeding Joyce and Kafka when “so many of our writers [are] following Dostoevsky or Tolstoy or Balzac” (Barth 67). In dealing with perceived “ultimacy... both technically and thematically” through irony and self-reflexivity, Barth proclaims Borges’ fiction to be the most avant-garde of the avant-garde, and in doing so represents more faithfully the ideas of his epoch (67). After all, the American “High Sixties,” in Barth’s words, rejected the “old masters” in favor of civil rights, recreational drug use, and et cetera, so why not experimentation in art? Barth, in delineating the finer conceptual points of Borges’ fiction, asserts that “if Beethoven’s Sixth were composed today, it might be an embarrassment; but clearly
Performing and Veiling Deformity

it wouldn’t be, necessarily, if done with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we’ve been and where we are” (69). For Barth and other writers of self-reflexive fiction at the time, irony becomes a tool to subvert the “old masters” and those looming literary figureheads in the name of an experimental rebellion. Even Barth’s tone, in describing the avant-garde conceit of an ultimate silence, embodies the snide, wry, ironic sense of rebellion: “…it might be conceivable to rediscover validly the artifices of language and literature—such far-out notions as grammar, punctuation…(ellipses his) even characterization! Even plot!—if one goes about it the right way, aware of what one’s predecessors have been up to” (68). Barth emphasizes this knowingness in hopes of defining his generation against those thoughts instead of in relation to them, and in ways, his (and other prominent writers’ in the sixties) erudite and hyper-aware works of fiction—Lost in the Funhouse, in particular—continue to influence literature even at present, though his brand of sardonic, intellectual humor has fallen out of vogue somewhat. For example, Wallace addresses the potentially alienating implications of Funhouse in his novella-length short story, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way,” which Wallace parodies through analogizing Barth’s ironic funhouse with both a creative writing MFA workshop and a McDonald’s franchise. Wallace’s concern in “E Unibus Pluram” and Infinite Jest takes a decidedly less playfully mimetic approach to the concept he approaches in “Westward”: if self-reflexivity, unceasing irony, and tireless posturing are all symptoms of an avant-garde rebellion, how does one reckon with mass media and culture co-opting those same symptoms for their cultural-capital? Wallace often wrestles with this in his work, and Infinite Jest’s Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed seems to be a byproduct of that.

James Incandenza, Wallace’s creator of the fatal film, states that Joelle is too typically pretty when he meets her at dinner with his son Orin, who wants his father to include Joelle in one of his films, as he believes she would be an excellent filmable subject. Unveiled Joelle fails to impress the avant-garde director, yet later after donning the UHID veil and extinguishing her relationship with his son, she and Incandenza become quite close; she practically becomes his muse. Essentially, the two bond over their mutual hiddenness—Incandenza’s technical genius equates to social awkwardness and alcoholism, while Joelle’s veil distances her from the judging eyes of others as she
becomes more substance-dependent. Yet Joelle’s movie-star prettiness and Incandenza’s initial rejection thereof implies certain ideological underpinnings about our visual culture’s objectification of beauty. Yet—considering again the implications of concealing beauty/pret-tiness—if the veil traditionally connotes (in the West, at least) a wife in mourning, then for whom does Joelle mourn? As we can infer from Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram,” we—at least those of us who digest entertainment—are married to certain images of ourselves, many of which are televisual in origin. In their advertising study, Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore claim that “cultural representations of beauty often result from the stereotypes held by media gatekeepers...[and] the personal intuition or taste of cultural gatekeepers appears to be based upon a common Zeitgeist regarding what artifacts and lifestyles are associated with a particular ‘type’ of person” (Englis, et al., 51). Though this particular mid-nineties study of beauty in advertising asserts that a given product’s semantic meaning is already predetermined a priori, it arrives at logical conclusions about media vehicles’ observation of their observant viewership and the appropriation of that viewership’s self-image. If Joelle, a character described in Infinite Jest as the “Prettiest Girl of All Time,” undergoes a shift from mass-marketable (and, for Wallace, fear-inducing) prettiness to hideous and improbable deformity, then the text hesitates to ascribe positive value to beauty in an era where media vehicles mass-disseminate beautiful images. The veil of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed, then, implies a rebellion against those images formed in the likenesses of the looker. James Incandenza’s filmography in the novel’s extensive endnotes even parody this concept. Wallace describes Incandenza’s film “The Joke” as a “parody of Hollis Frampton’s ‘audience specific events’” in which “cameras in the theater record the ‘film’s’ audience and project the resultant raster onto screen—the theater audience watching itself watch itself get the obvious ‘joke’ and become increasingly self-conscious and uncomfortable” (Infinite Jest 988-9). Essentially, this film within the novel, in illuminating the audience’s fear of being watched, exposes the silver screen as a transparent veil, much to the chagrin of the audience, who operate under the assumption that the screen is the object to their personal subject. As an après-garde filmmaker (a joking moniker Wallace employs to insinuate that the fictional filmmaker is so ahead of his time, he’s behind it), Incandenza’s theoretico-conceptual “joke” alienates much in the
same fashion of Joelle’s and UHID’s veil. If the relationship between audience and performer (media, in this case) operates under the presumption of the medium’s opacity, then this relationship between the medium/performer/entertainment and audience is one founded upon a contract that ignores its own terms. Wallace illuminates this same kind of blind contract regarding addicted persons and their enslaving substances—Joelle included.

Joelle’s black veil also seems to allude to the surface-heavy qualities and tropes of 18th and 19th century Gothic fiction. But Wallace’s postmodern nod to veiled characters in Gothic staples like The Mistress of Udolpho and Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil” is less symptomatic of an emphasis on surface emotion than it is a systematic construction. Lexically, the novel avoids the typically heavy Gothic description of countenances in favor of subjective narration, yet the veil, as a signer and object, performs a surface duty in its seeming allusion. In Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil,” Mr. Hooper’s facial concealment becomes a subject of mystery and sorrow for the townspeople, yet the symbolic properties of Hooper’s “piece of crape” are fraught with uncertainty (Hawthorne 5). Hooper even explicated the typology of his veil, proclaiming to his wife that “the veil is a type and a symbol, and I am bound to wear it ever, both in light and darkness, in solitude and before the gaze of multitudes, and as with strangers, so with my familiar friends…[it] must separate me from the world” (Hawthorne 6). Like Joelle in Infinite Jest, the veil shrouds Hawthorne’s Hooper in mystery, yet Hooper attempts to moralize with his veil: “I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a black veil!” (9). W.B. Carnochan, in his analysis of the story, states the “strange quality of the veil is that not only does it conceal what is behind it, it is a sign of that concealment; it both symbolizes and generates what is symbolized, is its own symbol—and, in its self-containment, is in one sense beyond interpretation, i.e., beyond any rendering into referential terms” (Carnochan 185). This reading of Hawthorne’s gothic story seems at once applicable to the veil as a Gothic stock prop and Wallace’s co-optation of such regarding the referential indeterminacy of Joelle’s veil in Infinite Jest. Though Carnochan determines that the veil may be “beyond interpretation,” Wallace’s postmodern performance of this Gothic trope we can assuredly interpret. Joelle is no minister, yet the studio where she performs broadcasts of “Sixty Minutes More or Less with Madame Psychosis” corresponds to a
pulpit, though her flatly intoned sermons would feel more at home in a diagnostic medicine manual than a church—and like Hooper she intones flatly. In appropriating Hawthorne’s gothic veil, the text performs the seductive mystery Carnochan finds at the root of Hooper’s self-concealment. In essence, Wallace employs the Gothic trope as a way to recapture the seduction attained by those texts, even as the philosophical tenets of postmodern thought strive to erase the signifiers of seduction in idealizing indeterminacy. For Jean Baudrillard, seduction—in both a physical and figurative sense—“continues to appear to all orthodoxies as malefice and artifice, a black magic for the deviation of all truths, an exaltation of the malicious use of signs, a conspiracy of signs” (Baudrillard 2). The allusive UHID veil in *Infinite Jest*, then, at once aspires to the sort of seduction manifest in the Gothic’s tropes and conventions. Joelle’s veil appears at once to mystify characters like Gately, providing visual seduction, yet its referential seduction (or aspiration thereto) provides another layer of meaning—the novel accepts these tools of narrative seduction as valid arbiters of meaning, at least concerning the UHID veil. Wallace systematizes the veil and provides an organization to promote it, therefore complicating a potential neo-Gothic reading of the veil and veiled. However, the veil continues to connote these images and meanings, whether personal or literary-historical.

