**Touch of Evil:**
The Devil and his Dam in Literature and Culture

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Contributors
Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, the prince of darkness, among other names, all refer to one being: the Devil. There are just as many, if not more, depictions of devils than there are names for the creature. As times have changed, so have images of the Devil: these images have been influenced by what various societies deemed to be “evil” at the time. From the Catholic Church’s fourteenth century attempt at conversion and maintenance of power, to modern-day television shows and video games, every era has had its own image of the Devil in mind. Theology, folklore, and individual artist imaginations have all had an influence on what the Devil looks like but the overarching theme of devilish art seems to represent societal, human evils of their respective time periods. Originally based in Greek mythology, devils first appeared as zoomorphic creatures, resembling goats, dogs, and reptilian or amphibious creatures. As folklore changed, so did devils. They began appearing more as gnomes or small elfish creatures on a mission to cause mischief and derail people’s lives. Now, it seems that the Devil is red, gigantic, grows horns, and wields a pitchfork, or at least this is the common Halloween costume representation of such a being. What was once a creature that upheld the ideals of absolute fear and terror has now been reduced to something cute or, in the case of the film South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut, a being that is emotionally vulnerable and creates wars against God out of insecurity in his relationships. Modern society does not fear the Devil of the past anymore but has
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put a new face to evil in the form of terrorism, war, and human acts. Modern art has depicted evil through human acts rather than the Devil of medieval art, signifying that artistic representations reflect contemporary anxieties about evil.

It is believed that there was no artistic representation of Satan before the sixth century. The Catholic Church did not certify the existence of the Devil until the Ecumenical Council of 553. It was only after this council that images of devils and demons were plastered on every church wall. The Second Council of Constantinople (the fifth ecumenical council) was called in 553. One of the issues the council dealt with was that of apocatastasis, or “Satan’s possible restoration to grace” (Patrides 467). This idea was officially condemned during the council, thereby certifying Satan’s existence as a way of showing that “for all wicked men, and for daemons too, punishment has an end, both wicked men and [demons] shall be restored to their former ranks” (qtd. in Patrides 469). In denouncing the idea that Satan could be restored to grace, the Catholic Church indirectly demonstrated that there was an actual being called Satan to begin with. By denouncing the idea of a redeemable Satan, the Catholic Church began its fear campaign against wickedness. After this council, since Satan was recognized as a real figure, the Church needed representations of Hell, Satan, and his demons in order to scare the hell out of people, literally. The view was that terrifying images posted in churches would encourage people to become members of the Catholic Church because the only way into Heaven is through the Catholic Church, at least that is what leaders at the time proposed. The Second Council of Constantinople began the Catholic Church’s campaign to instill in the people that there was no salvation outside of Catholicism.

Duccio di Buoninsegna was commissioned by the Catholic Church to create a piece for the high altar of the Siena Cathedral (Stubblebine 185). Created between the years 1308 and 1311, the Maestá includes
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one particular image of Christ triumphantly carrying a banner, breaking down the doors of Hell, and trampling over a defeated devil, Christ in Limbo. This devil, however, does not appear as a giant, red, horned, Pan-like Satan as depicted in more contemporary art. The Devil is a winged monkey-faced creature, covered in fur, with human-like hands, painted with stylistic characteristics of Byzantine art (330-1452 A.D.). This style of art is Eastern Roman Empire and was meant to glorify the Christian religion, hence Christ being placed above the Devil as well as the other figures in the painting. The article, “The Devil and Demons in Medieval Art,” states that Christ is walking over this creature and “greets the just”. As told in John, Chapter 3, Heaven was closed to humanity before the Resurrection thus, “good” people were sent to Sheol. This is not to say that God condemned even his followers to hell. There were two divisions of Sheol: a place of the wicked and a place of the righteous. Since Christ had not created Heaven as of yet, the “good” or “just” people had to be rescued from Sheol. Ephesians 4:8 says that Christ “led captives in his train” to the newly created Heaven. Christ in Limbo is a physical representation of Christ defeating Satan in order to rescue His followers. Christ in Limbo is one of the four events after Christ’s death depicted in the Maestá. This event occurs during the three days after Christ’s death but before the resurrection. In the painting, “[Christ] descended into Limbo, holding His banner in order to liberate the good souls there” (“The Devil and Demons”). He reaches out to a “grey-bearded Adam kneeling alongside Eve, to Abel with his shepherd’s crook, to John the Baptist, King David and Moses” (“The Devil and Demons”). All of these figures are historically devoted followers of God and Christ and without Christ’s death, would have remained in the place of the righteous within Limbo.

Duccio’s Christ in Limbo is just one part of the Maestá that essentially depicts the events of Jesus’ life in pictures. The Maestá is arranged in a Pas-
sion cycle, a form that was formerly thought to have no rhyme or reason. Florens Deuchler argues that this cycle is a “logical composition” and that the positionality of the paintings do in fact matter (541). *Christ in Limbo* is positioned below Marys at the Tomb and Walk to Emmaus and between the Deposition and Noli Me Tangere. All four of these paintings are events after the death of Christ. *Christ in Limbo* in particular, depicts a winged, furry, monkey type devil being trampled by Christ in limbo. Christ, in his squashing of the Devil in hell, is placed above the “just” that He is rescuing from limbo during the time between the crucifixion and the resurrection before He created Heaven, almost as though the devil is a platform for Christ. As Christ is positioned above the other people in the painting, He appears to be the tallest being, making Him the most noticeable but also suggesting that He is the most just of them all. Christ is also situated in almost the middle of the painting, making Him stand out as the most holy person.

The word “devil” has the connotation of the Judeo-Christian devil, Satan. “Devil” and “Satan” have often been used interchangeably, however, “in medieval conception, devils (including Satan himself) were clothed with various hideous and grotesque forms; their usual appearance, however (still more or less retained in art), was derived from the satyrs of Roman mythology, or from the figure attributed to Pan, being a human form furnished with the horns, tail, and cloven foot of a goat” (s.v. “devil”). Pan is the Greek god who presided over shepherds and delighted in rural music and had the “head, arms, and chest of a man, while his lower parts were those of a goat, of which he sometimes also bore the horns and ears” (s.v. “Pan”). Pan “was also regarded as the author of sudden and groundless terror seizing upon beasts or men […] in later times, from association of his name with the all, everything, the universe, he was considered as an impersonation of Nature, of which his attributes were taken as mysterious symbols”
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(s.v. “Pan”). These definitions prove that there must have been some other influences behind Duccio’s painting since this devil does not have any characteristics of Pan (other than the fur) but rather more characteristics of a monkey. While the painting is a depiction of an event straight from the Bible, its devil has human-like hands, wings, a monkey’s face, is furry, and does not appear to have cloven feet, horns or ears of a goat, or the chest and face of a man, an image not congruent with most descriptions of Satan. Why did the image of a Pan-like devil change? By exploring historical events as well as various depictions of the Devil, one can gather insight as to what influenced depictions of the Devil in medieval art and beyond to more contemporary images of a red, giant, horned and tailed Satan—“the proper name of the supreme evil spirit, the Devil” (s.v. “Satan”).

In the Bible, there is no physical description of the Devil as such. Even the serpent in the Garden of Eden is never specifically labeled as “the Devil.” It is simply implied that the serpent is Satan or represents him in a physical manner. The closest thing to an actual, physical description of the Devil is given in Ezekiel when Ezekiel sees the cherubim in Hell. As the Devil is supposedly a cherub, one can presume that he must look something like the cherubim described in Ezekiel with “four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim” and “their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels” (NIV, Ezek. 10.9,12). These cherubim also “had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle” (NIV, Ezek. 10.14). Satan is also described as “the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” adorned with “ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl.” (NIV, Ezek. 28.12-13). It is also said “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” suggesting Satan can make himself appear as
righteous and can hide within familiar images (NIV, 2 Corinthians 11.14). In Revelation 20:2, another description of the Devil as a dragon or ancient serpent can be found. Even in the Bible, inconsistent images of the Devil are presented. The Devil is either beautifully adorned and appears as righteous, or he is a giant, eye-covered cherub.

In 1302, Pope Boniface VIII issued the Papal bull Unam Sanctam which called for the unity of the Catholic Church. Leaders at the council referenced the Ark of the Flood in order to declare the Church is necessary for salvation, stating “extra ecclasiam nulla salus” meaning, “outside the church, there is no salvation” (Espín 439). Boniface VIII wanted to keep spiritual power within the church and, therefore, within himself. The Papal bull states that spiritual power “rests in the hands of the Church” and that “if temporal power errs, it is to be judged by the spiritual power” (Cavendish 63). Essentially, Boniface VIII wanted to become the sole authoritarian through whom everyone else was to be judged. In this sense, the Papal bull pushed to make Boniface VIII a supreme leader of sorts so that all the power remained in the hands of the pope. From this, one can gather that the Catholic Church meant to instill the fear into people that Hell is a real place and the only way to avoid it is through Catholicism. The true path to salvation is to remain under Boniface and the Church’s umbrella of spiritual protection. In order for this fear to spread, the Church needed more representations of the Devil to prove that it was a concrete being, truly existed, and that those who did not bow to the way of Catholicism would be eternally punished in the company of an utterly terrifying sovereign of suffering.

There is no description in the Bible that depicts a furry, *Wizard of Oz*-esque flying monkey devil creature. Folklore from the medieval period seems to suggest that devils are either small, trickster characters or amphibious creatures that can transform. Duccio’s depiction of the Devil is neither beautiful nor covered with eyes or a reptilian crea-
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ture. Some other outside influences must have been at work to make Duccio choose to portray the devil as a monkey-like being. Medieval depictions of the Devil varied widely and were often based on Pagan horned gods like Pan and Dionysus but Duccio’s devil has none of these characteristics. In 1308, the city of Siena commissioned Duccio to paint his Maestá for the high altar of the Siena Cathedral (Kleinhenz and Barker 310). Since this closely follows the issuing of Unam sanctam, it can be presumed that the painting, and particularly the depiction of the Devil, was commissioned as a way of propelling the unity of the Church and Boniface VIII’s claims within the Papal bull through artistic fear tactics. The fact that the devil in this painting is depicted as a monkey signifies a fear of the foreign. The monkey was a foreign animal to Europe, existing outside of the familiar. The main claim of Unam sanctam was to remain within the Catholic Church in order to reach salvation. Duccio’s depiction of the Devil as a monkey parallels and propels the idea that in order to be saved, one must remain within the confines of the Church. Going outside of the familiar resulted in damnation and a foreign monkey as a devil depicts a visual representation of the words behind it. The Catholic Church needed commissioned portrayals of Hell, demons, and devils in order to confirm statements that there is no salvation outside of the church and convince current followers to stay within the church as well as convert non-believers to Catholicism. This also alludes to the importance of art in that visualizations are much stronger and more effective than words.

Other images of the devil have been taken from medieval folklore. Many stories presented fairies, elves, gnomes, and kobolds as devils in disguise. Most commonly in German folklore, kobolds, “entities that lived in mines,” were the most commonly seen devils (Davidson 29). There was a sense that even members of the clergy supported the idea of devils as tricksters. It was “Martin Luther [who] stated point blank that they were devils” and even his con-
temporary, Georgius Agricola, stated the same thing in his treatise on mining and mining engineering (29). Kobolds were small creatures, “about two feet tall and wore a filleted ferment with a leather apron so that they resembled the miners themselves” (29). The creatures were made to resemble the people whom they tempted or tricked. The belief that these small, gnome-like devils existed was so widely accepted that the myth became a truth itself. Another common representation of devils in folklore was that of the serras, mermaids, and mermen. Serras are flying fish that could be transmuted devils and are found in many of the painting of Hieronymus Bosch during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Davidson 30). As more and more representations of the Devil and devils came into being, more folklore arose out of those depictions. What started out as zoomorphic, satyr-like devils soon became more fantastical creatures. These images became more popularized and widely spread as civilization advanced and stories were more readily available. Within one hundred years or so from Duccio’s monkey-like devil, devils were now seen as small trickster characters and, more importantly and sinister, animals that could be devils hiding in plain sight.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, devils in artwork appeared to be more zoomorphic—“attributing the form or nature of an animal to something, esp[ecially] to a deity or superhuman being”—and often were associated with witches (s.v. “zoomorphic”). Albrecht Dürer painted many religious themes in the late 1400s to early 1500s and in 1497, painted The Four Witches’, which shows witches interacting with a zoomorphic devil that somewhat resembled a dog (Davidson 186). Several artists of the same time period depicted witches and their interactions with the Devil, but Hieronymous Bosch (c. 1450-1516) decided to take a different approach to these representations. He showed various devils tormenting or tempting mankind. These paintings “stress the moral frailties of humanity and are, at times, also critical of the Catholic Church” (188). It is not
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until almost 1000 years after the Second Council of Constantinople and 200 years after Unam Sanctam that artists started taking a different route with respect to devils. Bosch essentially paved the way for other artists, taking in influences from other places besides what the Catholic Church commissioned them for. During this time, there was a shift in what was considered “evil.” One of the best-known followers of Bosch was Pieter Brueghel the Elder. His representation of the story “The Devil And the Old Woman” is manifested in Dulle Griet⁸,⁹ which shows Dulle Griet as a formidable woman “and her shrewish followers are so vicious that even the Devil himself is afraid of them” (191). Evidently, during the sixteenth century, evil was manifested in making caricatures of “mean-tempered” women (191).

By the seventeenth century, images of devils had become more decorative than anything and were more influenced by pagan gods. While they were not images of fun, these images were included in books and stories that were meant to entertain. As more and more artists started representing devils, perhaps the decorative devil upholds a notion that artists were moving away from the Catholic Church’s fear initiatives and more towards individual artistic interpretation. Even in moving more towards a decorative feel, it seems as though the Catholic Church still had a hand in these depictions of devils. Gargoyles, particularly, adorned the outside of churches and other buildings to serve a dual purpose. Gargoyles existed to remind the “faithful that the Devil could assume fantastic shapes” (Davidson 35). They served as a form of a manifested devil and seemed to be prodding people to believe that a devil could be hiding in plain sight and only after transforming into a gargoyle could it be recognized.

These images of more folkloric devils continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Depictions of devils still contained elements of Greek mythology, using the satyr figure as a devil or appeared as more of a trickster, costumed figure, signifying a hiding devil, a common theme in
folklore. There were still remnants of Catholic control in art but as a whole, artistic interpretation seemed to be moving more towards the Devil as a humorous thing, still definitively male in gender. David Newreti’s German Devil features a satyr, a creature with a man’s head, with spikes protruding out of his jaw, and a goat’s furry legs. Instead of cloven feet, this devil appears to have claws, resembling those more of a large cat, like a jaguar or tiger, or bear. This devil’s face is inherently that of a man, with some disfigurement, but the devil in question is holding a mask that bears the resemblance of a more animalistic being. Both the devil creature and the mask have horns, totaling in six. It is much more obvious in this depiction to see where the influence has come from in that folklore of satyrs and Pan were abundant during this time period.

Another later depiction of a devil from Japan depicts the devil as almost a tiger-like creature, having horns and large canine teeth protruding from its mouth. This zoomorphic devil is dressed in human’s clothing but is also shown with fur and claws on both its hands and feet. The mythology behind a zoomorphic devil had been circulating for some time and this artist’s interpretation represents that zoomorphic mythology. The fact that the Devil is wearing human clothing also denotes a fear that devils could be hiding in plain sight and can disguise their figure to later transform into a devil, another myth that was popular during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. These looser interpretations of devils give the impression that the Catholic Church did not have as much control over art as time went on. While there were still Catholic influences in art, artist’s interpretations began to differ widely signifying that other influences could be represented.

All of these interpretations were based on what was deemed “evil” in their respective eras. When the Catholic Church was in total control, leaders within the church determined and then spread what
they considered to be evil. At this point in time, it was easy to point to a specific being as “evil” and the Church had found that being. Leaders of the Catholic Church commissioned paintings of devils, demons, and Hell as they wished those to be depicted in order to keep members of the Church and convert even more to Catholicism. As artistic interpretation flourished and Catholic leaders had less control over the art produced, more influences came from folklore and events during the time periods. These artistic manifestations of devils reflected the views of “evil” during each time period and therefore, vary widely even within the same time periods. In the twenty-first century, there are less and less depictions of the Devil and more depictions of evils of humanity. It seems as though the Devil is no longer considered evil but society is focusing more on evil acts. In 2005, an exhibition titled Here Comes The Bogey-Man was held at the Chelsea Art Museum to “coincide with an exhibition of Los Caprichos,” a series of etchings by Francisco de Goya that showed the evils of humanity and was completed in 1799 (Lentini 53). This exhibition shows the Spanish equivalent of the bogey-man, “invoked by parents to frighten children” (53). The exhibition’s curator, Elga Wimmer, chose specific paintings of an international group in order to draw a comparison between the twenty-first century and 1799 and to show that Goya’s evils have now spread all over the world (53). Goya’s depictions of devils and demons appear to be fallen man. The devils and demons look like humans but disfigured in different ways. Other images show zoomorphic creatures convening with each other and playing music together, keeping consistent with older mythology. This exhibition not only parallels paintings and their depictions, showing that these evils still exist, but also shows that society in 2005 still has evils. Wimmer wanted to make the point that “modern society is enduring a period of turmoil, superstition, fear, political upheaval, and propaganda much like the era that inspired Goya to create Los Caprichos” (54). At the time of this
exhibition, only four years had passed since the events of September 11, 2001, countries were still at war, new space initiatives were being launched, Hurricane Katrina made landfall, bombings were becoming increasingly more common, and the general population was in a panic of sorts. In 1799, the French Revolution ended, creating mass upheaval that spread over all of Europe. Los Caprichos depicted images that represented subjects such as “failures of the priesthood and its use of superstition to control the masses; the vanity and weakness of the aristocracy; and social ills such as poverty and prostitution” (Lentini 53). These are all issues that cannot be solved overnight but have continued for hundreds of years and have thus become “evil” in much of society’s opinion.

The Devil takes many shapes. The Devil and devils have appeared as a satyr, fish and reptilian creatures, a monkey, and other zoomorphic beings. So, why then, is the devil often portrayed as a red, pitchfork-wielding, horned and tailed giant man? With the innovation of television and the Internet, images can cross the entire world in less than a second. Advances in communicative technology have made it possible to spread an image more widely than ever within the blink of an eye. South Park has become one of the most popular television shows within the past ten to fifteen years and its creators developed a recurring devil that is gigantic, red, cloven-hoofed, horned, and homosexual, in a relationship with Saddam Hussein. This devil seems to embody all that the twenty-first century fears and deems evil. The South Park devil associates himself with every figure that history has called “evil” such as Adolf Hitler, Big Gay Al, and even an antichrist figure in the rare, but still present, son of Satan, Damien. It would appear that modern devils are associated more with human sins but also with historically “evil” events and people. Also, the fact that the Devil is in a sexual relationship with Saddam Hussein signifies the consummation and therefore condoning of acts of terrorism (South Park: Bigger,
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Longer, & Uncut). Satan has no issues with Saddam’s terroristic acts but instead focuses on the fact that Saddam only wants him for sex, playing on the emotionally dependent and sensitive character that the creators made. In South Park, Satan is not a large, terrifying figure but rather an emotionally vulnerable being, suggesting that the Devil is no longer scary in the twenty-first century. Depictions of the Devil in shows like South Park and more often in video games reduce the Devil to a mere person, exposing flaws and humanizing him so that people are able to conceptualize the Devil as an everyday guy.

Another television show that trivializes the Devil is The Simpsons. This show depicts a red, horned devil but also often shows its characters in devil costumes, most notably, the extremely Christian Ned Flanders (“Treehouse of Horror IV,” October 28, 1993)¹⁵. The show is poking fun at the fact that even devout Christians can “turn,” signifying that religion is not nearly as important as it once was and that the Devil can tempt even the most religious of people. Figurines of the Ned Flanders character as a devil have been sold. In this representation, the Devil has horns, a pitchfork, a tail, and still keeps the satyr characteristics, possessing goat’s legs and cloven feet. Even in the twenty-first century, more traditional depictions of the Devil remain but now the Devil has become a commodity and something comical. Buyers not only buy figurines of comical devils but they also purchase video games and films depicting these more comical, humanized devils. With the humanization and commodification of Satan, the twenty-first century no longer fears a devil and has turned the focus more to mankind’s acts of evil like terrorism and war. The face that formerly belonged to evil has now become a face to mock. The concrete being that the Catholic Church originally certified in order to spike fear within its members is now just another character and even a Halloween costume. It seems as though there is no face to evil anymore, which poses a complication. If there is no concrete being to fear, what does society fear?
Evil is no longer represented by one supernatural being but rather by the acts of everyday people. Since religion is no longer the sole controlling force, the interpretation and definition of evil has been left up to individuals, thus, so have the artistic representations and manifestations. Christopher Burris and John Rempel conducted a study to see just exactly what symbols people believed to be evil and how they responded to those symbols. In the study, Burris and Rempel suggested, “that although some people may be inclined to see ‘evil’ symbols as the outward indicators of a person’s true character, others may interpret them as meaningless costuming and posturing” (70). From this, one can gather that people no longer see artistic representations or symbols as truly evil but see people who boast these symbols as “posers” only pretending to be Satanists or evil people. Symbols that were previously found to represent and embody evil itself are no longer that. In fact, they have become more of an idle fashion statement than anything. This study hinged on conceptualizing “evil” as a “label that can be applied to both behavior and individuals” (Burris and Rempel 77). From the study, participants seemed to agree that, “‘evil’ behavior is that which matches the prototype of intention, unjustifiable harm, and ‘evil’ individuals are chronically motivated to engage in such behavior” (77). Evil can no longer be represented in an image of a devil. Evil, as this study indicates, is now intentionally harmful behavior conducted by individuals who are specifically motivated to do such harm. If this is what society deems evil, then the face of evil becomes the faces of pedophiles, murderers, rapists, and the like. Evil is no longer one devil, demons, or Hell. Therefore, artistic representations of devils can no longer exist as something to fear since the consensus is that people believe people and acts are more evil than the prince of darkness.

Another study conducted by Joseph Baker concluded that only about 58 percent of people still believe
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in Satan. Even less than that believe in Hell and an even fewer number believe in demons (Baker 211). The study showed that those who attended church regularly were more likely to believe in Satan, Hell, and demons while those who did not attend church were less likely to believe in the three. With the decline of a belief in religious evil, artistic representations of the Devil had to change. People no longer believe in, let alone, fear Satan so the artistic representations of evil had to change to fit what society believes, forcing the Devil to become more a caricature and comical character than a force of evil. This also suggests that religion has declined, forcing people to find another source of evil. As the world has become less and less spiritual and more and more concerned with material goods, the belief in something unseen and supernatural declined. People in modern society need something absolutely concrete to point at and define as good or evil. Because of this shift in society, the Devil is no longer considered “evil.” People like to have a definite answer and the belief in Satan is not definite enough to satisfy people of the twenty-first century.

Evil cannot be limited to one definition. However, it appears as though members of modern society can pinpoint acts of evil. People in the twenty-first century are more inclined to believe that evil is represented in acts conducted with malicious intent and that harmful acts performed without intent are not evil. Exhibitions like *Here Comes the Bogey-Man* and *Los Caprichos* are created to highlight those acts and bring attention to the fact that evil can be represented and manifested in a physical form. These exhibitions also serve as a reminder that the same acts can be considered evil across hundreds of years. While depictions of the Devil have varied widely, acts of evil have remained much the same or similar throughout the ages. Even folklore can remain popular and can be used in depictions of devils and evil acts as the satyr figure still remains as one of the most widely recognized images...
of a devil. Many of the folkloric creatures created to represent the Devil or other devils are still in existence, even if they have changed to match different time periods. These tales were meant to be didactic tools in that they taught children, and even adults, that if behaviors went awry, devils were always around. Even when children were “good,” devils still existed to tempt and create mischief and stories and paintings were created to warn people against such devils. Artistic representations were required at the time so that people would be able to recognize a devil on sight if indeed there was one around. Some of the folklore is based on Biblical lessons that serve as the original didactic texts, meant to warn people against evils and not to fall towards the Devil’s temptations and mischievous ways. With a growing belief in the fact that mankind’s acts are evil rather than the Devil being evil, artists interpretations differ and change over time but they all point to the fact that across hundreds, and even thousands of years, people can still pinpoint evil, even if it is not characterized by a flying monkey. A picture used to be worth a thousand words, but in an ever-increasingly visual society is now worth a million.

Appendix

Fig. 1
From Duccio’s Monkey Devil to South Park’s Satan

Fig. 2

Fig. 3
Fig. 4

Fig. 5
From Duccio’s Monkey Devil to *South Park*’s Satan

![Image](image1.jpg)

**Fig. 6.1**

![Image](image2.jpg)

**Fig. 6.2**
Fig. 6.3

Fig. 6.4

Fig. 7.1
Fig. 7.2

Fig. 7.3
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Fig. 7.4
Goya, Francisco de. Ruega por ella (She Prays for Her). 1796. Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas.

Fig. 8
From Duccio’s Monkey Devil to South Park’s Satan

Fig. 9

Notes
1. Italian for “in majesty”
2. See Fig. 1
3. Hebrew for “place of the dead”
4. Also called Harrowing of Hell
5. Latin for “don’t touch me,” the words Christ spoke to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection as written in John 20:17
6. Latin for “one holy”
7. See Fig. 2
8. See Fig. 3
9. German for “Evil Margaret”
10. See Fig. 4
11. See Fig. 5
12. See Fig. 6.1–6.4
13. See Figures 7.1–7.4
14. See Fig. 8
15. See Fig. 9

Works Cited
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From Duccio’s Monkey Devil to South Park’s Satan


In the latter part of 1888 in the East End of London there was a man, a dark shadowy figure, roaming the streets late at night and the early morning killing women. Their deaths were not the shocking part of the story; what struck fear into the public was the way in which the women were killed and the state of their remains. Their throats were slashed with a blade, and their bodies mutilated in most cases. Entrails of the victims were pulled out and draped over their lifeless bodies; their organs removed, but none were ever found. A man, thought to be the killer, was taunting the public through the press with the “Dear Boss” letters, the “Saucy Jack” letter and another letter postmarked from “From Hell.” The final victim was mutilated beyond recognition. The walls of her room painted red with her own blood and pieces of her flesh and organs texturing the walls. This killer stuck fear in the heart of all London and beyond. All of this created the character of Jack the Ripper, the man who ripped through the women of London for what seemed to be no reason at all.

For late Victorian England the Jack the Ripper figure functioned as the devil for the culture; however, this devil was not created through any religious text like the Judeo – Christian devil that these Victorian people would have been familiar with at the time. The Jack the Ripper devil was created through sensational journalism. The Bible is what contains the Judeo – Christian devil; it holds the information concerning its creation and continues the re-telling of the story over time. The Jack the Ripper devil figure has the news articles that not only created the myth, but also allowed for the myth to be continued and manipulated over time.
Since Victorian England, Jack the Ripper has stayed popular in some circles. Criminologists still look at the case of Jack the Ripper and try and profile the UNSUB\(^2\). People still study the case and look at the conspiracies that consider themselves “Rip-perologist” (Ryder). There are movies, television shows, documentaries, and books still focus on the subject of Jack the Ripper. Just as the Bible is still used today to perpetuate the myth of the devil, all of the outlets, as well as the original media coverage, continue to give life the myth of Jack the Ripper.

Jack the Ripper, Leather Apron, and Saucy Jack are various names given to the figure responsible for the murders in the East End of London, but before looking at the figure that committed the crimes the base narrative for the case must be established. The murders took place on “the shadowy streets of London’s East End between August and November 1888,” which are described as “a series of fatal stabings that escalated into total mutilation” (Douglas, Olshaker 19). There are five victims that are the widely accepted as being Jack the Ripper victims: Mary Ann “Polly” Nichols, Anne Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Kelly. All of the victims acted as a stepping-stone for the killer to escalate from slashing throats and mutilating bodies in the alleys of London’s East End to complete destruction of the last victim to the point she was unrecognizable. Even with dead bodies being mutilated all over East End London, there was no one to blame but the shadowy figure known as Jack the Ripper.

While there were and still are many suspects for these murders, no one was ever tried and convicted for any of the murders associated with Jack the Ripper. Part of the shocking nature of these crimes was “[u]ntil Jack the Ripper, nearly all crime had been economic in origin... Then came the Ripper” (qtd. in Gibson 26); thus meaning the difference between these murders and other murders that the public would have been familiar with was the lack of a
clear motive. This idea coupled with the unknown identity of the killer, the horrid nature of the crimes, and the reoccurring pattern of the murders created fear and curiosity among the public and press alike. This murderer was seen as a devil figure in Victorian culture. The definition of ‘devil’ when applied to human begins is “a human being of diabolical character or qualities; a malignantly wicked or cruel man; a ‘fiend in human form’” (s.v. “devil”). The definition when applied to the human quality is “the personification of evil and undesirable qualities by which a human being may be possessed of actuated” (s.v. “devil”). This devil figure of Jack the Ripper was not just created by the crimes that were committed; the figure was created out of the extensive media coverage at the time as well. This sensational journalism that was emerging in Victorian culture gave power to Jack the Ripper, thus creating the myth of Jack the Ripper.

