



Writing the World

*Department of Comparative Literature
University of Massachusetts-Amherst*

2020

WRITING THE WORLD

A COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDENT WRITING ANTHOLOGY
2019-2021

EDITED BY
JUAN CARLOS CABRERA PONS
GENNIFER DORGAN
ELENA IGARTUBURU

Introduction	2
<i>Critical and Analytical Writing</i>	
CompLit 100 International Horror Shine on You Crazy Caretaker by Haley Kaye	7
CompLit 122 Spiritual Autobiography The Shape of Spiritual Trajectory in Augustine’s Confessions and Perpetua’s Diary by Abigail Betzalel	13
CompLit 130 Translation Matters Nabokov and Nida: Polar Opposite Approaches to Translation by Ryan Moore	16
CompLit 131 Brave New World Killing Individuality: Urban Design in Dystopian Fiction by Naeva Lemme	21
Dystopia and Violence in the <i>Hunger Games</i> Trilogy by Shannon Roch	25
Governmentertainment: Control and Jingoistic Entertainment in “The Pedestrian” and <i>Sleepdealer</i> by Marina Goldman	34
CompLit 133 Introduction to Science Fiction <i>Annihilation</i> and Subversion of the Colonial Gaze by McLean Taggart	39
CompLit 141 Good and Evil Maximizing the Capacity of Change by Samuel Jackson	44
CompLit 231 Comedy Feminism in Comedy by Teja Pallikonda	49
CompLit 335 Introduction to Comic Art in North America Pérez’s Subtlety: Art in JLA/Avengers by Adam Ford	54
CompLit 391DV Dreams, Visions, and the Supernatural Spiritual Embodiment: The Divine Power of Medieval Female Mystics by Nicole Bates	65
<i>Creative Writing</i>	
CompLit 100 International Horror Rewriting Edga Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Lilly Shaw	78
CompLit 122 Spiritual Autobiography The Buildings of My Spirituality: A Critical Introduction by Katherine Downs	86
CompLit 236 Digital Cultures An Artificially Intelligent Future by Kyle DeWitt	92
CompLit 293 Gender and Global Literature Home, a Question (a biomythography) by Phoebe Michel	102
Patriarchal Trauma: Rewriting the World by Olivia Davis	105
Vatan by Mondonna Mojahed	110

INTRODUCTION

Comparative Literature, as a field, offers a multidisciplinary and diverse approach that equips us with critical tools to better understand cultural artifacts such as novels, short stories, films, comics, art, music, or architecture—just to name a few. Comparing provides a language that helps us access the unfamiliar through what we know and understand. Translation—key in Comparative Literature—not only from one language to another but between and within genres and media, opens a space of intertextuality and dialogism: a text helps us understand another text as we trace connections and differences between them.

This is the work our students have embarked on over the past three semesters. This volume, which includes essays written in Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and Fall 2020, is *Writing the World's* most ambitious and diverse representation of student writing in Comparative Literature courses. For this edition, we have received submissions representative of the most varied range of courses from 100 to 300 levels. The writing centers topics and themes that go from autobiography to coloniality, from politics to architecture. These essays analyze medieval writing, comics, stand-up comedy, and contemporary film. In addition, this is the first time *Writing the World* includes a series of creative writing: original pieces produced by students that represent other ways to engage with the content and materials of Comparative Literature courses.

The range and breadth as well as the quality of the writing is testament to the resiliency of the students who produced these pieces. The particular conditions the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has created for students and editors alike, has made their work particularly challenging and all the more meaningful. Given these challenges that affected us at a global level, the editorial committee cannot help but present this anthology with a celebratory attitude that does not take away from the quality of the works included.

The editors:

Juan Carlos Cabrera Pons

Gennifer Dorgan

Elena Igartuburu

CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL WRITING

COMPLIT 100
INTERNATIONAL HORROR

Shine on You Crazy Caretaker

by
Haley Kaye

“Doc,” Jack Torrance said. “Run away. Quick. And remember how much I love you.”
“No,” Danny said. “Oh Danny, for God’s sake—” “No,” Danny said. He took one of his
father’s bloody hands and kissed it. “It’s almost over.” - King 632

Such is one part of the climactic ending of Stephen King’s *The Shining*, as Jack Torrance regains control of himself over the malicious Overlook Hotel long enough to urge his son—who possesses psychic-like abilities referred to as “the shine”—to run from his possessed, mallet-wielding and murderous self. After this brief interaction, Jack Torrance is lost forever to the Hotel’s control, and later goes up in flames with it as the result of a boiler explosion. Stephen King’s well-known work *The Shining* has become a staple of horror fiction ever since its publication in 1977. Gritty, gothic, tense, and thrilling, *The Shining* is truly worthy of the recognition it receives as the novel that cemented King’s place in the world of literature. As such it was adapted almost immediately by director Stanley Kubrick with his 1980 film of the same name. Though Kubrick’s movie is considered to be one of the pillars of its genre, there are major discrepancies between book and film that ultimately divide them into two separate categories of horror.

But it wasn’t really empty. Because here in the Overlook things just went on and on.
Here in the Overlook all times were one...In the Overlook all things had a sort of life. - King 447-
448

Standing tall and proud amidst the high mountains of Colorado, the Overlook Hotel of King’s *The Shining* is an old but grandiose building with a complicated history; changing ownership many times, falling into disrepair at one point, its seclusion and grandeur attracted movie stars, presidents, and the wealthy for decades. On the less desirable side, it has also been the site of many deaths—whether they be self-inflicted or, in the case of the Colorado Lounge and the Presidential Suite, acts of mafia violence. Throughout its long history, the Overlook has absorbed these misfortunes one by one, until, unbeknownst to the Torrance family, it has become a breeding ground for evil.

The Shining falls into many subcategories of the horror genre, but perhaps the most applicable is gothic horror. Gothic horror is described as literature that combines fiction, horror, death, and pleasure. The most common form of pleasure found in gothic horror is referred to as the sublime—language that excites thoughts and emotion within audiences, creating an

extraordinary experience. According to these definitions, it then seems only natural that the novel's primary source of horror is utterly inhuman, an entity of its own kind—the Overlook itself.

Jack makes an easy target for the hotel as he is a recovering alcoholic with anger problems, the most mentally unstable of the family. As such, the Overlook deals with him directly on multiple occasions, moving the hedge animals outside to intimidate him, drawing him into the basement where there is an old scrapbook of the Overlook's bloody history until he becomes obsessed with it. It even goes as far as imitating his father on the radio, telling him, "Have a drink, Jacky my boy...you have to kill him, Jacky, and her, too." (King 335) As a result Jack shatters the radio in a fit of emotion, unwittingly playing directly into the Overlook's hands and starting the family's isolation from the outside world. It completes this objective when it forces Jack to sabotage the snowmobile that will allow Wendy and Danny to leave, even though he acknowledges that "[the snowmobile] was part of the Overlook and the Overlook really didn't want them out of here. Not at all. The Overlook was having one hell of a good time." (King 414) The hotel later shows a terrifying range of power as it blocks the snowed-in path up the mountain with the hedge animals, which prowl with the agility of their living counterparts and nearly kill the chef, Dick Hallorann, who is on his way to rescue the Torrances.

On top of the hotel exhibiting frightening control of its many powers—the hedges, dreams, hallucinations, obsession, and eventually possession—it is revealed much later in the novel that it commands some form of sentience, speaking directly to the main characters. On one occasion it yells at Danny as he reads his father's increasingly distraught thoughts:

"(GET OUT OF HIS MIND, YOU LITTLE SHIT!) He recoiled in terror from that mental voice, his eyes widening, his hands tightening into claws on the counterpane. It hadn't been the voice of his father but a clever mimic. A voice he knew. Hoarse, brutal, yet underpointed with a vacuous sort of humor." (King 492)

On another, it sends out a brutal telepathic warning to Hallorann as he treks up the mountain after receiving a terrified call for help from Danny: "(GET OUT OF HERE YOU...THIS IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS...TURN AROUND TURN AROUND OR WE'LL KILL YOU)." (King 577) It is clear that the Overlook Hotel is not simply a building. It is its own being, a source of subliminal horror in the novel as it drags Jack Torrance into madness and seeks to kill Wendy and Danny. However, such is not the case in Stanley Kubrick's 1980 adaptation.

In Kubrick's film, the hotel is hardly ever featured as the source of evil that drives the plot. That role falls on Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson). Early on in the movie, Jack is already showing

signs of mental instability when he cusses out Wendy (Shelley Duvall) for interrupting his work, ripping up parts of his manuscript as he says, “We’re gonna make a new rule. Whenever I’m in here, and you hear me typing, or whether you don’t hear me typing or whatever the fuck you hear me doing...that means don’t come in.” (00:45’04”) Jack’s mannerisms here and throughout the film are erratic, intimidating and filled with anger. He degrades Wendy constantly by speaking down to her and mocking her when she cries. When he meets “Lloyd”, the imagined bartender of the Overlook, Jack happily proclaims that his wife is a bitch. (1:04’15”) This power imbalance creates a prevalent theme of domestic abuse, of which Jack is the abuser, looming over Wendy at every turn.

This idea of Jack and violence he inflicts as the film’s primary source of horror—as compared to the more metaphysical and gothic horror of the novel—is further perpetuated by the fact that he and the Overlook hardly interact with one another at all. Jack is never explicitly shown to find the scrapbook in the basement that draws him into an obsession with the hotel, and there is no mention of the dreams that plague him in the book. There are no hedge animals to move. There is no radio, booming with the voice of his father, telling him to kill his family. Stephen King himself described Kubrick’s Jack Torrance as “[in the beginning] he’s crazy as a shit house rat...all he does is get crazier.” (Jagernauth) Jack’s razor-thin grip on sanity seems to be the only thing to blame for the Overlook turning into a house of horrors. In the movie, it is even shown that he sabotaged the snowmobile before Wendy ever thought of bringing Danny down the mountain, stranding the three of them there after he also willingly breaks the radio. In the absence of the building’s supernatural capabilities it is Jack, not the hotel, who has complete control over what goes on inside.

“Once, during the drinking phase, Wendy had accused him of desiring his own destruction but not possessing the necessary moral fiber to support a full-blown deathwish. So he manufactured ways in which other people could do it, lopping a piece at a time off himself and their family.” - King 269

Though there are countless differences between novel and film, one of the most impactful is undoubtedly the portrayal of Wendy Torrance. Played by Shelley Duvall, the movie version of Wendy is radically different from the novel version; she is docile, domestic, and constantly terrified of Jack. There is no semblance of a bond between them. King referred to her portrayal as “one of the most misogynistic” ever put on film. (Jagernauth) As Jack berates and terrorizes her, she does nothing about it, only continues to remain as his quiet, subdued wife. Her character’s main, if not only, purpose is to be scared of the male lead and solidify the theme of domestic abuse. Rarely

ever does she defend herself from her husband's attacks, and when she does, as in the notorious "bat scene", she is shown to be crying hysterically and making slow, pathetic movements. (1:48'30") This also happens in the scene where Jack Nicholson famously cries "Here's Johnny!" while breaking in the door with an axe—Wendy, backed into a corner with a kitchen knife, does not immediately attack or try her hand at escaping, only cries as her enraged husband grows closer. It appears that Wendy would rather cry and scream than attempt to save herself, making her film portrayal incredibly flat and lending further credence to the central idea of Jack as the vehicle of horror in the film.

However, such is not the case in the novel's version of Wendy. Early in the book, Wendy spends many pages describing her life during Jack's "drinking days". Incredibly lonely but determined to keep pushing for Danny's sake, Wendy admits she was heavily considering divorce for a long time, saying "She told herself that she had stuck with the messy job of her marriage for as long as she could. Now she would have to leave it." (King 74) Throughout the rest of the book she is shown to be strained emotionally with Jack's changing attitude towards the Overlook, but also incredibly aware of him and his mood at all times. She is also fiercely protective of Danny, even going so far as to ignore Jack's temper and its consequences to grab the boy from him after they discover him with bruises on his neck. Even Jack realizes her selflessness towards their son, saying "Wendy would pour a can of gasoline over herself and strike a match before harming Danny." (King 358)

Wendy's strong will creates obvious division in the family as Jack finally succumbs to the Overlook and begins to view her as the villain; after she knocks him out when he tries to assault her, she immediately thinks to drag Jack into the pantry, saying it has both food to keep him alive and a thick door to keep him in until she and Danny can get help. Unlike in the movie, she does not doubt her decision. She tells Danny that Jack is no longer himself and has been taken by the hotel. Even the Overlook is forced to reconcile with her determination and resourcefulness, admitting to Jack: "She seems to be...somewhat stronger than we had imagined. Somewhat more resourceful...Perhaps, Mr. Torrance, we should have been dealing with her all along." (King 565)

"But see that you get on. That's your job in this hard world, to keep your love alive and see that you get on, no matter what. Pull your act together and just go on." - King 658

Standing tall and proud amidst the high mountains of Colorado, the Overlook Hotel of Stephen King's *The Shining* is an old but grandiose building with a complicated history; a history that comes crashing down one cold, snowy night in December. In King's thrilling gothic novel the hellish hotel is destroyed completely, along with its deranged winter caretaker, in a boiler

explosion. In Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation, said caretaker freezes to death, lost in the neverending twists and turns of a hedge maze. These endings differ greatly from one another, and such differences are prime examples to reinforce the idea that the novel and film cannot be grouped together in the same subgenres of horror. The end of each story brings about resolution, a final conclusion to the terror that took place within the Overlook's walls. But that terror changes for everyone, and it is impossible to know such terror without knowing the denizens that dwell within.

Works Cited

Jagernauth, Kevin. "Stephen King Says Stanley Kubrick's 'The Shining' Is 'Like A Big, Beautiful Cadillac With No Engine Inside It.'" IndieWire, IndieWire, 3 Feb. 2016, www.indiewire.com/2016/02/stephen-king-says-stanley-kubricks-the-shining-is-like-a-big-beautiful-cadillac-with-no-engine-inside-it-83995/.

King, Stephen. *The Shining*. Anchor Books, 2012. Kubrick, Stanley. *The Shining*. Warner Bros., 1980.

COMPLIT 122
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Shape of Spiritual Trajectory in Augustine's Confessions and Perpetua's Diary

by
Abigail Betzalel

In Augustine's *Confessions* and Perpetua's diary, both Augustine and Perpetua are devout in their Christianity, yet their spiritual trajectories follow two different paths illustrated throughout their autobiographies. Augustine's religious journey is similar to that of a wave: his beliefs wavering when in competition with his material wants and temptations before his ultimate conversion. On the contrary, Perpetua's journey is more linear, like a straight horizontal line with no change, since nothing is so certain to her as her religion; so much so that she is able to find peace, and even joy, while dying for her faith. The two autobiographies hold vast differences, including the starkly contrasting journeys of Augustine's wave-like path and Perpetua's linear one; however, both individuals follow paths to the grace of God and Christianity.

Augustine first shares his feelings towards God and religion during his boyhood. In book one, Augustine talks at length of all of the sins he committed during his childhood and while reflecting on that time from a state of full conversion, he says, "What indeed is more pitiful than a piteous person who has no pity for himself?" (26). The repetition of the word "pity" Augustine uses to describe himself at a younger age cements the idea of how drastically Augustine's mindset has changed in regards to religion. He then goes on to say that he "could weep over the death Dido brought upon herself out of love for Aeneas, yet I shed no tears over the death I brought upon myself by not loving you (26) revealing a time when God was so unimportant, that a children's story brought more emotion out of him. Augustine continues exploring religion as he enters adulthood. In hearing a story from his friend Simplicianus about the conversion of a man named Victorinus and how he rejoiced in newfound Christianity before God, Augustine states that he ached for the chance to do the same (144). Despite his strong desire to convert before God, Augustine says that "it was no iron chain imposed by anyone else that fettered me, but the iron of my own will" (144), showing that at this point in his life, Augustine debates if his will is strong enough to give up all temptation and lust for God, even though he "aches" to do so. Augustine's mindset at a young age of uncertainty of religion and his wavering want for complete religious conversion, compared to his completely devout feelings towards religion that he holds while writing the book, clearly creates a wave-like path. At some points in his life, Augustine holds disregard for religion, pointing to the crests of the waves, and at other points, he considers and even aches for conversion, signified by the troughs of the waves, until he reaches another trough when he finally converts and lives his life solely for God.

In contrast, Perpetua is certain and steadfast in her Christianity. As she is imprisoned for being Christian and is awaiting her death, her father pays her a visit in hopes to change her resolve, yet she is unwavering, stating that no one can call her anything other than what she is: a Christian (10). Even when facing death, Perpetua never budes in her beliefs, she would rather die in the name of God than be forced to live as anything but a Christian. Perpetua stays just as true to her faith as she approaches her execution and finds peace and even joy in her martyrdom. The day before her death, Perpetua has a vision where she emerges victorious in the fight meant to put her to death and awakens knowing that she will win (15). Perpetua, a young woman never trained in physical combat, stands no chance against wild animals, therefore her certainty that she will be victorious is meant in a metaphorical sense as she finds peace in her death, knowing that dying in the name of God is winning. An eye witness confirms Perpetua's peace in her death as he describes Perpetua and her fellow martyrs walking towards the "amphitheater as if they were marching to heaven" while trembling with joy (17). Perpetua's complete and utter confidence in her faith even in the most drastic of situations shows a linear, non-changing path regarding her religion. There is never a moment of doubt or uncertainty as she gives her life to God, but instead, she only feels joy.

Both Augustine's *Confessions* and Perpetua's diary follow paths to God and Christianity, albeit, in different ways. As Augustine grows up, he dismisses religion and God showing the crest of a wave. As he grows older though, Augustine creates new crests and troughs as his beliefs waver until he finally converts and promises to live his life dedicated to God, creating a new trough of the wave. Perpetua, on the other hand, follows a linear, non-changing path to Christianity as even facing her death, she doesn't turn her back on her faith but instead embraces the idea of her martyrdom and dying in the hands of God. Overall, the autobiographies reveal differing trajectories of Augustine and Perpetua's Christianity, yet the two are more alike in their beliefs than different.

Works Cited

- Augustine of Hippo. "The Confessions." *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B. Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2018.
- Perpetua of Carthage. "Prisoner, Dreamer, Martyr." *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Trans. and ed. Marcelle Thiébaux. Abingdon: Routledge, 1994.

COMPLIT 130
TRANSLATION MATTERS

Nabokov and Nida: Polar Opposite Approaches to Translation

by
Ryan Moore

The philosophies that Vladimir Nabokov and Eugene Nida hold disagree greatly on the answers to many key questions that arise in translation. Regarding Nabokov, his idea of what constitutes a proper translation centers around an intense examination of the context surrounding both the author and the work in question. When he comments on translating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, outlining his general beliefs on this matter, Nabokov states that every intricacy, commentary, and subtlety present in the original language of a source text "must" be translated (Nabokov 130). According to Nabokov, much knowledge is also required to translate a text with the "absolute exactitude" necessary to carry out an accurate translation (134). This added knowledge may include having familiarity with languages other than the source language if the author and/or their culture was influenced by a country of a different tongue. Additionally, Nabokov articulates that, to avoid the "ignorance" he lambastes throughout his commentary, one ought to "acquire exact information" and gain knowledge of "a number of [other] relevant subjects" such as expertise on other writers who may have influenced the author (137).

Along with the diverse education he mandates, Nabokov maintains that, when evaluating the form of a source text, no additions can be made to translate the original rhyme or meter. He believes any such addition "completely [breaks] up the original sense" of a text (142). Instead, Nabokov advocates selecting essential phrases that cannot be left out to ensure preservation of the author's original diction. Furthermore, Nabokov states it is preposterous that any translation could claim it emphasized communicating a work's content over its form. In his approach, Nabokov stresses that content must be maintained without compromise, and that any other strategy turns one's translation into an "imitation" of the original (135, 134). As a result of these many requirements, Nabokov's theory sets an extremely high bar for translating literature.

Regarding the translation philosophy of Eugene Nida, his beliefs center around the idea that no translation will ever be a perfect representation of an original work. Nida opines that the various idiosyncrasies unique to each individual tongue demonstrate that "there can be no absolute correspondence" when translating (Nida 346). While he still believes the goal of translation should be to produce as close an equivalent as possible, this lack of perfection leads him to claim that it is inevitable that a translator will have to make their own interpretations at many points throughout the translation process (346). He subsequently proposes two methods of translation he feels to be most effective at achieving equivalence. One, formal equivalence,

focuses on staying true to the source text's original message in both form and content, ensuring the elements in both languages match as closely as possible (349). The other, dynamic equivalence, focuses on producing what Nida deems an "equivalent effect" in its readers (350) and seeks to make the text as meaningful to them as possible.

Another key concept of Nida's theory is the idea that there are many differing types of translations that can be done (347). Some of the reasons that equally valid approaches may differ, he expresses, include the nature of the message one is trying to portray and the objective of the original author (347). In addition to Nida's statement that these variations *can* be executed, he goes on to say that works *must* be translated differently depending on the ability of the audience to "decode" the work they will be reading (349). For example, he mentions that, in some situations, it can be more beneficial to take liberties that make the text more impactful to its readers rather than simply making it intelligible to them (348). To Nida, it is these situations that require the adaptations for the translator to make themselves perfectly clear (349). In summary, Nida's perspective on translation allows for many methods of approaching a text that vary greatly depending on the circumstances.