Performance in the novel, however, does not require a tangible veil to enact a kind of concealment. Earlier in the novel, in Late October in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s radio broadcast center, WYYY, and Joelle, veiled as is required of UHID members, delivers her nightly performance of Sixty Minutes More or Less with Madame Psychosis. Indicating the tone of her show with several ironic witticisms like “The Dow that can be told is not the eternal Dow,” and “Attractive female seeks same; object,” Joelle, as Madame Psychosis, begins her show with another ironic syncretism employing both the sacred and profane (*Infinite Jest* 183). This particular performance, as the acne-scarred radio engineer informs us, list physical conditions, deformities, and illnesses accepted by the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed. However, far from a sort of advertisement for the “agnostic 12-step recovery program” UHID purports to be, Joelle’s performance does not seem evangelical or even informative regarding the veiled organization: rather, she uses the cold, clinical,
Performing and Veiling Deformity

and arcane language of disease to describe the deformities admitted to the program/union. “Those with saddle-noses,” Joelle intones during her radio show, “Those with atrophic limbs. And yes chemists and pure-math majors also those with atrophic necks. Scleredema adultorum…Come one come all, this circular says” (187). The language of her radio show hypnotizes (both the reader and her fictive audience) as much as it distances—yet the hypnotic quality of her language seems part-and-parcel of its distance. In the novel, those most rapt in aural engagement with Madame Psychosis include both the carbuncular radio assistant and the middle Incandenza child, Mario, born slow-moving and deformed yet refuses the UHID veil. Wallace describes Mario as “technically, Stanford-Binet-wise, slow…but not, verifiably not, retarded or cognitively damaged or bradyphrenic, more like refracted, almost, ever so slightly epistemically bent, a pole poked into mental water and just a little off and just taking a little bit longer, in the manner of all refracted things” (314). Mario’s disinterest in verbal irony—the mode of communication for Avril Incandenza and what Wallace sees as the predominate mode of speaking to the masses during the Nineties—compels the seductive interchange of Joelle’s radio broadcasts. In separating and distancing the physical conditions described from their descriptions, we can understand her aural performance as an antithesis to her visual performance. Her descriptions employ allusions to cinema, popular and avant-garde literature, and the Bible—the show begins with “And Lo, for the Earth was empty of form and void…And Darkness was all over the Face of the Deep...And We said: ‘Look at that fucker Dance’”—at once performs both sacred and profane allusion, yet for Mario the seduction of the program does not stem from the ironies inherent in the allusion but from the expressionism of the language (184). The veil of language—because, at root, language expresses and signifies much in the same way a tangible facial cloth does—between Joelle and Mario seems lifted by the desire to feel rather than, to use Wallace’s word, mentate. In essence, Wallace insists that only a wholly literal audience can raise Joelle’s linguistic veil of hip language, allusion, and pastiche, thus this lexically challenging author insists upon language as a signifier of self-hood and self-expression.

If Infinite Jest is a work of postmodern literature—which, philosophically speaking, it is—then it must conform at some level to certain ideas about structure and meaning that we associate with those
works. For the purpose of this study, we will examine this through the veil of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed and Joelle Van Dyne, the combination of which seems to speak to both structure and meaning. The veil, as it functions on both macro/structural and micro/character levels implies performance since it is an obfuscatory object. It aims to divert attention to itself; it points inward. The context of the performance, when we see Joelle don the veil, indicates a kind of visual and ontological indeterminacy Wallace associates with avant-garde postmodern literature—the reader is unsure as to whether or not Joelle is beautiful or deformed, yet the veil she wears, instead of allowing her audience a chance to make a determinate claim, draws attention to itself instead. The darkness of the linen, unlike the meshwork of a bridal veil, indicates a need to hide. However, the veil seems appropriate for a character as self-aware or self-conscious as the facially-burned Joelle. When the novel’s third protagonist, wheelchair assassin Remy Marathe, enters the halfway house with the intent of gathering information about the star of the fatal film, he sports the veil as pure disguise. Marathe is also deformed—he has only nubs for legs—and uses a wheelchair for mobility, yet the UHID veil cannot cover these deformities nor distract those around him from his obvious handicap. In this instance, the veil’s purposeful diversion of determinate meaning becomes a tool used with insidious intent, and it masks a motive rather than a repressive desire. In this sense, recontextualizing the veil only further exposes it as a concealant whose function is not to render a deformity invisible but to cloud an audience’s perception of the wearer. Gerald Graff describes a similar construct in his essay “Determinacy/Indeterminacy” in which he provides examples of rhetoric that perform similarly. “The phrase ‘it goes without saying’ is the kind of intensifier we conventually use when we wish to indicate that our point is obvious,” he states (Graff 170). Graff observes that phrases like this, after further inquiry, raise questions about themselves, since the linguistic act negates the content of the phrase. Therefore, he deduces that meaning “is finally suspended between the two positions in an indeterminate space” (170). This is what Wallace wants out of his readers of Infinite Jest, in my opinion: the veil and the organization that propagates it eventually signify this sort of indeterminate quality, where meaning becomes suspended without any possibility of significance in changing interpretation. Ihab Hassan, a postmodern theorist, understands postmodern works
as something decidedly indeterminate in comparison to works of modernism. In explicating the hermeneutics of the term, Hassan states that “by indeterminacy…I mean a complex referent that these diverse concepts help to delineate: ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking” (Hassan 593). In a sense, the veil acts as a stand-in for the indeterminacy and posturing associated with works of postmodernism. *Infinite Jest*, as a postmodern novel, is rife with these indeterminacies—the tripartite narrative structure encasing protagonists Hal, Gately, and Marathe never fully resolve over the thousand pages, and many of the subplots echo through the massive section of endnotes. As Wallace transposes the UHID veil onto Marathe, then, the indeterminacy resonates with not only other works in the postmodern vein, but the structure and genre-performance of the novel itself.

The veil, though it informs a reader’s response to Joelle as a character, is also an image. Wallace constructs the tableau of Joelle wildly cleaning her apartment, titrating her crack cocaine, and singeing the selvage of her veil with verbal dexterity and precision, his third-person narrator inhabiting Joelle’s consciousness. Joelle is an image for the reader to behold—an object rather than a subject, though the narrator somewhat inhabits her subjectivity. The veil as an image indicates a certain theoretical proclivity with respect to how others perceive the wearer: the wearer must conceal the desire to conceal. The meta-hiding, which, as I’ve stated before, directs the focus not around itself but instead toward its own constructedness, does not necessarily receive favor from Wallace. The author provides other organizational solutions for addiction and suffering divorced from any of the associative images of the veil. The veil occludes communication by creating distinct groups around it—the UHID and the not—whereas the institutions like Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous delineated in the novel create distinctions only spatially, encouraging direct communication and admittance (and all the tropes inherent in it). Though these organizations seem rife with troubled and disturbing characters—like the coke addled Randy Lenz who strangles feral animals—the organizations provide curative methodologies regarding addiction which the veil and the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed cannot. The veil is visually performative, occluding and isolating the audience from the veiled performer, and this performativity negates
the earnestness and acceptance other twelve-step programs require of their members in the name of squelching toxic dependence. Wallace therefore situates the kind of direct communication of Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous hierarchically above the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed in the narrative in order to expostulate the dangerousness and duplicity inherent in the veil. The veil, ultimately, becomes symptomatic of a larger cultural habit of watching and being watched, of which loneliness is a byproduct.

Works Cited


To Thine Own Self, Be True: Performance and the Animorphs Series

Chris Berry

The ability to capture or duplicate the enormous imagination of a young teenager requires a farfetched idea, usually involving nature’s interaction with the unknown, followed by protagonists faced with seemingly impossible situations. Alleen Pace Nilsen’s Literature for Today’s Young Adults focuses on audience’s fascination not only with science fiction, but the impact of inserting young adults in the realms of the unfamiliar. Nilsen suggests that science fiction is exciting and “allows anyone to read imaginative fiction without feeling the material is kid stuff … (science fiction) presents real heroes to readers who find their own world often devoid of anyone worth admiring, heroes doing something brave, going to the ultimate frontiers,” (174). Nilsen continues the significance of science fiction as a way to keep readers curious intellectually. Her words serve its justice as the boom of young adult literature in the closing of the Twentieth Century gave birth to essential book series: Goosebumps by R. L. Stine, Tales from Dimwood Forest by Avi, Heartland by Lauren Brooke, and Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling. However, the most significant came from the strange idea to combine animals and aliens which launched a fifty-four book series titled Animorphs by K. A. Applegate.

