TRIANGLE

NATIONAL ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY

VOLUME 2, 2025

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NEHS Triangle No. 2

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Published in the United States by the National English Honor Society, Christopher Lockwood, Director, Department of English, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115–2863, USA.

The NEHS Triangle journal is published with the continuing generous assistance of English Honor Societies. Publication is limited to members of the National English Honor Society.

The National English Honor Society is the high school program of the English Honor Societies.

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FOREWORD

The National English Honor Society (NEHS) is proud to present the second edition of the *NEHS Triangle*, this year celebrating exceptional analytical and critical work by student members from around the world. The *Triangle*—named in homage to the shape's symbolism of strength, connection, and balance—represents the energetic foundation of our vibrant, global community. Inspired by existing English Honor Society publications like Sigma Tau Delta's *Rectangle*, the NEHS *Triangle* affirms the enduring power of student scholarship.

This edition highlights our students' dedication to fostering critical and analytical writing that crosses boundaries and deepens understanding. Through essays that engage with texts from a range of writers within and beyond the traditional Western canon, our contributing students demonstrate how analytical writing can illuminate diverse literary landscapes. Their work underscores that critical thinking is not limited by geography or language—it serves as a vital link between cultures, contexts, and interpretations.

With NEHS chapters active in more than 36 countries and territories, the Society thrives on a vibrant exchange of perspectives and approaches to literary analysis. The writing featured in this year's *Triangle* showcases the intellectual rigor, cultural sensitivity, and thoughtful engagement of our student members. Whether they are unpacking the complexities of texts rooted in their own experiences or offering sharp analyses of unfamiliar works, our NEHS student members exemplify how analytical writing can foster both personal insight and global connection.

In a time when the value of English studies—and equitable access to literature—is under increasing scrutiny, the *Triangle* stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of our field. Thanks to the commitment of Chapter Advisors and the passion of NEHS members, it is clear the English language arts continue to be a vital force in classrooms, libraries, and communities across the globe. As long as our members continue to read widely, think critically, and uplift diverse author voices, the future of literature is in excellent hands.

Christopher Lockwood

Director of the National English Honor Society

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National English Honor Society extends its sincere gratitude to everyone who played a role in bringing this second edition of the *Triangle* to life.

We begin by recognizing our exceptional NEHS student members. Their enthusiasm for literature and dedication to elevating voices from diverse authors around the world have been the heart of this publication. Their thoughtful contributions reflect the depth and breadth of global storytelling and serve as an invitation for us all to explore new perspectives through reading.

We are equally grateful to our devoted Chapter Advisors, whose guidance and encouragement have nurtured our students' literary journeys. Their unwavering support and passion for the teaching of literature has been instrumental in shaping the content and quality of this journal.

A special note of appreciation goes to Katie Mudd, our Director of Marketing and Communications, who served as editor for this edition. Her keen editorial insight and attention to detail have ensured that this publication reflects the high standards of NEHS.

Thank you, also, to Joan Laurino, our Program Coordinator, who served as the typesetter and designer.

Finally, we thank our entire international NEHS community. Your continued dedication, creativity, and belief in the transformative power of literature have made this publication possible. Thank you for your contributions and your commitment to our shared mission.

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Groupthink and Societal Expectations

The Hidden Horrors in Shirley Jackson's Ordinary Worlds

by Kylie Elefante
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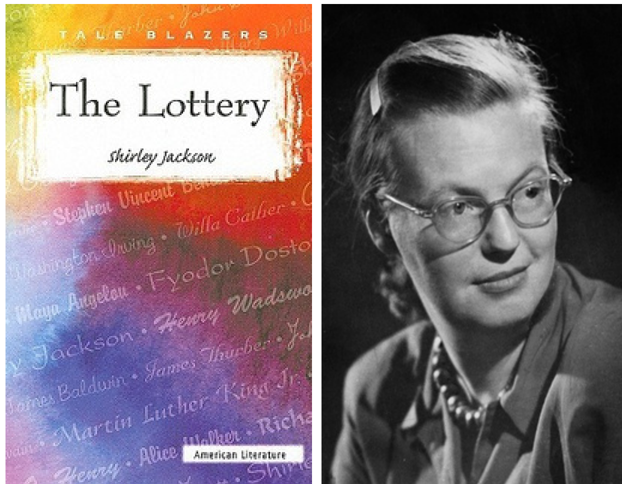

Traditions are often seen as the glue that binds communities and cultures. However, when traditions are unquestioningly followed due to societal expectations, this can have catastrophic effects. Shirley Jackson explores many themes in her short stories, exposing the dangers in everyday life, writing stories in seemingly normal settings to highlight the sinister nature of conformity. Through this, she shows the dangers of unquestioningly following leaders or what you think to be true, emphasizing the importance of having your own identity, rather than just following others. This can be seen through "The Lottery," "The Possibility of Evil," and "The Witch," where Jackson shows the corruption of morals due to traditions. Shirley Jackson uses ambiguous characterization, unsettling irony, and ordinary settings to critique the destructive consequences of unquestioningly following tradition and societal norms, revealing the fragility of morality and the ease with which collective identity can override individuality, showing the hidden darknesses lurking within seemingly normal communities.

Shirley Jackson utilizes irony in her short stories to critique unquestioning adherence to traditions and societal expectations. This is most clearly shown in "The Lottery," where there is a festive atmosphere before it is revealed just how terrible this event is, juxtaposing the happiness beforehand to the sense of stress for Mrs. Hutchinson afterward. The townspeople's casual discussions and laughter are a stark contrast to the preparation for the barbaric ritual. The black box, symbolizing the disastrous tradition, is treated with respect despite the chaos it causes, showing just how senseless

it is that the villagers are adhering to these outdated customs simply because they believe that is the way things are supposed to be. As James Gibson says, the lottery "is ruled by chance and caprice . . . irrespective of merit or demerit," showing just how arbitrary and dangerous these social norms have become (195). The people are so trapped in this cycle of the lottery, that they do not even stop to think about why it is necessary. When one family, Mr. and Mrs. Adams, brings up the fact that other places are getting rid of the lottery, they are immediately dismissed by Old Man Warner who says, "There's always been a lottery," (Jackson 4) and tells them that young people are crazy. Through this, Jackson is showing how the villagers are just following the traditions on a basis, with the older people refusing to accept a new era. Edna Bogert highlights this unsettling irony, noting that Jackson's village mirrors modern society, where "civility" often conceals deep-seated violence and true intentions (47). Similarly, in "The Possibility of Evil," Miss. Strangeworth outwardly seems like a happy elderly woman, which is incredibly ironic. She perceives herself as a wonderful person, the guardian of her town's morality; yet, her anonymous pen letters are doing the exact opposite of what she believes: she is the true source of evil and division in her town. "Miss. Strangeworth never concerned herself with facts; her letters dealt with the more negotiable stuff of suspicion" (Jackson 4), which highlights the irony between her self perception as a moral guardian and the chaos her baseless accusations make, showing societal facades masking hidden corruption. This ironic twist critiques the societal facades that mask inner corruption, revealing what John G. Parks calls "the hidden terrors beneath the mask of the ordinary" (17). Through these, Jackson uses irony to force readers to confront the absurdity and destructiveness of societal conformity. Jackson also uses ambiguous characterization to highlight how fragile morals become once individuals fall victim to a collective identity. The usage of ambiguity in characters shows how humans lose their sense of self and distinctive character traits once they join a group, lacking a true identity. By having her characters lack distinct traits, she emphasizes the dangers of groupthink. In "The Lottery," Mrs. Delacroix's transformation from friendly neighbor to active participant in the stoning of Tessie Hutchinson demonstrates how quickly individuals abandon personal morality in favor of groupthink. Gibson describes Jackson's characters as existing in a "chillingly impersonal world of gray amorality," reflecting how suffocating unquestioning tradition truly is (195). While in the "The Lottery" the Adams family mentioned other villages abandoning the ritual, it did not stop them from participating in it: "Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers," (Jackson 7) showing that even with knowledge of a

change they are still trapped in a cycle and unwilling to defy the tradition, mindlessly participating as well. In “The Witch,”the mysterious stranger embodies ambiguity, telling the young boys such a grotesque story of killing his sister without an explanation or consequences, simply anonymously providing the tale and dashing off. The character does not get a name, or any personality traits, he is simply a man who decides to tell a little boy about the time he killed her sister and “put her head in a cage with a bear” (Jackson 2.) The stranger gives the grotesque statements nonchalantly, embodying ambiguity with a casual tone, showing how easily society normalizes violence. He then gets to walk away scot free, lacking any serious repercussions for such a terrible thing, not feeling any remorse for his past actions. This lack of moral resolution adds to the story’s unsettling tone, showing how Jackson uses ambiguous characters to critique how morality dissolves under social pressures. Jackson’s ordinary settings help to highlight the unsettling themes in her stories by contrasting how normal and casual these events seem with their hidden darkness that lies beneath the surface. “The Lottery” takes place in a typical New England village, described with imagery that portrays normalcy, getting the reader comfortable to make the contrast of the violent ritual that much more striking. This ordinary setting heightens the horror of the story’s climax: these terrible atrocities could occur anywhere. Bogert states, “the story establishes that a group of ordinary people has the ability to commit extraordinarily horrible deeds, if the people in the group are unable or unwilling to think for themselves” (47). By having this take place in an ordinary setting with ordinary characters, it highlights how quickly groupthink can turn regular citizens toward evil. Similarly, the description of the setting for “The Possibility of Evil” as a quaint town highlights the hypocrisy of its inhabitants, specifically Miss. Strangeworth. Her neatly trimmed roses and well-kept home make her appear to be an ordinary citizen, but this is all torn apart once you see the malice behind her letters —the societal facades hiding her true character and evil.

Parks observes that Jackson's works expose “the inner demonic cancer of the community,” stating that Jackson is able to shed light onto the evils of seemingly ordinary people and places (18). “The Witch” uses the train ride to show a transition from a normal day to an exploration of humanity’s dark instincts, with the strangers' tales disrupting the ordinary journey. It started normally, with strangers talking to him and asking “the little boy if he were enjoying the train ride” (Jackson 1), but then the old man ends up turning the day dark. This shows how evil can manifest itself in unexpected places at unexpected times. By setting her stories in

familiar areas, Jackson reveals the sinister nature hidden within everyday life, challenging the audience to question the moral integrity of even their own seemingly ordinary communities. Shirley Jackson's short stories are effective in revealing the dangers of unquestioningly following traditions and societal norms through her use of unsettling irony, ambiguous characterization, and ordinary settings. By Jackson exposing the fragility of morality and the destructive potentials of groupthink, she forces readers to confront the hidden darknesses in their communities, and themselves. Her work reminds the audience that it is incredibly important to question what society tells us, ensuring that we preserve our own individuality and accountability.

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Suffocating Expectations

The Destructive Weight of Masculinity and Prejudice in *The Kite Runner*

by Emma Hirschauer
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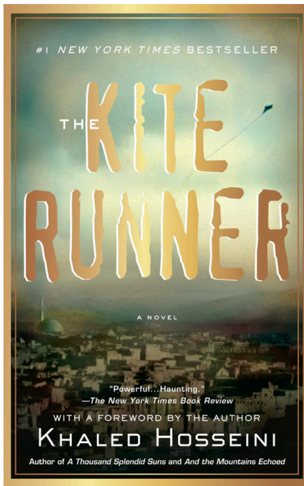

Expectations, when suffered so often in life, have the potential to maim the personality and demolish the mind. The threat of doing or not doing what others expect of one takes a significant toll, the kind of price that becomes the sole tax on life. In the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, the main character Amir, a young boy living and growing up in Kabul, Afghanistan, lives through all of the trials of growing up. He faces influences and develops as a result of them. In his novel, Hosseini uses intense cruelty as a form of social action in order to illustrate the toll of pervasive toxic masculinity on society, and the manner in which it drives people to hate, thus destroying lives and relationships in its path.

To begin, the expectation of society, carried through generations by role models in an individual's life, often holds a limiting, strangling position in the lives of those that they affect. Amir, in *The Kite Runner*, lives in a society that has clear definitions of the roles of men and the roles of women. Baba, Amir's father, embodies the apex of these masculine ideals, and Amir clearly idealizes him for it. Hosseini writes evocative descriptions in order to portray Amir's deep appreciation for his father, as he admires him unconditionally, and long deeply to satisfy him. After introducing this clear admiration, Hosseini then describes the manner in which Amir constantly fails to gain his father's approval. He writes, "Of course, marrying a poet was one thing, but fathering a son who preferred burying his face in poetry books to hunting . . . well, that wasn't how Baba had envisioned it, I suppose" (19). Hosseini, by showing Amir's intense knowledge of his father's disappointment, establishes pained motivations for actions that will come later. Baba wants a son who would be able to fulfill the traditional male expectations of their society, but Amir fails to meet these

expectations, writing instead of playing sports and suffering from constitutional weakness that prohibits him from defending himself or Hassan, his best friend. Once he introduces this fact, Hosseini begins to explore the devastating consequences of Amir's perceived failures. Because he cannot gain the approval of his father, he soon begins to follow a path that detracts from his wellbeing. The effects of the harmful presence of toxic expectations reveal themselves on the mind of those that they affect, as the tangible consequences to follow begin to spiral outward.

In the world outside of Amir's inner thoughts and the relationship that he has with his father, cruel prejudice paints the life of Amir and Hassan. This discrimination serves an omnipresent role in their life, and couples with the struggles Amir experiences with his father. Once, from a book in class he reads, "It also said some things I did know, like that people called Hazaras *mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys*. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan" (8). Hosseini writes these cruel words to show how this reading and realization haunts Amir throughout his childhood. Alongside expectations of masculinity, a parallel expectation of socioeconomic and ethnicity-based discrimination runs throughout Amir's life, devaluing him for his inability to be a true man by his father and judging him for his friendship with Hassan by the children in his neighborhood. Thus, Hosseini poses a challenge to Amir's life. Should he satisfy his father and stand up for Hassan as a truly chivalrous son would, or should he follow societal expectations and condemn his friend? As one calculates the answer to this problem, friendships, so pure and true, become jeopardized due to the unfair, unfulfilled expectations of masculinity.

Thus, deep cruelty forms as a result of the failure and judgement that toxic expectations incur. Amir resents Hassan, a member of the oppressed Hazara ethnic group as well as Amir's best friend, for the preferential treatment he receives from Baba. Because this treatment serves to remind Amir of his failure to live up to masculine expectations, he treats Hassan with cruel distaste. This cruelty takes many forms, but most features heavily in the mind of Amir himself. Hosseini writes his conflicting inner monologue, which at once loves Hassan like a brother and disregards him with intense prejudice. At one point Amir thinks, *"What does he know, that illiterate Hazara? He'll never be anything but a cook. How dare he criticize you?"* (34). Given the judgement and lack of support Amir has endured from Baba, Hosseini crafts a note of harshness from Amir to show the toll that this judgement has taken on him. Because of his longing for the love of his father, Amir will turn to any means necessary to attain this love. This

results in hateful thought, which manifests itself into final cruelty. Thus, in the moment when it matters most, Amir abandons his best friend to the cruelty of those that persecute him. “Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba” (77). Hosseini creates the expectations of Baba and the prevalent hate in Amir’s to drive him to this ultimate cruelty, acting in a manner that fails to satisfy both dueling forces. He sacrifices his best friend to win in a manner that will accept his father, and thus submits to the cruelty of his society without truly finding the way to impress his father through masculine defense. The strain of unfulfilled standards and the pain of overwrought expectations ultimately serve as a catalyst for hatred and cruelty. In the torment of these standards, brilliant relationships like Hassan’s and Amir’s become destroyed. Driven to darkness, the truth of love and companionship cannot stand.

Without influences that wish for nothing but to mold and change, an individual can be left at the mercy of their environment. In the case of Amir, Khaled Hosseini crafts a careful narrative that shows all of the dangers and downfalls of these expectations. The cruelty that Amir perpetrates against Hassan and the neglect he suffers from Baba, the reader has the ability to see what truly happens when society enforces strict stereotypes onto its inhabitants. There, in this lesson learned, one can find the hope to turn to. Striking down harsh expectations and making way for relationships that prove truly worthwhile reveals the true path toward a better future.

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“Cultured Hell”

The Paradox of Power and Pain in McKay’s “America”

by Isaac Wehrung
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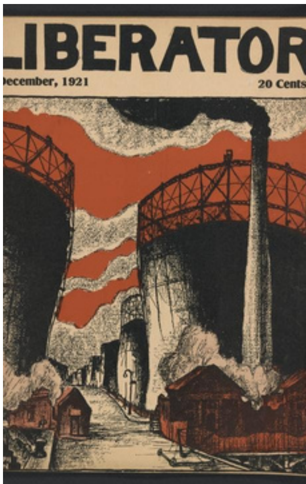

In “America,” Claude McKay emphasizes his perspective of American society and the complex effect it has on him. McKay, a Jamaican-born American poet, experienced the United States with a sense of hesitation and inferiority concerning the color of his skin. This 20th century sonnet exposes the reality that surrounded the Harlem Renaissance, signifying the oppressive and strenuous nature of the world that built McKay’sgrit. Through the intricate uses of personification, juxtapositions, and similes, McKay highlights the hostile society and what builds inside of him as he foresees what is to come of this world.

Beginning the poem, McKay personifies America to imply its true strength and power. He states, “she feeds me bread of bitterness, and sinks into my throat her tiger’s tooth” (1-2). This sets the theme of the poem, emphasizing society’s negative and harmful impact on McKay. America is more than a nation, but a vicious beast on the prowl for a meal. The audience can visualize this nature and perceiveMcKay’s view of America. He continues, “Stealing my breath of life” (3). This reiterates the oppression McKay is fighting against, for the people around him are taking his voice and individuality away from him. Contrasting America’s strength, this personification calls attention to the innocence and vulnerability of McKay. Showing a helpless individual in front of danger can further stress the poem’s theme of America’s destructiveness toward his power. In the depth of this language, McKay intentionally turns society into a living being, one that precisely feeds on the pain of a Black man.

To establish this complex relationship between America and McKay, he juxtaposes positive and negative language. He states, “I love this cultured hell that tests my youth” (4). Following the continued idea

that this world challenges him, McKay unexpectedly shows his admiration toward it. The use of the words “cultured hell” stand out due to their distinct connotations. Being cultured is to be refined, educated, or mannered, whereas hell is discerned to be wretchedness and suffering. Utilizing this device creates a strong contrast that pulls the audience into the complex emotion and perception dwelling in McKay.
Furthermore, the quote expresses the perseverance that he may hold, for McKay adores the testing of his youth and mind. Examining the whole poem, there are broader contrasts with the overall ideas developed by McKay. He says, “she feeds me” and has been “giving me strength” (1; 6). This is compared to the “bitterness” and “hate” (1; 6) of America. The themes of nourishment and fulfillment are followed up by distaste. Repeating this shows an importance toward the inconsistencies and opposite emotions brought out in McKay in his daily life. His surroundings are hostile, yet he allows it to feed into his ambition.

The sonnet shifts into a message regarding the motivation and power within McKay that is rising. He states, “Her vigor flows like tides into my blood” (5), and “Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood” (7). McKay is comparing America’s strength and power to that of a flood or tide. This signifies the intensity of control and strength rushing through him as he pushes through oppressive forces. The society is empowering McKay to fight for his honor and the racism he has to overcome. Thus, America is now seen in a more positive manner, fueling McKay to become better. Reaching the end of the poem, on the other hand, McKay shares his vision of what the world may become. He states, “Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.” In context, he implies that the rich and mighty country will soon reach its fall. The simile points to the sense of revenge that McKay has for America.After experiencing these racial barriers, he dreams that society must feel the same in the future.The visualization of the sinking treasure resembles a possible ruin of the white superiority.

Ultimately, McKay efficiently expresses his personal view of the reality he experienced. His raw emotions and feelings are well-developed to show themes of destruction and power. Through the use of personification, juxtapositions, and similes, McKay creates the hostile relationship with America and the effect it has on him specifically. Understanding his past and relevance to this oppression, the audience can grasp the society of the early 20th century. Every person of color had to overcome numerous barriers and racism that was uncalled for. The free and prized nation known for opportunity was outwardly limiting and harming those like McKay. With the description of this battle fueling McKay, the readers can understand the true emotions and grit of the past. The

countless leaders taking stand on their rights and freedoms, fired up by the Americans against them. Whether in the past or in today's society, this short sonnet calls attention to the brutal, yet motivating, factors one can experience due to the irrational feelings and ideas of America.

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Capitalist Society in Native Son

To Oppress is to Be Free

by Alexandria Middleton
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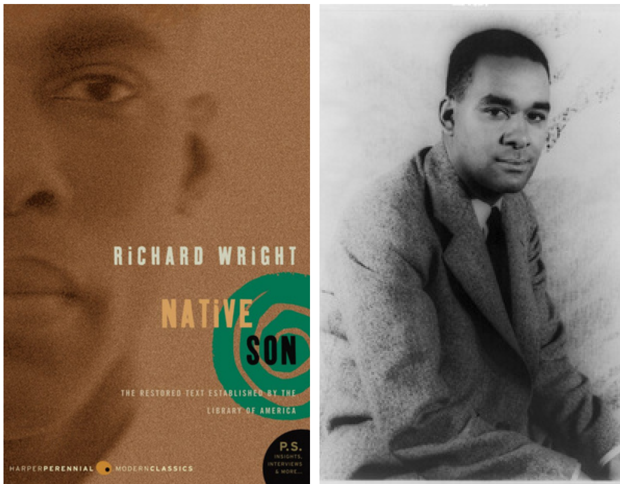

Power struggles have continued to rule and define the lives of minorities in the modern world. Karl Marx believed specifically in the profound impact of economic inequalities as a source of oppression. So did Richard Wright, author of *Native Son* (1940). Wright was not only a Black author who often integrated his personal experiences into his other writings such as “Black Boy,”but was also a member of the Communist party, and after publishing *Native Son* eagerly waited for a response from “the black leadership of the [Communist] Party” (Gayle). Knowing so, it is logical that Wright’s novel follows its protagonist Bigger Thomas, an initially unemployed Blackman dwelling in a single-room apartment with his mother, sister, and brother in the South Side of Chicago. Bigger is familiar with the existence of the discrimination and oppression stemming from a white empowering society that hinders his ability to uplift his socioeconomic status, and through illustrating power struggles between the Black working class and white upper elite, Wright emphasizes its contribution to Bigger’s violent lifestyle. Specifically, Bigger’s lifestyle results from a deeply rooted distrust of white authoritarian figures in the racially discriminative capitalist society combined with the necessities of money and survival, fostering Bigger’s urge to seek power through his own oppressive behaviors. Throughout *Native Son*, Wright reflects disparities between the Black working class and the white elite, which fuel Bigger’s violent and oppressive actions, ultimately criticizing capitalism in how it perpetuates racial and economic inequality.

In *Native Son*, there is a fierce contrast

between the Black working class and the white elite, shaping Bigger's outward perspective and impacting the amount of resentment he holds toward whites who dictate him within the racist American power struggle: Blacks have less economic mobility due to "race, class, and access to education" in a segregated America (Tolentino). When conversing with his friend, Gus, a fellow Black American, Bigger expresses his emotions of dread and doom related to his future: "Every time I get to thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they being there, I feel like something awful's going to happen to me" (Wright 20). The poverty, unemployment, and racial discrimination that Bigger faces is what ultimately lead him to develop this combination of fear, dread, and doom; the distance kept between Black and white Americans controlled by the white elite produces these emotions. In a society where Blacks and whites live closely, interact often, and are not urged to be kept separate, Bigger would not fear interactions with whites; however, as this is not the case, Bigger remains an outcast with the responsibility to contribute to society at the same time, a frustrating realization. Additionally, as the white elite continues to forceAfrican Americans to "live in one corner of the city" and restrict their opportunities, Bigger wonders, "why don't they let us fly planes" (Wright 20). The scene demonstrates the "material reality of racism and poverty," because in modern American society "whites are viewed as normative protagonists" while African Americans are expected to embrace the roles of "passive consumers and bystanders" (Tolentino). It exhibits the oppressive conditions that Bigger faces and how the higher valued white society views him, which in turn impacts his resentment toward them and the label of "bystander" that he is pushed into. It also illustrates the gap between the Black working class and the white elite by displaying the reality of the difference in the achievability of power and economic mobility between each race. At that point in the novel, Bigger was unemployed, but when he is eventually employed by the white, wealthy Dalton family, his feelings of resentment toward whites and societal structure do not change. When first entering the Dalton's neighborhood, Bigger notes that it "was a cold and distant world" composed of "white secrets carefully guarded"; feeling unwelcome, "only fear and emptiness filled him now" (Wright 44). The presence of power struggle and divide between economic mobility is so stark, tangible, and real that resentment grows inside him. Despite the job opportunity and the opening of a successful path, Bigger has already lost hope due to the recurring failures that African Americans have faced as a whole due to the prejudice of white society. Bigger's awareness of the gap between the Black working class and white elite and the societal forces that contribute to the

divide have fueled his emotions of powerlessness and resentment, setting him up for a life of defiance, violence, and the chase to finally oppress the whites themselves as he seeks the feeling of freedom.

Bigger's actions are undoubtedly a product of the systemic oppression he faces; therefore, Bigger oppresses others through violence and deviance which allows him to feel less powerless in solidarity with the white elite. The most impactful moment of violence in the novel was accidental: Bigger's murder of the white and wealthy Mary Dalton. After Mary's disappearance, Bigger was not yet a firm suspect and reporters were asking him to tell all he knew. This filled Bigger with "excitement," as he finally held the ability to "draw the picture" and "draw it like he wanted," despite whites having "always drawn the picture for him" in the past (158). By drawing the picture and manipulating the whites' perception of himself, he can challenge the structures of the oppressive white society that confines him by using stereotypes and taboos to his advantage, for "to accept the dream," of lacking an oppressed identity, and "to eschew realism, is only to perpetuate the realities of oppression" (DeCoste). In hiding his actions, Bigger is provided "a sense of superiority over them, regardless of the fact that whites see him as inferior" because with the image Bigger has molded, the white population would not suspect him as they continue to resort to their racist stereotypes, assuming a meek, Black boy like Bigger would not break the taboos set forth by a segregated society, thus Bigger "has victimized the oppressor" and "controlled the situation of which they are ignorant," swapping the positions of himself and powerful whites (Demirturk). In killing Mary Dalton, Bigger lacked regret and instead felt powerful: "The knowledge that he had killed a white girl they loved and regarded as their symbol of beauty made him feel the equal of them, like a man that had been somehow cheated, but had now evened the score" (Wright 164). In a society run by whites, Bigger is "deprived of being any symbol of beauty" because his blackness represents an "absence" of beauty (Demirturk). The resentment built from this societal perspective led to the satisfaction of Mary's murder, as his violence toward Mary allowed him to control the emotions of his oppressors, again reversing the roles of oppressed and oppressor and dismantling the sole "dominant image" that whites hold in society (Demirturk). Like Bigger had felt after killing Mary, after killing Bessie, "his girl," Bigger sensed a "queer sense of power,"because "these two murders were the most meaningful things that had ever happened to him," and he had never before "had the chance to live out the consequences of his actions"(Wright 239). The murders of Mary and Bessie thrust Bigger into the spotlight, under the eyes of

whites searching the streets for him. As a Black American living in the United States during a racially turbulent time period, he was born invisible, but whites were not; visible to all, they represented power, status, and wealth. The "consequences" of Bigger's violence could only be lived if the whites cared, demonstrating that Bigger had successfully tricked the white elite, reversing the power struggle and rising to their status, ultimately in solidarity with the oppressors.

Bigger represents all African Americans victim to the white-led, capitalist system of the modern United States. Wright points to a solution: communism. While in prison, Bigger fantasizes about the warmth of a "union, identity . . . a supporting oneness, a wholeness which had been denied him all his life," desperate for the world's "colors" to be "melted away" and for the rise of all that is "common and good" (362). The elements of common union, identity, and wholeness that Bigger desires emphasizes an appeal to communism and in turn criticizes the current workings of society: capitalism. In Bigger's fantasy world, "blacks can identify as protagonists" and to do so, Wright implies in *How "Bigger" Was Born* that Black Americans must create a "new role" for themselves through identification and solidarity with other workers (Tolentino). According to Wright, the continuation of the capitalist system will not provide justice for the oppressed African American population. Mr. Max, Bigger's lawyer, acts as Wright's exceptionally impactful means of exposing the burdens that the white capitalist government drops upon young, Black men in America. In defense of Bigger, Mr. Max presented a lengthy courtroom speech to reveal the dehumanizing effects of capitalism on marginalized communities:

The hunt for Bigger Thomas served as an excuse to terrorize the entire Negro population, to arrest hundreds of Communists, to raid labor union headquarters and workers' organizations. Indeed, the tone of the press, the silence of the church, the attitude of the prosecution and the stimulated temper of the people are of such a nature as to indicate that *more* than revenge is being sought upon a man who has committed a crime. (Wright 385)

Mr. Max claims that the public outrage resulting from the search of Bigger Thomas was incited by fear propelled by forces such as the media and capitalism as a source of oppression. He explains that due to systemic oppression, all people are "powerless pawns in a blind play of social forces"controlled by the regulation of the white elite who have kept their power through private-ownership and capitalism (390). The white, wealthy elite at the top of the capitalist ladder hold an imperative role in suppressing the Black working class, including Mr. Dalton, father of Mary Dalton who Bigger murdered. Mr. Max publicly unveils Mr. Dalton's ignorance as he claims to be a supporter

of the African American community, yet he is the owner of the South Side Real Estate company and thus controls where black Americans can reside and how much they pay for rent: "'you rent houses to Negroes in the Black belt and you refuse to rent to them elsewhere. . . . You kept the man who murdered your daughter a stranger to her and you kept your daughter a stranger to him." (Wright 393). Mr. Max openly declares Mr. Dalton's role in the issue of Black oppression and societal division. The distance between the Black working class and the white elite is maintained by the white elite, leading to misconceptions, prejudices, and fear between all whites and Blacks; however, it is communists within the novel, like Mr. Max, who are clearly depicted as lacking fear and instead approach Bigger with empathy and compassion, for they are both discriminated against in the capitalist society. Ultimately, Wright suggests a communist angle of solution for systemic racism in America and a critical view of capitalism in how it contributes to the issue.

Within Wright's *Native Son*, Bigger's actions toward others are often violent and oppressive, rooted in power struggles between the Black working class and the white elite that illustrates how the white-ruled capitalist society of modern America perpetuates racial and economic inequalities. In the beginning of the novel, Bigger's perspective is defined by the oppression he faces as an unemployed Black man with pressure to support his mother and siblings. In a white world, Bigger is enveloped with emotions of doom, fear, and resentment regarding what could become of him as he is so limited in opportunities. Bigger behaves according to the systemic oppression he endures. He attempts to assert power over others through violent, oppressive, and manipulative actions to challenge oppressive structures and reverse the roles of oppressed and oppressor, controlling how whites perceive him and using stereotypes to his advantage. Later, during Bigger's time in court, Mr. Max explains systemic oppression as the source for Bigger's violence and how he represents the whole of the African American population in the United States. Capitalism and private-ownership exemplified by Mr. Dalton fuels racial inequalities by governing where Black Americans live and the higher prices they pay, maintaining an unjust lack of economic mobility. As a Black man and member of the communist party, Richard Wright's *Native Son* skillfully illustrates the injustices and the social forces that prey upon Black Americans, ultimately exposing the power struggles that have defined the lives of minorities for centuries while forcing audiences to confront a harsh American reality.

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Depicting the Horrors of the Holocaust

A Comparative Study of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

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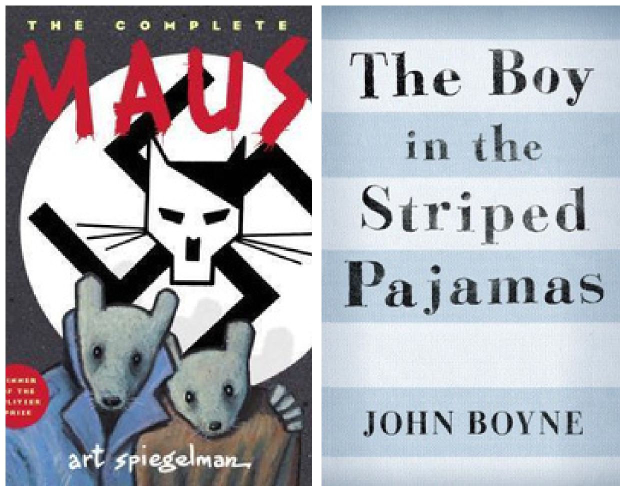

In both novels, Art Spiegelman and John Boyne depict the horrors of the Holocaust through father-son relationships and lost innocence, something crucial to the symbolism of children, innocence, potential, and vulnerability. In *Maus*, Spiegelman does so through Vladek and Artie, father and son, who have a difficult relationship and are often emotionally and physically distanced. In *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Boyne uses Bruno and Father who are distanced as well. However, Boyne also makes heavy use of the symbolism of children, more specifically of Bruno's innocence, which is stolen from him the longer he stays in Auschwitz. Through this, both authors depict the horrors of the holocaust as something that shatters and distances families, stealing children's innocence along with it.