There is very little common ground to be found between the translation theories of Nabokov and Nida. This divide becomes particularly clear when examining the assumptions of the differing "camps" the two men are in. For example, take Nida's opinion that there are many valid ways to translate and adapt a text depending on the literary situation (Nida 348). This is similar to the viewpoint shared by translation theorist John Dryden, who believes that someone translating "too faithfully is, indeed, [translating] pedantically" (Dryden 18). However, though Nabokov recognizes that language differences make exact translations difficult, he believes failing to convey every original detail in a translation makes a mockery of the source text and ceases to be faithful to it (Nabokov 134). This stance is also espoused by translator Lawrence Venuti, who states that taking liberties from an original text to fit a translated version also leaves the translator particularly susceptible to their own biases (Venuti 550).

When it comes to the perspectives on culture's role in translation, the philosophical clash between Nabokov and Nida is also evident. A Nabokov translation is one that inherently foreignizes, due to his demand that the authenticity of a source text remains intact. Reading and interpreting these works often takes much effort on the part of the reader. This can likewise be tied back to the wide knowledge base Nabokov requires of a faithful translator, as works in his style come by default with a heavy dose of contextualizing footnotes (this is what translation theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah terms a "thick translation"). On the contrary, translations

executed in the style of Nida are extremely domesticating. These renderings adhere to a much looser set of restrictions than Nabokov imposes, as the primary goal of Nida's approach is to make the text as meaningful as possible in the target language. Consequently, a Nida-esque translation will have far fewer footnotes and sound more "natural" to its intended audience than one from Nabokov.

When attempting to discern which of these approaches is best for a present-day translator, the decision to imitate Nabokov or Nida rests on both the type of text being translated and for whom it is being translated. Nabokov's rigid doctrines and explicit criteria best lend themselves to more "content-based" literature, like articles from academic journals or works chronicling historical events. This approach would also be favorable if the likely readers of the translation are looking to analyze the text in an academic sense, even if that was not the original purpose of the work. In contrast, Nida's approach is preferable when dealing with more "meaning-based" texts, including stories that convey morals at their endings (fables). Additionally, when translating for an audience that will be reading for pleasure, Nida's method is advantageous because it allows a text to be molded into something digestible. However, there is one additional factor that must be considered: the legacy of ethnocentrism that exists in translation history. As outlined by Venuti, the "violence" that has often ensued from over-domestication can be dangerous to cultural diversity (Venuti 550) and is something one must always keep in mind when translating any work today. All in all, though, the merits of both Nabokov's and Nida's approaches make them useful strategies when applied to the proper translation situations.

Works Cited

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony, and Mona Baker. "27 - Kwame Anthony Appiah: Thick Translation." *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, Routledge, 2000, pp. 417–429.
- Dryden, John. "Two: John Dryden - On Translation." *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, edited by Hugo Friedrich, 1st edition ed., University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 17–31.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. "Thirteen: Vladimir Nabokov - Problems of Translation: Onegin in English." *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, edited by Paul Valery, 1st ed., University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 127–143.
- Nida, Eugene A. "4.9 Eugene A. Nida." *Translation - Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, edited by Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinnsson, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 346–351.

Venuti, Lawrence. "5.18 Lawrence Venuti." *Translation - Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, edited by Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinnsson, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 546–557.

COMPLIT 131
BRAVE NEW WORLD

Killing Individuality: Urban Design in Dystopian Fiction

by
Naeva Lemme

In both real life and fiction, the design of cities is used to influence both individual lives as well as society as a whole. Often cities have designs for green spaces, sidewalks, and streets that are intended to keep people moving from one place to the next without lingering in public areas. Two such fictional cities exist in the worlds of “The Pedestrian” and “Billenium”. “The Pedestrian” is a short piece of dystopian fiction written by Ray Bradbury in 1950, in which a man attempts to keep up his obsolete hobby of walking despite the inhospitableness of the city and is punished for it. J.G Ballard wrote his similarly dystopian short story about overcrowded cities and stifling solutions to space shortages, “Billenium”, in 1962. In reality, cities are hailed as centers of diversity or “melting pots” where people are free to express their individuality and where people can go to chase their own dreams. However, the design of the city can either help or hinder this diversity. In the two aforementioned short stories, the designs of their respective cities prevent the protagonists from living as individuals and force them to either conform to societal norms or perish by not allowing them to do or own anything unique to themselves, as well as impeding the diversity of their entire society.

Cities are often thought of as homes for extreme diversity thanks to the plethora of job opportunities, as well as social and cultural experiences that they hold. In “The Pedestrian”, Leonard Mead describes what his city normally looks like during the day time. Its wide roads packed with cars coming into the city for work suggest that the city is a central hub for many different jobs. Rather than normal roads, the city has multiple highways to accommodate the high volume of vehicles that travel through it each day (Adams et al. 193). On the other hand, in the over-populated world of “Billenium”, people only live in cities. Apart from farming, the cities are where all of the jobs are, as well as entertainment and food. The protagonist, Ward, mentions that, “intensive cultivation meant that 95 percent of the population was permanently trapped in vast urban conurbations” (Adams et al. 117). In this way, cities become the home of every type of person in the world, making them an undeniable center of diversity.

However, despite the opportunity to be a home to enormous diversity, cities can be turned into places of mass conformity depending on their design of the city. The combination of no real sidewalks, “graveyard-like” scenery, and wide roads throughout the city force the citizens of the world of “The Pedestrian” to stay inside all day and never leave their houses at night. Leonard Mead implies the death-like stillness of his world on his walk, “Occasionally picking up a leaf as

he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell” (Adams et al. 192). This darkness and general chilling unpleasantness prevents people from meeting on the street and sharing ideas, as well as hindering the enjoyment of various outdoor hobbies by the public. While the lack of diversity in “The Pedestrian” is due to isolation, a similar problem as it exists in “Billenium” is caused by the overwhelming proximity of overcrowded cities.

In the city of “Billenium”, there are no houses, or even apartments. People are forced to live in tiny cubicles or crammed into small rooms with several others. Most people only have room for a bed and a suitcase to keep their belongings in. Because of this lack of personal space, people are unable to keep many things of their own. There is no room for unique furniture or knick-knacks, and there is barely any room for clothes. As such, the citizens of “Billenium” have no way to express their individuality. There simply isn’t space for it, and this hurts the protagonists of the stories.

The use of urban design to force conformity discussed above negatively affects individuals like Leonard Mead and Ward. Leonard Mead is an individual in a society that will accept nothing short of total conformity. He is the singular person who attempts to keep up his hobby of walking in a city designed to prevent that. He walks at night, when there is no danger of getting hit by cars, and he continues to walk on the overgrown lumps of concrete that can no longer be considered sidewalks. For this individuality, he is punished. He is forcibly sent to a mysterious psychiatric research center for daring to continue enjoying walking in a city designed to obstruct the enjoyment thereof. While Leonard Mead chooses to walk his own path because he knows no other, this is a harder decision for those who spend their lives surrounded by others in their same situation.

As such, Ward has a different reaction to being forced into conformity. When his beloved wardrobe, a unique piece of furniture in an otherwise monotonous world, is taken apart for space, he quickly gives into the desire of his society, to have more room. He does so at the expense of the one thing personal to him, and so loses his last remaining expression of individuality. As the wardrobe is being taken apart, he thinks, “It was a beautiful wardrobe, without doubt, but when it was gone it would make the room seem even larger” (Adams et al. 125). The way the design of the city presses people into spaces far too small for any one person, let alone multiple people, forces individuals to prioritize having any space at all, to move, to sit, to feel like they can breath, over having possessions. While at first glance it may seem like a plus to have a less materialistic society, the things people own express in the clearest way who they are as a person. Now that

Ward owns the same things as everyone else, with nothing left that is unique to him, he has become a flat, static being, rather than the multi-faceted person he was when he was able to own things that represented him.

In addition to affecting Mead and Ward as individuals, the conformity-inducing design of their cities also affects the diversity of their society as a whole. People in “The Pedestrian” travel to work in cars, work all day, then go home and watch TV until they go to bed. The monotony of this lifestyle is caused by lack of things to do outside of working and watching TV, which was carefully planned by the government, and the city was designed around this plan. This turns the citizens into mere wraiths, rather than multi-dimensional individuals. Leonard Mead describes the people he sees through their windows as “sudden gray phantoms [that] seemed to manifest themselves upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night” (Adams et al. 192). As the monotony of their daily routine crushes out any diversity in their society, the people of “The Pedestrian” become shapeless and mindless, a society run more so by the government than by the people that compose it. The government in “Billenium” takes similar advantage of the diversity crisis in their city.

In the space-starved world of “Billenium”, people are forced to wear the same baggy, dull clothes to save space in their suitcases, clothes which hide both their form and their personality. Similarly, there are no individual choices to be made about food. Rather than having a variety of restaurants with diverse cuisines, the city has food bars, where everyone goes through the same line and chooses from the same options. By forcing diversity out of the society for the sake of making space, the design of the city negates the need for people to make any decisions for themselves, leading not just to a lack of personal choices, but also to a lack of decisions being made by those in control of this society.

The idea that urban design can be used to create conformity is clearly represented in these stories, but this idea did not come from a vacuum. In the real world of Bradbury and Ballard, which is also our own, governments have been designing cities that hinder diversity rather than encouraging its growth. For Bradbury, inspiration came from the upheaval happening in cities at the time. Roads and highways for personal vehicles were being built, and public transportation and sidewalks were being torn out. These cities were being designed to move all travel into the private sphere, which has the negative effect of ending virtually all communication and sharing of ideas in public spaces. As for Ballard’s inspiration, overpopulation has long been a fear, and Ballard is clearly aware of this, hence his mention of “Neo-Malthusians”, referring to Thomas Malthus’s *Essay on Population*. But Ballard’s urban design “solution” to the problem of

overpopulation only leads to a completely one-dimensional society. Even today, cities are using “homeless deterrents” such as homeless spikes and purposefully uncomfortable benches to bring about the end of people living their lives in the public sphere. These applications of urban design are a very real danger, and in many cities they are already at work. Society is easier to control when it is one organism, rather than a collection of individuals, and governments are not afraid to use urban design to create the type of society that is easy for them to control.

Works Cited

Adams, John Joseph, et al. *Brave New Worlds: Dystopian Stories*. Night Shade Books, 2012.

Falk, Tyler. “Ray Bradbury's Vision of the Dystopian City.” CityLab, 6 June 2012,
www.citylab.com/design/2012/06/ray-bradburys-vision-dystopian-city/2199/.

Follett, Chelsea. “How Big Of A Problem Is Overpopulation?” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 30 July 2018, www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2018/07/30/how-big-of-a-problem-is-overpopulation/#20be65d6216a.

Rosenberger, Robert. “How Cities Use Design to Drive Homeless People Away.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 15 June 2018,
www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/06/how-cities-use-design-to-drive-homeless-people-away/373067/.

Dystopia and Violence in the *Hunger Games* Trilogy

by
Shannon Roch

The *Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins has become well-known for both its popularity among young adult readers, and its subsequent influence on the creation of dystopian young-adult franchises such as *Divergent*. Books in the young adult genre—particularly when they are, like this trilogy, paired with extreme popularity *and* with the sci-fi/fantasy genre—traditionally seem to be viewed by the general public as frivolous escapism, and thus are frequently overlooked by academics and literary critics as serious literature expressing concepts meaningful to the real world. However, the *Hunger Games* trilogy incorporates many grim elements common to dystopian literature, such as authoritarian governments and all that tends to accompany them—lack of freedom of speech, for example. The trilogy also includes themes of violence (including war, fear, and PTSD) as major themes in both the progression of the plot and the growth of the main characters. This paper will look at how the themes of dystopia and violence manifest themselves in the trilogy, and will argue that the trilogy actually explores socioeconomic, political, and psychological concepts much more mature than its critics would expect.

The *Hunger Games* trilogy is set in Panem, a future North America beset by environmental crises and rent by past war. Panem is governed by the wealthy, decadent Capitol in the Rocky Mountains, which survives on goods produced by the twelve working-class districts surrounding it. In punishment against the districts for a past rebellion, the Capitol forces each district to send one boy and one girl to participate in the Hunger Games, an annual event televised live throughout Panem, in which the children fight each other to the death. District children are selected for this purpose via a sort of grim lottery, called the reaping.

The dystopian elements of the series are obvious from the very first chapter of the first book in the trilogy, which opens with the heroine, Katniss, waking up on reaping day. As she goes about her daily activities and muses on the unfortunate reality of the reaping, the reader slowly gathers that Panem is a dystopian world. The most obvious dystopian element at this point, before the nature of the Hunger Games itself becomes fully revealed to the reader, is the lack of free speech. Katniss notes how she has “learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts. [...] Even at home, where I am less pleasant, I avoid discussing tricky topics. Like the reaping, or food shortages, or the Hunger Games” (*The Hunger Games* 7). It is not made obvious precisely how Katniss fears that incriminating speech could get back to the Capitol, but as Don Latham and Jonathan M. Hollister

note in “The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy,” “clearly the fear of surveillance is a powerful means of social control through Panem,” even though it “is not clear how extensively surveillance is actually used” (Latham 40). The fear of even the *possibility* of rebellious comments being recorded is enough to curb any such discussion.

What is clear is that this is not a world where free speech is valued or even possible, but instead a place where citizen dissent has serious ramifications. The threat comes not only from the government, but also from other citizens, who may use their familiarity and knowledge of others’ actions to exploit them, as evidenced by Katniss’s description of those who take bets on whose names will be drawn for the reaping. “Odds are given on their ages, whether they’re Seam or merchant, if they will break down and weep. Most refuse dealing with the racketeers but carefully, carefully. These same people tend to be informers, and who hasn’t broken the law?” (*The Hunger Games* 20). Needless to say, this makes District 12 a place of distrust not only toward the Capitol, but also toward one’s fellow citizens.

Another element making Katniss’s world dystopian becomes obvious in the first chapter: class differences. Katniss lives in the Seam, the poorest part of District 12, as does her closest friend Gale. The people of the Seam are less fortunate than other people of District 12, living in such extreme poverty that emaciated bodies and death from starvation are not at all uncommon. But aside from these disadvantages, the poverty of people in the Seam also forces them to put themselves at much higher risk of being reaped for the Hunger Games. Katniss describes how, at the age of twelve (the same age at which they become eligible for the Games), District 12 children may “opt to add [their] names more times [to the reaping bowl] in exchange for tesserae. Each tessera is worth a meager year’s supply of grain and oil for one person” (*The Hunger Games* 15). The necessity of providing for both oneself and one’s family every year means that, at the age of sixteen, Katniss’s name appears in the reaping ball twenty times, and eighteen-year-old Gale’s name appears a whopping *forty-two* times.

Clearly, both Katniss and Gale are at much higher risk of being selected for the Hunger Games than Madge, the mayor’s daughter, who seems to come from the merchant class and “has never been at risk of needing a tessera” (*The Hunger Games* 16). As evidenced by Gale’s anger toward Madge when she happens to meet him and Katniss on reaping day, these differences sow further discord and mistrust between the citizens of District 12, this time along class lines. Of course, Katniss quickly learns that their assumptions about the risk of being reaped are a bit misplaced—as evidenced by the reaping of both Prim, whose name was entered only once, and of Peeta, who is a baker’s son from the merchant class, and therefore has probably never needed

tesserae. Much later, Katniss also learns that Madge's aunt was herself a tribute, one who died while partnered with Seam-born victor Haymitch.

Class differences also lead to more generalized friction between the classes in District 12. In fact, as Joe Tompkins argues in his article "The Making of a Contradictory Franchise: Revolutionary Melodrama and Cynicism in *The Hunger Games*," that these class differences dovetail nicely with the Capitol's desire to keep the different classes (and the different districts) from feeling too unified, due to their differences, since "These circumstances [of poorer families taking more tesserae] underscore the class divide that propels the competition, and they disclose a world where 'pitting every district against the others' is a way of maintaining class structure" (Tompkins 74). As the people of the Seam look down on the merchant class for their supposedly soft lives, the merchants look down on the people of the Seam for no apparent reason than their poverty. In remembering the desperate days of starvation after her father died, Katniss describes how when she checked the Mellarks' trash bin for food, Peeta's mother started screaming at her, "telling me to move on and did I want her to call the Peacekeepers and how sick she was of having those brats from the Seam pawing through her trash. The words were ugly and I had no defense" (*The Hunger Games* 36).

It is worth noting that, although race or appearance *itself* seems to have little meaning in Panem, it is frequently noted how the merchant class and the people of the Seam look quite different, to the point where Katniss's blond and blue-eyed mother (from the merchant class) and sister "look out of place" (*The Hunger Games* 9) in the Seam. By contrast, Katniss resembles her Seam-born father, and like Gale has straight black hair, olive skin, and gray eyes. The mention of olive skin in particular suggests that the people of the Seam may be people of color. The connection between appearance and social discrimination is worth noting—not only in District 12 but also in District 11 (Rue's and Thresh's homeplace), an agricultural district seemingly set somewhere in the south, where many of the citizens are black-skinned and work in orchards of some sort in slavery-like conditions. District 11's description in *Catching Fire* makes it clear that the residents of this district are far more severely oppressed than those of District 12:

We slow slightly and I think we might be coming in for another stop, when a fence rises up before us. Towering at least thirty-five feet in the air and topped with wicked coils of barbed wire, it makes ours back in District 12 look childish. My eyes quickly inspect the base, which is lined with enormous metal plates. There would be no burrowing under those, no escaping to hunt. Then I see the watchtowers, placed evenly apart, manned with armed guards, so out of place among the fields of wildflowers around them.

“That’s something different,” says Peeta.

Rue did give me the impression that the rules in District 11 were more harshly enforced. But I never imagined something like this. (*Catching Fire*, 67–68)

It is important to acknowledge, of course, that the social hierarchies traditionally ascribed to race and color in the real world may not necessarily apply in Collins’s world. Nevertheless, this description of almost concentration-camp-like conditions in a district populated by black people, laboring daily in what is essentially a plantation for their rich Capitol overlords, are hard to ignore. Notable, too, is the surprise of Katniss, who has previously seemed to assume that the poverty and famine experienced by her own (generally lighter-skinned) district is the height of misfortune, and only now realizes that she has actually been privileged to escape the *additional* misfortune of social oppression experienced by District 11 residents. In other words, Katniss has been privileged all her life (due, if not to her race, then to the region she grew up in), to the point where she has been totally *ignorant* of her own privilege.

Aside from poverty, the lack of free speech, and class/ethnic differences, the ultimate challenge faced by the people of Panem’s districts is the Hunger Games itself. While there are certainly many citizens who never get reaped, the risk is always there for residents of every district, in every class, while going through their teenage years. The annual spectacle of the Hunger Games, however unpleasant, is very much a part of district culture: Even someone who does not get selected themselves is likely familiar with watching people die on live television, starting from a very young age. This is an important part of the preparation for potential future tributes, as stated by Latham and Hollister, who note that it “seems likely that Katniss has already gained a well-developed ‘sense’ of the Games from watching previous Games year after year, something that is required of every citizen in Panem” (Latham 36). Some of the people whom viewers see die may well be people they know from their own districts, or even their own family members—while in the Games, Katniss is often motivated by the thought that Prim is probably watching her efforts to survive. Of course, the Hunger Games also forces contestants to sacrifice their own morality and humanity in order to survive, since all children must attempt to kill *other* children (one of which may even hail from the same district) in order to survive. This ties into the larger subject of war, violence, and PTSD, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Aside from the *personal* challenges faced by tributes to the Hunger Games, the Games are dystopian in the sense that they also serve the larger purpose of discouraging revolt against the Capitol, which arguably counts as an authoritarian government due to its surveillance and its brutal treatment of the districts. The story told at every District 12 reaping recounts the Dark Days,

in which the thirteen districts revolted against the Capitol “which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens” (*The Hunger Games* 21). The Capitol’s retaliation led to the supposed obliteration of District 13 and the beginning of the Hunger Games: “The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws that guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games” (*The Hunger Games* 21). But Tompkins makes the case that the creation of the Hunger Games and the division it symbolizes between the Capitol and the districts can also be seen as an issue of class:

The ostensible purpose of the Games is ceremonial: to commemorate The Dark Days, an erstwhile rebellion wherein the poorer districts tried, and failed, to overthrow the Capitol, forcing the revolutionary vanguard underground in the seemingly abandoned District 13. But the Games’ true function is symbolic violence in the guise of entertainment, a ritualistic reminder of the sheer power of the Capitol and the futility of rebelling against it. In short, the Games exist to keep class conflict at bay, or, to paraphrase Guy Debord, to manifest a social relationship mediated by spectacle. (Tompkins 71)

In other words, the Hunger Games not only brings peace (in a sense) and provides entertainment, but also provides a framework for reinforcing class differences between the Capitol and the districts. What the reaping day’s history lesson does not mention, of course, is that the Capitol lifestyle is one of massive excess and comfort, and that most of the people of the districts do come from a drastically different socioeconomic class, being essentially impoverished slaves who spend their lives working to support their hedonistic Capitol masters. Hence, it seems highly likely that this framing of the Hunger Games as a just punishment against ungrateful districts is Capitol propaganda, and that the Hunger Games were instead created to discourage future revolts by demoralizing the Districts and making union between the Districts unlikely. Katniss seems cognizant of the fact that the first of those goals—demoralization—is inherent in the Hunger Games, noting that the “real message is clear. ‘Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen’” (*The Hunger Games* 22).