In order to understand how this devil figure of Jack the Ripper was created through the press, one must have a general understanding of the crimes that were committed. The details of the five most generally accepted murders are as follows. Mary Ann “Polly” Nichols was found on August 31, 1888, with her neck bruised and her throat cut through to the vertebrae (Douglas, Olshaker). Annie Chapman’s body, the second Ripper victim, was found on the morning of September 8, 1888, with not only a severe laceration to the throat, but the body showed signs that she was beaten before being killed and posed in the alley (Douglas, Olshaker). Along with those injuries, the killer had jaggedly cut open Chapman’s stomach and placed her intestines over her shoulder (Douglas, Olshaker). It was later discovered that the victim’s “uterus, half of the vagina, and most of the bladder” had been removed from the body and never recovered by law enforcement (31).

The next two Jack the Ripper murders are part of what is referred to by many as the “Double Event,” the night of September 30, 1888; Jack the Ripper is thought to have killed two women, Elizabeth Stride
and Catherine Eddowes. Stride’s throat was slashed, but her body was not mutilated like the previous victim; however, the scene of Eddowes’s murder was similar to Chapman’s (Douglas, Olshaker). Eddowes’s throat had been cut, her intestines on display outside of her body, and some organs, including the uterus, had been removed from the body and were not found at the scene (Douglas, Olshaker).

The last murder committed by Jack the Ripper occurred on November 9, 1888; the victim, Mary Kelly, was found on her bed, “but [the body] was so mutilated, so torn apart, with so much of the flesh ripped off and the insides strewn across the bed and on to the floor, that the dimensions of the body, the outlines of its form could no longer be discerned” (Douglas, Olshaker 58). It was later found that her face was cut into pieces, the head had almost been severed from her body, her breasts had been removed from her body, her stomach slashed open, and “the internal organs thrown about the room”; also, the body had areas where the flesh had been removed all the way to the bone (58). Doctors that saw the body at the scene or during autopsy “estimated that the mutilation had taken as long as two hours, though the cause of death, the severing of the carotid artery, had taken place far sooner” (58-9). The killer had taken murder from the alleys to the home and escalated the murders from slashing throats to all out mutilation, leaving his last victim unrecognizable, and no one but a dark figure in the alley to blame and fear. These series of crimes created the myth of Jack the Ripper, but it was the press of Victorian England that gave this myth its driving force.

In order for the myth of Jack the Ripper to be given power through the press, the people in England during the Victorian era must have had access to the news publications. The subject of literacy and access to the contents of the newspapers must be addressed. In the article “Common Misperceptions: The Press and Victorian Views of Crime” this issue is addressed by Casey: “Although literacy rates were
widely assumed to be low among common laborers... most of the working class were able to read well enough to understand the contents of a newspaper” (374). Some have estimated that anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters of the working class of the time was literate, “even those with poor reading skills were probably familiar with lurid crime stories of that day” (374). Even the illiterate population would have had access to the news as well because the news was “read aloud to them in public” (374). All of this allowed for all classes and levels of education to have access to the news of the time, including the stories and crimes associated with Jack the Ripper.

Knowing that the public had access to the news of the crimes, the information within newspapers is what allowed for the created myth of Jack the Ripper to gain power not only to the public, but within print as well. It was not print itself that gave the myth of Jack the Ripper power; it was the type of journalism that was occurring at the time. The journalism was “New Journalism,” also referred as sensationalism, was the shift in periodicals from “primarily parliamentary or political news in daily and weekly periodicals to more popular and ... sensational content” (Casey 372). This sensationalism in Victorian journalism was obsessed with crime and made crime, more specifically murder, a “best seller” (Casey 375). The effect of sensationalism not only sold more newspapers, this type of journalism “aimed to arouse strong emotional reactions in the public” (Wiltenburg 1378). This was accomplished through the frequency of the topic of Jack the Ripper and his victims, but more importantly, the language of the articles.

The news article “Another Horrible Crime in th [sic] East End” from The Star publication on September 11, 1888, is one of the articles depicting Jack the Ripper in a way that would have caused an emotional response from the public. This particular Jack the Ripper article was more than likely concerning the death of Annie Chapman, which is determined by looking at the date of the crime versus the date of
the article. The subtitle “Murder and Mutilation in the Spitalfields” would have begun this response; the use of the word murder would have not been uncommon at this time, but the “mutilation” would have been a topic unfamiliar to the readers at during this time period (“Another Horrible”). The article continues to use language that would ensnare its readers by stating, “[a]nother diabolical murder has been perpetrated in the East of London” (“Another Horrible”). The use of the word “diabolical” implies an evil action and/or a devilish deed when looking at the denotation of the word when used as an adjective. “Diabolical” is defined as “[o]f or pertaining to the devil... of the nature of the devil” also as “[c]haracteristic of or befitting the devil; devilish, fiendish, atrociously wicked or malevolent” (s.v. “diabolical”). By having the murder being of the devil and/or of the character of the devil, this would stimulate the emotions within the readership of the article. The description of the deceased also added to the emotional reactions of the readers. The body of Chapman is described as “[t]he throat of the deceased was cut in a fearful manner”; the use of the “fearful” would have contributed to the growing emotion surrounding the first few lines of this particular article (“Another Horrible”). The description of the body continues to describe the “cut” as being “so deep, in fact, that the murderer, evidently thinking he had severed the head from the body, tied a handkerchief round it, so as to keep it in position” (“Another Horrible”). The idea of the head being severed from the body would not only have been frightening to readers, but the fact that the killer was thought to have tied a handkerchief around the victim’s throat would have been an act considered evil and perverse at the time. The killer did not just kill this woman, but the act of mutilation that occurred would have been something completely foreign to the audience of The Star.

The article about Annie Chapman’s murder continues to state, “... the woman’s body had been ripped open and other atrocities too horrible to be minutely
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described perpetrated upon it,” which would have continued to shock the public (“Another Horrible”). The fact that her body was described as “ripped open” suggests an animalistic and barbaric attack; this kind of attack was not the “every day murder” that readers would have been accustomed to being informed about at this time. What would have been the most terrifying aspect for the reader was the fact that the writer of the article did not go into the complete gory details of the mutilation that took place. Even after describing the cut to the throat and desecration committed, whatever state the body was in was considered too much for the readers to handle. These unknown facts would have added to the mystery and the horridness of the crime. The article then makes the assumption “… the poor woman was murdered outside… [by a] person who knew the place well”; this statement would accuse one of the East End’s own (“Another Horrible”). By having the killer among the public, this would have made every man suspect. The fear and mystery that this statement would have caused would just keep adding to the previous emotions incited by this article. The article continues toying with the readers’ emotions by informing, “…[the body] was beyond all description horrible in its appearance. The body had been ripped open, it seemed to [the witness] by the hand of some maniac” (“Another Horrible”). By this account, this woman was not only killed, but her identity literally ripped and cut away from her. The assertion by the witness this was “by the hand of some maniac,” coupled with the thought that this crime was committed by someone familiar and/or living in East End would have put this “maniac” around every corner for those that read this particular article.

Another article, “The Whitechapel Murders” from The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post publication on October 5, 1888, continued perpetuating the news of the Jack the Ripper murders through the public. The particular murders that this article is describing are that of the “Double Event” (Ryder). The victims
of this crime were Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes, which are determined by the date of the crime when compared to the date of the article, as well as the details of the crime given in the article. The first body is not described as horribly mutilated as the others; the writer assumes the killer “... may have been disturbed before he had time to complete the mutilation” (“The Whitechapel Murders”). It is interesting to note that the article mentions very little about the first murder victim, Stride, but focuses a great detail of time on the second victim, Eddowes. The only difference between these two victims, in terms of the crime, is the fact that Eddowes was mutilated. This goes with the process of sensational journalism at the time. The writer spent more time on the second victim because the details of that would have caused more emotion within the readers than the first. The wounded throat of Stride could not top the mutilation that Eddowes’s body endured. Her body is described in detail as having “[her] throat was cut across, and the dress torn open, the abdomen bein [sic] exposed,” which reads very similar to the description of one of the first murders (“The Whitechapel Murders”). This similar depiction of the injuries sustained by the victim would have reminded the readers of the previous crime, as well as the emotions that the crime evoked within them. It may not have been the exact same article from The Star, but many newspapers had articles covering these crimes. The article continues with the crime stating, “[t]he intestines were drawn out and placed over the right shoulder, one piece being detached and placed between the right arm and the body” (“The Whitechapel Murders”). This again is a similar description to the one given in the first article shown here, thus having the possibility of causing the same type of reaction within the readers. Even though the “…[m]utilation was done afterwards” the continuing description of the crime is still disturbing. The reader is informed that “…the left kidney had been carefully taken out... the
womb was cut through, leaving a stump about three quarters of an inch long. The uterus... was absent” (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The idea of missing organs would have added to the terror this article and previous articles that were available to the public, thus allowing for the power of the myth given to the Jack the Ripper figure to continue on through the press coverage.

This particular article is different from the first in its subject matter; this piece is not only concerned with the murders that occurred, but also the “Dear Boss” letter that was sent to the press. The sender at the time was thought to be Jack the Ripper himself. The article introduced the article by stating “[t]he Central Press has received the following letter... written in red ink... At the foot is a rude drawing of a sharp pointed blade” (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The letter reads as follows:

Dear Boss—Since last splendid success two more and never a squeal. I am master of the art. I am going to be heavy on the gilded whores now. Some [duchess] will cut up nicely, and the lace will show nicely. no education like a butcher’s; no animal like a nice woman—the fat are best. On to Brighton for a holiday, but we shan’t be idle. If not you will hear from me in the West End. My pall [sic] will keep on at the East a while yet. Red ink still, but a drop of the real in it.3 (“The Whitechapel Murders”)

The fact that this letter was published in and of itself would have been terrifying for the readers of this article. To see the words of a figure that was roaming the streets of London killing women and mutilating their dead corpses and to also have those words described by the press as written in red ink would have caused fear in the readers. In reference to the words themselves, the phrase “last splendid success two more and never a squeal” would have not only depicted the murders of Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes, these words would have shown the
enjoyment Jack the Ripper gained through the killing of these two women.

The idea that a man could enjoy killing would have been unfamiliar to the readers as well as terrifying (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The continuation of the letter, “I am going to be have on the gilded whores now” would have implied Jack the Ripper was planning on continue the killing spree; the use of the word “heavy,” coupled with the idea of the killing continuing, suggests that the killing and/or mutilation of the victims was going to become even more brutal than the previous murders and mutilations (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The use of the word “gilded” would imply a treasure or trophy-like nature of the victims to killer even though it is coupled with the word “whore.” This explains why some of the victims had organs removed from their bodies during and/or after the mutilation. The readers would have been just as unversed with the idea of the death of women and their organs being trophies as some of the other aspects of the murders, thus this idea is just as fear provoking as the others. The statement “Some duchess will cut up nicely…” continues the thought that the murder is not finished with the prostitutes of London, meaning that the terror Jack the Ripper was causing was not going to end yet, if ever (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The writer resumes stating there is “no education like a butcher’s; no animal like a nice woman,” which allows for the implication that that murder’s occupation is a butcher and that he also sees his victims as animals as well as trophies (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The statement may also associate Jack the Ripper with a hunter due to his thoughts on women being animals. All of this would show the twisted nature of the offender by showing how he viewed his victims and that he treated them just as he did the raw meat that he chopped in his occupation. The idea that this killer would have been a butcher in London would have continued to perpetuate the fear Jack the Ripper was living among the readers of this article. The terror would
continue to grow as the readers read through this article containing this letter. The idea that the killer was not ready to stop killing would have been seen in the assertion, “[o]n to Brighton for a holiday, but we shan’t be idle. My pall [sic] will keep on at the East a while yet”; this not only shows that the killer plans to continue, but it will continue in the East End of London (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The final statement, “Red ink still, but a drop of the real in it” would imply that the red of the ink contained blood, and for some that blood could have been the blood of one of Jack the Ripper’s victims (“The Whitechapel Murders”). The crimes depicted in this article, as well as the “Dear Boss” letter published within it, would have created so much fear within its readers it is definite to say that the sensational journalism that was in place at the time of the Jack the Ripper’s attacks on London accomplished its goal of creating emotion within its readership.

The article “Another East-End Murder” in the Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser for Lancashire, Westmorland, and Yorkshire published on Wednesday, November 14, 1888, is concerning the last canonical victim of Jack the Ripper, Mary Kelly. Even though the murder of Mary Kelly is the primary topic of this article, the murders of Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, and Catherine Eddowes that occurred before this murder are mentioned in the article as well. The reference of the previous murders show that sensational journalism is at use in more than just its contents; the mention of these murders stirred the emotions caused by any previous articles concerning the Jack the Ripper murders. Also, the subtitle of the article is “A Woman Cut to Pieces,” which would begin the emotion rise the article would cause for the reader. This victim did not just have her throat cut like the other victims, but according to this subtitle the killer cut her whole body. The injuries to the body were described by a doctor that examined the body of Mary Kelly as, “the final escalation of the killer’s homicidal
mutilating frenzy. The face was cut apart and the head just about severed. The breasts had been cut off, abdomen ripped open, and the internal organs thrown about the room” (Douglas, Olshaker 58). The article begins with “the inhabitants of the East End of London were again thrown into a state of consternation by the discovery that another horrible murder had been perpetuated in their midst, the revolting character of which far exceed any of the... other [murders] which have been committed” (“Another East-End Murder”). In the introduction the writer gives the readers the same reaction as the public, “a state of consternation”; the phrase that the murder was “revolting character of which far exceed any of the... other [murders]” allows for the readers to assume actions even worse than the ones that were published before in this publication and others (“Another East-End Murder”). The article states that the victim’s “...assailant committed his demonical work un the woman’s own roof...” thus placing Jack the Ripper in collusion with the devil by painting Jack the Ripper’s actions as demonic (“Another East-End Murder”). This coupled with the fact that this “demonical work” was committed in the victim’s home allowed for Jack the Ripper to enter the homes of the readers. The killer had taken his killing spree from the streets into the homes of his victims. By showing the readers Jack the Ripper had invaded the home space in such a way that caused even more fear in the readers. This image of a demon created by the press committing this murder is continued through the description of the victim’s remains with the following:

The body of the woman, perfectly nude, was stretched out on the little bed, the clothes on which, were saturated with blood. The unfortunate woman had been cut and hacked by the assassin’s knife in a manner which was revolting beyond all description. The fiendish assailant was not content with taking the life of his victim by severing the head from the body, but he had exercised an infernal
ingenuity in despoiling the corpse of its human semblance. ("Another East-End Murder")

The statement “[t]he unfortunate woman had been cut and hacked... was revolting beyond all description” shows the work of this demon, Jack the Ripper. The killer had not just slashed the throat of the victim, but had “hacked” her body in such a way the author of this article did not feel that the readership could handle the details. This would have allowed the mind of the reader to wander to the darkest conclusions and continue to cause fear of Jack the Ripper within London. The murderer is described as “fiendish”; the word “fiendish” is found in the definition of the devil associated with human beings⁵ (“Another East-End Murder”). By depicting the murderer as a fiend, the image of a devil figure committing these murders is perpetuated. The statement the “assailant was not only content with taking the life of his victim by severing the head from the body, but he had exercised an infernal ingenuity in despoiling the corpse of its human semblance” would have shown to the reader that these murders were not just about the actual killer, but what Jack the Ripper wanted to do to this victim (“Another East-End Murder”). The use of “infernal ingenuity” would imply some type of intelligence of Jack the Ripper. By having an intelligent murder, in any form, would have been a new concept for the readers because intelligence was not something that would have been associated with a murderer. It has already been noted that serial murder and killing for enjoyment were not commonplace aspects of crime in London during this time period. Most all murders were caused by economic and/or domestic reasons. The murders committed by Jack the Ripper are depicted as murders that were fueled by the desire to kill. The fact that Mary Kelly’s body was without “human semblance” is a description of crime the reader was not familiar with considering the Jack the Ripper murders had different motives than others of the
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time ("Another East-End Murder"). Another depiction that occurs in this article is not of the victim, but of the public; the people are described as creating a "scene of restless excitement and activity, the streets being filled with thousands or idlers, attached doubtless by morbid curiosity" ("Another East-End Murder"). This image of the crowd not only applies the people living through the killing spree of Jack the Ripper, but the reaction of the crowd of history concerning Jack the Ripper in today’s society.

The obsession with Jack the Ripper did not stop when the killings stopped, nor when the articles about Jack the Ripper no longer concerned the murders; the "morbid curiosity" the writer in the previous newspaper article described has continued on through time ("Another East-End Murder"). There have been countless books, articles, movies, television shows, and documentaries on the subject of Jack the Ripper since the murders took place in 1888; there is an obsession in the Western culture to not only look back at the crimes committed, but also to consider the identity of Jack the Ripper. Over twenty suspects have been named, and multiple theories have been posited as well. Some of those suspects include Prince Albert Victor and the author Lewis Carroll (Ryder); there have been theories of a royal conspiracy and masonic involvement (Ryder). The film, From Hell (2001), blends the two theories of a royal conspiracy and masonic involvement together. From Hell features some of Hollywood’s biggest stars, such as Johnny Depp and Heather Graham. Depp plays the main investigator of the Jack the Ripper killings; Heather Graham as Jack the Ripper’s final victim, Mary Kelly; and Sir Ian Holm as Jack the Ripper himself. It should also be noted that this film was based off the graphic novel, From Hell, written by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell. By having a film adaptation of a graphic novel with internationally known actors allows for Jack the Ripper to infect the realm of entertainment, and literature along with the various criminological fields, one example
being criminal profiling, that have looked back to 1888 for answers about the murders. This example is just one of many that demonstrates how Jack the Ripper is prevalent in Western culture today. Jack the Ripper incited terror into the heart of London in 1888, however, that fear has been mutilated over time to create a fascination and fixation on the myth of Jack the Ripper allowing the fear that London once had to be lost.

The fixation on Jack the Ripper raises many questions about Western culture such as: What kind of culture fixates on a serial killer? What is the draw to the violent deaths of these women? What kind of culture focuses its energies on crime for the purposes of curiosity and entertainment? Western culture has television shows that are solely about crime; there is *CSI: Las Vegas*, *CSI: Miami*, *CSI: New York*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, and *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. These crime procedural shows allow viewers access to the stories of detectives investigating that particular episode’s crime. Why are these so popular? What does it say about Western culture when we have shows dedicated to following the life of a serial killer, such as *Dexter*? Did the myth of Jack the Ripper spawn this sick obsession with crime and serial killers? There are entire television networks, such as Investigation Discovery, that are totally devoted to shows concerning crimes. These shows take the viewers through the crime, investigation into the crime, and trial. What are the consequences of having crime as form of entertainment? Focusing back to Jack the Ripper and the associated myth of Jack the Ripper, what is Jack the Ripper to present day Western culture? He is certainly not the devil to the masses as he was in 1888; the current Western culture finds Jack the Ripper and the myth of Jack the Ripper fascinating as opposed the terrifying. This fascination is shown through the amount of movies, websites, television shows, and other avenues of publication that concern Jack the Ripper. When talking about the
Judeo – Christian devil, Timothy Johnson states, “language about the Devil... [has been] corrupted by misapplication, overextension, and trivialization” (14). Has Western culture done the same with crime and Jack the Ripper? Is Jack the Ripper the new trivialized devil? C.S. Lewis warns his own readers about the Devil and devils by stating: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them” (ix). Western culture has ignored Lewis in this sense. Western culture has taken an “excessive and unhealthy interest” in Jack the Ripper, but again what are the consequences of these actions?

Notes

1. There were at least three letters written to the press at the time, both published and unpublished, with “boss” as the intended recipient of the letter (Ryder).

2. UNSUB is a criminological term to name an unidentified offender (Douglas, Olshaker).

3. Other sources contain another sentence of this letter: “...yet. When I get a nobility ____ I will send it on to C Warren, or perhaps to you for a keepsake. It is jolly. George of the High Rip Gang. Red...” (Ryder). “C Warren” was most likely Sir Charles Warren, the head of London Metropolitan Police during this time (Ryder). It is not clear why this statement would have been omitted from the letter published in this article.

4. This present day description of the body was not given in the article, but was placed here to give a better description of the injuries to the body than what was provided by the press at this time.

5. The devil when applied to human beings is “a human being of diabolical character or qualities; a malignantly wicked or cruel man; a ‘fiend in human form’” (s.v. “devil”).
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Works Cited


Jack the Ripper


Generational Tolerance and Forgiveness; Observing the Relationship between African Americans and the Memory of the KKK
by LaTanya Lofton

On June 21, 1964, in an effort to discover the root of a fire that destroyed Mount Zion Methodist Church, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner became victims of the Ku Klux Klan’s racially discriminating violence. After a forty-four day search, the FBI was finally given a tip as to the location of the three men. In the Meridian Star, a local Mississippi newspaper states the bodies were a “mangle mass.” Tossed into a hole as if their lives were meaningless, Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were barely recognizable. Because of their ties to the Civil rights movement and their race, Chaney as an African American and Goodman and Schwerner were both Jewish, further prove the KKK’s hatred toward those they felt were not “pure whites.” The three men were not only beaten, but shot and beaten so inexorably bad that someone describes the condition of their bodies as something that “could only occur in a high speed plane crash” (Carrillo). In Karen Jaunita Carrillo’s article, “$100,000 reward for Mississippi’s Civil Rights Murders,” an equally horrific matter is discussed. Not only are these men beaten to a pulp, shot, and buried like animals, but they were handed to the KKK by police officers. As horrifying as this fact is, that people who are put in place to protect, abuse their authority for acts as vicious as the murders of these three men. Carrillo goes on to illustrate the injustice of the judicial system with the description of those suspected of having a relationship to the murder and those convicted in the murder being 21:7, 21 suspected and 7 convicted. Not even half of the men who were charged received a conviction and making
this issue of 1964 relate to contemporary times Carrillo shares that “nine to ten of those original defendants are still alive and still living in Mississippi.” The presence of these men allow for the resurfacing of the past violence committed by themselves and their peers. As time progresses and these men continue to live, the memory of their actions remains and resides in the area in which they once carried out violence and currently inhabit, but the importance of their past actions cease due to present day occurrences. David Cunningham in “Truth, Reconciliation and the Ku Klux Klan” states “On June 21, 2005, exactly forty-one years after the murder of civil rights workers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman in Neshoba County, Mississippi, former Ku Klux Klan member Edgar Ray Killen was convicted on manslaughter charges for those crimes” (Cunningham). These murders led to many accomplishments toward racial equality. This piece of history is a clear indication of how history is present, but has been slowly submerged in history to where vicious crimes, like depicted above, are no longer topics of contemporary discussions. Although, a man has just recently been convicted in 2005 and 1964 is not even fifty years in the past, the contemporary generation finds that the only way of moving forward and away from the past is to not address it. The unknown question—what is there to do about what happened in the past?—is the leading reason why the evils of the KKK organization have been suppressed. Carefully, clarifying that their actions have not been forgiven, but time has somehow masked the severity of their crimes. Even today, their actions from the 1960s affect how people in America live today. Numerous writers believe that because of how “evil” the KKK’s actions were that they actually helped the civil rights movement progress instead of harming the movement, as they wished to do. The violence they enacted onto certain groups of people disgusted many to move against them. Presidents were moved to act against them through laws such as the Civil Rights Act, Voting
Rights Act, etc. Their violence was so outlandish that it carried from the group of people to those who supported them, as well. The KKK and the evils they enacted on many people actually brought forth the well needed change of a nation and addressed many issues that had once been ignored. Time and time lapse acts as a mask for historical evil, only covering the issue until it resurfaces through contemporary issues, forcing those who once ignored the issues to now address them.

This paper will explore African Americans’ relationship with the Ku Klux Klan. It will discuss how outlook is differential between generations based on lack of “presence” of time. Examining how a stronger dislike for the KKK is housed in those who have actually experienced their oppression, or those who are closer in time to their violence, as opposed to those who have simply read about the KKK and watched movies depicting their heinous crimes, shows how distance and time change anger and outlook on those who once oppressed a people. This essay investigates how evil is relative depending on proximity of time and how, simply, ignoring an issue will not make it go away, but inevitably resurface at a later date.

The current younger generation no longer houses occasionally discussed contempt for the KKK. The KKK is still, very much, viewed as an “evil” organization, and or an organization that committed “evil” acts. Movies such as Mississippi Burning and A Time to Kill, still, exude anger for the contemporary generation, but may strike memories in older generations, which will create a different response toward the films. The evil acts committed by members of the KKK, or Klansmen, are horrific and downright “evil,” but why has a tolerance of their actions emerged in this new generation? Is it the distance between time periods of occurrence and today? Has so much time passed that no one cares for the oppression and violence committed against a race simply for the color of their skin? Or does no one know where to find reparation for the pain and
suffering during the era of the KKK, specifically during the Civil Rights era? The KKK today is known as a historical evil. Lynching, vicious killings, burnings of crosses are all acts committed by the KKK in the past; however, for this contemporary generation these acts are not as real, but a more abstract occurrence, in that they did not personally experience the violence, because there is not an everyday threat of the KKK, today. For the older generations the KKK is more concrete because it is them, their parents, perhaps, and or grandparents who experienced KKK violence first hand, making the responses toward them more hostile and unforgiving.

The Ku Klux Klan is an organization that, even today, is looked at as being a militant and racist group of white people who, according to its member stand for “White Power” (Ezekiel 15). Not only discriminating against African Americans, but Jews and Catholics as well, these white men carried out horrific acts against people, simply, to “Keep America American.” There are three important appearances of the Ku Klux Klan: the first being the Reconstruction Klan, the second is the Political Klan, and the third, which is the Klan that emerges during the civil rights movement. These three appearances are vital to the understanding of the KKK’s effect on the lives of many African Americans. Having brutalized men, women, and children, this organization is still a symbol of hatred for many African Americans in current American society; however, many members of the KKK provide justifications for their vile actions against those they find are not “pure whites.” Throughout the history of the KKK many violent acts are carried out by its members to scare people into doing what the Klan wishes them to do, which is to remain as the lower and to not rise above that image, and or belief. In Raphael S. Ezekiel’s The Racist Mind he interviews a Klansmen who states explains how Klansmen would meet up to ride through black neighborhoods, which he called “niggertown,” simply, “to keep the black people (“niggers”) in line” (8). These men harassed fami-
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lies for what they believed to be power. The search for white supremacy, for these, men is deeply rooted in keeping these various groups of people in their places and violence and fear allows them to feel as though they are succeeding.

According to Shawn Lay’s breakdown of the three KKK appearances the first KKK was founded in 1866, where their main focus was “white supremacy;” however, as years progressed, so did their plans for the organization. The KKK began as a militant hate group “assaulting and killing those who challenged the traditional racial order. In 1868, alone, more than 1,300 black and white Republicans were assassinated” (Lay). They quickly became involved in the “bitter politics of Reconstruction,” where they attempted to keep civil rights from being given to newly emancipated and already free blacks (Lay). Lay explains that “the federal government’s efforts to grant the freedmen full civil and political equality fueled white racial hatred and paranoia, resulting in widespread violence against African Americans and white Republicans” (Lay). This violence led to the swift demise of the first Klan. Gaining no support from others, even southern whites, the Klan was forced to stop their violence and slowly faded into history. Ezekiel’s texts is a series of experiences with the Klan and Neo-Nazi groups where he interviews Klansmen for a better understanding of why they commit the acts that they commit and their answers basically to enact justice on these people who have wronged their people in the past. Arthur Prone, one of the men interviewed by Ezekiel, states that Jews “crucified Christ” and invented abortion, justifying his hatred toward them. His argument towards black is that they are lazy and should just go back to Africa. Believing that these different groups of people are lesser than himself and other like him, Prone and his peers stand behind their beliefs that it is the Jews and the African Americans who are the violent ones. One Klansmen Ezekiel came across at a rally, even goes on to say that the people who were hanged by the Klan were guilty,
“they just save the town the cost of electrocuting the man” (Ezekiel 17). Shifting KKK violence from hate crimes to justifiable, beneficial, and conservative acts, these men believe their actions and the actions of past Klansmen to be needed and appropriate for the circumstances. Feeling as though it is their duty to get justice on people who have done wrong in the past, the KKK is an organization that realizes the erosion of “evil” throughout time, but chooses to take justice into their own hands. If they believed that justice had been served in the past, whenever the event occurred, perhaps they would not feel as though it is their duty to make sure it is received. Moreover, by producing more violence they only prolong the memory of historical evils and, in an essence, bring them into the present.