Firstly, in both texts, the authors depict the loss of innocence caused by the Holocaust to demonstrate its horrors. In *Maus*, Spiegelman uses visual techniques like shading to demonstrate how the Holocaust has taken Artie's innocence despite him not being the one who survived its horrors. Not only is Vladek shaded in stripes, but Artie is surrounded by the same striped shading in chapter one. Seeing as on Vladek, the stripes clearly represent the striped uniform worn in Auschwitz and on Artie, the shading symbolizes how he grew up surrounded by the Holocaust's effects through generational trauma. This can be further seen when both Artie and Vladek are shaded completely black in the same chapter. In that panel, it can be clearly seen how they are both gravely affected by the Holocaust and in Artie's case, how it has been passed down to him, stripping him of his innocence. In the beginning of chapter

one, The Sheik, Vladek is seen wearing a coat that is later given to Artie at the end of chapter three. This distinctly evidences how Vladek has passed down his trauma to him and has taken away his innocence with the horrors he has gone through.

Despite Artie refusing to take the coat, his father forces him to take it because the coat Artie came with was thrown away, a clear metaphor for Artie's innocence being thrown away and instead replaced with Vladek's trauma of the Holocaust. Similarly, in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Boyne depicts the loss of innocence as well through the main character of the novel, Bruno. The way the author does this is through Bruno's relationship with his grandmother. Bruno describes how "Every Christmas and at every party she would devise a small play for all three of them to perform" (Boyne 88) and childishly, how "the best part was the fact that Grandmother made costumes for Bruno and Gretel." (88) This demonstrates his innocence in Berlin, one that started fading when his grandmother stopped going to such parties after a discussion with Father over his new role as a general, his uniform, and its significance. Bruno also began to lose his innocence the longer he stayed in "Out-With," not even knowing where they are or what is happening not far from where he lives. He described the car that picked them up as having "red-and-black flags" (39), still oblivious and innocent to the horrors of the situation around him and finally unknowingly repeats "Heil Hitler" (54), imitating his father in hopes that he'd be proud. All of these innocent words and ideas got obliterated once Bruno's life got ripped away from him by the Holocaust. This is how both Spiegelman and Boyne displayed the loss of innocence and therefore the horrors of the Holocaust in their novels.

Secondly, both authors used distant fathers to demonstrate the devastating effects brought on by the Holocaust. In *Maus*, Spiegelman illustrates how Vladek has problems with his eyesight (39). Vladek's eyesight can be seen to symbolize how he cannot see a future for himself nor Artie, thus distancing them. This is because if Vladek cannot see a future where he and Artie are still connected by a family bond, as father and son, then they will only become the opposite, separated and connected only by blood. This can also be seen happening when Vladek is surprised Artie even came to visit him even if it was purely for the purpose of working on a novel (11), demonstrating how in the future, that distance will only grow as Vladek fails to see a future for him and his son. This distance is not only emotional, but also physical too. Vladek and Artie are rarely close together, and on occasions, they are even separated by objects between them. An example of this is when they are separated by the bicycle and the back of the chair (23).

The two objects clearly distance them both, illustrating how they have grown separate and physically with no warmth between them.

Similarly, in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Boyne displays both a physical and emotional separation between Father and Bruno. This physical separation can be seen by Father's office, which is "Out Of Bounds At All Times And No Exceptions" (10). Not only can Bruno not enter the office, but everybody else can, like the Nazis, reinforcing this separation caused by the Holocaust. Another example of this injustice to Bruno is seen as "he saw the door to Father's office standing open and a group of five men outside it, laughing and shaking hands" (42). Bruno is never shown such warmth by Father and neither is he ever allowed to visit his office if even just for a moment when he wishes to see him. The emotional separation between Father and Bruno takes Bruno's death for Father to realize how much he cares about Bruno and how separated they were. To further emphasize this, "He went to sleep every night thinking about Bruno and he woke up every morning thinking about him too" (215). Father's constant thoughts about Bruno are as if to make up for his distance, to make up for how stifled Bruno was when being told what to do by him when even then, they still remained separated. Both authors thus used distant parents to display the devastation of the Holocaust, where both parents were so distant due to it, that there was no future where both they and their sons shared the bond father and son should have instead of such distance. Not only this, but their lack of vision caused both Artie and Bruno to lose their futures. In the case of Artie, he was left with his life revolving around the trauma of his father and Bruno was left without his life, and thus, no future.

Both Spiegelman and Boyne in their novels clearly depicted the horrors of the Holocaust and its effects through father and son relationships and lost innocence. Spiegelman did so through Artie and Vladek and Boyne through Bruno and Father. They depicted how the horrors of the Holocaust shatters families and the very values of children and their symbolism as innocent beings. It is unquestionably important to study Holocaust novels in the present due to their implications and how unfortunately, their symbolism can be applied to present day society. Holocaust novels not only provide important historical context, but they also demonstrate how that context led to the world we have today and its discrimination toward groups of people who are still humans like everybody else. It is important to study these novels to create cultured and understanding people, allowing for the improvement of their morals and ethics, ensuring that no event like the Holocaust will ever happen again, if even at a small scale.

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"Cinderella" Character Analysis

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The story of "Cinderella" is easily one of the most influential fairy tales in literature, and especially for younger girls, the character of Cinderella is a symbol of resilience, grace, and transformation. Its many adaptations demonstrate the importance of humility and maintaining a positive spirit no matter the circumstance. Specifically, the Brothers Grimm adaptation of "Cinderella" reveals the story of a young girl who grieves the loss of her mother and faces abuse from her stepsisters. However, her unwavering faith helps her spark a connection with the famous prince, turning her story around. The Brothers Grimm version uses Cinderella's character traits not only to define her as a person but also to serve valuable lessons about resilience. Cinderella's kind actions, morals, and perseverance throughout the story are what led her to escape her struggles, and also teach the reader how having faith will result in a newfound freedom.

Cinderella's willingness to never give up even when she is being put down shows her true morals as a character. In the Brothers Grimm version of "Cinderella," the time of the story, placed in the late 1700s, reveals traditional societal roles and the discrimination women faced due to their social class. According to James F. McMillan in *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics,* "Anti-woman prejudice remained strong in the eighteenth century, and in many ways, the unconventional behaviour of women of the elite succeeded only in making it stronger" (2). Cinderella's stepsisters were consistently putting Cinderella down because she was an "outcast." However, even though her days consisted of household chores and remarks from her sisters, she was motivated by the last words of her mother to stay compassionate and kind, and always made it a point to act on that message: ". . . the little girl went every

day to her grave and wept, and was always good and kind to all about her" (Grimm 1). While it would've been easy for her to retaliate, she chooses to keep her kindness and is faithful. Another important trait of Cinderella is the distinction between what she truly values versus her stepsisters.

Cinderella's stepsisters highly valued their status, as well as materialistic items and things rich in value. This is apparent in the story when her father asks each of the sisters what they would like him to bring back for her. When her sisters request diamonds and jewels, Cinderella requests: "The first sprig, dear father, that rubs against your hat on your way home" (Grimm 3). This action of choosing something for her mother's grave, instead of something to show off her status, shows her true heart. Additionally, her constant visits to her mother's grave and her prayers highlight her faithfulness to the people she loves and her hope that things will get better.

Cinderella's transformation and character development throughout the novel highlight the irony of how her difficult, sorrowful lifestyle, quickly turned into her fairytale ending. One notable part of the story is how Cinderella's name came to be, which reflects the horrible living conditions she was put through: "She had no bed to lie down on, but was made to lie by the hearth among the ashes, and they called her Cinderella" (Grimm 2). Although Cinderella was naturally beautiful, she was working throughout the day among the ashes, which caused her to appear dirty. Her family purposefully placed her in tough living conditions and concealed her beauty; however, ironically she ended up being the most beautiful girl the prince laid eyes on and wanted to marry. After her transformation, even her own sisters "did not know her, [because] she looked so fine and beautiful in her rich clothes" (2). Cinderella's beauty is not only a character trait, but also conveys the message to women that those who are the most kind and compassionate are the most beautiful and sought out.

Throughout the story, Cinderella's optimism and hard work are highlighted in a variety of ways. When Cinderella hears news of the ball, and begs her mother to go, she does everything in her power to follow her mother's orders to allow her to attend: "So she shook two dishes of peas into the ashes; but the little maiden went out into the garden at the back of the house, and called as before and all the birds came flying, and in half an hour's time all was done, and out they flew again" (Grimm 8). Although her actions got her no where in her mother's decision to let her go, it shows how Cinderella was driven and willing to go after what she wanted. Even after the second rejection by her mother, she went out to her mother's grave and begged for a miracle. Because she never chose to give up, she was

rewarded with her gown and slippers and was able to attend the ball. Bruno Bettelheim analyzes the different adaptations of the fairy tale and discusses the positive message of Cinderella's actions: "The Brothers Grimm's 'Cinderella' conveys ever so subtly to a child that . . . by sublimating his misery and sorrow, as Cinderella does by planting and cultivating the tree with her emotions, the child on his very own can arrange things so that his life in the world will also become a good one" (18). Cinderella's actions serve as an inspiration to others to keep working toward life goals, because eventually success and freedom will be reached.

Cinderella's ability to stay humble over retaliating is what ultimately led to her happy ending. The Brothers Grimm adaptation of "Cinderella" reflects on the difficult societal standards of the time, and the troubles women of Cinderella's social class faced. Despite this, Cinderella never let her circumstances define her and instead strived for a more positive outcome. Many people reading Grimm's "Cinderella" can relate to her character on multiple levels since they themselves have been overlooked or put in situations where they had to work for success and face struggles along the way. The character of Cinderella overall serves as a role model for women and girls, and her traits serve as an important reminder to stay humble, keep high morale in hardships, and treat others with kindness and grace.

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Forced Maturity

The Case of James from "The Sky is Gray"

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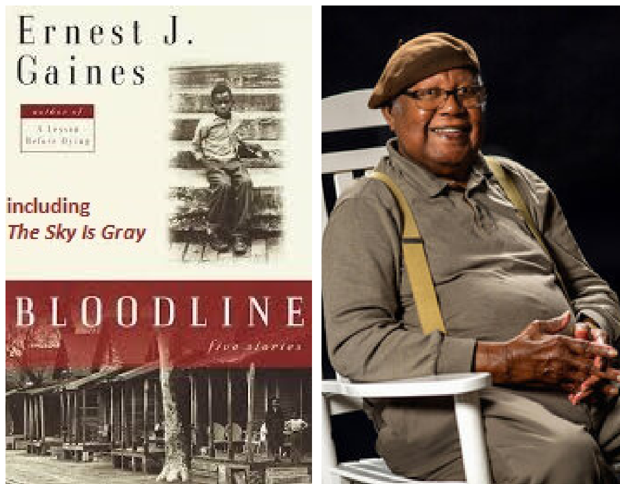

"You've got to start acting more mature!" Unless you were "a little angel" growing up, you've probably heard that phrase from your parents—maybe even many times! Though your parents might disagree, maturation is not so much a choice as it is a stage of biological and emotional development influenced by our surroundings. "Coming of age" stories highlight these prominent developments, depicting the effect of greater independence and responsibility on the human psyche. Everyone undergoes maturation at different times in life, but for some, maturity arrives far earlier than normal. Surroundings that force individuals to take on greater responsibility in their family or community might cause this early development, a dynamic explored in Ernest Baines' short story, "The Sky is Gray." Owing to the recent death of his father and the poverty of his family, the 8-year-old narrator, James, is forced to mature to support his family. As revealed through his reaction to his toothache, killing the red birds, and the argument in the dentist's office, this early maturation leads James to repress his emotions, adopt violent tendencies, and become defiant.

In the beginning of the story, James reflects upon his tooth pain, revealing his pattern of emotionally repressive behaviors. So agonizing that it could "almost kill," James' tooth has "been hurting [him] and hurting [him for] close to a month" (1). Yet, James ignores it, reasoning that he "didn't want to act like a crybaby" (1). Usually, trivial complaints—begging for a cookie or complaining about sharing toys—are considered "crybaby" behavior, not suppressing excruciating pain for a month. Considering this, James' behavior aligns less with typical childhood embarrassment and more with deeply entrenched emotional repression. This behavior continues to resurface throughout the story, such as

when James hides from his mother that he is "so hungry and cold . . . [that he] . . . want[s] to cry" (10). This emotional repression also extends to feelings, such as love and affection, and stems entirely from James' mother, Octavia, who deems emotional expression as "weakness and . . . crybaby stuff," echoing James' reasoning for hiding his pain. From his comments, it is clear James is not physically or emotionally numb, but instead buries his feelings out of fear, shame, and responsibility to set an example for his siblings. Though James appears emotionally mature on the surface, he simply masks his innocence and naivety with masculine austerity and indifference.

However, some aspects of James' hyper-masculine persona extend deeper into his psyche, such as the violent tendencies James develops after killing the redbirds. In a flashback, James describes himself and his brother capturing redbirds in hunting traps. While the boys hope to play with and later release the birds, Octavia beats James and forces him to kill, clean, and cook them. James' initial desire to play with the birds reveals his gentle and caring nature, and his recoil upon hearing the bird's "leg pop" from stabbing it with a fork shows his compassion and dislike of violence (4). However, James' personality later in the story stands in stark contrast to this picture, as he regularly demonstrates violent tendencies in his interactions with others. For instance, when the young girl on the bus derides him, James hopes she stops before he "[has] to bust her in the mouth" (5). Later, James pretends to hit the girl when she sticks out her tongue at him. One might view these as simply child's play, but James later wishes and attempts to attack two separate men who flirt with his mother, one who wolf-whistles at her, another who asks to dance with her. His violent behavior characterized as justified and necessary, James' nature has clearly shifted from peaceful to violent after the death of the redbirds. To James, violence signifies strength and control; emotion, weakness and vulnerability.

The Preacher and Student personify this dichotomy, and James' reaction to the argument between the two provides insight into his own defiant nature. While waiting for the dentist, James witnesses the Student demand that African Americans question God's "existence as well as everything else" (7). This angers the Preacher, who then slaps the Student. Despite this, the Student remains defiant. Here, the Preacher represents violence, control, yet also traditionalism, whereas the Student personifies defiance, independence, and education. James admires the student as, after the argument, James comments, "When I grow up I want to be just like him [the Student]," implying James wishes to not only grow mature and independent, but also openly express defiance toward others (8). This creates a parallel between James

and the Student, thus pitting them against the traditionalist forces in their lives, Octavia and the Preacher, respectively. Despite James' love for Octavia, his admiration for the Student reveals his inner defiance against her control, and his overarching desire for agency in his own life.

Throughout Baines's "The Sky is Gray," James' personality gradually reveals itself in his interactions with other people and reactions to his surroundings. James' surroundings demand greater responsibility and maturity from him, causing James to build a masculine persona around himself. As a result, James suppresses his feelings while outwardly expresses violence. James' relationship with his mother, Octavia, causes most of these changes and borders on abusive. In this light, "The Sky is Gray" comments on the impact of trauma and abuse on a child's development. Additionally, James' transformation serves as a reflection of the hyper-masculine roles and behaviors traditionally considered indicators of maturity.

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Beauty, Power, and Independence

The Symbolism of Hair in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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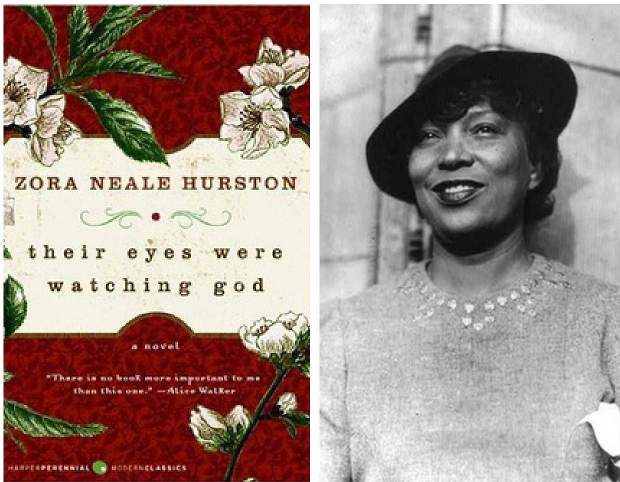

Throughout history, hair has been a symbol of physical and internal beauty. Matthew Wills first developed this argument in the thesis of his article, stating "Human hair has been the subject of countless cultural tangles over the centuries. The protein filament has been included in definitions of the civilized and the savage, of the modest and the vein, of the chaste and the sensual, of the orderly and the anarchic. Above all, hair has been intimately written into definitions of sexuality and gender" (Wills). Hair becomes an important symbol in many written works including *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Zora Neal Hurston uses Janie Crawford's hair as a symbol of beauty, independence, and power. Janie Crawford is a Black woman in early 20th century Florida, specifically in the all-Black town of Eatonville. This town is where she, an attractive woman with luscious flowing hair, navigates three marriages, along with the social and racial injustice that she carried with her. Defying Victorian and Biblical precedents and reimagining the more modern depictions of hair in the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston redefines the symbol of hair to mold it into a symbol of resilience and independence.

Biblical literature is known to use similes and metaphors to help elucidate a complicated topic including using hair as a symbol. In Judges, they tell the story of Samson who is being attacked by the Philistines. Samson falls in love with a woman named Delilah who is working for the Philistines to find the source of Samson's power. Delilah nags him for weeks until he finally says "So he told her everything. 'No razor has ever been used

on my head,' he said, 'because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man" (Judges 16-17). This verse highlights how Samson's long hair was a symbol of Nazarite vows and his divine strength. Once his hair was cut, he lost that power that had previously set him apart. When his hair began to grow once again, however, it symbolized his restoration of his relationships with God. As his hair grew, an immense amount of power came along. This power shows the importance of hair, especially when compared to Godly power. Another example can be found in the New Testament featuring Mary and Jesus Christ. After dinner, "Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12.3-6). Although her hair seems relatively unimportant, during this time it is seen as a sign of humility, love, and devotion to Jesus. Mary's hair is a sign of beauty and by using it to wash his feet, it proved how Mary was willing to give up herself to God. Hair is symbolized in biblical literature as a representation of strength, devotion, and humility in one's relationship with God establishing a solid precedent for the meaning of the symbol.

By the 1800s women were forced to comply to the idea of republican motherhood. Although women were still expected to be symbols of beauty, they were also supposed to maintain and educate their family as their work. Elisabeth G. Gitter describes, "A woman's long, flowing hair was not merely a sign of beauty, but of her moral authority within the home, where she was expected to cultivate purity, devotion, and self-sacrifice" (Gitter). This quote shows how women were supposed to sacrifice themselves for their home. The dedication to the home was also furthered by Gitter, stating, "Victorian mothers preserved locks of their hair for their children, weaving them into jewelry or keepsakes as emblems of maternal love and continuity" (Gitter). By encapsulating a person, especially a women's identity into hair, the Victorian period teaches family values and builds an expectation for society through this symbol.

During the 1920s, a large movement began to take shape. Melancholy streets were painted with trumpet blasts and sharp notes on pianos that lit the air. Pinstripe suits and flapper dresses filled the street moving between stores, each time a door opening and filling the street with either laughter, or the intoxicating smell of food. Through this meandering of people in the streets, there was a sense of purpose spread throughout people. Black-owned newspaper companies and aspiring artists were mixed into the town. This feeling of progress was known as the Harlem Renaissance, and was a

movement largely made up by the African American community of Harlem. One of the writers who capitalized on this social movement was Langston Hughes, a popular poet who helped give voice to the hopes and struggles of African Americans. One poem he wrote, "Fascination," explored the identity of Black people, and the idea of beauty. He described the main character, saying, "Her hair is a midnight mass, a dusky aurora" (Hughes). Hughes furthered the idea of hair as a scene of beauty, and defined the allure of hair, exemplified through African American women.

One novelist who further developed these ideas was Zora Neil Hurston. In her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main character Janie Crawford is on a continual quest for love and purpose. She runs away from her first loveless marriage with Joe Starks and hopes this decision will finally bring her happiness. Throughout this relationship, however, she experiences abuse and restrictions on her personal freedom. Going through the same motions every year, Joe begins to grow sick. In Joe's final moments, Janie finally stands up for herself and voices her repressed discontent with how he has treated her:

A sound of strife in Jody's throat, but his eyes stared unwillingly into a corner of the room so Janie knew the futile fight was not with her. The icy sword of the square-toed one had cut off his breath and left his hands in a pose of agonizing protest. Janie gave them peace on his breast, then she studied his dead face for a long time. "Dis sittin' in de rulin' chair is been hard on Jody," she muttered out loud. She was full of pity for the first time in years. Jody had been hard on her and others, but life had mis-handled him too. Poor Joe! Maybe if she had known some other way to try, she might have made his face different. But what that other way could be, she had no idea. She thought back and forth about what had happened in the making of a voice out of a man. Then thought about herself. Years ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she had remembered. Perhaps she'd better look. She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again. Then she starched and ironed her face, forming it into just what people wanted to see, and opened up the window and cried, "Come Heah people! Jody is dead. Mah husband is gone from me." (87)

In this section of the novel, it is easy to see how she changes from the beginning to the end. First, she is compassionate and mourns the loss of her husband. During this time,

she keeps her hair in a Handkerchief and conceals it per Joe's orders to do so. Once he has passed, "She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there" (87). Without the controlling influence of Joe, she literally lets her hair down and feels in control of herself, albeit briefly. Shortly after however, she ties it up again. This could be to symbolize her grief of Joe Starks. As previously stated, she still cared for Joe and wanted others to know that she was grieving her husband's death. By hiding her hair that she believed had made her a strong woman, she is able to convey her sorrow that would not be shown if she had let her hair stay free. This theme of hair symbolizes the dominance that Joe Starks showed over Janie, and the beauty being held back from herself as well as the world. When her hair is tied up, she is repressed and controlled. However, when she lets her hair loose, it creates a sense of liberation.

Hurston was able to reinterpret the symbolism of hair as a means of empowerment and resistance against societal norms. Unlike the Victorian and Biblical traditions where hair represented respect or virtue, Janie's hair becomes a symbol of her personal freedom and sexuality. Her journey from repression to a self-sufficient life is reflected through her hair. One example is after Joe dies and she is with Tea Cake. As they were sitting together, "The sounds lulled Janie to soft slumber and she woke with Tea Cake combing her hair" (103). Through this quote, the stark difference is evident between the treatment she was given during Joe Stark's marriage and her time with Tea Cake. This comfort in her relationship shows how she has gained a sense of freedom and self-identity. The defiance of others is especially shown in the courtroom scene, where Janie's hair is uncovered. Her hair at that moment is seen as a symbol of her resistance against the judgement and social constraints of others. Despite facing the judgement of the legal system and her own community, she remains calm, as she "just sat there and told and when she was through, she hushed" (187). This description showed how she had a calm demeanor in the face of adversity. By doing so, Hurston was able to use dialogue and description to emphasize Janie's strength. Beyond just the novel however, this symbol of hair helped advocate for Black women's right to express and be themselves. This closely mirrored Hurston's own philosophy at that time as well. Hurston believed self-discovery is required to break free of limitations put on individuals by others. By using the symbolism of hair, Hurston not only empowers Janie, but also redefines the narrative of femininity and independence.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston reshapes the historical importance of hair into her own version,

whether its drawing from Biblical narratives, Victorian ideals, or the Harlem Renaissance in general. Biblical stories like Samson's and Mary's use hair to represent divine power and devotion. The Victorian era uses it to represent family and moral authority. Langston Hughes talks about the sexuality and prettiness of hair, which incapsulates its role in the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston took from these examples and created a more complex symbol. Through Janie's journey, Hurston creates a broader feeling of beauty being linked to the ability to express oneself and be resilient. By embracing and displaying her hair to the public after Joe's death and to the court, it shows how a beautiful woman can outlast the oppression put on her by her community and the government. Ultimately, by reinterpreting the symbol of hair, Hurston empowered Janie, along with all women to fight for independence and define their own beauty in themselves.

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Epic Battles & Missed Opportunities

Reexamining the Legacy of *Avengers: Endgame*

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The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) was a cultural phenomenon for more than a decade, captivating audiences with action-packed blockbusters, beloved characters, and stunning visuals since *Iron Man* launched the franchise in 2008. Now, over five years since *Avengers: Endgame* concluded Phase Three in 2019, fans still hold *Infinity War* and *Endgame* close to heart. These films marked the culmination of a storyline that had been building up for years—the first hints popping up as early as *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron.* Not only that, but it was a reminder of why we fell in love with Marvel in the first place. It was a celebration of eleven years of Marvel blockbusters, the last hurrah of Phase One's core iconic characters, and an ultimate convergence, bringing together all of our favorite heroes into one epic film. Since then, the MCU has remained active with projects like *Wakanda Forever, Daredevil: Born Again, Thunderbolts,* and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3,* but despite a few strong entries, the franchise has yet to fully regain the momentum and widespread acclaim of the *Infinity Saga*. *Endgame*, while groundbreaking, made several narrative choices that continue to spark debate and raise questions about the direction Marvel has taken since—making it a key moment worth reexamining.

Now, there was no better way to initiate the grand finale of the *Infinity Saga* than with *Infinity War*. The film proves this duology is about family. Time after time, we watch as the strongest bonds are forged amidst the toughest times; heroes, people, family, friends, all rising from the ashes like a phoenix from rebirth, becoming stronger than ever before. Although these films are

filled with tragedy and despair, they also exude a sense of unwavering optimism and love, displaying the incredible resilience of these emotions and people experiencing them. In the end, *Avengers: Infinity War* stands unparalleled in its exploration of these profound themes, intricately woven together with the representation of the found family trope. However, it is worth noting that *Endgame*, while commendable in its own right, contains certain moments or elements that gradually chip away at the overall strength of the film. With the introduction of out-of-place narrative elements that diverge from previously established themes, *Endgame* fails to deliver a harmonious conclusion to the Saga, leaving behind a somewhat shaky foundation for the next phase of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The Endgame.

Avengers: Endgame stands as a monumental milestone in Marvel's history—its magnum opus—meant to shine brilliantly among the rest. With immense anticipation, pulse-pounding action, and the ultimate boss fight, it seemed set to be an unparalleled cinematic experience. But instead of soaring above *Infinity War,* it fell flat, stuck in the realm of the average Marvel movie.

Now, the only question is . . . *Why?*

The movie begins strong, focusing on Clint Barton, who was notably absent from *Infinity War*. Retired and enjoying a peaceful day on his family's farm, Clint's warm, domestic moment shatters as his entire family vanishes without any warning, leaving him confused and grief-stricken. Next, the screen cuts to Tony and Nebula adrift in space, their tragicomic dynamic blending lighthearted bonding with grim finality as Tony records a goodbye message to Pepper. "Please know, when I drift off, it will be like every night lately. I'm fine. Totally fine. I dream about you. Because it's always you." Then, a flash of light pierces the darkness, and Captain Marvel makes her appearance, once more giving audiences hope for their beloved heroes' survival.

Upon his return to Earth, Tony is unable to ask the one question gnawing at his core, terrified of the possibility of learning that Pepper had been dusted. Even in his relief for the love of his life still being alive, the audience is gripped by his heart-wrenching admission of failure: "I lost the kid." On the sidelines, Thor seethes with rage, grappling with the weight of his failure to save his brother or the entire universe. Nebula and Rocket silently intertwine their hands, seeking solace in each other's presence—a rare glimpse into their shared pain. Amidst these moments of vulnerability, Steve's and Tony's exchange resurfaces buried emotions from *Civil War*,

while Rhodey displays his unwavering determination in lending a hand to his closest friend, Tony, who is falling apart at the seams as he mourns the devastating loss of his only protege—his almost-son—Peter parker.

Finally, an opportunity presents itself for the Avengers to confront Thanos once more and fueled by a desperate desire to undo the catastrophic aftermath that has befallen them, they seize the moment. They find, defeat, and kill Thanos, yet their victory proves hollow—the infinity stones were destroyed, not to be used again. It is all for naught, because *nothing changes*.

As the curtain rises, *Avengers: Endgame*, the finale of all Marvel movies, begins with the ultimate failure: the end of the Avengers. This bold decision, praiseworthy as it may be, inadvertently exposes the film's first mistake. Just before confronting Thanos, Steve, aboard the Milano, gazes upon a compass with a picture of Peggy Carter. Revisiting their romantic subplot feels redundant. Steve has spent over a decade in the future, attended Peggy's funeral, and expressed contentment with his new life. "I don't know... family? Stability? The guy who wanted all that went in the ice seventy-five years ago. I think someone else came out," he says. To which Tony Stark asks, "You alright?" and Steve responds, "I'm home." This conversation between Steve and Tony in *Age of Ultron* clearly conveyed a pivotal point in Captain America's character arc. As a man out of time, Steve had long since accepted his past was gone and had begun to build something meaningful in the present. At this point in *Endgame*, Steve has lost Sam, Bucky, Natasha, Wanda, and essentially his entire team—Peggy should have been the last thing on his mind. The decision to have Steve remain in the past with Peggy Carter not only undermines his personal journey but also disregards Peggy's own narrative. After Steve's presumed death, Peggy moved on and married someone else—her life did not remain paused for his return. Her funeral in *Civil War* already provided closure for Steve, and Peggy's reintroduction through the sudden appearance of the compass feels incongruous and useless. It stands as one of the most significant hindrances to the character development fans had eagerly anticipated for Steve.

Not only that, but his choice to return to the past raises an important question: what about Bucky? They had only recently reunited after Bucky finally broke away from the programming installed by the years of torture and suffering at HYDRA's hands, but Steve just leaves him. Instead of cherishing his bond with his pseudo-brother, Steve opts to spend his remaining life with a woman he kissed once in the forties. While their relationship held significance, it is easily arguable that

Steve and Bucky's bond takes precedence, given their almost lifelong connection. When his two best friends—Bucky and Sam—were returned to him, he should not have needed to turn to the past for "happiness" or a "full life." Sebastian Stan, himself reposted a tweet by @TheNenya, saying "Together until the end of the line. Or until bad, inconsistent, out-of character writing turns Steve Rogers into his own antithesis. Shouldn't it be 'together until the end of the lie' now?" The conclusion of *Avengers: Endgame* not only dismisses Steve's character journey but also shatters other character arcs and thematic elements established in previous films.

In other Marvel films, the found family trope played a central role, particularly in *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Avengers*. However, *Endgame* pushes this theme aside, especially after the Avengers splinter in *Civil War*. The *Ant-Man* series, for instance, consistently highlighted Scott's chosen family—Luis, Kurt, Dave, his ex-wife Maggie, and her husband Jim—yet none of them are mentioned in *Endgame*. When Scott discusses "the Snap," only Hope is brought up, and the film closes with just Scott, Cassie, and Hope. This absence weakens the emotional payoff of their reunion.

Despite this, *Endgame* continues to showcase strong platonic bonds—Clint and Natasha, Steve and Bucky, Rhodey and and Tony, Thor and Loki—but it increasingly prioritizes traditional romantic love. As The Daily Dot critiques, "Obsessed with traditional family values, this film derailed several of its main character arcs to make way for incoherent and offensive endings" (Baker-Whitelaw 2019). The directors wrongly equate a "happy ending" with marriage and children, sidelining years of complex relationships for forced narrative closure.

One brief relief was that the Natasha-Bruce romance wasn't further explored. That relationship, based on the problematic "monster loves monster" trope, never sat right—especially since neither of them should be labeled monsters. Hulk is not truly a monster but a survival mechanism, as shown when Smart Hulk emerges. Natasha, on the other hand, is branded a monster for being infertile—something inflicted on her during her brutal Red Room training. Reducing her trauma to reproductive ability sends a dangerous message, suggesting that a woman's worth, or capacity for love and heroism, is tied to her ability to have children.

After years of pain, redemption, and complex growth, Natasha's self-sacrifice on Vormir should have been one of the film's emotional peaks. Instead, it is rushed and undercut by a lack of reflection from the remaining Avengers. Her death is treated more like a plot device than a moment of

collective mourning—just a quick acknowledgment before the mission moves forward. It's a disservice to one of the franchise's original Avengers and undermines the weight of her choice.