Applegate portrays adolescents contending with the issues of identity, bravery, defiance, survival, and even death. Animorphs introduces science fiction elements which blended aliens, boys, and bad lunch. Five young teenagers have the ability to morph into any animal who’s DNA they acquire through contact. They name themselves the Animorphs and use these powers to fight a secret alien invasion of parasitic aliens named the Yeerks. One of the Animorphs, Rachel, has earned nicknames from her comrades ranging from “Xena: Warrior Princess,” “Ms. Fashion,” and the “Goddess of War” due to her violent and hostile behavior when engaged in alien warfare. Rachel’s intense conduct is preeminent in the concluding book of the “David Trilogy,” Animorphs #22: The Solution, where her quarrels with David, a potential Animorph who eventually betrays the group. Applegate’s insertion of David during the narrative of Rachel to conclude the
trilogy arc shows a more complex focus than earlier stories of the series. Applegate uses David as a figure to exploit Rachel and contest her in ways she’s never experienced. For instance, David serves as a masculine counterpart who ironically represents an unacknowledged mirror image of Rachel. Also, Applegate uses David as a force exposing Rachel’s opposition to traditional gender roles socially as well as the expectations of young women in science fiction novels. *The Solution* frames Rachel as an adolescent opposing young adult science fiction expectations consisting of revelations from the book suggesting her transformation.

Applegate was able to participate in a brief interview with Chloe Williams; a representative of Applegate’s publishing company Scholastic. Applegate explains her motivation for creating the Animorphs as a giant idea produced by many tiny bizarre components. Applegate explains the main creations to a science fiction idea are proposed by questions of “what if?” Applegate states “if they (kids) can say what if, they’ll always be able to think about something to write.” Applegate’s “what if’s” lead to her combination of youths, animals, and aliens. Her ideas also follow the guidelines recommended by Nilsen who writes “there is probably no intellectual quality more important than possessing ‘the powers of if,’” (3). In the science fiction genre, the power of “if” is a leading factor when writing of unusual fantasies outside the reader’s experiences. However, the novels still serve their purpose of reaching out to a younger audience by creating characters in extreme problems. This allows readers to obtain assurance they are not alone when facing seemingly peculiar issues. Applegate believed the *Animorphs* series would allow readers to remain interested in the group’s intergalactic adventures while assisting in maturity during adolescence. Applegate confirms “kids will learn it’s really important to be your own person because you’ll grow into that person, and that’s what makes life so exciting.”

Applegate’s last statement applies to Rachel who exemplifies youth issues of developing into her true character. Jerilyn Fisher’s novel *Women in Literature: Reading Through the Lens of Gender* examines the roles of young women in fiction novels. Fisher emphasizes “the conflict lies in the heart of the female adolescent’s struggle to find a voice that will be acceptable to others and yet reflect her true being,” (96). Rachel struggles with the binds of the identity she is most comfortable with versus the identity others expect which will
earn her admiration. Rachel’s desire to live free introduces a complex characteristic of uncertainty of her personality.

Trends in young adult science fiction show how *The Solution* responds to tropes of the genre. Nilsen supports “during the teenage years, tremendous changes take place – physically, intellectually, and emotionally,” (3). This amplifies the influence of young adult literature, and by incorporating it into science fiction methods, the main idea can be created in a broader range to reach more readers. With the input of aliens, Applegate uses the opportunity to introduce a foreign species to adolescents who feel foreign to the mature world. Nilsen continues stating “authors are almost always more interested in what war does to human than in a mere historic recounting of battles and campaigns and casualties,” (239). Applegate is able to touch on themes of suffering and consistent, daily horrors. This allows her to focus on life and death in the *Animorphs* series, especially *The Solution*. Rachel as a character witnesses these trials of pain such as Tobias’s unfortunate consequence of being trapped in hawk morph since he remained in morph pass the two hour limit.

Although Rachel has her share of war scars, she still serves a purpose as an alternate hero for Applegate. Rachel serves this purpose as a female hero in a majority male series. Suzanne Reid focuses on such ideas in her book *Presenting Young Adult Science Fiction*. Reid writes “the emerging role of women in science fiction has raised challenging issues that have expanded the dimensions of the genre, offering alternate visions of heroism, social relations, and the quest for survival or fulfillment,” (120). The idea of female hero in the youth genre of science fiction was further expanded in books such as *The Solution*. Applegate concentrates more on Rachel’s character development in the series versus the advancement of technology or battle schemes which are viewed more in the male narratives. This is expected, according to Reid, who suggests “women are traditionally more intuitive than logical, more social than intellectual, women were not deemed capable of understanding the technical jargon of science fiction,” (102). These statements have been certified true through young adult science fiction’s history, usually portraying women to the roles of mother or “stay at home” wife. That is mostly due to the fact the genre was dominated by men who designed worlds dominated by men. The addition of women authors such as Applegate allowed young girls of science fiction to have a voice and an impact.
Applegate uses *The Solution* to portray Rachel’s complicated character more vigorously for reader’s early glimpse of her personal views towards herself. Applegate states in the interview “you see the characters grow, and they have to make very tough moral decisions about what’s right and what’s wrong.” Rachel mostly shrugs off this concept earlier in the series as she was mostly coping with the large scale war and remaining in secrecy of her morphing powers. The alien invasion has taken a huge toll on Rachel’s psyche, which is introduced at the beginning of *The Solution* where she narrates “you don’t have anything in size three hundred and twelve … at that moment I caught sight of myself in the mirror and I was in my elephant morph” (Applegate 1-2). The story opens with Rachel having another nightmare and what’s interesting is it incorporates her past and present lifestyles. By combining Rachel’s terrible experience at a department store where her morph creates it difficult to shop, Applegate suggests to readers that Rachel is still struggling with balance in her life. There have been hints throughout the series of Rachel being a former mallrat, but her dedication to resisting the Yeerks has allowed those past times to disappear. Applegate decides to begin the story with Rachel’s inner thoughts versus picking up where *Animorphs #21: The Threat* leaves us. The readers are automatically drawn in with a dream and wonder and this creates tension and confusion since the audience knows Ax has been sent to get Rachel to engage in battle. This opening allows the audience to interpret Rachel’s mind has been becoming more unstable as the war continues on, meaning the confrontation with David that is about to begin will only make matters worse.

Rachel justifies her actions early in the novel as a plan of attack and self-defense. Rachel narrates “if David had hurt Tobias, I would …I knew what I would do. So did Jake. That’s why he’d sent Ax for me” shows her killer instincts early (5). Immediate is a key term for Rachel’s behavior early in the novel as she engages to the battle early. She is displayed as a warrior earlier than before in her previous narratives where tension would build up to lead to her aggressive behavior. The readers are automatically introduced to Rachel’s love interest towards Tobias. Rachel’s attitude correlates with Jerilyn Fisher’s interpretation of adolescent women in fiction. Fisher proposes “a conscious assertion of strength and autonomy in the face of intolerable limitations and unyielding circumstances” (24). In connection, Rachel narrates “<For you, Tobias,> I whispered. And I led David
toward his doom” (33). Rachel justifies her intentions and Fisher supports Rachel’s decision as a necessary method. Fisher’s quote was defending the extreme actions taken by fictional, women characters substituting their common behavior of submissiveness. Fisher feels once placed in dangerous situations, women, young and old, realize dirty deeds, such as murder, are inevitable.

Rachel’s actions also stand parallel with Fisher’s statement “rebellion of female conformity profoundly offended moral sensibilities” (23). The audience learns Rachel is a forceful character, more violently displayed in _The Solution_ than before in the series. Applegate does away with comic relief and persuades the audience to remain on Rachel’s side as the protagonist although her verbal threats such as “I’ll kill you!” I screamed. “I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you,” suggests otherwise (17). Fisher argues “her authentic self is suppressed for the sake of being seen as good and proper” (96). Rachel opposed this idea early in the novel. This is the first account (_The Solution_ is Rachel’s fifth personal narrative) of the audience’s perception of Rachel as truly violent. Rachel’s earlier accounts were slightly aggressive, but she has never made threats of death. Her earlier killings in the series were mostly to accomplish a mission or to survive to fight another day. _The Solution_ introduces early Rachel’s assumed blood thirst may in fact be true accusations. However, these early encounters with David only show Rachel’s actions as harmless, but their first engaged confrontation was minor. David’s mark had already been made, but more with the Animorphs as a whole. Rachel’s narrative gives the reader’s an early interpretation of David from her personal point of view. Applegate asserts her reasoning for deciding to incorporate Rachel in young adult science fiction reminds readers of her duel lifestyle.