Reemerging in November 1915, the second Klan, as Lay’s essay explains, is one with a more political plan; however, at the beginning of their reappearance “a wave of violent vigilantism swept across the region, as hundreds of Klansmen participated in appalling acts of terror” (Lay). The second Klan’s focus was not African Americans; however, they “continued to inflict terrible punishments on innocent African Americans” (Lay). This Klan’s focus was on “social and political developments,” particularly immigration. With their motto being “Keep America American,” immigration posed as problem because it allowed people of different countries and ethnicities to come into America; and at this time they were coming in large groups. During the Klan’s new political stance many members gained political status and with this political status gained approval from many people. This acceptance is proven in the vast acceleration of members into the KKK. Being the one responsible for the Klan’s new found image “Hiram W. Evans, a dentist from Texas, replaced William Simmons as Imperial Wizard. Evans aspired to turn the Klan into a ‘great militant political organization,’ and under his guidance the Klan became a major force in American politics for a few years” (Lay). But the Klan’s new political stance
would be short-lived. The members in office were said to be “inept” and unable to perform the tasks they needed to perform in order to prove their intolerance. Facing current issues of increased liberal views, America ceased to find the importance of finding issue with people from other countries coming into America, but the Klan would not let up. Lay, also states “in the mid-1920s the Klan entered a period of rapid decline owing to internal disputes, scandals, and the growing recognition among voters—even Klansmen—that the group had little to offer.” This along with the highly publicized conviction of “Indiana Klan leader David C. Stephenson” led to the disinterest of the organization (Lay). The conviction did not help this Klan and is the key to their, now, second downfall. Possibly, realizing their demise the Klan, once again, became violent. Going from four to five million members the Klan’s members “reduced to a rapidly dwindling membership of less than 100,000 by 1930, the second Klan became increasingly fanatical and extreme during the Depression, denouncing New Deal policies, labor unions, and immigrants who competed for scarce jobs” (Lay). The second Klan’s actions are not as noted in history, like that of the third Klan. The historical evils of the Klan have become their image for many who know of them. Their political advances are not occasionally discussed; it is the violence that is remembered. Lay’s outline of the second Klan proves that violence for the second Klan is a last resort, an act out against the loss and lack of power and control, but the next reemergence of the Klan does not possess such a moral agenda.

The most essential emergence of the KKK is their third appearance, as it pertains to this essay. During the last abrupt emergence of the KKK their hostile and brutal acts increase during the civil rights movement. This is the era where the harsh actions of the KKK are later popularly depicted through films and novels, etc. This third KKK appeared sometime after World War II and were named the “Association of Georgia.” According to Lay’s
"Ku Klux Klan," Klan membership increased in both 1954 after the Brown v. the Board of Education case and in 1957 after "federal troops were used during the Little Rock school desegregation crisis" (Lay). The fact that this hate group appeared after such vital moments in history pertaining to the advancement of the African American race proves that there presence was not solely for the purification of the nation, but to keep a race of people oppressed because of their own beliefs. In Ezekiel’s trip to a Georgia KKK rally, beforehand thinks himself that "the south is where they killed people", making his trip to a rally tangible, as opposed to being something he merely read about in a newspaper magazine (6). He was now going to the South to “experience the emotions firsthand... under temporary and artificial conditions” (Ezekiel 5). Ezekiel acknowledges that his experience with the Klan will not be identical to that of those who were of the time and violence, but it does place him in a closer vicinity to the historical violence. This last KKK’s main focus was “railed against attempts to advance black civil rights and the threat of international Communism” (Lay). Failing to succeed in their many efforts, the KKK took out their frustration on those they opposed through violence. Violence acted out by many Klansmen, ultimately, caused many people to realize how harsh an affect they had on a race. With movies depicting this evil, anger and furry grows in many; however, watching what took place in the 1960s verses experiencing the violence, causes for different interpretations of the violence and different feelings toward the group who enacted the evil.

A Time to Kill, the film, not only gave the unknowing a visual of often occurrences, in the South, between Klansmen and African Americans, but the film also reflects on the injustice that would have sent a, rightfully upset father, to prison for the rest of his life. Standing up to powerful members of the Klan, also, had is consequences and many faced them and were punished for taking care of and
protecting their families. Movies, textbooks, etc. is where the younger generation receives information about what happened in the past. This mediated transference of information, in itself, separates the generation that experienced similar behavior from those who have only seen in films or read in novels or history books about the violence inflicted onto so many people. Although, many have tried to depict, accurately, the events that so horrifically brought attention to the films, it is no comparison to experiencing the outrage of the time period. The younger contemporary generation has received information through an eroded, better yet, filtered source, but the understanding of the evil acts that took place during the Civil Rights Movement have definitely eroded throughout history. One cannot completely grasp an understanding of the violence that was inflicted onto many people if it is not, also, a personal experience.

During the Civil Rights era many people protested against the harsh treatment of African Americans, it was at these protest and after these protest where violence was apparent and not only acted out through obvious, hooded, KKK members, but performed by police officers. Most likely they, too, were Klansmen. In President Lyndon’s address to the nation, after the death of a prominent Civil Rights activist, he states that the Klansmen are “enemies of justice” and he goes further to say that “their loyalty is not to the United States of America, but instead to a hooded society of bigots” (History). Johnson’s idea of the KKK goes against what they claim to stand for, which is “purifying America.” Johnson’s view that the KKK is against America and not for America sheds light on how the KKK is widely viewed. As an organization the contemporary generation believes them to be evil based on movies, books, and history books, but the words of Johnson are not memories for many, but simply something skimmed over in a Civil Rights era discussion in history class. Not even being fifty years in past an older generation actually lived during these
strenuous times of racial violence making their relationship toward the group harsher than those who have only heard of what the KKK has done.

KKK violence is not an issue of this time, but was a very real issue during this civil rights era, in which a couple generations before experienced. Bevernage explains the situation of the contemporary generation’s lack of knowing how to view the past perfectly is because they did not experience the past, which was before them. She states “history’s concept of time forces us to interpret the victim’s recurring stress on the “presence” of the past as merely figurative language” (155). As members of contemporary society, it is impossible to travel back in time and experience how people felt during the civil rights era, specifically African Americans, Jews, and Catholics. The only connection contemporary society has with the past is through media. Textbooks, articles, newspaper, etc. all pose as a means for a link to history. Reading about evil as opposed to personally experiencing these evils creates a distance between then and now making it hard to determine how to deal with historic evils. So, it is lack of “presence” that keeps many people from realizing the true evil of the third KKK’s violence.

Many feel as though the evils acted out by the KKK went without consequence, but as so many years have passed what can be done. Bevernage describes it as “the struggle against impunity and the search for new and alternative forms of justice, therefore, almost automatically leads towards a blurring and questioning of the schism between the concepts of time held by the disciplines of justice and history” (155). The time gap between KKK violence during the Civil Rights era and a few convictions of KKK members who committed vicious crimes against people just because they were of a different race or ethnicity or were a part of organization promoting equality of those races or ethnicities dissolves the importance of justice. People lose sight of the pain inflicted on many people as time passes and justice turns into a mere excuse to punish someone
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that has happened so long ago. Moreover, the more time that passes the less harsh the reality of the event becomes, solely because memory, for the most part, is not as harsh as experiencing violence. People cannot understand many other people’s problems because they did not experience what the other person has gone through and the more time passes the less painful it is for the person who experienced the trial. Inevitably diminishing the evil or trial that is experienced, time heals what was once pained, but time does not ameliorate the violence just the way people view the violence.

In this specific case of historical evil can any retribution be given? And if so what? The space of time between now and the crimes of the KKK make it harder for people to understand how the evils of an organization affected a group of people so drastically. Without the complete experience of the occurrences time diminishes understanding, eventually leading to the diminishing of the knowledge of severity. Being in the “presence” of time and closer to certain incidents calls for a better understanding of that relationship, from either side, and or recognition of what it means to the time period. Mimicking the cliché that “time heals all wounds,” perhaps “heals” is not the best word, but time certainly makes for a good bandage. Time could be the only known way to heal from such hardship and torment. Bevernage acknowledges “history’s concept of time challenges justice’s: the “retribution” of justice never can be swift enough to completely reverse or undo the damage done, because every crime is always already partly in the past and thus always displays a dimension of absence” (152). With time evil erodes and goes through attrition, because the evil is no longer of the time after it happens and with the more time that passes the more erosion reduces the appearance of the evil act.

In an attempt to answer the question: How does one reprimand an entire race for three hundred years, plus, of oppression? Many refer to the well-known saying with “three acres and a mule.” However, at
this point of time many of those who experienced these oppressions first hand are deceased. Then, do the descendants of the oppressed collect? That is the exact issue with the separation of time and justice that Bevernage explains in her essay. Not knowing how to reprimand and punish people because a substantial amount of time truly has passed erodes the action that once called for justice, but received none. The contemporary generation is now stuck to address the issue of the past, with no idea how to give it its proper justice.

It appears as though contemporary society proves the theory “even a perfectly just society can never compensate for the misery of the past” (Bevernage 153). No one is sure how to deal with the heinous crimes of the KKK. As vile as their acts were it has taken many people, who witnessed and were victims of the violence, a long time to remove the images of burned churches, beaten and burned men, women and children, people shot down and buried in shallow graves like animals, and men, women, and children hanging from ropes and set on fire from their minds; adding the odor of burning flesh to a gruesome sight. People in Madagascar believe the past is in front because it is what has already been seen and what is already known; it is the future that is behind and is unknown. It is hard to determine a punishment that will be enacted in the future because it is unknown. How can something that is unseen already have a punishment and reparations for those who were pained? It does not, therefore when violent outrages, like the third KKK appearance, occur it is hard to determine appropriate punishments for the violent persons and reparations for those who were hurt or affected by the violence. As time progresses knowledge of the severity of the actions deteriorates and ultimately is replaced by current issues. Some people, like Ezekiel, choose to make the historical issues the issues of the current, but it is not always successful. Trying to make someone care about something they did not
experience is just as hard as trying to understand the KKK’s reasoning for violence, for some people. Current issues play a significant role in the erosion of historical evils, such as the violence of the third KKK. Issues with terrorism have bombarded the field of evil for many Americans. After September 11th, 2001, many Americans fear that there will be another attack and with the mere topic of the people or place, mentioning the Middle East automatically sets off an alarm of danger. With that constant fear of terrorism and other current issues, many Americans have placed historical issues on the backburner to be dealt with at a later date; however, that is the problem of reparations. After being deferred for so many years, dealing with those past issues become more problematic because the stringency of the past issue dissipates. As the attrition of historical evils continues current evils replace the past evils. By focusing on the current evils nothing is ever done about past evils and they are simply left in the past, on to be stored in history books for future references.

Although, free from the agonizing torture placed on many in the 60s, the contemporary generation is forced to deal with the issue of the historical evil resurfacing. For instance, the outrage that spread across Georgia in 2012 when the KKK attempted to partake in the well-known Adopt-A-Highway campaign drove people into frenzy. Forcing people to relive and rethink about the KKK’s history of violence and the belief principles in which the organization was founded upon the story caused a grave outrage. The Klan in Georgia was not the first to attempt to Adopt-A-Highway. In Missouri the Klan, after denial, took their case to court with the intention of arguing that they have a constitutional right of freedom of speech and explain that the government cannot “deny a benefit to a person on a basis that infringes his constitutionally protected interests—especially, his interest in freedom of speech” (Kazlowski). However, in the Georgia case, on WSBTV’s website,
Diana Davis interviews Tyrone Brooks who states: “This is a terrorist group that has a history of violence, which has a history of destroying people based on their race or ethnicity or religion. We can’t do that in the state of Georgia.” By granting the Klan with the opportunity the government allows for the discrimination based on race, religion, sexual preference, etc. Approving and denying both place members of society in a bad place because the government cannot deny rights to citizens, but then again they cannot allow discrimination in a nation that was founded on set principles of equality. Instances like this force the “rememory” of the history of violence within the KKK and bring people to action to speak up and against the beliefs of the organization.

There is no way for justice to catch up to history, at this point in time. The evil act is in the past and has gone unjustified, in the eyes of many, for countless years. The aggression that is directed at Klansmen, today, is solely based off of outsider’s knowledge of their history. They are known as being a militant group of pompous “bigots” who partake in horrific crimes of discrimination. Time has eroded the evil of their action, but not the memory of their legacy. To many, the KKK will forever be known as an “evil” organization.

With their symbols representing signs many people of Christian faith believe to be symbols of God, the KKK uses them in, what could be seen as, in a corrupt many. The burning cross, for one, is the most popular. To set on fire something that represents Jesus and his crucifixion due to our sins is the most disrespectful act, for many Christians, which could be why the KKK used it to scare many African Americans. Another popular object associated with the KKK is their white hooded cloak attire. The white, seeming, to symbolize “pure white” for white supremacy, is a symbol of terrorism for many. On the cloak is a cross with a flame inside of it. The KKK symbol is in close relation to the Nazi symbol, which is a cross bent in a circle. These
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distortions of religious symbols cause issue within any person who identifies as Christian, outside of the KKK’s organization, solely because the symbols represent God, and/or Jesus, the son of God. Seeing the symbols of the KKK forces the resurfacing of their horrible memory to be relived, even by those who can only image.

The funny thing about the KKK is that many Klansmen, specifically one depicted in Ezekiel’s interview, believe others to be the evil ones. Arthur Prone says he “think[s] [Jews] are the children of the Devil,” which is his justification for hating them (19). He goes on to say that he does not identify Jews as a race. Ezekiel can only relate his experience with the Klansmen as one that “must resemble the experience of the American black folk, this kind of getting shoved out of your real identity” forces him relive a time where a race was oppressed in the same manner the Klansmen wish to oppress Ezekiel as he is interviewing them (14). Ezekiel explains that he “becomes invisible as a real human” (14). He communicates his experience as if it were of the time and not of a current date. Furthermore, revisiting and being placed into similar instances calls for a better understanding of the past evil, ultimately leading to an understanding of why it eroded and how to acquire reparations for the suffering.

Although the actions of the KKK were vicious and vile and unimaginable to many, they are somewhat overlooked because of time. The time lapse from the period of occurrence to now is an entire generation, a generation that mostly knows of the KKK through mediated references. Perhaps, history is a reparation in itself by replacing past evils with current evils. Furthermore, allowing history to hide evil because time does not make past evils any less evil it simply suppresses that evil with time eroding the memory of that evil. Ultimately, this idea forces the understanding that the nature of evil dissolves, merely, to be replaced by another. So, evils erosion is a cycle that continues through the replacement of other evils.
Works Cited


"Elizabeth Broderick followed all the rules. She married young, then supported her husband while he got his medical degree and his law degree. She raised their four children and became a Super Mom, living the American Dream. Then, when her husband, Dan, turned 40, he decided he no longer needed her. He began a subtle psychological warfare against his wife of 20 years, convincing her that she was old, fat, and dumb. She believed him. What she couldn’t believe was that he was going to give up their life together and marry a 20-year-old. Dan Broderick used his power as an attorney and doctor to strip Elizabeth of her future, her home, and eventually her children. She used the only power she had left: On November 5, 1989, she walked into Dan’s bedroom and killed him and his new wife.” (Pugh). Prior to this event Betty Broderick was unknown. By resorting to violence as a means to channel the hurt, anger, and humiliation felt from being jilted by a significant other, Betty Broderick and others like her gained instant notoriety as well as membership into an exclusive club. A club which flies under the banner of: “Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned.”

The phenomenon of “Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned” is no new concept. The phrase comes from a quote uttered by the scorned and deceived Zara, in the seventeenth century Tragedy, The Mourn ing Bride. Written by poet and playwright William Congreve, the original rendering of the phrase is “Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned/Nor hell a fury like a women scorned” (3.8). The concept of hell and the mystery surrounding what awaits
all condemned to its confines breeds much fear and
trepidation. In one of the most famous depictions
of hell, Dante’s Inferno, Dante Alighieri reinforces
this fear in Canto III where the sign waiting over
the gates of hell warns, “Through me the way into
the suffering city/ through me the way into eternal
pain.../ABANDON EVERY HOPE, WHO ENTER HERE” (1-2.8).
Like the warning at the gates of hell, the indi-
vidual unfortunate enough to cross the threshold
of a woman scorned best prepare for a similar dose
of suffering. Glenn Close made this frighteningly
clear in the movie “Fatal Attraction,” and Car-
rrie Underwood reinforces this through her play by
play of how she gets back at a philandering lover
in her song, “Before He Cheats.” In other words,
the scorned woman is not to be taken lightly. And
while this sort of conduct is nefarious, there is
something intriguing about a woman who chooses to
perpetrate an “evil” act rather than cut her losses
and walk away when spurned in a relationship. Proof
of this is validated by the success of shows like
“Snapped” and a slew of other television vehicles
aimed at presenting true crime stories.

Just what is it that makes women who commit evil
acts against their intimate partners so fascinat-
ing and newsworthy? (Gilbert 1272). In the media’s
sensationalistic handling of these stories, cer-
tain elements leave the public engrossed. Is there
a particular reasoning behind the framing of such
accounts? The “Hell Hath No Fury” motif reveals the
media’s demonic depiction of the “woman scorned.”
That demonization offers a devastating portrait of
the continuing misogyny undergirding gender expec-
tations in American culture.

Gender constructs are the bedrock upon which male
and female roles are set. Serving as “place hold-
ers” in society, the basis for gender constructs is
to set a balance between the sexes (ChangingMinds.
com). This balance is the mainstay of the structured
environment which the family unit is built around,
and which “society’s reproduction” depends upon (The
Sociology of Gender). With males pegged in the power
positions of leader, and provider, and the female in roles more "nurturing" and "maternal" the female "deviating" from her gendered role threatens the societal system set in place by patriarchal traditions (Berrington 51). By resorting to aggressive, violent, "masculine" actions, the woman falling under the "Hell Hath No Fury" motif challenges these norms, and dismantles the patriarchal structure. Because she does not conform to traditional rules nor does she comply with the role given her, she is "noticed" and "condemned" (Huijser 1).

Media framing is grounded in patriarchy. Inasmuch as violent behavior falls outside of the aforementioned female constructs, the woman stepping beyond these parameters finds herself a specimen under the media microscope. But, it is not just her violent actions which garner attention or fall under media framing. The character of the woman coloring outside the lines of patriarchy is also scrutinized. She is then labeled and finds herself sexualized, trivialized, minimized, and infantilized before becoming demonized. Author Paula Ruth Gilbert proposes that this stems from "society's stereotypical views of what a woman should be and how she should act." This in turn serves up a biased discourse in regard to the female in general (1272-3). Stereotypes and labels such as these contribute to the misogynistic treatment and handling of women in the media.

Women given to acts of violence are not the first to come under public scrutiny. The massive attention given to the woman reacting to scorn is reminiscent of that given to witch hunts of the past. In the same manner in which present day audiences are enthralled by stories of women taking vengeance into their own hands, this same fascination presented itself during Elizabethan times. The masses were described as being "fascinated by witches and the malicious harm they caused." Cases surrounding witches received the same "notorious" classification and the same "high profile" status as cases seen today (Dumycz 1). The "mass hysteria" behind many of these cases believed to be steeped in a misogy-
nistic panic which claimed that women possessing “supernatural” powers were poised to overthrow the power hierarchy which separated the genders. The consequence of this belief was misplaced fear and unmitigated “social hostility” directed at women (Pavlac). Women finding themselves accused of witchcraft, an act outside of social constraints became victims of public demonization.

The demonization of those considered witches was far reaching. One of the offshoots of the persecution of women accused of being witches came through a book entitled: *Malleus Maleficarum* or “Hammer of Witches.” A “demonological” tract written by Heinrich Kramer a Dominican Inquisitor, the Maleficarum became a “guide to help root out the witches of the time” because witches are a “particular” type of woman. It was also said to be a direct indication of the author’s “hatred of women.” Kramer’s work too proved instrumental in framing witchcraft as a “gendered crime” (Smith 85). One of the more bizarre aspects of the tract is a portion which focuses on whether or not witches can cause the male penis to disappear. In the tract, Kramer suggests that women steal penises and keep them in bird’s nests: “We have already shown that they can take away the male organ” (Smith 88). With a close reading, this statement leans toward interpretation in terms of either “emasculation” or “impotence” (Smith 94). Few would imagine it beyond these terms. That is, unless of course you knew Lorena Bobbit whose actions fit nicely into Kramer’s postulations.

Lorena Bobbit took the interpretation literally. While no “hocus pocus” took place and there is no proof that Lorena Bobbit had any knowledge of the content of *Malleus Maleficarum*, her actions certainly vindicate Kramer’s assertion of the woman possessing the power to “make the man’s penis disappear.” While technically her actions do not place her in the category of a “woman scorned” they certainly made her a “scorned woman: “In the years following Lorena Bobbit’s tumultuous marriage, the relationship between she and her husband John Wayne Bobbit
became strained. Their marital problems allegedly stemmed from a combination of the couple’s financial troubles, John’s extramarital affairs and his intensifying emotional and physical abuse of his wife, which included forcing her to have an abortion. Their troubles peaked on June 23, 1993, when John came home to their Manassas, Virginia apartment intoxicated after a night of partying and allegedly forced his wife to have sex. Lorena was traumatized by the experience. In a state of shock, she got out of bed and went to the kitchen for a drink of water. While there she noticed an eight-inch carving knife, and when she picked it up “memories of past abuse raced through her head.” Lorena then went to the bedroom with the knife in hand, removed the sheets that covered her sleeping husband and cut off almost half of his penis. As John lay in shock and losing vast amounts of blood, Lorena left the apartment, got in the car and drove off. In her panic, she hadn’t realized that she was still clutching John’s penis. Horror-struck, she rolled down the window of the moving vehicle and threw it out into a field” (trutv.com). This detailed report of the conditions behind Lorena Bobbit’s actions is shocking, and deemed worthy of copious media attention. Due to the media onslaught, Lorena went from “anonymous”, to “notorious” overnight. (cbsnews.com). The attention generated no doubt, comes less from her violent assault than from the fact that she dared to desecrate the Holy Grail of all “menkind”: the beloved penis. This became media gold for pundits, late night talk show hosts and the hot topic for water coolers devotees all over America. The Bobbit case caused a media frenzy. Jokes and snide remarks about Lorena and John Wayne Bobbit (awkwardly named after one of the most virile stars of cinema) sprung up everywhere. For instance, “Not since Lizzie Borden have a woman and her cutlery received so much attention” (Pershing 1). Rumors sprang up about her being killed in an automobile accident by a “prick that cut her off” or that the dog used to retrieve the penis was a ‘cocker’ span-
iel (Pershing 4). Lorena Bobbit became the Halloween costume of choice for many women after the attack, and companies like Ginsu knives and weed whacker manufacturers allegedly sought her out as a spokes-
woman for their products. Even her husband was said to be approached by “Peter-Bilt Trucks” and “Snap-
on Tools” for endorsement deals (Pershing 2-3). During the trial, vendors stood outside the court house selling “Slice soda, and cocktail weenies smothered in ketchup. The journalistic bent of the story contributed to the shaping of the story and the amplification of the public’s perception regarding it” (Pershing 1). Journalist’s used the Bobbit case as the opportunity to stretch their creativ-
ity coming up headlines like: “Forrest Stump”, “The Unkindest Cut of All”, and “Severance Pay” (Persh-
ing 4). Still, outside of the ridicule, some media outlets projected sympathy for her as a victim. Even in her defense her counsel argued that it was “the penis or her life” (Berns 26). Those on “team Wayne” argued that Lorena’s actions were heinous inasmuch as she possessed other options to remove her from what she claimed to be an abusive environ-
ment. Noted, was “Lorena’s position as the “main bread-winner” in the family, and the fact divorce was available (Berns 26). Yet, when the trial ended and Lorena was found not guilty by reason of insan-
ity, gender allegiance was loud and clear. As author Walter Berns noted, “The verdict was ‘cut cleanly’ along gender lines. Women cheered and men crossed their legs and made nervous jokes about sleeping on their stomachs” (26). No matter which side the public chose, the underlying messages in the media framing fell back to gender.

The more serious implications of the case were overlooked. While most had a field day with jokes and quips surrounding the Bobbits, few stopped to ask: “Just what is so funny about someone cutting off someone else’s penis amidst allegations of rape? In fact although overshadowed by the frivolity sur-
rounding the case, many were “deeply disturbed by the humor associated with it” (Pershing 4). In the arti-
Rose C. Payne

cle, “His Wife Seized his Prize and Cut it to Size, author Linda Pershing offers a feminist approach to why humor had such a sizeable role in the way the media handled the case: “People often use jokes to express ideas they are unable or unwilling to state more overtly. Humor can help maintain the status quo through comic devaluation” (Pershing 4). By turning to humor, one can diffuse the power of the situation. If you can laugh at the Boogey Man, he is less frightening. If you can make fun of witches and their power, then you can convince yourself that Kramer was just a crazy coot whose accusations lacked merit. Devaluing Lorena Bobbit in the media through humor quells long held patriarchal fears of what awaits male privilege and authority if a woman is allowed to wield any sort of power.

A comparison of the headlines and written accounts highlights how the media brands women and men differently. Unlike the men, the women have descriptors such as “insane”, “mad,” “bad” or “angry,” attached to their headlines and the stories written about them. Descriptors associated with either emotion or state of mind. Such “labels” are often used for “women who commit crimes which bring them into contact with the criminal justice system” (Berrington 50). For instance, when descriptions of the crimes of Betty Broderick, (the scorned woman whose story is first told) and Clara Harris (a Texas dentist convicted of running over her philandering husband repeatedly with her car) (Ludwig XV) were publicized, headlines such as “No Parole for Angry Betty Broderick,” and “Suburban Madness: The True Story of Clara Harris and the Murder of David Lynn Harris,” splashed across newspapers and television screens everywhere. These labels and others contributed to the way writers framed their opinions on each “scorned woman” in question.

In the book Till Death Do us Part, author Robert Ludwig proves quite misogynistic in his liberal use of labels in describing Betty Broderick. Initially, author Robert Ludwig’s take on the Betty Broderick case appears sympathetic to her situation. Yet, as
his account progresses misogynist framing prevails. Although Ludwig expresses a veiled praise for the role Betty Broderick plays in her husband’s success, he quickly turns Betty into a raving stalker when her actions turn deadly in regard to her husband’s infidelity and betrayal. One example of this is when Ludwig appears to give Dan Broderick an “oh, you poor guy” nod when he describes Betty as “disturbed” (31). He builds the case in Dan’s defense stating that, “although dependent on Betty, Dan felt smothered by her and their breakup was years in the making.” He also states that Dan stays with Betty as long as he did because he feared it would “kill her” (how ironic) if he left” (31). One of the worst misogynistic stabs Ludwig makes is when he sympathizes with Dan’s choice in leaving Betty citing that when, “Dan met someone else who gave him the feeling he wanted to have and longed for, it became impossible for him to stay married to Betty” (31).

Insert record scratch here. What’s wrong with this misogynistic picture? Let’s recap. It was fine for Dan to stay with Betty as he worked for the doubly successful status of doctor and lawyer, but as soon as he reaches this status she cramps his style? The author goes on to offer that when relationships are terminated in this way responses such as: emotional stress, diminished self-esteem, humiliation, depression, anger and hurt present. Yet, in the very next sentence he refers to Betty as a “ditched lover seeking retribution right before labeling her as having the personality of an “ego-centric stalker” (31-32). Betty = Angry = Bad. What is discerned from Ludwig’s blatantly biased, take? In what is obviously a page out of the “Bros before Hos” handbook, Ludwig whether consciously or unconsciously, privileges Dan Broderick. While account-ability from Betty Broderick is a must, Dan receives little chastisement for his own distasteful behavior. Positioning Betty as a women needing massive “validation, and attention”, Ludwig rounds out his argument stating that because her husband “could not and would not give Betty this validation, it
cost him his life” (33). Perhaps Mr. Ludwig should have re-read the transcripts or left his misogyny at the door before penning his book. For his one sided view downplays the fact that Dan Broderick was an opportunistic, self-centered, adulterous cad who used his wife to climb the ladder of success and then retracted it before she could join him on the climb up. How dare she act so monstrously!

Similar treatment is given to Clara Harris. In the same book, Robert Ludwig also gives his take on Clara Harris. The background on the Harris case is as follows: Clara and David Harris worked side by side, building a very successful practice in the suburbs of Houston, Texas. Shortly after their union, they became parents of twin sons. While on the surface their union seemed perfect, in reality, something was” terribly wrong.” By 2002 David had taken a lover. When Clara confronts David about the affair, he admits his infidelity. He even described the affair to his wife in intimate detail. Angry but resolute, Clara wanted to remain in the marriage and asked David to end his affair. Saying that he would, yet proving false to his vow, Clara eventually tracked David down to the same hotel where the two had married ten years previously. After phoning David and having him come downstairs to the lobby of the hotel, Clara once again confronts him about the affair. Words are exchanged and what happens next is frightful. In the middle of the confrontation, David strikes Clara in the head and pushes her onto the floor. Clara is able to collect herself and heads to the parking lot and her Mercedes. In a disoriented rage, Clara sees David standing in the parking lot and presses the accelerator aiming for David who boldly comforts his mistress who is overwrought over the incident. As the car rushes towards him, he pushes his lover out of the way just in time before Clara plows into him at forty miles per hour. To the shock and horror of others, Clara runs over the body of David again, and again and again, until his entire body is crushed. She then screams out words generally tied to abu-
sive men: “Look what you made me do! (19). In yet another misogynistic tirade, Ludwig’s frames Clara Harris as the “mad woman” pushed by female frailty and fear of abandonment. From his words you just know that he wants to taunt Harris with: “you’re not so tough without your car!” Citing Clara’s loss of her father at an early age, Ludwig paints her as a fantasy fueled, former beauty queen, turned “little girl lost” in need of a father figure to make her feel whole. Pushing the “mad” envelope even further, he shares Clara’s statement where she announces, “I found the one that ‘God’ had reserved for me in an attempt to “underscore” her “highly romanticized view of love” (20).