This is particularly disappointing because the scene itself—her and Clint battling to sacrifice themselves for the Soul Stone—is one of the few moments where familial love takes center stage. Clint's transformation into Ronin, driven by grief and the loss of his family during "the Snap," had already shown how deeply love motivates his actions. The Vormir sequence was a chance to showcase the profound bond between two people who have saved each other time and time again—not through romance, but through shared trauma, loyalty, and mutual understanding. Their struggle to be the one to die is a powerful, gut-wrenching testament to their platonic love. But the moment isn't given the aftermath it deserves. Clint is left to return alone, burdened by her death, but the film doesn't allow the team or audience to fully sit with the consequences. It fails to honor Natasha's sacrifice with the same emotional or visual gravity given to Tony Stark's.

Endgame initially plants seeds of powerful non-romantic love—Clint and Natasha, Scott and Cassie, even Thor's strained connection with his mother—but ultimately abandons these threads in favor of neater, more traditional closures. Most jarringly, Steve's final decision to go back in time and live out his life with Peggy undercuts the MCU's longstanding theme of chosen family. Throughout the franchise, Steve's closest relationships—with Bucky, Sam, and the Avengers—reflect that family is not bound by blood or obligation, but by the people you fight beside and grow with. Instead of reinforcing this theme, Endgame simplifies Steve's arc into a romantic endpoint, disregarding the emotional investment in his found family.

The final battle, while visually thrilling, feels like chaotic fan service more than an epic climax. Rather than showcasing coordinated, large-scale unity, the scene focuses on individual victories. The lack of a collective arc or clear objectives diminishes the stakes. Thanos' army is treated more like set dressing than an actual threat, with no significant progressions in the battle except a few isolated moments. Even Captain Marvel destroying the mothership, while impressive, does not alter the course—as they were already winning.

In the end, *Avengers: Endgame* is a story about fixing the world after its end. While visually spectacular and emotionally resonant in parts, it ultimately sacrifices thematic consistency and character development for rushed resolutions and nostalgia. It entertained, certainly—but fell short of its true potential.

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Epic Dreams & Hollow Triumphs

Gatsby's Pursuit of the American Dream

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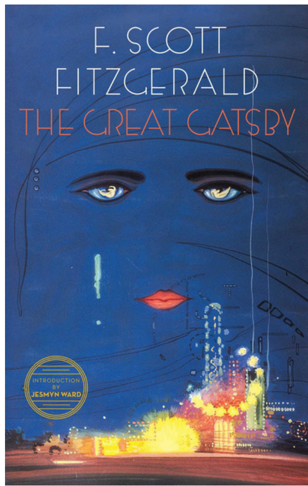

The fictional tragedy, *The Great Gatsby*, was written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925. The novel portrays the complexities of corruption, rich and poor, new money and old money, and the symbols of hope. It dives deep into the differences of social class, and how women had a lack of power. Fitzgerald also illustrates the idea of the American Dream using one of the main characters, Jay Gatsby. The profound idea of the American Dream can be defined as achieving great wealth from a poor start. Furthermore, it is the idea of having the capability to do the hard work that others are not willing to do. It can quite literally be seen as rags to riches. Fitzgerald depicts the doctrine of the American Dream by demonstrating Gatsby's low social class at birth, his determination to succeed and acquire freedom.

Gatsby's lower social class does not deter him from achieving his dreams of success, through wealth and recognition, in order to have a more fulfilling life than his parents. "[A] dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable . . . regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (Truslow Adams 1). One of the components of the American Dream is having an unfortunate childhood where one cannot have the luxuries that others have the privilege of having. However, according to Adams, birth and social class should not matter when hoping to achieve a dream. Each individual is born with the capability to aspire and arrive at their hopes. Someone's past should not deter their dreams for the future. J. H. Cullum Clark states, "Judge the state of the American dream according to how many

Americans enjoy greater economic well-being than their parents did, measured by material goods consumption" (4). One can interpret the American Dream as acquiring greater economic wealth than their parents did. Usually, having more wealth can contribute to more happiness. As *The Great Gatsby* progresses, Nick, the narrator, finds out more about Gatsby's true past. Gatsby tells him about his actual childhood, "His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (Fitzgerald 98). Contradicting Gatsby's lies, he was born into a poor family. Despite starting from an immensely poor childhood, he was able to turn that around and obtain great success. This reinforces Adams' beliefs that status at birth does not make a difference in the topic of success. In the last chapter of the novel, Nick meets Gatsby's father, Henry Gatz. The father was able to see Gatsby's house,"And when he [Henry Gatz] looked around . . . the height and splendor of the hall and the great rooms opening out from it into other rooms . . . mixed with an awed pride" (Fitzgerald 168). Henry Gatz's reaction to the grand house implies that Gatsby had attained more than his parents ever had. The amount of material goods Gatsby had bought indicates that he was proud of himself for being wealthy. The materialistic side of Gatsby also suggests he wanted to prove that he was nothing like his parents; he was no longer poor and could afford whatever he wanted to buy.

Gatsby's choices demonstrate his willingness to undertake whatever is necessary to reach his desired level of affluence. "The American dream is believed to be achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work, rather than by chance" (Clark 1). In order to attain the American Dream, one must be open to loss and extremely hard work. Success does not come from laziness; it comes from tiring determination to have more. This hard work will eventually lead to an enriched lifestyle. "[H]ard work could lead to increased productivity and improving living standards for ordinary working families" (Clark 2). In life, effort to work and provide equates to better housing and living conditions. In the future, families will have less worry about most things, such as bills, insurance, health, housing, etc. In the book, Gatsby told Nick about the start of his career, "To the small Lutheran college of St. Olaf's . . . despising the janitor's work with which he was to pay his way through" (Fitzgerald 99). To be educated, Gatsby had to work as a janitor. In society, janitors are seen to have a poor social class. Gatsby did work that was unenjoyable to kick-start his career. This work eventually contributed to his success. At the start of the novel, Nick describes Gatsby's house: "It was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of law and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion" (5). Gatsby's house is enormously above average living

standards. His house alone had more than enough needs than most Americans have. However, this house did not come easily to Gatsby. He had to work extremely hard to accomplish his money. This richness led to consequent luxuries, such as the pool, the large amount of land, and more.

Gatsby's new life displayed the abilities he had used resulting in a raised level of freedom and affording him the power to influence people. Clark also wrote about what it means to have attained the American Dream, "Freedom to make both the large and small decisions . . . accumulate wealth . . . opportunity to lead a dignified life . . . freedom to live in accordance with one's values" (2). The American Dream allows more freedom to the people who obtain it. Once an individual has arrived at the dream, they have more opportunities, more power, and can afford to make decisions that can affect their life. In addition, Adams explains an aspect of the famous idea, "[I]n which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement" (1). Each person has a chance to improve their life. Every person on Earth is unique; they all have a special skill or craftsmanship. This expertise could lead to their eventual success if one uses it. In the literary piece, Jordan tells Nick about Gatsby and Daisy's past, "Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay" (Fitzgerald 78). The wealth Gatsby had allowed him to buy the house that was overlooking Daisy's. Furthermore, Gatsby could make decisions about what to spend his money on, and how to influence Daisy. His wealth gave him more freedom with choices. At the climax of the book, Tom confronts Gatsby about his job, "I found out what your 'drug stores' were . . . and sold grain alcohol over the counter" (133). Even though illegal, Gatsby had used the opportunities he had to become rich. Two of Gatsby's skills were that he could keep secrets and was not scared to commit illegal crimes. This craftsmanship smoothly led him to acquire money. He also maintained a secret, perfect lifestyle; no one found out what he did, and he could build his empire further.

While Gatsby did not have a privileged start to his work, he never gave up on his dreams to achieve something greater than what he was given. He continued to relentlessly pursue his hopes no matter the obstacle thrown at him, and this trait of his is completely and indubitably admirable.

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From Exhaustion to Earnest Love

Frost's Poetry on the Nature of Work

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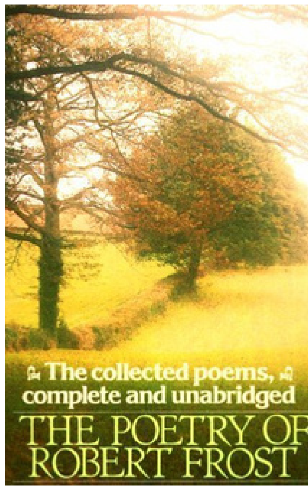

Working is the backbone of human existence, yet it carries a duality of fulfillment and detriment. Robert Frost's time as a farmer in the early 1900s enlightened him about the Puritan work ethic, the idea that working is one's moral duty to find fulfillment later in life. In this context, Frost grapples with contrasting perspectives on labor as merely a duty, which he explores as a key theme in his poetry. Through Robert Frost's strategic poem structure, distinct diction, and symbolistic critters showcased in "After Apple Picking," "Two Tramps in a Mud Time," and "Mowing," Frost explores conflicting perspectives surrounding the Puritan work ethic.

Firstly, Frost highlights the draining nature of labor simply done by duty through his weary diction, disfigured form, and personification of a woodchuck within "After Apple Picking." The speaker is exhausted from his repetitive labor as he has "had too much / Of apple-picking" and Frost highlights his condition through weary diction, developing an exhausted tone throughout the poem: "drowsing. . . overtired . . . long sleep" (Frost 68-69). Frost's weary diction conveys the mental and physical toll picking apples—the speaker's labor—has had on the speaker. The phrase "long sleep" signifies more than just physical exhaustion; it also suggests mental fatigue, as Frost compares it to "just some human sleep," implying that the speaker's weariness extends beyond simple physical tiredness (69). Frost's notion of dreariness conflicts with the Puritan work ethic as the speaker has nearly completed his duty—the apple-picking season is almost over—yet he does not feel a sense of fulfillment; rather, he is tired of his labor. Furthermore, Frost develops a weary tone through the poem's form. The poem is free verse; however, at the beginning of the

poem, there is an essence of rhyme with "still . . . fill," "tree . . . three," and more (68). Even the sparse rhyme falls off as the poem progresses alongside having irregular line lengths. Frost's inconsistent and draining form mimics the speaker's emotion, thus, also exemplifying the weary tone throughout the poem as it shifts from its initial harmony to disfigured exhaustion. The form helps pull the reader into the speaker's disorienting experience, conveying the turmoil the speaker's labor causes. Frost's form evolution challenges the Puritan work ethic by emphasizing how labor, when viewed solely as a duty, becomes a draining experience rather than an outlet for fulfilling. As the poem continues, Frost describes a woodchuck as a foil to the speaker. The woodchuck's hibernation—sleep—symbolizes a cyclical and rejuvenating rest, which contrasts sharply with the speaker's weariness from endless labor. The speaker notes that "the woodchuck could say whether [his sleep is] like his" (69). Frost's comparison of the woodchuck and the speaker helps the reader understand that the turmoil the speaker feels is not normal—as hibernation is—but is a penalty for his burdening labor. The contrast to the woodchuck furthers Frost's idea concerning the burdening toll and destructive effect of unrelenting labor driven by duty. While the speaker's suggests the draining toll of continuous work, his ongoing desire for the harvest reflects acceptance of this labor as a moral obligation, not a fulfilling experience.

Ultimately, Frost critiques the Puritan work ethic—noting the draining nature of work driven by duty—through his weary diction and form alongside the woodchuck comparison to the speaker within "After Apple Picking." Likewise, Frost argues that one's labor should be loved—not simply obligation—as illustrated through the unifying diction in tandem with the orderly form and auditory imagery characterizing the bluebird within "Two Tramps in a Mud Time." The poem depicts the speaker being interrupted by lumberjacks while splitting wood, leading to a realization that his goal is "to unite / [his] avocation and [his] vocation" (Frost 277). Firstly, the similarity between "avocation" and "vocation" catches the reader's attention, as the words sound the same and differ by one letter. Even though the two words are written alike, the Puritan work ethic vastly separates the ideas of keeping work-life—vocation—as one separate from hobbies and enjoyment—avocation (277). The similar diction causes the reader to question why these two ideas are separated, thus conveying the idea to unite the two. Additionally, words such as "splinterless" and "love" develop a content and complete tone throughout the poem as they evoke a smooth, precise, and emotional connection to labor. This, in tandem with the unification of " avocation" and "vocation," contradicts the Puritan idea of keeping work as duty (275–77). Similar to his strategy in "After Apple Picking," Frost parallels the tone within "Two Tramps in

Mud Time" with the poem's form. The poem has a constant ABAB-CDCD rhyme scheme and nearly perfect iambic tetrameter throughout. The form allows the reader to read at a stable pace, mirroring the speaker's satisfaction—or contentment—with loving his labor. The harmony with the rhythm and rhyme also evokes a sense of joy in itself; making the poem pleasant and fun for the reader, to help them understand the speaker's matched joy and desire to harmoniously unite his "avocation" and "vocation," contrasting to the Puritan work idea (277). Finally, Frost develops this perspective on the Puritan work ethic through auditory imagery. As the blue bird sings, the speaker notes how "his song so pitched as not to excite" (276). Despite the bird's natural tendency to sing, it metaphorically restrains itself to avoid disturbing nature, thus, the bird becomes a symbol of the choices sacrificed with labor. On the other hand, the speaker does not constrain himself and cuts wood as he wants because he loves it—contrasting with the blue bird—making the reader question why joy should be lost in labor. Hence, through Frost's similar diction, structured form, and blue-bird symbol within "Two Tramps in a Mud Time," the poet conveys that one's labor needs to be passion and more than simply a duty.

Finally, Frost presents another perspective, contending that labor should be approached through an open mind to offer a sense of peace, through the free verse form, evolving diction, and green snake within "Mowing." In the poem, Frost presents a field worker mowing grass with a scythe. Frost's free verse form in "Mowing" is vastly different compared to "After Apple Picking" with its fragmented and unstructured form. "Mowing" follows a looser and flowing structure; even though there is no rhyme or meter, the poem has similar line lengths and a calm mixing of enjambment and caesura (17). The free form of "Mowing" and lack of rigid structure allows the speaker's thoughts to unfold while allowing the reader to experience the speaker's tranquil mindset towards labor. Through this form, Frost presents the perspective of approaching labor from an open mind—not confining it as simply duty as with the Puritan work ethic. The evolving diction within the poem from a passive—pensive—attitude to a fulfilled and emotional connection with labor furthers the peaceful approach. At the beginning of the poem, Frost implements words such as "whispering" and "did not speak," developing a bounded tone, but then switches it to a tranquil tone by noting "earnest love" and "sweetest dream" (17). The shift in tone from the diction embodies the sense of realization and reverence that the speaker feels when they realize the labor—mowing—is more than just a duty but a deeply satisfying and fulfilling experience. The sudden shift from detachment in diction also encourages the reader to connect ideas of fulfillment with labor as the words themselves are closely

written together within the poem's lines. Additionally, Frost’s visual imagery with a snake in the grass develops a sense of peace with labor. As the speaker mows the grass he happens to have “scared a bright green snake” (17). Frost’s description of the snake’s “green” color is often associated with negative emotions such as envy, discomfort, and even sickness. Adding on, a snake is typically a more reserved and quiet animal—similar to the passive tone Frost developed earlier in the poem through his diction. The notion of scaring off the snake is symbolic of the speaker’s realization of the fulfillment his labor brings him and eradicating the negative connotations of work being duty as with the Puritan work ethic. In full, Frost’s structured free-verse approach, shifting diction, and symbolic snake communicate the peaceful perspective of loving labor–as more than just a duty–within “Mowing.”

Consequently, Robert Frost explores the complexities surrounding the Puritan work ethic—providing different perspectives—through his diction, form, and symbolistic critter choices throughout “After Apple Picking,” “Two Tramps in a Mud Time,” and “Mowing.” In “After Apple Picking” Frost critiques labor as an obligation through his exhausting descriptions, while in “Two Tramps in a Mud Time” he advocates a regenerative approach by uniting hobbies and work. Then, in “Mowing,” Frost suggests that approaching work with love and purpose brings peace far surpassing the claimed fulfillment from the Puritan idea of the duty in work. Ultimately, Frost’s labor expedition facilitates the reader to reconsider their approach to work and urges them to find peace and fulfillment in the task itself, not simply the notion of a Puritan obligation.

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Maturity, Literature, and Literary Maturity

Exploring Growth and Self-Discovery in Susannah Clarke's *Piranesi*

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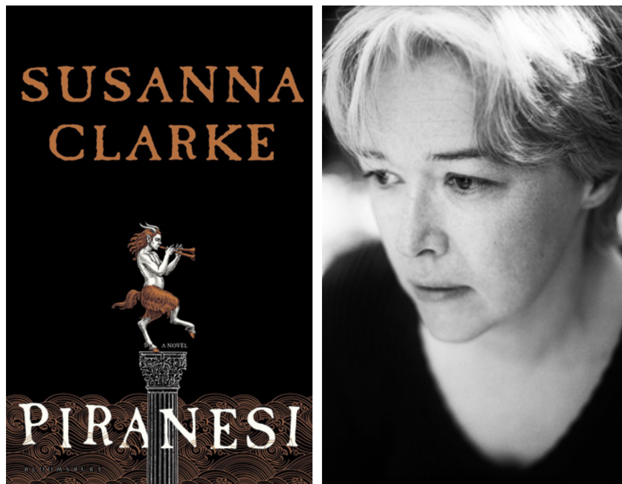

Susannah Clarke's novel *Piranesi* is a tale of isolation, memory, and self-discovery. Throughout the story, the central character struggles with the truth about who he is and what he really wants. The novel relies heavily on descriptive elements like personification, allusion, symbolism, and imagery to illustrate its themes of determination, friendship, and truth. In *Piranesi*, Clarke uses the central character's imagery, indirect characterization, and symbolism to illustrate how extenuating circumstances enhance maturity and character growth.

Near the end of the novel, after the title character starts his new life out of the House, he uses imagery to describe the new turn his life is taking. The description starts with his appearance, stating, "I no longer look like Piranesi. There are no coral beads or fishbones in my hair. My hair is cleanand cut and styled. I am clean-shaven. I wear the clothes that were brought to me out of the storage in which Matthew Rose Sorenson's sisters had placed them" (Clarke 238). The description of the character is more polished, put together, and mature than his previous incarnation. Assuming a new image of himself to be more worldly and grounded accentuates the character's development over the course of the story, as having discovered the truth makes him less detached and more like someone people would pass on the street without a second glance. What he has gone through, a rigorous self-discovery, mental breakdowns, and physical trauma and injury, have turned him from a wide-eyed, idealistic character and into a more mature, cognizant, and very human young man. He also describes other attributes about the aforementioned clothes, giving more of an

image of his new life: “Rose Sorensen had a great number of clothes, all meticulously cared for. . . . This love of clothes was something he shared with Piranesi. . . . This, I suppose, is where I differ. . . . I find I do not care greatly about clothes” (238). To contrast with the previous quotes, these accentuate the differences in attitude rather than appearance in the three people the character is. The sentence about Piranesi lamenting his clothes when compared to the Other’s can be interpreted as being similar to a child upset about not getting as good of privileges as an older sibling or an adult. He also seems to be looking back on preserved memories rather than simply at old relics, as adults would look back on things in their childhood. The difference between his care for clothing is also a contrast in mature thoughts and childish thoughts, in things that seem so important to someone young seem much more insignificant in adulthood.

Another tactic used to illustrate the theme of maturity is indirect characterization, used to “show not tell.” The central character says of the past incarnations of himself after his awakening, “Piranesi is always with me, but of Rose Sorensen I have only hints and shadows. I piece him together out of the objects he has left behind” (238). In this way we can tell differences between Piranesi and Matthew Rose Sorensen in the central character’s mind. Piranesi’s memories are much closer to the central character than Rose Sorensen’s, similar to how one can repress memories of happier childhood or teenage years and vividly remember harder ones or ones that are only realized to be difficult after they are over. Another area of indirect characterization is when the central character describes his interactions with the world around him: “I remember how the world works—more or less. I remember what Manchester is and how to use a smartphone. I can pay for things with money—though I still find the process strange and artificial” (238). This indirectly states that though he has mostly left his life in the House behind, a little bit has and will stay with him, in finding the process of trade and economy odd and fake. Making this indirect, however, better illustrates that one must think deeper sometimes to realize that what we learn in formative years stays with us for a long time. Piranesi became used to not paying, so the central character still is not used to the process—as a process learned in teenage years will stay through adulthood.

Writers also use the method of symbolism, the use of other objects to convey more meaning to an underlying theme. Throughout the story, journals and writing have been used as symbols of memory, and the ending is no exception: “Many other things were delivered to me out of storage, the most important being Matthew Rose Sorensen’s missing journals” (238). Journals are used precisely to preserve memories, and throughout, the central

character has looked through journals to look through memories and the truth. The recovery of the missing journals is symbolic of the recovery of the central character's memories of who Matthew Rose Sorensen is, much like in adulthood, one recovers memories of when they were a child. Another symbol used is possessions and belongings, which also symbolize memory and childhood. When talking about the other possessions in storage, the central character says, "As for the rest of his possessions, I am getting rid of most of them" (238). The symbol of putting away and getting rid of possessions is used in other pieces of literature as well, often when discussing maturity and how when you grow up, you put away childish things. The central character is getting rid of the "childish things" now that he has become a man and more mature.

Fiction is not reality, but its themes often are based in it, and this makes it more impactful to the readers, particularly the process of attaining maturity. Growing up is something people will eventually have to do. Some reach it on their own, others reach it by outside circumstances or influences, like parents, peers, and reality checks. The usage of literary devices in Piranesi is an easily accessible way to show its inevitability but also its relatability; though the story and the process may seem overwhelming, Piranesi and others will still find understanding and maturity.

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Transcendentalist Ideals in Writing

Exploring Simplicity and Authenticity in Thoreau and Dickinson

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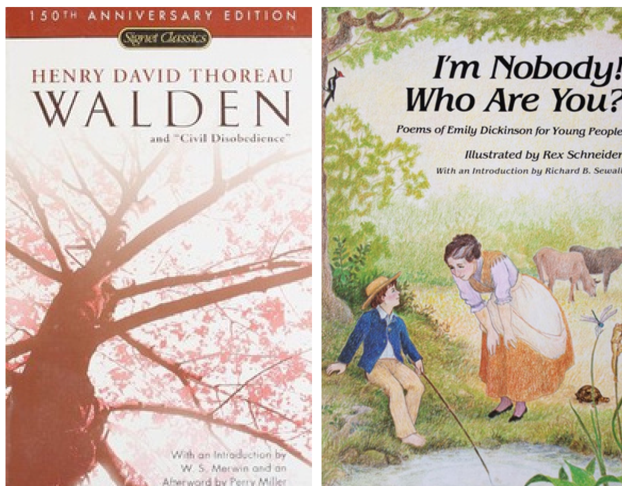

Simplicity and living with purpose can bring peace in a society that desires material wealth and fame. Henry David Thoreau and Emily Dickinson, though writing in different forms, drew inspiration from the philosophy of Transcendentalism, which values individuality, nature, and self-reliance. Transcendentalism also went against the society norms of the time. In *Walden*, Thoreau reflects on his choice to live simply, while Dickinson's poem "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" celebrates the action of staying true to oneself and the freedom attained from avoiding societal pressures. Both writers challenge the idea that material possessions and public attention are necessary for happiness, instead advocating for a simple life of quietness, and reflection.

Thoreau's *Walden* illustrates how simplicity and deliberate living, central to transcendentalist philosophy, lead to a deeper understanding of life's essential truth. He writes, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach" (72). This statement reflects Thoreau's desire to strip away societal distractions and focus on life's fundamentals. By retreating to Walden pond, he sought to reconnect with nature and live intentionally, embodying the belief that clarity comes from a simple, more purposeful way of life. He further advises, "Let your affairs be two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your fingernail" (73). This illustrates Thoreau's practical approach, advocating for a life free from unnecessary burdens. By living deliberately and rejecting excess, Thoreau embodies Transcendentalist ideals and challenges society's assumptions of fulfillment by stating that simplicity leads to

more than material wealth does. His philosophy resonates with Dickinson's focus on individuality and her view on public life.

Dickinson's poem "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" celebrates the freedom of living simply and quietly. The speaker begins with, "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you – Nobody – too?" (lines 1–2). This opening encourages the embrace of anonymity and the rejection of the need for public recognition. This work also aligns with Thoreau's ideas of simplicity and mindfulness, valuing inner-self. The speaker then critiques the shallow nature of public life in the lines,

How dreary – to be – somebody!
how public – like a frog –
to tell one's name – the livelong June –
to an admiring bog, (lines 5-8)

further illustrating how seeking constant attention can be exhausting and unfulfilling. The author's withdrawal from the public eye allowed them to cultivate their inner-self, echoing one of the same base beliefs of Thoreau that simplicity away from society leads to fulfillment and peace. Together, Thoreau and Dickinson challenge the noise of modern life and demonstrate how simplicity enables freedom and self-discovery.

Thoreau's and Dickinson's works collectively highlight how materialism and distractions keep you away from leading a more meaningful life. Thoreau's retreat to nature reflects his belief that simplicity fosters understanding, while Dickinson's choice to avoid public attention shows her focus on living authentically. For both, living deliberately means rejecting distractions—whether materialism or societal pressures—to focus on the essentials. Thoreau's statement, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (7), aligns with Dickinson's opinion of public life as "dreary" (5), as both explain that striving for wealth recognition often leads to a life of unhappiness. By rejecting the superficial and embracing the essential, both authors invoke the meaning Transcendentalism.

Thoreau's novel *Walden* and Dickinson's poem "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" reveal that simplicity and intentional living bring peace and purpose, while material possessions and public attention do not. Thoreau's retreat to Walden pond and Dickinson's choice of a private life reflect their shared beliefs rooted in Transcendentalism. Furthermore, Thoreau's philosophy of deliberate living shows that understanding and fulfillment come from rejecting distractions and engaging with the simplicity of nature and oneself. Like Thoreau, Dickinson's critique on public life shows that individuality and true happiness come from ignoring social pressures. As both writers go against the societal norms for their time, they advocate for deeper self-

awareness and connection to life’s truths. Their timeless insight on simplicity and intentional living challenge us to reconsider the way we live, offering a reminder that true happiness and purpose are not found in complexity or accumulation.

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A Critical Analysis of Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street by Herman Melville

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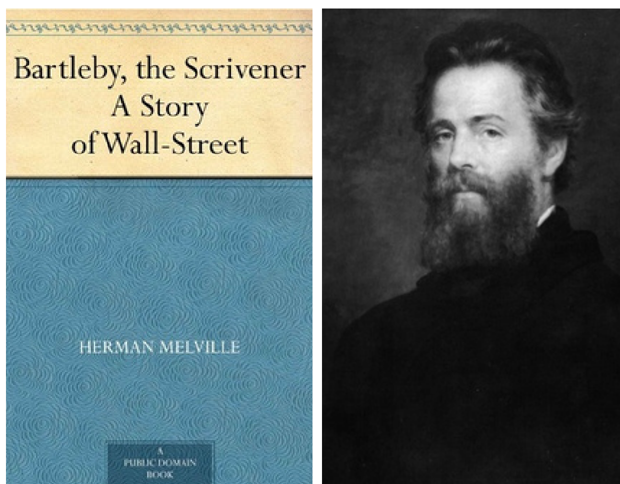

Herman Melville's *Bartleby, The Scrivener* is an immensely complex narrative. Written in 1853, it is narrated by an upper-class lawyer, expressing his experiences with his unique and near-collectible scriveners. While this story was unpopular at the time, compared to Melville's past exciting and adventurous novels, it was a literary masterpiece, as it exploited the societal issues of his time and explored themes of passive resistance and alienation. Melville highlighted the societal issues of the time, the purpose of life, and alluded to religion to create a story with underlying meaning and purposeful intent.

The story begins with the unnamed narrator expressing that "[he] is a rather elderly man" (par. 1). He explains that he believes the "easiest way of life is best" (par. 2), showing that the narrator does not want to go out of his comfort zone. The narrator is an upper-class real estate lawyer and relies on his law copyists, or "scriveners," to do his errands and work hard for him. He believed that he is a generous employer and wants to do what is right in the eyes of God. The story takes place in New York City, on Wall Street, which was the center of capitalism during the industrial revolution. Wealth disparity during the time was great, as some reaped the benefits of capitalism while others were exploited for cheap labor.

The narrator described his three employees: Turkey, Nippers, and Gingernut. The real names of these characters are not revealed, for they are characterized by their nature.

Turkey and Nippers are scriveners. Turkey is a hard worker in the morning but becomes sloppy in the afternoon due to drunkenness, often repeating the phrase "with submission, sir." Nippers deals with indigestion in the morning but is efficient in the afternoon. These two characters are said to balance each other out. Nippers is ambitious, but unlikely to ever escape the cycle of redundant, low-paying labor as he was not born with the same opportunities the narrator was given. Gingernut is a young employee, about twelve years old, who runs errands for the scriveners and the narrator. His name is because he often gets the other employees cheap gingernut cakes. Gingernut shows the young age that children enter the workforce, and it was common to begin work young to get set up for a good career.

The story follows the narrator's experience with a peculiar scrivener by the name of Bartleby. The narrator describes Bartleby as "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn" (par. 15). He believed that the calm demeanor of Bartleby would pacify his other employees. He found that Bartleby was a very efficient worker and decided to isolate him from his other employees, "[assigning] Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on [his] side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done" (par. 17). Bartleby was eventually found to be less useful than the narrator first presumed. When asked to do an expected task, proofreading the copied documents, Bartleby responds with the striking phrase of "I would prefer not to." This blatant yet peaceful refusal to do work leaves the narrator stunned, and he is unsure how to respond. The narrator expresses that "[he] sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying [his] stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to [him] that [his] ears had deceived [him], or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood [his] meaning" (par. 22). The narrator is continuously unmanned when Bartleby would refuse to do any additional work or run errands, continuously saying "he would prefer not to." Despite this, the narrator takes no action with Bartleby, believing that he is mentally challenged.

The story eventually escalates, as Bartleby refuses to do any work at all. He is found to be living in the office permanently, and the narrator believes he is being charitable by letting him have a place to stay. However, his charitable philanthropy runs short as clients and co-workers question Bartleby's presence. Instead of confronting this problem, the narrator moves offices. Bartleby eventually ends up in jail since Bartleby was committing vagrancy. He is brought to jail and passes away by starvation, because he would "prefer not" to eat. Bartleby was passive until the very end.

A theme explored in this text is one of passive resistance. The narrator was unmanned by Bartleby's peaceful and

blatant refusal to do anything. His defiance is powerful, as it unsettles the narrator and takes power away from the workplace system. This is a parallel to other forms of civil disobedience in history, such as Gandhi's Salt March or the Boston Tea Party. When Bartleby was taken to jail, spectators pitied Bartleby as he was not a visible threat. It shows the power that passive resistance has in gaining public support and having power over opposition.

Alienation is another prevalent theme in the text. Bartleby is separated from his co-workers, in a green cubicle facing a window looking into a brick wall. The work of copying is mind-numbing and repetitive. It is revealed at the end of the text that Bartleby worked in the dead-letter office prior to being a scrivener, where he read through letters of people who had gone missing, moved, or died. This type of work could have driven Bartleby into a depressive state. Events such as this explore the meaning of life. Is the purpose of life to make a profit or to experience real adventure and purpose? Capitalistic society takes away the freedom and creativity that make life worth living, and Bartleby is a representation of how work during this period can drain life out of a person. The story ends with the narrator explaining, "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (par. 251), allowing the reader to interpret the meaning and significance of Bartleby's life.

Melville often alludes to religion throughout this story. Things are often in sets of three, such as Turkey, Nippers, and Gingernut, or Bartleby having six days to leave the law office. The various sets of three allude to the Holy Trinity. The lawyer references a millstone, saying "In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear" (par. 136). A millstone was a heavy stone used to grind grain, and this alludes to Matthew 18:6, where Jesus said that one who leads a child into sin should have a millstone hung around their neck, representing that the narrator feels burdened by his presence and is testing his charity. It is often speculated that Bartleby is supposed to be a Christ-like figure in the story, as he passively accepts his fate and tests the Christian ethics of kindness and compassion. Throughout the story, the lawyer wants to do what is right in the eyes of God without stepping out of his comfort zone, highlighting the hypocrisy of the church. At the end of the story, after Bartleby passes away, the narrator says that he rests with "kings and counselors" (par. 249). This is a parallel to the story of Job, meaning that despite wealth, achievements, status, or other earthly possessions, death is inevitable, and life is futile, as we all are judged on equal footing.

The story of *Bartleby, The Scrivener* may be viewed as a depressing, bleak tale of a dreary scrivener years and years ago, but when looked at closely, the symbolism and deep meaning that Melville intended are

powerful. It was a text that challenged the societal norms of the time, and beyond the materialistic ideals of the industrial era, reflecting on the meaning of life, issues of capitalism, and alluding to religion. This literary masterpiece causes the reader to truly think and reflect on what life means, and what Bartleby was intended to represent.