Applegate uses _The Solution_ to remind audience of Rachel’s involvement in daily activities. Applegate’s focus of Rachel’s combat behavior does not simply end with her first one-on-one fight with David. Before the conflict escalates, Applegate thrusts readers into the Animorphs’ attempts to remain “normal.” Rachel narrates, “It had been a bizarre night. But the most bizarre thing was that when it was all over, we had to go to school. That’s right, school. On zero hours of sleep” (39). Rachel’s statement sets up readers for her abrupt lifestyle. School has been a consistent structure throughout the series, but _The Solution_ shows school as a danger zone. Normally, school is a reluctant escape from their fight with the Yeerks. Although there
were Yeerk Controllers at their school, it is more of a haven than a symbol of oppression. Just as the dream in the first pages of the novel, readers learn Rachel’s lifestyles clash wherever she goes. In addition, readers learn Rachel is due for many interruptions with David and readers are introduced to why the Animorphs themselves are dangerous. David is able to presume the figure of any student, in this case Marco, and harass Rachel even more. However, the lunch scene at school is Applegate’s opportunity to shift the story into a more personal conflict between David and Rachel. Rachel narrates “I couldn’t morph, not there in front of a whole cafeteria full of yelling, laughing, talking kids. But I could reach for my fork. And I could wonder what the tines would do if they were driven hard enough” (42). Applegate begins to suggest Rachel and David are engaged in more than an internal conflict amongst Animorphs. Unlike earlier, there was no necessary action of attack or defense as David only appears in the cafeteria to make negotiations for the morphing cube. In addition, unlike the earlier pages, Rachel is not placed in a “kill or be killed” situation. Her intentions infer she has a personal vendetta with David. Rachel’s personal war with David serves as a conflict which allows her to eventually witness her internal conflict.

Rachel shows opposition to gender expectations in young adult science fiction as her quarrels with David become more intense. David originally attacks Rachel as he expects her to be more submissive and less of a threat. Kay E. Payne’s book Different but Equal: Communication between the Sexes examines the opposite perceptions of men towards women and vice versa. Payne imposes “the social rules for women help them establish a nonthreatening persona when in the company of others” (132). Since David betrays the Animorphs almost immediately after introduction as a member, he was never able to learn of Rachel’s true nature as the aggressor of the group. Applegate uses David as a symbol of most male minds when facing a woman. David’s original thought of Rachel amplifies when David meets with the Animorphs at Taco Bell to negotiate possessing the morphing cube. Rachel narrates, “my role was to seem chastised, beaten down. Defeated and humiliated. That’s what we figured he’d want. That’s what would make him happy” (127). Applegate shows Rachel is aware of the expectations of not only David, but the vast majority of males. Applegate uses this scene as a tool to embrace expectations of young adolescent girls. Jake is even used a symbol of men’s beliefs of girls
being weak stating, “I always thought there was a coward hiding deep down inside all that tough talk of yours” (129).

David and Jake in this case, follow Payne’s proposal of male characters as the dominant force. Payne offers, “men’s language is characterized as using more dominating speech, forcefulness, aggressiveness, and bluntness” (106). The scene at Taco Bell allowed Applegate to create a sense of male dominance, an approach not taken before in the series until The Solution. Applegate elaborates on this new concept by reveals a weaker indication where Rachel narrates, “I did something I don’t do much. I started to cry” (129). Although this shows the Animorphs using David’s ego and masculinity against him, Applegate displays a sense of knowledge towards expectations. If readers were new to the Animorphs series, this scene would not serve any significance. The general audience would expect meek actions of a young adolescent girl after two masculine characters scold her. However, the scene shows David’s confidence as a male figure in comparison with Rachel.

Fisher argues, “Like Eve, they (women) are villainous, tempting, and corrupt, often responsible for the downfall of men” (124). David does not specifically believe Rachel as an Eve-like figure, but Fisher’s statement connects with David as he learns Rachel is the most dangerous of the Animorphs. The female depiction of literature remains consistent for males who are not pursuing the female antagonist romantically to view them as obstacles. David becomes aware of Rachel’s personality in a significant scene firsthand during his confrontation with Rachel during lunch hours at school. David states “you know, maybe you forget this sometimes, but you are a girl, Rachel” (45). David is not only cocky, but he’s confident of a sure victory against the Animorphs, Rachel in particular. However, his impression of Rachel shifts when she threatens:

“Even if we were warned, we wouldn’t last long.” I leaned close, close enough to whisper in his ear. “But some of us would last a while, you little creep. Long enough to make sure that your parents … well, use your imagination.” … I grabbed his head with one arm and jammed the fork against his ear. “You want a war between you and us, that’s one thing. We’ll play that out,” I said. “But you try and sell us out to Visser Three, and your little family will never get put back together again. Never!” (46).
This scene serves Applegate’s purpose of creating a character such as Rachel. Also, this statement opposes Payne’s statement of only males speaking forcefully as he insists “we stereotypically expect men to use more intense language … we stereotypically expect women to use less intense language, often describing them as passive or assertive” (103). Rachel embodies less female qualities as the novel progresses and is shown as more masculine. Applegate uses David’s interaction with Rachel as a challenge of gender behavior. David was originally a counter to Rachel but it turns out he mirrors Rachel. As mentioned by Fisher and Payne, an opposing threat towards a masculine force creates advanced tensions. These accusations are true, but Applegate is able to use these claims as ways of Rachel and David virtually representing one another. After Rachel’s threat, David makes a similar proposal saying “I’m sending you a message, Rachel. See, I know where you live, Rachel. That’s my message. You want to threaten me? I know where you live” (95). Rachel and David resemble each other through their threats and also through their speech. Applegate is also able to illustrate their similarities through animal morphs as they both inherit an eagle morph, the largest of the birds of prey. Also, David’s lion morph and Rachel’s grizzly bear morph are the two most powerful of the Animorphs. However, David’s entry to the series is not permanent. Rather than allow him to join the Animorphs and serve as an addition to the Yeerk resistance, Applegate makes David a temporary character and a traitor. In comparison, Rachel and David possess similarities, but Applegate is not suggesting either as feminine characters, nor is she questioning Rachel’s loyalty. However, Applegate suggests there is an evil side to Rachel similar to David’s, a concept never introduced to the series and also dismissed by Rachel earlier in the novel.

Through her constant battles with David, Rachel begins to become aware of her sinister behavior. Applegate’s interview featured her words “they (the Animorphs) have to really learn to be true to themselves … to thine own self be true.” Rachel begins a transformation and not for improvement, but more towards enlightenment. Her quarrels with David along with the Yeerk invasion creates a self-realization of Rachel never declared until The Solution. Nilsen suggests “war literature serves to acquaint young people with some of war’s horrors and how easily people forget, or ignore, their humanity in the midst of war … war books center on physical and psychological suffering”
To Thine Own Self, Be True

(239). As the audience was introduced early in the novel, Rachel had a passion for fashion, the complete opposite of her newfound joy for war. Applegate displays the war affecting Rachel more severe than the other Animorphs. Rachel narrates:

I kept wondering: Had I always been like this? Back before the Animorphs, back before that encounter with a dying alien who changed our lives, who had I been? I tried to remember, but it wasn’t like I was thinking about myself. It was like I was remembering some girl I used to know. Like she was an acquaintance I’d forgotten about until someone reminded me. It was like, “Oh, yeah, Rachel. I remember her.” I’d been very into gymnastics, I knew that. Shopping. I guess I’d never exactly been a happy-go-lucky party girl. But I tried to imagine myself back then, and tried to imagine grinding the tines of a fork into someone’s ear while I threatened his family … What made me feel stupid was that I hadn’t realized I was changing. But everyone else obviously did. Jake did. When he knew it was coming down to kill-or-be-killed with David, he’d sent Ax to get me. Not Marco. Not Cassie. “Get Rachel.” (49-50).