Again castigating the woman, Ludwig uses words like: smothering, insecurity, over dependency, and jealousy (21) to establish an impression of Clara Harris. Ludwig even goes as far as to posit that Clara continued to run over as a means to stop her own feelings of hurt, pain and torture (23). While by no means concurring with Ludwig’s logic, it cannot be denied that his point parallels a similar suggestion made by philosopher Arthur Schoepenhauer. In Terry Eagleton’s book, On Evil, he cites Schoepenhauer’s as positing,

Arthur Schoepenhauer distinguished between what he called the good, the bad, and the evil. Bad actions he thought were selfish one; but evil actions did not fall under this heading... He saw evil deeds as motivated by a need to obtain relief from the inner torment of what he called the Will; and this relief was to be gained by inflicting that torment on others. In psychoanalytic terms, evil is thus a form of projection. (107)

While both men posit almost identical ideology, Ludwig’s spin demonizes or blames Clara for the need to project her pained feelings onto her husband who is largely responsible for provoking her pain. Following his thoughts on Clara’s projection of her pain, Ludwig relies not only on misogyny
but also racial stereotypes snarkily stating that David had no idea of the danger a "fiery personality like Clara's" (she is of Colombian descent) possessed (23). Noticeably missing again are any venom laced words for the actions of David Harris. As in the Broderick case, Ludwig gives the male Harris's behavior a pat on the wrist (less than a slap) and pardons him with words like "not remorseful" and "showing poor judgment" pushing again the message that both men needed respites (which they morbidly received) from their overbearing wives. This same "milder" tone is attached to the language regarding men guilty of crimes against their wives or significant others.

By contrast, notorious males who have murdered their wives receive a far more generic billing. When Drew Peterson and Scott Peterson (no relation) received their media attention for murdering their wives, the media used far less scandalous and sensational language when framing their vile deeds. For example, In Crime Magazine, Scott Peterson was called simply "Scott Peterson: Pregnant Wife Killer." Drew Peterson’s headline stated: "Drew Peterson Found Guilty of Murdering Ex-Wife Savio." Absent from both descriptions are any particular adjectives defining them. There is an obvious difference in the language describing the same "evil" act. Why is this? Author Eileen Berrington suggests this difference is due to "media constructs" of women that tie into norms and expectations associated with appropriate female behavior" (50). Paula Ruth Gilbert notes, "It does not matter what men and women actually do or even if it is the same thing. The social institution insists only that what they do is perceived as different" (1273). This contributes to the attraction and wonder given to the dark acts committed by the woman. Because violence is considered to be a "rarity" among women, this "enhances the newsworthiness of it" and holds the female up to a greater reckoning and accountability than the male offender (Berrington 50).
Females presented from a sexualized angle also face demonization from the media. Women who are defined as bad, mad, and angry are not the only female archetypes vilified in the media upon straying away from societal and gender constructs. The “sexualized” female falling under the “woman scorned” motif also receives her fair share of criticism and judgment. One of the most famous of this category of women is Amy Fisher. On May 19, 1992, 17 year old Amy Fisher met Peter Guagenti, a 21-year-old college dropout from Brooklyn, to get a .25 caliber handgun. Guagenti then drove Fisher to the home of Mary Jo Buttafuoco, the wife of the man with whom Fisher was allegedly having an affair. There, Fisher shot Buttafuoco in the head; then, thinking she had killed her quarry, Fisher was driven back to her Long Island home by Guagenti. To Fisher’s dismay, she had not killed Mary Jo Buttafuoco, although she had permanently maimed her victim. After emergency surgery, Mrs. Buttafuoco identified her attacker, and Fisher was arrested (Carveth 1). This unfortunate attempt to kill the wife of an on again off again lover placed Amy Fisher squarely in the media eye. News agencies clamored for interviews, more “fodder” was supplied to the late night talk men, and the name Buttafuoco became a household name not to mention the “Butt-of-a-few” jokes told at the expense of all involved.

Described as a “media circus” (Carveth 1), the story of Amy Fisher’s rash actions took the airwaves by storm. Not only were newspapers and talk shows interested in Fisher’s story of scorn and revenge, so were the powers that be for network television. Amy Fisher’s story was a much anticipated spectacle of the “docudrama” genre, which quenched the viewing audiences thirst for more and more details about a bad love gone wrong. Author Rod Carveth suggests that the public’s fascination with the story was largely in part due to its subject matter being so close to the mega-successful film Fatal Attraction, the story of a woman fatally obsessed with a married man(2). The media attention was raised to
even greater heights when it was uncovered that her alleged lover Joey Buttafuoco demanded that she go into prostitution. From this revelation Amy Fisher became known as the “Long Island Lolita,” drawing her name from the similarities of her situation to that of the female protagonist in Vladimir Nabokov’s novel; a novel which details the illicit love of an older man and a 12 year old girl. With more and more of the lurid details of Amy Fisher and Joey Buttafuoco exploits coming to the surface, the viewing public remained fascinated.

Amy Fisher also displayed traces of a misogynistic framing. As the adult in the situation, greater accountability should have been required of Joey Buttafuoco. But, as the other male parties in previously mentioned cases he too received no more than a slap on the wrist. Again, Amy Fisher must take responsibility for her choices, but as an underage young woman, why was Joey Buttafuoco not held to higher standards? Do misogynistic gender allowances even trump the protection of a child? For her part in the attempted murder of Mary Jo Buttafuoco, Amy received over 15 years. For his part in the statutory rape, solicitation of and pursuing of an affair with Amy, Buttafuoco received six months. In similarity with John Wayne Bobbit’s rape charges, this aggression, against both Fisher and Lorena Bobbit was practically dismissed. When onlookers remember Joey Buttafuoco, the recollection will be that of an old guy with a funny name making out with a hot young girl. When people remember Amy Fisher prostitution, attempted murder, scorn, shame, and jail time are the words that precede her name. Of the two, who really committed the greater evil?

Lisa Nowak’s demonization carried a “double-burden.” While the most common definition for a double-burden is two workloads; one paid and the other unpaid, Lisa Nowak’s double-burden is a different kind of load. As an intelligent woman, she finds herself straddling both gender lines. She is expected to carry out what is designed for women but her closeness to the constructed male end of the spec-
trum holds her to higher standards. As a member of NASA, Lisa Nowak had privileges that many women will never experience. From the gendered, misogynistic viewpoint she got to come into the “boys’ private playhouse,” the one with the “invisible” no girls allowed sign, and she got to do “boy things.” As a part of this world, Lisa Nowak is expected to do better, act better and be better than the average woman. If she cannot live up to these expectations, then she does not get to play. The “run of bad news” started with her arrest following the actions of the following police transcript (Morgan 1). Police transcripts reveal ex-astronaut Lisa Nowak’s desperation the night she confronted a romantic rival. Even after she was under arrest; even after she was hauled away for questioning; even after learning she was in deep, deep, trouble for allegedly pepper-spraying Colleen Shipman—even then, Lisa Nowak just wanted to confront Shipman one more time. “Let me talk to her, Nowak pleaded to the police officer...I need to know where she stands.” An astronaut who rode the space shuttle in 2006, Nowak apparently felt she was losing her love interest and fellow astronaut Bill Oefelein, 42, to Shipman, 30. Police records show that Nowak 44 drove 950 miles to confront Shipman and having a steel mallet, knife, pepper spray and BB gun while wearing an adult diaper so she would have to make fewer restroom stops (Morgan 1, Tresniowski 1). Like John Wayne Bobbit’s severed penis, Lisa Nowak’s tale of diaper wearing became overnight fodder for ridicule. Stories and articles were written about her titled: “Houston, She has Some Problems.” “Maybe Someone Spiked the Tang?” “Rapid Descent.” “Out of This World”, to name a few. And just as telling in Nowak’s case is the language used when discussing her.

For example, when veteran astronaut Buzz Aldrin offers somewhat of a wooden show of support, his words do not show a sense of connection to Nowak, “‘Astronauts’ are not superhuman. It is not excusable, but it is understandable for an ‘achiever’ to fall into a trap” (Morgan 1-2). In no part of his
response did he acknowledge Lisa Nowak the astronaut or the person. His generalized statement hints at someone tolerant to the addition of females to the program yet displays an “I told you they (meaning women) do not belong here” attitude. Along the lines of high achievement, Nowak was hailed as one of NASA’s “very best and brightest” and Lisa reportedly took part in: student government, field hockey, track, math team, and was a co-valedictorian, all gendered as activities and accomplishments leaning toward the constructs designed for the male (Campos-Flores 4). Even the huge focus on the diaper wearing seemed to infantilize Nowak a one respected space traveler. Even more telling is what amounts to NASA putting Nowak in a “time-out. For instance, reports say that NASA “put” Nowak on leave and removed her flight status and mission access (Morgan 1). Notice the language again when discussing Nowak and her love interest Oefelein. In separate news reports it was reported that Nowak was “put” on leave, but Oefelein “took” a leave. Again, language completely gendered. Equally telling is the fact that Nowak was encouraged to make a public apology for her actions. Where were the public apologies from Oefelein who was married at the time of the affair, and from Shipman who was also involved with the married Oefelein? It is also noteworthy that in the restraining order Shipman takes out against Nowak, she describes her as being, “extremely unstable and feels like a “scorned woman’” (Tresniowski 4).

An apologetic attitude even spills over into Nowak’s private life. Stories of her return to church and congregations praying for her were highlighted (Tresniowski 2). And more feminized Nowak spoke of “Putting family first,” the amount of time that training took her away from her family, how thankful she was to have a supportive husband, and being aware of the sacrifice (Campos-Flores 4). All language framed as coming from an apologetic “bad girl” for shirking the things she “should do” and for trying to be like a man and failing to do so. Alex Tresniowski makes another misogynistic revelation, he states,
that earlier test pilots at NASA enjoyed a good time, good whiskey, fast cars and plentiful women. Yet, these things were considered nothing more than high jinks and NASA looked the other way. It is also noted that these “men” were noted as “disciplined” (3). This speaks to what Paula Ruth Gilbert posits as society’s gendering of control. Whereas men are constructed to take control and be in control, women who act out are said to have a “failure” of self-control (1275). Lori Nowak’s demonization in the media serves as a cautionary tale illustrating just what happens to the woman that wants to have it all when society tries to tell her that she is only allowed a small portion.

There is a certain rationale for the media demonization of the “scorned woman.” At first glance, the “woman scorned” appears deserving of her demonization. Yet, if one peers deeper, it is evident that she must be demonized in order to expose her and to keep her in her place. It is the hell which she is capable of releasing that threatens the patriarchal order. There are women like Betty Broderick and Clara Harris, who embrace the gendered call of wife, mother and supportive partner. Yet, when these roles betray them and implode upon them they will step across the threshold of evil and remind you that they played by the rules and expect to be treated accordingly. Women like Lorena Bobbit who are malleable, and ‘appear’ easy to control. But rile, them, hurt them and they will make you fear them. This type of woman is not afraid to “sever” all ties. For the Amy Fisher’s, the Lolita, the playful little minx. You tease her, taunt her, and have your way with her. But, do not let her have her way and her tantrum can turn deadly. And then there is the Lisa Nowak. She is the biggest threat. She is intelligent, capable and able to stand toe to toe with the best male opponent.

The women falling under the motif of the “woman scorned” are not demonized for the evil they commit, they are demonized for the fear this evil generates. If misogynistic practices do not continue to
restrain them, what hope is there for the preservation of a structured, regulated society upon which patriarchy depends upon? The warning is clear. If these various archetypes are allowed to develop and gather strength, and they rebel against gendered constraints, get ready patriarchy, for there will be hell to pay.

Works Cited


ChangingMinds.Com


I Can’t Make You Love Me if You Don’t


Rose C. Payne

The Ins and Outs of the Evil Genius "The Joker"

by Abel Bekele

The Joker is a clown-looking evil genius. An evil genius is a mutually opposed spirit by whom every person was supposed to be attended throughout his life. A person who powerfully influences for good or evil the character, conduct, or fortunes of another can also be defined as an evil genius (s.v. "genius"). He has the ability to achieve anything he wants because of his intelligence in the film The Dark Knight Christopher Nolan. The media, different directors and writers have turned a villain from the series Batman who was once a non-factor when first appeared to know being one of Batman biggest foes. This court-jester looking villain was first brought into the series Batman in the early 1940s and was known for his mysterious murders and using a deck of cards as a weapon. He was first portrayed as a crazy sociopath who kills people for amusement. An evil genius is someone who uses their intelligence well in a negative way, a brilliant person who uses his abilities for negative or harmful ends, especially a criminal mastermind. A timeline would be important of how The Joker was first brought into the Batman series as a clown looking like a murderer to how he is portrayed now as an evil genius that has power and uses his intelligence for the bad. Examining The Joker character from 1928 to his current appearance in The Dark Knight, shows how the media has changed his character around every time he appears in any book or movie. Modern society that includes movie directors and writers has made different versions of The Joker to fit how society’s view of evil is and how terrorism and craziness lead to being evil.

The Joker has always been a crazy maniac murderer but as times went on, writers and movie directors
Abel Bekele

have changed his persona and they have all been different but nothing like the character Heath Ledger played in *The Dark Knight*. Before The Joker was a clown looking murdering maniac, it is announced in the novel *Killing the Joke*, by Alan Moore, his name was The Red Hood first. Even then he was also crazy. His insanity led him to terrorize and be evil. In the novel The Joker says, “All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy. That’s how far the world is from where I am. Just one bad day” (Moore 63). The man who will become The Joker is an unnamed engineer who quits his day job at a chemical company to become a stand-up comedian, but fails at it. He is desperate to support his wife Jeannie who is pregnant. He agrees to guide two criminals through the chemical plant he previously worked at so that they can rob the card company next door. During the planning, the police inform him that his wife has died in a household accident. Grief-stricken, the engineer tries to withdraw from the plan, but the criminals strong-arm him into keeping his commitment to them. He whole life changes when he has found out his wife has died. His wife’s death had a major impact on him that drove him insane. Does him going crazy because the death of his wife and unborn child make him evil? Moore has times where he talks about The Joker and how he even knows he has changed. The Joker states, “...My point is, I went crazy. When I saw what a black, awful joke the world was. I went crazy as a coot! I admit it! Why can’t you?” (Moore 54). DC Comics does not address that in the comics books, but later on discusses how The Joker’s appearance was caused by an accident he had committed. The Joker thinks about life as a joke due to his carelessness about everything. The smirk he always has on his face makes it seem as if he always has something up his sleeve. Does going crazy make someone evil? If a person is crazy, that should not make them commit illegal or negative crimes. Every version of The Joker has a different appearance and persona. Later on in the films, The Joker is shown using his intelligence to beat Batman
but not always getting defeated as fast through the comics, televisions shows and video games. The media knows this type of Joker will not accept people’s version of evil so therefore the director of *The Dark Knight* gathers traits from all the different Jokers to make this version of The Joker, the best yet in the Batman Series.

In the first issue of the DC Comics series *The Batman* in 1940 with *The Joker*, he is claimed as a crazy maniac. He used his intelligence to gain access to the radio station and tell the city of Gotham who he was. Most villains have super powers or strength but *The Joker* used his brain, which was something different: “The Joker, a grinning Clown faced killer, announces his crimes over the radio, threatening to kill several men and steal valuable items from them” (JokerUniverse.Com). He always had a smile on his face but yet it was a creepy smile. When first noted in the comic book series, his weapon of choice was a deck of cards. He states in the comic, “They said I was sick in the head. They said I needed help. Well, maybe I’m a little Batty blame it on the Bats in my belfry” (DC Comic Issue 13). *The Joker* has a bizarre appearance modeled after the symbol of the Joker known from playing cards. He had the ability to perform magic tricks and that is how he would beat his enemies. The media has made *The Joker* into a character that uses his intelligence to get what he wants. New directors and writers have made him more of an evil genius. In the DC Comics this character was never able to beat Batman. The Joker plans would always fail which showed that he was not that smart, but in the film *The Dark Knight*; he has the ability to beat Batman and uses his intelligence to another level. The reason being behind the role of *The Joker* in the movie, the director tried to fit the society’s standard or evil or villain.

*The Joker*’s appearance can terrify anyone. This is a grown man in a clown suit who goes around committing crazy crimes. It seems as if he is crazy and demonic but is to evil to notice it. He is so wrapped up in viewing life as a joke; his smirk is
what grabs people’s attention. Brian Truitt writes about The Joker and his crazy looking appearance. He continues about why his appearance is a clown looking costume. He states:

With his stark white face and ghoulish smile, the Joker has always been fear-inducing. But his twisted new visage? Well, that’s downright horrific. The Clown Prince of Crime is back in the comics following an absence of a year—after having the skin of his face cut off—to torment the Dark Knight yet again in the pages of DC Comics’ Batman series. (Truitt 5)

In the comics, the Joker killed about three to four dozen people. This man is committing these murders with no powers, no help, no robots or technology. He uses his intelligence as his power. His brain is his best weapon. In “Joker Walks the Last Mile” (DC Comic Issue 64), when the Joker was executed in an electric chair, that affected him in a way to make him more evil. It felt as if the shock gave him more power mentally. He gets chemically revived by his henchmen. While the Joker is an evil character and comes back to the scene as a villain of Batman, he was less of a killer but wanted to make a point. At this point, the editors decided that only one-shot villains should commit murder, so as to not make Batman look impotent in his inability to punish such recurring foes as The Joker. The Joker became the most popular villain and was used frequently during the best time era of comic books. The use of the character The Joker calmed down by the late 1950s. The character The Joker almost disappeared when Julius Schwartz took over editorship of the Batman comics in 1964. With Julius Schwartz as top editor, he started to change the appearance and how The Joker perspective of evil is, that was the first start of different writers staring to change the character of The Joker to fit people’s perspectives. Writers knew that people’s view of evil always changes and it does not get any better, always worse. Writers chose to go with an even more
evil and smart Joker character to let the audience know that The Joker has an evil mentality and no powers to defeat Batman.

Jack Nicholson played the first The Joker ever on a movie screen. He is not the best actor to play The Joker, but then movie directors wanted all-star movie actors to get ratings up on their films. He was portrayed as the villain who always had henchmen to help him in the movie. His appearance in the film was just as the comics, with the clownish looks and the famous evil smirks he does. It was never shown how he turned into The Joker in the film, but his characteristics are not as the same as Heath Ledger playing The Joker in *The Dark Knight*. Nicholson’s appearance was cleaner than Ledger’s character was. In an article by Benjamin Svetkey, he notices the difference between the two different Joker characters. He states, “The guy had serious nuts,” Nolan says. “What I needed was someone who wouldn’t be afraid of the comparison with Jack Nicholson. And then I saw Heath’s incredible performance in Brokeback Mountain. Such a lack of vanity. This was an actor who wasn’t afraid to bury himself in his character—to a massive extent” (Svetkey). The media changed the clothing of The Joker to let the audience know what he has been through as a character. In the film, Ledger’s character The Joker seems more bothered and tormented with life and that is one example of how society has changed the character of The Joker to fit people’s standard of evil. When looking at The Joker that Jack Nicholson played, he does not look as evil, crazy or demented as The Joker in *The Dark Knight* played. Jack Nicholson’s character The Joker still used cards as weapons and had henchmen that helped him commit his evil crimes. The director of *The Dark Knight* uses a darker tone for The Joker so the audience can sense the evil Ledger’s character possesses.

Why need a sidekick when The Joker was one of Batman’s smartest villains who had no power to defeat Batman? In the 1999 cartoon series of Batman, The Joker had an evil sidekick who was always there
for him. A major addition to the character was the introduction of the character Harley Quinn. Originally introduced in *Batman: The Animated Series*, Quinn is a clinical psychiatrist who falls hopelessly in love with the Joker in Arkham Asylum after he relays his tale of having an abusive father and a runaway mother, and now serves as his loyal, if daffy, sidekick, costumed in a skintight harlequin suit. The Arkham Asylum is located on the outskirts of Gotham City, and is where those of Batman’s foes considered to be legally insane are incarcerated. Their relationship often resembles that of an abusive domestic relationship, with the Joker insulting, hurting, or even attempting to kill Quinn, who remains undaunted in her devotion. She was popular enough to be integrated into the comics in 1999 and a modified version of the character. She was never introduced in the movie because by then, the directors have made The Joker a different type of evil genius. Her appearance in Batman shows that The Joker needed help to defeat Batman, and that she could not do it by himself. The Joker in *The Dark Knight* has no problem facing Batman himself, his use of intelligence is used throughout the whole film to show his evil genius work. As time went on, the character of The Joker became more intense, from him having Quinn as a sidekick in the cartoons, to him having more power in the movie. Nolan made The Joker into an evil genius meaning he would not even need help from anyone else. His henchmen do his dirty work and he is the mastermind. Society has made the character The Joker from a children’s cartoon villain into an evil genius people are happy to see in a film.

The Arkham Asylum can be compared to Hell. When first noted in the comic books, The Arkham Asylum looks dark, creepy and a place no one wants to be. Writers wanted to depict this place as an area where only bad people reside. The people who are actually in the Asylum are criminals Batman has caught by yet why did they not use this in the film, *The Dark Knight*? Was the Arkham Asylum too much for movies
or did the director want to make the asylum so real that he did not have time for it in the movie. It is important in the Batman series and to The Joker because that is where he gets most of his henchmen, from the asylum. Video game creators have even made a video game about the asylum and how The Joker is also the villain in the game. In the game he mentions how the Arkham Asylum is important to him. He knows nothing but evil people and negative energy are originated from there so he states, “This island is under my control! That’s right, boys and girls! Mine, mine, mine, mine! Oh, the plans I have for this place. It’s going to be glorious” (Batman Arkham Asylum). Ironic part about The Joker is that he has no power but yet terrorizes the community that makes him evil. In the video game, they portray The Joker the crazy evil villain but yet show another side of The Joker. The Nolan Brothers should of put effort into bringing in the asylum to let the audience know how The Joker recruits his henchmen. Since the change in the society, directors need to add more of the old attributes of The Joker and make that more evil also instead of just The Joker.

The Joker’s character would have always been set up for failure. From the 1940s version The Joker always has failed to beat the Batman. His plans would always lead him to jail or Batman would out-smart him and his plans would go sour. The director of The Dark Knight changed that by making The Joker into a character that puts him in situations he can get himself out of. In the film, The Joker was so smart the if he wanted to go to jail and get out he would draw up blueprints of him defeating people while in jail; no other version of The Joker could of did that. Society standard of evil has gone up since the world has experienced so much terror since the first Batman so turning him into an evil genius works perfectly.

Power sets people apart and The Joker would use his intelligence as power. The Joker is the only villain to fight a hero without super powers; he uses his intelligence to defeat Batman but always
seems to lose. From the comics to the cartoon shows, he would always lose to Batman but Nolan makes an even more evil version of The Joker and Heath Ledger does an amazing job portraying the more “evil” version of The Joker. All the old versions of The Joker were always destined to lose to Batman, in the film, the director changes it up by making The Joker more evil by his acts he commits and his looks. The Joker proves he is an evil genius by all the chaos he causes just to get to Batman. Most villains want either the power or money but yet The Joker is different and commits these acts for his amusement. He has a smile on his always even if he is not smiling. In one of the scene in the film *The Dark Knight*, The Joker burns money to make a point. He knows money is power so he gets people attention by committing a crazy act such as he did. What type of villain burns money? The new version of The Joker does. Even at the beginning of the film where he robs a bank, what does he really do with the money? He did it to make a point in Gotham city. He has no type of mask; all of the people of Gotham know what he consists of but cannot stop him. Throughout the history of The Joker he always was never scared of the police or anyone cause only person who could stop him was Batman.

Society has set a new standard of evil and how it should be portrayed. Directors and writers know how society changes and the media have to keep up with it, movies and books now have way more violence than they used to have. Directors have made films that never had any evil or violence such as *Snow White* or *Alice in Wonderland* into movies with violence and villains. The media has made their own definition evil to fit society standards. The way The Joker was portrayed in *The Dark Knight* was like an evil genius that has the ability to get anything he wants, in the earlier versions of Batman, The Joker would get caught up with his bad ideas that ended up him losing to Batman.

Who has influenced the media to make movies, stories, or characters more violence? Do people enjoy more pain than pleasure? People have mad the media
think that violence is what people want more in plots. What does that have to say about us as people? More visions of evil and the devil are formed when making these characters evil. Violence in movies has made a major impact into people’s genre of film. More films that come out have to do with violence and killing. More characters are getting more violent which makes people want to see it. How does a Disney movie, such as Snow White, which was a cartoon movie for children, turn into a movie with weapons, sex, and violence? The media changes The Joker character around because of the change of evil that has been expected from people in society. Alice in Wonderland went from being a colorful children film to a movie that promoted war, violence and sex. Society tries to fit people’s standards of evil just to satisfy them but is it worth it? Directors are re-designing films to make people to watch it. Does this mean as a society we need to do better? People would not want their children to be watching Alice in Wonderland with people fighting with weapons in a war and promoting sex. Directors should not con-done fitting into what society wants. The drastic change of The Joker has made it hard for anyone to ever try to make a more evil version of The Joker.

The Joker is a type of villain who has no purpose but is overall an evil genius. Ever since the early versions of The Joker, he has been a villain who wanted to beat Batman at everything. When the DC comics came out with Batman, The Joker was his main villain but as time went on The Joker began to develop a different type of identity. In The Dark Knight, The Joker might be one of the smart-est villains to ever be in a superhero film. He uses his evil genius tactics to get what he wants. For example every move he makes is for a reason and is planned. One scene in the film, The Dark Knight where he was in jail was because he wanted to be in jail. Modern society has made The Joker into a character no one can stop except by killing him.

Studying the different types of The Joker characters will get a better understanding of where he
Abel Bekele came from and how he originated. Starting from the DC comics to even the early joker with Jack Nicholson playing him as a character. Analyzing the different characteristics of The Joker will prove if he has always been an evil genius or if modern day society has made him that way since the film *The Dark Knight*.

In one scene of the film, the Dark Knight, The Joker wears a nurses outfit and does not help the patient or hospital but blows it up. Everything The Joker does is premeditated because of his enemy Batman will get to him. This is the first time The Joker is out of his clownish looking suit and has no make-up on his face. In the hospital dressed as the nurse he states

> Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I’m a dog chasing cars. I wouldn’t know what to do with one if I caught it. You know, I just... do things... It’s the schemers that put you where you are. You were a schemer, you had plans, and look where that got you. I just did what I do best. I took your little plan and I turned it on itself. Look what I did to this city with a few drums of gas and a couple of bullets. Hmmm? You know... You know what I’ve noticed? Nobody panics when things go “according to plan.” Even if the plan is horrifying! If, tomorrow, I tell the press that, like, a gang banger will get shot, or a truckload of soldiers will be blown up, nobody panics, because it’s all “part of the plan.” But when I say that one little old mayor will die, well then everyone loses their minds (*The Dark Knight*).

The image he portrays is a crazy nurse who messes with patients. His craziness makes him evil. He seems so calm when stating all these crazy statements about his life and how people view life. His evil persona is showed because he wants people to scared and fear the world. When talking about the scene, The Joker is in the hospital in a nurse costume, Dreyer says, “This newfangled Joker is
wearing a uniform that hasn’t seen the inside of a hospital in thirty years. He looks a little like Nurse Ratched, who terrorizes her patients in 1975’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. He is definitely creepy, but he’s also kind of, well, pretty. The dude looks like a scary nurse lady. Holy Jerry Springer” (Dreyer 80). All the acts he commits through his insanity just to prove how evil he is. Only an evil person would blow up a hospital where innocent are hurt and are in the process of getting better. Randolph Dreyer talks about the appearance of The Joker in this scene and how his persona changed throughout the movie. Dreyer also sees the change in the character of The Joker himself, he also states, “The character’s limited back story is new. The killer street cred is new. The sloppy, ghoulish face paint is not so much new as new age. And his reason for taking on Batman and destroying Gotham? It might be new, but it is purposely vague, leaving lots of questions without answers. Also new is the manifestation of his primary pathology: the Joker loves to play mind games, and he does it here with a sinister glee, pitting a boatload of ordinary citizens against a boatload of ordinary inmates” (Dreyer 80).

The Joker’s character has changed drastically to satisfy society standards of an evil villain. The other versions of The Joker never has had that much power and especially the ability to defeat Batman. Christopher Nolan makes Heath Ledger’s character different from the other Joker characters by the darker clothes he wears and his ability to never give up or lose like in the other versions of Batman he was portrayed in. Different scenes show how The Joker has changed as a more evil villain.