But it is not until Katniss is actually *in* the Games that she seems to get the first inkling of how the Hunger Games are actually used to divide the Districts. The fact that flow of information between districts is banned seems to be a given, considering Katniss’s thoughts when she discusses life in District 13 with Rue. “It’s interesting, hearing about her life,” Katniss notes. “We have so little communication with anyone outside our district. In fact, I wonder if the Gamemakers are blocking out our conversation, because even though the information seems harmless, they

don't want people in different districts to know about one another" (*The Hunger Games* 246). This is in itself notable as a dystopian element, as it is part of Panem's "strict control of information and misinformation" (Latham 37) by which the Capitol "tightly controls information in an effort to discourage resistance as much as possible, particularly any kind of widespread resistance" (Latham 37).

But while partnering with Rue is not unusual—temporary partnerships form all the time in the arena—Katniss's unusual refusal to see Rue as an enemy, and her insistence on mourning her death, make clear that the animosity the Games typically arouses in rival districts is essentially an anti-revolt measure. After all, if Katniss had done the more typical thing and killed Rue, the people of District 11 would probably have hated her, and by extension would have hated District 12, making union between the districts difficult. Instead, Katniss covers Rue in flowers and sings to her, wanting to "do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own" (*The Hunger Games* 286). In doing so, she unwittingly invites sympathy from the people of District 11, who send her a gift of bread, and also commits her first act of rebellion against the Capitol, although she does not really seem to realize this until she watches the replay of her Games and notes that the act of covering Rue in flowers has been censored, since "even that smacks of rebellion" (*The Hunger Games* 440). Much later, in *Catching Fire*, the sheer sight of victors from different districts holding hands in unity is enough to cause a media blackout.

Aside from pitting the districts against each other and thereby discouraging rebellion, the yearly Hunger Games also, of course, involve violence and death. As noted, this has a powerful impact not only on the people of various districts who watch their own people kill and be killed, but also on the victors. It must be remembered that the violence visited on the tributes is not only perpetrated by other tributes (who could themselves be seen as "a piece in [the Capitol's] Games" (*The Hunger Games* 172), but also by the Capitol through other threats in the arena. In Katniss's first Games there are several examples of environmental threats—fireballs, tracker jacker wasps, and a body of water that dries up—most of which are merely meant to drive the tributes closer together for the sake of drama. The Games are, after all, being broadcast on live television and serve not only as oppression of the districts, but also as the "circuses" that keep the people of the Capitol safely entertained. But the final environmental threat instigated by the Capitol in Katniss's first games are the muttations, which seem specifically designed to serve not only as a physical threat but a psychological one. This could be seen as the Capitol's way of terrorizing the three remaining tributes—at least one of whom will certainly become a victor and thereby will have

“slipped the noose of poverty that strangles the rest of us” and become an “embodiment of hope where there is no hope” (both *Catching Fire* 212)—and reminding them that all tributes are still the Capitol’s dogs, collared and lacking their own agency.

Katniss’s first Games are only the first of the trilogy’s many instances of violence and killing. On her post-Games Victory Tour, Katniss witnesses the civil unrest in the districts which she has unwittingly instigated through her celebration of Rue and her romance with Peeta (which culminated in their particularly provocative suicide pact with the berries). The most poignant of these is in District 11, where displaying the three-fingered salute and Rue’s mockingjay call lead to the Peacekeepers putting a bullet through an old man’s head. Aside from being an obvious act of violence, this serves as more psychological warfare against the victors, particularly Katniss, whom President Snow sees as the one to blame for the unrest and who consequently has more guilt over the violence. Though Katniss has obviously been affected by her experiences in the Games since they ended, it is the Capitol’s retaliation that really seems to cause her to be wracked by symptoms of post-traumatic stress. It is on the Victory Tour that Katniss’s nightmares increase to the point that she wakes up screaming in spite of taking sleeping pills.

It is not until the revolution is well underway that Katniss fully realizes just how strong the Capitol’s hold has always been over the victors—while her actions make her particularly prone to arousing the Capitol’s ire, the Capitol has never been particularly kind to those who win the Games. Johanna, unlike Katniss, is untroubled by jabberjays mimicking the sounds of tortured loved ones because, as she says, “They can’t hurt me. I’m not like the rest of you. There’s no one left I love” (*Catching Fire* 418), which may suggest that any loved ones from her own district were murdered by the Capitol after Johanna became a victor. This may seem like a far-fetched inference to make until one considers the backgrounds of Finnick, who was blackmailed into prostitution out of a desire to protect his loved ones, and Haymitch, whose family was killed because he, like Katniss, made the Capitol feel threatened by the unconventional way he won his Games. In fact, the only relevant difference between Haymitch’s and Katniss’s actions in the Games were that Katniss’s actions not only defied the Capitol but actually incited revolt, whereas Haymitch’s did not.

After the decimation of District 12 and Katniss’s escape to District 13, the psychological warfare of the Capitol continues to serve as a weapon against the victors, particularly Katniss, and by extension against the rebellion. This could actually be said to have started at the beginning of Katniss’s second Games when Cinna was beaten up in front of her, but its frequency and severity takes a sharp uptick in *Mockingjay*. Conditioned by a life spent carefully attempting to

avoid aggravating the Capitol in any way, Katniss feels guilt when she visits the remains of District 12, blasted after her escape from the arena, and sees bodies “reeking in various states of decomposition, carrion for scavengers, blanketed by flies. *I killed you*, I think as I pass a pile. *And you. And you*” (*Mockingjay* 6). The Capitol’s torturing of Peeta also serves as long-distance warfare against Katniss with which they attempt to cripple not only him but also her. The roses that Katniss associates with President Snow serve as psychological warfare on several occasions, including the discovery of the roses in District 12 and the hideous rose-scented muttations in the sewer that call Katniss by name. Of course, there are also many more general instances of PTSD to be found in the other tributes, such as Johanna’s fear of water and Annie’s mental illness.

Finally, it could be argued that the effects of war, mistrust, and PTSD start to turn the supposed heroes of the trilogy, and Katniss in particular, into anti-heroes who bring about realities just as dystopian as the ones they are fighting against. On a wider scale, the anti-hero concept can be seen in District 13, which uses Katniss as a tool just as heartlessly as the Capitol did, and where President Coin seems poised to become just as much of a dictator as President Snow—to the point where Katniss chooses to shoot her rather than Snow. On a more personal level, Katniss in her child-soldier role seems to have become equally heartless, having transformed into more of a killing machine than she ever was in her first games, killing an unarmed Capitol citizen and shortly thereafter mowing down countless people in the Capitol streets. “Peacekeeper, rebel, citizen, who knows?” she says. “Everything that moves is a target” (*Mockingjay* 398). This is very different from the Games—where Katniss knew who she was killing, did so for her own survival (and Rue’s or Peeta’s), and frequently felt empathy for her victims.

Toward the end of the trilogy, however, Katniss seems to have a growing awareness of the pointlessness and evil of the violence she is both experiencing and inflicting, and again starts to feel, if not exactly empathy, then at least a weary discomfort with war. The key to unlocking this emotion is realizing that her own actions, and Coin’s actions, are endangering the lives of children just as much as President Snow ever did. Before Coin even proposes her own Hunger Games, Katniss feels deeply uneasy about the death of the Capitol girl in the lemon-yellow coat (*Mockingjay* 397) and the District 13-instigated attack of the children serving as a human shield for the President’s mansion, which results in Prim’s death. The latter incident is a particularly poignant example of the sort of anti-heroism of war at this point in the story, since it seems likely Gale played a role in devising this trap.

In conclusion, the world of Panem contains a number of elements that make the Hunger Games trilogy a classic, chilling example of dystopia. Many of the themes are ones familiar to readers of dystopia—authoritarian governments and surveillance, for example—but the Hunger Games trilogy has a particularly modern resonance with its use of themes such as class/racial friction, the use of media to manipulate viewpoints and simultaneously entertain/control the masses, oppression of the lower socioeconomic tiers, and the ensuing rage and desire for a revolution of the social order. The presence of such elements is especially poignant when one considers that the trilogy is supposedly intended for children and, as such, is frequently seen as just a frivolous mainstream franchise. On the contrary, it could instead be argued that the mature nature of many of the themes touched upon in the trilogy mean it deserves to be taken more serious in literary circles as a work of dystopian literature.

Works Cited

- Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. Scholastic, 2009.
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic, 2008.
- Collins, Suzanne. *Mockingjay*. Scholastic, 2010.
- Latham, Don and Jonathan Hollister. "The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 45, issue 1, Mar. 2014. 33–146. Web. Retrieved 9 Nov. 2020.
- Tompkins, Joe. "The Makings of a Contradictory Franchise: Revolutionary Melodrama and Cynicism in the Hunger Games." *Journal of Cinema & Media Studies*, vol. 58, issue 1, Oct. 2018. 70–90. Web. Retrieved 9 Nov. 2020.

Governmentertainment: Control and Jingoistic Entertainment in “The Pedestrian” and
Sleepdealer
by
Marina Goldman

Historically, some governments strive for as much control over their civilians as possible, however the methods by which they attain control vary vastly. A common example of this is punishing or rewarding certain behaviors and virtually brainwashing civilians into submission, and two works that epitomize these strategies are “The Pedestrian” and *Sleepdealer*. “The Pedestrian” is a science fiction short story published by Ray Bradbury in 1951. Set in 2131, the narrative follows an outcast by the name of Leonard Mead as he wanders aimlessly through a town of reclusive TV-watchers. *Sleepdealer* is a science fiction movie directed by Alex Rivera in 2008 that centers on Memo, a man searching for work, in a futuristic Tijuana that runs on virtual labor and remote connectivity. Both works depict dystopian societies where immersive technology is the apex of day-to-day life; from entertainment to communication to fields of work, people live through technology as much as they live by it. Moreover, the corrupt governments behind these stories utilize this technology as not only a means of suppressing their civilians, but also as a medium for jingoistic propaganda.

Leonard Mead’s society mediates experience through television screens, which reduces the lives of the civilians to uncanny, all-consuming technology. The narrator of “The Pedestrian” describes the town by explaining that, “Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now...” (193). By subjecting the civilians to such powerful technology, the government eliminates half a day of unpredictable civilian activity, maintaining absolute control until nighttime. However, at night, the narrator mentions that, “ill-lit by television light, ... the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their expressionless faces but never really touching them,” (193). The light which “touch[es] faces without really touching them” evokes the uncanny moment in which the eerily similar depiction of reality through the television screen demands their attention more than the real thing itself. The viewers can experience the outside world without ever having to leave their home, eliminating the need to set foot outdoors almost entirely. In fact, “the sidewalks had been vanishing under flowers and grass,” (192). This resurgence of nature in a technology-driven world indicates how obsolete sidewalks have become in the face of television; the government has such a strong-hold over its citizens through their television screens that nature was able to reclaim, literally and metaphorically, the streets due to their lack of use and lack of maintenance. Despite the padding provided by the grass on the sidewalks, Leonard Mead still, “wore sneakers when strolling at night, because the [police] dogs in intermittent squads would

parallel his journey if he wore hard heels” (192). Leonard Mead’s corrupt, totalitarian government is so hell-bent on controlling civilian activity that they set police dogs out on people who refuse to be kept inside watching television. By keeping people inside through totally immersive entertainment, and afraid to go outside from severe punishment and surveillance, the government ensures complete control over their civilians.

In Memo’s case, experience is mediated through nodes which are essentially headphone-jack-implants that allow for connectivity to all of life’s concrete and abstract experiences. On top of providing wholesome entertainment, such as chatting with friends on the other side of the globe, and hedonistic thrills, like sexual intercourse and intravenous drugs, the nodes also widen job opportunities. While the government does not directly punish those without nodes, they strongly incentivize civilians to install nodes for a much more fulfilling lifestyle. Memo installs his nodes illegally out of desperation for work to keep him and his family alive, demonstrating the stronghold that the government has over its civilians. Because of nodes’ prevalence, Memo has no choice but to submit to the invasive technology to ensure his and his family’s survival.

However, the jobs that nodes create vastly exploit and exhaust their workers. For example, Luz, Memo’s love interest, records, narrates, and sells her memories to anonymous users online to dig herself out of debt. The government created a medium for people to invade their own privacy for the sake of money, allowing the government a limitless window into their civilians’ lives without the risk of violating people’s rights. Since people uploaded and publicized their information themselves, the government cannot be blamed for viewing it, and therefore can survey their civilians and use what they see for whatever they want. The government’s devout encouragement of exploiting oneself for money further demonstrates how far they are willing to gain control of their civilians, and how far they are willing to push their civilians into compliance. Memo works in the sleepdealer factory constructing buildings through virtual reality technology in remote areas for 20 or more hours a day. In fact, the sleepdealer factory gets its name from the fact that their workers can collapse from exhaustion, or in some cases even death. The government, which drove the corporatization of node work, pushes the impossible decision between survival and comfort to the limit to squeeze as much as they can from people desperately trying to make a living. Yet again, the government cannot be blamed for the citizens pushing themselves past the breaking point because they cannot be held responsible for incidents that take place at a job that they did not directly force on the workers, allowing the government to escape responsibility but enjoy the fruit of other people’s labor and sacrifice. This strategy demonstrates controlling civilians through government manipulation as well as squelching.

Beyond being immersive and all-consuming, the technology ingrained in Leonard and Memo's societies are both powerful, twisted mediums for jingoistic propaganda. During his walk, Leonard asked the houses about what they were watching, including the question, "Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?" (192). Leonard's comment evokes vivid imagery of American heroism, which is especially highlighted by the use of the word "rescue." In this way, the government is showcasing American greatness through cowboys and cavalry, harkening back to slaughtering native peoples to pave the way for Anglo-American societies. Given that the only escape from the suffocating grasp of the television is punishable by law, the viewers have no choice but to watch propaganda that glamorizes the very society they might be living in. Moreover, this propaganda depicts the punishment inflicted on those that pose a threat to American progress. In essence, this program is not only an extolment of Leonard Mead's society, but it is also a direct warning to those who try to stand in the way of or rebel against their society. Leonard Mead's innocent hobby of taking late night walks instead of watching television is condemned by the police force as a "Regressive Tendency", and sends him to a psychiatric center to be studied for such behavior, (194). People are so enchanted by the programs the government broadcasts that a refusal to watch them is perceived as not only a threat but a neurological defect that must be studied and cured. Essentially, the government has so thoroughly engrained and idolized itself in entertainment and mass media, that escaping from such broadcasts is the equivalent of disrespecting or rebelling against the government. Moreover, the punishment for such escapism is enforced not only by police but "corrected" through scientific methods. This strategy of intimidation has worked so well for Leonard Mead's government that "Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for police," (193).

In the same vein of broadcast patriotism, Memo's society has a television program solely devoted to filming militarized drone attacks, steered by military sleepdealers, into the homes of suspected terrorists. One of these military sleepdealers is named Rudy, who steers a drone directly into Memo's house, killing Memo's father instantly. Memo, as well as every other worker with nodes, puts their life on the line every day to serve their government. Risking exhaustion, blindness, and in some cases death, the workers sacrifice not only their comfort but their general safety and survival for the sake of supporting their government, their society, and the rest of the people who live in it. Through building gleaming, majestic skyscrapers in remote areas, too expensive for anyone in his class to afford to live in, Memo is literally and metaphorically building up and advancing his civilization. Even more so, military sleepdealers, such as Rudy, leave their work day with the guilt of killing suspected terrorists; despite the fact that they were directly

instructed to do so by their superiors, there is no escaping the guilt of ending another person's life.

Leonard Mead and Memo's governments have the exact same goal of dominating their civilians, but go about it in very different ways. Leonard Mead's government deploys a vicious cycle of intimidation and glorification: the government directly punishes people from leaving their homes to the point where the civilians are terrified to go outside, so they stay inside and get brainwashed by their television that reminds them of how great their superiors are and the consequences of defying their superiors' demands. Memo's government fervently incentivizes nodes to the point where life without nodes is the equivalent of death, but the nodes are so draining and dangerous that they can lead to death as well. Despite their inherent extremism and fantastical qualities, both of these stories pose the question of how far contemporary governments are willing to go to get what they want.

Works Cited

Rivera, Alex, director. *Sleepdealer*. Maya Entertainment, 2008.

Bradbury, Ray. "The Pedestrian." *Brave New World*, 2nd ed., Night Shade Books, 2011, pp. 191–195.

COMPLIT 133
INTRODUCTION TO SCIENCE FICTION

Annihilation and Subversion of the Colonial Gaze

by
McLean Taggart

The film *Annihilation*, by Alex Garland, subverts the concept of the colonial gaze by mystifying its application onto a standard colonial relationship. The colonial gaze, as described by, “The Colonial Gaze and the Frame of Science Fiction,” by John Rieder, describes the “cognitive framework establishing the different positions of the one who looks and the one who is looked at” (Rieder 7). The colonial gaze is commonly used as a framework to paint groups as developmentally nascent, and cognitively impaired, treating them as subhuman. This framing is then used to excuse atrocities and mistreatment, negating the damaging effects on the impacted groups as they are stripped of their humanity. It is often applied to works tackling colonization, or the act of establishing control in a region over the native population. Under a standard colonial relationship, a colonizer is a group or entity that establishes control over a region while the colonized is the group or entity natively existing inside said region. Superimposing the colonial gaze onto standard colonial relationships, “...distributes knowledge and power” to the colonizer while “...denying or minimizing access,” to the colonized (Rieder 7). In *Annihilation*, an entity called the shimmer crash lands on to Earth and begins enveloping its surroundings in a refractive cloak. Following standard convention, the shimmer is acting as a colonizer as it is forcefully imposing its control onto Earth over humanity, the native, colonized group in this instance. Despite establishing a standard colonial relationship, as the film progresses it subverts the application of the colonial gaze through denying the shimmer cognition, portraying humanity as a technologically advanced race, and framing the shimmer’s actions as a natural phenomenon.

The first step the movie takes to subvert the application of the colonial gaze is denying the shimmer any form of cognition. Through doing this, the film puts its colonizer label into a tenuous position. Under the colonial gaze, an intrinsic feature of a colonizer is the sense of a divine right to expand influence. The colonizer sees land outside of their possession and, with intent, forces their influence over it (Ram 3). Some friction is met when trying to impose this definition onto the shimmer. When the female protagonist of the film, Lena, interacts with the shimmer, she notices that its actions are simply a mirror of her own. After killing the shimmer, she is being interviewed and, upon being asked what its intentions were, replied with, “I don’t think it wanted anything” (*Annihilation*). This reaction stunned onlookers as they assumed the shimmer was a hostile being as most colonizers are. This occurrence paints the shimmer as a being with no thought, one that mimics its surroundings and acts instinctively. Another instance that shows the shimmer’s lack of

cognition is when it merges with Lena's fiancé, Kane. The Kane doppelganger seeks out Lena as that is the only directive the original Kane gave it. Upon meeting her, it was unable to answer any questions about its past and had no answers for what its future looked like. This lack of foresight shows that the shimmer is incapable of forming intent. Through portraying the shimmer as an entity with no cognition, the title of 'colonizer' is hard to bestow upon it. Whereas colonizers typically possess power and knowledge, the shimmer has neither. Its actions are intrinsic instincts of its survival, acting more as a bacterium than a human. This existence is in direct contention with the standard treatment of a colonizer, putting into question whether this title can truly be applied to it. This contention puts the colonial gaze into a situation where it can not properly describe the colonizer side of the colonial relationship. This does not fully subvert the application of the colonial gaze since one half of the relationship can still be explained, however, the film continues its attack onto the colonized side through its portrayal of humanity.

Another way in which *Annihilation* subverts the application of the colonial gaze is by treating the colonized humans as a technologically evolved species. The standard colonial gaze portrays colonized groups as inferior and in need of progress (Ram 5). Through an advanced portrayal of humanity, the film does not conform to this standard colonial gaze of colonized groups, elevating humanity to Earth's apex group. The opening scene of this film follows Lena into a workday as a professor of cellular biology at Johns Hopkins, educating her students on cellular mitosis. By opening with advanced modern science, the film is setting the stage for a technologically advanced humanity. The portrayal of colonized groups under the colonial gaze establishes them as, "... a kind of anachronism that allows them to view their own cultural past"(Rieder 7). The film intends for the viewer to be able to relate to the period of the film, treating them as a member of the present rather than a figment of the past. In the film, humanity is also given complete control over the flow of information and knowledge. After the Kane doppelganger is captured alongside Lena, she wakes up in a top-secret military base operating under the directive of uncovering the mystery of the shimmer. They send reconnaissance missions into the shimmer with drones and computers to discover its true nature. Despite all missions before Lena's remaining unsuccessful, the teams are still able to learn some facts about the shimmer such as its strange magnetic field and the rate by which it expands. This knowledge may be minimal; however, it is more than the shimmer could ever obtain due to its intrinsic lack of ability to think and learn. This acquisition of knowledge contends with the colonial gaze framework of a colonized group since the group is normally denied access to knowledge (Reider 7). By putting humanity in a position in which they can obtain more knowledge about the shimmer than the shimmer can about them, the film actively fights the colonial gaze knowledge dynamic. Through fighting this

dynamic, the film brings into question whether or not the colonial gaze accurately describes humanity's positioning as a colonized group. By putting both the colonized group and the colonizer in a tenuous position regarding their placement under the colonial gaze, the film successfully mystifies both sides of the colonial relationship. After mystifying this relationship, the film only has to tackle the concept of colonization to push the usage of the colonial gaze beyond its bounds, completing the subversion of its application.