The series did not feature any of the other Animorphs reflecting on their past in the process Rachel has. The others focused on the future and triumph, but Rachel was more concentrated on her own demons. She was conflicted by convincing herself she lived a normal adolescent life before the invasion. However, Rachel does not declare regret. She does not blatantly admit to a total enjoyment for war, but she does acknowledge her sudden change. Rachel finally recognizes her own transformation versus earlier where most of her actions seemed justified. Applegate was able to use Rachel as a symbol of an adolescent going through enlightenment at such a young age. As the Animorphs trap David in the morph of a rat, which he will remain until his death, Rachel says “it won’t bother me. It will bother you guys”(149). Applegate uses this line as a definitive moment of awakening Rachel as she sacrifices her morality for the sake of everyone else maintaining a somewhat cleaner image. Each Animorph had an involvement of David’s “death,” but only Rachel accepts responsibility of carrying David away from civilization. It is a noble gesture by Rachel, but it also shows Applegate’s suggestion that Rachel’s
sense of morality has declined further than it did earlier in the novel. However, Rachel’s sadistic nature inclines throughout the series, but *The Solution* sparks the beginning of Rachel as a wicked character.

Applegate also engages the other Animorph’s recognition of Rachel’s new, sadistic personality. Jake states “Rachel, I think there’s something pretty dark down inside you. I think you’re the only one of us who would be disappointed if all this ended tomorrow … this war is to you like booze is to an alcoholic” (111-112). Applegate uses a strong analogy in Jake’s proclamation of Rachel’s desire for war. Metaphorically, an alcoholic cannot live without alcoholic beverages, meaning Applegate believes Rachel cannot live without war. Applegate uses an effective analogy which ironically is foreshadowing towards the end of the series.

*The Animorphs* series made a huge impact during the late 1990s as a new young adult science fiction phenomenon. Applegate was able to make an entire series focusing on the effects of warfare on a group of kids. She was able to eliminate the distractions of logic by making *The Animorphs* a science fiction series, which allows her to use creative imaginations to gather attention and interest from adolescents, but she was also able to get her point across of finding truth to identity. Applegate made an impact by incorporating complex themes of morals, regret, and survival in young adult novels. Applegate’s strongest, more complex character was Rachel, the most aggressive and most thrill-seeking of the Animorphs. Although her eager spirit was mentioned periodically early in the series, *The Solution* was the most essential for readers to really grasp Rachel’s authentic behavior. Applegate was able to introduce Rachel’s dark psyche by integrating David’s character as an Animorph attempting to assert dominance by overtaking the Animorph’s most hostile character. Applegate was able to connect gender roles and genre expectations of science fiction while also giving readers a lesson of true identity. *The Solution* allows Applegate to challenge gender role expectations by suggesting Rachel’s character as an example of difficult encounters adolescents face.

**Works Cited**

Suzanne Collins’ Transcendentalism: Reflection, Rebellion, and Restructure of Twenty-First Century America’s Sociocultural Landscape in The Hunger Games

Valerie Yearta

Present your bodies a living sacrifice[...] be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind[...] For as we have one body, and all members have not the same office: so we being many, are one body in Christ and every one members one of another[...] be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate[...] overcome evil with good.

—Apostle Paul, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, The Holy Bible King James Version

Many scholars credit mid-nineteenth century American philosopher and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson with inscribing what fundamentally defines American ideology, through his scholarly works and Transcendental philosophies. His foundational texts lay out the basic tenets of American Transcendentalism which valorize such ideals as self-reliance, individualism, anti-institutionalism, imagination, intuition over reason, and the spiritual sublime. In his “Nature” essay, Emerson proposes an individual accesses a heightened state of intuition through meditation and time spent alone communing with nature, the locus where an individual “may return to reason and faith” (Emerson 1112). He asserts, “To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun [...] the sun illuminates only the eye of man, but shines into the eye and heart of a child [...] in the woods is perpetual youth” (Emerson 1112). In order to suggest the possibility of and proclaim his own transcendent moments within nature, he surmises, “I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me: I
am part or particle of God” (Emerson 1112). Later in his “The American Scholar” essay, Emerson expresses concern for his nineteenth century peers as he labels them “mere thinker[s]” living in a “state of society […] in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man” (Emerson 1139). He urges them to “study nature” in order to “know thyself” (Emerson 1140) and apprehend the “Unity of Nature—the Unity of Variety” (Emerson 1124). According to him, this unity with a capital “U” acts in unison with the “Over-Soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart” (Emerson, “The Over-Soul”). He even encourages his audience to draw upon “the mind of the Past” (Emerson 1140), a once “active” and “divine[ly]” inspired “soul,” as a means to “create” a new “flame” (Emerson 1141) for the present “age” (Emerson 1140). These Emersonian philosophies still resonate profoundly within today’s culture.

Over one hundred and fifty years after Emerson’s essays, literary critic Harold Bloom acts as contemporary American culture’s “eye” as he reflects back on Emerson’s Transcendental philosophy. In his article “Reflections in the Evening Land,” Bloom declares Emerson’s self-reliance “the authentic American religion” (Bloom 4). He points to twenty first century America’s polarized division in polity and asserts America is on a path towards “national self-destructiveness” and “is too dangerous to be laughed away” (Bloom 4). With a sense of urgency, Bloom petitions his American readers to return to Emerson’s ideals, in order to restore a sense of unity within the socially fragmented United States. He calls out to America’s “most powerful writers” and challenges them to “imaginative[ly]” create a “comprehension” (Bloom 4) embodying Emersonian doctrines, as a means to awaken “the world with new eyes” (Emerson 1137).

Published two years after Bloom’s article, through her post-apocalyptic novel The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins appeals to the historical and traditional conventions of her audience’s past, and carefully implements the rhetorical ideals of American Transcendentalism as an overall framework for the text. When questioned in an interview, Suzanne Collins’ response alludes to this idea, as she replies, “Yes. The sociopolitical overtones of The Hunger Games were very intentionally created to characterize current and past world events […] as well as the nearly complete elimination of the rights of
the individual” (Blasingame 726). Notably, most of Collins’ creative career prior to publishing *The Hunger Games* encompassed writing scripts and screen plays. As a result, her previous writing experience structuring performance within scripts and media well equipped her for the ability to implant and personify Transcendental beliefs within the diction and characters of her novel. Through consciously selected frames, Collins manipulates her audience and utilizes the Young Adult Genre as a means to foster her reader’s insightful growth alongside that of her protagonist Katniss. In her article “Young Adult Literature: Rite of Passage or Rite of Its Own,” Katherine Proukou clarifies this notion as she explains, “The choice of a young protagonist in a literary work allows the author to stake claim to the archetypal function the motif provides, to awaken within the collective unconscious of readers the wonder of the potentialities and prophetic warning the conscious mind has slept away, forgotten or failed to dream” (Prokou 62-63). Through Katniss’ progressive growth and displays of the before mentioned Transcendental traits, Collins reminds her readers of a seemingly almost forgotten philosophical foundation. However, Katniss’ proactive measures enacted independently leave her limited in her efforts. In order for a lasting change to occur, she must join with and at times depend upon others throughout her undertakings. Collins’ post-apocalyptic setting, coupled with Katniss’s transitioning growth stages developed through the reframing of her indirect and direct alliances with agrarian culture, provides a lens for Collins to subversively expose the fragmented nature of modern day American society. This exposure then enables her to proffer a resolution through a revamped American Transcendental ideology, one of individual empowerment carried out through the actions of a collective whole.

At the outset of the novel, Collins establishes her protagonist Katniss as a self-reliant Transcendental individual, through her ability to vacillate between the two highly juxtaposed setting frames of the “the woods” (Collins 5) and the Capitol’s District Twelve. The two frames serve to illustrate the culturally fragmented and clashing ideologies in the regressive dystopian Panem, America futuristically reimagined. For Katniss, the woods that lie just opposite a “high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire,” serve as a secret sanctum, yet dangerous space. In the woods, Katniss portrays a Biblical Adam-like quality in her ease of movement through and her oneness with nature as she reveals such moments as when a “crazy lynx started following [her]
around looking for handouts” that she reluctantly “had to kill” because “he scared off game” (Collins 7). Her repeated use of the personal pronoun “he” in addressing and anthropomorphizing the lynx with “almost regretted it because he wasn’t bad company” (Collins 7), displays the interconnectedness between the transcendent individual and his or her relationship with nature. Emerson defines this notion in his “Nature” essay, “In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature […] the suggestion of and occult relation […] (Emerson 1113). Katniss’ communion with the animal contrasts sharply with the Capitol’s labeling the wildlife outside the fence as “flesh-eaters” and “predators” that “roam freely” and “used to threaten our streets” (Collins 4-5). Also, “trespassing in the woods is illegal” and getting caught outside of District Twelve poses the threat of death by public execution for anyone who dares to try (Collins 5). Katniss’ risky romps enable her to foster a sense of autonomy free from the confines of the Capitol’s oppression and gain a new perspective towards living life. Over time, Katniss’ experiences in the woods serve as a mirror and enlighten her to the bleak realities of life inside the confines of her district Twelve. As Emerson explains, “Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position apprizes us of a dualism. […] The least change in our point of view, gives the whole pictoral air” (Emerson, 1127). Also, Collins fronts the novel with Katniss’ initial transcendental behaviors in order to place emphasis on and allow the audience an immediate view of Katniss’ emerging self-reliance. Through Katniss’ reflective memories of her relationship with her father, the reader begins to understand the influences of Katniss’ history that equipped her to venture there in the first place.