The director did a good job making The Joker into an evil genius through his evil acts in the film. Christopher Nolan made The Joker into an evil genius who only commits crime for his amusement. In the film, it seemed as if he did never want to change. The Joker accepts himself and the life he lives. His crazy looking appearance always made him look
Abel Bekele

funny but not crazy until *The Dark Knight*. In one the scene of the film, he mentions why he always has a smile permanently on his face. His past might have turned him crazy which eventually led him to be an evil genius. The Joker states, “Wanna know how I got these scars? My father was... a drinker. And a fiend. And one night he goes off crazier than usual. Mommy gets the kitchen knife to defend herself. He doesn’t like that. Not-one-bit. So - me watching - he takes the knife to her, laughing while he does it! Turns to me, and he says, “why so serious, son?” Comes at me with the knife... “Why so serious?” He sticks the blade in my mouth... “Let’s put a smile on that face!” And...Why so serious?” (*The Dark Knight*). His slogan why so serious shows that he takes life as a joke and does not care about anyone or anything. In this same scene he mentions his wife and how he had a major impact on his change also just like the graphic novel by Alan Moore. In *The Dark Knight*, The Joker says, “Come here. Hey! Look at me. So I had a wife, beautiful, like you, who tells me I worry too much. Who tells me I ought to smile more. Who gambles and gets in deep with the sharks... Look at me! One day, they carve her face. And we have no money for surgeries. She can’t take it. I just want to see her smile again, hm? I just want her to know that I don’t care about the scars. So... I stick a razor in my mouth and do this...to myself. And you know what? She can’t stand the sight of me! She leaves. Now I see the funny side. Now I’m always smiling! A little fight in you. I like that” (*The Dark Knight*). His past has caused him to go insane which cause his evil instinct to kick in and commit evil crimes for his own amusement. Christopher Nolan shows how the media and society wanted another type of Joker that would terrify people and they did with this exact one.

The previous Jokers all get caught up into a small scandal but in this film, The Joker is so smart that he convinces the police that Batman is a criminal also. Christopher Nolan makes it known that this Joker is like no other due to how he uses his intel-
The Ins and Outs of the Evil Genius

The Ins and Outs of the Evil Genius

In the film The Joker states, “This city deserves a better class of criminal. And I’m gonna give it to them” (The Dark Knight). Making a more evil version was apart of the plan when making this movie. Nolan did not want to make this Batman film seem like the other version of Batman from the comics, games or even cartoon show. The Joker made it known that the Batman was also a criminal so instead of him just being after Batman, the whole Gotham police force are after him also. In the scene where he sets up the governor to get shot is where all of The Joker plans start to fall into place. He committing this act is another example of how The Joker as a character has changed because he had to end up finishing the job when he usually has his henchmen to do his dirty work. He does not care about getting looked at by the police or anyone because he knows he is capable to beat them. Only person who can beat him is Batman and he gives Batman a hard time trying to defeat him. The media has created another type of Joker character in this film and he is an evil character whose favorite quote to say is “Why so angry?”, implying him taking life as a joke.

If society never changed the persona and appearance of The Joker would the shooting in Connecticut ever happen? The shooter came into the movie dressing like The Joker, making everything seem all right until he started killing people. Has society influenced people to act like The Joker in real life? Society and the media tend to amp up the people with what they want but at the end does it benefit people in reality? The innocent people in the movie should of never died but the person who committed the evil act dressed like The Joker obviously got that idea from The Joker. This evil version has made people think it is ok to dress like he character from the movie and commit evil crimes and that is not fine. Society’s vision of evil has changed and turned people into crazy people. Why would a grown man come in dressed like The Joker to commit crimes to innocent people? Does Christopher Nolan feel some type of way since he created this crazy version of
The Joker? The Joker and his terrorist acts have influenced people to also go out and commit crimes like The Joker. Evil influences people and The Joker was one of the influences of the shooting.

Heath Ledger seemed like he became The Joker when acting as the character. He did such a good job of portraying an evil genius. From his costume to the way he acted. His attire was darker than any of the other Joker characters. The other versions of The Joker would wear a purple or green suit with colors everywhere, yet Ledger’s character had a darker persona. This Joker was also smarter and wiser than the other Joker characters through the whole Batman series from cartoon shows, movies and video games. It seemed as if Heath Ledger was The Joker while playing this role. In the article by Benjamin Svetkey, he states the importance of Heath Ledger playing this role and how he was perfect for The Dark Knight’s The Joker. Svetkey states,

Heath was the only one on it,” Nolan insists. “I knew he was it from the start.” Nolan was right: Ledger was fearless. The actor seemed to have no misgivings at all about trespassing on Jack’s old turf. On the contrary, Ledger’s feral take on the Joker makes Nicholson’s more gentlemanly clown in Tim Burton’s 1989 Batman look about as scary as Cesar Romero. Of course, at the time—the summer of 2006—Ledger had reason to be confident. He’d just been nominated for his first Academy Award for Brokeback, which must have eased the sting of recent flops like The Order and Lords of Dogtown. A major role in a big studio franchise was the next logical step for Ledger’s career (Svetkey).

Ledger knew the honor it was to play the character The Joker. He was the best for the position and was one of the reasons why this version of The Joker was more of an evil genius than the rest. If Nolan never tried to fit society standard of evil he would of never chose Ledger who did an amazing job as The Joker and will never be forgotten.
Christopher Nolan has satisfied society by making an evil genius version of The Joker who chooses his own destiny. The history of The Joker shows that before The Joker in Dark Knight, he would always lose to Batman. Throughout the comics, cartoons shows and video games Batman always wins against The Joker, yet Nolan changes this character around to be Batman’s hardest foe. Still having no special powers or abilities, The Joker had the ability to do anything he pleased to amuse him. The smile on his face symbolizes his craziness that led him to become evil. He terrorized Gotham city because The Joker knows he has the power to. Since the standard of evil has gone up in modern society, Nolan created a new version of The Joker to please everyone’s need. Heath Ledger’s character challenges all of the past characters of The Joker and Christopher Nolan knows that. This version of The Joker has caused society moments to remember, from bring the best villain in Batman to actually having an influence in real life. Writers and movie directors want to meet society standards of evil to show that their work is successful. The Joker is one of the smartest villains in The Golden Age of comics and now. Only villain to never have super powers but yet uses his brain as his special abilities. Christopher Nolan made Heath Ledger’s character so good that it will be hard to duplicate. The crazy villain The Joker terrorizes Gotham city and uses his intelligence for his own amusement that makes him an evil genius.

Works Cited


Guillermo Del Toro’s Pan’s Labyrinth: Humanity is Corrupt

by Solin Saleh

Guillermo Del Toro’s Pan’s Labyrinth depicts the relationship between the imaginative and the real world. Using the small girl, Ofelia, the film is able to show that even the most innocent of humans (like a child) risk the temptation of “evil” and immortality, for instance, Ofelia giving in to the Pale Man’s feast, when she eats the grapes. However, her underworld “spirit-guide,” the Faun, chastises her considerably for falling into temptation. Through the three main trials that Ofelia encounters to go through, it becomes clear that human nature is corrupt; for example, Ofelia’s innocence overpowers the corrupt human beings and no matter how evil a person is, there is always good that wins over evil. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “evil” as “morally depraved, bad, wicked, and vicious as applied to persons” (s.v. “evil”). Ofelia has to rely on her intelligence in order to deal with the situations. The trials show that she is going against corrupt human nature.

The Faun presents Ofelia with the Book of Crossroads which tests the limits of her courage. Even though the tasks are rather straightforward, it is from this point forward that she is tested on whether she has the ability to follow rules and directions without question. The disobedient nature of humans becomes clear in the second trial when she has to get a key from the Pale Man’s feast. Under instructions not to eat or drink from the giant feast, Ofelia acts on the contrary, showing not only the disobedient nature of humans, but also the greedy nature whenever golden (and mostly forbidden) opportunities appear. However, she learns that there is punishment for disobedience when the
Pale Man chases her. While still disobeying in the third trial by refusing to listen to Mercedes’ advice about trusting the Faun, Ofelia’s moral is tested by asking her to cut up her own baby brother. The skeptical nature of humans is brought out with her refusal to trust the Faun on the promise that it will only be a drop of blood. Ofelia does not want any harm to happen to her baby brother, and she strongly believes that this is her fight against the corrupt world and not her brother’s, and that is why she decides to keep him away from the trial.

Pan’s Labyrinth describes the fear that is going on during the Spanish Civil War by focusing on Ofelia because that shows that even children were affected by the war. The characters, especially Ofelia, describe the long term impact of the conflict as well as the cruelty that exists in the human mind. The settings show the dark as well as the cruel visions of the world. There is a great relationship between the imaginary parts of the film with the reality in the real world. The issue of the human morality comes out in great depth from the film whereby humankind tends to react differently during troubled times then in peaceful times. The whole film revolves around human nature and the issues of sins and imperfections. When people are afraid, they commit sins: for example, Ofelia kills Captain Vidal because of fear. It is quite clear that people usually make their judgments based on the current situations rather than prejudice.

In Martin Barnier’s article “The Sound of Fear in Recent Spanish Films,” Barnier describes the sounds used in the film by stating, “Monsters are part of an animist vision of the world. Only the child can hear and see them, and even though they can be dangerous, the real world is far worse” (210). Violence attracts attention from the society and it plays a big part in our evil world and in order to survive in that evil world, Ofelia has to create her own monsters that can protect her. She lets the monsters do the thinking for her and make the choices for her even though she is the creator. In order for Ofelia
Guillermo Del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth*

to escape the corrupt world, she creates monsters that actually talk and bring out fairytale logic throughout the film. Only she is able to see the monsters because they only exist in her mind and soul. Ofelia says, “Hello. I am Princess Moanna, and I am not afraid of you” (*Pan’s Labyrinth*). Ofelia says to the monster that “I am not afraid of you because I created you” (*Pan’s Labyrinth*). It is interesting to see how an innocent child can create such scary looking creatures that even adults would be scared to look at, yet a young child like Ofelia is not even afraid to talk or look at them straight in the eye. The reason for her to create these monsters is because she is trying to show that these creatures are not even scary compared to Captain Vidal whom everyone during the Spanish Civil War is afraid to speak to. Captain Vidal corrupts the people and uses his power to victimize these people and treat them like they do not even have the free will to exist. He seems to hate the existence of human kind and is willing to do anything to get rid of these people either by torture or turning them into his slaves forever. Del Toro puts a lot of power into the hands of Captain Vidal, and shows the female characters in the film as being very weak. Captain Vidal kills Ofelia while she is only a child, which shows Captain Vidal’s capacity for cruelty. It would have been interesting to see a transaction where Ofelia kills Captain Vidal, but Del Toro does not give the women in this film the right to be strong or even the right to remain strong because Ofelia dies at the end, and she is killed by Captain Vidal rather than the monsters that she has created.

*Pan’s Labyrinth* is shown to be a child’s story. The reader would not hesitate in imagining how human nature reacts to the difficult situations in order to fight against corrupt human nature and prejudice. Her mother tells Ofelia that she is “a bit too old to be filling her head with such nonsense” (*Pan’s Labyrinth*). Ofelia is an example of a character who passes through situations that make her react differently. The reason Ofelia throws herself in this
imaginative world is because she feels that this is the only way she can escape the evil world. Ofelia losing herself into this imaginative world, Ofelia shows that human nature is corrupt and in order for a child to get away from all that, the child must create their own imaginary world. Ofelia creates this fairytale world and she is the only one that goes inside this world because only her imaginative creatures are allowed to live in this world. The monsters are very scary looking and this shows that Ofelia’s mind is corrupt by human nature and she will do anything in order to survive.

Captain Vidal’s evil plans are needed to begin Ofelia’s journey into the world of fairytale. Even though Ofelia’s imagination is quite developed; her outside situation affects her the most causing her to push deeper inside her imagination. Children develop imagination when they are pressured by the outside world and this shows that human nature is bad and it provides stress for an individual and due to that stress, Ofelia is thrown into this imaginary world, and the only way she can survive this imaginary world is by laying her own rules and wishes. Ofelia’s imaginary world can be seen as this: “And every day, the rose wilted, unable to bequeath its gift to anyone... forgotten and lost at the top of that cold, dark mountain, forever alone, until the end of time” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Ofelia is trying to show her unborn brother that life outside the womb is filled with darkness and evil and she recommends him to stay in the womb forever and it would be better off for him to not be associated with the corrupt human nature. Ofelia tells her unborn brother stories from her imaginary world and she tells him, “If you be good to mother, I promise to make you the ruler of my world” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Ofelia strongly believes in her imaginary world and starts to get carried away in her own world. Ofelia does not want anything to happen to her unborn brother and that is why she is telling him these stories to make him see her imaginary world.
Captain Vidal is a ruthless dictator that seems unstoppable to his approaches. The cruelty of Captain Vidal is certain when he tortures the poor victims; for instance, in the film Captain Vidal uses a hammer and some other tools to make Mercedes speak the truth. His action shows that Captain Vidal’s torture has no limit. In the beginning of the film, there is a scene where Captain Vidal mercilessly kills a father and a son without even finding out the truth behind their story and without giving them a chance to explain themselves. Captain Vidal has his own law and rules that are so powerful even his own soldiers and guards are afraid of him and obey his command. Even if Captain Vidal's actions are not approvable, the soldiers seem to accept his ruthless decisions due to his evil nature. Captain Vidal’s strongest message to his followers and guards is to follow his rules and brutal actions. Captain Vidal is a heartless character towards Ofelia and his wife: for example, there is a scene in the film where the doctor asks Captain Vidal whom to save between the unborn baby and the mother and Captain Vidal demands his unborn child over his wife. Captain Vidal’s action shows that he is only concerned with the well being of his unborn child because his son will carry out his name for him. Del Toro shows that if the child would have been a girl, Captain Vidal’s actions towards that child would have been cruel because he does not care for females in general. The reality of fear in these incidences reveals fairies, the Faun, and the monsters that give a revelation of the escape from fear in Ofelia’s entire life. Therefore, the illustrations used in the two worlds reveal the repeated moral that there is no need to be influenced by the emotions, but rather by situations. In the film, there is a doctor who gives an argument to Vidal saying, “to obey—just like that— for obedience’s sake… that’s only something people like you do” (Pan’s Labyrinth). The doctor shows that humanity exists in the world because he remains strong and follows his duty by treating all his patients
equally and not getting involved in their personal matters. He is able to follow Mercedes (the maid) and do the right thing.

Furthermore, Christian religion also goes through trials and temptation. Del Toro compares Pan’s Labyrinth to the Christian religion; for instance, Ofelia has to return to her imaginary world just as Jesus Christ also returns to his father. Ofelia represents innocence and has to maintain that throughout her journey whether it is in the real world or the imaginary world. During the Spanish Civil War, it was necessary for everyone to have a father figure in their lives. Without any moral guidance from a man, there would not be any decisions made because the men’s always make all the decisions. It is interesting to the viewer to see Del Toro compare Ofelia who is a female to the Christ who is a male. Usually, when it comes to power there is always men’s that carry it and not females and especially not a female as young as Ofelia. Jesus Christ also had to go through a lot of trials and prove to his people that he is the chosen one and the son of God. Ofelia also has to prove her identity and her innocence to the viewer by going through the three tasks. In the beginning of the film, the viewer can see Ofelia anxious to go through the trials and not have fear which is very strange because the trials are even difficult for an adult to carry on.

It is interesting to see such an innocent child go through such hardship and gain the knowledge needed to survive such a cruel world. Moreover, Ofelia appears to be stronger than all the other characters that are shown in the film; for instance, her mother seems very weak and cannot fight back the demands of Captain Vidal. On the other hand, Ofelia does not shrink from him and she is not ready to accept him as a father figure. Ofelia sees Captain Vidal’s evil nature when they are first introduced. Physical abuse can affect the mental state of a person’s mind and that person will create issues of obedience. Ofelia lacks obedience because she does not know whom to
listen to due to the fact that everyone is so busy with their own lives they tend to forget about this innocent child and her happiness.

For the purpose of this film, Del Toro presents tortured victims as inherently good; it seems that those undergoing torture are the good ones while those performing the torture are actually the evil people. In addition, it seems that if one commits violence or the evil gets committed in their names, it is not really from the evil, but only from the need to bring back morality. However, human judgments do not depend so much on prejudice, as they do on existing situations.

All through Ofelia’s actions, she is a child having wild fantasy. She moves with her weak mother in order to meet her stepfather for the first time. He is a merciless captain to the others in the military and performs cruel actions in the face of other military officials. Vidal was so harsh, “If I say this asshole can leave would anybody here contradict me?” (Pan’s Labyrinth). However, Ofelia faces a problem in her decisions; the Faun tells her that if she wants to get back and reunite with her father, she must then finish three tasks successfully. In the efforts that Ofelia assert to accomplish the tasks, she faces a lot of strong power and needs to decide whether she wants to win this battle and face her true identity or stay amongst the evil world people forever. For a child to overcome such tasks shows that good always wins over evil, even if attempted with an evil approach. Therefore, there exist situations where human kind makes decisions according to the current tasks even if it means they would have to sacrifice too much in order to accomplish the tasks. They even undergo imperfections in the efforts to accomplish the tasks. She must complete these tasks in an evil manner. These tasks are evil because they are not only hard but also life-threatening. She could end up losing her life by completing these tasks and it is not the right thing for an innocent child to find evil ways in order to survive in this world. What justifies
Ofelia’s approach to these tasks is her innocence and the way she approaches them in an evil way, yet she still maintains her true human nature. In her attempt to get the knife from the Pale Man’s feast, Ofelia succeeds, but on her way out of the feast, she sees some juicy and delicious looking grapes on the table and she cannot resist holding herself back from eating it. Therefore, she reaches for the grapes and the Pale Man chases her down until she finally escapes from the house with the help of the “magic chalk.” Through this task, Ofelia sees that she cannot let anything distract her because this is a mission for her to prove that she is a Princess and she is not allowed to make mistakes. Through the escape, she makes the decision out of the fear that came to her inside the Pale Man’s place. Ofelia over thinks all her judgments in each situation. The creature represents the morality in Ofelia and the refusal to eat the food means that she did not follow her inner self that is the self-prejudice. The Faun tells Ofelia that “your spirit will stay forever among humans. You will live among them, you will get old like them, you will die like them and your memory of us will fade. And we will vanish along with it!” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Ofelia goes through the real world in order to return back to her imaginary world. In order to do this she needs to go through certain situations that test her purity.

Furthermore, Ofelia finds that disobedience is her only chance at access to the possibility of a future around the evil reality that she has to encounter every day, from the time she made her arrival at the military troop camp. Only adults get to choose their own destiny and make their own decisions, Ofelia creates a world where she is treated as an adult and can make her own decisions. When Ofelia passes through by the testing feast, she is uncaring to the fairies’ warnings that she was not to eat the grapes in the Pale Man’s place. She goes on to break the Faun’s rule not to “eat or drink anything, absolutely nothing!” (Pan’s Labyrinth).
In addition, Ofelia disobeys Vidal and goes on to abduct the newborn child. Finally, Ofelia looks back to her rigid promise that she would show obedience to the Faun, but later refuses to offer him her brother. In this case, Ofelia faces conflicting situations whereby she has to make hard decisions in her life. Using disobedience as the only rule to acquire that for which she longs. Despite Captain Vidal’s cruelty and negativity, Ofelia is willing to suffer so that she can see her mother happy. Interestingly, the fairies in this film provide a parallel to the biblical story Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The fairies warn Ofelia not to eat the grapes from the table, much as God warns Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit. The Tree of Eden was the Tree of Knowledge. Ofelia knowingly partakes in the surrogate Tree of Knowledge (maturity, death, childbirth, old age, nakedness, and shame) that Adam and Eve get exposed to as a result of the tree. The Faun is trying to block Ofelia from that tree, but Ofelia is doing it for the knowledge sake. Ofelia is seeing herself as an adult and that is why she does not like to be told what to do. She does not like following the rules and chooses to pick her own destiny. She is constantly being pressured around everyone she meets: for example, her mother tells her to call the Captain “father” which Ofelia refuses to do and Mercedes telling her not to believe in fairytale because they are not real. After all she is only a child and it is better for her to experience her own flaws and the only way she will know the true meaning of life is by breaking some rules.

Ofelia enters the house to find her ill mother covered in blood from the waist down. The mother extends her arms to Ofelia and calls, “Ofelia...help me” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Del Toro goes on to reverse a similar Biblical story, the myth of Cain and Abel, in the instance that Ofelia grants an opposition to the Faun and she gives up all the rights she had as royalty. The Cain and Abel myth demonstrates a capacity for disobedience and violent actions. This
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shows that children create a negative image towards their parents and disobey their rules because following rules is something that children cannot obey and will do anything possible to get around it. Therefore, her decisions are out of the disobedience she shows to the Faun. Elaine Cassel and Douglas Bernstein in their text *Criminal Behavior* explain:

Children in the preoperational stage recognized that rules are made by ‘all-powerful’ others. At this stage, they learn that in some situations, they can invent and modify rules which often happens as children play games; and by the time they reach that stage, they are able to apply accepted rules and law to specific situations. (140)

Ofelia is also at that stage where she thinks that she can make her own rules and change her own rules depending on the situations that she is going through. The psychological mind of a child is very sensitive and when Ofelia goes through so much hardship, she tends to drift away from the evil world because she knows that she does not have the power to fight the people in the evil world and that is why she decides it would be better for her to create her own imaginative world where she can fight the people she dislikes in her imaginative world. Since Ofelia is a victim in the corrupt world, she decides not to trust anyone around her and follow her own path which leads her to the Labyrinth. The Labyrinth shows a dark image which can be compared to how Ofelia sees the corrupt world and that is through darkness and evil. The fairies in the film also represent dark images because they are not colorful but very evil looking: for example, usually an image of a fairy in a Disney film is white and that way it tends to grab attention of the viewer, but in Ofelia’s imaginary world, her fairies are nothing compared to that of Disney film. *Pan’s Labyrinth* fairies are black and grey looking and have an ugly appearance to them. Even though Ofelia has created this imaginary world for herself, her world
is nothing childlike or fun, but has a negative and evil atmosphere coming out of her imaginary world. The Book of Crossroads is also shown as an empty book until she is shown drawing her own images and roads that will lead her to her destiny.

Furthermore, she annoys her mother who later sends her to bed without any food as a punishment for dirtying her new clothes and getting home late for supper. Ofelia’s action means that she cared less about getting home early but instead wants to ensure that she passes the first task. Passing the task is her greatest concern at that moment therefore she broke her mother’s rules and regulations that she had to get home early for supper. Her mother says to her, “You’re getting older, and you’ll see that life isn’t like your fairy tales. The world is a cruel place. And you will learn that, even if it hurts” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Del Toro stresses how “Ofelia’s stomach growls with hunger” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Even though Ofelia is the Princess in her imaginary world, there still exist rules that she must follow in order to prove her innocence. Catherine Orenstein, in her text Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale, explains, “The tale as told at Versailles suggests that an unchaste woman is as good as dead. In Victorian versions of the tale, the girl’s mother forbids her to stray from her path, and later the tearfully contrite heroine promises that she will never again be disobedient” (6). “Little Red Riding Hood” compares to Pan’s Labyrinth and where both the protagonists are little girls and both decide their own path to walk on and both get into trouble for doing that by their mothers. Ofelia’s mother tells her that she needs to arrive home before dinner and be company for Captain Vidal, but Ofelia decides to disobey her mother’s rule and instead decides to make her own rules and law.

Moreover, Captain Vidal showcases his evil mind to the visitors by saying, “I want my son to be born in New Spain. Because these people have the idea that we are all alike” (Pan’s Labyrinth).
Captain Vidal strongly believes that his unborn child is a baby boy and he seems to not appreciate having a baby girl. In Captain Vidal’s mindset, having a son will make him much stronger and he believes that his son will be his right hand man. Captain Vidal’s idea is to let his son take over his power after his death. The notion is just like all the other dictators in the world, having the power within the family will mean a lot to Captain Vidal. During the Spanish Civil War, women could not survive without men in their lives and that is the reason why Ofelia’s mother wants Ofelia to call Captain Vidal father figure. Having a father figure in their lives would take away the financial worries for Ofelia and her mother. After all Captain Vidal does not love his wife because he only cares about the baby boy that is going to take on his name for him. Captain Vidal thinks that women are a weaker species than men. Ofelia’s mother says, “The captain has been so good to us... Please, Ofelia, call him father. It’s just a word, Ofelia, just a word” (Pan’s Labyrinth). Ofelia refuses to call him father because she can see right through him and it is obvious to her since she is innocent and children are able to tell whether a person is real or not because adults don’t get scared of children and that is why they will say and do anything around children and the child can see that. That is why Ofelia decides to be her own adult and guidance and not follow the rules set by Captain Vidal. Jennifer Orme states, “For Vidal, a powerful political figure, the combined narrative of paternity and masculine pride and valor is a particularly potent master narrative, one he repeats over and over again, and attempts to impose on others by rejecting alternative interpretations and versions” (230). The decision taken by Ofelia to collect the “baby root” may seem crazy to the real world, but she has the faith that the “baby root” is to change the situation of her ill mother providing that people seek solutions in any way possible regardless of the law that is in place.
Moreover, the fantasies that Ofelia has created assist her greatly in getting the reality of life as well as the purpose she has in life. The purpose is not only to find her way out of the difficulties but also to be a hero. Fantasy and imagination assist her to bear the awful situations of her mother’s illness. In addition, they offer the hope as her mother is facing death and gives her the solutions in the encounters of danger. Her imaginations enhance her to make decisions that see her finding solutions.

As Ofelia tries to make sense on the unjust as well as the barbarous environment that surrounds her, the events go on to occur in reality and the supernatural realm. The place where she met her father, as described by Roger Clark, is “the forest, on the other hand, is inhabited by the Resistance forces, who present us with a world symbolized by the organic and archaic, where the timelessness of the forest is itself in resistance to the temporal rigidity enforced by Captain Vidal” (54). Therefore, the environment was not favorable for Ofelia hence she had to find ways to survive in it. As Allison Mackey illustrates Ofelia emphasizes an “existential choice might help to imagine a more realistic (and perhaps less overtly Christian) vision of hope for humanity” (181). On the other hand, the bloodthirsty monsters in the film reveal the cruelty of humankind that causes them to make wrongful as well as immoral judgments according to their situations. Humankind is susceptible to temptation when faced with difficult encounters. The trials Ofelia goes through reveal that the ways of men are corrupt and that the decisions they make in life are in accordance with their situations rather than prejudice.

Ofelia, upon realizing the stepfather’s demonic behavior, Ofelia decides to go against him and his law. In this case, Ofelia decides to follow her own judgments in her life. Ofelia experiences so much upon the separation from her family and wishes to save her mother as well as the baby brother. She has no time for the stepfather who is responsible
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for his mother’s illness and state of mind. Captain Vidal is persuading Ofelia’s mother and Ofelia to be just like him evil. In addition, the cruel Captain Vidal chooses his male strength and uncaring ways to treat his pregnant and seriously sick wife and his sensitive stepdaughter. Del Toro uses Captain Vidal as a way to let the audience see that just because the film is centered on Ofelia and her innocence, there is still a male figure around to overpower her. If Ofelia is presenting the good sides to human nature, then Captain Vidal is the perfect example of human nature being corrupt because he showcases that throughout the film.

The whole film has strange fairytale logic with all the characters not acting in accordance with their choices but according to larger force that compel them. The difficult lesson that Ofelia has to learn is that only through our disobedience to tyranny and by standing on our own morality will we be at a point to conquer and get free. Ofelia’s life appears to be very painful because everyone is busy with the Spanish Civil War and she is busy building a whole new world for her in which to survive. Allison Mackey states:

Day after day, children are denied the right to be children. The world treats rich kids as if they were money, teaching them to act the way money acts. The world treats poor kids as if they were garbage, to turn them into garbage. And those in the middle, neither rich nor poor, are chained to televisions and trained to live the life of prisoners. (171)

Throughout the life of humankind, there are challenges that require them to think quickly in order to make final decisions that would see them to the next level of life. Ofelia becomes excited and motivated with each task. Most of the time, humans tend to engage in evil actions and imperfections in order to get out of difficult situations. Therefore, the person may not engage in certain actions because of free will, but out of necessity. It happens that
the person has to do the act if at all she wishes to be out of difficulties. The person gets into sin and imperfection as well as making judgment based on current situations. In other words, it is important to follow our moral understanding of situations to enable us to overcome problems. There are situations that require fast judgments and the need to follow our free will.

Ofelia’s father dies and she moves with her ill mother to live with the stepfather who cares less about their well-being. Ofelia is already suffering from her father’s loss and she reaches a whole new world with cruel people around her, as Roger Clark and Kenneth McDonald explain, “Ofelia’s trauma is also heightened by the fact that she is orphaned with the three potential substitute figures who emerge as possible surrogates, namely Vidal, the Faun and Mercedes, each wanting to take a part of Ofelia’s innocence and power and, ultimately, placing her in danger” (57). Ofelia’s action forces her to find ways to survive from her own judgments. She decides that disobedience is the best way to achieve what she required. Therefore, she goes on to disobey the stepfather, the mother, the Faun as well as the other external influence that stressed her into situations. Making decisions based on situations and not based on prejudice will force us to change and grow into another person. Not only do situations make us change, but decisions, both good and bad, make us different people. Pan’s Labyrinth cautions against a parent’s negligence of her child. If a child feels stressed out by the outside world, they will create their own imaginary world, which will be dangerous because that child can lose themselves in that imaginary world. A child’s imaginary world may consist of monsters and evil creatures that will take over the mind of an innocent child and make them do all sorts of evil actions which will be harmful to that individual. Ofelia feels pressured by the people that surround her and so she chooses loneliness and subsequent disobedience lead her to an imaginary world.
Works Cited


Fictional characters allow viewers to live through them; it is easy to watch a fictional character stand up to his/her boss, but doing it in actual life is terrifying. Entertainment such as television series, allow viewers to do things they normally would not be able to, like traveling in space or standing up to their boss. Modern day television series have many characters that go against what is socially acceptable behavior: for example, it is socially unacceptable to be rude to someone trying to be helpful. By doing so, television series are able to attract viewers who need to escape from their real life. The viewers idolize these fictional characters, by buying t-shirts with their quotes or other merchandise to support their favorite characters, such as Sheldon Cooper, Simon Cowell, Doctor Gregory House and many more. However, the television series trap viewers into supporting something they normally would not: an evil genius.