The final method by which *Annihilation* subverts the colonial gaze is by tackling the action of colonization through the shimmer's expansion. Through the colonial gaze, colonization is seen as an act of spreading influence over an inhabited region to mold it to closer represent one's interest (Ram 4). The film presents the shimmer's actions as a natural phenomena rather than a forceful expansion of influence. This difference takes the colonial gaze outside of a framework by which it can be applied to one by which its application fails. The shimmer's cloak is a forcefield that joins with nearby physical matter, refracting the shimmer, the environment, and biological life into a singular, fused existence. The expansion of the cloak occurs naturally as it runs into more matter, acting like a gas expanding to fill its container. At first sight, the shimmer's action seems to follow the standard colonial gaze depiction of colonization well, as its cloak takes the land and changes it. Upon closer inspection, however, friction is found between the colonial gaze's description of colonization and the shimmer's actions. As described by Josie, a scientist on Lena's shimmer exploration, "It refracts everything. Light, waves, fields, DNA" (*Annihilation*). Rather than expressing control over the region, the shimmer is fusing its existence with its surroundings, taking life, the environment, and itself and fusing them into a singular refracted entity. Instead of imposing control onto the region, the shimmer is taking a natural approach and integrating itself into its structure. The shimmer simply changes the environment into something new, much like natural evolution over long periods. This mode of operation brings rise to a disconnect between its actions and the standard method of colonization under the colonial gaze. The shimmer is not imposing beliefs, power, or control while appropriating land, rather it modifies natural processes and allows them to play out with time, incorporating itself into this evolution. Through this subtle difference, the film directly combats the colonial gaze's need for control. While the shimmer is acting as a colonizer, forcefully taking land from those already living nearby and changing it, it is not doing so in a manner any different than that of a flood wiping out the nearby fauna. Through portraying the shimmer's actions as a natural process, the film disallows the colonial gaze to accurately describe the film's method of colonization. Having subverted both sides of the colonial relationship as well as the concept of colonization itself, the film succeeds in subverting the application of the colonial gaze.

Annihilation establishes a standard colonial relationship of the colonizer and the colonized to push the viewer into framing the film through the colonial gaze. The shimmer is initially presented as an extraterrestrial colonizer expanding its influence and forcing humanity, the perceived colonized group, to flee to safety. Throughout the film, the relationship between the shimmer and humanity is mystified in an attempt to subvert the colonial gaze. By restricting the shimmer from cognitive function, while promoting humanity to a position of technological superiority, the film strips their initial titles and puts them into boxes that do not fit directly into the standard colonial gaze framework. After mystifying this relationship, the colonial gaze is further combated by presenting the actions of the shimmer as a natural phenomenon rather than an attempt to expand influence. This action pushes the colonial gaze even further and makes one ask whether or not the colonial gaze is even applicable to the scenario. The evolving colonial relationships succeed in changing character while refusing to fit under a single framework. Through these actions, the film takes the colonial gaze from a framework by which it fits the scenario to one under which it can no longer be applied. It is through this evolution that *Annihilation* pushes the colonial gaze past its bounds and out of its working parameters, successfully subverting its application.

Works Cited

- Garland, Alex, director. *Annihilation*. Paramount Pictures, 2018.
- Rieder, John. "The Colonial Gaze and the Frame of Science Fiction." *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Wesleyan University Press, 2008, pp. 1-33.
- Ram, Kalpana. "Gender, Colonialism, and the Colonial Gaze." *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 2018, pp. 1-7.

**COMPLIT 141
GOOD AND EVIL**

Maximizing the Capacity of Change

by
Samuel Jackson

Epistemology can be defined as the study of one's own knowledge regarding a topic. How do we know what we know? It could be argued that everyone engages in epistemology through introspection consistently over the course of their lives but it begs the question of how often one acts on their introspections. In the year of 2020, racial justice movements are at the forefront of international news and the minds of individuals around the world. During these times especially, it is vital for people to understand the events taking place around them to make change to the greater systems that cause these events. In mobilizing to maximize one's ability to make change in their society, few individuals set a better example than Angela Davis, devout member of the American Communist movement, the Black Panther movement, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. In *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, Davis demonstrates that in order to effectively insight change based on one's cultural awareness, one must understand the truth of their system by achieving awareness of aspects of the system on multiple levels, including the broader awareness of the system itself, the understanding of others' place in the system, and the awareness of one's own place in it.

Over the course of her autobiography, Davis goes into depth regarding the weaknesses of the United States government and justice system as a whole. It is these shortcomings of the system she lives in that inform her activism over the course of the book, and she explicitly states how the justice system disadvantages black Americans several times. Davis makes the flaws of the United States' justice system clear, but she further emphasizes the necessity to be accurate in the portrayal of her system's faults from another angle. While protesting against the practices of the government with the United Front Against Fascism, Davis takes issue with the notion shared by other members of the movement that the United States is a fascist state, rather than a democratic state that adopts fascist ideals. In fact, Davis proposes:

The basic difficulty, I thought, was that we were being asked to believe that the monsters of fascism had already broken loose and that we were living in a country not essentially different from Nazi Germany. Certainly, we had to fight the mounting threat of fascism, but it was incorrect and misleading to inform people that we were already living under fascism. Moreover, the resistance dictated by such an analysis would surely lead us in the wrong direction.... For, if we believed we were living under genuine fascism, it would mean that virtually

all democratic channels of struggle were closed and we would immediately and desperately rush into the armed struggle. (Davis 198-199)

This understanding of what constitutes a fascist state holds importance for Davis, as it clarifies what exactly the movement fights for, and how the fight should be carried out. This shows Davis's belief that an in-depth understanding of the system one opposes is necessary as it streamlines the objective and allows for appropriate planning towards dismantling the oppressive system. It is not sufficient that one merely knows what they are opposing; it is equally vital that they accurately understand why the force they oppose is worth fighting.

While Davis chiefly calls into question the objectives of the justice system as a whole, she frequently cites instances in her life where others exemplify and interact with the system. Davis believes that measuring the understanding of others' places in the world is key to painting a picture of the sum of the system they belong to, as it presents those who occupy roles as benefactors and disenfranchised of the system. This is shown in the book while Davis is attending Brandeis on-campus. Davis makes it clear that she does not enjoy her time at the college as she feels isolated as a black student on campus, while her peers are privileged and tonedead regarding racial and political issues in the country. She takes note of this especially when preparing for James Baldwin to give a speech at the school before the Cuban Missile Crisis interrupts the event. Regarding this, Davis writes:

They were not interested in the fact that the people of Cuba were in terrible jeopardy--or even that millions of innocent people elsewhere might be destroyed if a nuclear conflict broke out. They were interested in themselves, in saving their own lives. Girlfriends and boyfriends went off together to get in their last little bit of love. (Davis 119)

The reader can see Davis's disgust at the response of the rest of the student body, which displays lack of understanding and insight into the effects and reasons of the Missile Crisis from a Cuban civilian's perspective. One could argue that this informs Davis of the feelings of the privileged regarding events that do not immediately affect them. That is, they make the issue about them, or dismiss it entirely. Drawing a broader understanding of the reactions of various groups in the face of oppression of their system of government exemplifies the relationships others have with said system, further informing one of the nature of the system they are part of.

Another aspect of the cultural awareness of others involves observing who the public views as worthy of praise. When Martin Luther King Jr. is killed, Davis laments his death as she understands him as a proponent of the black freedom movement on an economic movement but

recognizes his gentle and palatable demeanor portrayed to the public. SNCC recognizes that many Americans in support of the black freedom movements would not understand the reason for his assassination and decides to spread awareness of the anti-war and economic equality messages that got him killed (Davis 143-144). The ability to understand the views of others allows for the effective spread of ideas about the movement one wishes to promote. Davis sees this as important because keeping the public informed allows for the most possible exposure to the truths of societal issues, and maximizes the number of people who view these issues as worthy of tackling.

In order to make change based on the cultural awareness one possesses, there must be an understanding of one's own place in the system in question. In her autobiography, Davis recounts moments in her life that she feels aided in preparing her for challenging the oppressive justice system of the United States. These are moments that show her the role she occupies in the nation as a black woman and natural proponent for equality. A powerful instance of this is referenced just prior to the climax of the book's main storyline, in which Davis stands trial on accounts of crimes she did not commit. In this instance, Davis once again recalls a time at Brandeis, in which she and her friend take a roadtrip to Gloucester, MA. Upon returning, they stay at the dorm of their male friends but are caught and made to stand trial for staying in the boys' dorms overnight. Davis states that "I never forgot the self-righteous condemnation of that tribunal. They were convinced they had a right to play God, master and mother. Since we refused to accept their way of life, we were "moral criminals" and they wanted to see us punished" (Davis 351). This story from her past is juxtaposed with the climax of the main plotline for the reason that the two instances are strikingly similar, though to differing scales. Her trial at Brandeis is unfair and unnecessary, as her offences are subjective and conducive to a conservative ideal of women. Even a decade later, Davis is unrightfully tried for subjective reasons. She knows, however, that she is essentially tried for challenging the status quo set by the greater systems surrounding her. Davis's analysis of her own life prior to taking part in the black equality movement informs her of her place in society. While she may be angered by the unjust hand she is dealt as a black woman, she acknowledges why her life is disadvantaged, and this understanding motivates her to act against the system that has oppressed her life.

Throughout her life, Angela Davis builds herself to understand the complex systems at play that work to oppress her, while also mastering her ability to exploit and stand in opposition to these oppressive systems. She does this by strengthening her ideas of the United States government and justice systems as a whole, and their relationships with the people who occupy

the nation, including herself. In following the example set by Davis, one can make a greater effort to insight positive change in the communities they are part of.

Works Cited

Davis, Angela Y. *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*. International Publishers, 1988.

COMPLIT 231
COMEDY

Feminism in Comedy

by
Teja Pallikonda

The fundamental question of this class has been: among all the varying comedic tastes, what makes something funny? Several theories have come about to answer this question, none being more famous than Henri Bergson's rules of comedy. In *Laughter An Essay on the Meaning of a Comic*, he highlights three main rules of comedy: 1) The comic does not exist outside of what is human; 2) Comics appeal to intelligence, not emotion; 3) Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo (Bergson 2-4). Overall, he claims that "the comic will come into being, it appears, whenever a group of men concentrate their attention on one of their numbers, imposing silence on their emotions, and calling to play nothing but their intelligence" (Bergson 4).

It does not take much to notice a key issue with Bergson's rules: it only considers the opinion and intelligence of men. From Lucille Ball, Lily Tomlin, Gilda Radner, Wanda Sykes, Ellen DeGeneres, to many others, women have always played a significant role in creating the improv and stand-up comedy culture of the United States. Yet, comedy remains a male-dominated field. Data from one of the most famous comedy clubs in New York City, Carolines on Broadway, shows that only 14.3% of performers were females from 2011-2014 (Mitchell). Amongst TV writing staffs on *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, and *Last Week Tonight*, only two of these shows have writing staffs that are over 50% women (Mitchell). On the bright side, the success of comedians such as Tina Fey, Amy Schumer, Mindy Kaling, Ali Wong, and many others has definitely been a strong rebuttal against the cultural bias that *women just aren't funny*. Coupled with feminism and representation being at the forefront of discussion in the entertainment industry, there has never been a better time to be a female comedian.

I decided to see for myself what makes stand-up so difficult as a woman. In February of this year, I entered into a charity beauty pageant and for my talent, I performed a 10-minute stand up piece. When preparing my performance, I did not want to shy away from expressing my opinions. From the resurgence of the n-word, dating, to my generation's escapist attitude toward life, I wanted to tackle it all. But I was constantly anxious about figuring out what my angle into speaking about such heavy topics was going to be. I worried that if I got up on stage and performed a roast of my generation, it would not be perceived well coming from a woman. I wanted to avoid offending people and being perceived as bossy and *holier-than-thou*. I did not want my format or delivery to hinder my broader message. Then suddenly it hit me. If I could balance my jokes about my generation by roasting myself. I remembered that I had a copy of my ugliest school

picture in my phone camera roll, so I decided that I would showcase that photo, roast my appearance, and from there delve into my deeper critiques of my generation. After all, the best way not to offend people was to make myself the biggest target. My performance worked out beautifully and exceeded my every expectation. I placed second in the pageant! I was getting laughs from the very beginning to the very end. Even the people I was most worried about offending praised my set. My performance was compared to Hasan Minhaj's *Patriot Act*, and people went as far as to say that if I had a TV show, they would tune in.

As wonderful and fulfilling as this experience was for me, I realized that there were certain obstacles I could not overcome. Out of a ten-minute set, I dedicated half my time to making jokes about my 6th-grade self, and went beyond just my appearance. I made fun of my mindset as a 6th grader and even went as far as to make a deal with the audience: if I promised to never look this ugly again, then maybe we can leave the "n-word" in the past. I am still incredibly proud of the performance I gave and the feedback I got showed that people perceived me as a funny, intelligent woman. But I still question whether or not I could have delivered the same level of performance without self-deprecation. Especially as a woman, I did not want to rely on lessening myself in order to get my point across, but I could not think of a way to get the audience to warm up to me without it. Maybe that is simply the novice in me. But upon further research, this seems to be an issue faced by even the most successful women in comedy.

According to research conducted by author Karen M. Stoddard, "there are very few women stand-up comics. Of those who achieved fame during the early and mid-1960s,... not one gained an audience based on positive, assertive acts about women..." (Stoddard 12). This may seem outdated given the progress of the feminism movement, but testimony from today's top comedienne show that very little has changed. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2015, Amy Schumer, one of the highest paid comedians today commented, "I know my experience has been tricking people to listen and then you get in the door that way, but it's like a dance you have to do because there is still such an aggression towards women" (*The Hollywood Reporter* 28:05-28:22). Even with so many examples of successful female comedians, it still seems that women are battling against the idea that women aren't funny. Former Saturday Night Live writer Anne Beatts recalled that star John Belushi, being of the "chicks-aren't-funny" school, often requested that the women writers be fired (Kein 672).

Where does this bias come from? And why is it so difficult for women to have an audience without self-deprecation? According to Stoddard, the traditional ingredient of stand-up humor in American culture is aggression - the success of the joke is usually at the expense of others

(Stoddard 11). But women are taught to not be aggressive because it threatens the foundation of the women's role (Stoddard 11). Additionally, it is a commonly-held cultural stereotype, by both men and women, that women have no sense of humor (Stoddard 11). Regarding the difficulty in garnering an audience, Rebecca Krefting, author of *All Jokes Aside*, explains that there are a disproportionate number of women performing "charged humor." Charged humor is "humor that gives voice to the identities and experiences of marginalized groups and movie audiences of those groups to action" (Kein 674). Krefting goes on to explain that charged humor is not easily marketable because television networks and club owners want to appeal to the broadest audience they can, and charged humor threatens to alienate market segments (Klein 674). Additionally, unlike racial humor that developed among oppressed communities because of the commonly-held knowledge of oppression, charged humor does not favor women because there is no widespread belief among women that they are, indeed, oppressed (Stoddard 11). Therefore, it becomes harder for an audience to identify with women's point of view when doing charged comedy because women aren't seen as marginalized (Kein 674).

But there are notable exceptions to this trend. One in particular is Hannah Gadsby. Gadsby's Netflix special, *Nanette*, is probably the only female comedian that I have seen in recent years that barely used self-deprecating humor while also being fearless in mentioning her politics. Her special discussed issues within the LGBTQ+ community, homophobia, her difficulties in coming out, mental health, and toxic masculinity. But the central point of her special was: I need to get out of comedy. She claims that in her 10 years as a comedian, she has made a career out of self-deprecation. She says "people feel safer when men do the angry comedy, they are kings of the genre. When I do it, I'm just a miserable lesbian ruining all the fun and the banter. When men do it—heroes of free speech" (*Nanette*). She delved into the mental toll of having to explain traumatic events in jokes. For example, in the beginning of her special, she tells a funny story about the time she almost got beat up at a bus stop. A young man thought that she was a gay man and was acting very aggressive, until the moment he realized she was a lesbian. Towards the end of the special, she explains that in order to get the laugh at the right time, she could not tell the truth of that story. The truth is, once this man figured out that she was a "lady-faggot," he beat her at the bus stop and nobody had stopped him. Gadsby finds that comedy has hindered how she remembers her own story, which diminishes its value. She concludes by saying, "laughter is not our medicine, stories hold our cure. Laughter is just the honey that sweetens the bitter medicine" (Madeline, Olb 1:06:51-1:07:01).

Henri Bergson's theory is right: the comic will come into being whenever a group of *men* concentrate their attention on one of their numbers. With the foundation of comedy rooted in patriarchal attitudes about men and women, Stoddard, Kein, and Gadsby have shown that women can be funny, but only when they garner our attention through self-deprecation and package their story in an uncharged, noncontroversial performance. So, why aren't there more women in comedy? The answer is the same for any woman going into a male-dominated field. Given the bias, the obstacles, and the lack of opportunity and creative control all due to a biological trait that cannot be controlled—is it even worth it?

Works Cited

- "Amy Schumer, Lena Dunham, Gina Rodriguez and More Actresses on THR's Roundtables | Emmys 2016." *Youtube*, The Hollywood Reporter, 17 Aug. 2015.
- Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Alpha Editions, 2018.
- Kein, Kathryn. "Recovering Our Sense of Humor: New Directions in Feminist Humor Studies." *Feminist Studies*.
- Mitchell, Kaitlyn. "We Crunched the Numbers on How Much Stage Time Female Comedians Get." *Bitchmedia*, Bitchmedia, 4 Feb. 2015.
- Parry, Madeline, and Jon Olb . "Nanette." Netflix Official Site, Netflix, 19 June 2018.
- Sandberg, Sheryl. *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. First edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- Stoddard, Karen M. "'Women Have No Sense of Humor and Other Myths: A Consideration of Female Stand-Up Comics, 1960-1976.'" *American Humor Studies Association*, 1977.

COMPLIT 335
INTRODUCTION TO COMIC ART IN NORTH AMERICA

Pérez's Subtlety: Art in JLA/Avengers

by

Adam Ford

For decades, the Marvel vs. DC argument has been a common subject among comic book fans, as both studios have tenured histories and billions of dollars in revenue. Too often their premier heroes are compared, wondering which character or group would prevail in a fight. Yet in 2003, the world was given an answer to these questions with the release of *JLA/Avengers*, a cross-universe series depicting DC's finest team up with Earth Mightiest Heroes to stop an otherworldly threat. Many years ago I received a hardcover set of these issues, and as a young child I enjoyed looking at the wild battles between characters I knew and mesmerizing two page spreads. Later on, I revisited these comics, this time enjoying them for their inter-dimensional but straightforward plot, as well as trying to recognize as many heroes as I could, pinpointing the decades and eras that their costumes in each issue represented. However, reading this series today, I tried my best to look past the often obvious examples of fanservice. In this four issue storyline drawn by George Perez, I was able to find significant artistic value, particularly in its spatial elements. Despite the commercial nature of being a crossover between two highly successful properties, Perez's art in *JLA/Avengers* brings an artistic integrity to the financially-driven miniseries, with its use of subtle and simplistic elements, innovative use of spatial backgrounds and elements, and depictions of size.

In the early 1980s, an agreement between DC and Marvel was established to create a crossover special between the Avengers and the Justice League, but after a draft was rejected by Marvel's Editor in Chief, plans for a 1983 release fell through and the idea was ultimately scrapped. Written by Gerry Conway with art by George Perez, this draft had both supergroups manipulated by inter-dimensional beings, leading them to fight each other in a competition for powerful artifacts to benefit the antagonists. Still, this idea was not forgotten, and in 2002, another agreement was reached, this time with Kurt Busiek as the writer. In September 2003, the first issue of the four part series was released with over 191,000 issues sold, wrapping up in March 2004 at just below 144,000 (Miller). Just like before, this comic had the Avengers and Justice League manipulated by cosmic figures to fight for powerful weapons artifacts, this time being the truth-seeking Kronos and the wagering Grandmaster. After realizing they have been misled, the supergroups end their conflict and ally with one another, but not before Kronos' ever-growing powers create an imminent collision between the DC and Marvel Earths. In a last ditch effort to stop this mad titan, both supergroups invade his fortified lair and ultimately stop him before returning to their own worlds.



Just like how this plot is an evolved version of the 1983 draft, the art of the finished product evolved greatly as well. On the left, you can see one of the few colored pages of the draft, an action shot showing both supergroups ready to fight one another. In issue #4 of *JLA/Avengers*, Perez pays homage to his initial draft with the image on the right. Comparing these two, one can find similarity in the facial structure and shadow patterns between both panels, especially on Superman and Thor's muscles. The glaring difference here though is that while the 1983 draft has one tannish color for everyone's face, the modern version contains both a very light and slightly darker tan, mimicking side shadow on the heroes' profiles. This light and dark combo can also be seen on the costumes on the heroes and a few of the non-human faces as well, thanks to the work of colorist Tom Smith. In the era before digital artwork, using multiple colors on a single face or article of clothing was very difficult if one of the colors was not black or very dark blue. After inking, shapes would be marked with a note containing the number of a singular color (of which they were only 64 to choose from), before printing (Wiley). With this lack of colors and combinations, Perez did not have much to work with, and thus relied more heavily on inking to create expression from his characters. Comparing the depictions of Red Tornado, Martian Manhunter and Starfox, the 1983 draft shows a lot more shadow and lines on their face, making them look angrier than their modern counterparts. Also, since different colors needed to be used for separate shapes, the outlines around a few characters are noticeable, most clearly Superman and Thor. This serves a second and possibly unintentional purpose though, that being attracting the reader's attention. Even though the digitally colored 2003 version contains multicolored shapes allowing for secondary shadow, the lack of the shadows and lines as seen in the original version lead to the characters appearing less defined and less expressive. When reading through

this miniseries, one begins to notice the frequent motif of lightning, first appearing in issue #2. During the fight between Kronos and Galactus, thin lines of white lightning go in every direction in numerous panels. Since real life lightning is also made up of simple white lines, this effect looks eerily real, especially after the reader has just seen the more traditional cartoony yellow lightning that the Flash emits while running. On top of appearing realistic, it also amplifies the emotion of the panels, particularly the close ups on Kronos' enraged face. Despite being in the same general pattern on every page, Perez adapts the lightning to a different use in every panel. On a close up of Kronos yelling at Galactus, his red eyes lead the reader to assume that the lightning is coming directly from them, making his face appear every angrier. In the following two panels though, Galactus is shown feeling the impact of Kronos' lasers and punches, making the lightning appear as if it comes from the punches' impact. This makes the attack look stronger, once again amplifying emotion and feeling from the reader. Finally, the powerful but weakened Grandmaster is shown in a panel, knocked down to the ground but casting a spell on the combatants. With his glowing hand in the foreground, the lightning appears as if it is caused by his spell, making the panel even more chaotic than it previously was. Over the next two issues, this motif continues to appear, and every time adding chaotic elements. While simplistic in its design, Perez's use of lightning helps contribute to the otherworldliness and cosmic nature of the story, bringing chaotic emotion and anger to the characters and actions in every panel the effect appears in.