The familial alliance between Katniss and her father permits her initial access to the woods, where she learns and begins to display her Transcendental self-reliant nature. The novel begins by alluding to Katniss’ embodiment of both feminine and masculine characteristics. The very first paragraph points to her feminine nurturing aspect as she worries over her sister Prim and desires to console away the fears festered by Prim anxiousness over the impending annual reaping ceremony perpetrated upon them by the Capitol. In contrast, Katniss begins to costume herself with masculinity as she “slide[s] into [her] hunting boots” and “pull[s] on her trousers” while tucking her “long
dark braid up into a cap,” an act to conceal her femininity, in preparation for her hunt (Collins 4). Emerson explains this Transcendental androgynous manifestation as he expresses, “In fact the eye,—the mind,—is always accompanied by these forms, male and female; and these are incomparably the richest informations of the power and order that lie at the heart of things” (Emerson 1126). While in the realm of the woods, Katniss’s first alliance against the Capitol initiates with her father, who provides her with the “rarity” of a “bow” and “sheath of arrows” and the skill to effectively use them (Collins 5). Possession of these items prompts the risk of Katniss being “publicly executed” as well as accusations of “inciting a rebellion” among the people of her district (Collins 5). Her father not only provides her with the necessary equipment to survive and models taking risks, he also equips her with the powerful knowledge of self-sustaining trade and commerce. His trading and selling game from their hunting excursions allows her family to not only survive, but also not only depend solely on Panem’s government for all their provision as well. After Katniss’ father dies, she assumes his role as sustainer and provider for the family. Her proactive behavior and ability to hunt exhibits what Transcendental essayist Thoreau regarded as “a great virtue to obtain,” in other words, to sustain one’s own needs without exorbitant expense, but by means of one’s own efforts (Thoreau 1865). Influenced by her father’s teachings and companionship, Katniss performs as a Transcendental self-reliant individual as she operates with an enlightened and autonomous sense of self, following in his manner. Her newfound knowledge and access to “the woods” positions her for an encounter with Gale, with whom she trades goods and stories, as well as openly dreams of “rebellion” against the Capitol.

Within the setting of the woods, Collins aligns Katniss in an alliance with Gale, an adolescent male from her district, in order to illustrate a formative union that develops out of means of necessity. Through Katniss’ flashbacks, the audience gains insight to the beginning of her relationship with Gale. Interestingly, Collins frames Katniss and Gale’s first meeting in the woods as a relationship that initiates “grudgingly,” even they exchange knowledge of hunting skills, as well as swap goods such as the prey they secure for food (Collins 111). After sharing the common bond of providing for their families and taking the risks to do so, they eventually develop as a “team” (Collins 111). Their meeting in the first chapter of the novel
reinforces this idea. Right before the reaping, Collins situates Katniss and Gale in the essence of a communion ceremony. They each bring symbolic food items that they exchange in a ritualistic manner and enjoy eating together. Gale offers warm bread that he shoots with one of her arrows, a foreshadowing of her ultimate union with the bread maker Peeta. Whereas, she provides goat cheese wrapped in basil, a gift from her sister Prim. Intriguingly, basil is commonly “associated with the Feast of the Cross” as well as “noted that those stung by scorpions will feel no pain” (“Basil”). Collins uses the diction in describing the communion event to foster her audience’s awareness of the resulting vitality brought on by this performance of Katniss and Gale, as it incorporates such words as “puncture,” “inhaling,” “real,” “plucks,” “break,” and “explodes” (Collins 7-8). Their ceremonial exchange represents two distinct individuals joining together and arriving at a negotiated and agreeable position. The exchange occurs within a liminal space and signifies their arrival at common bond, negotiated interchange, and in a sense, this reframes or redefines an individual’s original viewpoint, due to the compromise that takes place in the moment.

Furthermore, Collins utilizes Katniss and Gale’s exchanges to point out the positive effects that result from communion exchanges between individuals. Their repeated acts of trade that take place within the woods allow the reader a voyeuristic view towards the positive results of an intimate relationship between persons. Katniss and Gale’s relationship exhibits a genuine attachment and friendship as she refers to him as “the only person with whom [she] can be [her]self” (Collins 6). His nicknaming her “Catnip” and being the only one to witness her “smil[ing] in the woods, further connotes this idea (Collins 6). This “happy” (Collins 112) union with Gale alludes to the transcendental ideal of living a “simple” (Thoreau 1879) life, one satisfied with basic needs and genuine relationships. However, Collins uses Katniss’ passive refusal to “run off” and “live in the woods” with Gale to point to a deeper underlying issue within the text. Shortly after Gale asks her to run away with him, Collins’ readers gain immediate insight towards an internal struggle going on within Katniss. She thoughtfully perceives something amiss as she thinks to herself, “the conversation feels all wrong” and that their relationship is not “romantic” (Collins 10). She then thinks about the care of their families, and even reminds the reader of the initial formulation
of their relationship being founded out of necessity. She asserts, “It took a long time for us to even become friends, to stop haggling over every trade and begin helping each other out” (Collins 10).

Katniss’ responses to Gale in these moments point to her developing intuitive Transcendental nature. Before Katniss leaves her district for the games, his advice for her to see the other tributes as just prey she “hunt[s]” in the arena and dehumanizing the other tributes greatly disturbs her. She connotes this in her response, “The awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different at all” (Collins 40). However, Collins does not intend for her audience to read Gale as evil. She affirms this through his last words to her as he promises to care for Katniss’ family while she is away. Furthermore, Katniss often hears his voice while competing in the arena. At times his voice serves as her motivator, and at other times, she pushes it out of her conscious. In these moments, Collins reveals Katniss’ likeness to Gale, thus the reason for their communion ritual. Her repression of his voice connotes her need to further develop a “dualistic” nature, as before mention. Also, these moments of her internal tension illuminate Katniss’ development of a collective conscious, an awareness of all, as well as her growing transition from Katniss the “I” into an Emersonian “eye.” Moreover, her shift in thinking once again creates a reframe for the audience as well. In order for Katniss to continue towards Collins ideal self-reliant individual, she must align with someone like Peeta, thus the reason for her not feeling right about fleeing to the woods with Gale or mindlessly killing other tributes. Her character’s individualist actions culminated with her early alliances’ remaining outside the district’s fence, highlights the relegating effects of a group differing from a majority under an imbalanced power structure, thus the reason for her literal change in the novel’s setting from District Twelve to the Capitol. She must travel away from the comfort zone of the woods and deeper within Panem, in order to grow into a full potential of self, who not only acknowledges the wrongs of her government, but takes action towards progressive change. Through Katniss’s early alliances, the novel illuminates the Transcendentalist individual’s need to actively participate within a group in order to model for Collins’ audience the ideal relational structure necessary for a balanced cultural community to occur.

Early on in The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins carefully posits the dandelion as a metaphor to subtly point towards Katniss’ indi-
vidual empowerment carried out proactively through a collective agency. A memory: One Spring afternoon filled with “warm sweet air” Katniss collects her sister Prim after school and begins to head home. She spots the first dandelion of the year. Suddenly, a “bell” goes off in her “head,” thinking back to the “hours spent in the woods with [her] father.” She knows how her family will “survive” (Collins 32). Interestingly, the dandelion plant frequently serves as a curative source in naturopathic medicine. A single flowering head often holds as much as two-hundred seeds. Each fragile dandelion seed disperses via “an umbrella-like, plumose crown of hairs” and parachutes with the “slightest gust of wind”, literally “sailing across valleys and mountain ranges” (Armstrong, “Blowing in the Wind”). Collins’ young adult heroine Katniss, not only functions as the “girl” on “fire” (Collins 70) and the “mockingjay” against the Capitol of Panem, but also, in a sense, performs as the dandelion of the text. In his nature essay, Emerson explains this relationship between an individual and nature, “Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other’s hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seed” (Emerson 1113). As Katniss leaves her humble District 12, travels throughout Panem, and lands in the Capitol’s arena, she carries with her a message of hope and implants the power of individual will as she performs in the games for the people of Panem.