Sherlock Holmes has withstood the test of time; since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created the character in 1899, Sherlock Holmes has increased in popularity. The United Kingdom has a popular show based on Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes character; Sherlock on the BBC television network. Sherlock takes Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and brings him into the modern age of technology. The popularity of Sherlock from the beginning was high and it only continues to grow. In the essay, “Sherlock Critical Reception by the Media” Paul Rixon describes how Sherlock had 7.7 million viewers for its premiere, some viewers were already Sherlock Holmes fans, but the publicity of the Sherlock Press Pack drew many viewers to watch the show (175, 167). The online newspaper The Inde-
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*Pendent* describes *Sherlock* as “a Rolls-Royce of a popular entertainment, beautifully engineered and beautifully finished” (Independent 2). Society idolizes people who are able to “break convention rather than abide by it. That means they could be slightly odd, transgressive, or even immoral” (Leadbeater 3). The popularity of this television series comments on how many people idolize the Sherlock Holmes character, however these people do not realize that this character is an evil genius. The series’ unique modern twist, along with great plot lines, brings viewers back for more, which only adds to the series’ popularity. *Sherlock* has a massive number of followers; however, *Sherlock* attracts these followers and traps them into idolizing him. In the conclusion of *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom*, Stein and Busse describes the show as:

*Sherlock returns us to the genial individual who is smarter and better than everyone else and, and who, rather than being wholly restrained by the system, can often employ the system to work for him — thus proving his superiority and the seeming superiority of the outsider individual over the bureaucratic system. (226)*

Superiority is *Sherlock*’s flaw. The way *Sherlock* treats the people around him for his need of superiority helps to depict him as an evil genius. He degrades not only his coworkers but his friend, *Watson*.

What keeps the viewers returning for more is the fact that *Sherlock* is a type of evil genius. ‘Evil genius’ is used to describe someone who is smart and is seen above society, while using their abilities for good. However, evil genius’ personalities and antics make them evil: as Charles Leadbeater phrased it “the cold, brilliant and seemingly amoral eminence grise” (1). Eminence grise is a word used to “describe one who wields real though not titular control” (s.v. “éménence grise”). An evil genius is someone who does not have an official position of authority, yet gains authority through
his antics. A part of being an evil genius is to degrade people in order to appear in charge; this can be in a form of bullying. Bullying “is a form of interpersonal aggression, that is, any behavior intended to harm another person. This can include verbal insults and threats” (Vickers 207). Sherlock appears evil when he bullies Anderson with insults to his intelligence.

According to Margaret Vickers, bullying is evil, no matter the reason behind it. In her article, “Bullying as Unacknowledged Organizational Evil: A Researcher’s Story,” Vickers depicts an overlap between the definition of bullying and evil; “Intention to harm and pleasure in hurting others” (205). Bullying is a form of harm to others which provides pleasure for the bully. Sherlock insults Anderson after he accuses Sherlock of being the serial killer and a psychopath (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock degrades Anderson after he calls him a ‘psychopath’ Sherlock states, “Not a psychopath, I’m a high functioning sociopath. Do your research” (“The Study in Pink”). Later on in the episode, Sherlock degrades Anderson again by stating, “Anderson, don’t talk aloud. You lower the IQ of the whole street” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock gets pleasure from having a better retort and by proving how Anderson is making false claims because he did not ‘do his research’ like Sherlock has. Vickers states multiple reasons behind bullying, but the one that fits Sherlock the best is bullying in order to enhance his self-image (207). Vickers states that sociopaths need to bully people because they are “typically individuals with personal insecurities and problems that they need to exercise in destructive ways, especially when they reach positions of power and influence” (206). When Sherlock degrades Anderson, the viewers see this as funny each time he does it. The viewers do not realize that Sherlock is a bully because they see the incidents as small parts and during the tension of Sherlock attempting to solve a crime. When looking at all the bullying incidents as a whole, they “form a pattern of abuse and aggres-
sion that is rarely given serious consideration that it deserves” (206). Some audience members may see the bullying of Anderson funny in the moment, but if they looked at the bigger picture, they can see how Sherlock is trying to enhance his self-image because he has insecurities. The times Sherlock chooses to bully Anderson occur when he is trying to figure out a crime, and the police department is looking at him for answers. Sherlock chooses to bully Anderson in an attempt to draw attention to Anderson instead of himself, so Sherlock can gather clues for the police department.

Sherlock does not only bully Anderson, but people who seek his help as well. The episode, “The Great Game” begins with an inmate, Mr. Bewick, begging Sherlock to help him. Instead of focusing on what Bewick was stating, Sherlock focuses on Bewick’s grammar. When Bewick describes how his father “learned us to cut up a beast” (“The Great Game”). Sherlock looks bored and states, “taught.” Bewick catches on and soon begins to correct his grammar, but Sherlock continues to look bored and starts to leave. Bewick begs, “You got to help me, Mr. Holmes! Everyone says you’re the best. Without you, I’ll get hung for this” (“The Great Game”). Sherlock turns around and states, “No, not at all, Mr. Bewick. Hanged, yes” he adds with a smirk before he leaves (“The Great Game”). Not only does he give Bewick a false sense of hope, but he also appears to take pleasure from it. Sherlock knows Bewick is a murderer, but gives him hope that he is there to help him. Instead, he ridicules Bewick’s grammar and in the end tells him there is no hope. In this scene, Sherlock demonstrates how he believes he is above everyone. No one else is in the room while this conversation is being held. This makes one wonder if this is how Sherlock acts away from his friends, Watson or Lestrade. This question soon fades further on in the episode, when Sherlock proves he is more interested in solving the puzzle of the crime then in the morals behind it.
Sherlock does not only bully his coworkers but his close friend and flat mate John Watson. In “The Hound of Baskerville” Sherlock does a psychological experiment on Watson in order to solve a case. The case involves a possible hallucinogen, which Sherlock believes is in the sugar. Sherlock makes Watson a cup of coffee with some of the tainted sugar. He then puts Watson in a room in which Sherlock has set up in order to bring about the hallucinogen. By doing this Watson is terrified and ends up locking himself in a cage in order to stay safe. Watson calls Sherlock on his cell phone and begs, “Sherlock, you have to help, you have to get me out!... Now Sherlock, please!” (“The Hounds of Baskerville”). While Watson is facing his fear of a gigantic hound chasing him, Sherlock is upstairs creating the hound noises and making the lights flicker on and off. When Sherlock gets the evidence he needs he goes to ‘rescue’ Watson telling him “It’s alright, it’s okay now” (“The Hounds of Baskerville”). Watson is so terrified he yells, “No its not!” (“The Hounds of Baskerville”). Sherlock terrifies Watson in order to solve a case even though he puts Watson through this experiment believing the hallucinogen was in the sugar. By doing this to Watson, Sherlock demonstrates how he will use even his friend to solve a case; this demonstrates how Sherlock will do anything to enhance his self-image.

Sherlock is an evil genius when he bullies people and is excited with playing the ‘game’ of finding the murderer and not necessarily catching the murderer. Sherlock is enthused to be working on a serial killing. Sherlock disregards societal behavior by stating “Brilliant! Yes! Four serial suicides and now a note. Oh, it’s Christmas!” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock appears to be evil in this sentence alone. Not only is he excited that four innocent people are dead but he compares it to Christmas, a holiday known as a joyous season. Sherlock goes on to state “Impossible suicides? Four of them? No point sitting at home when there’s finally something going on!” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock learns of a fourth
killing, while he was showing his flat to a potential flat mate, Watson. They have just met the day before and Sherlock refuses to reign in his mirth over the fourth killing in front of a potential flat mate. This depicts Sherlock as someone who lives in the moment and does not care about consequences. He is attempting to sell Watson on sharing a flat together, and does not think that his mirth over the killings may send Watson away.

Sherlock is more excited about the ‘game’ and not the victims or the consequences that arise because of the ‘game’ using innocent people as pawns. While playing the ‘game’ Sherlock becomes elated at the prospect of a new puzzle. Sherlock goes against societal restrictions on being overjoyed over a murder. Both Ms. Hudson and Watson attempt to reign in Sherlock’s enthusiasm on multiple accounts. Ms. Hudson attempts to reign in Sherlock’s enthusiasm by stating, “Look at you, all happy. It’s not decent” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock argues, “Who cares about decent? The game, Ms. Hudson, is on” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock ignores the fact that four innocent people have died and is more concerned about the ‘game’ of solving the crime. At the end of “The Study in Pink”, Sherlock toys with turning in the serial killer stating, “No one else will die, though, and I believe they call that a result” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock is quick to state “they” would call it a result and that he may not care about that kind of “result”. The serial killer states that he will go willingly with the police however; Sherlock “won’t ever understand how those people died. What kind of result do you care about?” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock proves that he does not care about anyone else dying because he leaves with the serial killer, instead of turning him in.

Sherlock’s actions prove that he is more fascinated with the puzzle behind the crime than solving the crime for justice. Watson attempts to show Sherlock that he is too enthused about the ‘game’ and he should think about the woman hostage however; Sherlock states, “Oh, she doesn’t matter, she’s just
a hostage. No lead there” (“The Great Game”). Later on Watson attempts again, “Try and remember there’s a woman who might die;” Sherlock asks, “What for? There’s hospitals full of people dying, doctor. Why don’t you go and cry by their bedside and see what good it does them?” (“The Great Game”). Sherlock is more concentrated on playing the ‘game’ than he is about the outcome if he fails, the killer will set off a bomb on the woman that will kill innocent people around her.

Sherlock does not change his enthusiasm for the ‘game’ in season two. In “The Hounds of Baskerville” Henry is the victim who witnessed his father being murdered by what he believed to be a gigantic hound. Henry is terrified his entire life about this hound. When Sherlock proves Henry’s father was killed by a man. Sherlock exclaims, “Oh, this case, Henry! Thank you, it’s been brilliant!” (“The Hounds of Baskerville”). Not only is Sherlock insensitive, but he is so enraptured over the complexity of the case he does not realize Henry has been suffering his entire life. Sherlock proves he is more interested in the game behind the case than solving the case for the victim. Sherlock goes so far as to put a woman into shock. When two children are kidnapped, Sherlock is told by Lestrade to “go easy on her” (“The Reichenbach Fall”). Sherlock approaches her and begins to talk quickly, he accuses her of neglecting the children, and even takes her blanket off of her. After he confirms she had nothing to do with it, he tells an officer that she “will need to breathe into a bag now” (“The Reichenbach Fall”). Sherlock knows that this woman is worried about the children and causes her to go into shock. He is more worried about the details of the crime than keeping innocent bystanders calm.

Sherlock is emotionally detached from apparently everything, including his family. His brother Mycroft is the same way. Mycroft introduces himself to Watson, stating that he is Sherlock’s “arch-nemesis” (“The Study in Pink”). However, Sherlock and Mycroft have a superiority complex. Both want to exert their
power over everyone which causes friction between them. Mycroft demonstrates how powerful he is by moving the security cameras and stating "Get into the car, Dr. Watson. I would make some sort of threat, but I'm sure your situation is quite clear to you" ("The Study in Pink"). Mycroft attempts to bribe Watson into spying on Sherlock for him by showing how he has Watson's psychiatrist private notes on Watson's therapy. These notes prove that Mycroft is powerful enough to gain access to Watson's psychiatrist. In "The Hounds of Baskerville," Mycroft abducts Moriarty and it is later discovered how he allowed Moriarty to coerce him into telling everything about Sherlock. Later in the series this proves to be Sherlock's downfall. Moriarty uses Sherlock's story as leverage to create a story in which Sherlock creates Moriarty and sets up the whole thing. Mycroft allows Moriarty to go free at the end of "The Hounds of Baskerville" even though he knows Moriarty is going after Sherlock, this is known because his holding cell had "Sherlock" written all over the walls. Throughout the series Mycroft demonstrates himself as an evil genius.

At first Mycroft does not appear an evil genius, however at the end of the series it is demonstrated that he is one. When Moriarty is actually on trial in "The Reichenbach Fall" Mycroft could have easily made sure that Moriarty was locked up. In the very first episode, Sherlock describes Mycroft as "the British government when he's not too busy being the British Secret Service or the CIA on a freelance basis" ("The Study in Pink"). By being "the British government" Mycroft could have made sure the judge and jury were paid off or told to find Moriarty guilty. However, Mycroft does not and Moriarty is able to threaten the jury and thereby secure his freedom. Mycroft appears as an evil genius because he uses people as pawns in order to get what he wants. Mycroft appears to enable Moriarty and Sherlock to play their 'game,' even when people start to die. Sherlock's 'game' is designed by Moriarty, a self-defined "consulting criminal" and a true evil genius.
"The Great Game"). Moriarty is the antagonist of the series thus far, he paid the serial killer in the first episode, "The Study in Pink." The serial killer tells Sherlock he has "a sponsor...for every life I take, money goes to my kids. The more I kill the better off they'll be" ("The Study in Pink"). Moriarty knows the killer is dying of an aneurism and when he seeks help, Moriarty convinces him into becoming a serial killer, which in turn allows Moriarty to attract Sherlock's attention. This action of taking a dying man and using him as a pawn to start his 'game' with Sherlock demonstrates some of the evilness of Moriarty. The episode "The Blind Banker" has a Chinese gang as its antagonists; however, they were hired by M; which is suggested is Moriarty. The Chinese gang leader states, "Without [Moriarty], without [his] assistance we would not have found passage into London" ("The Blind Banker"). It appears that the Chinese gang went to Moriarty for help smuggling out artifacts, and he sent them to London knowing that Sherlock would soon pick up on the operation. Moriarty sends the Chinese gang to London in order to create another puzzle for Sherlock; to attempt to gain his attention.

The third episode, "The Great Game" has Moriarty taking a more upfront role in his 'game' with Sherlock. Moriarty sets up puzzles for Sherlock to solve. Moriarty has a bomb strapped to a random person, who then calls Sherlock with the clue. Sherlock has a specific time frame to solve the puzzle, if he fails Moriarty will set off the bomb, which not only kills the hostage but has a big enough radius to knock out a whole apartment building. The second season begins with Moriarty hiring Irene Adler to manipulate Sherlock's feelings, in order to have him crack a code ("A Scandal in Belgravia"). Irene, due to her dominatrix status, was able to get a hold of a computer code, and spends many months manipulating Sherlock in order to get him to crack it. She uses her sexuality to intrigue Sherlock because she is able to read him as he reads people. Irene gets the code from Sherlock and sends it to Moriarty.
Towards the end of the episode, when Sherlock hears that she was working for Moriarty he foils their plan and she is exiled from London. The next episode, “The Hounds of Baskerville” does not feature a puzzle by Moriarty, but he is seen at the end being released by Sherlock’s brother Mycroft. Moriarty’s true nature comes out in “The Reichenbach Fall” in which Moriarty goes toe to toe with Sherlock and attempts to ruin his character. Moriarty proves to be a terrorist who wants to play this ‘game’ with Sherlock because he is bored. Not only does he kidnap children to catch Sherlock’s attention, but he brainwashes them to react negatively when Sherlock goes to question them. This makes the police believe Sherlock is the culprit. Moriarty fed the children candy, which was laced with mercury, so the hungrier the children got the more they were killing themselves. This and the innocent killing of civilians in “The Great Game” cause Moriarty to be labeled as a terrorist, whose one mission is to gain Sherlock’s attention.

Both Moriarty and Sherlock become dangerous when bored. Moriarty sets a new puzzle for Sherlock which will involve harming innocent people. Sherlock shoots the wall at one point because he is bored (“The Great Game”). Moriarty and Sherlock are stimulated when they are playing their ‘game’ together. They need each other to stay stimulated, Moriarty creates puzzles and Sherlock solves them. Without one another they would be in a constant state of boredom, which would be very dangerous; Sherlock would shoot more walls, and Moriarty would make more puzzles for Sherlock that would put innocent citizens in harm’s way. The more intriguing the puzzle the better reaction Moriarty receives from Sherlock.

Moriarty’s puzzles become more theatrical as the season progresses. Moriarty is the most theatrical in “The Reichenbach Fall.” He creates a false identity in which he proves Sherlock invented Moriarty to set himself up as a hero. Moriarty tells Sherlock that he has assassins prepared to kill all those
he cares about if he does not jump off the roof. Moriarty makes a mistake by alluding to having a code which would call off the assassins. In order to stop Sherlock from getting the code, Moriarty kills himself. In Webber’s Psychology and Crime he describes how “Suicide has often been used as an effective means to gain political advantage where other methods have failed” (138). Moriarty tried to talk Sherlock into killing himself and when he fails, he uses the last thing he can give up in order to kill Sherlock. By killing himself, Moriarty proves his need to have some sort of advantage over Sherlock.

Moriarty is characterized as a terrorist in Sherlock. However, he appears to be theatrical about his crimes. In “The Reichenbach Fall” Moriarty breaks into the crown jewels while dancing to classical music. When apprehended the police find him sitting on a throne wearing the crown jewels, still in their display case. By not even trying to escape the police, Moriarty demonstrates his need for an audience. The text Psychology and Crime refers to “theatrical violence of terrorism” as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetuated against non-combatant targets...usually intended to influence an audience” (Webber 133). Moriarty seems to fit this statement on theatrical terrorism. Moriarty throughout the series is attempting to capture Sherlock’s attention; as the serial killer in “The Study in Pink” calls him, Sherlock’s fan.

Ellen Harrington’s essay “Terror, Nostalgia, and the Pursuit of Sherlock Holmes in Sherlock” demonstrates how Moriarty makes Sherlock look at crimes amorally and “for the sake of the craft” (70). Sherlock becomes more interested in the puzzle of the crime then the victims. Harrington goes on to describe Sherlock’s and Moriarty’s relationship by stating the following; “Moriarty’s ‘flirtation’ with Sherlock is obviously gratifying to both men, more so because of the high stakes involved in their intellectual joust” (77). Both men are stimulated in playing their ‘game.’ Harrington describes how
Moriarty is a ‘fan’ villain and how this fandom helps to create the show. Harrington depicts many reasons why Moriarty is “the new face of terror;” the main one being this curiosity Moriarty has in Sherlock and his need for Sherlock’s approval (71). Moriarty craves this approval and finds the only way he can get it is through creating crimes only Sherlock can solve. Harrington does appear biased about Sherlock’s benevolence. She depicts Moriarty as an evil genius, but does not characterize Sherlock as one. Harrington assumes that because Sherlock is not a ‘face of terror’ like Moriarty, Sherlock is not on the hierarchy of evil genius.

However Sherlock is a type of evil genius, mainly because he appears to be an “amoral eminence grise” (Leadbeater 1). Sherlock is in a position of power, not only does he prove himself superior to Watson and Anderson, but also over the whole police force. When the audience first hears of Sherlock Holmes, it is during a police press conference. When Detective Lestrade is explaining to the press about the serial killings (which he believed were just suicides) Lestrade explains: “There’s no link we’ve found yet, but we’re looking for it – there has to be one” (“The Study in Pink”). Almost immediately after that statement, everyone’s phone gets a text; “Wrong!” (“The Study in Pink”). Lestrade tries to console the public by stating, “We are all as safe as we want to be” and again everyone gets a text; “Wrong!” (“The Study in Pink”). Sherlock is behind these texts, by telling everyone that the police is wrong, he is proving his superiority over them, because in order for them to be wrong, he must know something they do not.

Francesca Marinaro and Kayley Thomas wrote the essay, “‘Don’t Make People into Heroes, John’ (Re/De) Constructing the Detective as Hero” in which they describe how Sherlock and Watson are heroes. Marinaro and Thomas conclude that Sherlock is almost a hero but not quite there yet. They believe Watson will be able to mold him into a hero. However, because Sherlock is not a hero, they depict Sherlock
as an anti-hero: someone who “is characterized by emotional detachment—from family, community, nationalism or patriotism” (ch. 5). Marinaro and Thomas label Sherlock as an anti-hero, however they also state that he is not quite up to anti-hero status. This would put him into the evil genius hierarchy.

The hierarchy of evil genius of *Sherlock* has three categories, the true evil genius, the enabler evil genius and the anti-hero evil genius. Sherlock is the anti-hero evil genius because he “admires the craft of the crime largely without judging its morality. Sherlock openly takes pleasure in the texts he has been invited to read, the range of clues Moriarty has laid, perhaps a witty take on the maxim ‘art for art’s sake’ of the decadent movement” (Harrington 77). Sherlock is an anti-hero evil genius because he possesses some qualities of a hero, mainly when he solves a crime for the police and not getting paid to do it. This demonstrates how he is trying to help the public even though he gets more out of solving the puzzle of the crime, than justice for the victim. Sherlock’s brother, Mycroft, is an enabler evil genius. He had a chance to get rid of Moriarty, but instead he lets him go free. Mycroft even sets up a plane of dead people to crash in order to let the terrorist continue to believe he has not cracked their code. Jim Moriarty is the true evil genius. Harrington describes how “In *Sherlock*, Moriarty becomes the new face of terror, peppering his crimes with gratuitous killings and bombing threats and enjoying the personal power that ensues” (Harrington 71). Moriarty also “represents the crudest human inclinations: cruelty, greed, sadism, egotism, self-gratification” (Harrington 75). Not only does he kill people because he is bored, but he does so to gain Sherlock’s attention. Both Sherlock and Moriarty seem to allow innocent people to be their pawns in their deadly ‘game.’

An evil genius is someone who is incredibly smart and uses their abilities for the general good; however, to become a true evil genius takes one step, using their abilities to cause suffering and death.
Harrington states: “Moriarty mirrors Sherlock’s aesthetic appreciation of artful crime and his detachment from its victims. This offer highlights the link between Sherlock’s coldness and Moriarty’s cruel disregard for humanity” (82). Moriarty does not care about humanity but Sherlock appears to care somewhat about humanity by helping solve crimes. The only difference between Sherlock and Moriarty is the fact that Sherlock is on the “side of the angels” (“The Reichenbach Fall”). However, as Sherlock tells Moriarty, “Oh, I may be on the side of the angles, but don’t think for one second that I am one of them” (“The Reichenbach Fall”). Moriarty is able to see this side of Sherlock and replies, “No. You’re me. You’re me” (“The Reichenbach Fall”). Moriarty is agreeing that Sherlock is playing on the side of the angels, but he is not one of them, meaning Sherlock is on the side of good, but he is not good himself.

Sherlock has a three tier evil genius hierarchy, however, John Watson must be discussed since he is a key figure in the show. Watson acts as a bystander in the midst of evil geniuses; he serves as a baseline for the audience to judge Sherlock, Moriarty and Mycroft. Watson seems impartial to Moriarty and Mycroft, however he does favor Sherlock because he sees him as redeemable. This enables the audience to sympathize with Sherlock because they trust Watson’s instincts. Watson attempts to correct Sherlock’s inhumane actions. Watson serves as the voice of reason throughout the series.

With three evil geniuses in Sherlock one may wonder how many are out there; the answer is a lot. The probing question is why there is an influx of evil geniuses in this decade. Modern times have people working the same job and needing to work it because they need to pay off debts due to an increase in consumerism. This may seem to have nothing to do with evil geniuses but in reality it does. People want to watch a show where they can live in a world (for a brief moment) in which characters are able to do what they want to without real life consequences.
Viewers are intrigued by characters that go against societal norms, like insulting people even their close friends. After a hard day of work, audiences want to come home and see television characters live out their fantasy; they want to see people yell at their bosses or to tell the truth no matter who they hurt in the process. Television shows like *Sherlock* have these anti-social characters who are types of evil geniuses. Without the proper language to define these characters, audiences buy into their cunning and start to idolize them. Audiences revere these characters not realizing they are admiring an evil genius; who with one step in the wrong direction can become a true evil genius, like Moriarty. Many shows in the twenty-first century feature evil geniuses or anti-heroes as the main character. These shows then make the audience sympathize and relate with these main characters. By making these characters relatable, television networks and writers appear to be making a statement about how the lines between good and evil are sometimes blurred. Popular television series such as *Dexter* (Dexter), *Supernatural* (Crowley), *The Big Bang Theory* (Sheldon), and even films, like *The Avengers* (Loki) feature an antagonist that relates to the audience. If the character does not relate to the audience, the audience may still sympathize with the character because they do have some type of hero-like quality that makes them appear redeemable, even after they do evil deeds. The lack of language defining evil genius allows the audiences to be off guard when choosing who to relate to; and they often can see why a bad guy can become a good guy. Relating to evil geniuses may cause people, in real life, to blur the lines between good and evil.

**Works Cited**


Vickers, Margaret H. “Bullying As Unacknowledged Organizational Evil: A Researcher’s Story.” *Em-
When you talk about violence, this has become in my opinion a definite point in the script, it has a dramatological reason to be there. After the Second World War, the close structure of family started to crumble. It started naturally already with the first one. There is really very, very little in family life today. I definitely don’t think they believe in the devil with the horns and the forked tail and therefore they do not believe in punishment after they are dead. So, my question was: what are people feeling? And the answer is physical pain. Physical pain comes from violence and I think today that is the only fact that people really fear and it has become a definite part of life and naturally also of scripts.

—Fritz Lang

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, a graphic novel by Jhonen Vasquez was published under Slave Labor Graphics, depicting a young, socially awkward, and potentially mentally insane man (as the title depicts) who violently kills people. Not only is the main character, Johnny C, a serial killer, he is also a mass murderer and a spree killer; to the dismay of parents, his character is intended for young adults. While the general adult public is not adverse to violent media (for example, violent horror films, novels and television series) marketed to adults, Johnny like other creations from Jhonen Vasquez, is meant for a younger audience— in this case, for teenagers and young adults. Other creations from Jhonen Vasquez include a television series titled Invader Zim, which, due to its graphic content was pulled from Cartoon Network, the tele-
Vision station on which it originally aired. The problem with *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* and other works by Jhonen Vasquez is that his works often portray all sides of humanity and being human. In a world where high school students are frequently sent to youth detention centers for participating in fist-fights, Vasquez declares that adults do not recognize that younger generation has the same needs in entertainment and emotionally that they do; therefore media for children and young adults should present content that reflects and/or reconciles the world they live in, and that is often a violent world. Johny, like Jhonen’s other creations, exists because he fulfills the need for violence in a world that does not overtly allow young adults to show that emotion, not simply because he can. The world that Señor Satan describes is all of humanity—“all its beautiful, terrifying sublime existence.” Through Johny, Vasquez is saying that by filtering out some of those experiences, humans (young and old alike) lose perspective of what it means to be human. Tyler Durden, the fictional character of *Fight Club*, directed by David Fincher makes a similar argument that not experiencing all facets of life isn’t living through his lifestyle. Tyler is what narrator of *Fight Club* wishes he could be—he experiences all of life, including the violence.

The question of why we as a modern society are interested in the idea of violence arises when looking at *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* (*JtHM*) and other media is does it not create violent young adults? The answer is that contrary to popular belief, violent media does not create violent adolescents. Both psychology and sociology refute the notion that watching, reading, or listening to violent media by adolescents will render them violent individuals. Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory states that in becoming a violent person, an individual not only has to observe behaviors (e.g. be exposed to violent media), but must be modeled toward that behavior over time by various methods; the individual must be attentive to the behavior, retain that information,
have correct motor reproduction to the behavior, and finally must have the motivation to actually engage in behavior. Simply watching *Invader Zim* or reading *JtHM* does not give adolescents motivation to model the violent behaviors that they witness, because despite the violence in both of these works, the violent behavior does not behoove the character who expresses it. A sociological study of violence by Walter S. Dekeseredy and Barbara Perry states that “a person must be externally or internally motivated” to commit violence, and that for violent acts to occur, the person must have no “social constraint to violence or self-control” (6), or in simpler terms that a person must have a reason to commit a violent act by personal or outside motivation, and that individual must either lack social constraint or possess little to no self-control over violent impulses. These ways of scientifically explaining how violent acts occur state that people do not commit violent acts because see violent acts occurring, but because they are modeled toward violence and have no reason to refrain, or possess a motive to commit violence. For example, a young adult will not necessarily commit violence acts because they read *JtHM* unless they lack the personal or outside restraint to do so, in which case they most likely would have engaged in such behavior regardless.

A recently published article on psychologist Fredic Wertham states that he wrote in his 1954 novel *Seduction of the Innocent* that “comic books were a direct cause of violence, drug use, and homosexuality among young people” (Newitz 1), which helps explain why many people still believe that exposure to violent media creates violent behavior. The problem with Wertham’s theory is that he “often lied about his case studies and used stories that he had heard second hand from colleagues” (Newitz 1), making his novel an unreliable source on which to base the “crusade” against violent media in Wertham’s time comic books. Because media is such an easy and obvious target to blame for violence, this type of rhetoric has returned in current society in
order to explain violence such as school shooting and serial killers, and the notion that the correlation of violent criminals to violent media equals the causation of violent crime continues in spite of persistent debunking. Despite its hyper-violent content *JtHM* does not cause young adult to become violent, but rather offers a cathartic release for the spectrum of human emotion, particularly for fear and anger that is so prevalent in adolescents, allowing them to release these emotions in a safe and relatively healthy way, rather than “bottling” up these emotion within themselves. Readers of *JtHM* have something to turn to that tells them that the voice inside their own head that wants to inflict violence may not be a bad thing, but it is not socially acceptable to act upon them. Readers of comic books in the 1940s would have felt similarly as they read about Batman attempting to restore order in Gotham. Youths of the 1940s were told by comic books that wanting to pursue justice is perfectly acceptable—however very few of them ever donned a ski mask and went out to purge their own cities of criminals.