When discussing a comic's art, one could argue the cover is the most important piece. After all, it is the only art a customer will likely see before deciding whether to purchase the comic or let it sit on the shelf. As a result of this, cover art often contains the most detailed and flashy designs in a comic book, all to entice a reader. Despite being heavily driven by financial motivations, a cover of a comic is often thought to have the most artistic integrity to it, and Perez's work in *JLA/Avengers* is no exception to this. Every cover in this four issue miniseries contains artwork on the front and the back, uncommon for most comics. Typically, advertisements for another comic are placed on the back, but by combining two superhero universes, Perez wants to show as many superheroes as he can, leading to the two sides. Issues #1-3 of the series contain a significant amount of superheroes on the cover, with an increasing number for every installment. The cover of Issue #3, drawn on an extremely large size of paper, contained every single superhero who appeared in the series, and was so time-consuming and difficult for Perez to draw that he actually developed tendonitis, leading the series to be delayed a few months.⁴

With these crowded covers, comic book fans were certain to spot a character they liked, incentivizing them to purchase the issue. In fact, there are so many heroes that the title had to be printed in clear font so no character could be made unrecognizable in being partially blocked by it. There is no doubt that this is one of the most skilled covers ever drawn in Perez's career, let alone the entirety of comic history. So for Issue #4, the final installment of the mini-series, how could Perez top this?

Viewing the series from a social context, Issue #4 of the *JLA/Avengers* miniseries had a lot to live up to, and Perez likely knew this. After all, the first three issues were released in September, October and November of 2003, yet this final installment was released a whole four months later in March. It is entirely possible that some readers of the first three issues had completely forgotten about this series, and would need a powerful cover to bring them back in. So, to reestablish interest for the final chapter, Perez created a simplistic but powerful cover, depicting an angrily weary angry Superman on the front, with Marvel and DC's colliding Earths on the back. However, this was not just any angry Superman, as he wields both the invulnerable shield of Captain America and Mjolnir, Thor's hammer which can only be carried in dire moments by those worthy. This image was actually the first idea Perez had conceived when drafting in the early 1980s, and is extremely fitting in serving as the final cover for the miniseries. While it may appear to be an obvious appeal to fanservice, this art does have merit to it, and not just because it is a change of pace from the crowded covers seen before. For example, there are cracks on Thor's hammer and Captain America's shield, both thought by the reader to be indestructible objects. By building upon the reader's preconceived notions about these characters and objects, Perez offers a subtle indication of how dangerous whatever Superman's opponent, likely Kronos, is. Another subtle detail is how the stars are colored. Throughout the stars, colorist Tom Smith has typically followed the traditional approach of a black background with stars represented as white dots, but as seen here, part of each page is covered with a slight red-orange, most noticeably turning the stars into an orange color. This color is seen closest to the title and Superman, giving the impression that both are emitting this sort of light. For the title, this effect may appear to be possibly breaking the fourth wall, as it is a common trope in comic books for titles to have an impact on the background. For Superman though, this orange light he appears to be emitting makes him look even more powerful, especially since in this image he has red glowing eyes. For the previous three installments, subtle effects like these would have gone largely unnoticed, but with the choice to showcase just one character in the final issue, Perez brings artistic merit to a simplistic work as well.



In *JLA/Avengers*, space is often used as a background, and as described in the last paragraph, the design is simply just a black background with white dots as stars. What's surprising and innovative about this miniseries though is how characters interact with this background, particularly the character of the Grandmaster. As a comic being, the Grandmaster has some control over space and time, and this is seen firsthand in Issue #1 during a fight with the mad titan Kronos. After feeling the impact of one of Kronos' strikes, the Grandmaster is knocked down and begins to pull himself upward. However, the way his hands and body are resting would indicate he is on the ground or some floor when in fact he is still floating in space. To draw this, Perez must have created a flat line somewhere in the panel to base the position of the Grandmaster off of, and erased it when the sketch was complete. Yet as the reader views this, the position of the Grandmaster in a space environment like this makes no sense, leading them to re-envision that line Perez drew. Whether knowingly or not, Perez stimulates the reader in an example of Gestalt's Law of Closure, manipulating their minds due to how well he captures a character's reaction to a floor-like surface. Oddly enough, this is not the only use of Gestalt laws in space backgrounds to better enhance his art. For all four issues, the Marvel character of Eternity or his DC equivalent make an appearance on the title page. These characters look as if they are made of space, appearing to be drawn as cutouts of a full page space background. Normally, this would look lazy, but with subtle facial and clothing features, Eternity looks alive, appearing as a humanoid figure but maintaining the stone-faced expression and mystique that a cosmic being should. In fact, another one of Gestalt's laws comes into play again, this time the Law of Proximity. Only half of Eternity's face is drawn, but due to a light blue star on the right side of his face, it appears that he has a glowing eye. Most likely intentional, this means that instead of cutting Eternity out of a full page space background, the opposite process occurred. Perez likely traced a rough outline of

where Eternity would stand, placed one of his blue stars on the right side of this outline, then drew the rest of the background within the cutout's boundaries correspondingly. Another decision especially smart by Perez is to place this character in front of a white background. After all, to most humans "the great unknown" is pictured as the depths of space, filled with mysterious celestial bodies. But when you have a character made up entirely of this great unknown, then it is difficult to portray their otherworldliness if you place them in front of an earth-like or even similar space-type background. Backgrounds like these would make Eternity look more like a "normal" character, constrained by the planet or area they are in currently in. Thus, in order to keep this character fully grandiose, the only sort of background that Perez could place this character against was a white background. This whiteness draws the reader's entire undivided attention to the cosmic being of Eternity. Surprisingly this does not appear out of place, as completely white backgrounds are commonplace in space-age media, often symbolizing emptiness or something far beyond what humans can perceive.



When designing comic panels, there are typically two specialty types: the splash and the spread. A splash page is usually a panel that takes up one page of the comic, while a spread fills up two. In *JLA/Avengers*, Perez makes little if any use of the splash, as when trying to depict as many characters in a panel as he does, fitting them into a panel the shape of a vertical rectangle will prove difficult and likely compromise the quality of the art. However, a two page spread can, and Perez takes full advantage of this, particularly in the opening issue as the Avengers are introduced. In this spread, Starro the Conqueror rains down mini versions of itself onto New York in an attempt to hypnotize the population, and the Avengers are at the ground level fighting their corrupted allies. Because this is such a large panel, Perez is able to convey two key points to the reader through the art. The first is showcasing Starro's vastness, as with this expanded panel, the reader notices the subtle effect of glimmers on the character's edges. From these bits of light, it is inferred that Starro is so massive that he is literally blocking the sun's rays from hitting the heroes. Without this large two page spread, this detail would have gone unnoticed and likely not even drawn in the first place. The second detail conveyed through this spread is the grounded nature associated with the Marvel brand. When compared to DC, Marvel superheroes are typically considered to be more "down-to-earth", both in more realistic personalities and possessing weaker abilities (Hatfield). Thus, while the Justice League is introduced flying through the air in multiple panels, Perez takes this social context into consideration, and introduces these grounded characters in an up-close look. Not only do the Marvel heroes appear closer, but with the use of a low angle point of view, their facial expressions and musculature are better defined, conveying their prowess and heroic nature in a grittier and more realistic way than the laser-blasting and sonic-speeding of the Justice League. If this was just a singular panel on a normal page, then these ideas would go unnoticed, but in the spread format, the reader can better interpret the panel. With the decision to create elaborate two page spreads, Perez can depict more detail in his art, making it easier to emphasize specific qualities in his characters and better connect his work to the social context of comics.

While Perez's work in *JLA/Avengers* contains a strong but subtle style full of artistic integrity, this does not mean his work on the miniseries is perfect. For example, in Issue #4 as both supergroups are assembling a vehicle to invade Kronos' lair, both Batman and Green Lantern look exactly the same from the chest up. Although only for a few panels, this highlights Perez's struggle to create unique faces for male characters. If a male character does not have facial hair and is not wearing a mask, then Perez usually gives them a basic-looking face. This is fine in Issue #2 when Mr. Fantastic is introduced, as he is the only character on the page to contain the basic facial structure, but in Issue #4 when multiple characters contain the same facial

shape on the same page, then the design looks lazy. In his design of characters, Perez shines best through the character's costumes and accessories, and since it is rare that two characters with basic facial patterns will appear on the same page, it makes sense why he does not concern himself with altering it. However, for Superman and Thor, who both do not wear masks or have facial hair, Perez makes sure to give them the unique facial features traditionally associated with those characters. Many artists have portrayed Superman's face in different ways, but here the universal look of a cleft chin and strong jawlines is used. Thor is given a more square-like face, with a line marking his labiomenal fold to emphasize the size of his chin. Both of these caricatures are not bad by any means, but they are not unique by any means, highlighting the miniseries' other issue: a lack of originality in the depictions of both supergroups.

To be fair, some of the blame could be placed on writer Kurt Busiek for not introducing a single new character, but with the characters he is given, Perez only creates one unique design, a color change of DC's Green Lantern's outfit for a few panels as he absorbs the energy of Marvel's Cosmic Cube. One would think by combining both universes, the miniseries opens many opportunities for new superhero uniforms. With so many battles in the upper atmosphere and space, Perez could have created spacesuits for normally grounded heroes to wear, but instead chooses to depict them in their normal garb. Another missed opportunity was the lack of combined costumes, as since both supergroups teamed up to fight the same enemy, seeing a DC character in Iron Man armor or a Marvel superhero with a Batman-style utility belt would have given them a refreshing look. Instead, every character is drawn in their traditional garb, looking the same as they would in a solo series. While Perez's use of subtle and simplistic elements to enhance his art certainly work for the miniseries, these more outward elements of new character designs and costumes can only appear in a cross-universe comic like this. The space backgrounds and lightning motifs are smart decisions and have merit to them, but these effects could be used for any comic, unlike combining costumes of heroes from two different companies. His only chance to work on a story like this, Perez fails to capitalize on the opportunities that a collaboration like this offers.

Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, team-ups between Marvel and DC characters were fairly common, whether it be the X-Men and Teen Titans team-up in 1982, or *DC vs. Marvel*, a 1996 miniseries containing one on one matchups of each company's most popular characters. However, almost seventeen years after *JLA/Avengers'* last issue, there has not been any more crossovers between these two companies. Many of the artists and executives behind these works have either retired or changed jobs, and with movies the current money-makers for both

companies, attempts to create a new miniseries would likely face even more delays than Perez's drafts did. With this in mind, *JLA/Avengers* is the last representation of both the DC and Marvel universes in a single comic, and from an artistic perspective does great justice to its story and characters. On its covers, Perez draws what is needed to bring in sales, but does so a skilled way, whether through the explosion of characters in Issue #3 or the simplistic but powerful image of Superman in Issue #4. Motifs like the lightning in battles scenes and simple backgrounds like space are purposefully used, conveying emotion or reaction from the reader whether they know it or not. With the use of two page spreads, the smallest of details are conveyed, heightening the reader's reactions and understanding of panels. For a series containing some of the world's biggest commercial properties, it is the use of subtlety in Perez's artistic techniques which make the series impactful.

Works Cited

- "1983 - JLA/Avengers Crossover (also Known As the Team-Up Controversy)." Marvel Comics of the 1980s, 19 June 2011, marvel1980s.blogspot.com/2011/06/1983-jlaavengers-crossover-also-known.html. Accessed 1 Dec. 2020.
- "GEORGE PEREZ Reveals the One Image Destined to Be in JLA/AVENGERS." 13th Dimension, Comics, Creators, Culture, 8 Sept. 2019, 13thdimension.com/george-perez-reveals-the-one-image-destined-to-be-in-jla-avengers/.
- Hatfield, Charles. "Jack Kirby and the Marvel Aesthetic." *The Superhero Reader*, edited by Charles Hatfield et al., University Press of Mississippi, JACKSON, 2013, pp. 136–154. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hvr5.20. Accessed 1 Dec. 2020.
- Miller, John. "Comic Book Sales by Month." *Comichron: A Resource for Comics Research*, www.comichron.com/monthlycomicssales.html. Accessed 3 Dec. 2020.
- Wiley, Natalie. "The History of Comic Book Printing Dot By Dot." *Printivity Insights*, 14 Oct. 2020, www.printivity.com/insights/2019/08/08/the-history-of-comic-book-printing-dot-by-dot/.

COMPLIT 391DV
DREAMS, VISIONS, AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Spiritual Embodiment: The Divine Power of Medieval Female Mystics

by
Nicole Bates

The tradition of female mysticism molded a new space for women to participate in the patriarchal medieval church. In the medieval world, women had limited opportunity to contribute to their communities, and the only way they could be active in the church was by becoming a nun. Therefore, female mystics held great power because of their transcendent connection to God. This power gave them authority to speak with and amongst the men in the church. From a modern-day feminist perspective, it may seem these female mystics failed to empower each other in their male-dominated society; however, it is not productive to criticize medieval female visionary literature from a modern lens. The literature of medieval women visionaries cannot be interpreted according to contemporary standards of feminism, because the society they lived in cannot be compared to modern day. Though female mystics demanded their voices be heard, they still had an internalized sense of the patriarchal order of society.

When it comes to the tradition of medieval visionary literature, women are clearly the favored sex to receive visions of God. A woman's heightened ability to see visions was often tied to qualities associated with the female body. Hence, the tradition of mysticism was linked to femininity. There was a certain softness about the female body that made them more impressionable to divine forces. Female mystics, like Hildegard of Bingen and Angela of Foligno, describe the experience of their visions as full body experiences. They would often ache and fall ill as a symptom of their visions, because it was difficult for their bodies to endure the power of divine forces. Their extreme physical manifestations of visions created a paradox surrounding the visionary experience, because within divinity was abjection. These women suffered greatly due to their intense desire to please God but, in their suffering they felt the joy of God's "divine sweetness." They had a direct connection with God that male religious leaders relied on when in need of divine intervention. Female mystics may not have been taken seriously as proper theologians, but their exegetical visions made them an asset to the church.

Even respected female visionaries who spoke from within the institution as nuns, such as Hildegard of Bingen, were never given a proper place in the leadership of the church. Thus, female mystics like Angela of Foligno, who attempted to share their visions from outside the institution, struggled further to have their visions written and shared. These women had to fight vigorously to be heard, whilst taking no pride in their supernatural ability. Men discredited women's authority as vessels of God by condemning them for their frenzied behavior. The hysteria women

demonstrated in connection with their visions was often interpreted as a sort of dark force that possessed their bodies. However, in these "dark" physical manifestations of visions, the women continued to dedicate their lives to serving others. Once again, this illustrates the paradox of seeing God in a tormented state. These women felt they needed to suffer bodily and spiritually in order to serve God. Despite the physical suffering, they never wavered in their commitment to carry out God's will.

Female mystics worked within the confines of their *unlearned and simple* lives as women, but they were still vital to the church. They were firm in their commitment to a life of selfless humility, whilst sharing their visions and inspiring a following of women. They led the way for women to engage further in the church, and therefore in society. Despite the hysteria, asceticism and suffering caused by their enlightenment, it was ultimately their vulnerability and self-punishment that made them the preferred sex to receive God's messages. In the lens of medieval times, despite their submission to the patriarchal system, female mysticism opened up a space for women to have a voice in society during a period where there was no distinction between the religious and the secular.

The Female Body: A Vessel for the Divine

Medieval women were believed to be more in touch with their physical bodies, and this is why much of female spirituality was rooted in embodiment (Elliot 14). However, while grounded in their carnal form, this association with the body also made them a liability due to the profane nature of the human body. Many believed that the body was composed of two parts: the physical body and the soul. However, the way religious leaders and philosophers viewed these two separate parts varied. Some believed that "both aspects had been created by a good God and were thus themselves intrinsically good"; however, others believed that the body was a "kind of prison for the soul" (Elliot 14). In Hildegard of Bingen and Angela of Foligno's somatic visionary experiences, both beliefs about the relationship between body and soul are present. It is the women's compassionate souls that free their bodies to receive divine visions.

These women's unfaltering desire to please God motivated them to live utterly selfless lives and spread goodness in the world in the name of God. It was their physical bodies that trapped them in the suffering that accompanies such selflessness. Women's bodies may have been considered weak because of their susceptibility to possession; but, to endure such suffering to fulfill God's will actually demonstrates an incredible amount of strength. It was their extreme self-control that purified their souls. The human body leads people into temptation; therefore, in

resisting bodily temptations, the women proved their faith to God. Through severe self-discipline, these women forged a clearer path to salvation.

During medieval times, women had severely limited life choices, and those life choices were wholly dictated by men. There were two options for women: to become a mother or a nun (Dickens 25). Hildegard of Bingen chose to become a nun and Angela of Foligno became a mother. However, it was not until Angela's whole family died, and she was liberated from all her earthly ties that she began to practice self-restraint in service of God. Though Hildegard and Angela began on different paths, both women demonstrated extreme physical restraint in service to God. In a further attempt to fight their earthly forms, both women practiced abstinence. Chastity was a virtue believed to make a woman more pure and receptive to God's love. By becoming a nun, Hildegard of Bingen committed to lifelong chastity from a young age. According to Wilson-Kastner as referenced in *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, "Virginity, in both its physical and spiritual manifestations, its most perfect form, is the highest form of the deifying life" (Petroff 33). This idea is reaffirmed in the Gawain Poet's literary vision, *Pearl*, as the dreamers' most "perfect pearl" ascends to heaven a virgin, and is rewarded by marriage to God. The daughter says to the dreamer: "Unblemished am I, my peers among; / So much I claim with honor here, / But matchless- there you have it wrong. / We all are brides of the Lamb so dear" (Gawain Poet 782-785). Virginity, the most perfect human form, meant the guarantee that the soul would find its place, wed to the Lord, in the beautiful kingdom of heaven. The dreamer sees his daughter wed to "the Lamb" because of her chaste life on earth. Both Angela of Foligno and Hildegard of Bingen were motivated in their self-determination on earth by the promise to be wed to God in their eternal lives in heaven.

Hildegard of Bingen and Angela of Foligno's faithful service to God liberated their bodies and souls to experience glimpses of his "divine sweetness" during their time on earth. Hildegard of Bingen developed her "second sight" in childhood (Kerby-Fulton 343), showing mystic ability even before she devoted her life to the church by becoming a nun. Her visions resolved mysteries of religion, making her a valuable resource to the church: "from my fifteenth year, I felt in myself a wonderful way the power of mysteries of secret and wonderful visions" (Hildegard 151). In her commitment to serve God, her life on earth was one of great influence. Hildegard was unable to accept any praise for her piety because God commanded her to live humbly in order to achieve salvation:

For I guarded her heart from danger lest her mind should be elated by pride and vainglory, but rather that she should feel fear and grief than joy or wanton pleasure. (Hildegard 152)

God affirms that in order for her actions to remain pure, she must take no pleasure in them. Like Hildegard's humility, Angela also denies all praise for her positive actions. Everything Angela does, she does in penance for her sins. Her self-punishment is intense, yet God affirms that her actions please him: "All your life, your eating and drinking, sleeping and all your living is pleasing to me" (Angela 263). Her mystical ability comes from her self-control, but because God confirms her life pleases him, she continues to live in that way.

Whilst promising God her "perpetual chastity" Angela says, "I stripped myself of all my clothing and offered myself completely" (Angela 255). Her actions have been referred to as masochistic and eroticized by contemporary feminists. She seems to feel that her purpose is to give her whole self over to the Lord. In a never-ending attempt to cleanse herself of her sins, Angela does all she can to give herself to others, therefore giving herself to the Lord. She wants to be stripped of all earthly associations so she can feel God's love, so when her whole family dies she says, "I felt great consolation at their deaths" (Angela 256). She also goes to St. Peter "seeking poverty" (Angela 261) so that she "could give to the poor" (Angela 259). In her mission to fight her human needs, she "wished that it were not necessary to eat, so that [she] might remain in prayer" (Angela 259). She prays for something incarnate, because she feels her obligations as a human keep her from ultimate submission to God. Like in *Pearl*, where the dreamer's desire to be reunited with his daughter has him begging for death, Angela longs for the day that she can leave her human body and fall infinitely into the "divine sweetness" of the Lord. It is the promise of the ever-lasting light of the Lord in the kingdom of heaven that drives these women to continue suffering on earth.