The Capitol’s setting highlights the novel’s concern for the negating effects of unimpeded consumerism upon the individual and society, as well as to postulate the reimagined Transcendental individual’s need to align with a group proactively working towards equalizing the balance of powers within the social structure. After the Reaping, Katniss finds herself removed from the familiarity of her home. Unlike the “team” (Collins 111) formed in her “savior” (Collins 51) woods, she finds herself forced into a group dictated to her under the Capitol’s totalitarian authority. Most members of her “prep team” (Collins 63) and Capitol citizens literally embody the negated effects of hyper-consumerism upon the individual as the novel negatively portrays them as “grotesque” (Collins 63) and in a sense wearing “false skin” (Thoreau 1884), due to the unnatural alterations to their bodies such as “dye[s],” “stencils,” (Collins 63) and “surgery to appear” younger, thinner, and without wrinkles (Collins 124), which suggest the Capitol’s literal inscription written upon them. She further emphasizes this
idea as she describes her prep team who only see her body, hinting at their lack of insight, and her own “hopping around like some trained dog” (Collins 177). These images illustrate what Transcendentalist Emerson calls, “mere think[ing]” (Emerson 1139). The Capitol’s perceivably harmful morality reveals their “spiritual and intellectual poverty” (Newman 527), and Katniss’s firsthand experience in its oversaturated materialistic culture enlightens her to its total depravity towards the human spirit and disregard for life, thus the reason for her rage over “being upstaged by a dead pig” (Collins 101). She wanted the Gamemakers to see her as an individual, not how she functions for their amusement.

However, while in the heart of Panem, Peeta, her accompanying District 12 tribute, stands in sharp contrast to the Capitol and its occupants, as he provides her with “a flicker of hope” and “holds her hand” during the opening ceremony (Collins 70). Interestingly, Collins establishes Peeta as the Transcendant self-reliant individual and his alliance with Katniss early on in the novel, as he deliberately defies his mother and knowingly receives a harsh punishment in order to give Katniss bread to keep her from starving. Katniss explains, “to this day, I can never shake the connection to this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the dandelion that reminded me I was not doomed” (Collins 32). His very occupation of baking bread, taking the fruits of District Eleven and creating sustenance for the people, alludes to his already established alliance with them and implies the Transcendentalist ideal of “absolute goodness…that will leaven the whole lump,” the necessary human substance to change the ills of society (Thoreau 1860). Later on as Katniss internalizes during the setting with the Capitol’s Avox servant girl, she confirms this as she expresses, “You don’t forget the face of the person who was your last hope” (Collins 85). Later on in the story as Peeta and Katniss spend time alone on the rooftop, Collins seizes this moment in the text to clarify her ultimate desired effect upon her audience as individuals through Peeta’s self-reliant assertion, “I want to die as myself […] I don’t want them to change me into some kind of monster that I’m not […] Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to…to show the Capitol they don’t own me. That I am more than just a piece in their Games” (Collins 142). This idea causes Katniss to feel guilty for not thinking in this same manner as well as remains somewhat of a mystery in her mind, until after District Eleven Rue’s
death. Unfortunately, a complete unity between Katniss and Peeta must remain undeveloped until after she experiences a transcendent alliance with District Eleven through its tributes in the arena, which establish her as the Transcendentalist individual in an ideally natural and spontaneous union.

Collins’ positioning Katniss in the arena not only permits her to promote an ideal of a mature self-reliant individual, but also to suggest a heightened empowerment of the individual through a proactive ideal alignment with a transcendent collective agency as a means to create a balance of power within her disjointed society. Katniss’s initial performance in the arena positively displays the transcendent self-determined individual’s actions as she intuitively plans and solely overcomes every challenge she encounters. However, during the instance inside the arena when Katniss saws the tree limb in order to drop the tracker-jacker nest onto the career tributes, she also gets stung in the process, which leaves her debilitated and in need of assistance. Her immediate need ushers in her very reluctant union with District Eleven’s tribute Rue who heals Katniss’s unnatural sting with her medicinal plants. Katniss’s alliance with Rue metaphorically aligns her with nature itself within the artificially created arena that symbolizes the ultimate perversion of nature. Interestingly, Rue’s district serves as the agricultural state of Panem and produces all of their food and sustenance. This situation positions them to reveal what literary critic Lance Newman describes as an “imposition of the unnatural institution of civilization” (530) where independent yeomanry produce for their own use and that of parasitic merchants and bureaucrats who profit from the needs of others (529). Collins’ districts of Panem display Newman’s very statement. As Katniss describes her own district in the first chapter of the novel, “District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety” (Collins 6). Later on, Rue expresses the same sentiments as she explains to Katniss about the control of food in her own district, “Oh, no, we’re not allowed to eat the crops […] They whip you and make everyone else watch” (Collins 202). This shared conversation causes Katniss to not just view her own district as strictly the most impoverished of all Panem, but more as a “safe haven” (Collins 204), due to the Capitol’s “ignor[ing]” (Collins203) them. In turn, their ignoring allows her more freedom, such as displayed in her ventures across the fence’s boundaries into her own “rejuvenating” woods (Collins 152). Katniss’ and Rue’s produc-
ing districts stand in sharp contrast to that of Panem’s Capitol where excessive amounts of food and gluttony abounds.

Not only does Katniss’s alignment with Rue position her with nature, it also invokes a sense of unity with the “Divine” (Emerson 1151) as Rue’s character maintains a literal elevated position in the treetops. In a sense, Rue also portrays Emerson’s “Poet” (1181) who acts as the “world’s eye” (1145) as she “knows and tells” (1183) Katniss her observations of the other tributes’ activities and teaches her about the botany in the arena. Their exchange of food, knowledge, and stories serves as subversive acts against the Capitol’s notion “want[ing] people in different districts to know about one another” (Collins 203). This sharing signifies a “natural, spontaneous human community” (Newman 534) and exhibits “look[ing] through each other’s eye’s for an instant” (Thoreau 1877). Katniss’s alliance with Rue positions the novel to offer an “ethical regeneration” (Newman 527) for a society through a “moraliz[ed] labor, transforming it into an activity that develops spiritual integrity and character in its own right” (Newman 529). Also, it encourages society to “rediscover the lineaments of human nature, which are located in a precivil state of nature” (Newman 530) as in the manner found within an agrarian culture, like Rue’s. Therefore, this reinforces the reason for Rue’s ability to give Katniss the voice of the mocking jay, her ultimate title. Rue’s death metaphorically connotes Katniss’s losing this pure and healthy sense of exchange between self and culture, definitively, a Utopia. Katniss’s natural response to mourn and unselfishly honor Rue shows her deliberate “rage against the [Capitol’s] machine” (Thoreau 1863) and solidifies her alliance with District Eleven, thus initiating the spark of rebellion with them as well as displaying the model for all of Panem’s voyeuristic viewers to see. Katniss’s combining the lullaby from her district with the flowers (most likely propagated seeds from Rue’s for the arena) figuratively blurs the boundaries between the two districts that the Capitol worked so hard to keep separate. Rue’s last words, “you have to win,” (Collins 233) not only determine Katniss to “do something” (Thoreau 1863) and make Rue’s death have purpose by winning the game, but also align her to join Peeta in the ideal alliance destined to her all along, but equipped with the insight from her friendship with Rue. However, Collins effectively leaves her waiting for her special union with Peeta until District Eleven as a group and its last standing tribute in the arena joins her as well.
District Eleven’s radical gifting of bread, a significant sacrifice on their part, coupled with Thresh’s decision not to kill Katniss at the feast in the arena confirms their allegiance and reinforces the Transcendentalist idea that the “force of a single living” (Thoreau 1857) person impacts change through his/her proactive efforts (Thoreau 1857). District Eleven’s history making moment in the Games by sending Katniss bread, further illustrates the blurring of boundaries as before mention in the exchanges between Rue and Katniss. In an indirect manner, Katniss partakes in a communion ceremony with District Eleven as she acknowledges their gift and creates a communal bond with them by eating the sustaining bread they send to her. In “Walden, or Life in the Woods,” Transcendental philosopher Henry David Thoreau places emphasis on his removing himself, for the most part, from the society around him, in order to resist and get away from the overtly materialistic focus of his day. He explains, “I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself […] by the labor of my hands only” (Thoreau 1872). Essentially, District Eleven’s tribute Thresh portrays a Threauvian figure as he remains alone, yet well-nourished and strong. Throughout the Games, he refuses to form alliances and doesn’t even stay with Rue in the arena. He separates himself completely from the other tributes and runs to the wheat field of the arena and hides (his Walden). As Katniss notes, he’s the only tribute that appears to remain healthy and strong throughout time spent in the arena. Like Thoreau, Thresh removes himself from Capitol’s ultimate display of materialism, the perversion of sacrificing human children as an entertainment commodity. Furthermore, his vacillation in and out of view during the Cornucopia setting points to the novel’s presenting Katniss’ as an embodiment of goodness, due to her helping Rue and his acknowledgement of it, by choosing to not kill Katniss. He could have easily killed both Katniss and Clove at that moment and moved one step closer towards winning the Games. However, he instead refused to participate in the Capitol’s expected manner. Most intriguingly, his death never gets fully explained in the novel, only alluded to. Katniss assumes he falls victim to one of the naturally simulated thunderstorms in the arena, maybe a decisive death by the Capitol because his refusal to play the game on their terms. His independent nature and lack of connection with Panem’s viewing audience made it easier for the game makers to dispose of him. In turn, this serves
as warning for the citizens and tributes of the Capitol to heed their totalitarian power or suffer the consequences, a display of the Thoreau “machine[’s]” ultimate act (Thoreau 1863). For Collins’ audience, Thresh’s death reminds them resistance and revolution often results in some type of sacrifice. Ultimately, Thresh’s character displays the self-reliant individual as good, like Katniss, but not enough. Collins’ text implies self-reliant individuals must take action like her character Rue, within the actions of a collective group.