Much like the young adults in the 1950s (an example would be Holden Caulfield from *Catcher in the Rye* and Ponyboy from *The Outsiders*), young adults in current society often feel like they missing out on a feeling of unity, the type of which that World War Two created. As Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* says, “we have no war in our generation”, and it is this feeling of empty conflict which modern society explores through the mass production of violent materials, particularly from the 1990s to the present. The generation from the 1980s and early to mid-1990s, during which Johnny was designed, are capable of claiming wartime experience, however, and therefore the need for this type of media should have diminished. However, more recent wars, perhaps due to high publicity and a certain desensitization after generations of war, lack the sense of personal connection to today’s youth on a ubiquitous scale, instead only bearing such relevance to
a minority of the population. The “war on terror” and the war in Iraq are relevant to the generation of young adults today, yet the general feeling of inclusion that existed WWII made way for patriotic parades and a determination for victory as a world power; young men returned from war or died as heroes, while young women met relief at having their loved ones return, or heartbreak at losing them to death and suffering; however, all involved gained personal power due to a common goal and cohesive pride. Following World War Two, the American public became disillusioned with the idea of war, and no war since has managed to mimic the resounding sense of nationalism and inclusion. Without war and the feeling that is relevant to oneself, there is a need for a vicarious release of chaotic energy for young adults. As such, a thriving market exist which offers a safe outlet for aggression, as well as a personal sense of connection to war and crime via fiction, and a reconciliation to the same in reality. Video games in particular carry this appeal on the highest level; many video game franchises continue to find themselves under constant social fire due to their violent content, yet they continue to maintain their success. Grand Theft Auto and Halo: Combat Evolved both sold over six million copies within the first week of release, according to Curt Feldman of CNN and Seb Parker of vgchartz. Eminem, a rapper who is infamous for his gory and, at times, grotesque lyrics, raps about the need for violence in today’s youth, stating in his song “White America” that there is no specific goal for the violence in today’s youth, but rather the violence is aimed in “no particular direction, just sprays and sprays” (5-6), portraying that all forms of young adult media acknowledge and respond to the youth to which they appeal and sell. In this way, JTJM is the graphic novel from of the heroes that young adults would have had access to in the 1940s, he simply has a different audience (who has had different exposure to materials) whom have different needs. Young adults in the 1930s through 1940s
needed comic books heroes whereas Johnny cannot find much good around him, and therefore, by definition cannot “fight in the name of good…” as Jiří Růžička says in the article “American Superheroes and the Politics of Good and Evil” like the superheroes of the 1930s-1940s (46). Růžička goes on to say that “superheroes… reflect and commentate on current happening and illustrate unique views of the world—where good…always prevails” (48), Johnny just has to do this in a different way than other heroes.

Roman plays often used the idea of catharsis for an overwhelming sense of release, particularly that of sadness. *JtHM* and other media in today’s society use catharsis to release anger— to portray this emotion rather than to ignore it and potentially perpetuate unchecked anger on a social scale. *JtHM* works as a catharsis for violence because it is so hyper-violent and yet relevant to the thoughts and emotions of young adults, that it makes the reader feel as though they were committing the violence, and thus offers a release for violent or wrathful thoughts and emotions. Rather than appealing to an audience of weeping adults, Vasquez offers his audience of angst-ridden adolescents a sense of eased tension, because they realize that they are not the only people who feel that emotion or have a need to release it. The need for this release is especially important and appealing to young people who exist outside of “normal” or “average” society. These youths are often labeled antisocial and asocial indifferently, but it should be noted that these terms are not indistinguishable. “Asocial” as defined by the Oxford English dictionary is a state of being “not social; antagonistic to society or social order (s.v.); for example an asocial individual exist apart from society, meaning that hermits, agoraphobes, or other reclusive individuals may be considered “asocial”. Meanwhile, “antisocial” denotes a specific personality disorder, as opposed to a disinclination to be involved with society. Antisocial personality disorder is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “per-
sistent antisocial (often criminal) and aggressive or violent behavior [that is] often accompanied by an inability to feel remorse or sustain personal relationships and often misuse of alcohol or other drugs" (s.v.), which describe a manipulative, violent person rather than a person who simply wishes to exist away from society. These definitions are often used to describe not Johnny, but also the feared consumer of the graphic novel. The consumers of the graphic novel – more often young adults than not, may be a-social to begin with, but rarely are they anti-social, and they are usually “no threat to anyone but themselves”, as Señor Satan says in part six of *JtHM*.

The main character of *JtHM* is a young adult male named Johnny C. (at times Nny for short) who portrays asocial personality traits. He portrays himself in part one as wanting “not to be alone” (1:14), while he battles with two Styrofoam dough-boys and a dead rabbit named Nail Bunny about committing suicide. Unlike Batman, Superman, and Captain America from the 1940s and Rorschach (from the graphic novel *Watchmen*) from the 1980s, Johnny kills people rather than saving them. Characters such as Johnny represent the discontent that young adults often feel for the world around them. Batman, Superman, and Captain America were all initially created in the late 1930s through the 1940s, making them literal projections of the national unity present during WWII. Mike S. Duboise states in “Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America” that “Captain America had to radically change his morals from the 1940s to the 1980s” (927), pointing out that the public’s morals have changed, and therefore the heroes must change as well. The heroes from the past have a tangible, visible enemy to fight, while Johnny is left fighting with the voices in his head and his house. Captain America had to become relevant in the 1980s, which Duboise says was a “drastically more morally complex era than the one he originated from”, which means that Johnny from the early 2000s morals must change
to be relevant to his audience as well. Johnny’s generations must deal with a much different evil and moral ambiguity than the original or revised Captain America does. In Part One, on page twelve, Johnny massacres customers in a “Taco Hell” because another customer makes the remark that he appears “wacky”, thereby playing on the hidden desire that humans feel when mocked or rejected by society. The evil that Johnny must deal with is both the evil desire for him to kill those around as well as the seemingly lesser evil (although not to Johnny) of making fun of others. Johnny, therefore, becomes the a fictional outlet for young adults who share his sense of societal rejection, much like young adults felt unity when reading Captain America in the 1930s. Captain America was the obvious hero in the comic book series, as DuBoise quotes David Kraft when he states that Captain America “…fights against injustice and oppression, no matter what form they take” but he also admits that there is a “doubtful status of morality” in the 1980s, making him a questionable hero for such times, even with his “adapt[ation] to postmodernism” (927). Johnny has no such obvious enemies, but rather he is both monster and hero for the young adults of the 2000s.

Johnny is the monster that we wish could be, despite the fear we feel toward the acts he commits as well as the fear of being so far detached from normal society. WE all wish to be part of society in some manner or form, while simultaneously wishing on some level to eliminate those who do not accept us for who we are. The hero in Johnny comes out when he admits that kills not only who make fun of him, but also those who are not the best people they could have been – much like Rorschach kills those who do not fit his moral code and Batman fights those who threaten Gotham City. Johnny also harms those who wish ill upon his next-door neighbor Squee, as he protects him from a potential pedophile by gruesomely mauling the perpetrator at a crowded mall after Squee’s mother abandoned him. In this particular instance of saving Squee, Johnny
Laura-Ann Coale

is both a monster and a hero, because though he saves Squee, he does so in a way that horrifies the small boy. Johnny desperately attempts to rescue Squee from horrors, yet he cannot save Squee from himself or Squee’s own parents, who repeatedly tell Squee that they do not want him and that he is a burden. Johnny is a hero whom is doomed to fail, and therefore is doomed to a generation who wonders if their fate is the same.

Johnny actively fights against the broken domestic sphere in the novel by attempting to help Squee and find a companion that he can associate with; however, because of the nature of the world around him and the monster inside the house, his attempts fail. In part four, he actively stops feeding his house blood and can feel that it is “furious at [his] disobedience” (4:7), but he refuses to be a “servant [to and] manipulated by some demon scourge” (4:3) any longer. In the following pages, Johnny is able to kill himself, and the monster in the house escapes. It is only after the monster in the house is starved that Johnny’s wish to die can be completed, as he is no longer participating in the way the monster wants him to. Johnny’s relationship with Devi (the potential companion) is not only destroyed because he cannot react correctly to courting her, but because the broken world in which Johnny lives will not allow happiness. The night Devi and Johnny experience together outside of the house is what one would assume to be a normal night out, but once he takes her home, the Styrofoam doughboys convince him to try and kill her, and he succumbs to their wishes, saying that he “can’t let you leave” (2:12) because he fears being alone. Devi escapes, feeling tormented by her last experience with Johnny to such an extent that she no longer leaves the domestic sphere of her own apartment. Johnny’s broken sphere makes Devi retreat so far back into her own sphere that she does not leave for months. *JtHM* leaves no room for role models that would give Johnny or Devi a way to relate their experiences to one another in a productive, healthy way. After Johnny attempts to
kill Devi, she calls him to see if he is even in town any longer. This phone call is what set off the “Radio Shack Suicide Kit” that Johnny had set up, causing him to die. After Devi hears his death (but is not certain of what it is— all she hears is “wzzzz BLAM WHUMP AAAAAIEEEE EEEEEEK” (4:11)), she is convinced of staying at home even longer. Devi finally leaves her space after Johnny calls her after he is sent back to Earth and tells him that “what’s worse than hiding from what scares [her] is letting good things pass [her] by because [she] is too busy cringing in idiot terror...where she dwells on shit” (7:8). Neither Johnny’s house nor Devi’s allows them the peace and tranquility of what is often considered to be a scared place either because of terror on her part and Johnny’s inability to take control of his own house from the monster. Johnny’s kitchen is no longer a scene of a mother cooking breakfast, but of Johnny watching a bug crawl across the counter. The house is not only evil, it is deteriorating. The address of “777” that the unsuspecting interviewer in part one asked “Isn’t 777 the number of Heaven?” Johnny about was meant to be a joke, but it symbolizes the entire domesticity falling apart. Johnny’s house and home is a place of death, decay and insanity as opposed to a place to escape from the world. The world that Johnny must reconcile with leaves him no way to cope, and nothing is safe. Everything has been broken down into simplified versions of what the reader recognizes as broken homes, parents who are absent, incapable, or destructive, and stupid neighbors, all of which are things that youths have to be angry about. Young adults who read JtHM recognize and appreciate the way in which the graphic novel addresses the problems they deal with on a (hopefully) less extreme scale; Johnny’s world is completely evil, while the one in which the reader resides plays host to such evil, to a lesser extent and on a daily basis.

In part because Johnny’s world around him is so insane, Johnny succumbs to madness himself. In
part four of *JtHM*, Johnny tells himself that he has “relinquished his sanity” (5), which makes the reader curious of whether Johnny is evil or simply insane. Marcus Singer, author of the article “The Concept of Evil”, defines evil as “something over and above ordinary badness” (190), which certainly typifies Johnny, who carelessly murders people throughout the graphic novel. Johnny’s culpability, however, is questionable. Later in the novel, Johnny dies and makes his way to Hell, where the devil tells him he is a “flusher”, or someone on Earth who eradicates “waste” from his particular “cell”, or area (Part 6 page 10-11). Johnny would be considered evil if he committed the murders of his own complete volition because as opposed to his statement in part four that he “control[s himself]”, (4:15) he does not; but because of his position as a “waste-lock” or “flusher”, his actions are not completely of his own accord. Unlike most serial killers in the tangible world, Johnny feels that his house will kill him if he does not feed it blood constantly, as he points out in part one when he answers an unknowing interviewer regarding whether he felt that the murderer was vampiric in nature because all the “blood was drained from the victims”, and he responds that he “needed it for the house” because the “wall changes colour” when it is not “fed”. (1:10 Vasquez). Johnny is therefore not wholly responsible for his actions, yet he does enjoy the power that the house gives him, as he can take vengeance on those who do not accept him. As shown in the “Taco Hell” massacre and throughout the novel as Johnny speaks to his victims, Johnny kills people not only to save his own life, but also because he feels like the people whom he kills (with some exceptions) deserve it. His actions are evil, while his overall character is more chaotic and mischievous, as Singer would describe. The novel portrays Johnny as human; he relishes the powers that the house gives to him, such the ability to resist death or capture, yet he is remorseful afterwards, as he shows in part four when he says “there is something inherently wrong in
this” (4:1) and when he says that “this isn’t’ me”, meaning that he does not fully comprehend or excuse his actions yet can do nothing to stop them. Johnny fantasizes about a world “where there are people he would like”, but he does not exist in that mirror reality that he desires. Johnny exists in world where people are human, his house is a monster, and he is stuck between being a maniac and being human. He enjoys the power and mis-uses it at times, but he does not always find joy in his actions, and he finds himself wishing for something else.

Society is simultaneously disgusted and fascinated by serial killers and mass murderers because they represent an “extreme disconnect with society” according to Anomie Theory proposed by the sociologist Robert Merton. Bruce Mork writes that the Anomie Theory is the “apparent lack of fit between the culture’s norm...[and] appropriate ways to achieve those goals”, which explains why some serial killers attempt to connect with people, yet end up killing them. They often attempt to have normal relationships, yet cannot deal with how other act within those relationships. The Anomie Theory proposes that serial killers and mass murderers do not understand how reconcile the inability to connect with others. Johnny attempts to fit into the culture’s norm, but his constant rejection causes him to take inappropriate actions to achieve goals such as companionship, as shown in part two during his love scene with Devi. As opposed to having a night with her and allowing the relationship to take its own course, Johnny attempts to stab her to “immortalize the moment” because he “feels happy” with her. Johnny cannot distinguish between appropriate reactions and inappropriate reactions, and he attempts to perpetuate his relationship with Devi by killing her in order to render his night deathless, barring the door to any change in or ending of the relationship between them. In this way, Johnny is not just similar to murderers and people with anti-personality disorder, but is connected again to comic book and other graphic novel heroes. Despite
the varying moral centers between Johnny and heroes, they also are unable to find stable relationships in their lives due to their position outside society. No superhero is able to maintain interpersonal relationships (whether or not their love interest knows their true identity) because they must remain outside of “normal society” to “fix” what is broken. Rorshach asks in Watchmen “Why are there so few of us left with no mental problems?”, but perhaps he should have asked why there are so few who have no normal human interaction because the lack of human interactions can cause mental breakdowns. Despite the superheroes and Johnny’s attempts to restore or fight against societal norms, they can not have any of those norms themselves.

Johnny’s antisocial personality and extreme disconnect from society limns him as the ultimate representation of supreme violence. Kevin Boon states in “Men and Nostalgia for Violence: Culture and Culpability in Chuck Palaniuk’s Fight Club” that “men are paradoxical[ly] introduced to a culture that makes heroes out of aggressive men while debasing violent impulses” (267). Violence is not only perpetually present and even necessary in human culture, it is often praised and rejoiced given the correct circumstances, yet criticized and punished when that violence has a wholly negative impact on society. For example, people praise characters like Batman, yet consider the actions of characters such as Johnny and Rorschach from Alan Moore’s Watchmen to be wrong because they are executed without society’s permission. While Rorshach maintains a much higher moral center than Johnny, he is still inclined “look down at [humanity] and say no...when they shout save us” because they already “made their choices” (Moore 1); this portrays a sense “bad” violence, or indifference to violence done upon those whom he considers deserving of it, which generally is not considered to be the attitude or action of a hero. Rorshach is specifically debased because he is not “soft” on criminals and does not “let them live” (Moore 6:14), imposing his sense
of morality onto others by dispatching them himself as opposed to allowing the courts to handle criminals. Rorschach, like Johnny, has lost his faith in humanity, yet unlike Johnny continues to attempt to repair the problem. Society’s teaching that controlling one’s anger and refraining from violence is what differentiates a “normal” human being from a sociopath. Yet, human emotion, including anger and violent impulses, is what connects human beings to one another. As Rob Schrab says in the introduction of *JtHM* “our monsters [inside us] need something to grind their teeth on” (x1), or rather that humans need to release emotions in some manner—in the case of violent media, cathartically and vicariously. All human occasionally wish we could release our impulses, to deny “natural impulses is to deny life” (Schrab x1), just like denying the need to eat. Using violent to capture the imagination of our “monsters” is what keeps them in check—we have to eat so that our stomachs do not growl and so too—other impulses must be kept in check.

Another difference between Johnny and comic book heroes is that Johnny lives in the same world as his audience, whereas Batman, Superman, and Captain America reside within fictitious cities, while Alan Moore’s Watchmen live in alternative version of the actual world, as opposed to the concrete world which Johnny faces. Vasquez frequently references actual businesses and locations in *JtHM*; however, the reader perceives these places through Johnny’s eyes. In part one, Taco Bell is rendered “Taco Hell” (page 8), and Radioshack Johnny’s resource for “suicide kits” and “torture buddies” in part three. By having the reader view these establishments in the same manner that Johnny does, Vasquez illuminates the emptiness, detachment, and unchecked wrath that Johnny feels within the surrounding capitalist society. The only establishment that Johnny’s perception does not caustically parody is the bookstore in which Devi works, and this location is never shown directly. Therefore, the place that sells tools for knowledge (and empowerment) are in some way sacred
to Johnny, or at least unmarred by his detachment from human society. Through Johnny’s eyes, everyone and everything is devoid of value, with this one exception. Despite Johnny’s participation (which, admittedly often fails), he cannot live outside of the society completely as it also keeps him alive, much like the house also kept him alive. He continues to build detest for everything around him, but it has nothing tangible for him. He finds no joy in having nice thing, but still wants to be happy— which is impossible while living in America. The American dream is literally built off having nice things and being successful. Johnny does not care about keeping up with the Joneses—he has killed them.

Comic books and graphic novels are what are often referred to as the “mythology” of America. Růžička states that “void of any ancient history or mythology of its own...the nation has embraced and worshipped its comic superheroes” (46), meaning that America’s way of easing our tensions about what happens in the world and explaining phenomena is through our comic books. JtHM is the 21st century myth as it explains how our society deals with its problems. Johnny explains our problems in a way that comic books did in the 1930s, in a way that makes the reader love all of his humanity. Johnny is hyper-violent, murderer, and mentally disturbed, but he is also the hero for a generation that needs just that.

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Idle Evil: Malignancy to Escape Monotony in Lolita, American Beauty, and Other Demonic Texts

by Amadi Ozier

My mother goes to work every day and comes home tired all the time; so does my father, and he is sick at his stomach with ulcers. It seemed that everyone was always tired; that we were always getting up, going to work and school, coming home, eating, cooking meals, washing dishes and going to bed and getting up again. It seemed that it was too much for all of us, and that we were always tired. So I lay there in bed and planned how I was going to kill us all. I wanted to kill everyone quick, so we wouldn’t have to suffer any more.

—Diana Daye Humphries

In October, 1958, in order to save her family from the quotidian dullness of their standard three-bedroom unit ranch house in Houston, Texas, Diana Daye Humphries, age sixteen, began to plot a murder-suicide. Her mother was a clerk and her father was a salesman, with two bright kids with sandy blonde hair. Standard. Average. Trapped, Diana would say, in the tedium of their mundane lives. Diana bought some rifle shells from a nearby 7-Eleven. She sat in her father’s den watching American Bandstand on ABC until her younger brother came home from school, right on schedule, at which point she shot him in the head, and then again, in the back of his head, to make sure he would not be in any pain (“On Boredom”).

The crime was irrational, gruesome, and perhaps even evil, but significant in that it was engendered of a fear of the insipid, a fear of boredom. Humphries exhibits the phenomenon of aggressive, criminal response to monotony which I will dissect
In this paper, and like Humphries, *Lolita’s* Humbert Humbert (1955) and *American Beauty’s* Lester Burnham (1999) both react to the dullness of their surroundings by embracing taboo, in entertaining virtually incestuous obsessions with two young girls. Humbert Humbert, for example, contends in the early pages of the novel that Dolores’s mother, “Bland American Charlotte,” “frighten[s]” him (Nabokov 83), and, in his first tour of the Haze house, where he has plans to live as a lodger, he immediately decides that he could not be happy in “that type” of house, with its “bedraggled magazines on every chair,” “enmeshed in one of those tedious affairs” with the “deadly conventional[1]” Mrs. Haze (37). He openly derides the obvious, lolling Americana of Charlotte’s home, and, later, of the country at large.

In this paper, I will identify the cause of boredom-incited evil by examining the evils perpetuated by Humbert Humbert as well as by Lester Burnham, as both seem invested in the creation of a fanciful, separate reality in an effort to escape monotony. I posit that the aversion to monotony—an aversion to sameness—that begets evildoing is bizarrely reminiscent of the philosophical discussion of evil as absentia, nothingness, lack. In addition, I suggest that this brand of evil, this idle evil, is motivated by the evildoer’s fear of their own lack, thereby positioning evil as something committed in order to account for the evildoer’s sense of meaninglessness. In order to compensate for this feeling of lack, the evildoer distracts from it with theatrics, self-aggrandizement, and spectacle, with the fomentation and deification of the improbable, the absurd, the ungraspable, in order to manufacture his or her own significance. This evildoer despises the conventional and defies convention, subverting expectations for acceptable human existence and subverting reality.

This phenomenon of idle evil, obviously, is not isolated to just Humphries and these two characters. As such, this paper will look at Humbert, Lester, and several other characters who engage in crime,
malignancy, and taboo explicitly or implicitly to escape the normalcy of a monotonous and benevolent existence, and will examine and analyze these several prominent literary figures of evil—because they are evil, if only to make things interesting.

1. The Noontide Demon: A brief overview of the history and definition of boredom.

Kierkegaard famously espouses boredom as “the root of all evil” in the first volume of Either/Or (1: 281), and there is certainly a strong interest in demonizing dullness, especially with the reams of literary critics who typify boredom, terrifyingly, as “a general exhaustion with life itself” (Clare 429), a “cessation of existence” (Putnam 70). The word “boring,” even, has its most likely etymology in the more traditional, mechanical usage, as in, to bore a hole in something. To be bored, then, would mean to be perforated, to be made “cylindrically hollow” (s. v. “bore”)—or to be made metaphorically so by succumbing to ennui. This etymology would suggest a dull, boring person as something burdensome, piecing, and hole-inducing, near-violent and wounding in his insipidness. In France, in the early nineteenth century, boredom increasingly dominated the literature and esthetic of the Romantic movement as something aggressive and malignant, where it became known as the mal du siècle: the malady of the century. LuElla Putnam describes a sort of malaise boredom, an ennui “observably personified as the devil” (70), which closely resembles death and often begets suicide, and therefore signifies some kind of death of the self (67). Still, discussion of boredom, in literature and elsewhere, has been faint and erratic (Epstein 44; Clare 429), mainly because, as Ralph Clare notes, we have not yet agreed on what boredom actually is (429).

The problem with defining boredom is, mainly, its dizzying abstractness. Boredom is a tedious emptiness, but one weighted by, as Rasmus Johnsen puts it, “nauseating tension” (482); boredom is empty, but aggressively so, aggressively obstructive in
its monotony. In addition to this inherent contradiction—boredom as a very something nothingness—is the problem which arises in attempts at quantifying any emotion: we all get bored by different things. In his seminal (and dull) discussion of boredom in *The Fundamentals of Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger relies on a description of boredom as the image of a person waiting for a train in a provincial depot. But, in a way, this description falls short, precisely because it is so damagingly specific. Boredom is difficult to describe because boredom is not and cannot be confined to any particular event or location. Boredom is subjective.

As such, discussion of boredom is difficult, in that the actual feeling of boredom cannot be solidly attached to anything material with any sincerity. Boredom is the reaction to a boring thing, and, because it is reactionary, it is near-ungraspable in its existence. So, for simplicity’s sake, in the context of this paper, boredom is engendered by either a lack of stimulus, or of a disinterest in the available stimuli, but it can also be, as in the case of Ms. Humphries, an aversion to normality. In addition, in this paper, evil is defined as the behaviors and acts executed, irrationally, despite the evildoers’ cognizance of their social unacceptability—for example, sleeping with a child despite explicit participation in a society that condemns sex with children (or committing unprovoked fratricide, or the genocide of an undesirable ethnic group, or an act of domestic terrorism, despite an awareness of these things as no-nos). In this fashion, this paper will not focus on a mythically objective Evil, but on the morally relativistic rights and wrongs culturally dictated by a particular society, by looking at taboo (committing an act despite knowing it to be wrong) and malignancy (committing an act because you know it to be wrong).

Because of this difficulty in defining boredom as boredom, this paper will necessarily be conflating the boring with the expected, using words like
pedestrian, monotonous, dull, standard, and mundane interchangeably to unpack this phenomenon. In a qualitative research project, Marion Martin and his fellow researchers interviewed ten participants about their experiences with boredom, and observed that the participants could be very easily compartmentalized into three groups: those who got bored while at home, those who got bored while at work, and those who didn’t get bored at all (population: one participant). As such, I feel comfortable defining boredom, in addition to being simply a response to a lack of stimuli or acceptable stimuli, as a feeling of being trapped in the expected—domestic, obvious, and stable. As such, taboo and malignancy both serve as subversions of convention (“a rule or practice based upon general consent, or accepted and upheld by society at large”—propriety) and the conventional (“not natural, original, or spontaneous”—the boring [s. v. “convention”; “conventional”]). Humbert Humbert’s aversion to the mundane—quite literally, of the world—is what most fascinates me, as it demonstrably separates the idly evildoer from its acceptably inert society.

It is important to note, in this discussion of the correlation between boredom and evildoing, that boredom is not itself evil. Put simply, that which begets crime is not a crime in itself. This is not the banality of evil posited in Hannah Arendt’s 1963 report of Nazi lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann—or, as Ron Rosenbaum of Slate.com calls it, “the most overused, misused, abused pseudo-intellectual phrase in our language” (“The Evil of Banality”). One objection of Rosenbaum and others to Arendt’s positioning of Eichmann as “terrifyingly normal” (qtd. in Calder 364), as a person who helped to coordinate the Holocaust only because he believed he was “engaging in ordinary behavior,” is that, firstly, it’s inaccurate (Rosenbaum): during his trial, Eichmann himself maintained that he was “just following orders” with a nefarious triteness, but, in reality Eichmann had legitimate animosity towards the Jewish ethnic group, and acted on that animosity. So,
in Rosenbaum’s estimation, Arendt’s positioning of a sort of ordinary evil is both “wrong” and “self contradictory,” and relies on a radical ignorance of evil (I didn’t know that executing twelve million people was wrong—I was just following orders!) that is virtually impossible.

The banal evil discussed here is not that of a genocidal clerk orchestrating the murder of millions with the flippancy of a dutiful receptionist, that of someone who mistakes his evil for utter normalcy. The evil discussed here is that committed precisely because the evildoer knows that it is not normal. In April 2009, two brothers in South Yorkshire, England, aged ten and eleven, lured two boys of about the same age to a secluded ravine. There, the brothers tied the boys up and threw rocks and bricks at their heads. The boys were strangled, slashed at with glass, burned with cigarettes, stripped naked and sexually abused, and, ultimately, covered with a plastic sheet and set on fire. When asked to account for the crime, the elder brother explained that they had captured and tortured the boys because they were bored and “there were nowt [naught] to do.” At the sentencing, the judge in the case suggested that the brothers “inflict[ed] pain for the purpose of [their] own emotional pleasure,” “for no reason other than that [they] got a real kick out of” it (“Edlington Torture”). The evil I discuss in this paper isn’t that mistaken by the evildoer for a boring, quotidian thing, but is knowingly committed in order to escape that normalcy.

2. “Nymphean Evil”: Humbert’s acknowledgement of his own evil; evil to combat the prosaic.

There is no moral to the story of Lolita, according to Nabokov, who found the midcentury accusations of immorality in the text “idiotic” and immaterial (Nabokov 315). In his 1956 commentary on the book in The Anchor Review (the book was then actively unpublished in the United States), Nabokov argues that, at least for him, “a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly
call aesthetic bliss” (315)—in short, writing has emotional value and artistic value, rather than a moral one. Nabokov intended for the story not to be immoral, but amoral, which certainly complicates the use of Lolita here, in a discourse on morality and on evil. However, throughout the text, Humbert himself utilizes morally coded language to describe his obsession with the young girl, acknowledging his relationship with Dolores as something “evil” (125, 284) or “monstrous” (83, 140), constantly dubbing himself (and sometimes his Lolita) an ogre (186), a sinner (9), and a demon (16, 17, 139), amongst other things. As such, while Nabokov might shy away from any moral reading of his text, Humbert capitalizes on such a reading by casting himself as the villain in his own narrative.