Suffering, masochism and hysteria: symptoms of divine intervention

Both Angela of Foligno and Hildegard of Bingen fully embody their mystic abilities. At the time, men believed women were more easily influenced because of their frailty. However, this "frailty" allowed them to see and understand God in a way that other earthly beings could not comprehend. In spite of this, it cannot be denied that these visions brought female mystics endless pain. Their behaviors were masochistic, because they took no joy in their actions yet, they felt a sense of purpose in pleasing God. Hildegard expresses, "The world had no joy nor pleasure in her, nor recreation in the things that pertained to her" (Hildegard 152). However, she felt fulfillment in being God's servant:

But the Spirit of God in the great strength of His love, sometimes raised her up by this infirmity from death, as a refreshing dew, so that she was able to live in the world as a servant of God. (Hildegard 156)

Hildegard and Angela both suffered for God, but in doing so they were granted the ability to see his "splendid light," which gave them glimmer of what they would one day feel when they unite with God in heaven.

In order to see a divine vision, a woman's body was possessed by a godly force, so it was inevitable the woman would suffer. The power of the divine is beyond human; therefore, it would be excruciating for human forms to endure: "it ought to be so great a joy that my soul ought not be able to endure it" (Angela 262). However, in suffering these women do not fight the pain, but they welcome it and it pleases God. Their ability to endure suffering distinguishes them from other men and women.

In both Angela and Hildegard's visions, God describes to them the qualities that make them capable of seeing him. The women renounce their human impulses for greed and gluttony, and perform acts of penance "at the edge of the human experience" (Mazzoni 589). God praises Angela in her extreme penance and offers her reward: "Make haste, for as soon as you have finished what you are doing, the whole Trinity will come to you" (Angela 259). Hildegard was born a servant of the Holy Spirit, and God sought her out for her mystical powers: "I sought out according to what pleased me in her wonderful gifts" (Hildegard 152). She showed that she had an affinity for the divine and that she could handle the power of God within her soul:

For she appears a servant, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and has an affinity with the air, and so she was susceptible to this same air, and to the wind, and to the rain, and to every kind of tempest. (Hildegard 156)

God continues to refer to Hildegard's humility as reason for her divine ability: "she never had any confidence in herself...otherwise the inspiration of the Holy Spirit would not have dwelt in her so powerfully" (Hildegard 156). The lack of confidence in Hildegard and Angela's devotion is what makes them perfect receptacles for the Holy Spirit.

Being charged with delivering God's messages to people on earth was certainly no simple task, and it led to immense pain and suffering for Angela and Hildegard. However, both these women persevered through the pain, because they had been chosen by God to deliver these messages, and that was boundlessly more important to them than their comfort on earth. Hildegard faced a number of aches and illness because of her power to see visions: "entangled in a net of suffering and illnesses, so that she was vexed with continual pains in all her flesh to the very marrow...in the interior of her rational soul she saw spiritually certain mystical things of

God" (Hildegard 156). Her suffering is a symptom of her supernatural ability. Angela, who acts more frantic than Hildegard, almost begs to suffer more just so she can continue to please God:

I disposed myself and determined that even if it were necessary for me to die of hunger or nakedness or shame, as long as God were pleased by it or could be pleased, I would in no way omit doing this...For even if all these evils happened to me, I would die happy in God. (Angela 256)

Many viewed these extreme behaviors as ecstatic, suggesting that these women may have been "demonically possessed" (Angela 259). However, in the dark manifestations of celestial visions, these women saw something more spectacular than they could express.

Some twentieth century feminists have criticized medieval female mystics for failing to fully assert their position amidst the men of the medieval church, saying female mystics represent "an unsuccessful expression of women's ambition within the patriarchal order" (*Feminism, Abjection, Transgression* Mazzoni 63). They disapprove of the masochism and ecstasy in these women's actions, seeing it as a surrender to the patriarchy. They believe that because these women could not speak with confidence, they did not make strides for women. However, to apply modern-day feminism is anachronistic. These critics frequently fail to recognize that, even in their mania, female mystics managed to find a "voice" in the male-dominated church, which was not only highly unusual for the time, but was likely all that *could* have been achieved at the time.

Female visionaries' position in the medieval church

Regardless of the contemporary feminist debate about female mystics' lack of authority in the medieval church, the men in the church still relied on these women for their supernatural ability. Whether they spoke to the men in hysteria or with authority, these women served as a vehicle for God to send messages to followers on earth, which was an invaluable role in the church. Therefore, regardless of their frantic behaviors, religious leaders had to listen to these women. The tradition of mysticism created a space for women to speak, where they could not be ignored. Also, these female mystics uplifted other women in society, by connecting with communities of women. Both Angela and Hildegard reached out to women and formed groups of followers. Hildegard, who was able to establish more of a place for herself in the church than Angela, became the first published female. By gaining respect in society, she was able to connect to other women and teach them. According to Kerby-Fulton, "Hildegard...had great confidence in them [women], musically and spiritually" (355). Though she acted by the rules of the patriarchy, considering the oppression they faced prior to the emergence of the female mystic tradition, this

sense of female comradery was a step forward for women. It gave women a way to be involved with religion amongst other women in these communities.

The powers of female mystics traversed boundaries between the sexes. In their visions, both Angela and Hildegard describe gaining an inexplicable understanding of God. Though they dictated what they saw to men who wrote it down, they express that the experience of the vision could never truly be understood in writing. It was the message they received from the vision that needed to be written and shared. Both women showed an affinity with the incarnate that a carnal man would never experience. According to Angela "The experience of the truly faithful proves, sees, and touches the Incarnate World of life" (254). Though these women lacked confidence in their ability, it was the image of God's words ingrained in their brains that assured the men that these visions were God-given and must be heard. For Angela, God "placed the paternoster in [her] heart with such a clear understanding of the divine goodwill and of [her] unworthiness" (257). Hildegard describes the "fiery light" as "coming from the opened heavens" and pouring "all in [her] brain" (151). Rather than portraying these visions as something they hear, it is more something they feel and receive directly from God.

Because the nature of these visions is more sensual, these women express difficulty in being able to articulate what they experienced in words. Both women exclaim that God specifically called upon them to share his word with the people of their community. Hildegard is called upon to "cry aloud...and write thus" (152). God gives her a higher understanding of something that "foolish" man cannot fathom:

Thus understand, O man, One God in three Persons. But thou in the foolishness of thy mind thinkest God to be so impotent, that it is not possible to Him to subsist truly in three Persons. (Hildegard 155)

With this knowledge and understanding, Hildegard is elevated in society because she possesses information that men of the church need to know to properly lead their people.

Unlike Hildegard, Angela struggled more to have her voice heard and her visions written. However, she too saw God and was called upon to deliver a message: "And I give you this sign: try to speak with your companions " (Angela 262). Like Hildegard she "felt compelled to get these revelations into written form" (Angela 261). Because Angela was not of the same esteem as Hildegard, a nun, she is turned away by a friar in Assisi when he deemed her as possessed by evil: "I told her that never again in the future should she dare to come to Assisi where this evil overtook her" (Angela 260). However, Brother Arnaldo sees the vitality in her visions and records

them to the best he can without having a complete understanding: "I honestly could not understand everything she said...I wrote, I consider that it was a divine miracle what I wrote and could put in order" (261). Though less established than Hildegard, Angela too made an impact on her contemporaries. She had a number of disciples while she was still living, one being Ubertino of Casale who said she was "central to his spiritual rebirth" (Mazzoni 595). Angela's influence in the church was a paradoxical one, because though she possessed the power of God, it was manifested hysterically. She was always weeping and screaming as a result of her mystic ability.

Both women use imagery of some kind of divine light or warmth that suggested an unearthly brightness in what they were seeing. The shared imagery across female visionaries created a tradition in female mystic literature. The language they used in describing their visions caught the attention of men, because they explained something so great, an unworthy man could never endure it. Though they lacked true authority, and their humble response to praise for their positive action upheld the patriarchy, men would still turn to them "when terrible happenings required divine intervention" (Dickens 6). Therefore, female influence reached further than it would have if women did not possess the ability to receive magic through God's intervention. The "splendid light" and "divine sweetness" these women were able to experience, because of their vulnerability and femininity, empowered them to speak in the church. It may have come from a place of submission, but this manic pursuit to share their visions forced men to listen to women.

Conclusion

Even with all the suffering, self-punishment and lack of vainglory in the medieval female mystic tradition, it still carved out a place for women to be more involved in society. They were never elevated to the position men held in society, but their supernatural power to receive messages directly from God gave them an upper-hand to the men of the church. These few special women had the ability to see things most could never understand. It was actually women's connection to their bodies that allowed them to build a transcendent relationship with their human form that allowed them to see the incarnate world. In service to God, these women denied their position as being pure and devout, because they did not want praise for doing God's work. Angela spent her whole life devoted to surrendering herself to help others in penance for her sins. Hildegard did the same, and she gained enough esteem to communicate with leaders of the church, writing to "popes, archbishops, priors, abbots and abbesses" (Dickens 27). She shared her knowledge with all of society and specifically provided women with a forum in which to find their voices. Prior to the female mystic tradition such a forum did not exist.

Though these women have been criticized for their extreme humility and inability to take pleasure in their faith, they did so all in service of God, which in a way made them happy. They were pious servants above all others on earth, and it would be inaccurate to try and condemn their behavior using modern-day standards of what defines an empowered woman. Though in modern day it may seem that these women's eroticism and hysteria in relation to their visions took away from their authority in the church, in medieval times it was these same behaviors that empowered them to speak out. Therefore, when looking at the female mystic tradition through the lens of modern society, it does seem they allowed the patriarchy to control them; however, it cannot be looked at that way. These women did ascend above their inferior position to men simply because the men listened to them. To these women, serving God in pain, brought them a sublime level of joy. Their service to God held the promise that they would rise up to an eternal life with the lord after their time on earth was up. In medieval times, this was the highest level of joy and fulfillment available to women.

Works Cited

- Dickens, Andrea Janelle. *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.
- Elliot, Dylan. "Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body." *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition C.1100-C.1500*, by A.J Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Brepols, 2010, pp. 13–36.
- "Introduction." *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, by Elizabeth Alvilda. Petroff, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 3–53.
- Kerby-Fulton, Kathryn. "Hildegard of Bingen." *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition C.1100-C.1500*, by A.J Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Brepols, 2010, pp. 343–365.
- Mazzoni, Christina M. "Feminism, Abjection, Transgression: Angela of Foligno and the Twentieth Century." *Mystics Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 2, June 1991, pp. 61–70.
- Mazzoni, Cristina. "Angela of Foligno." *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition C.1100-C.1500*, by A.J Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, Brepols, 2010, pp. 581–596.

CREATIVE WRITING

COMPLIT 100
INTERNATIONAL HORROR

Rewriting Edga Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

By
Lilly Shaw

Introduction

For my rewrite I chose Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of The House of Usher". I wanted to keep the story very similar to the original with one major difference: the narrator would no longer be the unknown visitor but the house itself (or more accurately the mysterious evil presence that dwells within it). I knew this would be a bit of a challenge, but if done right could effectively portray similar themes as the original story, themes such as human vulnerability in both the body and mind.

For this reason, I made my monster one that feeds off not only the physical blood of the victim but it's soul as well. I did take the liberty of changing the meaning behind small plot points in order for it to fit my story better. One change, or more so addition to the story, is that the haunting presence gets a bit of a background in my story, describing itself as an ancient being that first began living in the water outside of the house before it was built.

However, in my mind the most substantial of these changes is the ending moment with Lady Madeleine, who in the original story one can assume was indeed buried alive. In my version, Lady Madeleine is indeed dead when the two men find her, and it is the evil presence in the house that is conducting her body in order to feast fully upon its victims. I believe this change would make the ending more about the creature I give a voice to rather than the characters it feasts upon, making the ending of its agency rather than of anyone else's.

With this change I could also have my ending, in which its weakened state is responsible for the house's disintegration, as well connecting it to the backstory I created for my monster, having him come full circle and retreating to the black depths of the water from which he came. Other than this I tried to tell my story in a way that is parallel to the original, describing the same events only through the perspective of the monster that is continuously feeding upon the family of Usher and all else who enters the house.

The Fall of The House of Usher

I had been sinking low, the black depths becoming my hands, my eyes, my mouth, I was lapping at the dank and sulfurous edges of the earth, darkened by the hate and rot of the dead, my teeth stretched over everything I could not taste, so hungry, so insatiable, crying into the

blackness and creating its source, weeping out great ballons of inky grotesquery. It was in this search for some slick pink morsel to wrap my blade of a tongue around, to pierce and draw into me, that I smelled roaming in the distance, something fresh, not yet begun to rot.

Now I am not the black water, I am metal bones and glass edges to spy, to peak, to glance at things I might be able to taste. I groan and ache, in search of something to fill me, I expand my bones, draw them out, seep them like water into corners and holes within rotten wood. I am so large, I can twist and turn within the confines of my new body, hurt with it, feel my hunger with it. I dance around in this form, I dance because the new and fresh thing is here with me, came right up and offered its sweet flesh.

I spy on him now as I did when he first came, when I fled to the emptiness of the ash and oak, conducting their bony roots like a marionette, setting them to writhe and squirm beneath the earth, feeling with them each approaching step of the newcomer. The closer he came the stronger the scent enticed me in hollow places, the fresh energy stretching over me, so unlike the used up halflings that had sustained me, more my black thickness than their own silver. I threw myself back to the water, spying at him there, while he glanced at my edges, then I threw myself again, to the sharp angles of the windows and their rotting beams set against cold glass.

His face is vivid with life, flushed with color and strength. He is untouchable, I find, as my prodding finger falters and squirms, moving like a worm in the presence of his independence.

He is too clean, too fresh, too full of otherworldly wonders whose influence restricts me. I watch him for a while, as he glances over me, and the russett pink of his flesh makes me weep with anger. He is so unlike the two pitiful souls who sit small and quivering, pressed against me, rotting on my insides. He is the scent of something untainted, new, something that could fill the miserable fathoms of my hunger. I will take him slowly, I have already begun to gnaw at the boundaries, soon I will be able to taste.

I feel him shift within me, as I peak at him with eyes of glass and wood. The one I have feasted on, the one who rots, greets him. They make sounds I do not care for, and I watch with quiet glee as the newcomer searches for traces of things that I have devoured. He sings like a songbird notes of different colors, vibrant and moving sounds he makes in an effort to draw something from his companion. He does not know that all he searches for within his friend is lost, sucked into oblivion, sloshing in my monstrous stomach. The only thing I've left there is fear, the thing that tethers him to me, that holds him in place so he can be tasted at my will. It is the only thing the newcomer will find in his proddings; the fear, like ribbons of blood that wink and

dance before me, hints of life, filling my eyes with ruby red lust. They move and squirm, I tear at the flesh of my own mouth, watching in anticipation to see when his songbird call will wilt, when he too will be infected with the fear I have left intact, cultivated, within my victims.

Though he is too strong for me to pluck away at, his scent entices me enough to feast upon the other little thing, the one already used. As they sit down, still speaking, I crane my finger down to his head, feeling with a tender grace, the tares and folds of the grey thickness within it, the place where I feel his substance most acutely. I trace over the old wounds I have made there before, deep hollow plunges to bleed him of the liquid silver and red I need to smooth the creases of my cracked mouth. They are old and wasted, cavernous in their lacking, black and tasteless moments I have already savored. I prod and touch, I can feel the slippery dew of his palm against the seat as I feel for the remainders of his sanity. I find a place there, warm and untouched, for me to widdle my little finger in, my tongue lulling in anticipation beneath him.

Though he does not see me his body registers the peeling back of its bark, the small intrusion I make three inches above his left ear. With rigid motion his body stiffens and shakes, excretes sweat that I catch, along with the blood and silver from his head, with my open mouth, wide as the floor beneath him. I am glowing, dancing through my metal veins pumping thick bile, the grey walls I have adopted as skin sinking and groaning in delight.

When I finish, he looks white as marrow, dark eyes darting like synchronised flies. The new one too looks worse and stretching my long face to his I catch the fresh scent of fear. I am still ravenous, the little thing I fed upon does not taste so sweet. I taste myself in his blood, it is corrupted by the traces I leave from plunging, the holes I make that shrivel and fold then fill up with my seeping soul that crawls into all these dead and empty spaces. He knows he will die, there is so little of him left, so little claim to life already. He is more dead than alive, more myself than his own, he shakes and tells the other of his fate, again I laugh, I laugh because it is true, because he will die and when he does it will be with a muted trickle that the last of him goes, finding its way into my mouth in its final rest.

Deeper within me I feel a stirring, the other quivering little soul, closer to its end even more so than the other tasteless creature. She moves and I slip away from the room where they sit, swinging myself about to follow her as she traces down the stairs. I am in the ceiling, watching them all as she passes by, passing with the soundless steps of a body who walks in the fields of death. I will taste the last of her soon, and despite her tainted nature it will give me the strength I need to make the first plunge into this new flesh. For now I'll let her alone, she'll lay

within me for a while longer, the last of her light a flickering thing for me to devour when the time is right.

My only focus lies within observing and tearing away at the new soul. He cannot spread like I can, though he tries. I have watched him for days now, taking small drops of dew from his companion to sustain me, all the while waiting as fear decomposes him enough for me to pierce. I watch as he tries to spread himself as I do, travelling through my many arms, my waist, my thigh, his song bird call dropping bit by bit its flourishes as he tries to recompose my squirmy little pet, but he cannot spread like I can. I am the walls that shield them, the beds they sleep in, the air they breathe which I use to plunge myself into their bodies, searching their lungs in my frantic, relentless way for a nick or contusion to burrow and grow parts of myself in.

I am constantly bouncing, spreading myself over these things, conducting them as my own. This new flesh looks over it all and sees different things, not knowing they are all the same, all my bones, all my flesh and teeth. He tries to spread himself, I see his feeble attempts, stretching and searching for the remains of his friend with little golden thoughts, not knowing I have sucked him dry of himself, not seeing that he encounters only me with his attempted tetherings. I am the only thing that enters him, that encases him, I have weakened him with the consistency of my meager violations, and I know he is nearly susceptible. Tonight, I will finish the nearly dead thing, and then take my first plunge into the new flesh.

I am spread out against mold and darkness, in the sinew of webbing, the harshness of old iron and wood, and I am rolling in my mouth the thoughts of how I will eat the new and fresh thing. I know I must be sure to keep him here, so as to give him time to lose in his entirety the unknowing powers he has against me. If he leaves but for a moment, he will have grown defenses against me. I know this from the others, before I learned to keep them in place, when they would come and go and with each return carry the foul protection of stupidity that comes from an ever-shifting focus, a mind that is not stagnant and cannot be feasted upon slowly. This movement, like thick hide, delays the piercing action of my glass and iron teeth, unlike the soft and supple skin of one that has begun to rot. Within the harsh piers and angles of my body the creature is safe to decompose, to bleed and disintegrate into my open mouth.

Before the house was erected, I dwelled only in the depths of that black pond, a feeble body of wax sucking out the life of frogs and birds in order to sustain myself. Then the house was born in sweat and blood, and the water made it alive, pulsing through its pipes, mixed with its cement, carrying me with it and enfusing me within its structure. There I found a place to dwell, a place to feed, to grow stronger and older.

I kept these creatures alive enough to spawn for me, like little pets with the bloody task of keeping a constant thread of souls for me to pluck away at. But an ancient thing such as me grows tired of the same taste, the same blood that runs through their veins which I have feasted upon for centuries. I will let them die, finally, then I will trap this new one here and sew a fresh thread, perhaps become stronger, spread more, take my fill of things. For now, though I must wait, take my time as all ancient things do in the process of sustaining myself.

Now it is night, and I can feed again. I move from the damp and mildewed darkness, lifting into the air. The darkness carries me faster than the light, so that I slip with seamless intent through peeping cracks and into the lady's chamber. Hovering above her I grow my fingers into long and slim tools, bending their grey form into twisting hooks I place around her head. One by one I pierce the veil of her flesh and feel the corners of her mind for any lasting dew which I draw out, hard and fast, into my own being. Her eyes are open suddenly, her body pale and slick, trembling with the last heave of life as I cleanse the emptying shell of her soul. Fully dead now, a grey pallor takes set on her face, my mouth fills with a mixture of my own soot and traces of her liquid membrane, the traces of life left within her drained like the last grainy sips of muddy water.

I am floating again, through the air and walls, taking up the space in its entirety with the strength of my delight, then sinking back down into something smaller that passes through the space with slow, floating movement. The morning will come soon, and new ribbons of fear will dance with me through the halls, sprouting from the heads of those that discover the clean bones of my last victory. In envisioning them I slip through time until they are real, when the pitch of the night has settled into a lifeless grey, and the two mortal souls carry the body of the woman deeper into my depths. I follow them, shifting myself through pipes and paper across the walls, catching sight of their fear. The new one is becoming tender and supple, I reach a finger out to caress him as they walk, and I can feel the slacking of skin, the beginning of rot. Gleefully I retreat, willing myself to wait, waiting until the darkness comes again.