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The Invisible Man as a Hero's Journey

Ralph Ellison's Modern Monomyth of Growth and Identity

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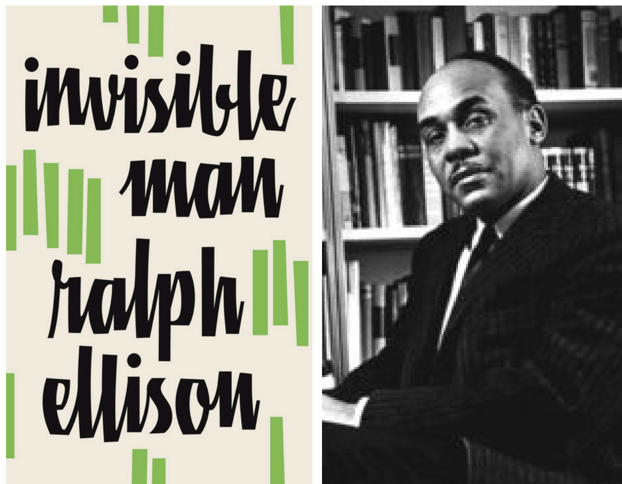

When a person thinks of the most famous stories ever made, many different titles come to mind: *Star Wars, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, The Lion King, The Hobbit,* and *Cinderella,* to name a few. Although these stories occur in vastly different worlds, they all share one thing in common; they follow the monomyth structure developed by Joseph Campbell. In each of these stories, the protagonists are forced to leave their homes and embark on adventures. On these trips, they make allies and enemies who either aid or hinder the main character's progress throughout the story. While the narrator in the novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison may sometimes deviate from the traditional model of a monomyth, the book meets the majority of the criteria by incorporating many traditional elements of such a journey; this includes basic elements such as leaving the "ordinary world" to overcome various ordeals and making many friends and foes along the quest.

As previously mentioned, a hero's journey, also referred to as a monomyth, begins by establishing the protagonist's "ordinary world." Disregarding the prologue, the ordinary world that the narrator lives in can be considered the Deep South. At the beginning of the book, the Invisible Man spends most of his time at college, which is why this can be characterized as his normal world. The narrator explains, "It was a beautiful college. The buildings were old and covered with vines and the roads gracefully winding, lined with hedges and wild roses that dazzled the eyes in the summer sun" (34). The narrator's choice of diction clearly illustrates his fondness for the college. Words like "beautiful." "gracefully," and "dazzled" all have

positive connotations. As a result, the narrator reveals to the reader the comfort that the college brings him. He is eternally grateful to have been granted a scholarship there and hopes to further his academic goals there. Although the narrator is a Black man in the Deep South, this is his way of life and he knows what to expect while living here, even if that means being considered lesser in society. This sense of normalcy comforts him as he does not want to seek anything different. In doing so, the narrator reveals how the college is considered the normal world that he wishes to stay in, meeting the first set of criteria for a hero's journey; however, this desire to stay home is not up to the narrator.

In a typical monomyth, the protagonist is called to leave their home and embark on a journey after establishing the ordinary world. For the Invisible Man, this occurs after his disastrous tour that he gives to a white trustee, Mr. Norton. The tour is only meant to be on campus, but the narrator takes him off the route, where Mr. Norton has a medical emergency. When they return, they meet with the college president, Dr. Bledsoe, who hears about the whole ordeal and decides to expel the narrator from the school. Rather than leaving him with no direction, Dr. Bledsoe tells the narrator, "I want you to go to New York City for the summer and save your pride . . . you go there and earn your next year's fees" (145). By sending the narrator on this quest to a faraway land, the book meets the next set of criteria for a hero's journey. In the traditional model, the protagonist typically rejects this quest at first, fearful of venturing into the unknown. At the time the book was written, New York City truly would have been a foreign land for the narrator. Growing up in the Deep South, he was used to extreme levels of racism and a lack of civil rights. However, things were vastly different in the North as people of color enjoyed far more rights (although still not fully equal to whites). The narrator has no idea what this new land will be like and thus is afraid to go. In addition, he is also fearful of what his family will think of him for getting expelled. He states that "I stood there on the moonlit walk. . . . imagining the satisfaction of those who envied my success, the shame and disappointment of my parents. I would never live down my disgrace. . . . How had I come to this?" (146). By asking "How had I come to this," the narrator is clearly in denial and rejecting reality. He cannot believe that his life was completely turned upside down. He feels that he has let down his family, which is something that will haunt him for quite some time. It is normal for a character to feel this way in a monomyth as their sense of an "ordinary world" is ripped away from them. He refuses to embark on the quest because he does not want to leave his home. However, after some time, the character realizes that they have no choice but to embark on the quest, marking the

next set of criteria for a monomyth. The Invisible Man understands that there is no chance for him to enroll for the current year so he must accept his fate and embark on the quest.

After accepting the quest, the narrator embarks on his journey into the unknown. After a bus ride to the city, the Invisible Man describes the strange spectacle of New York. He claims that "I had never seen so many black people against a background of brick buildings, neon signs, plate glass and roaring traffic" (158–59). This world is clearly different from the restrictive society the narrator was used to. For example, where the narrator was from, he would never see this many Black people fully integrated into society. They are living normal lives and appear to share many more freedoms compared to the Deep South. On the other hand, the narrator is a young man all alone in a land quite unlike his old life. This passage to the city represents the narrator officially leaving his land and entering the unknown. With this comes many challenges that he must face, which is the next set of criteria in a hero's journey. This includes things such as finding his own identity by starting a new life for himself and navigating a racist society.

While in this new land, the narrator meets various characters; some of these become allies while others become enemies. For example, after securing a job at a paint factory, the narrator meets a worker by the name of Lucius Brockway. Brockway is an old man who tries to hold onto his job at the paint factory despite his age and the growing technology that would replace him. As a result, he deeply despises anyone he views as a threat to his job.
Brockway finds out that the narrator accidentally stumbled upon a union meeting and exclaims, "Union . . . I knowed you belonged to that bunch of troublemaking foreigners. Git out!" (224). After finding this out, Brockway grows furious and threatens to kill the narrator, even rigging the boiler room to explode. These acts by Brockway are examples of the unknown dangers that a protagonist faces in a hero's journey. What originally appears as a stubborn coworker ends up being a threat to the protagonist's life. It is these types of difficulties that define a character in a hero's journey and provide them with valuable lessons that nurture their growth throughout the story.
Furthermore, an example of one of the narrator's allies comes after the boiler room explosion. Following his release from the hospital, the narrator stumbles upon a woman named Mary. This woman offers to take care of the narrator as he recovers from his injuries. After meeting the Invisible Man and taking him to her apartment, Mary tells him that "It's you young folks what's going to make the changes. . . . You got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little

higher" (255). Although brief, this is a significant statement by Mary as she provides the narrator with a new sense of direction. She suggests that he go out and make a difference in his community, elevating the position of Black individuals. She believes that he has a "social responsibility" to do so. As one of his allies, she is tasked with assisting him on his journey and helping him accomplish his goals. The narrator does not know what to do with his life after his accident and is fortunate enough to stumble upon Mary's kindness. As with most monomyths, the friends protagonists make along the journey greatly assist them in their story of success. Without the help of these characters, protagonists would lose hope in their goals. Thus, it is up to characters like Mary to set the hero straight and on the correct path, while enemies like Brockway serve as valuable lessons.

Although *Invisible Man* meets most of the criteria for a monomyth, certain aspects are not included. For example, a typical hero's journey ends with the protagonist returning to their home in a "happy ending." Instead, in the epilogue of the novel, the Invisible Man runs away from people who are hunting him down. Rather than standing up to fight he goes into hiding, embracing his invisibility. He states that "I'm an invisible man and it placed me in a hole—or showed me the hole I was in . . . and I reluctantly accepted the fact" (572). This statement is contradictory to what one would expect from a hero near the end of a novel. When faced with difficulty, the hero typically fights back instead of "reluctantly accepting the fact" that things have not gone their way. In this sense, Ellison's novel strays away from the typical monomyth model. However, Ellison returns to the traditional layout when the narrator acknowledges that after hiding for quite some time, "I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play" (581). By describing his hiding as a "hibernation," the narrator reveals that this hiding was only temporary. So, Ellison intentionally misleads the reader into thinking that the narrator blindly accepts his fate and gives up, only for the Invisible Man to later change his mind and go back out into the world. It is the experiences that he shares with people like Mary that inspire him to carry out his "social responsibility" and return from his self-exile. So, although Ellison deviates from the traditional monomyth template, he still places an uplifting twist at the end of the novel to summarize the journey.

After analyzing Ellison's plot structure in *Invisible Man*, it is clear the novel includes most of the major elements in a hero's journey. The narrator grows up in an "ordinary world" and is terrified when forced to leave and embark on a quest.

However, after agreeing to go on his journey, he meets many different people who help or hinder the progression of his adventure. Ellison may deviate from the typical structure where the protagonist returns to the “ordinary world” but still sums up the story in a manner appropriate for a hero. Using the monomyth template for his story allows Ellison to inspire readers and reveal to them the growth that people gain when faced with difficulty.

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Frankenstein's Cautionary Tale

Ambition, Responsibility, and the Perils of Progress

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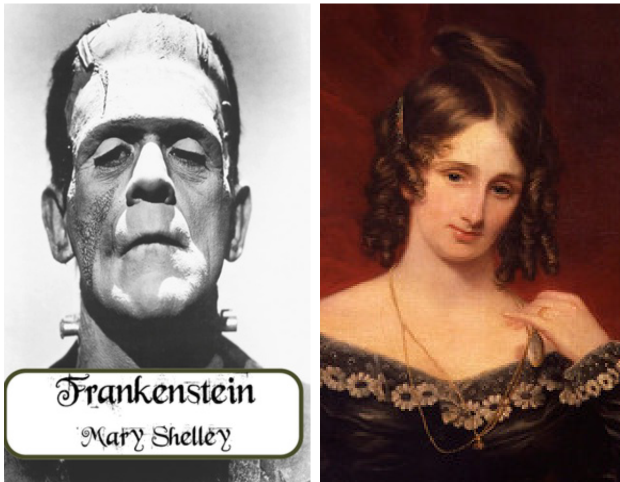

Humankind's favorite dream is to change the world, but it is also our worst nightmare. History and fiction both warn of the cost of scientific and societal advancement, even if it is motivated by a good cause. The rapid growth of science and technology in recent history has been a source of enlightenment, improvement, and opportunity. But, with new possibilities and unexplored frontiers come unforeseen dangers.Though societal transformation often begins with a good motive, one sweeping glance at the news shows that even the best efforts of ambitious leaders, innovators, and scientists have left humankind just as helpless as before.

Uncertainty blurs the lines between progress and digression, and when this boundary proves to be thinner than the most brilliant minds predict, who can trust that humankind will ever truly improve? Mary Shelley tests the integrity of this fine line in her 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein's relationship to Henry Clerval's and Shelley's choices regarding the Creature's character development are highlighted through her use of diction and metonymy, cautioning against the dangers of playing god in both science and society.

Few character foils in literature carry as much weight as Frankenstein and Clerval, whose contrasting paths highlight the hope and tragedy intertwined with ambition. Their shared thirst for knowledge is what brought them together as children, yet, as close as the two were in friendship and aspirations, their personalities and views of the world differed in many ways.
When describing Clerval, Shelley uses more romantic terms. His ideas are described as "fanciful and magnificent,

[forming] a world" (157), and his soul as "the very poetry of Nature . . . alive to every new scene" (159). His love and appreciation for nature is the epitome of romanticism, and the connection between this concept and his own character is consistently denoted in the diction Shelley uses to portray him. By contrast, Shelley drenches Frankenstein in the dark vocabulary of gothic horror. Language used to describe his work includes "midnight labors . . . unrelaxed and breathless eagerness . . . frantic impulse" (54). Each phrase spurs his descent into obsession. Further, the romantic language that characterized the outset of the novel dies away as Frankenstein falls further into madness. His recollections cease to draw attention to the beauty of nature, and "the same feelings which made [him] neglect the scenes around [him] caused [him] also to forget those friends" (55) who he hadn't seen since the beginning of his experiments. Since his friends and family—including Clerval—represent different aspects of sensibility and grounding in his life, this withdrawal illustrates how he has isolated himself from all reason in pursuit of his goal. When the result falls short of his expectations, Frankenstein goes into histrionics, falling into a nervous fever. This type of overwrought emotion is a constant aspect of Frankenstein's character, and coupled with the dark, mysterious nature of his work, Shelley establishes Frankenstein as the human manifestation of gothic horror.

By tying Frankenstein's obsession with scientific progress to society's unquenchable thirst for change and transformation, Shelley criticizes those who seek to change the world for the sake of their own glory rather than the betterment of humanity. She uses Clerval's good traits and motivations to serve as a critique for the negative ones that Frankenstein displays. One prominent example of this is found in how the two characters view their fellow beings. While Clerval's mind "expanded in the company of men of talent" (162), Frankenstein isolated himself, claiming that "solitude was [his] only consolation—deep, dark deathlike solitude" (91). These contrasting characterizations show how widespread progress is impossible to achieve through one individual. Rather, connection and compassion are essential to have any hope of truly improving humanity. After all, how could Frankenstein be expected to successfully raise a new race of beings when he cannot even bear the company of his own kind? With nobody to ground him or remind him of the ethical considerations of his pursuit, Frankenstein unleashes chaos. On the other hand, though Clerval did not live long enough to realize his dreams, Shelley's portrayal of his wholesome motivations and humanities-based education emphasizes the priority he placed on connection and compassion. Had Frankenstein shared Clerval's veneration

for knowledge as a uniting force rather than a means of control, his creation may have been nurtured with empathy rather than fear, thus altering the course of the novel's tragic events.

The Creature's character arc in Frankenstein illustrates how transformation, though full of potential, can be corrupted by neglect and cruelty. The perspective used to convey his story is effective because it shows the bitter results of his abandonment before it reveals the goodness that initially existed in him. Likewise, media has a pattern of criticizing what has gone wrong with new discoveries or institutions before it considers what caused it to fail. The Creature in Shelley's story was "benevolent and good," but his creator's abandonment and humankind's merciless rejection transformed him into a self-proclaimed "fiend," illustrating how even the best of intentions can spiral into darkness when love and acceptance are absent. This preventable disaster mirrors the way societal transformation begins with hope but is often polluted by human imperfection and corruption. Like the Creature, societies can grow in ways that whisper of progress. Yet, when change is met with fear or indifference, it festers rather than flourishes. This message has been worked into several creative adaptations of Shelley's novel. For example, Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie* hyperbolizes the effects that love and selfishness have on the outcome of transformation, reinforcing Shelley's warning about responsibility and ethics in creation. The film demonstrates that innovation, like Frankenstein's scientific pursuit, is neither inherently good or bad—its consequences depend on the creator's intentions and accountability. Similarly, Shelley shows that ambition has the potential to nurture transformation when driven by love and responsibility. However, when it is fueled by ego or recklessness, it becomes destructive. Frankenstein himself admits that he was "animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm" when he set about his work, craving the gratitude and worship of a "new species" (54). But when he was faced with his own "Adam," he was horrified. The creature, bitter after being denied the care he was owed, warned Frankenstein, "I too can create desolation," emphasizing how mistreatment is a breeding ground for revolt. Shelley's gothic portrayal of this descent into madness and ruin serves as a cautionary tale. Societal transformation, like the Creature himself, cannot thrive in an environment of fear, neglect, or cruelty. When injustice festers and science and progress are wielded recklessly—when those in power refuse to take responsibility for their actions—hope withers and leaves disaster in its place.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* serves as a haunting warning of how progress, when driven by selfish ambition rather than an altruistic desire to better humankind, can lead to

disaster. Through Frankenstein and Clerval's foil and the Creature's tragic transformation, she highlights how the pursuit of change—whether scientific, societal, or personal—can either elevate or doom humankind. Frankenstein's isolation and unchecked ambition contrast with Clerval's compassionate thirst for knowledge, highlighting the importance of connection and responsibility. Likewise, the Creature's descent into vengeance mirrors the way neglected ideals and mistreated individuals can turn against those who were supposed to nurture them. In both cases, progress is not inherently good or evil. Rather, it is shaped by the intentions and actions of those who wield it. As history and literature continue to remind us, the pursuit of transformation without discernment carries significant risk to the well-being of society. Frankenstein serves as a timeless cautionary tale, urging us to consider not just what we can create, but what we should—and how we must take responsibility for what follows.

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Riding the Carousel

Holden Caulfield and the End of Childhood

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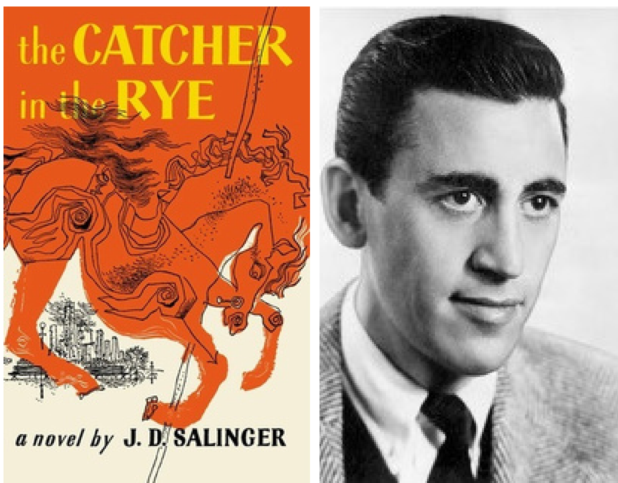

The end of childhood is a trying time for many people—it can be hard to accept the end of a carefree period of life and accept the responsibilities of growing up and being part of the society in which we live. Many adults, and even young adults and teenagers, yearn for the simpler times of childhood, and perhaps no better book illustrates this concept better than *The Catcher in the Rye*. J. D. Salinger's 1951 novel explores the life of Holden Caulfield, a teenage boy in 1950s-era New York City, who is struggling to accept the end of his adolescent years and the many unpleasant parts of life he must face. Holden continually struggles with leaving his childhood behind, culminating in a final scene at the end of the book in which Holden watches his younger sister ride a carousel in the pouring rain and seems to accept the end of his adolescence. This carousel is used as a metaphor to represent Holden Caulfield, the protagonist, accepting the end of his childhood and the start of a new era in his life.

Throughout the book, Holden's teenage years are filled with grief, anger, and depression, all of which are exacerbated by the circumstances and people around him. Some adults, such as Holden's history teacher Mr. Spencer, only lecture him about "playing the game" of life and to play it "according to the rules" (12). Other adults, such as Holden's old teacher Mr. Antolini, genuinely attempt to give him helpful advice about opening up to the world, though Holden rejects this idea. Early in the book, Holden tells a story about his brother Allie and how he died of leukemia as a child. Holden speaks about how he broke his hand in a fit of rage after Allie died, and how he "can't make a real fist [with it] anymore" (50–51). However, Holden immediately follows this up with how he does not care about it, because "I'm not

going to be a goddam surgeon or a violinist or anything *any*way" (50-51). Holden talks about how this incident, and his unpredictable behavior after Allie's death, led to his parents shipping him away to different boarding schools to try to get him back on a less destructive path. However, all this accomplished was making Holden feel worthless and burdensome, and caused a very low sense of self-esteem; he does not even care that his hand does not work because he does not expect that he would have done anything noteworthy with it in the first place. Holden is in a very vulnerable mental state at this point in his life, and in the absence of any real help or care, turns to his memories of childhood for comfort, placing a reverence and importance on them.

Though Holden constantly thinks back to his childhood for comfort, it ends up being only a source of pain as he travels to old places from when he was a kid. He attempts to visit the museum he often took field trips to in primary school, but only feels saddened by it, reminiscing that, "The best thing . . . in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was . . . You could go there a hundred thousand times . . . The only thing that would be different would be you . . . you'd be different in some way . . . Certain things should stay the way they are . . . I know that's impossible . . ." (157–58). Though the idea of Holden's childhood gives him comfort, physically revisiting it only serves to remind him that those days are over. Holden never ends up visiting the museum, stating that ". . . all of a sudden I wouldn't have gone inside for a million bucks. It just didn't appeal to me . . ." (159). Holden cannot bring back the early years of his life, so instead, he turns to others' current childhoods as a source of comfort.

Though Holden has a deep loathing for most parts of his life and the world around him, he seems to have a strong affection for children—his reverence for childhood lets him see young children in a fond light, as he perceives them as having the untroubled experience he never did. Holden sees children as mostly untouched by the phoniness of society, and enjoys seeing them be their real, authentic selves with no worry about what others might think. During a walk in the city, Holden observes a child walking in the street, in his own world, and remarks about how "he was walking in a very straight line . . . and the whole time he kept singing and humming . . . He was just singing for the hell of it, you could tell . . ." (150). This interaction comforts Holden, as he remarks on how it "made me feel not so depressed anymore" (150). This is a strong contrast to Holden talking about his hatred for actors, explaining that "if any actor's really good, you can always tell he *knows* he's good, and that spoils it" (152). Holden continually hates performances, shows of talent displayed only for praise and

awards not displayed because the performer particularly enjoys what they are doing. On the other hand, he enjoys watching people, especially children, perform only for themselves, because then it is not a performance anymore. They are doing something because *they* enjoy it, not because they care about the compliments they might receive from it. And children, especially very young children, have little to no concept of the world around them, much less enough awareness to know their singing may garner praise and perform accordingly. Holden loves the authenticity that comes from kids, and thus places significant importance on the years of childhood, a time for doing things for the sole reason of amusement and having no concept of the complicated world around one, and therefore not able to be saddened by it. And Holden is frantic to protect the children he sees, to spare them from the trauma he endured. When he sees swear words written on the stairs of his sister's school, Holden makes many futile attempts to rub them away, worrying that his sister and the other kids might see it and that ". . . they'd all *think* about it and maybe even *worry* about it . . ." (260). But finally, he gives up, darkly musing that "If you had a million years to do it, you couldn't rub out *half* the . . . [dirty] signs in the world" (262). Though Holden has a strong desire to protect children, he knows that it is impossible to protect them all, which only makes him feel worse.

The main child that Holden interacts with is his younger sister, Phoebe. Phoebe, for all intents and purposes, has had an idyllic childhood. She is too young to remember Allie, and she seems to be socially well-adjusted as she talks to Holden about her friends at school. Holden holds his sister in very high regard, musing that "...you have to watch her every minute. If you don't think she's smart, you're mad" (213). Though Holden enjoys watching the innocence of children and their relatively small troubles, he seems to hold his sister in high regard, viewing her almost as an equal rather than someone he must protect. Phoebe seems to be the only person that Holden can really talk to or take advice from. Though he rejects Mr. Antolini's advice and flees his home, he listens when Phoebe lectures him and claims that "You don't like *any*thing . . . Name one thing [you like]" (220). Through this interaction, Holden realizes that he cannot name one activity he genuinely enjoys, or one dream he has, or one job he wants to get. Though Holden refuses to listen to any of the adults in his life, he does listen to his little sister, a child he views as innocent enough not to be phony, but smart enough to actually help him figure out his feelings.

Though Phoebe attempts to get through to Holden, he cannot handle being in the city he grew up in, surrounded by all his childhood memories, and finally makes plans to run away from home permanently,

dreaming about how ". . . I'd build me a little cabin somewhere . . . and live there for the rest of my life . . . I got excited as hell thinking about it . . . All I wanted to do first was say good-by to old Phoebe" (258). Phoebe, however, is not as thrilled about this plan and insists on coming with Holden, who shouts at her to go away. However, he immediately feels guilty about it, so guilty that he follows Phoebe through Central Park apologizing. This is unprecedented behavior from Holden—every time he makes someone uncomfortable or is rude to them, he does not think about it much and leaves the scene as fast as possible. When he frightens Sally Hayes on their date and she leaves, his only thought is of how rotten his luck is and how he should not bother with girls anymore. But with Phoebe, he is frantic about getting her forgiveness, likely because he knows that she is the only one he can talk to with any real feeling. This scene culminates in Phoebe grudgingly forgiving Holden and the two of them finding a carousel in the park.

This carousel becomes the encapsulation of Holden's journey, and the final metaphor for his acceptance that his childhood years are gone, and he needs to face the future. He watches Phoebe ride the carousel and reach for the giant gold ring in the middle, like all the other kids are doing. He worries that she will fall off the horse, but does not warn her to sit down and now understands that "The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it . . . if they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them" (273–74). This is Holden's realization that, in his desire to defend children from everything bad in the world, he's lost sight of what childhood means. Childhood is a time to fall off carousels, get hurt, and get right back on. It is a time to learn, grow, and try again. Shielding kids from anything that could hurt them defeats the purpose of childhood, and only ensures that, as an adult, they will not be able to handle the inevitable bad parts of life that come their way. Holden, despite Phoebe's pleas, declines to ride the carousel, stating that he's "too big" (272), and that Phoebe should just have fun and not worry about him. Holden keeps watching Phoebe ride the carousel, even as it starts to rain, noting passively that "I got soaked; . . . I didn't care, though. I felt so damn happy; . . . I don't know why" (275). In literature, rain often symbolizes cleansing, a new beginning, and Holden's acceptance of the rain, sitting in it despite becoming drenched, seems to be his acceptance of a new start to his life, the end of his childhood, and the acknowledgement of the hard and uncomfortable parts of life, whether it is wet clothes or facing the future.

Though Holden struggles to accept the end of his childhood, a time many consider to be happy and unburdened, he seems to come to terms with it. Holden's dilemma is

one that many of us face—all of us have, at some point, wished to return to the carefree nature of our early lives. Just as Holden watches his sister on the carousel, realizing he would fall off if he tried to get on, we all must view our own carousels as a fond memory of a time long gone, and look forward to the future, representing bigger and better things we can accomplish. Although *The Catcher in the Rye* may be a work of fiction, literature becomes a mirror for our own lives, and the struggles of Holden Caulfield are ones we can all see reflected in ourselves.

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The Glorification of War

Satire and the Absurdity of Heroism in *Dr. Strangelove* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*

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Power, glory, pride, heroism. For many people in our world, the event that connects these four ideas is war. From heroic war movies to patriotic images of soldiers with the American flag, the glorification of war is all over our society. People will often view war as something to be proud of, when in reality it is a horrific event that should be viewed as such. In both Stanley Kubrick's movie *Dr. Strangelove* and Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, the creators utilize satire in order to discredit the dominant ideas that war is some grand and heroic event. To convey this message, both Kubrick and Vonnegut implement exaggeration, irony, and the manipulation of mood throughout their works.

The exaggeration used by both Vonnegut and Kubrick is meant to put emphasis on the ridiculous aspects of war and is a tool used to capture the audience's attention. This is because when things are exaggerated, people are more likely to pay attention to them and therefore will think deeper about the idea or message being exaggerated. Throughout *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick uses exaggeration through extremely expressive acting, especially in the character General Turgidson. This exaggeration is seen through Turgidson's wild and drastic movements and facial expressions. One example is during the scene in which President Muffley asks General Turgidson if there is a chance that the bomber will be successful in reaching its target. In response to this, General Turgidson gets visibly excited and uses expressive hand motions to describe how the plane would use different flying tactics to reach the target. Through his exaggerated movements and extremely enthusiastic tone of voice, it is clear General Turgidson has no true regard for the disastrous consequences of the bomber reaching its target, and is instead more focused on the flying abilities of his pilots. This displays the idea that many people in war do not

have real concern for the actual war itself and often have ulterior motives such as being heroic, or in the case of General Turgidson, a love for the capabilities of the military.

This directly connects to a scene in *Slaughterhouse Five* in which Vonnegut exaggerates the actions of a German corporal searching Roland Weary. When describing this scene, Vonnegut writes, “He tore open Weary’s overcoat and blouse. Brass buttons flew like popcorn. The corporal reached into Weary’s gaping bosom as though he meant to tear out his pounding heart, but he brought out Weary’s bullet proof bible instead” (54). Vonnegut uses purposeful diction such as “tore” and “gaping” to portray the excessive aggressiveness of the corporal’s actions. In addition to this, the simile “flew like popcorn” allows the reader to envision the fact that Weary is clearly being treated brutally for no apparent reason. These extremely rough and forceful actions of the corporal culminate in the corporal taking out Weary’s bullet proof bible; a completely contradicting action to those preceding. Based on the exaggeration of the corporal’s search of Weary, it is expected that he would remove some large weapon or important document from Weary’s person. However, the fact that the corporal only removes a bible adds humor to the scene and allows the audience to laugh at the fact that the corporal was being so forceful. Forcefulness and aggressiveness are often seen as strong and admirable traits in warfare, and this use of satire makes readers reconsider this prevailing idea. Vonnegut’s use of exaggeration here is very similar to that of the General Turgidson’s as both use exaggeration to make fun of the dominant ideas of being heroic and powerful in war. This forces the audience to realize that war is not some grand and heroic thing and in reality is an extremely terrible and serious event.

Another way in which both Vonnegut and Kubrick use satire to convey their message is through the manipulation of mood. In *Dr. Strangelove*, the main way in which Kubrick manipulates the mood is through his very distinct and purposeful music choice. The film opens with a scene of United States bombers flying through the air, which gives off a strong feeling of patriotism and power. During a scene in which these ideas are portrayed, it would be expected that intense and powerful music would be playing. However, Kubrick contrasts this mood by using a slow and romantic song as the music for the scene. The addition of this style of music makes the ideas of patriotism and heroism laughable since they are being displayed at a time when romantic music is playing. This compels the audience to reconsider if war is really about being heroic, which is the exact point that Kubrick is trying to get across throughout the film. Similarly, in *Slaughterhouse Five* Vonnegut uses the song “My name is Yon Yonson” in order to

create contrasting moods throughout the book. This song is first seen when Vonnegut describes his struggles in writing about the bombing of Dresden: “My name is Yon Yonson, I work in Wisconsin, I work in a lumber mill there. The people I meet when I walk down the street, They say, ‘What’s your name?’ And I say, ‘My name is Yon Yonson, I work in Wisconsin . . .’” (3). The rhyming scheme of the song automatically presents a feeling of playfulness, as if the song is a children's rhyme. Furthermore, the fact the song ends the same way that it begins is used as a way to show how the song is essentially meaningless and has no real point. This completely contrasts the mood of the ideas that Vonnegut is discussing at this point in the book because he is writing about the extremely terrible and appalling bombing of Dresden. Based on the common idea that people feel a sense of victory or pride that they fought in a war, it would be expected that Vonnegut would feel more accomplished in writing a novel about his experience. However, the use of this meaningless and playful song accomplishes the same goal that Kubrick does through his use of music. Both Kubrick and Vonnegut manipulate the mood during their works to represent their beliefs that war should not be glorified. A final way in which both Kubrick and Vonnegut utilize satire is through irony. In both *Dr. Strangelove* and *Slaughterhouse Five* irony is used to make fun of how soldiers feel the need to follow exact military codes because of their pride and dignity. One key moment in which Vonnegut uses irony is at the end of the novel when he is describing the corpses in the mines: “Somewhere in there the poor old high school teacher, Edgar Derby, was caught with a teapot he had taken from the catacombs. He was arrested for plundering. He was tried and shot” (214). This is completely ironic because executing a person for stealing a teapot during a time in which immense death and destruction are occurring is absurd. Furthermore, through his purposeful syntax of two short sentences, Vonnegut portrays the idea that this execution was not some far-out event. This is because the sentences are straight to the point and contain no further elaboration on the topic of the trial or execution, making it seem as though the execution was not an irrational event. Through this use of irony, Vonnegut highlights the pure absurdity of following strict military laws in a time when hundreds of people are being killed. In *Dr. Strangelove* Kubrick uses irony in a nearly identical way during the scene where Group Captain Mandrake asks the Colonel to shoot the Coca-Cola machine. Through shooting the Coca-Cola machine Mandrake would gain coins needed in order to call the the President; however, the Colonel initially refuses, stating that the machine is “private property.” Additionally, in this scene Kubrick decided to film a close up shot of the Colonel followed by a lengthened shot of the Coca-Cola machine

in order to portray how the Colonel was deep in thought about the legalities of shooting the machine. This is utterly ridiculous and proves the point that the Colonel was more concerned with following his military orders than possibly saving the lives of millions of people. Through these two uses of irony, Kubrick and Vonnegut force their audiences to question the idea of following military orders and the law in times of war, which are typically viewed as strong and honorable attributes.

In today's world, the idea of the glorification of war that both Kubrick and Vonnegut critique in their works is still present. War is constantly glorified through pop culture in our society, especially in regard to films and video games. Films play a large role in this as they often portray war as an adventurous and thrilling event, focusing on ideas of heroism and bravery. While there may be acts of courage and bravery during war, these films often downplay the tragedy and horrors of war. Films such as *Captain America: The First Avenger* influence both adolescents' and adults' viewpoints on war, making people in our society more likely to believe that war should be viewed as an honorable event. Furthermore, video games often have a huge emphasis on strategy, rather than the effects of war. While blood splashes across the screen, players are more focused on a task like "collecting the most amount of guns" instead of the fact that they just killed another player. This greatly diminishes how people view tragedy during war, normalizing the ideas of death and destruction.