Humbert typifies the first subcategory of my established definition of evil, in that he pursues a recognized taboo. Despite his “hell furnace of localized lust for every passing nymphet” (his term for especially endearing pubescent girls), he—at least initially—remains a “law-abiding poltroon” (18), and tries to find ways to satisfy his desires “without impugning on a child’s chastity” (55), thereby acknowledging the sinfulness of the obsession, discussing it in terms of “tribulations” and “retribution” (60), often characterizing his hebephilia demonically, either as that furnace or some otherwise “rich flavor of hell” (20). At the end of the novel, even, he admits that he has chosen the pseudonym “Humbert Humbert” for himself in the first place because it “expresses the nastiness best” (308). In the words of Humbert himself, “Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good” (19), and it is this awareness of the moral code, of what goodness would be, that makes it nefarious for him to disregard that code.

Indeed, Sean Benson contends that (despite Nabokov’s objections), Lolita is a “work of rare moral force” (354), as there are heavy parallels between the narrative of the controversial novel and fourth century theologian and philosopher St. Augustine’s
privation theory, which defines the nature of evil as a “privation of the good” (Enchiridion qtd. in 354). Reminiscent of the way in which boredom is necessarily reactionary, in St. Augustine’s theory, evil is the “absence of good” (Alexandrov qtd. in 355), defined solely by its opposite. Humbert constantly refers to his relationship with Lolita in terms of not-experiences, their affair acting as a privation, in particular, of Lolita’s childhood. Throughout the novel, as Benson also notices, Humbert constantly refers to the experiences he’s deprived of Lolita in taking her as ward and lover (Nabokov 283), and, as such, the scope of their relationship is defined in terms of its deprivations, and is therefore reminiscent of Augustine’s theory, and of contemporary typical Catholic renderings of and discourse on evil.

Of course, one could argue that Humbert’s predilection is a compulsion, thereby exculpating him of any fault in his behavior. Even while preoccupied with the newly discovered Lolita, Humbert “mechanically” follows the movements of two other nymphetic girls of the neighborhood (73), and later in the novel, he damns his “cursed nature” for pulling him to beaches and playgrounds “against [his] will” (257), as though he has no control over himself, and therefore no responsibility in his actions. As Todd Calder argues in “The Apparent Banality of Evil,” an evildoer “cannot do evil if [his] desire for [his] victim’s harm is outweighed by [his] desire for her well-being” (365). In the text, Humbert definitely seems, at least initially, concerned for Dolores’s “well-being,” manufacturing methods of satiating his mania without alerting and ruining Lolita, such as during the notorious secret masturbation scene, in which Humbert employs a “secret system of tactile correspondence between beast and beauty” (59) to surreptitiously fondle Lolita while they are sitting together on the couch discussing a popular song, masturbating in such a way as to have “proud[ly] … stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a
minor” (62). Similarly, earlier in the novel, he muses about the fates of his other nymphets, hoping that “the hidden throb [he] stole from them did not affect their future,” that “[he] had possessed [them]—and [they had] never knew it” (21). However, more than anything, this demonstrates that Humbert has the capability to restrain himself, consequently accentuating his refusal to restrain himself as the novel progresses, as he loses all interest in protecting Lolita in favor of the pursuit of what he calls at one point his “nymphetelic bliss” (166); on the same page, Humbert dubs his budding affair with Lolita an “elected paradise,” and it is this choice in wording—elected—that best illustrates Humbert’s autonomy and his self-accountability.

Humbert’s commitment to self-acknowledged evil behavior stems from his disdain for monotony, so he excuses his affections for the young girl by aggrandizing them. Lolita’s not perfect, but she is “perfect.” Humbert deifies even the scar on her “neat calf” and her “rough white sock” (49) and her “monkeyish feet” (51), and transforms even the barest scratched scab on her arm or leg into a line of “coagulated rubies” (111). His discussions of any “tactile correspondence” with the girl becomes bizarrely beatific, as he “enter[s] a plane of being where nothing matter[s], save the infusion of joy brewed within [his] body” (60). For contrast, Humbert heightens the disappointing ordinariness of more conventional, less evil relationships with other women, like his second wife Charlotte, who he says he “had better describe … right away, to get it over with” (37); and his post-Charlotte girlfriend Jean, who Humbert also describes in a flip-pant, perfunctory list, folding in details like her two miscarriages and her already developing cancer amongst other, equally trivial details, like that Jean was “very tall,” wore the same sorts of sandals and slacks as boring old Charlotte, and “wrote stories about animals.” Even Jean’s “special” laugh exposes “large dull teeth and pale gums” (emphasis added); it is the perceived normalness of these
women that makes them “hopelessly unattractive to [him]” (104). To counteract the affections of these and other boring, normal women, he concocts a spectacular Dolores—but even “the name Dolores is far too prosaic for his fantasies” (Benson 355)—a spectacular Lolita, with her “beautiful boy-knees” (120) and “lovely prismatic entrails” (116).

Humbert desperately manufactures Lolita’s specialness, needing that specialness. He sets her and all nymphets apart from the “provisionally plain,” “ordinary,” “essentially human” young girls (17), yet, in truth, Lolita is a “disgustingly conventional little girl,” in love with “obvious” things like hot fudge sundaes and movie magazines (148). Lolita is “unconscious” of her “fantastic power”—her nymphetic allure—precisely because she has none (17). Humbert cares the “utmost for ordinary children,” and because Lolita is not ordinary, he can guiltlessly entertain a sexual relationship with the girl (19). After the death of his wife, Charlotte, Humbert decides to pick up Lolita from summer camp and take her on an extensive road trip, reasoning that “anything was better for Lo than the demoralizing idleness in which she lived” (173). As such, here and elsewhere in the text, Humbert demonstrates his aversion to monotony, constructing the extraordinary in order to escape that monotony and to excuse his taboo.

Humbert’s aversion to the prosaic is interesting because such an aversion is truly an aversion to neutrality—like being consciously annoyed by the absence of waves in a swimming pool, or with a stillness in the air. Indeed, in On Essays and Aphorisms, Arnold Schopenhauer describes tedium in much those terms, likening a life of goodness to an unobstructed, unrippled stream, and evil to obstructions in that river, creating waves and interest. For this reason, Schopenhauer posits evil not as an absence—à la Augustine’s privation theory—but as a presence, the “positivity of pain” to good’s “negativity” (41). Quite simply, the sensation of being hungry is far more pressing and memorable than
the sensation of being not-hungry. The sensation of being ill is more noticeable than the sensation of being well. He suggests that evil serves as the positivity because the pains we experience in our lives are our most significant and pressing experiences, so it makes sense to define our realities by them, because, to put it another way, “the measure of suffering increases in man far more than the enjoyment” (45). Paul Krugman articulates the same phenomenon in his op-ed for the New York Times: “In times of crisis, good news is no news. Iceland’s meltdown made headlines; the remarkable stability of Canada’s banks, not so much” (“Good and Boring”). Of course, I could argue that Schopenhauer’s obstructions are meaningless as obstructions without something to obstruct, and therefore useless as a point of definition, but Schopenhauer’s argument is still useful in that it equates goodness to lack; to a motionless, flat river; to dullness. In his book, Schopenhauer argues that you “can look upon your life as an episode unprofitably disturbing the blessed calm of nothingness” (47), and, for him, boredom most closely replicates that calm. According to Martin Heidegger too, in the stillness of boredom, we are best equipped to think deeply and introspectively (Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics), so it is therefore the most truly authentic mode of being-in-the-world (qtd. in Gibbs 603). Indeed, goodness has often been equated with monotony and complacency, as evidenced by the meditative tedium of some religious ceremony, and the treatment of asceticism and abstinence as piety in certain cultures. Goodness is “no news.” Boringness, in this context, is “proper.”

Schopenhauer argues that the “twin poles of human life” are want and boredom (45): the desperate need for a thing, and then a motionless lapse in experience after actually obtaining the thing—or, desire, followed by a “period of waiting for desire” (Nunokawa 359). In this sense, humans are perpetually uncomfortable, oscillating exhaustingly between need and the dull acquisition of that need, render-
ing, for Schopenhauer, the “striving of the will ... essentially vain” (42), as satisfaction of the will “achieves nothing but a painless condition in which he is only given over to boredom,” demonstrating the “valueless,” inescapable “emptiness of existence” (53). Life, therefore, is meaningless. A person’s quest for life’s meaning, in entertaining the will to live, is useless—and near-demonic. “[T]he value of life,” Schopenhauer argues, is that “it teaches him not to want it” (65), as Schopenhauer suggests a “denial of the will” (in acquiescing to permanent boredom) as the ultimate good, the “road to redemption from evil and from the world” (62). As such, Humbert’s disdain for stability, for the “essentially human,” registers as a disdain for goodness, and a refusal to acknowledge his own insignificance.

Instead, Humbert Humbert, as mentioned before, concocts the celestial allure of a nymphet (and its male equivalent, the faunlet) to avoid being boring. Humbert prefaces his novel-long account of his Lolitic obsession with a story of his childhood affair with another little girl, Annabel Leigh, like Lolita, perfect, with her “lovely live legs” (14). Very often, Annabel and young Humbert sneak away from their respective summer vacations at neighboring villas on the French Riviera to kiss and fondle each other, but Humbert is thwarted each of the two times he attempts legitimate sexual intercourse with the girl. “[I]n a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel” (14), as the frustration of these attempts at consummate consummation create a “permanent obstacle to any further romance” in Humbert’s youth, thereby fomenting his sexual interests in nymphets. On the second of the thwarted sexual encounters the two pubescent kids, naked on a gritty beach, are interrupted by two old men. As the children scramble back into their clothes, the men shout mais allez-y, allez-y—but go for it, go for it, or, more contextually, don’t go, don’t go! (and it is actually unclear whether it is the ribalding old man shouting this, or young Humbert himself, but it certainly mirrors Humbert’s
prayer during the secret masturbation scene with Lolita, “Let her stay, let her stay” [59]). This desperate plea for stasis suggests an anxiety about Humbert’s own lost faunness, and, in this sense, his obsession with youth and young girls serves as a way to recast himself as once again “equal” to his nymphetic loves, a “faunlet in his own right” (17), in an attempt at reclamation of his own childhood eminence.

3. “Stability of Type”: Evil as a response to the evildoer’s sense of his own meaninglessness.

Therefore, to counteract boredom, Humbert Humbert uses his evil in order to manufacture spectacular significance for the object of his desire, and, through her, self-validation and spectacular significance for himself. In a psychometric, longitudinal, and experimental analysis published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, Shelley A. Fahlman and her fellow researchers note as much, discovering a documentable association between a participant’s feelings of insignificance and his feelings of boredom, demonstrating that “a lack of life meaning is at least one major source or trigger of the experience of boredom” (Fahlman 335). Similarly, in her article examining the responses to boredom in, among other texts, Voltaire’s Candide, LuElla Putnam notes a parallel between the sentiments espoused by characters in the novel and the argument by Arthur Schopenhauer previously explored in this paper. In the perorating scenes of the novel, “all of the characters’ goals seem to have been met” (Putnam 68), and an old woman contends that she “would rather experience all the tortures and privation that have led her up to this supposed time of harmony rather than the actual time of harmony itself,” which re-illustrates that Schopenhauerian quest for the satisfaction of a want, and subsequent discontent with that satisfaction. As such, Putnam identifies a direct correlation between feelings of insignificance and the encroachment of boredom (69), as loss of meaning begets a loss of
a reason to live, which begets a loss of the will to live (in the Schopenhauerian sense), and loss of the will to live is precisely, at least for Schopenhauer, what boredom is.

Albert Camus, an existential philosopher active throughout the 1940s and 1950s, often concerned himself with the meaninglessness of life in his novels; as such, his characters are, very often, bored. His novel *The Fall* (1956—two years before *Lolita* was finally published in the United States), for example, concerns the protagonist Jean-Baptiste Clamence, who is initially a very well-off, very well-known lawyer. He makes himself an incredibly visible presence in Paris, as he enjoys the “satisfaction of being on the right side of the bar” (18), because, like Humbert, he revels in his own mode of self-aggrandizement, obsessing over the maintenance of his public image by being aggressively and profusely generous and otherwise pantomimetically pleasant (22), such as by employing himself solely at “noble cases” concerning orphans and widows (17), simply so that people would know him to be the kind of lawyer who only handles noble cases. Indeed, Jean-Baptiste contends that he “never feel[s] comfortable except in lofty places,” choosing buses over the subway, terraces over “closed-in places,” “need[ing] to feel above” in order to maintain his sense of superiority (23), much as Humbert Humbert nurses his own superiority with attempts to make himself faunlike. However, one day, while walking along the Seine, Jean-Baptiste overhears a laugh—not at all “mysterious” or creepy (39), but accompanied by the suicide of a young woman dressed in Camusian black. In time, he discovers that that laugh he heard was the laugh of the whole universe (80), and realizes that even death is meaningless (75). He begins to trip when walking places (78).

With that laugh, with that discovery of the absurdity of his existence, Jean-Baptiste begins “half unlearning what [he] had never learned and yet knew so well—how to live” (42), losing a sense
of purpose in his life—nefarious, for a man who “can’t endure being bored and appreciate[s] only diversions” (59). In an effort to “forestall the laughter,” Jean-Baptiste plans on “hurling [him] self into ... general derision,” counteracting the laughter by being purposefully despicable, imagining “punctur[ing] the tires of invalids’ vehicles, ... and slap[ping] infants in the subway” (91), though he only succeeds in committing lesser crimes, like humiliating vagrants outside a restaurant. Like Humbert, Jean-Baptiste, struck by the “frivol-ity of seriousness” (87), relies on criminality to reaffirm the utility of his existence. For a time, Jean-Baptiste tries to acquiesce to his insignificance, giving up gambling, theater, and women, and “probably” even enters “the realm of truth,” which he finds to be a “colossal bore” (101)—that Heideger-gerian profound boredom, that chance at benignant monotony. Instead, Jean-Baptiste begins “[going] to bed with harlots and drank for nights on end” (102), and, in those “months of orgy,” he “live[s] in a sort of fog in which the laughter became so muffled the [he] ceased to notice it” (106), stifled by desire, by the desperate and constant satisfac-tion of the will.

And Jean-Baptiste is not unique in his own ver-sion of Humbert’s privileging of a “nymphetlic bliss” over social morality. For example, one of the symptoms of antisocial personality disorder—or, more glibly, sociopathy—is perpetual boredom, often accompanied by impulsivity and frequent engagement in “risky behavior” (promiscuity, gambling, drug usage, and other Jean-Claudian things) for some semblance of fulfillment. In Oscar Wilde’s The Pic-ture of Dorian Gray, too, both Lord Henry and the titular character are perennially bored, victims of a general feeling of exhaustion throughout the text, “sick” with “that terrible ennui, that ter-rible taedium vitae” (177, qtd. in Nunokuwa 361). Dorian Gray and his various aesthete acquaintances are constantly languorous, immobile, and exhausted. The whole book, it seems, can be summarized with
a statement made by Dorian in chapter seven: “My friends were bored. I was bored” (122). One of these characters, that Lord Henry (who spends the first several pages opening the novel languid on a divan, practically unconscious) “campaigns” for a “proliferation of passions” (Nunokawa 365), a “return to the Hellenic ideal” (Wilde 59). This Hellenic ideal is his philosophy for overcoming boredom through some “fresh impulse of joy” (59), a philosophy which quickly inspires and infects Dorian, who begins to “attempt to satisfy his [own] craving[s] for new sensations” (Platizky 202), engaging wholeheartedly in Lord Henry’s decadent, new hedonistic lifestyle, “giv[ing] form to every feel, expression to every thought, reality to every dream” (Wilde 59). By the end of the text, however, Dorian, like Humbert, feels “monstrous” in his mode of escape from tedium; in the novel’s final moments, Dorian expresses a “wild longing for the unstained purity of his boyhood” (247), to “expel every sign of evil passion from the face [of his painting, which serves as the visual representation of a lifetime of Dorian’s ‘sins’]” (249). Desperate for “purification in punishment” (248), Dorian stabs the painting, his surrogate self, accidentally committing suicide.

Evil has often been typified as a type of inner lack, a vacuous nothingness (discussed at length, for example, in Terry Eagleton’s *On Evil*), and, in a sense, meaninglessness describes a lack of a different kind. In this way, Humbert’s nymphetic bliss, Jean-Baptiste’s muffling of the laughter, and Dorian’s Hellenic impulsivity all serve as modes of compensation for that lack, filling in the nothingness of purposelessness with Schopenhauerian “obstructions.” In *American Beauty*, directed by Sam Mendes, Lester Burnham well-articulates this lack, when he muses that both his wife, Carolyn, and his daughter, Jane, think he is a loser, and that “[T]hey’re right … I have lost something” (00:04:08). It is this *loss* that cleaves Lester to his own nymphet, named Angela Hayes (in obvious homage to
Humbert’s Dolores Haze). Lester is stuck in the monotony of suburbia, with a wife who listens to “elevator music” while she eats and matches her gardening clogs to the handles on her pruning shears and chats about neckties or fertilizer recipes with her neighbors, a tax accountant and an anesthesiologist, who jog together in “perfect unison” in the early mornings (00:46:25). In an early scene, Brad, a newly hired efficiency expert, asks Lester to create a report detailing how he “contribute[s]” to the office (00:05:54)—but Lester doesn’t know how he contributes. He is like Jean-Baptiste, who is “tormented by the thought that [he] might not have time to accomplish [his] task,” but then thinks: “What task?” (89). Lester is useless and taskless. He is a beige cubicle surrounded by beige cubicles, visually indistinct and indistinguishable from his fellow cubicle workers (American Beauty 00:04:32), purposeless and “expendable.” When his wife reintroduces him to one of her real estate agent competitors for the umpteenth time, Lester has to smile, with a “It’s okay. I wouldn’t remember me either” (00:31:00).

When he discovers Angela, he describes it as escaping a stupor (00:19:27), as he becomes visibly more active, listening to more vibrant rock music, becoming more virile and more violent, and, on one occasion, throwing a dish of asparagus against the wall of his lovely and symmetrical dining room because he is “sick and tired of being treated like [he doesn’t] exist” (01:06:14). He aggrandizes Angela much as Humbert aggrandizes Dolores—Angela, characterized as “strikingly beautiful,” with “perfect even features” and a “nubile young body” (Ball 00:14:10), who “couldn’t be ordinary if [she] tried” (Mendes 01:46:30). In Lester’s dream sequence, she even glows, “with a subtle, burnished light” (Ball 00:19:54). However, the other characters in the film don’t find Angela nearly as extraordinary (Mendes 00:26:59; 01:38:09); Angela, like Lolita, is “special.”
4. “A Nice Quiet Horrorshow”: The positioning of vacuous spectacle (theatrical evil).

I borrow a word in the heading for this section—horrorshow—from Anthony Burgess’s 1962 novella *A Clockwork Orange*. It is a Nadsat slang term which either means very bad or very good, depending on the context, but which, either way, demonstrates the utter importance of spectacle—even forced spectacle (à la the Ludovico method)—to qualify experiences. The protagonist of the novel, a teenager named Alex, engages in bouts of violence mainly organized as orgiastic group excursions, in a gang of friends who lend adolescent importance to their appearance, both in terms of their dress and their behavior. It is in this context—of aestheticized ultra-violence and theatrical evil—that I want to conclude my paper, in continuing, briefly, to discuss Lester’s and Humbert’s perceptions of their nymphetic loves.

Both Humbert’s Dolores and Lester’s Angela are cast as actors in a private play, with Humbert, especially, treating his target as a blazon and Annabel surrogate (even blithely calling her Annabel on several occasions [124, 162]) rather than a human being. She is “Lo. Lee. Ta” (9), lovely and segmented. It seems to be no coincidence that Lolita is a stage actress. In his narrative, Humbert is obsessed with watching—sometimes participating, but mainly narrating and ogling. His mode of malignant affection for Lolita, then, seems to necessitate spectacle as its vehicle, aggrandizing her and reifying her for performative perfection. Dorian Gray, too, attaches himself to a performer. When she decides she will no longer act professionally, he tells her she has “killed [his] love” because “[she] used to stir [his] imagination” and now she doesn’t even “stir [his] curiosity” (123-4). Because she is no longer pretending, she is no longer lovely. In *American Beauty*, in an early scene, during a school dance team performance as a halftime show, in which both Angela and Jane participate, Lester watches, “transfixed” (Ball 00:16:04), and fantasizes that
Angela is alone on the basketball court, and he alone in the audience, fetishizing and personalizing the spectacle. That night, he has another fantasy of her, naked and extravagant with rose petals and hanging from his ceiling. The dream girl, he even says, is “spectacular” (Mendes 00:20:02).

As the erotic audience, both Lester and Humbert rely heavily on fantasy in the name of spectacle—Lester, most obviously, with his three heavily stagger-edited and stylized dream sequences starring the precious high schooler, but also Humbert, who is very conscious of his creation of “another fanciful Lolita” apart from the legitimate and ordinary Dolores (62), and invents roles for himself and his Lolita to perform, once deciding to call himself Edgar “just for the heck of it” (75). Evil is necessarily outwardly grandiose to balance out its radical lack. The type of evil committed to avoid monotony privileges the spectacular as something necessarily separate and above the ordinary, in that the spectacular is insensible, on the cusp of mundane human comprehension. As such, throughout Nabokov’s text, Humbert does privilege the use of his imagination over any allegiance to reality, gleefully manufacturing new identities and histories, and even saying, at one point, that “[i]maginary torture” is “all the more horrible” than even the real kind (70), because imaginary torture exists in his spectacular mind. When touring schools for his kidnapped charge to attend, the headmistress at one such school explains the intuitive, student-centered approach to the Beardsley College curriculum, by saying “[w]e live not only in a world of thoughts, but also in a world of things. Words without experience are meaningless” (178). When he hears this, the wordy, practically imaginary Humbert is “appalled.” Humbert does not need things.

Therefore, spectacle not only serves to compensate for monotony with cacophony, but functions as a mode of separation of the self from society and from the mundane. (Again, the double meaning of the word mundane, as something dull and as some-
Idle Evil

thing human, seems especially significant here.) Spectacle is necessarily distancing, requiring, in order to function, an outside spectator to give the performance meaning as performance; as such, the spectacle separates Humbert both from his chosen spectacle and from the general public, who are too insignificant to even participate in the audience. In a “mental daze,” Humbert only perfunctorily describes their extended road trips through those “frightening” and “wary” motels of midland America, in places like Ohio and those “three states beginning with ‘I’” (210). He moves through the dull country only as a symptom of the fiction, in order to facilitate his satisfaction of his decided taboo; for example, his “scheme” at one point, in order to kidnap Lolita from her summer camp, is to distract her by continuously moving and moving his nymphet from inn to inn (106), “to give her the impression of going places” (152). Humbert’s frequent shifts and voltas, both geographically and linguistically, demonstrate that he is noncomittal both to Lolita and to his world, preferring the “mental hygiene of noninterference” and perpetual movement (287). Idle evil, then, is dynamism—outwardly kinetic, if only to compensate for its essential vacuity. This dynamism functionally severs spectacular evil from the intrinsically inert and humane; thus, the evildoer’s vibrancy is coupled with a sociopathic inability to connect sensibly with the material world.

Though idle evil is engendered of a need to feel extraordinary, using spectacle and forced significance to attempt to manufacture meaning for the evildoer, these attempts are ultimately unsuccessful. In Marion Martin’s small-scale qualitative study, his interviewed participants explain their strategies for overcoming boredom; though the respondents do try various solutions for conquering that boredom, these solutions are usually temporary and ineffectual. As argued in this paper’s premise, boredom is subjective, making it necessarily personal, and the locality of boredom makes it utterly unavoidable—we
become bored because we are boring. For example, over the course his text, Humbert descends into the dull self-righteousness of a parent. Lester essentially spectacularizes a stereotype, falling in love with the blond cheerleader and splurging on a midlife crisis-red sports car. They are both obvious and tedious without actually meaning to be.

The true strategy for overcoming boredom, it seems, is Heidegger’s, acknowledging its inevitability and acquiescing to it. As Lester dies at the end of Mendes’s film, his life flashes before his eyes, as it were, and he flits back to certain memories. Nothing unique or spectacular—“lying on [his] back at Boy Scout camp” (01:53:16); the “yellow leaves from the maple trees that lined [his] street” (01:53:36); his grandmother’s papery hands, folding over the buttons of a cardigan (01:53:50). Nothing phenomenal at all, suggesting a need to acquiesce to the prosaic, and learn to meditate and revel in it. In returning to the ordinary, Lester abandons his crush on Angela, expressing “gratitude for every single moment of [his] stupid little life” (01:55:35), rather than eschewing that life in favor of a more evil and spectacular one. Humbert also becomes finally complacent in his ordinariness and his meaninglessness, ultimately embracing the mundane, ending his lengthy confession with a series of inane aphorisms, like “Do not talk to strangers” (309). It seems banal and platitudinous in itself to suggest that the truest solution to violent boredom is to enjoy the little things, and to appreciate them in and for their littleness, so I won’t say it. Not quite in that way.

Works Cited


Amadi Ozier


Works Consulted
Contributors

Abel Bekele is a current senior at the University of West Georgia. His major emphasis is English. He plans to enroll into UGA Law School after getting his Bachelor’s Degree in English. Plans to open a law firm and own a restaurant by the year 2022.

Laura Coale is a senior at the University of West Georgia majoring in English with a minor in psychology. She likes all things punk rock and gore, and is interested in the link between graphic novels and classical literature. She aims to go back to University at West Georgia to gain a bachelor’s degree in philosophy, with the intention to attend law afterwards. Evil is what you make it, rather than a black and white line. Something can be bad, but not evil, just like something can be good, but not great. Evil is not the devil, but what we make the devil do.

LaTanya V. Lofton was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. She has always had a passion for African American literature. Taking numerous classes in that field for her undergraduate degree she will continue her education towards her Masters in African American literature at Georgia State University. Hoping to eventually teach African American literature LaTanya’s dream exceed from this point. LaTanya acknowledges the influence her professors had on her during her undergraduate studies. They allotted her the space she needed to explore her focus. She will forever be grateful. Evil is eliciting intentional harm against other excluding self-defense or mentally disabling people who cannot recollect/control their actions. Evil = Non-loving

Kimberly Lucas was born and raised in Ohio. In her junior year of high school her parents divorced and she moved to Georgia with her mother. She graduated high school in 2008 and in 2013 she will graduate from the University of West Georgia with a Bach-
elor’s degree in English. Kimberly is a huge Sherlock fan and when the opportunity arose for her to write about it, she was very excited. Along with Sherlock some of her favorite television shows, in no particular order, are Supernatural, Doctor Who, Psych, and The Walking Dead. When Kimberly read Charles Leadbeater’s article “Allure Of The Dark-arts,” she realized some of her favorite characters were in fact, evil geniuses. To Kimberly evil is defined as any act that intentionally causes pain to another, human or animal, to increase pleasure for one’s own self.

Rose C. Payne is a Non-Traditional Student at the University of West Georgia. An English Major completing her senior year, Rose is a 2012 recipient of the English Foundation Award, endowed by the University of West Georgia’s English Department. She is also a member of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. Convinced that the tenets of patriarchy are the Devil’s own handiwork, with an affinity for critical thinking and feminist theory, she is determined to topple patriarchy one paper at a time. As a lifelong lover of knowledge, Ms. Payne is an avid reader, and creative writer enjoying a wide range of eclectic topics. Anticipating a long awaited graduation in July, of 2013 the mother of three currently resides in Carrollton, Georgia.

Solin Saleh was born in Kurdistan, Iraq, and came to the United States when she was twelve years old. Solin is a polyglot, speaking English, Kurdish, Farsi, Pashto, Hindi, and Urdu, which has nursed a love for languages and an awareness and fascination for the intricacies of communication. She is pursuing her Bachelor’s Degree in English with a Minor in Business Management. As a child, Solin always had an interest in writing and reading fiction, as well as interests in cooking, traveling, and spending time with her family. Family is especially important to her. Solin has a fifteen month old son and he is the strength in her life. In the future, Solin
would like to pursue a career in teaching—a desire fomented both by her receiving her Substitute Teaching Certificate in 2009, and by her love for children and longing to be able to educate them. Prior to entering the University of West Georgia, Solin had the opportunity to earn her Associates Degree in Paralegal Studies. Solin’s definition of evil is the inherent urge within the human race to wreak damage upon the world and each other, the absolute need to run from the idea of being good.

**Taylor Smith** is a graduating senior at the University of West Georgia with a major in English Literature and a minor in Criminology. Taylor has participated in the University of West Georgia English Department’s Undergraduate Research Conference and has worked as an editor for LURE Literary Magazine. The investigation of the myth of Jack the Ripper stems from Taylor’s interest in Criminology and the desire to blend the fields of Criminology and English Literature together. Taylor hopes that she will be able to combine her interests in these two fields in her future career as well. The investigation of evil throughout this particular course has taught Taylor evil is subjective on age, culture, and other aspects of life, but she loosely defines evil as any act meant to cause harm and/or fear to others.

**Caitlin Smith** is an English major with a concentration in Secondary Education. She is looking forward to graduating from the University of West Georgia in December 2013 and plans to pursue a career in teaching middle school English. Her interests include art, music, and some pop culture and she hopes to incorporate these interests with her major in the form of creative lesson plans and essays. Caitlin has a passion for teaching middle school and is excited to bring what she has learned at West Georgia into the classroom in a fun and interesting way for adolescents. Her main goal is to make middle school students excited to come to English class. Caitlin personally believes that evil is defined by
malicious intent to do harm to another person or group, especially children, the elderly, and animals who are otherwise helpless in many cases.