It comes, and when it does, I am swift, impatient and hungry, finally ready to taste the newness of his flesh. I clamor across the floorboards, jump from wall to wall, fling myself into the space where he sits and waits for me. When I see him there, the grey and green of his skin glistening with fear, I am electric and pulsing with ravenous joy. I smell the crimson of his life and it drives me to act swiftly, diving down but an inch away from him, my fingers traveling like the legs of spiders up his back and to the sides of his head. I feel with my coarseness the dip of his temple, and it is there I make my first incision. His body, like all the others, begins its quivering submission as I lap up the first signs of crimson nectar that betray him, falling to my mouth and

filling me with colors I have never felt before. I am alive and buzzing, these few drops of a purity which I have not tasted for centuries. I take my fill greedily, savoring the sweetness of his sweat, the liquor of his blood. I feel him unknowingly resisting me, trying to pull away, perhaps willing himself to jump up, but unable to do so because of my tight grip. For a moment my eyes tilt back in exalted submission as I savour the pooling taste of his fresh soul, filling me as I have never been filled before.

I feel the other one coming, the ribbons of his fear dancing through the room and falling into my mouth, mixing with the essence of his companion. With much difficulty I withdraw my finger and stop the drainage. Yes, I could have very well finished him off right there, left his corpse an empty shriveled thing. But then I would have had no new thing to keep sustaining myself with, I would be forced to continue with the consumption of the one who is entering the room and speaking words, whose blood will never be enough now that I have tasted something fresh, something other than a mixture of my own being. He is loud and frightened, smothering the traces of my satisfaction. I close my mouth, trying to savor the last moments of that taste. But it is not enough. A feverish desire has flooded my body, a new passion that drives me in a way which is electric and rapid. I must find some lasting permanence in that taste, some way for it to fill my body entirely without wasting it on the expanse of my being. I am vibrating and shifting about the room swiftly, looking at the pair, the one I desire picking up a book, shaking off my effect, the scent of his life filling him again. I shift faster about, rickashaying from the corners of my walls, trying to find a new angle, looking for some new way to feast and be filled.

I think of the empty shell below me, the small one with little teeth that can bite. She could be filled, she could taste and be filled by the blood in a way I cannot, she who lays stiff and still beneath us. I race to her, letting myself fall through the floors with frantic speed to reach the cold dead body, banging against the walls as I go. I have never tried to infect in such a way, to enfuse broken flesh with myself, flesh that has already begun to rot, but it is the only solution to my growing need, the only way I will be filled. I enter her little box, squeeze myself in and penetrate her flesh.

It is cold and still and does not at first contain me. I feel myself slipping out every time I try to move, and it takes all of my concentration to press firmly from the inside against the flesh, willing myself to move its little eyes and hands with my force. I twitch the fingers, stubby and useless, but under my control, nonetheless. I move her head, her feet, her arms, I cry with excitement, and it is not a thick inky black but a light salty trickle that wets the cold cheeks I feel encase me. I use my strength through her feeble body, lashing and tearing at my confines,

breaking her skin and revealing the little bits of dew left behind. I release myself, moving slowly, strangely, the confines of a body such a foreign conductor of my soul. My arms and hands are one connected thing, they fling and flop as I move, almost breaking as I close the iron door with a strength they are not used to wielding. I clamber up the stairs, slipping and falling but moving with as much haste as the broken body allows. I feel my new tongue and my new teeth, the instruments I will seek my satisfaction with. I am smiling, I think, smiling because I know this is a body that can be filled. I move faster, feeling the clutch I have on the body becoming weaker, parts of me close to slipping out through the eyes and mouth.

Finally, I have come to the door, the place in which they dwell. I see no ribbons of fear with these human eyes, but I hear the silence and I know it is there. I am slipping, I must act fast, I feel heavy and strange, unable to control myself within this form, I know I am weakened with every moment I spend in this condensed state, I need to feed, to be filled. I open the door with fingers that feel limp when I conduct them, and slowly my two victims are revealed to me. They stare with shock and horror as I stumble towards them, hand outstretched for my prize.

My vision is blotchy, I am so weak, but I can smell him and I must have him. I am moving forward, but I can barely see, the body I feel is slipping in and out of my control, lulling and swaying as I advance. I feel so strange, so strange, but I must be filled, I must be. I feel myself fall, falling on something, it is my victim, I cannot tell if it is the right one, the one I want, I can only hope it is. With my lasting strength I stretch my jaw as wide as it can go so that I can bite down, but I find that I can't. Instead I am slipping fast, tumbling down, leaving the mortal body and sinking with incredible speed. I am weeping out loud and wretched wails of despair that makes the air ring with fury, I fall faster, I don't know how long for, but the house is crumbling around me, I feel the borders I once inhabited sinking and cracking, passing through me as they too fall.

I land in the depths of the lake, the darkness swallowing me as I sink to its bottom, a weakened frail thing, wallowing in my own wretched emptiness. I am sinking, spitting out black bile and taking it in again in the desperate hope that it will fill me, fill me completely.

COMPLIT 122
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Buildings of My Spirituality: A Critical Introduction

By
Katherine Downs

Spirituality is a combination of personal mentality and an individual's interpretation of themselves in relation to the world around them. It develops over the course of a lifetime as one gains external experiences from both society and Nature, and is altered by their own perceptions of how these aspects influence their future ways of viewing themselves in relation to the universe. There are multiple sources I have found myself drawing my own spirituality from including; those discoverable in nature as Matsuo Basho expresses in *Basho's Narrow Road*, one's origins or sense of home covered by Grace Nichols in "The Fat Black Woman's Poems", and both the state of solitude and events of your childhood according to Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*.

There are limitless possibilities to the conclusions someone can draw from nature as a part of the world around us. It offers a simplistic sense of understanding and deep internal reflection towards the act of being alive. I find it valuable to notice and appreciate the non-materialistic side of the world. It offers a reality check so-to-speak of my current standing in the cycle of life. Basho shares this respect for living life forms by expressing that "the way those cherry blossoms...touched [him] deeply" (101). These flowers have no audible voice for themselves, but yet they have the power to speak to us in a spiritual sense, a sort of inspirational form of existence. I find a similarly touching encounter lying in the stars with their vast coverage of the dark sky. They do nothing extraordinary, similar to the cherry blossoms, but allow for self-taught teachings of our place in the world. I find their presence calming and they motivate my mind to think in ways apart from my own physical needs. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that the stars in nature represent different aspects of ourselves as individuals. Nature has the power to reflect spirituality based on your interpretation of it, what you see when you look at different parts of nature. I see parts within myself in sections of the stars, including my past and the ways in which I used to think, similar to how "an indubitable monument from a thousand years ago...allowed [Basho] to contemplate the minds of ancient people" (75). The ways I used to think in my childhood are distant to me now, and they're interesting to reflect back upon to see how my mentality has developed over time.

You begin your ways of viewing the world throughout your childhood experiences. Sometimes it's important to "continue to look like a child upon it all as upon something unfamiliar, from the depths of one's own world" as this beginning perception of the world does not lack

importance compared to my modern self-perceptions (Rilke, 53). A large piece of one's childhood is the places where they grew up. If Nichols' is referring to herself as the speaker in her poem "Tropical Death", then she expresses how she wants to die in the place where she grew up, with "a brilliant tropical death / not some cold sojourn / in some North Europe far/forlorn" (lines 3-4). The environment of one's childhood is essential in our early thoughts about our place in the world, acting as a starting baseline for future spiritual molding.

With our spirituality sharing the same origins as our physical selves, we gain knowledge and contentment within ourselves about our purpose in this world as we age and move around the globe. The journey to forming this internal perspective of life is one that must be taken alone and without the influence of other people's ideas. Rilke said, "we are solitary" as I believe this to be our natural state of being, as humans (50). I agree that "you should not be confused in your solitude by the fact that there is something in you that wants to break out of it. This very wish will help you, if you use it quietly, and deliberately" (Rilke 53). We learn from solitude and being alone with our thoughts, as it allows us to form a personal acceptance of ourselves in connection to external influences--being our past and present experiences. Being alone, we can limit the extent to which the ideas or judgments of the people around us influence our ways of thinking. It allows us to cope in times of frustration and sadness which also develops our personal sense of identity. According to Rilke, "almost all of our sadnesses are moments of tension that we find paralyzing because we no longer hear our surprised feelings living...because we stand in the middle of a transition where we cannot remain standing" (64). We cannot remain standing in one place of emotional distress for the remainder of our lives. Dealing with emotional baggage brought about by a negative experience is essential to shaping who you are. You learn from these experiences in the sense of whom you have become as a result of them. From here, you can go about reshaping yourself through mental work and self-acceptance once considering "whether these great sadnesses have not rather gone right through the center of yourself? Whether much in you has not altered, whether you have not somewhere, at some point of your being, undergone a change while you were sad?" (Rilke 63). To come out of this with a more positive outlook, the issue must be dealt with head-on and accepted as an event that has become a part of you, regardless of any denial you may have on the subject. This process of self-acceptance and return of self-certainty in your role as part of the world is similar to that of a pilgrimage--and "one virtue of pilgrimage" is, "the joy of being alive" (Basho, 75). Despite some experiences being more negative than others, "the point is to live everything" in its entirety (Rilke, 27). Life is a journey through various experiences, with each one of them having something to be learned and added to one's view of the world from an internal perspective.

I incorporated these aspects that I believe to be true and influential over my own spirituality in a series of poems. Each poem in my brief collection covers one aspect of places I draw my current spirituality from. "Astronomy" reflects on my view of the stars and the conclusions I come to while viewing them in nature. I believe they tie me (and us collectively) to the past by holding within them parts of both my current self and past versions of myself throughout my youth (as they were also present in the sky during my experiences then). I describe specific experiences of my childhood that I reflect upon in "My Childhood Self Origin" over the course of my elementary school years. "Out to Dinner" describes one specific negative incident in life that must be accepted and overcome, although, I do not use the first person and include a different speaker (similar to Nichols' in her collection "The Fat Black Woman's Poems"--as some readers may perceive the speaker and author of her poems to have different identities). I also include "Journey" to encompass the idea of solitude being an accepted aspect (and place of reflection) of living that I acquire to keep progressing forward in life.

The Buildings of My Spirituality, A Collection

"My Childhood Self Origin"

I am from the peeling black numbers on stolen bar mugs
and fractured toothpicks.

From the warped brick patio,
of the tall green townhouse
next to the gritty run-down playground.

I'm from the broken up driveway,
and its crooked borders of chalk drawn streets.

From long strands of drool
that drape down and dangle from shrinking candy necklaces.

I am from sand angels in the dunes of Ferncroft Country Club.

From the sprinkler mist,
that leaves an aroma of wet grass
on my bathing suit.

I'm from the waft of strawberry shampoo,
as it swirls down the shower drain at the YMCA.

From the personalized igloos of New England,
with locations west and south of the garage.
From rosey cheeks pinched white by winter winds.

I am from the sea of snow
that swallowed the black sled,

It sank years ago, enduring the weight of too many children in down coats.

“Out to Dinner”

Ice box car. Cold—

Words.

His feet fill the empty footwell.

Motionless. Stunned frozen.

Vague memories of the living room radiator’s seeping warmth

Amidst this ambush of criticism.

Oil on the garage floor. Immature. Irresponsible.

Wake up. Pay attention.

Migraine. Dad’s bottle left on the coffee table

But the whiskey on Dad’s breath laughs at the boy’s own pocketed driver’s license,

Of course he’s incapable of driving

...to Dad’s standards.

“Astronomy”

The stars

are not twinkling lights
against a limitless empty canvas.

They are not massive pits
of endless fire and ice.

Their constellations are not pictures
of timeless tall-tales.

No. The stars

are the truthful soul-bearings of our pasts.

They are the perceptive memories buried within ourselves.

They are the brightness within our voids,

the insightful reminders of who we are.

The stars are our individuality amongst each other.

“Journey”

I only move forward

Face ahead and eyes wide.

Leaving a trail of history,

An imprint of memorable twists and turns

Spotted with experiences

And painted with people.

The sun sets behind my back

And I watch my shadow grow taller

The farther I go.

Together we walk for miles,

Attached at the heels,

Stepping to the rhythm of the wind.

Suddenly the painted rays drop behind the valley

The pavement fades from sight,

Disappearing within the darkness.

Reflections of starlight glisten,
Speckled patterns of light in my eyes.

My head sways
To the tapping of each step,
The patter of my feet on the open road beneath me,
Nodding to the echoes of my toes.
My heels attached now only to the opaqueness,
And I am peacefully left alone.

Works Cited

- Basho, Matsuo. *Basho's Narrow Road*. Translated by Hiroaki Sato, Stone Bridge Press, 1996.
- Nichols, Grace. "Tropical Death." *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, London, Virago Press, 1984.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Translated by M.D. Herter Norton, W.W. Norton & Company, 1954.

COMPLIT 236
DIGITAL CULTURES

An Artificially Intelligent Future

by
Kyle DeWitt

“Hey Siri, play me a song”, I speak into my phone while holding down the power button. A colorful, visually pleasing line fluctuates on the screen as I speak, and before I know it, music is flowing out of my iPhone’s speakers. Siri, an artificially intelligent software, is programmed to solve problems and offer solutions to any input from an iPhone user. She can be very helpful, as well as funny, quirky, and downright interesting. This artificial intelligence, however, only scratches the surface of what AI technology is capable of. As we continue to progress into the digital age, technology is becoming more and more advanced by the day. The rate at which technology is advancing is increasing rapidly, with new developments and discoveries constantly leading us farther into the future. Artificial intelligence is a branch of technology that continues to advance at a rapid pace, while blurring the line between the digital and human world. A.M. Turing first hypothesized the idea of artificial intelligence in 1950 by asking a simple, yet infinitely complex question, “Can machines think?” (Turing). 70 years later, Turing would simply be floored by the way that scientists across the world have answered his question; with a resounding yes. Artificial intelligence is becoming a part of our everyday lives. From our Siris and Alexa’s, to self-parking cars, to what appears on our social media feeds, artificial intelligence is everywhere, even when we may not know it. Artificial intelligence is also being used to make breakthroughs across different industries across the globe. The future of industries like healthcare, business, and the public sector will incorporate AI, and this technology will be used to hopefully better the lives of all and make our processes more efficient and more effective. However, with great power comes great responsibility. And artificial intelligence will prove to be one of the greatest powers when it comes to technology. We must exercise caution and ethical judgement when moving forward with AI, as there are very real dangers and risks that will come along with its use. Artificial intelligence has the ability to be humankind’s most impactful invention, and the world of possibilities and potential is endless as long as this technology is used responsibly.

Artificial intelligence will have the potential to make monumental improvements across many fields, including the field of medicine and healthcare. AI can make an impact in the world of healthcare in many ways, one of which that is very relevant today, is by using data to get ahead of and better analyze the spread of viruses. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread has been limited and slowed mainly by isolation and contact tracing. Some aspects of this fight against the

virus have used artificial intelligence, including countries like China and Japan using “robots for surveillance. Countries like Qatar, Indonesia, and Jordan also use drones to monitor the isolation process” (Albzeirat). These artificially intelligent surveillance techniques have been used to monitor and ensure isolation, but AI can be used in other ways in order to help monitor and slow the spread of a virus like COVID-19. There have also been “new applications related to remote temperature checks and thermal monitoring cameras” (Albzeirat). These thermal cameras, when equipped with artificially intelligent data collection, can be used to monitor public places and collect data, helping to control the spread and better inform public policy makers.

While these uses to help monitor isolation are helpful, the biggest advantage of AI in virus spread control is the ability to use data to predict the future and forecast where the spread will move to next. This process of predicting the evolution of any viruses through genetic analysis and analysis of interactions between viruses with each other or with the surrounding environment” (Albzeirat) will help scientists to be better equipped in stopping new strains of virus. AI can also be used to collect and analyze valuable “data about the incubation period, the route of transmission, the ports of entry” (Albzeirat). This data and the way that AI algorithms can be run to predict the viruses next move “could be critical to control the spreading of the diseases” (Albzeirat). While the technology is limited at this point, artificial intelligence will be key in preventing the next outbreak of a virus like COVID-19. The results of this virus have been catastrophic across the globe, and hopefully our research and advancements in technology like AI will have the potential to prevent and protect us from another event like this.

While AI presents us with a powerful tool to aid in the fight against the spread of diseases and viruses like COVID-19, this technology and the collection of biological data must be done responsibly and carefully. While the positive possibilities are certainly great, “the risks and challenges facing this future vision in combating viruses and epidemics should be considered in order to prevent using this knowledge to build a biological weapon” (Albzeirat). Anytime biological data is collected and used in this way, especially with artificially intelligent software, it is essential that it does not fall into the wrong hands. The results of irresponsibility on this stage could be very dangerous, and the idea of a biological weapon is one that must not be taken lightly.

In addition to potential advancements in virus spread prevention, artificial intelligence is being researched for many other uses in the medical field, including breast cancer screening. The ability of artificial intelligence to read and analyze images can be applied to this field and may prove to be very useful in the next few years. The growth of artificial intelligence and “the developments in AI interpretation of medical images over the last few years seem to have opened

the door for incorporating stand-alone computer interpretation of images into breast cancer screening programs" (Sechopolous). This is a very interesting development in the world of medicine, as the use of AI to interpret images and screen for these cancers would greatly reduce the human workload in this field. Impressively, "current evidence shows that these algorithms are approaching, if not yet have reached, expert human performance" (Secopolous). This is a groundbreaking time in both the world of science and medicine. As the programs and algorithms developed for artificial intelligence are reaching extremely proficient levels, studies are showing these algorithms are becoming closer and closer to an expert human ability in analyzing these images. The next few years will be critical for these developments, as this technology will hopefully be able to reach other sectors of screening and imaging analysis. Over the course of the near future, "further improvements in algorithms and training sets, combined with evidence from more definite, prospective, actual-screening-prevalence trials, could finally usher in the age of computers having a direct role in breast cancer screening" (Secopolous). Artificial intelligence could prove to be a game changing technology in the world of breast cancer screening. In such a vital field, advancements in technology and increased reliability and accuracy in screening could save lives. The progress already made in this direction is extremely promising, and in the next few years we could see artificial intelligence start to have a powerful impact on breast cancer screening and the world of medicine as a whole.

In the near future, we can also expect artificial intelligence to become incorporated with and play a part in the public sector and government. In a field like the public sector, an increase in productivity and technology has the potential to benefit lots of people. Governments will have the potential to "use AI to design better policies and make better decisions, improve communication and engagement with citizens and residents, and improve the speed and quality of public services" (Berryhill). If this artificial intelligence is used in the right ways, it has the ability to benefit the lives of citizens across the globe. By collecting a large amount of data from constituents of governments, artificially intelligent programs can make decisions on a basis that is more representative of the people. It is believed that "automated processes can assist the government to make decisions that are more fair and accurate than previously was the case" (Berryhill). By automating decision making process of government, there will be a shift in power to the people and the will of the majority. Opposed to current government setups where small groups of people in power are responsible for decision making in legislation. There will also be a significant amount of time, energy, and money saved by automating processes in the public sector. By automating certain processes, "it is expected that the potential will exist to free up nearly one-third of public servants' time, allowing them to shift from mundane tasks to high-value

work” (Berryhill). By allowing public servants to spend their time performing meaningful tasks, like connecting with their communities, and actively strategizing and analyzing complex situations, artificial intelligence has the potential to drastically improve government decision making and time management.

Artificial intelligence also has the potential to positively impact another aspect of the public sector: public transportation. The most obvious use of artificial intelligence is self-driving cars, which could play a large part in the future of transportation. With many companies already equipping their cars with the ability to park themselves, and some companies, like Tesla, already using self-driving technology, artificial intelligence has already infiltrated the automobile industry. However, in the public sector, “governments are using AI to transform the ways in which they predict and manage traffic flows and handle potential safety issues.” (Berryhill). In a few examples from across the globe, governments are using artificially intelligent programs to compile data and using this data to better predict and adapt to reduce traffic congestion. In China, “the city of Hangzhou, which has a metropolitan population of about 6 million, has partnered with tech firm Alibaba to launch the “City Brain” project. The initiative uses hundreds of cameras around the city to collect real-time data on road traffic conditions. These machine-readable data are then centralized and fed into an “AI hub” which makes decisions affecting traffic lights at 128 city intersections” (Berryhill). This technology is groundbreaking and has the ability to monitor and control the flow of traffic, preventing traffic jams and increasing the efficiency of commutes. This technology, however, does not just monitor traffic. This artificial intelligence also has the ability to make “strategic decisions, such as identifying and clearing paths for ambulances on emergency calls, reducing their travel time by 50%” (Berryhill). By helping to clear the way for ambulances, cutting their travel times in half, this technology is actively saving lives and benefitting the citizens of Hangzhou.

In Singapore, SMRT, a public transportation organization, has worked on “a pilot using AI to predict the likelihood that public bus drivers would crash within the next three months. If the AI systems indicated a high chance of a crash for a driver, they are required to take a training course. The AI pilot used historical road performance data, and two data scientists observed bus driver behavior in order to identify potential risk factors” (Berryhill). This type of algorithmic analysis done by the artificially intelligent pilot could potentially save lives. This type of analysis would be nearly impossible for a human to complete, and this program will hopefully be able to prevent tragic accidents from occurring. These are only the beginning of the potential for artificial intelligence in these aspects of the public sector. With possibilities like these across the globe, it is clear that AI

will play an important role in the future of public transportation and have a meaningful impact on the public sector and governments around the world.