The ideas that Kubrick and Vonnegut satirize are still present in our world today. People will go on believing that war is some glory-filled and noble event; however, creators like Kubrick and Vonnegut attempt to discredit these prevailing ideas. Throughout *Dr. Strangelove* and *Slaughterhouse Five* Kubrick and Vonnegut utilize exaggeration, irony, and the manipulation of mood to express their strong beliefs that more emphasis should be put on the horrible consequences of war rather than the glory of being part of it. Overall, the satire used in both the book and the film displays the absurdity of focusing on being powerful, valiant, and honorable at a time in which a horrific and tragic event is occurring.

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Fragments of Self

Identity and Mental Illness in *The Bell Jar* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*

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Identity, or the understanding of one's true self, has always been considered a complex topic of the individual. Both *The Bell Jar* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* explore a woman's descent into mental illness and her struggle to maintain a secure sense of self. In *The Bell Jar*, identity is heavily linked to external accolades—Esther longs to find meaning in a certain lifestyle, though she has no clue which lifestyle suits her best. *The Yellow Wallpaper* depicts identity as a struggle between the narrator's personal desires and the expectations of those around her. As both characters struggle to maintain a sense of self, they seem to fall apart, ultimately conveying how a loss or denial of identity can have catastrophic mental consequences.

In the beginning of *The Bell Jar*, Esther uses the story of a fig tree to convey her understanding of identity formation. Each fig represents a life she may choose to lead; however, she sits in the "crotch of this fig tree, starving to death" because she cannot decide which direction her life is going (Plath ch. 7). Esther's fig tree is a metaphor for her struggle with identity. As figs are representative of abundance and prosperity, it is ironic that Esther should be starving while surrounded by the fruit. With a plethora of opportunities available to her, Esther still struggles to determine which opportunity is the most valuable to her. Esther inherently links her choice, career, or lifestyle with her identity. Thus, she struggles with her own conception of self, because her idea of identity is dependent on the appearance of a specific lifestyle. Esther states that as she adults and passes over chances due to indecision, the figs "wrinkle and go black" (ch. 7). Further developing the extended metaphor, the deterioration of the figs mirrors Esther's deteriorating mental health. As Esther struggles to find purpose or maintain a sense of self, her mental well-being slowly falls apart. In fact, Esther notes that she would go "crazy"

if she had to listen to Dodo Conoway—a notorious local housewife—drive her baby carriage by the house one more day (ch. 10). Esther's word choice here is very deliberate. Instead of referring to frustration, anger, or confusion, she chooses to say that she would go "crazy" if she had to listen to a woman whose life is determined for her while Esther herself struggles to find purpose; Dodo Conoway is perfectly content for each new chapter of her existence to be defined by a new child or pregnancy, and feels no confusion over her role in society, whereas Esther cannot seem to pick which direction suits her best. Esther never fully defines what "crazy" means to her, though we know it to be a state of mental disrepair. This ambiguity further develops Esther's indecisiveness and strengthens the link between loss of self and mental illness. Once Esther enters a state of complete mental disturbance, she is admitted to an institution where she receives treatment and is discharged. Upon her release from the mental hospital and the improvement of her mental health, Esther stated that there should be a "ritual for being born twice" (ch. 20). This use of figurative language in describing her mental state's improvement is significant. The rebirth that Ether refers to can be interpreted as a rediscovery of her person. No longer dependent upon group membership or external recognition to form her sense of self, Esther's concept of identity comes from a genuine place of understanding herself, contributing to an overall improvement in her mental well-being. The extended metaphor of the titular bell jar is representative of Esther's mental state. Esther feels trapped under a bell jar of expectations for her to correctly decide her path in life. The bell jar, which represents her struggles with mental illness, lifts and begins to "circulate air" only when Esther realizes that she does not have to be like other women in her life, she just must be herself (ch. 20).

Similarly, in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the struggle to maintain an identity contributes to the narrator's state of mental disarray. As her husband repeatedly enforces rules and regulations on the narrator, she struggles to maintain her sense of self. The narrator remarks that her husband John believes her "imaginative power and habit of story-making" will exacerbate her condition and lead to "all manner of excited fancies" (2). The dismissive diction in this line creates a clear juxtaposition. In the beginning of the sentence, the narrator's reference to her "story-making" abilities feels almost celebratory, and it becomes clear that the narrator's imagination is an important aspect of her sense of self. The sentence shifts in tone, however, with John's use of the word "fancies." A fancy implies triviality and frivolity. This connotation not only invalidates the mental struggle the narrator experiences, but also manages to attack fundamental aspects of her personality. As established, the narrator's

imagination matters deeply to her perception of the world. Thus, referring to the narrator's mental episodes as mere fancies reduces the severity of her conditions, while also forcing shame onto aspects of her identity. John continues his condescending behavior when he refers to the narrator as his "little girl" before picking her up and carrying her to bed. Here, trivial diction is used to evoke a patronizing, condescending tone. Notably, this assessment of the narrator is incorrect, as she is an adult woman. In referring to the narrator as a "little girl," John forces an infantilized identity onto the narrator, further alienating her from herself (10). As the text continues, the narrator becomes obsessed with the woman she perceives in the yellow wallpaper and begins to relate to her. After she sees the perceived woman "creeping" along the wallpaper, she claims not to "blame her a bit," and reveals that she too "creep[s] by daylight" (14). The diction used through the word "creeping" evokes a sense of deliberate and frightening actions and gives readers a strong sense of the narrator's disabled mental state. The narrator, in relating to the woman in the wallpaper, begins to accept her own hyperactive imagination despite John's warnings. This represents her acceptance of her unconventional identity. Ultimately, when the narrator has had a complete mental break, she disregards her husband's wishes completely and fully embraces her madness, stating, "It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!" (17). To be "out in" the great room draws attention to the juxtaposition of the opposing words. It implies a sense of freedom in the room with the yellow wallpaper, a symbol of her mental illness. Thus, the narrator is no longer ashamed of her identity and mental state, and instead accepts the freedom the yellow wallpaper provides her. The repression of the narrator's true desires, and subsequently her identity, contributes to her mental decline.

Both *The Bell Jar* and *The Yellow Wallpaper* explore the relationship between identity and mental well-being. In both texts, the protagonist's struggle to maintain a foundational or grounding sense of self. Gender plays a significant role in the descent into madness of both Esther and the narrator from *The Yellow Wallpaper*. In her essay, "A Ritual for Being Born Twice: Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*," Marjorie Perloff argues that Esther's exposure to women who fill archetypal roles of femininity contributes to her identity crisis. In seeing women whose identities so strongly conscribe to a specific brand of womanhood, Esther feels inferior and lost. It is only when Esther discovers the superficiality of such a one-dimensional life, Perloff argues, does she begin to find peace and come to terms with her identity beyond just external markers (Perloff). Thus, the expectations placed on women to "all of one thing," rather than complex

people, contribute to her identity crisis and deteriorating mental health. Similar expectations are placed on the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* to be a submissive, docile woman. However, as previously established, the narrator is not naturally an "angel of the house," and her struggle to fit this mold, and to reject the imaginative aspects of her personality as per her husband's requests, leads to significant inner turmoil which correlates with her downward mental spiral. *The Bell Jar* focuses on a struggle to find identity, while *The Yellow Wallpaper* emphasizes the struggle to maintain a sense of self. However, both texts cite the expectations placed on women as a catalyst for these issues. Additionally, the mental health issues both Esther and the narrator experience are a result of a murky sense of self. Perloff states that only after Esther rejects the cookie-cutter lifestyle of the women in her life and instead embraces her own individuality does her depression alleviate. Unlike in *The Bell Jar*, however, the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* descends further into a state of mental disarray after she has come to terms with the imaginative aspects of her identity that have been repressed for so long. The causes for Esther and the narrator's identity crises, though slightly different in nature, they both represent the idea that women are not granted the freedom or grace to discover their own purpose of meaning, ultimately contributing to deep mental disturbances.

The struggle for a strong sense of self is more prevalent now more than ever. In an age of hyper-interconnectedness and social media, women of today, much like Esther, have thousands of other women to compare themselves to. Short-lived aesthetic trends and online forums create niches into which people choose to associate themselves with. However, these trends and online spaces lack tangibility and staying power. When they fade from the popular view, people are left more confused and isolated from their sense of self than they may have been before entering these spaces. Social media has created an over-saturation of external identifiers to link oneself to. This superficiality creates a feeling of hollowness that leaves many users to feel inadequate and further isolated, much like Esther does in *The Bell Jar.* This pressure seems to be particularly pronounced for women, who now have many different ideals of womanhood to live up to. Certain pockets of the internet, such as the aptly dubbed "trad wives" promote a return to the ultra-domestic lifestyle, much like John pushed his own desires of a docile wife onto the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper*. External pressure to live "correctly" as a woman now not only comes from one's family, friends, and community, but also from complete strangers online, further isolating a person from their own self-discovery.

Both *The Bell Jar* and *The Yellow*

Wallpaper explore the influence of identity on the mental well-being of their female protagonists. Although Esther and the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* may differ in their struggle for identity, both suffer greatly as a result.

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From Innocence to Monstrosity

Shaping Identity in *Frankenstein*

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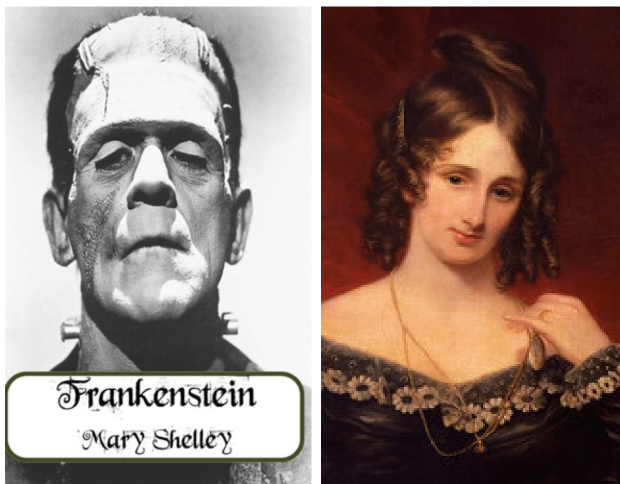

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a deep exploration of identity and its creation. Mary Shelley outlines the creation of life, the twisting of the Monster's character, and the breaking of his spirit, which spirals into his eventual suicide. He is broken by the development of his identity, where the amalgamation of experience, appearance, and rejection by society brews within. Unable to experience life under the protection of his "father," Victor Frankenstein, and unequipped with any sense of self-love, he is forced to go it alone and steers himself toward self-destruction. Shelley's characters struggle to overcome destiny, with their own morality, with education, and the way they're perceived. They are shaped in half by their own personal desires and the other by the fate they have been subjected to. Shelley uses the idea of fate and the cycle of life and death in her novel to support the theory of *tabula rasa*.

In the beginning of the story, Shelley introduces the idea of fate as dramatic but ultimately deceptive in how we perceive identity. Victor frequently blames fate for everything to absolve himself of his guilt. He goes on to claim, "Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction" (42). His choices—on the other hand—paint a different picture. He actively goes against fate, pursuing forbidden knowledge, abandoning his creation, and refusing to confess. Victor knows that he is in control, despite claiming the contrary. His use of fate as a scapegoat for his demons shirks accountability. Shelley uses Victor's front of powerlessness to show that identity is not dictated by an extra-human force, but instead by the decisions of an individual

and their consequences, along with the external circumstances dictated by the people we surround ourselves with. The creature serves to contrast Victor; he doesn't blame fate for his suffering at first. He seeks out belonging, tries to understand the world, and experiences the goodness of people that he believes is out there waiting for him. Only when his repeated efforts are met with stiff rejection does he start to ponder fate and his destiny to be hated. "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (121). This line perfectly aligns with the theory of *tabula rasa.* He becomes what society deems him to be. He starts joyful and unjaded, then his "destiny" is decided by humanity when they decide his worth. His destiny is constructed by dejection and trauma. Shelley uses these two cases of identity and personality in parallel to dissuade the reader from thinking fate is predetermined and emphasizes how it is formed internally throughout your life, thus emphasizing the idea of the blank slate *tabula rasa* theory.

This theme is continuous throughout the novel. It becomes more evident when taking a close look at the novel's approach to character development. If identity were innate and predetermined, then the creature should have been monstrous from his birth, but when he comes to life, a different side appears. He is childlike and vulnerable. "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend," he later says, directly debunking any argument that he was born evil. The words "misery made me a fiend" are incredibly powerful, and sad at that. Humanity beats down the creature time after time—rejected by his creator, and later rejected by society as a whole. Misery made him a fiend because misery made him its friend. Shelley creates him as the perfect blank slate. His early actions are motivated by curiosity, empathy for humans, and a deep longing to be loved and feel a connection with people. He rescues the young girl from drowning and helps the De Lacey family without seeking any barter in return. These instincts prove his innocence as a being of good. It is only after being shot, and rejected by the De Lacey family, that he turns into a fit of rage and burns their house down. Meanwhile, Victor is given a picturesque upbringing, surrounded by love and a great deal of access to education, who instead chooses to pursue forbidden knowledge without regard for others. Shelley loves using this reversal to challenge the reader's preconceived notions of identity based on appearance and shows that morality is not something we inherit. Instead, she shows it is something we build brick by brick, through exposure to kindness or cruelty. Through the transformations of Victor and his creature, we see that nobody is born evil, but the influences of kindness, cruelty, and careless decision-making can drastically alter your course. Shelley defends this idea, instead

asserting that the world is what breaks people.

Education and the learning experience are another tool used by Shelley to support the *tabula rasa* theory. Victor's formal education at the college of Ingolstadt helps to shape his identity into one that is more focused on pursuing research than morality. He delves into natural philosophy and reads books from ancient scientists and thinkers. He loses all sense of ethical responsibility. It is because of this that Victor loses all sense of moral culpability and stalls in the development of his moral maturity. By contrast, the creature has no fancy education. Instead, he teaches himself to speak and read by watching the De Lacey family and studying the books *Paradise Lost, Plutarch's Lives*, and *The Sorrows of Werter.* Shelley writes, "I read of men concerned in public affairs. . . . I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth, and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood" (111). These books help to shape the creature's morality and expectations. He begins to see the world less like an observer who has been brought in to watch, and more like a person who has value and belongs as a member of society. Although his education is completely unguided, he gets no love or guidance, and no formal teaching. He is denied emotional and social support, and his learned experience is that humans are hostile and uncaring toward outsiders. Shelley presents the idea that knowledge by itself does not create identity, but knowledge and emotion combine to create one's identity. Education doesn't fill a blank slate—it serves as an outline, and the lived experience is what writes in the details. Shelley's most damning argument in favor of tabula rasa is in the creature's repeated rejection and failed attempts to join human society. The creature repeatedly fails to join in human society, only to face violence and hostility. He saves a child and gets shot, and when he finds a connection with the blind De Lacey, he is beaten by the rest of the family. He then comes to a realization: "I am alone and miserable: man will not associate with me" (113). This interaction is inescapable for the creature. Each rejection is another gouge in his mind, and it chisels hatred and disdain for humanity into his identity. Shelley does not portray this as bad luck or sheer coincidence. Instead, she makes humanity the real creator of monsters. The creature is badly hated, so he becomes a being of hatred. Even Victor grows more isolated over time, and despite being socially accepted, he grows isolated over time. His guilt estranges him from the people he loves. Unlike his creation, Victor's isolation is more in part due to his self-destructive nature. Victor suffers from the lack of a loving connection and spirals downward.

Robert Walton serves as the third and final demonstration of society's destructive

tendencies. His correspondence with his sister keeps him from becoming another Victor and steering himself off the rails. Shelley uses him to argue that it is connection, not isolation, that is a driver in preserving the better parts of his identity. The creature's descent is not a failure of his own; it is an indictment by society. Nowhere is that clearer than in how his physical appearance defines him. His sole problem is how others treat him, and this leads to how he treats himself. Shelley carefully plans this to expose the injustice of carrying preconceived notions of other people based on appearances. She emphasizes this hallmark case of "looks can be deceiving" throughout her story. From his birth in the laboratory, Victor is terrified of the monster: "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (56). This is a slap in the face and immediate rejection of the monster that sets the tone for everything that follows. No matter how intelligent, gentle, eager to learn and love, or caring the creature seems to be, he is only seen by the way he looks instead of the content of his character. He internalizes the hatred against him, understanding that his appearance dictates the amount of respect he is given. "If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear" (122), he remarks. This is the most poetic line of the whole story, and a perfect defense of the *tabula rasa*. Society does not accept him as a blank slate because, firstly, he scares them, and secondly, they do not know that he is a new life, unjaded by the cruelty of humans. He stops trying to become human when humanity makes it clear that he will never be accepted as one. He becomes monstrous because the world insists he is a monster. Shelley actively forces readers to recognize this injustice and tell readers that perception, not nature, is the true scribe of a human's blank slate.

Shelley does more than tell a monster story or some cautionary tale about the overindulgence in scientific advancement. Through the lens of *tabula rasa*, the novel becomes an educating work that teaches the dangers of blind science, isolation, and the effects of societal rejection. It teaches readers that appearances can be deceiving and destructive. The creature is born innocent and open, then is transformed into the monster that the world makes him out to be. Victor, born into the world of privilege and opportunity, becomes a martyr for fate in his own mind, and for the outsider looking in, he becomes a coward and an example of how ego without empathy leads to self-destruction. Shelley's message still resonates today, as people continue to judge and be judged. They allow themselves to be shaped by their environments, appearances, and society's treatment of them. Children who grow up in poverty and individuals with disabilities are marginalized for their appearances and identity as it is still developing. *Frankenstein* reminds readers that empathy

and acceptance have the power to change a life, and Shelley's work is a powerful argument against the existence of predestination. She shows that humans become what they allow themselves and society to make them, and that unfortunately happens too often. The world writes monsters into people who only want to be loved.

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The Uneasy Truth

Why *The Great Gatsby* Makes People Uncomfortable

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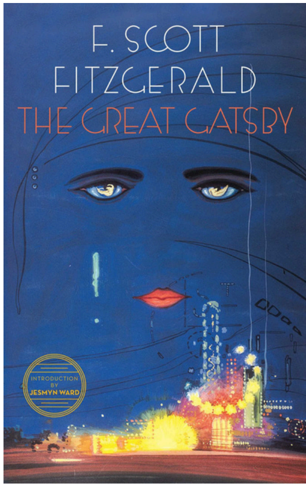

My new-year's resolution for 2025 was to read the classics. As a young reader, I jumped from youth fantasy like the *Magic Tree House* series to modern fiction and nonfiction, skipping straight over classical literature. So, I decided 2025 was my year to remedy my own greatest shortcoming and become conventionally "well-read." A Herculean undertaking, I know, and where to start? I was in luck, because my newest literary quest coincided with my AP Literature class reading *The Great Gatsby*, which is hailed by the website *The Greatest Books* as the number one greatest book ever written. Popularity and reverence often bring harsh critique, and this is true for *Gatsby*, which faces as much hate as it does love. I did not know what to expect from F. Scott. Fitzgerald's classic: a new favorite, or yet another overhyped work?

The Great Gatsby follows the young Nick Carraway, a Yale graduate who moves to the East coast in search of wealth and prosperity and follows his neighbor Jay Gatsby and distant relatives Daisy and Tom Buchanan in their affluent escapades. Nick meets socialite and golfer Jordan Baker, with whom he strikes up a romance borne of loneliness. He parties with Tom and his poor mistress and Gatsby and his elites. Nick visits the "desolate" and "ash-gray" Valley of Ashes, as well as Gatsby's "enormous garden" packed with "faces and voices and color" (23, 40–41). As the action of the novel progresses, Nick remains a passive spectator—that is, until the very end. After Myrtle's automobile death and Mr. Wilson's vengeful murder-suicide of Gatsby, the three deaths shock Nick into taking on a position in the action. His grand display of newfound morality is throwing Gatsby's funeral, and its small number of attendees creates in Nick a feeling of "scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all" (165).

The reason *Gatsby* stands out among the

volumes of literary masterpieces of history is its commentary on fundamental human nature. Nick, our protagonist, is shockingly non-judgemental in his navigation of the strange world of the wealthy. Aside from a few comments on the bizarreness of Gatsby's extravagance and Tom and Daisy's tumultuous relationship, Nick's commentary is limited to the world in relation to his own experiences. Some critics feel this lack of moral judgment in the narrator weakens the novel: after all, the role of literature is to teach a lesson, right? I disagree. To me, Nick's passiveness on the action of the novel forces the reader to develop their own ethical beliefs. Instead of relying on a figure in the novel to inform their feelings about people and subjects, the Gatsby reader must do this hard work themself. Many well-respected works of literature utilize a "moral compass" character, who often preaches to other supposedly less morally-enlightened characters about the things that are right and wrong in the novel's world. Atticus Finch of *To Kill a Mockingbird* fits this role perfectly: he teaches his children, and by extension the reader, about the wrongs of racism in the South and the dangers of mob mentality.

I believe the discomfort felt by critics of *The Great Gatsby* stems from the noticeable lack of an Atticus type. There is no fallback for a Gatsby reader. There is no character to comfort the reader and say, "don't worry about forming your own judgements, this is the way." There is no personal litmus test for morality and no safety mechanism for the wondering reader. Instead, *Gatsby* invites readers to immerse themselves in a shockingly real world: one of interwoven relationships and complicated motives. Nick offers only a few moments of judgement, all at the very end of the novel. During his last meeting with Gatsby, Nick offers his first spoken critique of the Buchanans, saying, "They're a rotten crowd. . . . You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (154). It takes a woman being killed by Daisy's driving to shock Nick out of silence. And this nature in the narrator is fitting, as it shows how difficult it can be to make judgements of others with incomplete information.

Critics who comment on *Gatsby* often find it to be "morally complacent" and overly-respected (Schulz). The novel's opposers tend to believe that Nick's passive narration coupled with Fitzgerald's removed writing style allow the reader to become cynical about the fate of characters like Tom, Daisy, and Jordan, who neither the narrator nor the author make any effort to humanize and sympathize with. While I understand the concern of readers making *Gatsby* into a story of heroes and villains, I find the unsympathetic nature of Nick and Fitzgerald to be yet another source of the freedom readers have to judge these characters on their own. Some readers will

think Nick is the villain for being a bystander, some will find Gatsby villainous for his obsession and immaturity, and others will believe Tom and Daisy are the obvious malevolent forces for their disregard of the effects of their actions. The Great Gatsby is great because it allows those judgements by readers to happen, and even encourages them. Then the book turns everything on its head with the culminating chaos of the novel. I speak from experience that my feelings about Nick, Tom, Daisy, Jordan, Gatsby, and Myrtle shifted multiple times throughout my reading experience, and continue to quaver even now. I disagree with the critics. I do not think this indicates weak writing at all. Actually, I find the lack of ethical preachings in *Gatsby* to be more morally enlightening than most other books I have read. The role of literature is not to preach, but instead to teach readers how to think. *Gatsby* achieves this by forcing readers to change snap judgements, analyze their own biases, and see through the smoke and mirrors of society to understand the true nature of people. *The Great Gatsby* makes people uncomfortable because of this very success, but that does not undermine the tremendous achievement of literature made by the novel. *Gatsby* paved the way for literature to become more fluid in its morals, and literature would no doubt be in a very different place today if not for Fitzgerald's work. The novel is worth reading particularly because it does not teach just one lesson from one point of view. Are the rich villains or victims? Should we endorse or shun Nick's passive ways? Is Gatsby sympathetic or obsessive? With *Gatsby*, you get to decide.

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Queerness as Impurity

Homoeroticism, Freudian Theory, and Moral Corruption in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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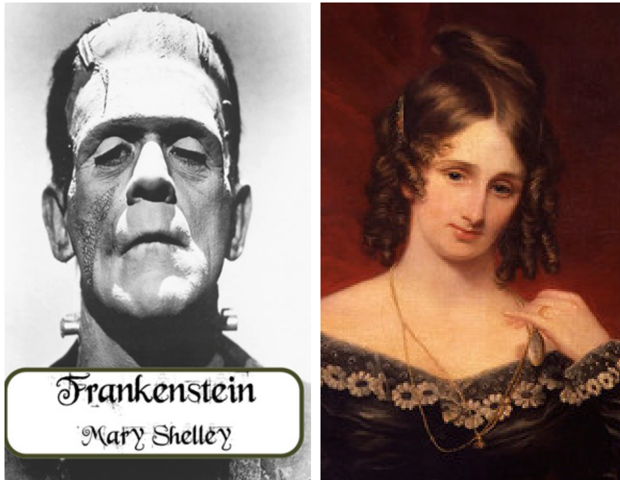

David Halperin defines queerness as "being at odds with what is normal," stating that "[t]here is nothing in particular to which it . . . refers" (62). As society limits (homosocial) queer relationships to pure sexuality, queerness begins to represent sinfulness and all non-normative relationships (incestual, pedophilic). In Mary Shelley's 1818 science fiction novel *Frankenstein*, Shelley argues that Frankenstein's homoeroticism is an infectious element of his id (unconscious) and is righteously repressed by his superego (social morality). She extends Frankenstein's homoeroticism to pseudosexual incestualism through a frame narrative as Walton (symbolizing purity) describes the tale. Frankenstein's impurity corrupts those closest to him, including Henry and Elizabeth, but not Walton. While Walton, Elizabeth, and Henry are born inherently pure, Elizabeth and Henry are forced into impurity from the symbolic penetration of Frankenstein's corruption, while the monster is impure from its creation as an abhuman being, representing "unnaturalness" (queer identity). Through observing the heteronormative portrayal of queer identities through Freudian psychosexual theory, the reader develops the broader idea that all queer relationships have elements of impurity because they focus on homoeroticism or result from force.

The foil between Walton and the Creature emphasizing the absolute purity and impurity of each respective character's relationship to Frankenstein through various points in Frankenstein's isolation from others in the frame narrative communicates the overt sexualization of queer identities through the oedipal and masturbatory making of the Creature juxtaposed with the traditional and

honorable portrayal of Walton. Walton introduces the text by describing how he "voluntarily endured [struggle] . . . work[ing] hard and . . . study[ing]" (Shelley 9). This diligence is furthered by piousness as he wishes to his sister that "Heaven shower down blessings on [her]" (10). This noble characterization establishes that Walton values purity and makes Walton a symbol of the conservative status quo as he embodies such venerated traditional values, foiling the depiction of the Creature's fabrication. Frankenstein works "with profane fingers, [at] the . . . secrets of the human frame" while "separated" in his "workshop of filthy creation" (42–43). The metaphorically sexual and masturbatory imagery from the shame is associated with Frankenstein's emotional responses to the creation, as he is "engaged, heart and soul, in [the] one pursuit" (43) of the pleasure associated with the satisfaction of making life and eventually in an inability to stop despite self-shame or disgust. The act of creation thus conveys the Freudian conflict between id and superego as Frankenstein initially works for self-satisfaction and then is impacted by societal expectations and morality, particularly through language like "profane," explicitly illustrating a sense of ungodliness. With the sexual imagery, the Creature is inherently born out of sin and represents the phallic desires of Frankenstein; however, as it was created entirely by Frankenstein, the Creature is oedipal in nature as Frankenstein must couple with himself and the idea of a mother to create life, apparently incestuously. Thus, Walton represents absolute purity being born human and symbolizing traditional values, whereas the Creature represents absolute impurity as it is seen by Walton through the frame narrative as an incestuous, sexual, and unnatural being. The unnaturalness is queer as its non-normative origin places it outside of acceptable creation and thus the Creature's abhuman state and creation are a metaphor for the sinfulness of queer identities viewed through a conservative lens.

The homoerotic tension developed between Henry and Frankenstein communicates Henry's chosen impurity; however, Henry retains purity in his naturalness (humanity), directly opposing the Creature's absolute impurity as an unnatural (queer) being that lives and acts degenerately. Frankenstein, after the creation, describes how "nothing could equal [his] delight on seeing [Henry] Clerval" and that "[he] grasped [Henry's] hand, and in a moment forgot [his] horror and misfortune" (48). This interaction demonstrates the pair's homoerotic tendencies associated with their id, but their superego prevents them from acting further; Frankenstein notes "fear[ing] . . . that Henry should see [the Creature]" (48). Because the Creature is a representation of Frankenstein's sexuality, Frankenstein attempts to shield Henry from

Frankenstein's true desires, as Frankenstein knows Henry is pure from his humanity; Henry is introduced as being of "a singular . . . fancy" (26). His ambition and tenacity give him the appearance of an honorable individual, but this pureness is consistently corrupted through his willing interactions with Frankenstein. However, Henry is more pure than the Creature due to his human naturality, juxtaposing the Creature's unnatural degeneracy. When Henry is with Frankenstein, Frankenstein recalls "imagin[ing] that the monster [had] seized [him] . . . struggl[ing] furiously . . ." (49). This represents how the Creature forces impurity into those around it, symbolically penetrating as a phallic symbol for queer identity. This corruption is furthered as Frankenstein reads how his brother William was "discovered . . . [with] the print of the murder's finger on his neck" (61). The strangulation implies molestation as the Creature, symbolizing non-normative sexuality, must use absolute force. Ultimately, the characterization of the Creature and Walton both as queer symbols emphasizes the juxtaposition as Walton is partially pure through humanity whereas the Creature is absolutely impure through sexuality.

Elizabeth's pureness is developed as a symbol of virginity, originating from her human birth and modest behavior; thus, her murder by the Creature infects her with Frankenstein's impurity and juxtaposes Walton's absolute purity as someone who is isolated from the events and not associated with homoerotic tendencies, communicating the notion that queer identities cause disaster through their molesting penetration into the lives of the innocent. Frankenstein describes Elizabeth as perfect, mourning her as "the purest creature on earth" (189). Like Henry, Elizabeth is inherently innocent because of her humanity; however, Henry willingly abandons purity whereas Elizabeth retains it because she does not involve herself in homoerotic affairs. Nevertheless, this purity is lost as Frankenstein beholds "the . . . mark of the [Creature]'s grasp . . . on her neck" (189). The mark, like William's, represents a rape of innocence as Frankenstein's symbolic sexual corruption forcibly destroys Elizabeth's innocence. This loss of purity juxtaposes Walton's absolute purity as an outsider unengaged with homoeroticism and never infected with the symbolic penetration of Frankenstein's corruption. Shelley communicates this juxtaposition to emphasize Walton's representation of the conservative status quo and ideal traditional man. Walton writes to his sister wondering if "[her] blood congeal[s] with horror, like . . . [his]?" (202), a comment stressing his status in the story as an outsider and chronicler; homosexual impurity is thus portrayed through Walton's frame narrative. Furthermore, Walton's purity is heightened above Elizabeth's as he can

"journey . . . [for] consolation" (211) and leave the tragedy behind. While Walton is pure through the ability to put these events behind him as a disturbing and perverted tale, Elizabeth becomes impure through the forced molestation that infects her with Frankenstein's corruption. Ultimately, this conveys the conservative idea that queerness intends to corrupt, pervert, and infect the innocent in society.

The societal perspectives toward queer identities develop through the foils in the settings where Frankenstein mourns the deaths of Elizabeth and Henry; he mourns Henry in prison, a metaphorical representation of the punishment ascribed to him for the symbolic homoerotic tendencies that ultimately lead to Henry's death, whereas he mourns Elizabeth in the comfort of an inn, reflecting the acceptable and unhidden nature of their heteronormative relationship. Upon Henry's death, Frankenstein wonders "why did I not die?" before commenting on how he was "more miserable than man ever was before" (171). This extreme anguish parallels later feelings toward Elizabeth's death, in which he exclaims "why did I not then expire!" and recounts how he "fainted" senselessly (189). These dialogue parallels imply that Frankenstein felt similar grief at their deaths because of what each meant to him; however, he was only able to mourn Elizabeth due to their socially sanctioned relationship. He laments being "doomed to live" (172) after the Creature kills Henry. Because the Creature is an extension of Frankenstein's impurity and sexuality, the former's murder of Henry can symbolize Frankenstein's corruption of Henry beyond his human life. Thus, the uncomfortable setting of the prison is a metaphor for the disapproving perspectives toward Henry and Frankenstein's homoerotic relationship as it prevents Frankenstein from continuing to live his life or avenge his loved ones. This punishment contradicts the reaction to Elizabeth's death where Frankenstein felt overwhelmed before immediately "rush[ing with his pistol]" (190) and hunting the Creature. He describes being "surrounded by the people of the inn" (189), a stark contrast to the "unfeeling" (172) attitude of his nurse when he was in prison. Despite Elizabeth and Henry both being born pure, Henry's relationship with Frankenstein is portrayed as corrupted because the transgressive homoeroticism as undesirable justifies Frankenstein's suffering as portrayed in the way those around him address his anguish after the murder of his closest companions.