The novel strategically aligns Katniss and Peeta together in the arena in order to propose a resolution through an ideal symbiotic relationship between self-reliant individuals and suggests proactive change within the reimagined post-apocalyptic American cultural landscape. Peeta continually sacrifices himself for Katniss and essentially serves as Katniss’s mirror encouraging her to act towards the good of others, not just for the survival of herself. However, it takes Rue’s death to bring this idea into full fruition. In a sense, Katniss becomes like him when she finds him in the mud, his literal connection to the earth/nature, and purposes to save him. Their interdependent relationship to survive challenges the reader to also move beyond selfish desires and consider the wellbeing of others, and in turn, illuminates that the benefits of all involved and results in a greater satisfaction of the individual soul as well. Katniss’s and Peeta’s natural union in the unnatural arena serves as a mirror for Panem’s controlling power structure and all its citizens. As an individual, much like Rue, Peeta embodies the spirit of the “complete man of beauty” (Emerson 1181), in whom “the powers are in balance” (Emerson 1182), and he holds Katniss “steady to truth” (Emerson 1184), thus the reason for her finding him literally hiding in the earth, safely camouflaged in his “artist[ry]” (Emerson 1182). Self-reliant Katniss embodies Thoreau’s “agent” willing to “break the law” (1863). Alone, they appear strong, but united they are unstoppable. Near the end of the novel, their subversively transgressive communion act of deciding to risk death for both of them and possibly leaving the Capitol without a winning tribute by eating the poisonous berries together, places them in a dialectical union acting as the “one soul which animates all men” (Emerson 1148). Their participation communion presents a natural transcendent relationship built on their devotion to the highest ideal displayed in the text. The Capitol remains powerless in owning Katniss and Gale’s soul or spirit, even though they maintain control.
of their bodies as well as all the inter-workings within Panem. Additionally, their union promotes a collective agency’s ability to invoke change, as the plots of the later novels in the trilogy display.

Just as Katniss’s dandelion metaphor, Collins Hunger Games conveys the message that self-reliant individuals proactively working within a cooperative agency using Transcendental ideals can ultimately create a balance within a disjointed social power structure. Collins effectively asserts these ideals through the adolescent characters within her Young Adult dystopian text. As literary critic Katherine Proukou notes as she quotes psychologist Carl Jung in her essay, “The child is potential future [… ] it is a symbol-tradition which unites opposites; a mediator, a bringer of healing, that is one who makes whole” (Proukou 63). Collins’ approach serves to encourage her modern American culture to examine their own conscious acts with relation to others as well as their role as consumers within society. She effectively points to the negating ills upon society as a result of unimpeded consumerism through the imagery of the Capitol’s citizens and the very idea of the games itself. Her valorizing the self-reliant individual’s transcendent actions encourages her audience to look within to discover their own living with purpose as opposed to the mundane reinforcement within the “machine” (Thoreau 1863). However, her portrayal of Peeta’s and Katniss’s symbiotic relationship affirms a greater empowerment to progressive change occurring through a collective agency that values humanity and works towards a common goal.

Works Cited


Proukou, Katherine. “Young Adult Literature: Rite of Passage or Rite of Its Own.” *The ALAN Review.* Summer (2005): 62-68.


Author Biographies

Tamara Beckham is a senior majoring in English.


Ashley Carroll-McCarley is a graduating senior at the University of West Georgia with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in Creative Writing. She plans to continue her education at the University of West Georgia for her Masters of Arts degree in English. She hopes to one day earn a Doctorate in Speech and Language Pathology to work with special needs children of military families and hearing impaired children. In addition, she would like to work at the university level, teaching students how to teach literature to special needs students. She is the daughter of Chief Petty Officer Roger L. Carroll and Audrey Carroll, sister to five younger brothers, wife to Airman First Class Tony L. McCarley, Jr., and mother to a two year old son, Ashten.
Author Biographies

**Jordan Hall** lives in Peachtree City, Georgia with her son, Jacob. She graduated from the University of West Georgia in the Fall of 2012 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She hopes to find a career as an editor or writer while also finding time to travel, read, garden and try delicious and new foods.

**Tyler Key** is a senior English major and current president of the UWG’s Creative Writing Guild. He likes to write, but not about himself in the third-person. His interests (other than the obvious) include recording songs, reading prolix postmodern fiction, extolling the virtues of his hometown of Bowdon, GA, and working at pharmacies. He loves the work of David Foster Wallace, Kurt Vonnegut, William Faulkner, and Flannery O’Connor, though these dead authors do not solely occupy his heart. He hopes to write stories and teach literature, though he has other options.

**Clence Patterson** is a senior majoring in English.

**Jack Perry**: On an 8th grade trip to D.C., my classmates and I visited the Holocaust Museum, an ominous, startling experience that ultimately changed my life. There are very few moments in one’s life that gain this level of significance, but history lessons simply cannot communicate the intensity of this events having not personally witnessed it. If the Holocaust Museum is the closest I ever come to experiencing such a travesty, it will have still been too close. To think that people, human beings just like you and me, are capable of such violence, is a blight on our collective unconscious. As an English major, I have battled between idealism and realism and found that the thin line dividing them rests upon an individual’s willingness to live and live abundantly, with purpose and distinction, not to rapture one’s influence but to grace the world with his or her presence.

Daughter to an English teacher, **Casey Smith** grew up in a home where the English Standard was as important as the Golden Rule and reading for pleasure was as instinctual as breathing. Although she went through a phase in high school where she rebelled against the familial worship of books, Casey struggled to suppress the desire to fix the grammatical errors of everyone around her and eventually found her way back to books in college through an overwhelming desire to correct others for
a career. After changing her major three times, Casey settled into the English department at UWG to acquire the skills necessary to assist her in her goal of becoming an editor when she graduates.

Lauren Dale Williams is an American poet, writer, amateur philanthropist. Early in her career Williams was recognized for her artistic creativity and early achievements in art and short stories throughout early adolescence. She was born in Marietta, Georgia as the third of four children, to parents Lillie and Frankie Williams. She tends to focus her literary work on elements of the real world, and the experiences of females in modern society. Her philosophies feature ideologies on the post-modern world; Influenced by the philosophies of French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, and his theories of “hyperreality”. The majority of Williams’ worked is influenced by her beliefs in, what she refers to as “raw life”. Referring to the gritty, unromantic, simplistic realities of the world.

Valerie Lyn Williams Yearta: Almost twenty years after beginning this venture to obtain my degree in English and countless battles with a debilitating neurological disease, I have finally neared the completion of a major life goal. Like Emerson, I too consider myself just a “particle” in this great adventure called “life.” Through my perseverance and determination, I hope to encourage others to press on towards whatever mark they have set before them and never give up. I’m grateful to all of those who have encouraged me along the way, most especially my best friend and husband, Brad.