Although there is great potential for artificial intelligence to have a positive impact on the public sector, we must go about this transition cautiously as a society. It will be very important that governments are held accountable for their use of artificial intelligence, and that its use is for purposes of bettering society for all, not some. Artificial intelligence can only be as good as its training and understanding of data, so bias and discrimination is possible if the programs are trained in a biased way. Artificial intelligence programs have had issues with bias and discrimination in the past. A few examples of this were seen when “Amazon discovered that its AI to sort through and select job applicants was biased against women (Dastin, 2018). The use of the COMPAS system in American sentencing and parole decision making has also been well analyzed for reproducing systemic biases against Afro-Americans (Allen, 2019; Benjamin, 2019). Facial recognition systems developed in the Western world have also been critiqued for having much higher error rates for non-White people (Bacchini & Lorusso, 2019)” (Henman). While these are just a few examples of bias in AI, they highlight the need for extensive caution and oversight if governmental practices are to transition to artificial intelligence for decision making and representation. With more research, development, and training of AI programs, there is hope that these biases will be mitigated and there will cease to be discrimination in the algorithms. Once this key piece is solved, artificial intelligence will be able to make a positive change on the way the public sector and governments operate. But until then, these programs should be closely monitored and those in power must be held accountable for their use and any discrimination that occurs due to a lack of training. Overall, there is a hopeful trajectory for artificial intelligence in the public sector, but this technology must be used responsibly, and with the best interests of all constituents in mind.

In the near future, artificial intelligence will also infiltrate and begin to impact the world of business. Within the world of business, marketing is one aspect of the industry that will be most impacted by the arrival of artificial intelligence. Recently, “a survey by Salesforce shows that AI will be the technology most adopted by marketers in the coming years (Columbus 2019)” (Davenport). While this technology is still being developed, many believe that artificial intelligence is the future of connecting consumers with products, and for good reason. Across different business platforms and models, artificial intelligence will have an effect on how sales are made. In an AI future of sales, “salespeople will be assisted by an AI agent that monitors tele-conversations in real time. For example, using advanced voice analysis capabilities, an AI agent

might be able to infer from a customer's tone that an unmentioned issue remains a problem and provide real-time feedback to guide the (human) salesperson's next approach" (Davenport). This extra layer of assistance will help both the salesperson to perform their job at a higher level and help solve customers' problems in a more efficient manner. By helping to solve problems and answer questions in real time as a supplementary tool to a salesperson, the ability and potential of AI can be maximized. Along with aiding in real time sales work, AI will also have the ability to do predictive work, analyzing patterns and data to help inform businesses what their consumers want, when they want it. In the world of sales and marketing products, "AI should lead to substantial improvements in predictive ability. Contingent on levels of predictive accuracy, firms may even substantially change their business models, providing goods and services to customers on an ongoing basis based on data and predictions about their needs" (Davenport). These advancements have the potential to really change the landscape of marketing and business as a whole, as better predictive ability and forecasting will lead to better performance with increased efficiency. This efficiency will not only help the companies selling the products, it will also make it easier for the consumers who wish to purchase them to be connected with the right seller. As well as helping to connect customer to consumer in an effective way, AI is also "expected to play an important role in predicting not only what customers want to buy, but also what price to charge, and whether price promotions should be offered" (Davenport). This technology will help businesses find pricing points that maximize sales and customer satisfaction. Ideally, these programs will be used to help the consumer, however in certain hands and with certain corporations that very well may not be the case. Overall, artificial intelligence has the potential to change the world of marketing and sales and increase efficiency and satisfaction of both sides of the business world.

With the adoption of artificial intelligence into the business world comes concerns and like in other industries, this technology must be used responsibly. One of the biggest concerns is data privacy, especially regarding the collection of consumer data by artificially intelligent programs. Some consumers are very uncomfortable with the idea of their data being used for purposes that they are unaware of, and this could lead to legal and ethical disputes over a transition to an AI based business world. The main reasons why data privacy when dealing with artificial intelligence becomes difficult according to Davenport are "(1) the low cost of storage implies that data may exist substantially longer than was intended, (2) data may be repackaged and reused for rationales different than those intended, and (3) data for a certain individual may contain information about other individuals" (Davenport). These are real concerns for consumers and may create a difficult situation when it comes to businesses fully adopting AI to make suggestions and

predictions for their customers. These issues and concerns must be addressed by businesses and important decisions will have to be made regarding the privacy and usage of this data.

As artificial intelligence continues to advance, it will begin to become prevalent in many different industries across the globe. With the ability to think, machines are surpassing the expectations and standards that many have of technology and of computers. In the medical world, the possibilities of artificial intelligence are endlessly promising. With increasing precision, accuracy, and efficiency, AI is going to change the way that we view, imagine, and test surgical procedures, and disease prevention. The benefits of this technology in the medical world will be lifesaving, and the research and development being done right now will lay the groundwork for an artificially intelligent future of medicine. In the public sector, artificial intelligence is being developed that will change the way that governments interact with and make decisions on behalf their citizens. Automated processes will allow for public servants to spend less time doing busy work, and more time in their communities, addressing the issues that matter. Transportation will potentially be revolutionized, and with AI the efficiency of public travel can be maximized. In the world of business, AI implementation has the ability to result in increased customer satisfaction, as well as heightened efficiency and effectiveness of marketing and sales initiatives. With artificial intelligence, the possibilities for our future are endless. This technology has the power to be one of humankind's greatest inventions and has the potential to make life better in a plethora of ways for people across the globe. But with the power that comes with this technology comes responsibility, and it is essential that artificial intelligence is used for the benefit of all, and not selfishly or dangerously. If used for the wrong purposes or without caution, there is catastrophic potential. When giving machines the ability to learn, think, and become more and more like humans, we walk a fine line between great benefits and grave danger. As we continue into the future, for better or for worse, it will be fascinating to see the way in which artificial intelligence continues to change the world as we know it.

Works Cited

- Albzeirat, M.K., Zulkepli, N.N., Qaralleh, H. (2020). A Vision to Face Covid-19 pandemic and Future Risks Through Artificial Intelligence. *Journal of basic and applied Research in Biomedicine*,6(1):15-20
- A.M. Turing (1950) Computing Machinery and Intelligence. *Mind* 49: 433-460.
- Berryhill, J., et al. (2019), "Hello, World: Artificial intelligence and its use in the public sector", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 36, OECD Publishing, Paris,

- Davenport, T., Guha, A., Grewal, D. et al. How artificial intelligence will change the future of marketing. *J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci.* 48, 24–42 (2020).
- Henman, Paul. “Improving Public Services Using Artificial Intelligence: Possibilities, Pitfalls, Governance.” *Taylor & Francis, Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 14 Sept. 2020, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23276665.2020.1816188.
- Sechopoulos, Ioannis, and Ritse M. Mann. “Stand-Alone Artificial Intelligence - The Future of Breast Cancer Screening?” *The Breast*, Churchill Livingstone, 2 Jan. 2020,

COMPLIT 293
GENDER AND GLOBAL LITERATURE

Home, a Question (a biomythography)

by

Phoebe Michel

so then take me back if that place is it—
don't hold my hands,
stifle this heart
still not finished beating
its deepest expressions of
solitude and unity.

Palma de coco, currincho, maní.

i tried to dance alone in my room and felt myself all wrong.
alma and *soul* are not the same word;
translation falls down terribly
when asked to speak of love.

my bones are cold,
knees frail and wanting.
let me move, hear me sing—
there is no word in English for *gozar*.

Mar, verde frito, mono selvático, mi amor.

i keep on trying to sink my bare feet into the crunchy, bitten grass
and wail in silence when i see me
go nowhere, be stagnant, when i
feel the hot sand further than before;
wonder was it ever near to me,
because does anything belong to?

Huir, hogar, profundísimo vacío, casa mía.

I am often asking myself what does and does not belong to me, what I can justly and honestly call mine. *What is of me, what am I of?* I am often wondering if, anyway, I ever wanted to be identified, to own or to belong. Wondering what my life would have been if I had never learned of something other. It's a different thing to be told that you were born someplace and to feel that you belong to it, it to you.

I went to the town of Canoa, Ecuador for the first time when I was eight. I took my shoes off and I knew that that mud belonged with me, was of me, was me. I had three friends next door when I was ten and we played cops and robbers, threw sand, swallowed the ocean's water. Once, we found a huge pit on a construction site and threw a length of bamboo across it. We spent

hours balancing back and forth over the light-colored earth and sand below, sometimes falling, sometimes jumping or making it all the way across, victoriously, youthfully. Boasting scraped shins, telling the stories of reprimands we each received for coming home dirty and late.

JD was my first real kiss, and a good friend. I see those three childhood friends only very rarely, and we are strangers to each other. An *hola* without the memory of bonfires and twisted ankles, coca-cola and ritz crackers, oreos probably stolen. And this idea, this boundless possibility, of being a stranger to people I played with as a child, is beautiful to me because it seems at the very core of what makes a place feel like home. Meaning, I lived deeply enough that I can still walk a certain stretch of street or sand and feel that my memories of it and in it are far away but tangible.

Repollo made me a wedding ring out of thin strips of palm frond. Joao pulled my hair on the bus. Leito snuck bottles past my mama under the bougainvillea when we were teenagers. Emma was an utterly wild child and still my favorite friend carried in memory. We wrestled and ran and I swam past the break to save her from drowning. I walked her home through the salty-thick air (*salitre*) on a night during coastal Ecuador's windy season (winter, there, and one of two seasons) before she left for Lithuania.

I've come to believe that home for me is the home of my mistakes, of old romances, of pain, of enemies, the most deep-rooted and ferocious of my love, the food that warms me up and cools me down and fills my soul with life's good stuff. Home is the place I go to remember what the good stuff feels like. And no place has felt so much that way to me as Ecuador.

Joy Williams says, or quotes someone saying "home is not a place but a power". In my mind home doesn't have to stay, or speak, or wait. It only has to be. And my work is to open myself up to it—to that feeling, to that power. To hope for anything different would be to eternalize heartbreak, and to waste my blessed and ephemeral chances of being rooted, in everything and in nothing, waiting for a stability which I was born not to possess.

*god who i do not know,
bathe me please with cold water.
street of dust, burn me, barefooted.
i want to sweat on mainstreet at three a.m.,
complain about the roosters, eat bolo
and laugh in the heat.
far away from me is the mango,
so far away the monkeys,
the throbbing night.
my legs ache to run there*

*where everything is left behind.
when i go back i'll sit in the park with the birds,
the dogs, the chocolate shaved-ice con leche condensada.
when i go back i'll be more grateful
for passion, for poverty, for hope, and faith...*

In Ecuador we always have cold showers. You take a deep breath, step in, squirm underneath it, bathe quickly and gratefully. My very best friends, the ones I call sisters, live there. They carry hard-earned smiles, they brim with the smell of plantain peels and coastal salt.

The love of my life is bathing in the Santo Domingo river with her head thrown back, golden-breasted and glorious with the pain of her ancestors and mine nestled between her collarbones.

Patriarchal Trauma: Rewriting the World

by

Olivia Davis

This piece, a two-work set of two digital paintings, compares Carmen Maria Macahdo's "The Husband Stitch" and Oksana Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* and their depictions of the patriarchal system. "The Husband Stitch" is a world of magical realism that explores the patriarchy through the retelling of various urban legends, wrapped up in the narrator's green ribbon which she refuses to let her husband touch. *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* follows a protagonist who struggles with her Ukrainian nationality and her womanhood, exploring the intersection between various identities and the forms of violence that come with them. Both "The Husband Stitch" and *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* have a dual mode of understanding and processing the effects of patriarchal systems on women: the first method is an exploration of how external factors cause physical and embodied harm, and the second is a storytelling aspect that both reveals the harmful impacts of these systems as well as acting as a way of reclaiming or processing that pain.

The depiction of "The Husband Stitch," represents the external factors of the patriarchy through the use of the ribbon, as is also done in the story itself. The ribbon acts throughout the story as a boundary that the husband continually wishes to cross, despite repeated refusals, and one that, in the end, kills the narrator. Though there are other violations, such as the jokes about sewing her tighter after childbirth—"How much to get that extra stitch?" (17)—and the like, the ribbons are systemic and physical, as shown both by the fact that all women have them, and that their removal causes harm. This systemic nature is somewhat directly commented on in the lines, "I am up for a long time listening to his breathing, wondering if perhaps men have ribbons that do not look like ribbons. Maybe we are all marked in some way, even if it's impossible to see" (21). Given the dynamics of the story, the ribbon is represented as being undone by a clenched, masculine fist at the bottom, a slow pull that will undo her. The woman is holding the ribbon loosely, depicting her repeated refusals that eventually are worn down to consent; it is an effort to stop the harm, but it is not effective in the end.

In this piece, the woman's body is subdivided into the urban legends that are scattered throughout the story. Each story represents a different fear of womanhood, as mentioned on page 11: "Brides never fare well in stories. Stories can sense happiness and snuff it out like a candle." In these stories, the women tend to meet unhappy ends, and yet these stories are also the ones

that are told (or retold) to us by the narrator, not something done to her. This seems to be done as a way of processing or understanding the unfair pain of the world, as she says at the end of the killer's story at the end of the work "I'm sorry. I've forgotten the rest of the story" (30). Though this "forgetting" may not be part of the legend she is telling, it is indicative of their role in the story: these legends are all being filtered through her and are retold, used to help her process. As such, the stories are inscribed on her body in my artwork, the result of what the narrator chooses to tell us. They are the result of trauma, but are being reclaimed and shown to us.

The depiction of *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* shows the dual nature of the patriarchy. One of the most major ways the external pain is shown is through sex. In many ways, women become objectified and used for sex in this story, as even on page 7 it asks "is there nothing other than my sex organs that interest you?" There is the continual mention of sexual assault and sexual violence, with her husband and by the man on the train on page 86, and this is shown with the disembodied hands, as it is not just the specific men that assault, but also the faceless cultural sexual assault. This cultural nature of the sexual assault is brilliantly described like this: "What can I tell you[...]? [...]That we were raised by men fucked from all ends every which way? That later we ourselves screwed the same kind of guys, and that in both cases they were doing to us what others, *the others*, had done to them?" (158). This is why in her hand is clutched a piece of paper with "Ukraine is not yet dead" written on it, as it is a refrain in the story that shows the pain and struggle of Ukraine to continue, even painfully. The other form, poetry, is very symbolically similar to the use of urban legends in "The Husband Stitch" in that it remixes and reforms and retells trauma as a form of processing and understanding it. The poems selected are those from pages 40, 49, 50, 60, and 78 from top to bottom.

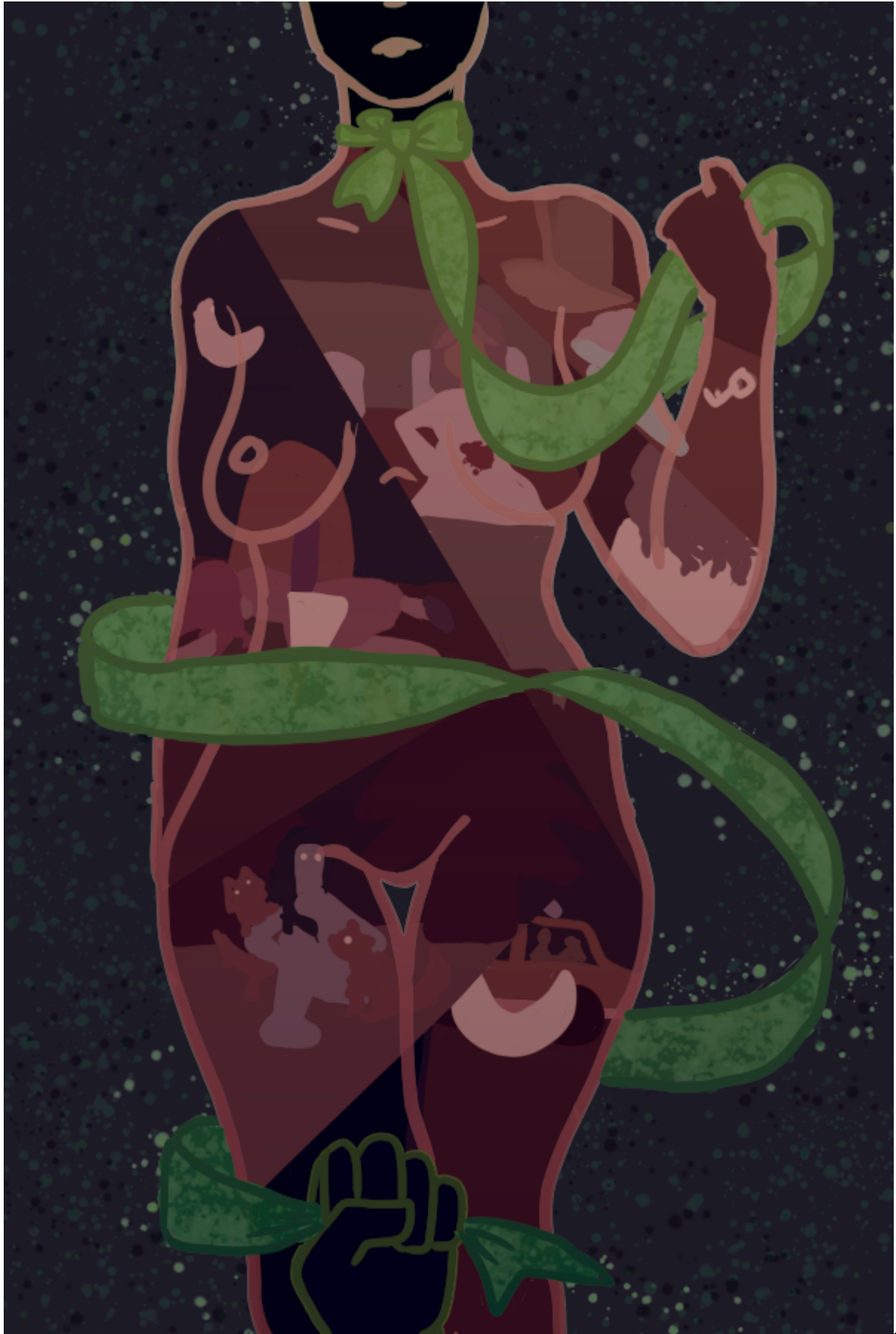
These pieces do not simply draw inspiration from the two works, but also from ideas of Audre Lorde. Her representation of her past in *Zami* as a biomythography served as a base of understanding, especially the idea of rewriting history as a form of catharsis or re-understanding. Additionally, "Poetry is not a Luxury," also by Audre Lorde, drew further connections between the two pieces. One influential quote comes from the first few lines:

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt.

It is through this, and the mention by Zabuzhko of women in Ukraine finally feeling seen, that the pieces truly became clear. Poetry, here the legends and poems both, as well as the stories as a whole, are methods of naming. Not only are they naming for one's own self, but also for others to see and understand. That is why the poems and legends had to be visibly shown on the body in my piece: it shows the embodiment of the problems, the personal nature of telling and retelling, and showing the very person as a vehicle for their messages and ideas—their naming of the world and its problems. It is through this naming and re-understanding of the world that it can be changed, and it through change that the world can become a better version of itself.

Works Cited

- "The Husband Stitch." *Her Body and Other Parties*, by Carmen Maria Machado, Serpent'sTail, 2019.
- Lorde, Audre. *Poetry Is Not a Luxury*. Druck- & Verlagscooperative, 1993.
- Zabužko Oksana, and Halyna Hryn. *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. Amazon Crossing, 2011, *Kindle*.





Vatan
by
Mondonna Mojahed

The sound of the *tombak* and *santoor* mingled together echo off the dome ceilings above us. I was dreaming, or maybe I was just living a dream where an orchestra of music, laughter and *Farsi* permeated through my ears and into my mind. Smoke swirled around the room and danced out of the mouths of covered young women getting a taste of life from a *galyoon*. My family and I sat with full bellies around the restaurant table, drinking cups of *chai* and drinking in each other. We have been separated by mountains and oceans, but now we have arrived.

Iranians all sway the same. Whenever we feel groundbreaking sorrow, or when we are listening to sweet melodies that take us away to distant memories and places, we sway. We sway to the internal rhythm of our hearts that are linked together by the same tune. The *haji* is tapping the *tombak* with all his feeling as his body also moves in sync with ours. *Haji* plays the song that all Iranians know and unite under. “*Ey Iran ey marz po gohar..*” bellows out from each of us as it is our duty and necessity to be a part of this moment and sing proudly this song. All of our eyes are gleaming with a mixture of melancholy, pride and longing. My heart is exploding like a firework that refuses to be over, and salty tears begin to burn the brims of my eyes. I scan the room to see the faces of those that are participating in our chorus, and I am filled with warmth because these faces look like mine. These are my brothers and sisters that I have long been away from, these strangers that sway the same as us.

A child’s laughter is loud in my ears. Her laugh sounds unburdened by the world and chirps the way birds do as the sun welcomes itself into the sky at dawn. My eyes search the room for the young girl, and before I can find her my mother who is swaying besides me asks me why I am laughing.

The silence seeps in. Our bodies are waking up from our dreams, but our eyes are wide awake. We step outside the restaurant that is as brown as our skin, and into the night that is lit up by the headlights of millions of cars roaming the streets. I loosen my *rusari* so that the night breeze can cool my skin and let my hair blow free. The breeze strokes my neck and leaves my skin with goosebumps that raises the dark hairs of my arm.

The seven of us squeeze into the five-person sedan, but none of us mind the tight space because we are trying to feel as much of each other before we must part. I sit next to my grandmother who smells like freshly bloomed flowers on a beautiful spring day, and I lean my

head against hers. Her soft hand reaches for mine as she says “*gorbounet beram*,” meaning “I would die for you,” and I reply “*khoda nakoneh*,” meaning “I hope that God never lets that happen.” I stare out the window looking at the city around us, the image before me grows blurrier as my eyelids become heavy. I am left only with smell of freshly bloomed flowers and a warmth in my heart.