Shelley's portrayal of the Creature as a queer phallic symbol juxtaposes Walton's honorable qualities; the absolute impurity and purity of these two characters develop a scale of innocence between Elizabeth and Henry, illustrating the tension between the Freudian id and superego that impacts Frankenstein's relationships due to his

corrupting sexuality with these four characters, consequently communicating how absolute avoidance of queer identities is ideal to remain pure in a conservative society.

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Religious Desolation and Transformation

The Role of Faith in T.S. Eliot's Poetry

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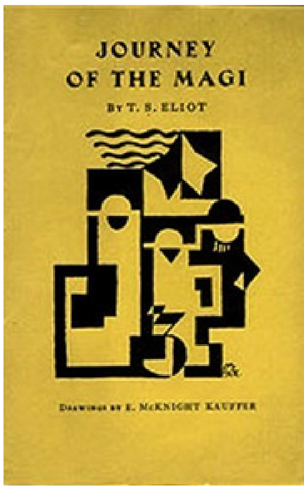

One of the most notable poets of the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot's attitudes on religion and society reflect in many of his works. Particularly, the subject of religion is prominent in his writing, even branching out of poetry—he also wrote of an "Idea of a Christian Society," or a "redemption of Christian faith" (Egri 8) as a solution to what he viewed as a social crisis. Though he was born into a Unitarian family, Eliot accounts that he once lived "without any definite religious faith, or without any at all" (Leitch 35), until in 1927 when he was baptized and confirmed into the Church of England. In the realm of poetry, there is a noticeable shift in his publications before and after this point of conversion, and critic Vincent B. Leitch argues that upon his baptism his poems became Christian in nature, citing the 1927 "Journey of the Magi" as an example, whereas his pre-conversion work was secular. However, earlier poems of Eliot's, namely "The Hollow Men," also carry heavy religious themes, which contradicts Leitch's claim. While Eliot's post-conversion poetry, such as "Journey of the Magi," certainly differs from his earlier work, "The Hollow Men" intricately ties to the Bible and parallels the Christian *Inferno*, which mean it cannot be defined as secular, and is in fact a poem of religious desolation like his post-conversion works.

Falling in the same year as Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, "Journey of the Magi" depicts the journey of the three wise men on their way to witness the birth of Jesus Christ. Their tale is retold in a desolate atmosphere, with an unexpectedly uncaring attitude to the usually celebrated Nativity. These traits are why Leitch characterizes it as a poem of "religious desolation," as it embodies the themes of "restlessness and resignation"

(38) that make a common appearance in the subject. In the first several lines, Eliot drops the reader into the "worst time of the year" (2), "The very dead of winter" (5), in a world that has yet to understand the meaning of the Incarnation. The description of the journey—featuring sore-footed camels, unfriendly locales and poor conditions—conveys explicitly the hardship of the Magi without a single indication of hope, anticipation, or even relief at the journey's end. Rather, they are discouraged by "voices singing in our ears, saying / That this was all folly," (19, 20) as they hear from an older world order that their efforts to witness Christ's birth and, by extension, Nativity itself, were wasted. These lines undermine the supposed heroism of the Magi and sharply contrast the joyous air in which the event is typically framed.

Their journey's terminus in the second stanza again features no exclamations of happiness, but is undoubtedly a positive turn. The shift is implied through Eliot's use of "dawn" (21), and "a running stream" (23) as opposed to the icy conditions in the previous stanza, the thawing of frost paralleling the Magi escaping hardship. Additionally, idyllic, natural imagery of the scent of vegetation, a white horse in a meadow, and a water mill "beating the darkness" (23) suggest to the reader the emergence of spring after a long, arduous winter. Though the scene cannot quite be characterized as cheerful, its serenity suggests a hopeful attitude to the coming of Christ. As such, this stanza more adheres to what one would expect of a Christian poet, yet it once again subverts expectations as the Magus refers to their destination as merely "(you may say) satisfactory" (31). This word choice is important, because it sparks multiple interpretations of the Magi's thoughts: were they disappointed by what they found, still following the thinking patterns of an older world order, or did Christ's birth literally satisfy the will of God it was meant to fulfill? Leitch argues that the poem's creative perspective "satirizes the sentimental, romantic Christmas-card treatment of the Nativity" (37). Eliot may be using the understated "satisfactory" to achieve a similar effect here. Regardless of its true meaning, the reader finds the unexpected ending of the stanza jarring, and is reminded that the Magi are still "caught between the new and the old world visions" (37), and as such do not treat Christ's birth with the same gravity that would become the "new world" perspective. Finally, the last stanza encompasses all that a poem of religious desolation should, transitioning back to the darkness of the poem's beginning with "Hard and bitter agony" (Eliot 39), and the Magus' confusion and disorientation, still stuck in this old world, unsure if they had been "led all that way for / Birth or Death" (35, 36). In the end, the Magi found no peace or resolution, and forever remained troubled by their journey.

This satirical element has great

significance to the argument of both poems' religious qualities. Despite its depiction of hardship and distress, its creation still falls after Eliot's point of conversion to Anglicanism, which Leitch argues is the same point his works shifted from secular to religious in nature. Eliot's religious poetry is uncommon in the sense that it does not glorify biblical canon, but if a poem such as "Journey of the Magi" can still be categorized as religious, it broadens the scope of what should be considered a religious work, including Eliot's pre-conversion writing.

One of his most famous works, written in 1925, exemplifies this. "The Hollow Men" is a poem often associated with "sterility and desolation" (Gillis 464). It is told from the perspective of "hollow men," stuffed and "filled with straw" (Eliot 1, 4), stuck in a desolate world simply awaiting its end. Beneath the grim message, though, lies a plethora of connections to Judgment and the Bible. In the poem's first section, the hollow men are described as little more than scarecrows, both mentally and spiritually empty, and the only thoughts or sounds they produce are entirely "meaningless" (7). Moreover, Eliot introduces the notion of "Death's other kingdom" (14) as a representation of finality, where they will someday have "that final meeting" (37) that they have yet to reach. "Other" implies that the world of the living hollow men is also a kingdom of death, emphasizing the hopelessness of their current situation. These empty people are caught between beginning and the end:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act, (72-75)

feeling death's presence but not yet leaving the land of the willing, only able to wait for the end. Curiously, despite the "twilight kingdom" (65) being "The hope only of empty men" (66, 67), they still intend to "wear / Such deliberate disguises" (31, 32) to evade the eyes of death, wishing to be "no nearer" (36), and going through the motions of fruitless prayer rituals. This evasion does not necessarily stem from a will to live, but rather because they are unable to fathom or bear the reality of death. As such, they are doomed to live paralyzed until they eventually fizzle out, "Not with a bang but a whimper" (98).

"The Hollow Men" is rife with religious allusions. Most notably, much of the poem draws inspiration and themes from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a religious text so influential it has altered interpretation of Christianity and persists even today. In fact, critic Everett A. Gillis sees entire scenes as derived "almost entirely from Dante's Divine Comedy" (464). The hollow men's existence in between the worlds of the living and the dead parallels Limbo, the first circle of Hell. There, those who led virtuous lives but never knew Christ are

doomed to wait for eternity, standing just before the river that would ferry them to true death, but unable to cross. Eliot makes this connection most clear in the fourth section, where they stand "In this last of meeting places," "Gathered on this beach of the tumid river" (57, 60). Through connections to the representation of Limbo in *Inferno*, the reader understands that the hollow men in the poem are to be viewed as empty souls tethered in place, unable to die, and equally unable to find peace where they are. Later, in Section V, certain lines are taken directly from the Lord's Prayer, as the poem leads up to the end of the world. In this sense, Gillis believes the fifth section is reminiscent of a "conventional worship service at its climax" (475), and parallels the anticipation of Judgment Day, when God would determine the fate of humanity. Eliot uses this religious foundation to make his own commentary on the state of current society.

Section III alludes to a sort of ritual; they raise "stone images" and pray to them, but by the omission of any result from these prayers other than them "Waking alone," one can infer that they achieve nothing. This is not a Christian prayer, and neither is the childish chanting of "Here we go round the prickly pear," that may as well be a form of ritual for a society that has lost all sense of convention and spirituality. These pagan versions of prayer resemble the ending of "Journey of the Magi," which recounts the old dispensation without Christ with "alien people clutching their gods". In both poems, the general setting is one without Christianity—while in "The Hollow Men," their desolate world had lost connection to religion, in "Journey of the Magi," they simply had yet to learn of its significance—and both poems are abundant in suffering. By writing of the difficulty of these worlds, Eliot implies Christianity's ability to bring hope. Leitch claims that "The Hollow Men" is a secular poem because in the end, they failed to establish a connection with God (38), yet "Journey of the Magi" also ends without celebration or salvation, with the Magi at last wishing for "another death." Despite both "The Hollow Men" and "Journey of the Magi" offering an unexpected, tormented perspective, their comparison reveals strong religious themes shared between them.

Where the Magi's harsh reality originated from an old-world order, the hollow men's experience is more akin to a post-apocalyptic scenario that had already lost concrete religion. However, both poems are founded on influential religious stories, and heavily reference Christianity. Neither the post-conversion "Journey of the Magi" or the pre-conversion "The Hollow Men" is a happy or optimistic story, but that does not disqualify them from being religious poems. Rather, their grim themes identify both as poems of religious desolation.

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Beyond the Battle

The Everlasting Nature of Trauma in Veterans

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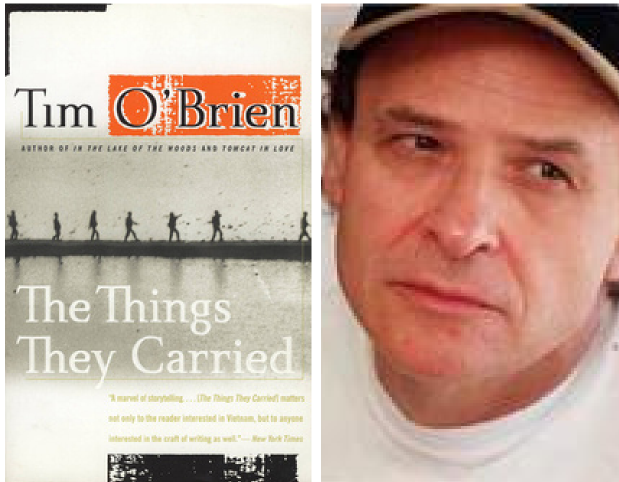

Traumatic events and experiences, such as war, can have a profound impact on an individual's mental state and quality of life. Traumatic situations are generally referred to as overall threats to life, or direct interactions with violence or death. These gruesome realities of war can inflict memory struggles, behavioral issues, and emotional battles upon soldiers for years following their service. Specifically pertaining to war, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) frequently recurs in soldiers post combat. Doctors diagnose PTSD through various diagnostic criteria, encompassing unusual stress, persistent reactions, reversibility, shift in personality, and progression toward a neurotic state. Many soldiers who experience wartime settings eternally carry these disconcerting memories with them, separating these individuals from a sense of normalcy, causing an unstable recovery process. Tim O'Brien utilizes a circular narrative structure in *The Things They Carried* to mirror the perpetual cycle of traumatic memories that soldiers face, illustrate how war irreversibly shifts an individual's life, and exemplify the circularity of the healing process.

O'Brien implements a circular narrative in *The Things They Carried* to mirror the perpetual cycle of traumatic memories that soldiers face. In the chapter "Speaking of Courage," a former Vietnam soldier finds himself aimlessly driving around his hometown lake post war. O'Brien notes that "circling the lake, Norman Bowker remembered how his friend Kiowa had disappeared under the waste and water" (143). This circular symbol reflects the way traumatic memories are inescapable, and how the cycle of remembering inflicts guilt upon these soldiers. For each circle he completes, Bowker's intensity of guilt regarding Kiowa's death heightens, as his actions serve as a reminder of the trauma. Moreover, in Mark Taylor's essay from *The Centennial Review*, he notes that "the

circles suggest the endlessness and purposelessness of the Vietnam War to those who fought it—would a charge into the tunnel have provided a fleeting moment of purpose?" (218). This exemplifies how the circles in this chapter serve as a metaphor for the repetitiveness that soldiers experience in their post-combat lives. The questioning embedded in Taylor's essay reveals how Norman Bowker struggled to find his way and struggled to uncover a sense of purpose in his new, so-called "normal" life. Norman Bowker's internal struggle suggests that his trauma led him to become virtually lost, failing to bring an end to his cycle of guilt from the war. The nature of trauma emerges through his circles around the lake, because the memories that haunt him limit any current hopes for normalcy. Ultimately, O'Brien's circular narrative structure illustrates how trauma remains an unbroken cycle immersed in soldier's lives, because of remembrance.

Furthermore, O'Brien reflects the perpetual cycle of remembering through his personal inability to forget pieces of the war. Remembering tends to be a detrimental way the human mind keeps war trauma alive, and causes memories to linger as reminders of severe struggles. O'Brien himself expresses his internal conflict of remembering by stating "I'm forty three years old, and a writer now, and even still, right here, I keep dreaming Linda alive. And Ted Lavender, too, and Kiowa, and Curt Lemon, and a slim young man I killed, and an old man sprawled beside a pigpen, and several others whose bodies I once lifted and dumped into a truck" (213). This emphasizes how O'Brien continues to relive his war experiences, regardless of all the years that have passed since his time of service. Despite his new career and lifestyle, a connection between O'Brien and those that died remains, as he is constantly haunted by the gruesome sights and experiences he once endured. The process of remembering is revealed as an inescapable continuous loop, because this circularity portrays how the past never fully disconnects from veterans post combat. Alongside this, American psychiatrist, Judith Herman, researched her Contemporary Trauma Theory about remembrance, uncovering that "the more violent the trauma, the more the subjects are likely to remember it, indeed to never forget it even if they want to" (Suleiman 279). This connects to Tim O'Brien's personal experiences, because not only did he witness horrific violence while in Vietnam, but he still has recurring memories. The repetitive narrative shines through in this context because O'Brien experiences a perpetual cycle of failed attempts to forget disturbing experiences. Thus, O'Brien's circular narrative assists in displaying the traumatic cycle of remembrance, mainly from the memories of violent situations and losses in war time.

Additionally, O'Brien's circular narrative illustrates how war irreversibly alters an

individual's life. Many soldiers tend to be incapable of letting go of traumatic moments after experiencing severe trauma, and in turn, these experiences transform into a concrete piece of their lives. O'Brien explains how "grief, terror, love, longing . . . all of them were carried. And it was a burden that would last forever. It was a part of who they were. It would never leave them" (20). This suggests that the soldiers' lives are shifting, because both their physical and intellectual states undergo damage from wartime struggles. O'Brien's circular narrative structure represents the concrete, and permanent nature of trauma, revealed through the soldiers' inability to leave their past behind. This suggests that their past tends to reappear in different settings, robbing any chance they had at normalcy or a new life. By the same token, James E. McDonald from Air University acknowledges the fact that PTSD causes "dysfunctional symptoms that significantly compromise reintegration into a full and productive life. This level of dysfunction is reportedly experienced by as many as 30 to 40 percent of military personnel who have been in a war zone" (4). These "dysfunctional" symptoms are represented by the emotional obstacles the soldiers endure, since reintegration into a normal life becomes a daunting obstacle. McDonald's description of PTSD emphasizes how a productive lifestyle is far out of reach for veterans, as memories are on a constant loop, and trauma resurfaces in all their endeavors again and again. This heightens O'Brien's use of a circular narrative because the difficulty adapting to normalcy illustrates how trauma ultimately alters veterans' return to civilian life.

Likewise, trauma not only alters veterans' lives through the impact of memories, but also disrupts normal brain function by inflicting chaos within their minds. When describing his headspace, O'Brien states that "the memory-traffic feeds into a rotary up on your head, where it goes in circles for a while, then pretty soon imagination flows in and the traffic merges and shoots off down a thousand different streets" (33). This establishes that veterans are stuck in a continuous cycle of wartime thoughts, because O'Brien depicts how memory traffic is limiting his usually natural writing abilities. This traffic also illustrates how his mind becomes jumbled, as these memories cause mental discomfort and overwhelming stress. His altered psychological state, and inability to do things that used to come naturally, provide an example of the idea that traumatic memories crowd one's brain. Additionally, in an essay from *The Centennial Review,* Mark Taylor states that "these circles suggest O'Brien's going round and round the central events of his own wartime experience, and of his imagination, working tirelessly to get it right, to find the truth, to display the meaning he wishes to display" (218). Essentially, O'Brien's circular narrative

uncovers how war irreversibly shifts an individual's brain function, because he is struggling to come to terms with his horrifying past and is unable to make sense of it most of the time. As a result of this, O'Brien struggles with a shifted mental state, where he attempts to decipher which of his memories are truthful, and which are just a product of his imagination. Therefore, O'Brien's circular narrative structure constantly shifts from past to present, parallel to the shifting mental states of veterans who have experienced war traumas.

Additionally, O'Brien's circular narrative structure demonstrates the looping nature of the healing process. To come face to face with his past, O'Brien revisits the site of Kiowa's death, attempting to comprehend the loss. On this trip, he notes that he "looked for signs of forgiveness or personal grace or whatever else the land might offer" (173). This visit emphasizes the ongoing struggle trauma carries, as O'Brien feels forced to return to Vietnam years after the war. The healing process lacks linearity, and proceeds in an endless cycle for O'Brien. By revisiting the site, he searches for some extent of closure that may provide him with peace regarding his past. However, his uncertainty about what the land has to offer further highlights the way that healing encompasses a process of the unknown and unsatisfied hopes. Similar to O'Brien's struggle, Judith Herman's Contemporary Trauma Theory describes how "the survivor is one who has encountered death but remained alive, and it is this remaining alive that leads to psychological themes, . . . the inability to move beyond indelible images of death, guilt of having survived while others died, lack of trust in the world, and struggle for meaning" (Suleiman 280). Herman's theory connects with O'Brien's experiences, because all these psychological themes are contributing to his painful guilt as a survivor, inflicting a perpetual loop of remembrance, reflection, and lack of healing. Herman suggests that survivors are stuck in a painful cycle, similar to O'Brien's actions returning to Vietnam. This demonstrates that healing is not a direct path, and rather a skewed process. Ultimately, the return to painful memories uncovers the circularity of healing because the concept of closure constantly remains unclear.

In the same token, O'Brien expresses how healing requires a reevaluation of the past, emphasizing the complexity that healing from trauma brings. Throughout *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien revisits key traumatic events, even ones from his childhood. Toward the end of the novel, he states, "sometimes I can even see Timmy skating with Linda under the yellow floodlights . . . doing loops and spins, and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a

story" (233). This mental image of Timmy skating with Linda holds great importance, as the "loops and spins" on the ice reflect the cyclical nature of O'Brien's revisitations of his past. These circular motions on the ice also convey how the same memories continue to haunt him. When he takes a "high leap into the dark" he becomes detached from his painful struggle, only to sooner or later come face to face with it again. His attempt to save Timmy's life with a story depicts his motivation to heal. But no matter the extent of his efforts, O'Brien will never be capable of making perfect sense of his past. Likewise, Susan Farrell explains, "what shapes a person then is difficult to unravel. An individual seems to be the product of biological predispositions as well as a jumble of experiences: wartime experience as well as larger life experience" (20). This reflects the complexity of revisiting painful trauma, because Farrell identifies how individuals become composed of a "jumble of experiences." This emphasizes the fact that healing lacks linearity, because all these past experiences make it difficult to uncover a single meaning of why trauma is so persistent. Wartime experiences and "larger life" experiences contribute to the unclear path of healing, because a full sense of understanding traumatic experiences is an unattainable goal. Overall, both O'Brien and Farrell stress the fact that the complexity of the past and the struggle to find closure influence the ongoing nature of the healing process.

To portray the circular nature of the healing process, reveal the irreversible effects war has on one's quality of life, and exemplify the repetitive cycle of traumatic memories, Tim O'Brien imbeds a circular narrative structure throughout the novel *The Things They Carried*. Through the stories of characters like Norman Bowker and O'Brien, the novel explores how past horrors continually haunt the present day and make recovery from trauma a nearly impossible task. The cyclical nature of remembering portrays the perpetual struggle that soldiers face day to day in society, as guilt causes a feeling of disconnection from normalcy. Essentially, trauma does not simply dissipate. Instead, it lingers, recirculates, and becomes life-altering for those who experience it, reshaping their sense of self as individuals. O'Brien conveys the fact that the journey through trauma will never be a straight path to simple closure but will rather be an ongoing tug-of-war with the past, where each cycle of remembrance holds new understanding, meaning, but can also worsen guilt. Ultimately, even figurative wounds will never fully heal. They simply just reshape our sense of self, constantly lingering, looping, and leaving a lasting mark. The past can never remain in the past, as it will perpetually present itself in the present day, invading future hopes for a life of normalcy.

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Between Animality and Authenticity

The Multiplicity of Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

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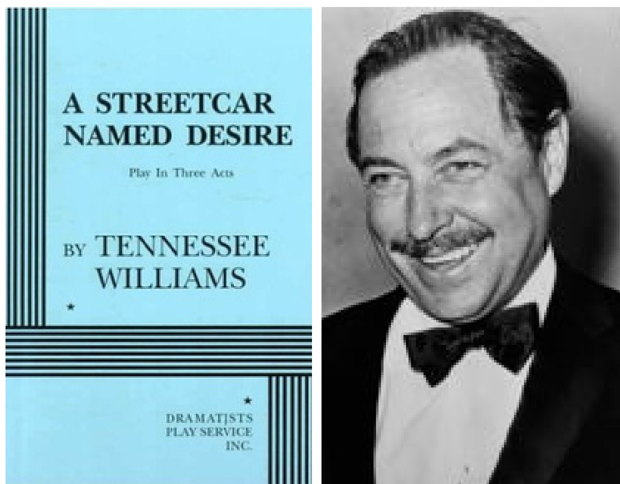

In Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* the multiplicity of Stanley Kowalski indicates a character who, as much as being a representative of toxic masculinity and cruelty, equally embodies a relatable, blue-collar revealer of truth as the playwright seeks to dissect the convergence of the modern patriarchy and the post-war era.

The carnal characterisation of Stanley at the beginning of the text is utilised by Williams to convey the malevolent nature of the archetypal alpha male. Before his introduction in scene one, Stella describes his husband as "A different species," which promptly establishes an animalistic undercurrent that henceforth remains synonymous with his character; this disposition is reinforced throughout the play in order to articulate his malignity in subsequent violent acts, where Stanley's, "sheer physical vitality," (Galloway), is expressed through inciting violence against his pregnant wife and the adulterous rape of Blanche in scene 10. Williams utilises vivid stage directions to similar effect: Stanley is a "richly feathered male bird among hens" who is emblematic of "the gaudy seed-bearer" (Williams, scene 1). Here, Williams parallels Stanley's animality with the notion of eros. In doing so, a mid-twentieth century audience is exposed to a vulgar male figure that demarcated the patriarchal era of the time; perhaps the playwright uses such provocative allusions to overt sexuality and brute force to condemn such attitudes that became more prevalent among American men in the new south, as Stanley perhaps embodies the landscape of the post world-war-two era, in which men sought to reestablish dominance after a role shift that saw women in the workplace begin to assimilate into the fabric of

masculine labour. The act of Stanley "remove[ing] his shirt," in scene 1 reveals an almost militant insistence in his comfort despite the presence of his in-law Blanche—which would be a salacious act for the stages of the 1940s (especially in the Kazan adaptation in which Marlon Brando expertly exudes dominant male sexuality through his use of method acting)—arguably mirroring acts not dissimilar to territorial male animals asserting dominance. In effect, the playwright highlights his sheer, unadulterated insolence so reminiscent of a male antagonist, and resonant of the licentious psychology of the modern man.

However, the pluralistic nature of Stanley Kowalski reveals itself in his undeniable relatability—his working-class status echoes the work ethic of a modern audience, so as such, he can be viewed as a monolith of industrial America: the rugged individualism and cultural heterogeny that served as the backbone of the American dream. In describing himself as, "common as dirt," and, "100% American" (Williams, scene 8), the playwright achieves two things regarding Stanley's character: firstly, his adherence to a typical way of life is representative of the urbanized New South that he also represents in his possessions, "his car, his radio," common items that were a result of the assembly line that gave rise to personal vehicles and technology for the average American (scene 1). Secondly, when contextualising Blanche's use of the pejorative, "Polack!" to demean Stanley's American citizenship (scene 1), the aforementioned declaration that he is one-hundred per cent American not only pays homage to the patriotism imparted by Huey Long, but adds complexity to his character as it reveals that Stanley is seemingly an insecure character who, contrary to being, "sub-human," as Blanche implies in scene 4, is a tapestry of human emotion who expresses more refined feelings such as emotional injury, which can be evidenced in his pleading, "I want my baby down here," after hitting Stella in scene 3. Arguably, he is betrayed by societal expectations of men, breadwinning, that embolden providing one's family with comforts that he and his immigrant status cannot provide, bruising his sense of manhood, and thus retaliates by lashing out in violent outbursts to reassert authority. Interestingly, an audience may resonate with Stanley's underlying frustration—from a Marxist perspective, his character is no longer a barbaric antagonist but is instead a frustrated, common man, who is attempting to survive in modern society, being unable to uphold a patriarchal standard set by upper classes with the disposable income to flaunt their masculinity through alternative means.

Stanley's character is further multifaceted by his seemingly virtuous motive to uncover the truth entangled in the deceptive rhetoric of his antithesis, Blanche Dubois. The diametrical opposition of the two characters in scene two is masterfully

captured through poker imagery. Blanche remarks, "you're [. . .] on the primitive side, I should think. To interest you, a woman would have to—" to which Stanley replies, "lay her cards on the table." Your euphemistic nature of this exchange, that to fulfil his primitive desires, a woman must be promiscuous, reveals, upon closer inspection, Stanley's fixation on blatant actuality. By, "laying one's cards on the table," one would have nothing to hide, and Blanche's insidious half-truths and fabrication in the name of preserving "magic" at the cost of "realism" (scene 9), fundamentally disagrees with Stanley's position as the man of the house with all of the "cards" known to him. Perhaps one could argue that ignorance of Blanche's intentions emasculates his character, which provokes his displays of male aggression, specifically through his rape of Blanche to reassert control. Literary critic Rebecca Cole argues that there is an ideological binary between truth and beauty. The mechanical, "electric light bulb" that is truth illuminates the doubt of Blanche' theatrical, "pretty, pretty little candles" (Williams, scene 8), which implies that the whimsical and ideological rendition of an antebellum era American South, evidenced by the antithetical Blanche, has no place in Stanley's multicultural post-World War II America. Thus, the "deliberate cruelty" inexorably linked to Stanley's rejection of Blanche is presumably a reaction to Blanche's Old South anachronism that is constructed on a delusion that Stanley cannot tolerate (scene 10). Consequently, the holy tableau of Stanley, Stella, and their child united at the play's dénouement, signalling Stanley's survival and Blanche's metaphorical demise, is a declaration that, despite Tennessee Williams's, "love for the South," the "hostility" to its inherent "romanticism" ultimately assumes victory (Williams and Freeman). In Stanley's transparent, imposing characterisation, he becomes a victor—ultimately unpunished—who, in his quest to uphold truth, succeeds without reproach.

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Expression and Belonging

An Exploration and Analysis of Sandra Cisneros' Poetry

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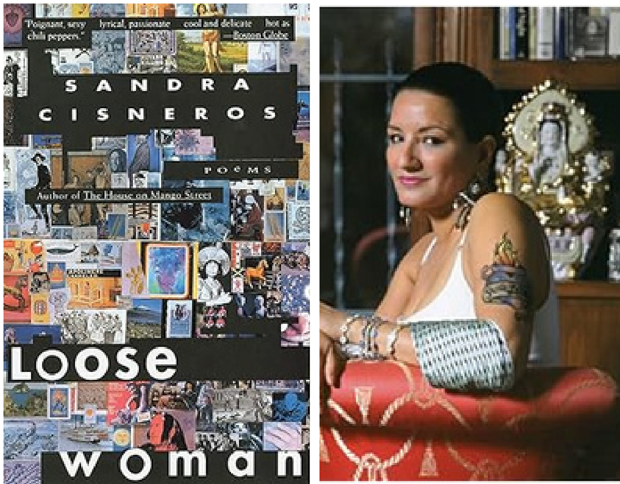

There are various ways to express one's thoughts, feelings, and opinions in the world. Some find comfort in sharing parts of themselves through art, like drawing and painting, while others express themselves through music by writing and by performing songs. Selena Quintanilla, iconic Chicana singer and songwriter, wrote songs about love, relationships, self-confidence, and cultural pride. Her music served as inspiration for many Tejano women who endured the obstacles that Quintanilla faced. In the same way Quintanilla expressed herself through music, Mexican-American writer Sandra Cisneros chose to share her voice through prose and poetry. Born to Mexican-American parents in Chicago, IL, in 1954, Cisneros grew up feeling like an outsider. After attending Loyola University Chicago, she received a Master's in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the Iowa Writers Workshop, which launched her writing career. Her writing focuses on identity, gender, and cultural heritage, especially from the perspective of Mexican-Americans and Mexican-American women. In her poetry, Cisneros illustrates the complex struggles of navigating a bicultural identity as a Mexican-American woman by utilizing cultural and historical allusions, Spanish words and phrases, and enjambment in order to mirror the anxiety and tension she and many others experience traversing a judgmental society.

Cisneros demonstrates the internal conflict Mexican-American women face due to their bicultural identity through cultural and historical references that help convey the emotional tension and societal judgment they face navigating their dual heritage. In her poem "Old Maids," which focuses on the cultural expectation in Mexico that women marry young and Cisneros' rebellion against this societal norm,

Cisneros utilizes a list of allusions that serve as examples of strong, independent women whom the speaker has drawn inspiration. To support the speaker's claim that women who do not marry are not "Old Maids," Cisneros lists women from Greek mythology, history, and traditional folklore, alluding to

Aunt Ariadne,
Tía Vashti,
Comadre Penelope,
querida Malintzin,
Señora Pumpkin Shell. (lines 27-31)

For example, "*querida* Malintzin" refers to La Malinche, the primary interpreter for Hernan Cortes, who had a child with him despite never being married (line 30). By providing various historical examples of strong women who chose to remain single, Cineros strengthens her argument against the cultural expectation that all women marry in Mexico and provides reasoning for her and her cousins' decisions not to take part in this rite of life. However, because of their decision to not marry, she and her cousins are "too old / by Mexican standards" (lines 3-4) to marry, and therefore judged by their family and community, ultimately contributing to the struggles women face because of their bicultural identity. Similarly, Cisneros' poem "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me" also employs cultural allusions when she writes about the speaker's passionate relationship and says the speaker's lover brings out the "Dolores del Río in [the speaker]," (line 13) alluding to the legendary Latin American actress who became a cultural icon in Mexico after breaking barriers in Hollywood with her acting career. Despite the judgment and isolation Mexican-American women face, successful women persevere through the tension and judgment surrounding their identities. By implementing the allusion to Dolores del Río, Cisneros adds another example of a strong woman, which illustrates a part of the speaker's identity as a Mexican-American woman and acknowledges Rios' struggles as she began her acting career. In Laurie Grobman's essay "The Cultural Past and Artistic Creation in Sandra Cisneros' 'The House on Mango Street' and Judith Ortiz Cofer's 'Silent Dancing'" about Cisneros' use of artistic creation to reclaim cultural identity and personal agency, Grobman explores how Cisneros integrates personal and collective memory into her work, drawing upon Mexican-American history and traditions to shape her narratives. Cisneros experienced a "solitary childhood," which sparked her love for reading and writing literature as a way of expressing herself (Grobman 43). Grobman argues that Cisneros' work serves as a form of cultural preservation and self-definition, which can explain why Cisneros utilizes historical and cultural references in her writing.

In her poetry, Cisneros incorporates Spanish words and phrases to highlight the bicultural tension felt by Mexican-

American women, illustrating the impact of bilingualism on their identities. In her poem "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me," Cisneros incorporates several Spanish words into her writing, many of which have negative connotations, such as "*lágrimas*" ("tears"; my trans.; 5), "*navajas*" ("knife, razor-blade"; my trans.; 15), "*berrinchuda*" ("one with a short-temper"; my trans.; 22), and even "*bien-cabrona*" ("bitch"; my trans.; 22). Utilizing these words and this specific syntax, Cisneros reflects an apprehensive tone that mirrors the anxiety felt by many Mexican-American women about their identities. Cisneros also utilizes Spanish words and displays her bilingualism in her poem "Original Sin," which illustrates the speaker's hurry to conform to meet the cultural standards for women in Mexico as she is on her way to visit her father's family. As the speaker travels closer and closer to Mexico, Cisneros uses Spanish when describing that the speaker sees "the land of *los nopales*" ("cactus"; my trans.; line 26) out of her plane window. This transition and increased use of Spanish symbolize the speaker physically crossing the border but crossing the border back into her Mexican identity, and navigating the pressures that come with the fluidity of the borderlands. Bilingualism is also present in other forms of Cisneros' writing, as described in Sarah Staes's journal essay "Multilingualism and Melodrama in Sandra Cisneros's *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life."* This article highlights Cisneros' blend of Spanish and English, emphasizing how this linguistic interplay reflects the complexities of biculturalism. Staes notes that Cisneros strategically weaves Spanish phrases into her narratives to assert cultural belonging while also confronting linguistic tension, stating that "Cisneros has displayed a desire of reconciliation with Spanish, the language she associates with her father and her feelings towards him," (148) noting that Spanish began to appear more as Cisneros continued to write and publish. By incorporating Spanish into her writing, Cisneros appeals to her Mexican-American audience and deepens the impact and her connection through sharing her experiences.

Cisneros uses enjambment in her poetry to express the emotional upheaval and heavy tension tied to the experience of managing a bicultural identity, weaving together a flow of ongoing thoughts and experiences in her work. In her poem "Original Sin," Cisneros utilizes structure, specifically enjambment, to convey the uneasiness and uncertainty of the women speakers. The reader feels this poem's fast rhythm, which mirrors the speaker's anxiety as she tries to conform to Mexican cultural norms. The imagery and symbolism of "crossing the volcanoes" and "descending into the valley" (lines 17–18) illustrate a broader perspective of crossing the border and descending into another culture with

different expectations and norms. In her poem “Night Madness Poem,” she utilizes a series of very short sentences, creating a fast, choppy rhythm. Writing, “It’s no secret. / I’m here.”(lines 11–12), very few words reflect a feeling of anxiousness through her female speakers and their feelings as they navigate their different bicultural identities. Martha Satz further supports this claim through her interview with Cisneros, where Cisneros shares what shaped her identity, the significance of language, and the themes of belonging and displacement in her writing. Once Cisneros realized she could write about things that no one else could, like the traumatic events she experienced, she began to tell her stories (Satz and Cisneros 170). This firsthand insight provides context into how Cisneros’ work mirrors the complexities of bicultural identity, just as the enjambment reveals the heightened emotion and stress that is coupled with one’s bicultural identity.

Cisneros’ poetry examines the nuances of bicultural identity, yet her use of cultural allusions, language, and stylistic elements also act as a broader invitation to embrace personal agency and to uplift Mexican-American women. Ellen C. Mayock examines how Cisneros, Julia Álvarez, and Esmeralda Santiago construct bicultural identities in their literary works exploring how these authors navigate the intersection of two cultures through their personal history and self-representation. In her article, Mayock argues that these authors build their identities in response to societal expectations and personal experiences as Cisneros uses oppositions frequently when writing about the roles of women in her works to emphasize the understanding that if the women in her novel follow the cultural norms, they will end up limiting their possibilities and potential (2).

Similarly, Ganz explores the concept of border crossing in Cisneros’ works, focusing on how Cisneros portrays the challenges of living between cultural boundaries. She discusses how Cisneros navigates the complexities of bicultural identity, emphasizing the tension between Mexican and American cultures and the internal and external struggles that arise from this duality, examining the emotional and cultural aspects of border crossing and its implications for understanding identity. Additionally, Ganz notes that the Cisneros family constantly migrated between Chicago and Mexico, resulting in the loneliness that shaped Cisneros’ childhood because of her bicultural identity (21), serving as a prime example of how one can overcome and should overcome cultural barriers and adversity to live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

In a society full of countless ways to share opinions, writing remains a key source of information and expression. Cisneros’ poetry invites diverse voices to be heard,

not just her own, because she is willing to share many common experiences that cause Mexican-American women anxiety and uncertainty. By writing about these experiences, Cisneros effectively illustrates Mexican-American women's struggles and provides a sense of community to help them feel less alone in a divided world.

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Honor, Hubris, and Fate

Antigone's Defiant Journey in Sophocles' Tragedy

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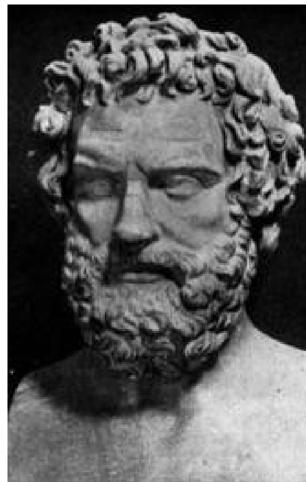

"From mine own, he has no right to stay me" (Sophocles). What compels Sophocles' Antigone to bury her brother's body? What compels Antigone to meet her death, and accept it? In this Ancient Grecian drama written by the playwright Sophocles, Antigone chooses to go against the words of the king Creon and her own sister Ismene in her plan to bury her brother, the traitor Polyneices. She cannot be stopped from giving her brother his final honor, nor from securing her own honor in completing his final rites with an honorable burial. That is what motivates her in this task: honor and pride. And this is how Sophocles develops her character throughout the tragedy. He sets other characters to stop Antigone from doing this crime, to persuade her away from doing this service to her brother, and she bulldozes through all of them, to secure her honorable death. These external conflicts are used by Sophocles to characterize Antigone as the drama's tragic hero, falling on the sword of her own, and others', hubris.

Sophocles opens the play with one of the characterizing conflicts of Antigone, the protagonist and titular hero. Antigone asks her sister Ismene to help her bury Polyneices' decaying body that is laying out for the vultures and rabid dogs to eat, and Ismene refuses (Sophocles 3). This immediately characterizes Antigone as a young woman with strong personal beliefs. Even though King Creon has forbidden anyone from giving burial rites to Polyneices, Antigone works and schemes to do so without fear or even hesitation. She does not believe Creon can keep her from giving this final honor to her brother, and she refuses to be seen as disloyal to her family (3). In these resolutions, we can see her pride begin to take shape. Even in Antigone's harsh tone of voice as she scolds Ismene for attempting to stop her, there is a strong will to prove herself. She shows no hesitation or doubt when she speaks about her plan. Throughout their

confrontation Sophocles builds the plot of the play into Antigone accepting the idea that death will be the punishment for this act, and that this death will be honorable for her, using her tone of voice and her words to her sister (5).

The crime of burying her brother is a major contender in every external confrontation Antigone has in the drama *Antigone*. She desires to do right by her brother and secure her own honor in doing so. Her grief at this point in her life has reached a breaking point: the grief of losing both of her parents and both of her twin brothers, all which have died gruesome and unbecoming deaths (4). In securing the honor of her family, Antigone can heal her own trauma. She can also achieve the feat of healing her pride and returning herself to a place of honor in society. Antigone's argument with King Creon cements these ideas further.

Sophocles' choice to include dialogue between Creon and Antigone about the laws disobeyed and crime committed, and Antigone refusing to deny it, is used to characterize both King Creon and Antigone and to develop the reasoning behind the young woman's actions (25). Antigone's tone is prideful and antagonizes Creon. She even goes as far as to tell him that she does not place so much value on his decrees to let it override the divine laws of her Heaven (25–26). It is in these lines that we really see how Sophocles begins to develop Antigone into a tragic hero and further develop the themes of pride and honor. Sophocles chooses to show her continually seeking pride and honor in her actions and dialogue with others. With Creon, she will not let him beat her down into being scared, or ashamed. She takes excessive pride in what she has done. She appeals to the law of the Greek Pantheon to find her honor. Her hubris builds through the rest of the story as well, but here specifically we begin to see how her hubris is built by Sophocles to be her tragic flaw. We also see her truly embrace the course she is taking with her actions and acknowledge that she is not motivated to bury her brother honorably by any laws of men like Creon, but only by divine laws.

During the same confrontation, Antigone continues to foolishly argue with Creon. She has a snide response to everything he says. When he asks her why she pays honors to both brothers, even if one was a traitor, and she says that the dirt does not object to it. Creon says the enemy can never be a friend, and Antigone says she was not made for hate, but for love. And finally, Creon tells her that if she must be someone motivated by love, she can love the dead (29). The author's choice to include these exchanges of harsh and cruel words show both Antigone's and Creon's hubris. They both refuse to give up their pride and acknowledge how they might be wrong in their actions, and it shows in the

unerring tones of their confrontation. But Creon is the one with power, and he sentences Antigone to die. Sophocles uses adult Creon's overzealous show of strength against a young girl to show the true scope of Creon's pride; he shares this tragic flaw with Antigone.

As Antigone goes to die, the tragic hero remarks how the Gods of Thebes have scorned her and tells the people of Thebes to never forget what she has done (46). This is her final plea for honor from the God's, whose laws she has followed to death. As she hangs, dead in her tomb, Creon's son Haemon dies by his own hand and his body holds onto her waist and hangs down (66). Just as Creon proclaims he is the one at fault for his son's death, he hears the news that his wife has followed her son and stabbed herself, overcome with grief (68–69). This string of tragedies presented by Sophocles closes on the overarching message of the drama and shows the true tragedy of Antigone as the tragic hero. Antigone's death caused a domino effect, leading to Creon's grief exemplifying how hubris and overzealous grabs for honor can be the seal on a horrid fate.

As she was lead like a criminal to her tomb, Antigone still decreed her own honor to the very gods that have scorned her. Even if she was the first to die in the drama, she is characterized the heroine of the play by her actions and words and cements her place as the tragic hero of her own story. She did not bow before the might of King Creon's own hubris. She secured her own honor and her family's respect in the eyes of heaven. Antigone took pride in her love for her family, even if that pride was what led her to her death. In the end, Antigone's actions of taking mastery over her own fate allowed the steps to fall into place for the rest of the play, falling all the way to the final, bloody reproach of too much pride that Sophocles uses to close the play.

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Free Indirect Style in Salvage the Bones

A Narrative Analysis

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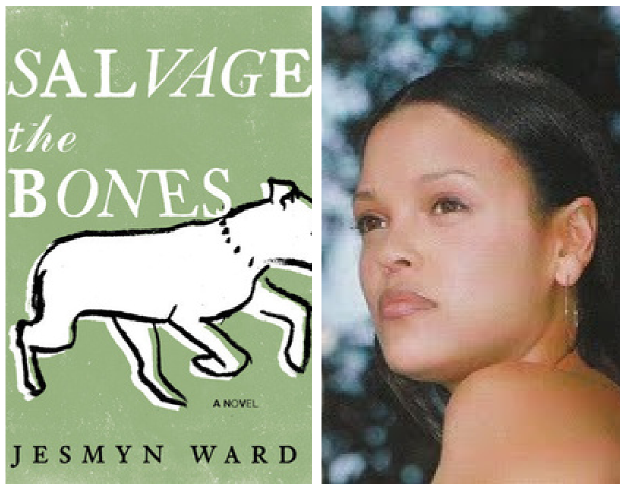

A question every author must ask themselves when they begin a story is how—and consequently *when*—their story shall be told. In most cases, this is nothing more than a decision made between the past tense, and the present tense, and, barring occasionally examples of free indirect discourse, this decision is rarely made diegetic; it rarely reflects the actual in-universe events. The author tells the audience implicitly to suspend their questions about how or when or why and by whom the story is being told in favor of a less limited writing, and therefore reading, experience. This applies even to first person past tense stories, where, in most cases (even within free indirect discourse), there is no context beyond how the author writes.

The line between the past and present is at times, however, a squiggly one, which Jesmyn Ward walks elegantly in her novel *Salvage the Bones*. Although *Salvage the Bones* does not necessarily break any rules in this respect, it bends them freely; her style of free indirect discourse is excellent even if not unusual, per say, and the way Esch's narration mimics her stream of consciousness is subtly fresh; the themes of time and the perception thereof pervade her tale. This theme does not surface, but occasionally submerges—or is otherwise the water itself—as it is nigh always present, even on page one:

Now China is giving like she once took away bestowing where she once stole. She is birthing puppies.

What China is doing is nothing like what Mama did when she had my youngest brother, Junior. Mama gave birth in the house she bore all of us in, here in this gap

in the woods her father cleared. (Ward 1)
Notice the way Ward transitions from the present tense, in paragraph one, to the past tense, in paragraph two, easing the reader from the present to a memory, and then, later that chapter, back to the present, and soon thereafter, back again. This shows Esch's way of conveying how the present reminds her of the past; it is her line of thinking. I am obviously not the first essayist to point out this structure. As others have observed, this structure draws attention to the parallels, and therefore contrasts, of two completely different events in time, and narrates them almost as though they are simultaneous, but for the change in tense. In Cynthia Raices's and Lawrence McCauley's essay "*Salvage The Bones:* A Transcorporeal Bildungsroman," she writes that "The novel's opening scene highlights the ways modern culture generally distinguishes between the human and non-human, the former of which we consider more important. [. . .] Esch's memory establishes this dualism—culture/nature—at the novel's opening . . ." (1). Raices and McCauley brings up the idea of dualism here—and, although the point of her essay might be besides the point of mine, I cannot help but point out that, for an essayist writing about transcorporeality, she seems to be neglecting, also, the way that this stream-of-consciousness-esque structure reflects that very theme, viewing one's life as a complete part of the universe—a paintbrush stroke upon the canvas of spacetime— rather than a temporary object that ceases to exist upon death: as though nature lacks object permanence.

In just a twelve-day excursion into one part of Esch's life, we learn about her whole past and, in some ways, her future. There, as the hurricane approaches and passes by, lies a focal point, where everything that has happened and will happen to her meets. Ward's narration allows us to immerse ourselves in Esch's memory and present, and this effect swells when Esch's stream of consciousness is most reflected by her narration. In the final scene of day six, the tension is so thick you could cut it, owed largely to the manner in which Esch's narration reflections her sense of focus:

The puppies are whining for milk . . . Skeetah lifts them one by one by their necks . . . / "Randall!" Daddy yells . . . / Skeetah releases China from her chain . . . / Daddy's tractor growls from the darkness, bullies the insects . . . (Ward 123)
During this scene, Esch alternates focus between Skeetah with his puppies and Claude with Randall, accelerating in frequency, and mounting pressure. So at the end of the chapter, when Skeetah and Claude both ask "Why?" simultaneously, and Esch asks "Is this what motherhood is?" it is explosive, because we have immersed ourselves in Esch's mind and panicked alongside her; due to the manner in which the narration matches Esch's stream of consciousness and her own perception of time, we have, for five

minutes, become her.

Another fantastic example of this narration style presents itself on the fifth day. As Esch helps her father start the truck, she weaves in and out of memory. “Daddy trails off, his voice dissolving under the metal. The truck broke right after Mama died . . .” (Ward 90) and Esch trails off as along side her father. This effect occurs numerous times during this scene, but its most potent instance is when Esch’s mind wanders after “Junior doesn’t even bother climbing down.” She remembers and ponders, for one long paragraph, memories of Junior’s past, which he may not himself remember. She becomes lost in her ruminations, as do we—until we are jolted back to the present world: “I press, turn, wait. / ‘Stop!’” Fittingly, Esch ponders the significance of memory, during this passage, as well:

Sometimes I wonder if Junior remembers anything, or if his head is like a colander, and the memories of who bottle-fed him, who licked his tears, who mothered him, squeeze through the metal like water to run down the drain, and only leave the present day, his sand holes, his shirtless bird chest, Randall yelling at him: his present washed clean of memory like vegetables washed clean of the dirt they grow in. (Ward 90–91)

Notice the implication of the metaphor closing this passage: our present grows out of our past. Memory is an all-important part of our nature, and therefore our lives, and therefore our minds, and therefore Salvage the Bones—so it’s no wonder Esch swims with us among them so often. Not only does the free indirect discourse style of narration reflect Esch’s character—and therefore indirectly characterize her—but it also reflects the themes of the novel—and therefore characterizes them, as well.

Free indirect discourse, as a narration style, is undeniably powerful. If you have read *Salvage the Bones,* you definitely did not need this essay to prove that to you. The question tackled now is thus: how? And it is easy to imagine how, because every time you do so, you create another answer; when you read *Salvage the Bones*, Esch imagines and reminisces—and you do not have to, because for however long you listen, Esch is real.

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Trapped Minds

Gothic Madness in “The Signalman” and “The Yellow Wallpaper”

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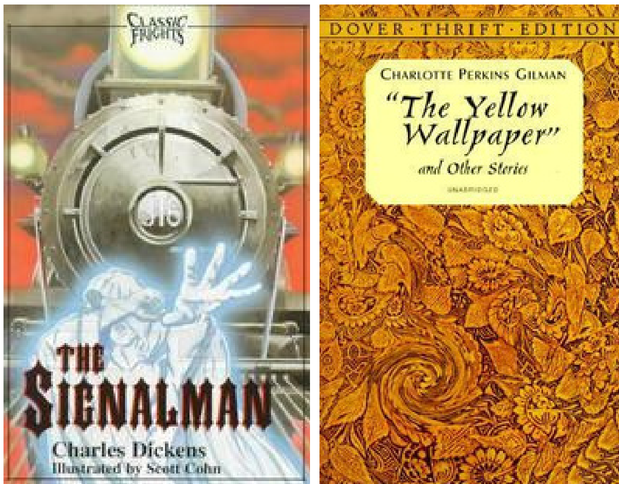

The “Signalman" by Charles Dickens is a short story that depicts the life of a Signalman inhabiting an uncanny railway. He is visited by an ominous and eerie specter that seems to predict death, which the Signalman is helpless to stop. This eventually drives him deeper and deeper into a spiral of madness and paranoia. “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, on the other hand, narrates a story of a young woman who slowly becomes insane trapped under the confines of a room with a haunting wallpaper that drives her mad. The literary devices utilized by the authors gives the reader a powerful view on the gothic themes present in both short stories. Perkins and Dickens share the themes of environmental isolation, relationship influence on descending into madness, and an essence of the supernatural to convey the main narrator’s mental evolution. These elements enable the reader to step into the world of dark romanticism.

The imagery of the physical environment in both stories describes the isolation and progressive insanity of the characters as they seem to be trapped in their surroundings. For instance, in “The Signalman” the narrator's initial description is, “as solitary and dismal place I ever saw” and “crooked prolongation,” (Dickens 17). These words enhance the theme of secludedness. The words solitary and dismal produce an eerie, intensely emotional effect making the reader wonder how these conditions have or will affect the Signalman. The reader can notice the narrator’s feelings and mentality caused by the physical environment. The reader interprets that there is a supernatural element coming into place. “Crooked” highlights something inhuman and unnatural. This relates to the Signalman. His physical appearance and attitude reflect the dark and solitary environment that surrounds him. On the other hand, in “The

Yellow Wallpaper," Perkins-Gillman uses initial violent descriptions of the environment to reflect the narrator's mental state. She does this by using graphic descriptions including associating the wallpaper to human-like characteristics and personifying by stating it "looks like a broken neck—two bulbous eyes," (Perkins-Gillman 12). The imagery is brutal; "broken neck" encourages the reader to relate to death and possibly suicide. This perhaps could be a foreshadowing of the narrator's fate. Furthermore, "bulbous eyes" suggest the person was strangulated, again foreshadowing suicide. From the beginning, the reader senses that this wallpaper is unwelcoming and could deem the fate of the narrator. Secondly, as the narrator spends more time in the room, her observations of the wallpaper develop. The author uses words like repellant and revolting highlighting that the narrator is physically disgusted by the wallpaper. She cannot bear looking at it. This expresses the fact that the room makes her sick and that it is degrading her health.While the descriptions of the Signalman's home produce an isolated and almost demonic effect, the yellow wallpaper takes more of a maniacal, twisted turn. Nevertheless, both isolating environments that the characters are exposed to eventually drive them insane.

Throughout the stories, the relationship of the main characters and others perceptions of them are distinct indicators of their progressive madness. In "The Signalman," there is evidence of concern from the narrator regarding this mental health. For example, by using terms like "his state of mind" (Dickens 11) and resolving to send him to a "medical practitioner" (11) he concludes that the Signalman is surely going insane. Despite his trustworthiness, he does not know how long this "state of mind" will last. The term "state of mind," indicates something delicate that might shatter at any moment. However, using this instead of saying "mad" or "paranoid" denotes that whatever has come over him is unspeakable. Thus, medical attention is required, directly implying he is not in his right mind. Furthermore, after the Signalman's death he is depicted as an "unfortunate man," (21). The narrator seems unsurprised and uses the word "unfortunate" to describe him. This makes it seem as though the Signalman was simply an old man that was going insane. This confirms the idea that the narrator never really took the Signalman seriously and saw him as someone to pity due to his "condition" (11). Alternatively, in "The Yellow Wallpaper" the relationship with her husband John affects how the reader perceives her state of mind. The influence of this relationship could be considered a factor for the narrator's descent into madness. For instance, when John refers to the narrator's changing personality he states, "Nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies,"

(Perkins-Gilman 6). John depicts his wife as simply a “nervous patient” indicating he does not take her very seriously. Furthermore, he emphasizes that she cannot be trusted to take care of herself or otherwise. Moreover, the use of the word mere “fancies” suggests that the narrator's feelings are not important and are unserious complaints. The narrator becomes convinced that there is nothing wrong with her, and that she simply burdens her husband. Additionally, John threatens to send her to a psychiatric hospital if she doesn’t “pick up” faster, comparing her to a child throwing a tantrum. The relationships of the many characters with other people impact their journey into insanity.

The supernatural element in the stories is emphasized through progressive paranoia and insanity in both stories. The supernatural encounters become progressively interactive in both stories, causing the characters to become fixated on them. For example, when the Signalman initially describes his interaction with the Appearance the narrator says, “It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel,” (10). The Signalman calls the Appearance “it” instead of “he” or “she,” making it seem inhuman even though it seems to have a human figure. Additionally, the paranoia is further evidenced when the Signalman asks, “is anything wrong?” (21) after an alarm was given. This indicates doubt and an undertone of fear in his unsettling question. The fact that he does not understand what he is seeing increases his paranoia, guilt, and madness. He is typically a man of reason, nevertheless, he can give “no reason.” Thus, he is almost losing his principles and no longer knows what to abide by due to these frequent visits. Alternatively, in “The Yellow Wallpaper," the supernatural is observed when the narrator describes nobody else knowing the wallpaper but herself. The dim shapes become clearer as the story progresses. Here the narrator makes it evident that she believes there is something more to the wallpaper. When she says “things,” it makes it sound like besides the pattern, there is something akin to a person or people but not quite human living in the wallpaper. “Dim shapes” supports this fact. She is becoming more and more insane as the shapes evolve. Additionally, these shapes take on a human figure. For example, she says, “I am quite sure it is a woman,” (14). At this point it is certain that she has lost her mind as the “figures” have now become an actual person. Now she can see and hear them, which is the last stage of her madness. Signalman’s interactions with the Appearance imply he is becoming paranoid and is hallucinating, thus aware of this spiral. On the other hand, “The Yellow Wallpaper” produces the sense that the narrator is not aware of her progressive delirium which perhaps causes an even more unnerving effect on the reader.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and “The Signalman” written by Charles Dickens are

both short stories that take on various themes that enhance the gothic styles intended by the authors. These include environmental isolation, relationship influence on the main character's sanity, and the supernatural visions that lead the character to a seemingly inevitable fate. These elements are utilized by both authors to vividly portray gothic elements in the 19th century.

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Snatching the Quilts

Legacy, Identity, and the True Keeper of Heritage in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"

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It is widely believed that to understand someone fully, you have to walk a mile in their shoes. However, a stylish girl's shoes have no place in the quaint pasture lands. In Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," Dee's homecoming is not a sweet reunion but rather a confrontation. It is centered on her lack of connection to her past and the impact of her new identity on her place in the family. Mama, the head of the house, struggles to navigate her daughter's new disposition and wild demands. Going through this discouraging family interaction, Mama finally recognizes Dee's hypocrisy and rejection of their history, commodification of their family legacies, and unfair sisterly dynamic. All these revelations lead Mama to the realization of her other daughter, Maggie, and her value and role in keeping her culture and legacy alive.

Early in the story, Dee's offhanded dismissal of her past and where she has come from forces Mama to see how Dee has intentionally separated herself from the family. This is in contrast to Maggie, who recognized the value and stayed close to their roots. When Dee goes to the extreme of introducing herself using her chosen name, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo, she explains that the reason she picked it was because she is unable to "bear . . . being named after the people who oppress [her]" (Walker 4) while embracing her so-called oppressor's values concerning money and status. Walker lays bare Dee's insolence and abandonment of her family's culture. This is because, in reality, her name had a familial tie, being passed down from generation to generation. The implications of this well-intended but misguided action take no account of the rich home roots that Dee already has. A feeling of division has been prevalent in Dee since she was young.

She struggled to find her place in the world when she was a child living with Mama, which led to her trading her name for something seemingly meaningful but hollow in significance. The proof of her rejection is confirmed when Dee leaves the home in a fury. Dee lashes out, proclaiming, “You ought to try to make something of yourself too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live, you would never know it.” (8) This hurtful, spiteful, and self-righteous advice concludes Dee's views on her own culture, a fascinating yet unsophisticated way of life. While she is willing to consume it, Dee has no intention of embracing and cherishing the memories of something she finds outdated. If she were to honor such a culture, she would lose the superiority over her family that she cultivated after leaving the house. Ironically, she treats her mother and sister with such blatant disrespect while she struggles with her own attachment and desire to procure and preserve their household items.

In addition, Dee's entitled comfort in asking for treasured household goods and intentions with them inspires Mama to consider who is more deserving of the family heirlooms. When wrapping up the newly claimed dasher, Mama "took it for a moment in [her] hands," reflecting on the marks "where thumbs and fingers had sunk in the wood" (5). Through this detail, Walker evokes a sense of nostalgia in Mama, challenging her view of where meaningful tools belong. Dee's choice to use it as a decorative piece contrasts with its relevance in her and Maddie's lives. This tool is nothing but a decorative ornament to Dee. It is a valued instrument rich with memories, touched, and imbued with power for Maggie. Similarly, when Mama informs Dee that the hand-sewn quilts she asked for were intended to go to Maggie, Dee explodes with rage, stating how "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they would be rags," contrary to her, who would "hang them . . ." (7). This contrast sheds light on the importance of Maggie preserving the family's heritage through use, unlike Dee, whose only intention is to exhibit and gawk at the quaint home-sewn quilt as if her home were a museum.

As the story progresses, the injustice of the treatment of Maggie becomes vividly apparent, and Mama experiences a breakthrough. When the defeated younger sister gives in to Dee, accepting her influence over her mother, Mama notices how her tone is similar to ". . . somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her" (7). Mama stops and reflects on the lives of her children through this insight. Because Maggie is not as forthright, something Dee and Mama share, she has often been overlooked in the house; Dee's passions bulldoze her opinions and feelings. This causes Mama to place more weight on the question of who deserves the quilts. Should they remain in use with Maggie or be displayed on the

wall of Dee's home? Mama's sudden realization causes her to do something she has never done before. "When she looked at [Maggie] it was like something hit [her] in the top of [the] head . . ." and she "hugged Maggie to [herself], then dragged her on into the room" and "snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands . . ." (Walker 7). Mama and her children's relationship changes as she develops a new appreciation for the once-disregarded Maggie. By referring to Dee as "Miss Wangero," her superior role over her sister is dissolved, leaving her nothing but a stranger to Maggie and Mama. On the other hand, Maggie is welcomed into Mama's arms and all that her culture entails. Together, they find contentment in their way of life in each other's arms.

There was no anticipation of Mama's epiphany that Maggie was the worthy daughter to receive the torch to keep the family flame lit. It was Dee's blatant arrogance and ego that finally convinced Mama that she was not only unworthy but also no longer part of the family. Although it is a harsh truth to face, Mama's character can no longer deny the reality of her relationships with her daughters, and she does what is one of the hardest things to do when it comes to family; she moves on.

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Madness and Metaphysics

The Birth of Philosophy in *Hamlet*

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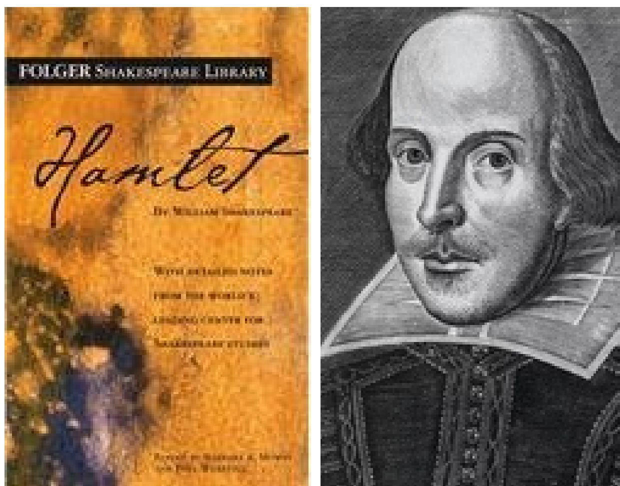

Throughout literary works from across the world, authors have explored the limits of the nature of truth. Often, their characters test the parameters of fact, allowing both the audience and the writers a means of decoding the metaphysical qualities of *veritas*, a journey that both challenges and fortifies human character and intellect. However, in most of these pursuits of universal truth, one aspect remains constant: the explorer is not at peace. To navigate the treacherous waters of reality, the wayfarer must be slightly troubled—if not, everybody would take the voyage. David with the Psalms, Dostoevsky with *Crime and Punishment,* Nietzschewith *Ecce Homo:* all these writers first suffered trauma, be it through madness or external tragedies, in order to analyze the true bounds of reality. When traveling across the icy river of actuality, it is necessary for an individual to break through the thin layer of support and momentarily suffer from the freezing shock of full immersion to comprehend the cloudy waters. Through his incredible sense of perception, William Shakespeare realized the necessity of unrest in uncovering truth. Therefore, in his insightful plays, Shakespeare's characters suffer through times of astonishing struggle to best understand their selves and the purposes of their lives. In Shakespeare's work *Hamlet*, the battles fought by Hamlet, Ophelia, and Claudius against troubled minds allow the characters to encounter profound truths regarding the nature of reality.

In Hamlet's war against a volatile psyche, the conflicted Dane emerges with a newfound philosophy that grants relief in an inconsistent universe. From every angle, the prince faces a distinct attack on his rationale, leading to an "inability or unwillingness to hold a consistent

position."Hamlet's deficiency of reliability in thought develops into an erratic attitude in which "the world presents itself to him as an irrational immediate experience" (Sypher 750). The moral groundwork of the scholar's world crumbles in weeks, beginning with the collapse of his home structure. However, as is the case with most volatile intellectuals, Hamlet's disillusionment regarding his mother-aunt and father-uncle infects his general worldview; the overturning of the governing statutes of his family leads to mistrust in the basic yet divine building blocks that maintain society. Though the instantaneous loss of faith in mankind may appear to be a result of detachment, one may argue that it is rather an effect of Hamlet's shocking encounter with the raw nature of civilization. When temporary labels and transient relationships no longer hold real depth in a person's mind, the crude, unfiltered truth of entropy presents itself. Hamlet's fixation with the limitless expanse of reality expresses itself through a fascination with death, arguably and ironically the greatest mystery of life. In his most famous soliloquy, the prince, in a theatrical and revelatory effort, attempts to discern whether it is preferable "to be" when one must "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" or "not to be" and find solace from the troubles of the world through the embrace of a "bare bodkin" (III.i.64–84). Hamlet's presentation, though intended to express a show of hopeless despair, displays a key intermediate step in Hamlet's recovery from the initial shock of the recent regicide and incest that so notably occupies his mind. The purpose of life becomes particularly obscure when the objects in which one's faith resides reveal themselves to be fragile and transient. Therefore, in Hamlet's understandably dramatic cry for attention, the scholar reveals that his innocence no longer remains. However, the void this doubt permits becomes a medium through which the intellectual may experience spiritual transfiguration. As the end of his life draws near, Hamlet suddenly embraces a stoic perspective, recognizing that there are certain "boundaries in which human action, human judgment are enclosed" (Mack 125). Hamlet's guideless journey through the intangible expanse of reality terminates when the prince finds his footing in the immovable, eternally consistent being of God. The enlightened prince surrenders the reigns of fate to the Creator of the universe, allowing him to find solace in being for the first time since his father's murder: a redemptive experience. The pilgrimage that the scholar embarks on allows the troubled man to see the world as it is for the first time in his life, breaking through the narrow-minded lens of feigned knowledge and entering into the truest form of wisdom: submission to the will of God. Therefore, when comparing the beginning and end of the work, the stark contrast, even through the presence of incredible

tragedy, in Hamlet's understanding of where his trust should reside displays that Hamlet undergoes significant spiritual maturity, a sign of an elevated comprehension of the nature of reality.

Next, Ophelia's encounter with madness provides the young lover with a greater comprehension of her surroundings than ever before. The persona of Ophelia is drastically misunderstood, with scholars labeling her as a "pathetic beauty,"a true bastardization of the ever-complicated, ever-troubled young woman's complex intellect (Camden 247). Ophelia's madness is not a sudden occurrence caused by brief discomfort; rather, her grasp of reality bleeds away with each stabbing remark made by Hamlet. Suddenly, insanity assumes total control of the loyal gentlewoman when the tragic yet delivering death of her father transpires. However, Ophelia's madness is not a separate class from that of Hamlet: the woman maintains a certain level of methodology in her thoughts, leading those who analyze her actions to find that Ophelia's lunacy allows her, for the first time, to encounter true freedom from binding societal constraints. For example, in her demonstration conducted for Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes, Ophelia reveals through her discussion of "fennel" and "columbines" a crude, unfiltered knowledge of the corrupted situation in Denmark (IV.v.204). There is much to say when considering the apparent leap from the mild-mannered young lady to the inventive discord-raiser that occurs in several pages. To begin, the supposed "leap" does not occur at all. Rather, the woman's sudden loss of decorum represents her gradual climb, or regression, to an elevated state of reason. From the start of the play, Ophelia realizes the fleeting nature of secular love, a revelation made possible through Hamlet's repeated offenses against the young woman's adoration for the prince. The vacillating demonstrations of emotion shown to Ophelia demonstrate to her the ever-present instability in the fallen world. However, the true nature of transience reveals itself through the death of Polonius. With the fatality of a paternal stronghold, Ophelia's mind deliberately flees the tangible world, shifting to a plane in which the changing constructs of the world no longer hold worth. This unanchoring from the palpable causes the seeming loss in etiquette, a conscious decision likely deriving from the woman's discovery of the needlessness of feigning loyalty to a malevolent authority. Then, Ophelia's life comes to a sudden end when the waters of a brook drift away, carrying the melancholy lover's final breath. This incident, though it "may not have been deliberate," still falls into the blame of the girl as she "made no attempt to save herself" (Camden 254). Many view Ophelia's death as an erratic, quick-tempered decision that resulted in the grievous despise of an innocent life. While

the event is undeniably tragic, one may argue that the decision was not unplanned but rather the final step in Ophelia's intentional journey to disengage from the arbitrary nature of life. Ophelia's decision to detach herself from inconsistency derives from a weariness with the perpetually altering nature of society, an idea beautifully symbolized through her passing in the ever-shifting ripples of a brook. Therefore, Ophelia's passing indicates an extreme repercussion of the adoption of the spiritually mature desire to disallow the fluctuating nature of reality from maltreating her mental state: an idea meditated throughout philosophies and religions across the world. However, in this profound idea, Ophelia loses herself, leading to a complete separation from the world around her and the front of madness. Therefore, through Ophelia's tortured experience with the world around her, she encounters an incredibly insightful ideology. Though it eventually leads to her demise, the knowledge that Ophelia gains is nothing less than astonishing in its examination of the nature of the world around her.

Finally, Claudius's struggle with guilt leads the king to consider moral truth for the first time throughout the play. The man's corrupted nature is apparent from the beginning of the play due to Hamlet's orations: dialogues fueled by emotionally charged disdain. However, it is the tortured brother's visceral response after the showing of the play that reveals the extent of the corruption that plagues the man's soul. When recounting the events that have led to his fantastic show of guilt, Claudius lays claim to the "primal eldest curse" of "a brother's murder" (III.iii.41–42). The nature of this crime shows an incredible lack of wisdom from the king. Rather than remaining content with the countless blessings already present in his life, the murderer trespasses his creed and morality for the temporary satisfaction of power. This overstepping of his own belief displays a true lack of intelligence in that, if Claudius were truly an intellectual, mature leader, his reason would have overcome his passionate desire to gain authority. However, after the play, Claudius displays a momentary expression of grief, realizing the "nauseating" nature of "the murder of his brother": a feeling that leads to the "[attempt] to pray" (Beatty 244). This recognition, made possible through the intense pressure placed on the king by the newfound familiarity of Hamlet's awareness of his crime, allows the reader to observe the first spiritually keen action taken by Claudius: prayer. The king's decision to consult a higher power demonstrates a remarkably perceptive understanding of the nature of his soul, which is that his present decisions determine its eternal residence. Therefore, even in his mere attempt to reconcile with God, Claudius displays a pearl of

prospicient wisdom regarding the nature of the afterlife and eternity. However, the king's encounter with truth ultimately does not impact him enough to cause any significant shift in action, a theory supported by his "unrepentant" attitude and his resistance to "forfeit the advantages he has gained through his crime" (Hacht 204). Therefore, though Claudius understands the burden of his crime, his inability to reconcile with his Creator and nephew displays the unfortunate truth that knowledge does not always correlate with action. The implications of his malevolent inaction, though, appear through his demise, with his desire to cling to control ultimately resulting in self-damnation. Claudius's recognition of the implications of his Cain-like murder, a realization made possible through the intense guilt and anxiety that crowd the king's mind, reveals that a troubled psyche often leads to a more resounding comprehension of the nature of reality, regardless of the actual transformative results that come from this understanding.

Throughout *Hamlet*, characters of varying backgrounds, temperaments, and ethics encounter profound truths regarding the nature of society, morality, and spirituality through confrontations with extreme dismay. Though the individuals take separate approaches to the implementation of the divulgences uncovered to them, the intimate, metamorphic nature of the encounters with these sublime disclosures is undeniable. Therefore, as is the case with philosophers and intellectuals throughout the span of history, Shakespeare's brilliant perception allows his readers to uncover the origin of most metaphysical theories: the convergence of human intellect with unrelenting distress.

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The Architecture of Cruelty

Dehumanization and Power in Orwell's *1984*

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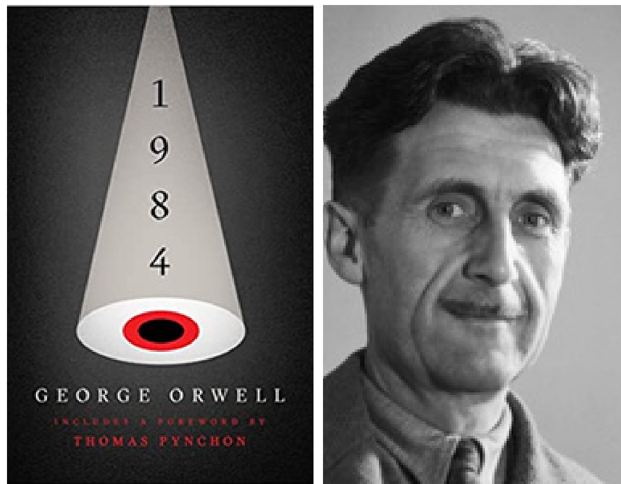

The concept of cruelty, or the explicit infliction of physical and emotional harm on one group to another, serves as a driving force in Orwell's *1984*. *1984* explores the system of totalitarianism through the lens of Winston Smith, a member of the lowest branch of society. Displayed through Smith's cognitive dissonance with the Party's regime, the theme of cruelty becomes a central one. Throughout the novel, The Party suppresses the civil liberties of the Oceanic citizens by mass censoring information, deterring critical thinking, and quelling logical reasoning. Shown through the facets of absolutism and oppression, cruel acts are a fundamental tool that allows perpetrators to manipulate and eradicate individualism in the victims.

The theme of cruelty is deeply interconnected with The Party's relentless absolutism which facilitates manipulation and lack of individuality through many mechanisms. In the novel, Big Brother is able to wield unchecked authority through his control in the behavioral, fact, word, and emotional realms. This uncharted level of power allows for perpetrators to enforce unfair punishments and lifestyles on members of lower branches of society. Absolutism allows the Party to control every aspect of life, especially facts and history. Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth is specifically to alter published news articles to better align the Party's rhetoric. This would involve "rectifying[ing] the original figures by making them agree with the later ones" or changing Oldspeak to Newspeak (43). This consistent perpetuation of altering historical records allowed The Party to undermine perception and individual belief, replacing independence with conformity and

conviction with doublethink. The framework of absolutism is continued by the omnipresent nature of surveillance by the Party and the Thought Police. Totalitarian control is epitomized by the ability to manipulate truth and suppress individual perception with contradictory thought systems. This tense climate of absolute surveillance causes even personal displays of anxiety, or "facecrimes" to be a punishable offense by the Thought Police (62). Big Brother also mandates telescreens in each home and worksite, which ensures not only that citizens are continuously watched, but that any variance is punished brutally. This framework of absolutism shows that manipulation and conformity are inextricably linked and are integral to the Novel's central motivator of cruelty.

Physical and psychological cruelty function as essential mechanisms of oppression, allowing the Party to manipulate and ultimately eradicate individualism in Oceania.The physical torment is highlighted in torture chambers in the Ministry of Love, where Winston is subjected to severe physical pain and agony when he is confined to a room with his greatest fear of rats. The torture placed on him for being a thought-criminal is about far more not simply inflicting pain, but rather calculated to reduce him to a submissive mind. To further ensure that rebellion against the Party is an unthinkable feat, the Party employs relentless mental manipulation, using psychological cruelty that forces individuals to police their own thoughts out of fear of the Thought Police. The fusion of physical and psychological cruelty creates an environment where oppression is absolute in nature and the possibility of variance or resistance is unthinkable at best and obliterated at worst. For the perpetrator of cruelty, the Party specifically, these acts of cruelty far surpass the tools of control but cross over into expressions of domination and power. The Party is designed to underscore absolute authority and unchallenged hierarchy. The system of oppression that is the very premise of the regime highlights its complete detachment from moral constraints and its deep-seated goal to crush the spirit of each citizen into submission. Conversely, for the victim, the connection between cruelty and oppression is defined by the fragility of human resilience and vulnerability. Smith's journey from quiet dissent to complete compliance shows the damaging effects of cruelty in the long term. Winston's entire sense of self was dismantled by the psychological torment and physical torture inflicted on him by the regime, which coerced him to betray his underlying beliefs. This dynamic between the regime and the victim highlights the catastrophic nature of oppression and cruelty, causing them to destroy the humanity of the perpetrator and the autonomy of the victim.

In the novel *1984*, Orwell illustrates how

cruelty, in both psychological and physical forms, serves as a vital instrument of absolutism and oppression, allowing the Party to manipulate and obliterate individualism. Through relentless physical torture, such as the trials Winston endures in the Ministry of Love, the regime can break the optimism, empathy, and creativity of the human mind into its innate base of survival and compliance. Concurrently, Orwell shows how psychological cruelty—showcased through pervasive surveillance, alterations of truth, and enforced uses of doublethink—can erode the mind's capacity for self-awareness and expression. The duality of the regime's control ensures that its power is total, not simply over actions but over the body in totality, emotions, and thoughts included. Through both elements of cruelty, Orwell supports the claim that if you can control the mind and the body, you can control the will. Ultimately, Orwell's depiction of this systemic cruelty reveals that cruelty is an indispensable tool in the cycle of dehumanization and fuels the vigor of the regime.

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Weakness, Interrogation, and Conflict

Catalysts of Mob Mentality in *The Crucible*

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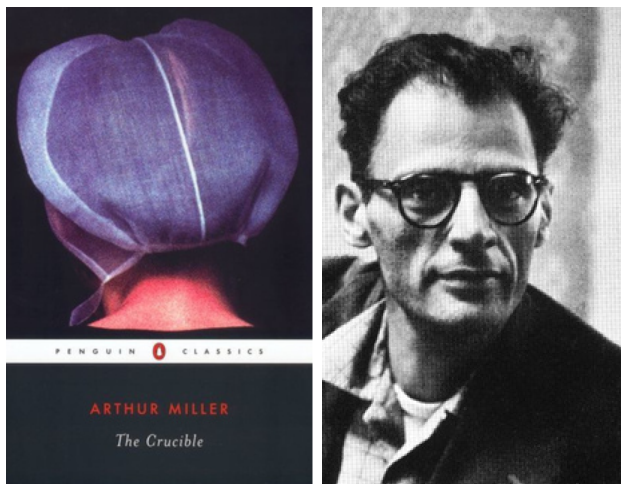

The Crucible, by playwright Arthur Miller, is set in 1692 Salem Massachusetts, the era of overwhelming, drastic witchcraft allegations. The majority of the accusations in the play occur through mob mentality: a large group following a belief, true or false, with a hunger to gain more power. The power of mob mentality can become limitless if the so-called "mob" has enough followers. Miller effectively portrays this power throughout the play with his incorporation of characterization, allowing the reader to take a closer look at certain characters and the way that they seemingly effortlessly join the mob of accusers without even realizing it. Through Miller's purposeful use of stage narration and syntax, several characters are revealed to join the mob mentality that plagues Salem in the 17th century.

Miller creates the character Mary Warren to portray the influence that weak and fearful qualities have on entry into mob mentality through his use of stage narration. When the audience first meets Mary she is a part of a group of girls dancing in the woods. Miller uses stage narration to present her as an anxious, scared character when, through stage narration, this is exemplified: "MARY WARREN, *with hysterical fright!* What's got her?" (26). Miller incorporates this line in the beginning of the play, in Act One, to create this original characterization of Mary. This underlying fear in her character is what ultimately causes Mary Warren to join the mob of girls accusing others of witchcraft later in the play. In Act Two, the woman who Mary works for,

Goody Proctor, gets accused of witchcraft because of a poppet with a needle inside of it that is in her possession. When John Proctor, Goody Proctor's husband, asks Mary to help him prove his wife's innocence in trial, Miller uses stage narration to emphasize the anxiety and fear Mary feels when responding with, "MARY WARREN, *in terror:* I cannot, they'll turn on me—" (85). With this stage narration, Miller puts another emphasis on the overall weak and fearful qualities of Mary's character. The line that Mary says displays her fear of punishment from the girls. Miller's incorporation of syntax through his use of the dash at the end of Mary's dialogue additionally portrays her fear; her stuttering illustrates her discomfort, and anxiety. Once at trial, Mary is attempting to emphasize that Abigail, the young woman who accused Goody Proctor, is lying about her accusations, and that she and the others have never actually seen any witchery or the devil. However, Abigail begins to cause a scene amongst her and the other girls that Miller illustrates through stage narration with, "*she and all the girls run to one wall, shielding their eyes*" and, "*as though cornered, they let out a gigantic scream.*" It is at this point that Mary Warren's weakness comes to light, and her fear takes over. It is at this point that she joins the mob, which Miller portrays with, "*and Mary, as though infected, opens up her mouth and screams with them*" (120). Through the character of Mary Warren, Miller uses stage narration to put an initial emphasis on her fear and anxiety toward the other girls in the town accusing people of witchcraft. Miller's stage narration also displays the character's weakness. It is these qualities created by Miller that ultimately cause Mary to fall to the mob and go against what she knows is morally right.

Miller creates the character of Tituba to present a character who falls into mob mentality because of pressure and interrogation due to her role as a scapegoat, as Miller illustrates through his use of syntax and stage narration. With Tituba's introduction into the play as Parris' slave, Miller's use of stage narration immediately labels her as a possible scapegoat with, "*and his Negro slave enters . . . her slave sense has warned her that, as always, trouble in this house eventually lands on her back*" (14). As several girls from the town are being accused of witchcraft for the first time, they immediately deflect and blame Tituba, as seen through Miller's use of syntax when he has Abigail scream, "ABIGAIL: She made me do it! She made Betty do it!" (49). Miller's use of multiple exclamation marks in the previous quote illustrates the emphasis behind Abigail's accusation and her attempt to prove it. Shortly after Abigail's accusation, Tituba responds, with equal exclamation from Miller, "TITUBA: No, no, sir, I don't truck with no Devil!"(49), to emphasize Tituba's innocence. Tituba then faces immense

pressure and serious interrogation, as Miller illustrates using syntax Parris threatens, "PARRIS: You will confess yourself or I will take you out and whip you to your death, Tituba!" (50). Miller's incorporation of exclamation marks display the interrogatory qualities of the dialogue toward Tituba and its direct influence on her ultimately folding, and joining the mob. Miller illustrates this directly with,

HALE. You have confessed yourself to witchcraft . . .
TITUBA. *Deeply relieved*. Oh, God bless you, Mr. Hale! (52)

In this line, Miller utilizes stage narration to end the process of Tituba's entrance into the mob. Miller's characterization of Tituba as a scapegoat due to her role as a slave renders her vulnerable to witchcraft allegations, and eventually causing her to join the mob in an attempt to save her own life. The use of syntax paired with stage narration allows Miller to portray this effectively.

John Proctor is a character in the play created by Miller to illustrate a character joining the mob as a last resort to save his wife, as displayed through his incorporation of conflict. Miller first introduces Proctor as a strong, almost impenetrable man, as shown in, "He was the kind of man— powerful of body, even-tempered, and not easily led—" (26). When his wife, Elizabeth Proctor, falls victim to the witchcraft allegations, and gets accused by the very young women whom Proctor had an affair with, Abigail Williams, Proctor becomes furious. Miller portrays through his use of stage narration and syntax when he has Proctor yell, "PROCTOR, *angrily, bewildered*: And what signifies a needle!" (79). Miller's use of an exclamation mark instead of a question mark portrays Proctor's infatuation with the accusation toward his wife. Shortly after Elizabeth is taken, in his state of confusion and madness, John is already attempting to come up with ways to take the blame away from his wife and place them onto him. Miller illustrates Proctor's urgency to save his wife through his use of syntax and repetition, as he screams, "PROCTOR: My wife will never die for me! I will bring your guts into your mouth but that goodness will not die for me!" (85–86). Proctor goes to court to try and save his wife as well as the wives of many of his friends who are also wrongly accused. He defends the women, despite facing tough criticism, and even confesses to lechery with Abigail Williams. Miller illustrates the significance of his confession with his use of stage narration and syntax as Proctor's character folds: "PROCTOR, *his voice about to break, and his shame great. . . . Then, as though to cry out is his only means of speech left*: She thinks to dance with me on my wife's grave!" Proctor's need to save his wife drives him to confess to one of the most shameful crimes a man could commit in the church. "PROCTOR: I have rung the doom

of my good name—" (113). However, when asked to confirm the validity of Proctor's confession, Elizabeth lies to protect John's name, convicting both of them. They stand in the courtroom, both of them, guilty. Scheduled to be hanged, John gets to talk to Elizabeth, to whom he confesses that he is considering confessing to save his life. Miller portrays Proctor's desperation with his use of stage narration when Proctor admits, "PROCTOR, *with great force of will, but not quite looking at her*: . . . I would confess to them, Elizabeth" (137). Proctor's willingness to confess to the church to save his life, while the clear choice, is extremely out of character for him. Miller begins outlining Proctor as almost impenetrable: a man who runs by his own rules. Miller uses stage narration and syntax to illustrate the impact that mob mentality can have on even the strongest of men. John Proctor confessing to save himself and his wife displays this.

Throughout the play, Miller constructs the characters Mary Warren, Tituba, and John Proctor to illustrate the influence and impact of mob mentality on innocent people's lives. Miller incorporates both stage narration and syntax to illustrate and enhance the turning points that cause these characters to fall to the power of the mob mentality: even if it is out of character.

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The Haunting of Repressed Memories

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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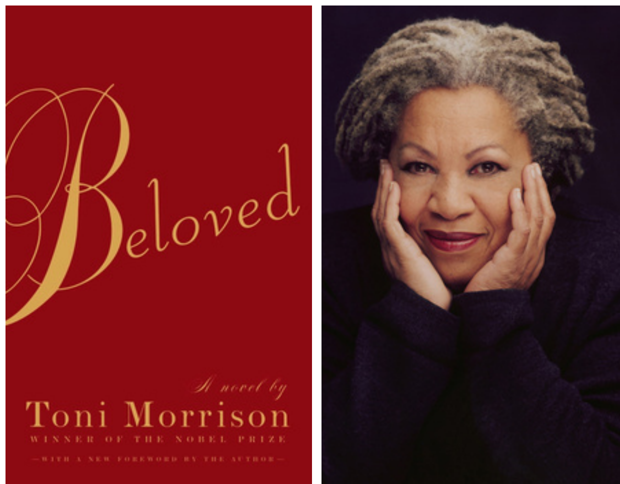

With a haunting epigram, Toni Morrison precedes her novel by honoring the countless lives lost to slavery: "Sixty million and more" (1). She advocates for those that remain forgotten, nameless, and overlooked to emphasize the relentless infiltration the past inflicts upon the present and to foreshadow Beloved's legacy: an embodiment of erasure. Throughout *Beloved*, Morrison explores the hauntological resurfacing of repressed memories and their influence on one's affective and somatic state through the protagonist Sethe. Sethe's traumatic past as a slave continues to haunt her through the manifestation of Beloved, forcing her to confront her painful history wherein she commits infanticide and subsequently fragmenting her identity as a mother. Luana De Souza Sutter explores this complex notion of repressed memories in her article "Rememorying Slavery: Intergenerational Memory and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* (2003)," illustrating the continuous effect of slavery that exceeds confinement to one's past and carries forward through the notion of inherited memory. Both Morrison and Sutter emphasize the cyclical and familial nature of suffering and argue that repressed trauma derails linear pathways of healing. Thus, Morrison elucidates Sethe's traumatic past as a slave through the manifestation of Beloved to highlight the inevitable psychological fragmentation and loss of autonomy inflicted by the cyclical nature of repressed trauma.

Sethe's relationship with her repressed memories, wherein both slavery and infanticide haunt her, act as an inescapable barrier that inhibits her from healing and

leads to a destabilization of the psyche. At the start of *Beloved*, Sethe exists in a suspended present, for her trauma prevents her from progressing and leaves her ontologically paralyzed by the weight of her past. As her trauma continuously burdens her affective state, any attempt to recall it becomes unbearable, leading to a lack of realization that Beloved is her once child. Sethe becomes startled after realizing "the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling" for "every mention of her past life hurt" (63). Evidently, as those around her actively delve into their past, she remains unable to confront that which she has suppressed. Morrison illustrates that as Sethe's longing for memory and remembrance grows, her fear of emotional damage leaves her immobilized. In Beloved's presence, Sethe further destabilizes, feeling "Beloved's soft new hand on her shoulder" and looking "into her eyes," before witnessing that the "longing she saw there was bottomless . . . some plea barely in control" (62). Morrison mirrors the yearning for both healing and acceptance that Sethe experiences as her grief reflects at her through Beloved's eyes. The psychological dwelling not only invades Sethe mentally but spatially as well, through Morrison's concept of "rememory." Facing her memories through physical spaces, Sethe suggests that despite the instability of memory, "places are still there" for she argues "if a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world," signifying the persistence of trauma in one's internalized and externalized state of being (42). Sutter further explores this notion by asserting that rememory is "an immortal recollection whose immunity to time assures an enduring presence in its place of origin," and illustrating that "rememory allows the past to remain active and accessible" (329). This classifies Sethes's resurfacing memories as invasive hauntings that infiltrate her sense of reality and dislocate her identity, further distancing her from her maternal authority. As she navigates through the reappearance of her past, Morrison illustrates the cyclical nature of history on one's autonomy.

Beloved's emergence as a physical manifestation of Sethe's repressed past forces her to confront the memories she attempts to bury, ultimately consuming her world and fracturing her autonomy as the cycle of generational trauma persists. As Beloved's presence intensifies, Sethe becomes consumed by her past, interpreting Beloved's return as an opportunity for redemption rather than healing. Sethe realizes that Beloved is more than just a stranger to her, remarking "I made that song up," after Beloved hums a tune, and recognizing that she "made it up and sang it to [her] children" (170). Though Sethe accepts Beloved as the reincarnation of the daughter she once had, she remains confined—unable to break free from her

guilt. Though unable to "lay down . . . in peace" prior to Beloved's arrival, she now "sleep[s] like the drowned," asserting, "She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine" (193). Morrison illustrates her transient sense of peace for her relationship with Beloved mirrors the trauma it attempts to resolve. Rather than granting her forgiveness, Beloved exemplifies resistance, leading to Sethe's emotional turmoil. She faces manipulation from her daughter, underscoring how repressed trauma consumes an individual when left unmended. As Sutter similarly argues, "rememory is not simply the act of recalling the past, but a re-experiencing of trauma that resists closure and reemerges through embodiment and repetition," suggesting that rather than healthily processing the pain she experiences, Sethe is forced to relive it, prompting her to feel a loss of autonomy as an individual and a mother (66). Sethe's trauma returns in the form of Beloved, a rememory that dictates her emotional state and leaves her powerless. Morrison illustrates that her lack of agency results in psychological deterioration as she oscillates between guilt and longing. Morrison blurs the lines between the past and present to generate a sense of temporal distortion that intensifies Sethe's dissociative state. Thus, Morrison conveys that a violent manifestation of one's repressed past reshapes the self and disrupts one's independence.

While Sethe's trauma persistently destabilizes her ontological state, Morrison highlights the import of confrontation, acting as a means of reclamation and providing assertion to one's autonomy. Although Beloved's presence consumes Sethe throughout the novel, her eventual rejection of Beloved signifies a shift in her assertiveness, prompting her to reclaim her autonomy and signifying the beginning of cognitive restructuring. Toward the end of the work, Sethe physically distances herself from the spectral figure of Beloved and metaphorically distances herself from the past that has confined her thus far. Sethe understands that "although she has claim, she is not claimed" and realizes that "she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her" following her metaphysical disappearance (265). Through Sethe's development, Morrison illustrates that the reclamation of one's identity is necessary to reconstruct the fragmented pieces of one's being and heal the psyche. She further enforces Sethe's need to remain autonomous, for that her past trauma remains a failed attempt to assert her identity as a mother yearning to protect her children. Morrison acknowledges Sethe's violence as a desperate attempt to resist dehumanization towards her and her children as Paul D remarks "She ain't crazy. She loves those children. She was trying to out-hurt the hurter" (228). Morrison reframes Sethe's past to suggest that despite seemingly inescapable memories, healing begins through the confrontation rather than the resistance of

the past—a journey that embraces repressed memories rather than succumbing to their hauntological nature. As Paul D asserts, "We got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow," Sethe begins to shift her outlook on her future to one filled with possibilities and restores her independence (262). Though trauma is ultimately enduring, Morrison elucidates the import of resisting psychological consumption of one's identity by one's past to reclaim a sense of autonomy.

Ultimately, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* delves into the resurfacing of repressed traumatic memories and their effect on the self, as seen through Sethe's acknowledgment of Beloved as a manifestation of her past. Morrison portrays Beloved as a haunting embodiment of Sethe's failed attempts to combat slavery through infanticide as a means of protection, underscoring the weight of trauma upon the individual psyche. Beloved's presence both consumes Sethe's being yet also leads to an eventual act of reclamation, suggesting that while trauma is everlasting, it is only possessive when one allows it to be. Through Sethe's recognition of her humanity beyond her actions, Morrison suggests that healing is possible through confrontation. Although the cyclical nature of repressed memories continues to dislocate the identities of suffering individuals, autonomy may be restored if asserted. While history will continue to have a haunting effect on the present and trauma will pass through generations as inherited, *Beloved* insists that freedom is achieved by acknowledging one's past without letting it define oneself.

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Birth Revisited

Morrison's Use of Childbirth Imagery to Portray Beloved as Sethe's Reborn Daughter

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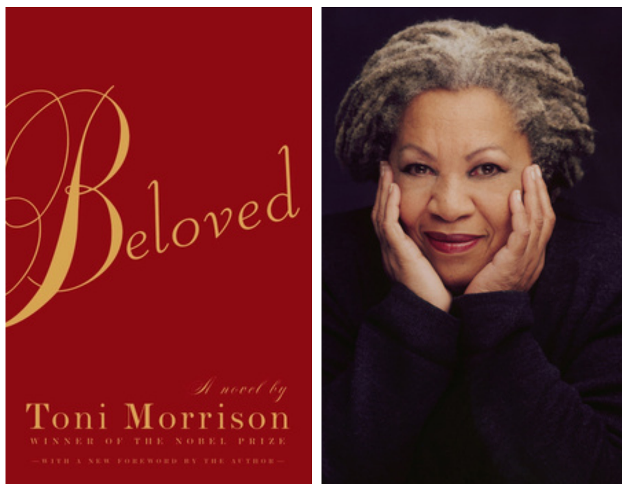

During childbirth, the amniotic sac, which is full of fluid that sustains a fetus, bursts and is referred to as a woman's water "breaking." In *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, Morrison uses the extended metaphor of childbirth, allusions to newborn babies, and a simile to suggest that the fully dressed woman, named "Beloved," is Sethe's deceased child and establish that Sethe cannot control the change that Beloved will bring to her life and household.

Morrison, through the extended metaphor of childbirth, connects the fully dressed woman to Sethe as a re-emergence of her dead baby, both of whom bear the name "Beloved." As soon as Sethe "got close enough to see the face, [her] bladder filled to capacity; . . . there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb" (61). Sethe's sight of Beloved's face caused her uncontrollable urination, metaphorically connecting this to a "breaking womb," suggesting Sethe was giving birth to Beloved again. One of the first signs of imminent birth is the water breaking. This comparison contributes to the idea that Beloved is the same Beloved that Sethe killed long before; and in her second coming, Sethe must complete a second birth of her, revisiting her traumatic past.

By alluding to babies and youthfulness, Morrison presents Beloved as a newborn, thus strengthening the idea that Sethe has just given birth to her and that they share a mother-daughter connection. Beloved is described as "sopping wet and breathing shallow, . . . negotiating the weight of her eyelids, . . . new skin, lineless and smooth, . . . her voice was so low and rough" (60–62). When babies are minutes old, they are similarly "sopping wet and breathing shallow." They will find themselves "negotiating the weight of [their] eyelids" as they adjust to their exhaustion and new

sensations. These allusions seek to portray Beloved as like a newborn in these features and mannerisms.

The metaphor of Sethe's water breaking creates an image of a childbirth-like event. The author describes Beloved as having "new skin" and a "low and rough" voice. A major characteristic of youth, especially babies, is how fresh and smooth their skin is, unblemished by the world or by hardship. The description of her voice suggests years of disuse and can be seen as alluding to the croaks and cries of a newborn. These allusions to youth and the characteristics of a newborn baby highlight that Beloved may in fact be a newborn child, just entering the world, and surrounded by unfamiliar stimulants. This forces Sethe to confront her past and the idea that Beloved may truly be her child.

Morrison also uses a simile to develop the idea that Sethe cannot stop the force that is Beloved from enacting change in her life. Seth describes her urination as "an emergency that [is] unmanageable, . . . like flooding the boat when Denver was born . . . there was no stopping now" (61). Comparing Sethe's emergency to her water breaking on "the boat when Denver was born" establishes that Beloved's manifestation is "unmanageable." Using the word "emergency" creates a sense of urgency surrounding this urination, emphasizing that Beloved's "birth" is an imminent issue. By comparing it to "flooding the boat," Morrison suggests that this "birth" may not bode well for Sethe and is wholly "unmanageable." These comparisons create the image of Beloved as a quickly approaching, uncontrollable force who might change Sethe's life for the worse.

Toni Morrison, in her novel *Beloved*, uses extended metaphors, allusions, and a simile to insinuate that the "fully dressed woman" is actually Sethe's dead child Beloved and highlight Beloved as a great power who might destroy everything Sethe's built. Morrison's use of these techniques tells a story that can apply to motherhood in the real world. Birth is a singular, life-changing event for women, but it may not always have positive effects. Especially in the realm of slave motherhood, birth is more likely a production of "property" and a source of grief rather than a joyous event for slave mothers.

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ABOUT NEHS

The National English Honor Society (NEHS) is the only discipline-specific high school honor society for students excelling in the English language arts.

NEHS was founded in 2005 by Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, marking the beginning of a journey toward academic and cultural enrichment. Since its inception, NEHS has grown to boast over 1,500 chapters across the United States and in 36 countries and territories beyond. This growth reflects the Society's success in increasing recognition of the importance of English language arts in schools. Rooted in the tradition of academic university honor societies, NEHS continues to build a legacy of excellence and community engagement.

NEHS offers a range of programs and activities designed to enhance the educational journey of its student members. Creative Challenges encourage creative expression and allow students to showcase their talents on local, national, and international stages. The NEHS Scholarships program requires student members to submit high-quality critical and analytical writing. Service projects enable members to give back to their communities by promoting literacy and education, thus extending the impact of NEHS beyond the confines of the school.

These activities reveal some of the ways in which NEHS works toward its mission of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of its student members. The Society is committed to nurturing a love for literature, writing, and the arts among its members. By providing a platform for students to excel and showcase their talents, NEHS aims to create a community where academic excellence and creative expression thrive. The NEHS mission is not just about honoring individual achievements; it is about cultivating a collective passion for English language arts that can inspire and influence entire communities.

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